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DOI: 10.25108/2304-1730-1749.iolr.2026.82.57-63

UDC: 34:316.7

### Legal enlightenment as a factor in the development of civil society

**Abstract:** This article examines legal enlightenment as an important factor in the development of civil society. The study analyzes the relationship between legal culture, legal consciousness and citizen participation in public governance. Special attention is given to the role of legal literacy in strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring the rule of law. The article emphasizes that legal enlightenment contributes to the formation of active and responsible citizens. It concludes that improving legal culture is essential for sustainable democratic development.

**Key words:** legal enlightenment, civil society, legal culture, legal consciousness, public governance, good governance, rule of law, democratic institutions, citizen participation, institutional stability, legal literacy, sustainable development, social capital.

Legal enlightenment has traditionally been regarded as an auxiliary element of state legal policy. Meanwhile, in the context of the transformation of public authority and the increasing complexity of social relations, it acquires a system-forming significance. An insufficient level of citizens' legal culture directly affects the quality of rights implementation, the effectiveness of institutions, and the sustainability of civil society.

Modern societies face a paradox: the regulatory framework is constantly expanding, enshrining a broad range of rights and freedoms, yet the actual realization of these rights remains limited. The reason lies not only in institutional failures, but also in the lack of knowledge, skills, and trust. Formally fixed guarantees do not function without a subject capable of consciously using them [1, p. 621].

Legal enlightenment becomes a factor linking norm and practice. It ensures the translation of abstract legal constructions into the everyday behavior of citizens. It is precisely in this context that the question arises: can legal enlightenment act as an independent factor in the development of civil society rather than merely its accompanying element?

The research problem is determined by the need to rethink the role of legal enlightenment within the system of public governance. In the conditions of digitalization, increasing social mobility, and political polarization, the formation of legal consciousness acquires a strategic character.

#### Objectives and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this article is to substantiate the position that legal enlightenment constitutes a key factor in the development of civil society, influencing institutional stability, the level of trust, and the degree of citizen participation in public life.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks are proposed:

- to reveal the essence of legal enlightenment as a socio-legal phenomenon;
- to determine its connection with the category of civil society;

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- to analyze the mechanisms of influence of legal enlightenment on public institutions;
- to examine examples and practical aspects of the implementation of relevant programs;
- to formulate conclusions regarding its strategic significance.

The significance of the study lies in the attempt to provide a systemic analysis of the problem, going beyond a formal listing of educational initiatives. The research is aimed at identifying structural links between legal culture, citizen participation, and the stability of democratic institutions.

### **1. The Concept and Essence of Legal Enlightenment**

Legal enlightenment represents purposeful activity aimed at forming citizens' knowledge of law, understanding of legal mechanisms, and skills in their application. Unlike legal education, which is oriented toward professionals, enlightenment is addressed to broad segments of the population.

Its content includes informing citizens about their rights and duties, mechanisms for their protection, principles of functioning of state bodies, as well as the development of legal thinking. The latter component is especially important, since knowledge of a norm without understanding its meaning does not form stable legal consciousness [1, p.305].

Legal enlightenment has an interdisciplinary character. It relies on jurisprudence, sociology, psychology, and pedagogical technologies. Its task is not merely to transmit information, but to form an attitude toward law-abiding and responsible behavior.

It is necessary to distinguish between legal information and legal enlightenment. Information is limited to the transmission of data, whereas enlightenment presupposes the internal assimilation of legal values. It is precisely this value-oriented aspect that allows it to be considered a factor in the development of civil society.

### **2. Civil Society: Theoretical Foundations**

The category of civil society has a complex history of development. In classical philosophy, beginning with the works of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, it was regarded as the sphere of private interests and associations distinct from the state [2, p.20].

In modern interpretation, civil society is understood as a set of institutions and relations independent from the state, ensuring citizens' self-organization. These include public associations, professional unions, charitable foundations, and initiative groups.

The key features of civil society are autonomy, horizontal connections, and the capacity for collective action. However, its existence is impossible without a certain level of legal culture. A subject who is legally illiterate is incapable of effectively participating in public life.

Thus, legal enlightenment appears not as an external element in relation to civil society, but as an internal condition for its functioning. It forms a competent participant in social processes.

### **3. Legal Culture as the Basis of Participation**

Legal culture reflects the degree to which society has assimilated the values of law and the level of respect for legal norms. It manifests itself in lawful behavior, trust in the judicial system, and readiness to defend one's rights.

Without legal culture, civil society becomes formal. Associations may exist, but they lack real influence. The absence of knowledge regarding court procedures, the submission of collective petitions, or participation in public hearings reduces the potential for civic activity.

Freedom of information in the Republic of Azerbaijan is enshrined in legislation. According to Article 50 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, everyone has the right to legally seek, receive, transmit, produce, and disseminate any information [7]. The formation of citizens'

legal consciousness and access to knowledge about their rights are key conditions for the effective functioning of a rule-of-law state. In the educational sphere, this task is fixed in the Law “On Education” (2009), where fostering respect for the law and forming civic responsibility are identified among the goals of educational activity [8]. Thus, enlightenment, including legal enlightenment, in Azerbaijan is institutionally fixed and systematically implemented as a mechanism for forming an active citizen.

Legal enlightenment contributes to the formation of sustainable participation skills. It explains how public decisions can be influenced within the framework of the law. This is where its institutional significance is manifested.

#### **4. Mechanisms of Influence of Legal Enlightenment**

The influence of legal enlightenment is carried out through several channels.

First, educational programs in schools and universities. They lay the foundation of knowledge about constitutional principles, human rights, and protection mechanisms. Early socialization forms respect for law as a value.

Second, the activities of state bodies and ombudsmen in informing citizens. Public reports, explanatory campaigns, and hotlines create an accessible environment for obtaining legal assistance [4, 5]. It is extremely important that state bodies cooperate with citizens in this sphere, as such activity increases public trust in government.

Third, the work of non-governmental organizations. NGOs conduct seminars, provide consultations to socially vulnerable groups, and promote the development of legal literacy at the local level. Their contribution is particularly noticeable in regions with limited access to legal assistance.

Finally, digital platforms and online courses expand the audience. Electronic services for submitting applications and open databases of normative acts make law more transparent.

#### **5. International Standards and Practice**

International organizations emphasize the importance of legal enlightenment as an element of democratic development. The United Nations, in its documents, points to the need to improve legal literacy for the realization of human rights [3, 4].

The Council of Europe also regards legal education as a tool for strengthening democracy and the rule of law. The recommendations of the Committee of Ministers are aimed at integrating human rights into educational programs [5].

In a number of states, legal enlightenment has become part of national strategies. Programs for the development of legal culture provide for inter-agency cooperation and long-term funding.

#### **6. Connection with the Principles of Good Governance**

The concept of good governance presupposes transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. These principles are impossible without an understanding of legal mechanisms.

If citizens are unaware of decision-making procedures, they are incapable of controlling authority. Legal enlightenment forms skills in analyzing normative acts, participating in public discussions, and applying to courts [8].

Thus, it strengthens the accountability of public authorities. An informed society places higher demands on the quality of governance.

Although the concept of “good governance” is far from flawless [9], it should be noted that the absence of a universally accepted definition is to some extent compensated by the presence of the principles and conditions that describe it and on which such governance is based in any society [10].

### 7. Practical Examples and Effects

Practice shows that in regions with active legal enlightenment programs, the number of applications to courts and public authorities increases. This indicates not a rise in conflicts, but an increase in trust in legal mechanisms.

Moreover, legal literacy reduces the level of everyday offenses. Citizens become aware of the consequences of their actions and choose lawful means of dispute resolution.

The effect is also evident in the economic sphere. Entrepreneurs possessing basic legal knowledge violate regulatory requirements less frequently and participate more actively in public discussions of draft normative acts.

### 8. Problems of Implementation

Despite its obvious significance, legal enlightenment faces a number of difficulties.

The first problem is formalism. Programs are often limited to lectures without a practical component. The absence of interactive methods reduces learning effectiveness.

The second problem is unequal access. Residents of rural areas and socially vulnerable groups receive less information. This creates an imbalance in the level of legal culture.

The third problem is connected with the digital divide. Online resources expand opportunities but require technical infrastructure and skills.

### 9. Prospects for Development

A promising direction is the integration of legal enlightenment into the sustainable development strategy. It should be regarded as an investment in social capital.

Coordination of efforts between the state, educational institutions, and NGOs is necessary. Practice-oriented forms of training should be developed: simulation of court proceedings, participation in public consultations, and legal clinics.

Special attention should be paid to digital tools. The creation of interactive platforms and mobile applications simplifies access to legal information.

### Conclusion

The analysis conducted allows us to conclude that legal enlightenment is an independent and significant factor in the development of civil society. It forms legal culture, ensures the implementation of good governance principles, and contributes to strengthening trust in institutions.

Legal enlightenment cannot be regarded as an auxiliary function of the state. It serves as an instrument for forming an active citizen capable of participating in public life and defending his or her rights.

Based on the above, the development of civil society is directly linked to the level of legal culture. Investments in enlightenment are investments in the sustainability of democratic institutions and social stability.

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*The article was submitted: 2026 March 09*

*Accepted for publication: 2026 March 19*

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### Hüquqi maarifləndirmənin vətəndaş cəmiyyətinin inkişafında rolu

**Xülasə:** Məqalədə hüquqi maarifləndirmə vətəndaş cəmiyyətinin inkişafının mühüm amillərindən biri kimi nəzərdən keçirilir. Tədqiqat çərçivəsində hüquqi mədəniyyət, hüquqi şüur və vətəndaşların publik idarəetmə sistemində iştirakı arasındakı qarşılıqlı əlaqə təhlil olunur. Xüsusi diqqət hüquqi savadlılığın demokratik institutların möhkəmləndirilməsi və hüququn aliliyinin təmin edilməsində oynadığı rola yönəldilir. Qeyd olunur ki, hüquqi maarifləndirmə fəal və məsuliyyətli vətəndaşların formalaşmasına mühüm töhfə verir. Nəticə etibarilə hüquqi mədəniyyətin inkişafının davamlı demokratik inkişafın təmin olunması baxımından xüsusi əhəmiyyət kəsb etdiyi qənaətinə gəlinir.

**Açar sözlər:** hüquqi maarifləndirmə, vətəndaş cəmiyyəti, hüquq mədəniyyəti, hüquq şüuru, ictimai idarəetmə, yaxşı idarəetmə, hüququn aliliyi, demokratik institutlar, vətəndaş iştirakı, institusional sabitlik, hüquqi savadlılıq, dayanıqlı inkişaf, sosial capital.

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*Мəqalə daxil olmuşdur: 09 mart 2026-cı il*

*Çapa qəbul edilmişdir: 19 mart 2026-cı il*

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DOI: 10.25108/2304-1730-1749.iolr.2026.82.57-63

УДК: 34:316.7

### Правовое просвещение как фактор развития гражданского общества

**Аннотация:** Рассматривается правовое просвещение как важный фактор развития гражданского общества. Анализируется связь правовой культуры, правосознания и участия граждан в системе публичного управления. Особое внимание уделяется роли правовой грамотности в укреплении демократических институтов и обеспечении верховенства права. Отмечается, что правовое просвещение способствует формированию активных и ответственных граждан. Сделан вывод о значении развития правовой культуры для устойчивого демократического развития.

**Ключевые слова:** правовое просвещение, гражданское общество, правовая культура, правосознание, публичное управление, надлежащее управление, верховенство права, демо-

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кратические институты, участие граждан, институциональная стабильность, правовая грамотность, устойчивое развитие, социальный капитал.

*Дата поступления: 09 марта 2026 г.*

*Дата принятия в печать: 19 марта 2026 г.*