



# AKADEMİK TARİH VE DÜŞÜNCE DERGİSİ

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## Improving the Efficiency of Executive Power Bodies in the Republic of Azerbaijan

Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti'nde Yürütme Organlarının Etkinliğinin Artırılması

### Abstract

*This study analyzes the efficient organization of the activities of executive power bodies within the modern public administration system in the context of large-scale administrative reforms implemented in the Republic of Azerbaijan. It follows a qualitative, descriptive-analytical design based on a review of the theoretical literature on public administration efficiency, an examination of relevant normative legal acts and official documents, and a conceptual comparison of administrative models with Azerbaijani practice. The article investigates the transition from the traditional hierarchical bureaucratic model to "New Public Management" (NPM) and "Good Governance" principles and the impact of this transformation on the flexibility and results-orientation of the state apparatus. At the center of the research are Azerbaijan's management innovations: the "ASAN service" model, digital government solutions, and the institution of the Special Representations of the President in the liberated territories. The article discusses the role of functional review in eliminating overlapping jurisdictions, the formation of human resource potential based on meritocracy, and the prospects for optimizing center-local relations. Finally, directions are proposed for the evolution of Azerbaijan's management model toward a more compact, transparent, and citizen-oriented structure in line with the national development strategy.*

**Keywords:** Executive Power, Efficiency, Digitalization, ASAN Service, Special Representation, Administrative Reforms

### Öz

*Bu çalışma, Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti'nde uygulanan kapsamlı idari reformlar bağlamında, modern kamu yönetimi sistemi içinde yürütme organlarının faaliyetlerinin etkin biçimde örgütlenmesini incelemektedir. Araştırma nitel, betimleyici-analitik bir desene dayanmakta; kamu yönetiminde etkinliğe ilişkin kuramsal literatürün taranmasını, Azerbaycan'a ait ilgili normatif hukuki düzenlemelerin ve resmî belgelerin incelenmesini ve yönetim modellerinin Azerbaycan uygulamasıyla kavramsal olarak karşılaştırılmasını kapsamaktadır. Makalede geleneksel hiyerarşik bürokratik modelden*

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*“Yeni Kamu İşletmeciliği” ve “İyi Yönetişim” ilkelerine geçiş süreci ile bu dönüşümün devlet aygıtının esnekliği ve sonuç odaklılığı üzerindeki etkisi ele alınmaktadır. Araştırmanın merkezinde Azerbaycan’ın yönetim alanındaki yenilikleri, yani “ASAN Hizmet” modeli, dijital devlet çözümleri ve işgalden kurtarılan topraklarda uygulanan Cumhurbaşkanı Özel Temsilcilikleri kurumu yer almaktadır. Çalışmada yürütme organlarının faaliyetlerindeki yetki çakışmalarının giderilmesinde işlevsel analizin rolü, liyakat ilkesine dayalı insan kaynağı kapasitesinin oluşturulması ve bölgesel yönetimde merkez-yerel ilişkilerinin iyileştirilmesine yönelik olanaklar tartışılmaktadır. Son olarak, Azerbaycan’ın yönetim modelinin ulusal kalkınma stratejisi doğrultusunda daha sade, şeffaf ve vatandaş odaklı bir yapıya doğru evrilmesine yönelik öneriler sunulmaktadır.*

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *Yürütme Organları, Etkinlik, Dijitalleşme, ASAN Hizmet, Özel Temsilcilik, İdari Reformlar*

## **Introduction**

In the modern era, the efficiency of public administration constitutes the core line of every country’s national development strategy. After restoring its independence, the Republic of Azerbaijan implemented fundamental reforms toward transitioning from a centralized administrative-command system to a management model based on market economy and democratic principles. Increasing the efficiency of public administration is considered a primary factor determining the future of the Azerbaijani state (Yang & Azadov, 2005). In this context, organizing the activities of executive power bodies according to modern standards requires not only structural changes but also the renewal of the management philosophy.

The relevance of the research is also conditioned by global challenges and the new realities emerging after the Second Karabakh War. New management models applied in the liberated territories, the deepening of digital transformation, and increasing transparency in citizen-state relations are priorities for modernizing the executive power system at the current stage. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to examine how the activities of executive power bodies in Azerbaijan can be organized more efficiently in light of administrative theory and recent reform practice.

Studies on administrative reforms in Azerbaijan approach the problem of efficiency from different angles. Yang and Azadov (2005) examine the achievements, problems, and prospects of public administration reforms; Hasanoglu (2008) analyzes the restructuring of the state and the efforts to strengthen local governments; and Sadigov et al. (2025) study the commercialization of digital public services through the ASAN service model. These studies suggest that structural reforms, digitalization, and the development of the personnel corps should be treated as interrelated directions for increasing efficiency. In the research of Yang and Azadov (2005), the efficiency of public administration is characterized by two important dimensions: efficiency (*səmərəlilik*) and effectiveness (*nəticəlilik*).

In modern literature, the “New Public Management” (NPM) doctrine is widely analyzed for increasing efficiency. This doctrine envisages bringing business methods, competition, and results-oriented evaluation to the public sector. Hood (1991) identifies hands-on professional

management as one of the doctrinal components of NPM and justifies it by the argument that accountability requires a clear assignment of responsibility for action rather than a diffusion of power. Bagirzade (2023) rendered the concept of “governance” into Azerbaijani as “*idarələşmə*,” substantiating its difference from traditional “management” (*idarəetmə*). While management is based more on hierarchical and bureaucratic processes, governance implies interactive cooperation between the state, private sector, and civil society (Bagirzade, 2023). In this model, participation, transparency, and accountability act as the main indicators improving the quality of executive power bodies’ activities.

Ibrahimzade (2026) analyzed the role of the Presidential institution in crisis management within Azerbaijan’s management model. The President’s speed of decision-making and the authority to redesign the executive apparatus in “real-time” mode through decrees are the primary factors ensuring the system’s efficiency in emergencies (e.g., during a pandemic or war conditions) (Ibrahimzade, 2026). The Presidential Administration acting as a centralized information and coordination center ensures that proposals received from various ministries are promptly transformed into executive decisions.

Sadigov et al. (2025) researched Azerbaijan’s experience in the commercialization and efficiency of digital public services through the “ASAN service” model. By applying the “One-Stop Shop” principle to the activities of executive power bodies and minimizing direct contact between citizens and officials, the ASAN model can contribute to reducing corruption risks; red tape and petty corruption were among the problems that the initiative was designed to address (United Nations, 2015). According to Sadigov et al. (2025), the success of the ASAN model is linked not only to technological innovations but also to the establishment of service processes based on market-oriented principles and the application of quality standards (ASAN Index). The model has also received international recognition: in 2015, the ASAN service initiative of the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan won the United Nations Public Service Award in the category “Improving the Delivery of Public Services” (United Nations, 2015).

Muradov et al. (2014) monitored the e-government infrastructure in Azerbaijan and evaluated the availability and level of development of frequently used electronic public services. The electronic government portal (e-gov.az) and “Digital Executive Power” (rih.gov.az) platforms increase the accessibility of executive entities and automate document turnover.

Hasanoğlu (2008) shows that the centralized structure of public administration in Azerbaijan, in which most local services are implemented by the field organizations (territorial units) of central executive bodies, limits the development of local self-government. To increase efficiency, it is necessary to transfer powers to municipalities based on the “subsidiarity” principle. Azerbaijan’s

modern management system, constituting a synthesis of national characteristics and global innovations, serves as an important basis for sustainable development.

### **Method**

The study employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical research design. It does not use primary survey data, interviews, or statistical analysis; its conclusions are derived from the analysis of academic literature, normative legal acts, and official documents. Data were obtained through document analysis: texts were selected on the basis of their direct relevance to the organization and efficiency of executive power in Azerbaijan and were interpreted in relation to the theoretical models discussed in the following section. The research was carried out in three stages.

First, a narrative (non-systematic) review of the theoretical literature on the efficiency of executive bodies was conducted. The review covers the classical bureaucratic approach, decision-making theory, incrementalism, New Public Management, lean management, strategic management, digital governance, and the Good Governance framework, as presented in the foundational works of the field and in later academic studies (e.g., Hood, 1991; Lindblom, 1959; Simon, 1946; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], 2009; Weber, 1922/1978; Wilson, 1887).

Second, the institutional and legal framework of executive power in Azerbaijan was examined on the basis of normative legal acts and official documents, namely the Constitutional Law on the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman), the Law on Public Participation, the Regulation on the Special Representations of the President, and official information on the ASAN service (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021; Republic of Azerbaijan, 2001, 2013; United Nations, 2015). Studies on Azerbaijan's administrative reforms, digital public services, crisis management, and local governance (Hasanoğlu, 2008; Ibrahimzade, 2026; Jafarli, 2021; Sadigov et al., 2025; Yang & Azadov, 2005) were used to interpret these documents.

Third, the theoretical models were compared conceptually with Azerbaijani practice in order to identify the extent to which their elements (one-stop service delivery, the functional separation of policy-making and service delivery, performance orientation, and participation) are reflected in the organization of executive bodies. Efficiency, effectiveness, flexibility, transparency, and accountability were used as the criteria of analysis. The main limitation of the study is that it does not measure the efficiency of executive bodies empirically; therefore, the proposals formulated in the conclusion should be regarded as directions for further research and policy discussion rather than as empirically tested findings.

### **Multi-Dimensionality of the Efficiency of Executive Bodies**

Ideas regarding the efficiency of the activities of executive bodies have evolved in several dimensions and reflect different perspectives. In management, efficiency is usually considered

together with effectiveness. Efficiency is the ability to ensure the best ratio between used resources and obtained results, whereas effectiveness expresses the successful solution of social problems and the real achievement of goals set by the government. Focusing on the formation of efficiency models in public administration will help achieve the purpose of the research.

**Classical Governance and Rationality:** In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, public administration associated efficiency with strict rules, hierarchy, and professional discipline. The politics-administration dichotomy put forward by Woodrow Wilson emphasized that executive activity should be carried out impartially and on the basis of technical professionalism, away from political interference (Wilson, 1887). Another important figure of this period, Max Weber, characterized bureaucracy as the most rational and technically superior form of administrative organization (Weber, 1922/1978). In the classical period, Luther Gulick regarded efficiency as the basic value of administration. Gulick and Urwick systematized management functions with the acronym “POSDCORB,” identifying planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting as the main efficiency tools (Meier, 2010).

**Decision-Making Context:** From the mid-20th century, the efficiency of executive bodies began to be reconsidered in the context of decision-making processes. Herbert Simon criticized classical management principles by calling them “proverbs of administration” and stating that they had not undergone scientific testing (Simon, 1946). Simon considered decision-making the core of administration and put forward the concept of “bounded rationality” (Simon, 1947, 1955). According to him, it is impossible to achieve full rationality in administrative situations; therefore, decision-makers settle for choosing a satisfactory (“good enough”) option rather than the best one (Simon, 1955).

In response, Charles Lindblom proposed the “incrementalism” or “muddling through” model, which is more suitable for the real activities of executive bodies (Lindblom, 1959). According to this model, decisions are made not through radical changes, but through small and consistent adjustments to the existing situation. The incremental approach is considered more flexible and applicable in complex socio-political environments.

**New Public Management (NPM):** From the 1980s, the inefficiency and resource waste of the traditional bureaucratic model began to be sharply criticized. During this period, the “New Public Management” (NPM) paradigm emerged. The core philosophy of NPM was the transfer of private sector management techniques to the public sector. This model evaluated the activities of executive bodies based on the “3E” criteria: Economy, Efficiency, and Effectiveness. Within the framework of NPM, state bodies were no longer viewed merely as entities following procedures, but as entrepreneurial structures focused on results. In this model, the principle of “steer, not row” was brought to the fore, indicating that the state should organize and coordinate service delivery

rather than provide services directly. NPM reforms involved decentralization, privatization, the introduction of competition, and the monitoring of activities through measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Christopher Hood characterized NPM with elements such as hands-on professional management, explicit standards and measures of performance, and greater emphasis on output controls (Hood, 1991; Lægreid, 2015).

**Lean Management and Efficiency:** One of the important models applied in modern times to increase the efficiency of executive bodies is the “Lean Management” approach. Originating from the private sector, specifically the “Toyota” production system, this model focuses on eliminating all types of waste and creating value for the citizen (customer) (Dekier, 2012). Lean management aims to minimize unnecessary bureaucratic procedures, waiting times, excess movement, and errors in the public sector.

The lean approach in state organizations puts the citizen at the center of the process and ensures the most economical use of resources. This model is regarded as effective in increasing service speed and reducing costs, especially in entities in direct contact with citizens, such as municipal services and social protection bodies. Lean management also encourages the use of employees’ creative potential and continuous improvement (*kaizen*).

**Strategic Management and Performance Models:** Strategic planning and strategic management models are of great importance for the long-term efficiency of executive bodies. Strategic management involves defining the mission and vision of the organization, evaluating the internal and external environment through SWOT analysis, and coordinating resources to reach goals. The “Management by Objectives” (MBO) model, introduced by Peter Drucker, requires managers and employees to set common goals and evaluate results based on these goals (Drucker, 1954).

In the field of budget efficiency, the “Zero-Based Budgeting” (ZBB) model holds an important place. In this model, every program or expenditure unit must be re-justified every year, which allows directing resources to the highest priority areas and canceling inefficient programs. The Performance-Based Organizations (PBO) model proposes transforming executive entities into units that operate like private firms, largely free from detailed regulation but directly accountable for results.

**Digital Governance and E-Government Models:** The development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has given rise to “E-Government” and “Digital-Era Governance” models for executive bodies. The e-government model increases labor productivity through the automation of administrative processes and reduces public procurement costs (Adilov, 2017). This model ensures the transition from a traditional “closed” state structure to an “open” and transparent structure for the citizen.

Digital management models speed up the interaction of executive bodies with citizens, minimizing paper flow and time loss. E-government applications also strengthen coordination within the state and reduce tendencies toward corruption. This approach views citizens not just as “customers,” but as partners and “co-producers” of state services.

The analysis of models regarding the efficiency of executive bodies shows that there is no single “best” model. Efficiency is a multi-faceted concept with technical, political, and ethical dimensions. While classical bureaucratic models provide stability and discipline, they often remain slow and inefficient in modern dynamic environments. Although NPM reforms helped increase efficiency, in some cases, they can weaken democratic accountability (Hill, 2018). For this reason, modern executive bodies prefer hybrid approaches that combine the strengths of various models. In the future, efficiency is likely to be ensured more through a harmony of digital innovations, citizen participation, and “lean” approaches.

The new public management concept emerged as an alternative to monolithic, hierarchical bureaucracy (Zia & Khan, 2014). This model brings the private sector management style (flexible recruitment, results-oriented salary, competitive environment) to the public sector. A clear tendency toward a post-bureaucratic organization model is observed in Azerbaijan’s modern management architecture, where the citizen is no longer accepted as a “petitioner” but as an active “customer” and consumer of state services.

### **Efficient Organization of the Activities of Executive Power Bodies in the Republic of Azerbaijan**

In Azerbaijan’s management model, the institution of the President stands at the center of the executive power system and possesses extensive powers as the supreme executive subject. Under conditions of modern threats (pandemics, military conflicts, economic shocks), the institution of the presidency plays the role of a “flexible executive center.” There are three main elements ensuring flexibility in crisis management:

1. Centralization of information flow;
2. Legal clarity of the decision-making center;
3. Rapid transmission of decisions to the executive apparatus (Ibrahimzade, 2026).

Redesigning the executive apparatus in “real-time” mode through Presidential decrees and orders speeds up the system’s adaptation to the external environment. The creation of centralized structures such as the Operational Headquarters under the Cabinet of Ministers during the COVID-19 pandemic served to accelerate decision-making by addressing coordination problems between various ministries (Ibrahimzade, 2026).

In Azerbaijan, the Cabinet of Ministers is the supreme executive body of the President and organizes the implementation of executive powers. The main direction of reforms is the transition

of central executive bodies from the sectoral principle to the functional principle. This envisages the separation of the function of developing state policy from the functions of execution and regulation.

The application of functional review methods is an important tool for eliminating overlapping jurisdictions in executive entities, saving budget funds, and optimizing management. In line with the NPM doctrine of disaggregating public sector units (Hood, 1991), the primary task of ministries should be strategic planning and policy analysis, while day-to-day service functions can be transferred to agencies or lower tiers of administration.

### **Development Directions of the Activities of Executive Power Bodies**

Digitalization is one of the most effective means of ensuring transparency and reducing corruption risks in the activities of executive power bodies. Azerbaijan's best-known brand in this field is "ASAN service," created in 2012. The ASAN model brought several important innovations to public administration:

- **Single Space (One-Stop Shop):** Citizens can receive services from various entities at a single center.
- **ASAN Index:** Continuous evaluation of the quality of state services using quantitative and qualitative indicators.
- **Commercialization and Customer Orientation:** Presenting state services in a high-quality, fast manner focused on citizen convenience (Sadigov et al., 2025).

The "Electronic government" portal (e-gov.az) and "Digital Executive Power" (rih.gov.az) platforms speed up the transition to paperless document turnover by increasing the accessibility of executive entities. The X-Road system, based on the Estonian experience, ensures secure data exchange between state entities. These technological solutions significantly increase the efficiency of activities by automating the internal work processes of executive bodies (Jafarli, 2021).

After the Second Karabakh War, one of the most important innovations in Azerbaijan's local management system has been the creation of the Special Representations of the President. Unlike traditional local executive authorities, a special representative is appointed and dismissed by the President and is directly subordinate to the head of state, while the structure and the number of staff units of each special representation are determined by the President (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021).

According to the Regulation, special representations coordinate the activities of state bodies and their local units in the territories concerned and take part in restoration work in the liberated territories (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021). This model combines central control with local flexibility in public administration. Whether it could be applied in other regions of the country, however, remains a question for further research: such an assessment would require

comparative data on the performance, staffing, and costs of special representations and traditional local executive authorities, which is beyond the scope of this study.

The main problem facing the improvement of efficiency at the regional level is the overlap of functions and powers between local executive powers (field organizations) and local self-government bodies (municipalities). The majority of local services are carried out by centralized executive bodies, which causes the financial-economic base of municipalities to remain weak and limits their independence (Hasanoğlu, 2008). For efficient management, it is necessary to transfer many local tasks to municipalities based on the principle of “subsidiarity.”

The efficiency of executive power bodies directly depends on the quality of human resource potential. The principle of meritocracy should be taken as a basis in Azerbaijan’s civil service system, and the selection and promotion of employees should be based on their professional competence. Civil servants’ compliance with ethical behavior rules is a key factor in strengthening public trust in the state apparatus.

Accountability is the responsibility of the executive branch to the legislative, judicial, and public oversight for its actions. In Azerbaijan, the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) performs an important external oversight function: under the Constitutional Law of 28 December 2001, the Ombudsman acts to restore human rights and freedoms violated by state bodies, municipalities, and their officials (Republic of Azerbaijan, 2001). For increasing transparency, it is vital to involve civil society institutions (NGOs) more broadly in the decision-making process. The Law on Public Participation provides the legal basis for this through such forms as public councils, public discussions, public hearings, the study of public opinion, the public discussion of draft legal acts, and written consultations (Republic of Azerbaijan, 2013). External financial control over the use of public funds is another dimension of accountability; research on the audit system in Azerbaijan indicates that its further development is needed to strengthen transparency and accountability in the use of public funds (Abbasova Agamamed et al., 2023).

In modern political and administrative sciences, the transition from the concept of “management” (*idarəetmə*) to “governance” (*idarələşmə*) is evaluated as an important transformation. While management is based more on hierarchical structure and bureaucratic procedures, governance envisages mutual cooperation between the state, private sector, and civil society, as well as transparency and accountability (Bagirzade, 2023).

In Azerbaijani management literature, the term “*idarələşmə*” expresses the transition from hierarchical bureaucracy to network-type, flexible state services that comply with market principles. According to the UNESCAP (2009) framework, good governance has eight major characteristics: it is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law. One of the main goals of the reforms

implemented in Azerbaijan is the integration of these principles into the daily activities of executive entities.

### **Conclusion**

The efficient organization of the activities of executive power bodies in the Republic of Azerbaijan is a systemic and consistent process. The analysis suggests that the transition from the traditional bureaucratic model to digital and citizen-oriented management has contributed to increasing the flexibility of the state apparatus. However, to further increase efficiency, the following measures are proposed:

1. **Strategic Structure Reform:** The experience of the special representations in the liberated territories should be studied as a possible model for streamlining local executive power apparatuses in other regions. Before any nationwide application, its performance should be assessed against clear criteria (such as speed of decision-making, quality of coordination, service delivery outcomes, and administrative costs) in comparison with traditional local executive authorities.

2. **Deepening Decentralization:** The role of municipalities in solving issues of local importance should be increased, they should be given real financial independence, and the division of powers with local executive bodies should be clarified by legislation.

3. **Functional Audit:** Periodic functional analyses should be conducted in state entities, redundant departments should be eliminated, and resources should be directed toward strategic planning.

4. **Full Integration of Digital Government:** All state services should be fully digitalized, artificial intelligence technologies should be applied in the decision-making process, and “paperless document turnover” should cover all regional branches.

5. **Modernization of Civil Service:** Mechanisms for evaluating the labor of civil servants based on results (KPI system) and for providing incentives should be improved, and a professional corps of state managers should be formed.

The Special Representations of the President created in the liberated territories constitute a new element of Azerbaijan’s regional management system. The model may serve as a pilot for future regional management reforms; however, its suitability for wider application should be tested empirically, including through studies of citizens’ assessments of local executive authorities. Azerbaijan’s modern management model, built on the principle of “strong state – transparent service,” can contribute significantly to the sustainability of national development.

## **Author Contributions**

Anar Ibadov contributed to the conceptualization and design of the study, the collection and analysis of data, the interpretation of the findings, and the preparation and critical revision of the manuscript. The author read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

## **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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