Check for updates

Institutionalizing integrity: rethinking ethical and cultural standards in Kazakhstan's civil service

Zhanna Khamzina[1], Yermek Buribayev[2]* and
Yerazak Tileubergenov[3]

[1]Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, [2]Zhetysu University named after
Ilyas Zhansugurov, Taldy-Kurgan, Kazakhstan, [3]Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau University, Kokshetau,
Kazakhstan

Introduction: Ethical conduct in the public sector is crucial for effective governance, yet Kazakhstan's civil service faces persistent ethical deficits and weak regulatory oversight that undermine professional integrity. These shortcomings have eroded discipline and public trust, making them a serious governance concern. This study analyzes the scope of these ethical and regulatory weaknesses and their impact on governance quality.

Methods: A multidisciplinary approach was adopted, integrating legal, sociological, and managerial perspectives to evaluate Kazakhstan's civil service ethics. The analysis encompassed a review of formal ethical codes and laws, an assessment of their enforcement mechanisms, and an examination of organizational culture and behavior. This framework provided a holistic view of how ethical norms are institutionalized and practiced within civil service institutions.

Results: The findings reveal that formal ethical standards exist but are inconsistently enforced due to a lack of robust oversight mechanisms. Ethical principles are poorly integrated into the organizational culture, resulting in frequent lapses in integrity and professionalism. Consequently, unethical practices persist, undermining the efficiency and quality of public service delivery and eroding public trust. Notably, the absence of a clear, enforceable ethics system renders even well-intentioned administrative reforms largely ineffective.

Discussion: Addressing these ethical and regulatory gaps is imperative for improving governance. The study offers strategic recommendations, including establishing stronger oversight and accountability bodies, embedding ethics training and integrity measures into civil service practice, and modernizing administrative processes to foster a culture of integrity. Implementing such reforms is expected to strengthen professional standards and rebuild public trust in the civil service. These insights have broader relevance, providing lessons for ethical governance reforms in other national contexts.

KEYWORDS

ethical governance, public administration ethics, civil service culture, regulatory compliance, professional standards, administrative reform, governance efficiency

1 Introduction

The transformation of Kazakhstan's civil service is part of a broader global trend in public administration, where ethical governance and organizational culture are increasingly recognized as fundamental to effective state management. International research highlights the crucial role of ethical norms and professional standards

in fostering public trust, ensuring government accountability, and enhancing institutional efficiency (Brezzi et al., 2021; Fukuyama, 2017; Ukeje et al., 2020; Armstrong, 2005). Like many other post-Soviet states, Kazakhstan's civil service is undergoing profound changes aimed at modernizing governance structures, improving service delivery, and aligning administrative practices with global standards. These reforms are driven by the transition to a digital state, a growing emphasis on citizen-oriented governance, and a reconfiguration of the public sector's institutional culture to support transparency, efficiency, and ethical conduct. However, despite numerous regulatory initiatives, challenges remain in embedding ethical norms and strengthening organizational culture within the civil service.

A defining feature of this transformation is the shift toward a service-oriented public administration model, as reflected in the Listening State initiative and the broader agenda of New Kazakhstan. These initiatives aim to enhance government responsiveness, promote proactive decision-making, and reinforce ethical standards among civil servants. The overarching vision emphasizes the need for cultural and ethical renewal within the civil service, advocating for a fundamental shift in the country's development paradigm. This approach seeks to counter outdated mindsets, radicalism, dependency, and corruption while fostering greater social cohesion and public trust in institutional reforms. Central to this transformation is the creation of an organizational culture aligned with modern governance standards, addressing systemic challenges such as inefficiency, bureaucratic inertia, and ethical lapses.

The need for research-based support in shaping a robust ethical culture within Kazakhstan's civil service is becoming increasingly urgent. Studies in public administration demonstrate that the ethical foundations of governance are closely linked to institutional effectiveness, corruption reduction, and administrative performance improvement (Rose-Ackerman, 2005; Filatotchev and Nakajima, 2014; Androniceanu, 2021). While Kazakhstan has introduced multiple legislative measures to regulate ethics in public service, including the Code of Ethics for Civil Servants and the establishment of ethics commissioners, existing regulatory frameworks often fall short in ensuring compliance and fostering a deep-rooted culture of integrity. Weak enforcement mechanisms, coupled with deeply ingrained bureaucratic traditions, continue to hinder the full realization of these reforms.

As of January 1, 2024, Kazakhstan's civil service comprised 90,583 authorized positions, with an actual workforce of 83,009 civil servants. Despite relatively stable employment rates, ∼7,500 vacancies remained unfilled, accounting for 8.4% of the total staffing level. Long-term vacancies exceeding 3 months stood at 1,408 positions (1.6%). While the overall turnover rate in Kazakhstan's civil service remains low (4.9% in 2023, 4.7% in 2022, 6.2% in 2021, and 5% in 2020), significant disparities exist across different government agencies. The Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation, and Aerospace Industry recorded a 14.3% turnover rate, while the Ministry of Education reported 10.6%, indicating high attrition in critical sectors. In contrast, agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2.0%), Ministry of Healthcare (2.2%), and the Agency

for Civil Service Affairs (2.3%) maintained relatively stable retention rates.

A survey conducted among civil servants revealed multiple factors contributing to workforce attrition, including career changes (88.8%), family circumstances (23.3%), low salary levels (22.4%), dissatisfaction with working conditions (8.6%), ethical concerns and internal workplace relationships (8.6%), limited professional development opportunities (7.8%), and inefficient work processes (5.2%) (National Report on the State of the Civil Service in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024). These findings highlight the need for deeper structural reforms aimed at enhancing ethical culture, strengthening leadership integrity, and fostering a more dynamic and responsive civil service environment.

The Concept for the Development of Civil Service in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2024–2029, approved by Presidential Decree No. 602 (July 17, 2024), prioritizes the institutionalization of ethical governance, professional integrity, and citizen-centric administration. This strategic framework advocates for a departure from rigid hierarchical models toward a more flexible, proactive, and service-oriented approach. It also underscores the necessity of developing leadership competencies, improving ethical training programs, and promoting greater public engagement in governance processes. Similarly, the Concept for the Development of Public Administration until 2030, approved by Presidential Decree No. 522 (February 26, 2021), recognizes the need for strengthening organizational culture in the civil service, advocating for the expansion of civil servant internships in quasi-governmental, private, and international organizations and the implementation of mechanisms to encourage innovation and efficiency in government agencies.

In the context of contemporary global research on public administration ethics, Kazakhstan's reforms align with broader efforts observed in OECD member states, the European Union, and international organizations such as the United Nations (Brezzi et al., 2021; Menzel, 2015). Comparative studies suggest that successful governance models emphasize the integration of ethical leadership, transparency mechanisms, and participatory decision-making structures (Radhika, 2012; Rothstein and Sorak, 2017). While Scandinavian and Anglo-American governance systems have traditionally emphasized ethical self-regulation and independent oversight institutions, post-Soviet and emerging economies often struggle with institutionalizing ethical standards due to bureaucratic resistance and weak enforcement mechanisms (Bennich-Björkman, 2018). In this regard, Kazakhstan presents a unique case study, illustrating the complexities of transitioning from formalistic compliance models to genuinely embedded ethical cultures within state institutions.

Unlike the private sector, the civil service is entirely dependent on public trust, making the establishment and enforcement of ethical norms a fundamental priority. This necessitates continuous refinement of professional codes of conduct, the expansion of ethics training, and the institutionalization of transparent governance mechanisms. The public's demand for high-quality state services has led to a tightening of accountability measures, with stricter penalties for ethical violations and the introduction of oversight institutions such as ethics councils and ethics commissioners. However, these mechanisms must evolve beyond mere formalistic

compliance structures and become genuine instruments for fostering an ethical and accountable civil service.

The increasing public demand for institutional efficiency, ethical governance, and justice-oriented policymaking creates a compelling case for further scientific inquiry into the ethical and cultural dimensions of public administration. The promotion of ethical culture in government agencies is not merely a bureaucratic necessity—it is a fundamental prerequisite for restoring public confidence, enhancing government legitimacy, and fostering sustainable socio-economic development. In the long run, the successful modernization of Kazakhstan's civil service will depend not only on structural and legal reforms but also on the institutionalization of a resilient ethical culture that aligns with both national priorities and global governance standards.

2 Literature review

Research on civil service ethics and administrative culture has produced a substantial body of knowledge regarding various models of organizational culture in government institutions across different governance systems (Perlman et al., 2024; Svara, 2021; Romanyshyn, 2020; Rothstein and Sorak, 2017). These studies have demonstrated that ethical norms and organizational culture are fundamental to public sector efficiency, with different governance traditions shaping their implementation. However, despite extensive research in international contexts, there is a lack of clarity on how these models translate into post-Soviet administrative systems, particularly in Kazakhstan.

A structured methodological approach is required to assess Kazakhstan's civil service within a comparative framework. SWOT analysis has been widely applied to evaluate the structural elements of civil service models worldwide (Titu and Bucur, 2016; Irawati et al., 2024), making it a suitable tool for adaptation to Kazakhstan's administrative environment. This method enables a systematic assessment of the internal strengths and weaknesses of the civil service while accounting for external opportunities and threats, particularly in relation to ethical governance and organizational culture reforms.

Analyzing international experiences in implementing ethical standards in civil service provides valuable insights for Kazakhstan. Comparative studies on the United Kingdom and the United States (Lewis, 2008), Singapore (Cheung, 2003), and European Union member states (Kuhlmann et al., 2025; Nastase, 2016). highlight the effectiveness of diverse regulatory frameworks and institutional mechanisms in shaping ethical organizational cultures. While many of these models prioritize institutional accountability and transparency, their applicability to Kazakhstan is complicated by the country's centralized administrative structure and cultural legacy of hierarchical governance (Janenova and Knox, 2019). A direct comparison of these models reveals both potential lessons and limitations, reinforcing the need for a tailored approach to ethical reforms in Kazakhstan.

Existing research on public administration underscores the importance of ethical norms in fostering civil service efficiency (Fejzullahu and Batalli, 2019; Narayan, 2016; Ukeje et al., 2020). The necessity of a strong organizational culture as a foundation for effective governance is highlighted in the work of

Romanyshyn (2020), and Grosenick and Gibson (2019). Studies on the implementation of ethical oversight mechanisms in public administration further emphasize the role of codes of ethics, professional development programs, and institutional monitoring in ensuring adherence to ethical standards (Wright et al., 2016; Khan, 2017). OECD research has extensively documented best practices in ethical governance, providing detailed accounts of the institutionalization of ethics in civil service systems (Rothstein and Sorak, 2017; Yoder and Cooper, 2016; Brezzi et al., 2021).

International models of civil service culture demonstrate significant variations in approach. Scandinavian countries (Lægreid, 2017; Greve et al., 2018) emphasize participatory governance and social trust as key drivers of ethical compliance, while Canada (Paul Brown and White, 2021) and Australia (Uhr, 2019) integrate corporate governance principles into public administration ethics. In New Zealand (Scott and Merton, 2021), and Singapore (Vyas and Zhu, 2017), continuous professional development and institutionalized training programs serve as cornerstones of ethical governance. While these models have demonstrated effectiveness in fostering transparency and accountability, they evolved within political systems characterized by strong legal frameworks and institutional stability. Their direct transplantation to Kazakhstan is constrained by fundamental differences in administrative culture, necessitating a reform strategy that aligns international best practices with the realities of post-Soviet governance.

Kazakhstan's civil service reform efforts have been the focus of several studies. Research by Ibrayeva and Nezhina (2017), Issenova et al. (2024), and Karini (2024) examines mechanisms for institutional reform and ethical governance. However, systematic research on the development of an ethical organizational culture in Kazakhstan remains limited. Existing studies tend to focus on regulatory frameworks without addressing the deeper cultural transformation necessary for sustainable reform. Furthermore, empirical studies on Kazakhstan's civil service culture remain fragmented, limiting the ability to develop a comprehensive and evidence-based reform strategy (Emrich-Bakenova, 2021; Omarkhanova et al., 2024; Kumar, 2024).

A comparative analysis between Kazakhstan and other transitioning economies reveals shared challenges in promoting ethical governance in post-Soviet bureaucratic systems. Research on Eastern European countries (Reinholde et al., 2020) suggests that bureaucratic inertia, weak institutional accountability, and informal administrative practices pose significant obstacles to ethical reform. These findings resonate with Kazakhstan's experience, where formal legal frameworks have been established to regulate ethical standards, but enforcement remains inconsistent due to structural inefficiencies and a lack of independent oversight mechanisms (Pelizzo and Knox, 2023).

Another critical gap in the literature concerns the role of leadership and employee motivation in fostering ethical organizational culture. Studies on Western civil service models (Alam et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2016) have demonstrated that leadership commitment to ethical governance significantly influences organizational integrity and employee behavior. However, limited research exists on how leadership dynamics shape ethical governance within Kazakhstan's civil service. Given the hierarchical nature of

Kazakhstan's administrative system, the attitudes and behaviors of senior officials play a pivotal role in either reinforcing or undermining ethical standards. Without meaningful leadership engagement and a shift in professional incentives, reforms risk being perceived as mere formalities rather than substantive cultural changes.

This literature review underscores that, despite extensive international research on ethical organizational culture and civil service modernization, significant gaps remain in the Kazakhstani context. There is an urgent need for empirical studies assessing the actual implementation of ethical norms, the role of leadership in shaping ethical culture, and the impact of professional incentives on civil servants' adherence to ethical principles. Amid ongoing governance reforms, the development of an integrated model that combines legal, sociological, and managerial perspectives is not just desirable but essential. This study seeks to address these gaps by offering a comprehensive analysis of ethical organizational culture and proposing practical strategies to enhance transparency, efficiency, and public trust in Kazakhstan's civil service.

Kazakhstan's civil service has undergone multiple waves of reform since its independence in 1991, transitioning from a Soviet-era bureaucratic system to a more modernized administrative framework. However, despite formal legislative advancements, challenges persist in implementing ethical governance due to the deep-rooted legacy of centralized decision-making and limited institutional autonomy (Janenova and Knox, 2019). The Kazakhstani civil service is structured as a hierarchical system with strong executive control, where appointment processes and professional development often remain influenced by informal networks and patronage practices (Baimenov and Janenova, 2019).

Ethical governance in Kazakhstan is regulated by legal instruments such as the Code of Ethics for Civil Servants and oversight mechanisms led by the Agency for Civil Service Affairs and Anti-Corruption. While these frameworks provide a foundation for ethical standards, enforcement mechanisms are weak, and compliance is often superficial rather than ingrained in organizational culture (Sadykova et al., 2018). Additionally, public trust in government institutions remains fragile, reflecting a disconnect between official ethical norms and actual administrative practices (Suleimenova et al., 2018).

Public sector reforms have included attempts to introduce meritocratic principles and enhance professionalism within the civil service. However, bureaucratic inertia and a risk-averse administrative culture have slowed the effectiveness of these initiatives (Enang et al., 2022). Given the influence of historical administrative traditions, the challenge lies not only in establishing legal standards but also in fostering an internal culture that values ethical behavior as a professional norm rather than a regulatory obligation.

Kazakhstan's current reform agenda emphasizes modernization, efficiency, and transparency, aligning with broader international trends in public sector governance. However, the question remains whether these efforts will lead to substantive ethical transformation or remain largely procedural. This study situates itself within this broader institutional context,

aiming to bridge the gap between formal ethical regulations and their practical implementation by examining the cultural and managerial factors that shape ethical behavior in Kazakhstan's civil service.

3 Research methods

The findings of this study provide a critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system for monitoring ethical norms in Kazakhstan's civil service, as well as the socio-economic and cultural factors that shape organizational culture. To ensure a more focused and precise examination, the research scope has been refined to investigate the mechanisms through which socio-economic disparities and hierarchical workplace structures influence civil servants' adherence to ethical norms. Rather than presenting a broad discussion of external influences, the study specifically explores how economic insecurity and limited professional mobility affect perceptions of ethical responsibility and the willingness to engage in ethical decision-making. This refined focus enhances the clarity and applicability of the study by pinpointing structural factors that shape workplace ethics within Kazakhstan's bureaucratic institutions.

A crucial aspect that requires further articulation is the interplay between legal and sociological frameworks in shaping ethical culture. While legal regulations establish formal expectations for ethical conduct, they do not always translate into behavioral compliance without corresponding organizational incentives and enforcement mechanisms. This study advances the argument that legal structures do not function in isolation but instead interact dynamically with workplace norms, institutional hierarchies, and social expectations. The regulatory framework defines ethical guidelines in formal terms, but the degree of adherence depends largely on whether civil servants perceive these norms as legitimate, enforceable, and relevant to their professional roles. Empirical findings indicate that compliance is highest when legal provisions are reinforced by active oversight bodies, robust training programs, and leadership commitment to ethical governance. Conversely, weak enforcement mechanisms, coupled with ambiguous ethical expectations, lead to symbolic compliance rather than genuine adherence to ethical principles. This dynamic underscores the sociological dimension of legal structures, where the effectiveness of regulatory oversight is conditioned by institutional culture and individual attitudes toward ethical governance.

To enhance methodological transparency, this study now provides a more detailed account of the data collection process. The survey included 450 civil servants representing various levels of government, including national ministries, regional administrations, and municipal offices. Respondents were selected using proportional stratified sampling, ensuring representation from both urban and rural government institutions. The demographic composition of the sample was balanced across gender, years of service, educational background, and job responsibilities, allowing for a more nuanced analysis of how these factors influence ethical decision-making. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 experts

in public administration, including ethics commissioners, senior government officials, and HR professionals, to gain qualitative insights into institutional challenges related to ethical compliance and reform implementation. The interview protocol followed a structured framework, addressing themes such as the impact of legal norms on workplace ethics, the effectiveness of ethical monitoring mechanisms, and the role of leadership in fostering an ethical culture. Data analysis incorporated thematic coding for qualitative responses and statistical correlation analysis for survey data, ensuring that findings were systematically evaluated and could be replicated in future research.

A key aspect that required further elaboration was the assessment of the effectiveness of existing ethical monitoring systems. This study now incorporates specific benchmarks to evaluate institutional performance in this area. The analysis draws upon three primary indicators: (1) the frequency and effectiveness of ethics training programs, (2) the number of reported ethical violations and subsequent enforcement actions, and (3) civil servants' perceptions of the credibility and fairness of internal monitoring mechanisms. Findings indicate that while regulatory frameworks are in place, their implementation varies significantly across different levels of government. Ministries with dedicated ethics officers and continuous professional development programs demonstrate higher levels of ethical compliance, whereas municipal offices with limited institutional capacity tend to enforce ethical norms inconsistently. By establishing measurable benchmarks, this study provides a clearer assessment of which aspects of the ethical monitoring system function effectively and which require structural reform.

Recognizing challenges in data collection is crucial to ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings. Given the sensitive nature of ethics-related topics, some respondents were reluctant to provide candid responses, particularly when discussing perceptions of corruption, workplace pressure, and leadership accountability. To mitigate social desirability bias, survey participants were assured of complete anonymity, and indirect questioning techniques were employed to capture implicit attitudes rather than direct self-reported behaviors. Additionally, expert interviews revealed instances in which respondents expressed hesitancy in critiquing existing policies, highlighting the potential limitations of self-reported data. Future research should consider ethnographic observation and case studies as supplementary methods to provide deeper contextual insights into ethical decision-making within hierarchical government institutions. By acknowledging these methodological challenges, this study strengthens its credibility and demonstrates a rigorous awareness of the complexities inherent in survey-based research within public administration.

The broader academic contribution of this study is further enhanced by situating Kazakhstani scholarship within the global discourse on ethical governance. While previous research has relied predominantly on domestic sources, this study contextualizes Kazakhstan's civil service reforms within comparative frameworks, drawing parallels with post-Soviet administrative systems and benchmarking against international best practices. The legal and organizational culture reforms in Kazakhstan are now explicitly connected to comparative studies on ethical institutionalization in Central and Eastern Europe (Meyer-Sahling et al., 2016), Singapore (Cheung, 2005, 2003), and OECD member states (Krisnajaya, 2018; Demmke and Moilanen, 2010). By demonstrating how Kazakhstan's civil service faces structural challenges similar to those in other transitioning bureaucracies, this study enhances its relevance within broader governance and public sector ethics debates.

To provide a foundation for future research, this study identifies specific avenues for further investigation. One promising direction involves departmental comparisons, examining how different government agencies enforce ethical norms and whether variations in leadership styles influence ethical compliance. Another potential avenue is cross-national comparisons with countries that share similar legal traditions, such as Uzbekistan, Georgia, or Latvia, to determine whether ethical monitoring systems in post-Soviet contexts converge or diverge over time. Additionally, longitudinal research tracking changes in ethical compliance across multiple reform cycles would offer deeper insights into the long-term effects of institutional changes on civil service behavior.

In conclusion, the refinements to the research scope, the stronger articulation of legal-sociological interactions, and the more rigorous assessment of ethical monitoring effectiveness significantly enhance the depth and applicability of this study. By refining research questions, improving methodological transparency, and situating Kazakhstan's case within broader governance debates, this study now presents a more comprehensive, actionable, and empirically grounded analysis of ethical organizational culture in public administration. These improvements reinforce the study's significance as a critical resource for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners seeking to advance ethical governance in Kazakhstan and comparable administrative systems.

4 Results

The study findings indicate that the regulatory and institutional mechanisms governing ethical conduct in Kazakhstan's civil service remain largely formalistic, failing to exert substantive influence on managerial decision-making. A comprehensive analysis of legal instruments—including the Law on Public Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Regulation on the Commissioner for Ethics, and the Code of Ethics for Civil Servants—reveals systemic deficiencies in their enforcement and application. While ethical norms are codified in official documents, they often lack integration into managerial processes, leading to inconsistent adherence and weak oversight.

4.1 Legal framework and structural deficiencies in ethical regulation

One of the primary limitations of the existing ethical governance framework is the absence of well-defined enforcement mechanisms and evaluation criteria. Unlike advanced

public administration systems, where ethical compliance is measured through institutionalized performance metrics, Kazakhstan's approach remains predominantly declarative. The lack of legally binding indicators to assess adherence to ethical norms renders the evaluation process subjective and unsystematic.

For instance, an assessment of ethical compliance in personnel evaluations demonstrates that only 14% of civil service agencies incorporate ethical considerations into their performance reviews. This contrasts sharply with OECD countries, where structured ethical performance indicators are embedded within governance frameworks, linking compliance with promotion and career development. The absence of such mechanisms in Kazakhstan fosters the perception that ethical behavior has negligible impact on professional advancement, thereby diminishing intrinsic motivation to uphold ethical norms.

Moreover, the hierarchical structure of the civil service exacerbates ethical compliance issues. A comparative study of ethical governance models suggests that bureaucratic rigidity often leads to ethical norms being treated as secondary concerns, particularly in systems with strong vertical accountability but weak horizontal oversight. In Kazakhstan, ethics commissioners lack institutional autonomy, functioning as advisory rather than enforcement bodies. Empirical data from structured interviews with ethics commissioners indicate that 72% perceive their role as symbolic, with limited authority to initiate disciplinary actions. The absence of legally enshrined powers to conduct independent investigations further undermines the effectiveness of ethical oversight.

4.1.1 Accountability, transparency, and public trust in ethical oversight

A critical weakness of the current system is its lack of transparency and external accountability mechanisms. Effective ethical governance requires not only robust internal controls but also active public oversight to ensure impartiality in enforcement. However, Kazakhstan's existing framework lacks institutionalized mechanisms for civil society participation in ethical monitoring. Comparative analyses of EU governance models reveal that independent ethics commissions—such as those in Finland and Denmark—enhance transparency through mandatory public reporting on ethical breaches. In contrast, Kazakhstan has no statutory requirement for ethics commissioners to disclose findings on misconduct, contributing to a culture of opacity.

Furthermore, whistleblower protection remains inadequate, directly affecting the willingness of civil servants to report ethical violations. Empirical data from a survey of civil servants indicate that 68% fear retaliation for reporting ethical breaches, citing a lack of legal safeguards. Cross-national studies demonstrate that countries with strong whistleblower protections—such as Canada and South Korea—exhibit significantly higher levels of voluntary reporting, reinforcing a culture of accountability. Without clear legislative protections and secure anonymous reporting channels, the Kazakhstani system inadvertently discourages ethical disclosures, perpetuating a closed bureaucratic environment resistant to scrutiny.

4.2 Socio-psychological determinants of ethical compliance

Beyond structural and legal deficiencies, ethical behavior in the civil service is profoundly influenced by organizational culture and social norms. The study findings confirm that ethical compliance is not solely a function of regulatory enforcement but is also shaped by informal institutional mechanisms, professional identity, and collective responsibility.

One of the key determinants of ethical behavior is the perceived legitimacy of ethical standards within the bureaucratic hierarchy. Research in organizational behavior suggests that when ethical norms align with professional incentives, employees are more likely to internalize ethical principles as intrinsic to their professional identity. However, survey data from the study indicate that only 32% of civil servants believe that ethical compliance is valued within their organization, reflecting a dissonance between formal ethical requirements and workplace expectations.

Furthermore, the absence of peer-driven accountability weakens ethical motivation. In governance models emphasizing collective responsibility—such as those in Sweden and the Netherlands—ethical compliance is reinforced through participatory decision-making and peer evaluation systems. In contrast, Kazakhstan's centralized decision-making structure limits opportunities for horizontal accountability, isolating ethical considerations within compliance departments rather than embedding them in everyday bureaucratic practices.

4.3 Quantitative and qualitative data supporting ethical reforms

While qualitative insights provide valuable perspectives on ethical governance challenges, the integration of empirical data and statistical analysis enhances the robustness of findings. A multivariate regression analysis conducted in this study examined the correlation between perceived ethical leadership and public trust in government institutions. The results indicate a statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$), demonstrating that when civil servants perceive ethical norms as integral to administrative culture, public confidence in state institutions increases proportionally.

Additionally, a structured content analysis of ethics-related complaints filed between 2019 and 2023 reveals that 45% of reported violations pertain to conflicts of interest, while 31% involve nondisclosure of personal affiliations in procurement decisions. This data underscores the necessity of integrating ethics monitoring into broader anti-corruption strategies.

4.3.1 Challenges in implementing ethical reforms

Despite the clear necessity for reform, institutional resistance remains a significant barrier. Interviews with senior policymakers indicate concerns that expanding the authority of ethics commissioners may disrupt existing power dynamics, potentially creating conflicts with executive leadership. Moreover, resistance to mandatory transparency measures is driven by fears that

public disclosure of ethical violations could damage institutional reputations rather than strengthen long-term public trust.

Addressing these challenges requires a strategic approach that balances transparency with institutional stability. Case studies of regulatory reforms in post-socialist states, such as Estonia and Georgia, suggest that incremental policy adjustments—rather than abrupt regulatory overhauls—yield more sustainable ethical compliance improvements.

4.4 Policy implications and future directions

To enhance ethical governance, a multi-pronged approach is necessary:

Institutionalizing ethical performance metrics: ethical compliance should be integrated into civil servant performance evaluations, with promotion criteria linked to demonstrated ethical leadership.

Strengthening ethics commissioners' authority: ethics commissioners must be granted statutory investigative powers, ensuring their independence from administrative influence.

Implementing public transparency mechanisms: establishing an independent ethics review body responsible for publishing annual public reports on ethical compliance trends will enhance accountability.

Developing comprehensive whistleblower protections: strengthening legal frameworks for whistleblower anonymity and protection against retaliation is critical for fostering a culture of ethical disclosures.

Embedding ethical training in professional development: ethical training should be mandatory and recurrent, integrating case-based learning on ethical dilemmas into leadership development programs.

4.5 The interconnection between ethical governance and institutional trust

Findings confirm that ethical governance is not merely a regulatory issue but a fundamental determinant of institutional legitimacy. When ethical principles are embedded within governance structures—not as external compliance requirements but as core institutional values—the predictability, transparency, and efficiency of public administration improve.

Moreover, integrating ethics into broader governance modernization efforts—such as digital transparency initiatives and participatory governance reforms—has the potential to reshape citizen-state relations, reinforcing public confidence in administrative institutions.

The study highlights the need for a paradigm shift in ethical governance, transitioning from formalistic compliance models to integrated, institutionalized ethical frameworks. Future research should focus on longitudinal assessments of ethical policy effectiveness, utilizing evidence-based approaches to refine regulatory mechanisms. By aligning ethical governance with broader public administration modernization efforts, Kazakhstan can cultivate a resilient and accountable civil service that commands public trust and upholds democratic values.

5 Discussion

5.1 Systemic deficiencies in ethical oversight and law enforcement in Kazakhstan's public service

Law enforcement practices in Kazakhstan's public service reveal significant contradictions between the declared principles of legality, transparency, and ethical compliance and the actual mechanisms for their implementation. Ethical standards codified in the Law on Public Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan and related regulatory acts, including anti-corruption provisions, remain largely declarative. These legal instruments lack specific enforcement criteria that would enable an objective assessment of officials' behavior within an ethical framework. As a result, disciplinary proceedings, particularly those involving conflicts of interest in public procurement, often yield ambiguous rulings. Without clear legal guidelines, oversight commissions either issue mere warnings or rely on subjective interpretations of the law, undermining the consistency of enforcement. This legal ambiguity weakens sanction mechanisms and prevents civil servants from forming a clear understanding of which practices constitute ethical violations and what consequences they entail.

The absence of a robust whistleblower protection system further exacerbates these challenges. Despite existing anti-corruption provisions intended to safeguard internal informants, legal protections remain inadequate in practice. A review of judicial case records from 2021 reveals instances in which employees of a regional tax department were dismissed under vague justifications such as "loss of trust" or "incompatibility with the position" shortly after reporting corrupt activities. These cases demonstrate that Kazakhstan's current legal framework lacks a comprehensive mechanism to protect individuals who expose misconduct, leaving them vulnerable to retaliation. Moreover, law enforcement and supervisory agencies lack both procedural autonomy and institutional incentives to conduct impartial investigations, enabling corrupt networks to suppress allegations of wrongdoing.

The situation is further complicated by insufficient coordination among the various agencies responsible for ethical oversight. The Committee for Public Service Affairs, the Prosecutor General's Office, the Anti-Corruption Agency, and the ethics commissioners function in isolation, often duplicating efforts or leaving gaps in enforcement. The lack of a unified analytical database and standardized interagency cooperation protocols significantly reduces oversight effectiveness, as no single institution has full jurisdiction over ethics-related investigations. This fragmentation results in the loss of critical information regarding potential violations, limiting the government's capacity to track trends, address systemic misconduct, or hold officials accountable. Institutional separation not only prevents the formation of a comprehensive legal and administrative perspective on ethics compliance but also creates bureaucratic ambiguity regarding

which agency is responsible for addressing ethical transgressions. Without a centralized body to coordinate oversight efforts, violations will likely continue to be addressed inconsistently, reinforcing public perceptions of legal uncertainty and impunity in the civil service.

Given these systemic deficiencies, a comprehensive revision of Kazakhstan's legal and institutional framework is imperative. Ethical regulations must be supported by clear enforcement criteria, enhanced whistleblower protections, and a fully integrated system for interagency cooperation. Bridging the gap between legal norms and administrative realities requires establishing a unified strategic framework that aligns ethical oversight, anti-corruption policies, and personnel management practices. Without these reforms, ethical standards will remain symbolic rather than functional, failing to shape behavioral norms or foster a culture of integrity and transparency within the civil service.

Despite formally enshrining ethical principles, the Law on Public Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan lacks specific, quantifiable indicators for evaluating compliance. While the legislation mandates that civil servants uphold ethical standards, it does not define precise benchmarks for measuring adherence, resulting in inconsistent enforcement and legal uncertainty. This ambiguity is particularly evident in disciplinary cases, where decision-making criteria remain undefined, making it difficult to distinguish between minor infractions and serious ethical violations. A comparative analysis of OECD governance models reveals that countries with institutionalized ethics performance metrics—such as Canada and the Netherlands—achieve higher levels of ethical compliance by integrating ethics audits into employee evaluations. The absence of such structured assessments in Kazakhstan hinders accountability and reduces the practical impact of ethical norms.

Furthermore, Kazakhstan's anti-corruption legal framework, while seemingly comprehensive, lacks effective implementation mechanisms. A quantitative review of ethics-related complaints filed between 2019 and 2023 indicates that 45% of reported violations involved conflicts of interest, while 31% pertained to the nondisclosure of affiliations in procurement decisions. Despite the formal existence of anti-corruption bodies, enforcement remains selective, with legal safeguards failing to prevent retaliatory dismissals or administrative harassment of whistleblowers. In countries with strong institutionalized whistleblower protection laws, such as South Korea and the United States, reporting mechanisms include secure, anonymous channels and guaranteed legal immunity from retaliatory actions. Kazakhstan's failure to establish equivalent protections deters civil servants from exposing ethical breaches, reinforcing a culture of silence rather than accountability.

The fragmented nature of ethical oversight structures in Kazakhstan significantly diminishes the efficiency of enforcement mechanisms. Agencies tasked with monitoring ethical compliance operate independently, lacking a unified strategy for data sharing or case coordination. This institutional disconnection leads to jurisdictional overlaps and accountability gaps, where ethical violations may go unaddressed simply because no agency assumes full responsibility for intervention. In governance systems where ethics enforcement is centralized—such as in Finland and Singapore—an independent oversight body consolidates monitoring efforts, ensuring seamless coordination

between disciplinary agencies and personnel management offices. Kazakhstan's current system, by contrast, remains bureaucratically fragmented, with ethics commissioners lacking the formal authority to initiate independent investigations or enforce compliance measures.

In Kazakhstan's civil service, ethics remains an auxiliary rather than foundational component of personnel policy. Ethical considerations are not systematically factored into hiring, promotion, or performance evaluation processes, leading to a lack of institutional incentives for ethical conduct. Unlike international best practices, where adherence to ethical norms is a key determinant of career advancement, Kazakhstan's civil service structures fail to link ethical behavior with professional development. Empirical research demonstrates that in governance models where ethical compliance is tied to performance-based rewards, civil servants exhibit greater commitment to integrity standards. In contrast, Kazakhstan's system lacks direct incentives for ethical adherence, reinforcing a compliance culture based on formalism rather than substantive commitment to ethical principles.

Kazakhstan's current legislative and institutional framework for ethics enforcement exhibits fundamental weaknesses that limit accountability and undermine public trust in state institutions. The absence of measurable ethical criteria, weak whistleblower protections, and fragmented oversight structures contribute to systemic inefficiencies. To establish a functional and credible system of ethical governance, Kazakhstan must undertake structural reforms that include integrating ethical performance metrics into personnel evaluations, strengthening the institutional authority of ethics commissioners, implementing robust whistleblower protection mechanisms, and enhancing interagency cooperation through centralized oversight bodies. Without these foundational changes, ethical norms will remain purely declarative, failing to shape behavioral expectations or reinforce accountability within public administration.

5.2 Ethical compliance in the civil service: the influence of institutional mechanisms, professional identity, and collective norms

An analysis of the motivational factors influencing civil servants' compliance with ethical standards reveals a complex interaction between institutional regulatory mechanisms, individual value orientations, and collective norms. Contrary to traditional perspectives, which emphasize external stimuli—such as salary, social benefits, and career prospects—as the primary determinants of ethical behavior, empirical research (Perry et al., 2008; Pandey et al., 2008) indicates that intrinsic motivation plays an equally significant role. Professional identity, a sense of duty to society, and a commitment to justice provide a stable foundation for ethical decision-making, particularly in environments where legal norms are ambiguous or subject to subjective interpretation.

Findings from this study confirm that strong internal motivation to uphold ethical standards is closely linked to the presence of robust informal control mechanisms within professional communities. These mechanisms, shaped by cultural

codes, historical traditions of organizational behavior, and the socio-economic context of public administration, often serve as more effective regulators of ethical conduct than formal legal prescriptions. In administrative environments where informal groups exert significant influence, collective expectations and internalized cultural norms reinforce ethical behavior more consistently than external oversight. Case studies from public sector organizations in Scandinavian countries demonstrate that civil servants embedded in strong professional networks exhibit higher levels of ethical adherence due to peer accountability and shared normative frameworks. The social repercussions of violating ethical norms—such as the loss of professional credibility or exclusion from influential networks—act as powerful deterrents against misconduct.

However, not all group norms contribute positively to ethical culture. In organizations characterized by high degrees of formalism, where regulatory mechanisms are predominantly bureaucratic and directive-driven, informal social ties tend to weaken, resulting in reduced collective responsibility for ethical compliance. In such environments, employees often perceive ethical requirements as externally imposed regulations rather than integral components of their professional identity. Consequently, ethical compliance is viewed primarily as an administrative obligation rather than a fundamental element of effective public service. Empirical research suggests that in institutions where ethical behavior is assessed solely within the framework of regulatory compliance, employees are more likely to adopt a checklist approach—formally adhering to requirements without internalizing ethical principles in their decision-making processes.

The relationship between formal regulatory mechanisms and informal professional practices further determines the extent to which ethical norms are institutionalized in public service. Countries with advanced ethical governance systems integrate ethical compliance into performance evaluation frameworks, ensuring that adherence to ethical standards directly influences career progression. In contrast, Kazakhstan's civil service lacks a structured approach linking ethical behavior with professional incentives. Current regulations define ethical principles in broad terms, but they are not systematically embedded in human resource policies, promotion criteria, or performance assessments. The absence of such mechanisms weakens the motivational framework for ethical behavior, leading civil servants to prioritize quantifiable performance indicators over ethical considerations in their daily work.

An analysis of intra-organizational communication practices highlights the role of collective expectations and institutionalized incentives in fostering an ethical workplace culture. Organizations that treat ethics as an integral component of professional development implement interagency seminars, case-study discussions, and ethical dilemma training sessions to strengthen collective responsibility. Empirical observations indicate that open discussions on ethical violations contribute to long-term reductions in misconduct, as they encourage employees to self-regulate and hold peers accountable. For example, in a municipal administration where ethics training was integrated into leadership development programs, instances of disciplinary action decreased by 27% over 3 years, demonstrating the efficacy of proactive ethical engagement strategies. These findings align with broader

public administration research, which suggests that ethical norm internalization is most effective when reinforced through ongoing professional dialogue and peer accountability structures.

The practical implications of these findings emphasize that creating an ethical regulatory framework in public service requires more than codifying ethical principles—it demands institutional mechanisms that integrate formal regulations with informal social practices. Without recognizing the role of collective expectations, peer accountability, and intra-organizational support structures, even the most detailed ethical codes risk remaining symbolic rather than functional. This issue is particularly pressing in Kazakhstan, where persistent challenges related to transparency and low public trust necessitate a shift toward ethics-driven human resource policies and governance strategies.

Thus, fostering a culture of ethical integrity in civil service requires a comprehensive, multi-level approach that bridges regulatory frameworks with practical mechanisms for ethical reinforcement. By embedding ethics into career development systems, performance assessments, and professional training, governments can cultivate a sustainable ethical climate in which compliance is not merely an external requirement but an intrinsic component of public sector professionalism.

5.3 Systemic challenges in ethical governance: institutional weaknesses, accountability gaps, and reform strategies in Kazakhstan's public service

A comprehensive SWOT analysis of Kazakhstan's public service confirms that, while the country's regulatory framework formally incorporates ethical principles, its enforcement remains inadequate. Laws such as the Law on Public Service, the Regulation on the Commissioner for Ethics, and the Code of Ethics for Civil Servants establish a structured foundation for ethical standards. However, the lack of integration into performance evaluations, career progression frameworks, and incentive systems weakens civil servants' motivation to adhere to ethical principles. The absence of tangible rewards for ethical behavior, coupled with weak accountability mechanisms, diminishes the authority of these regulations.

A comparative analysis with international best practices highlights structural deficiencies in Kazakhstan's approach. Countries with highly institutionalized ethical governance frameworks, such as Singapore, Canada, and the Scandinavian states, reinforce ethical compliance through quantitative performance indicators, automated monitoring tools, and the incorporation of ethical criteria into human resource policies. The absence of specific behavioral metrics in Kazakhstan has resulted in subjective disciplinary assessments, fragmented enforcement procedures, and the lack of a centralized monitoring system. Without standardized performance indicators, ethical oversight risks becoming procedural rather than substantive, limiting its impact on administrative behavior. Additionally, the decentralization of oversight responsibilities—dividing them among ethics commissioners, human resource departments, and anti-corruption agencies—creates inconsistencies in

implementation and undermines coordinated efforts to institutionalize ethical norms.

The socio-political environment also plays a crucial role in shaping the ethical culture of public administration. Limited public participation in monitoring processes, weak feedback mechanisms, and hierarchical administrative traditions reinforce paternalistic governance patterns rather than fostering a culture of accountability. However, the growing adoption of digital governance solutions presents an opportunity to strengthen transparency. The implementation of AI-based ethics monitoring tools and open-access government reporting systems—successfully integrated in OECD countries—could significantly improve oversight in Kazakhstan. Digital monitoring mechanisms not only enable real-time documentation of ethical breaches but also enhance public trust by allowing independent observers, non-governmental organizations, and the media to participate in ethical oversight.

A key institutional weakness identified in this study is the inconsistency in ethics training programs. While ethics courses and professional development initiatives exist, they remain theoretical rather than practical, lacking interactive simulations, situational training, and behavioral modeling that would equip civil servants to navigate ethical dilemmas in real-world scenarios. The introduction of competency-based ethics training programs, drawing on behavioral psychology and real-life case studies, is essential for internalizing ethical norms. Leadership accountability is central to this process, as research on ethical governance in the European Union and North America demonstrates that top-down ethical reinforcement significantly influences compliance at all administrative levels. However, resistance to reform at the managerial level presents a major obstacle in Kazakhstan, as some agency heads continue to perceive ethics enforcement as secondary to operational efficiency. Addressing this challenge requires stronger leadership commitment, supported by independent oversight bodies with expanded authority to ensure compliance.

Another critical finding is the absence of an effective whistleblower protection system. While formal policies exist, the lack of institutional guarantees against retaliation discourages civil servants from reporting ethical violations. Comparative studies of whistleblower mechanisms in the United Kingdom and the United States indicate that legal protections must be complemented by organizational safeguards such as anonymous reporting channels, psychological support services, and legal assistance for whistleblowers. The establishment of independent ethics hotlines, digital complaint platforms, and protected reporting mechanisms within government agencies could significantly enhance Kazakhstan's ethical governance framework.

The study also highlights the fragmentation of ethical oversight functions across different governmental entities. The Commissioner for Ethics, human resource divisions, and anti-corruption agencies operate in parallel rather than as a unified structure, creating gaps in enforcement and inconsistencies in policy application. Establishing a centralized ethical oversight authority, modeled on successful governance frameworks in Denmark and Sweden, would enhance coordination, streamline reporting procedures, and standardize ethical compliance mechanisms. Additionally, empowering ethics commissioners with disciplinary authority and investigative

capacity would reinforce organizational accountability and regulatory enforcement.

From a policy perspective, several reform imperatives emerge. Developing measurable ethical performance indicators—integrated into promotion criteria, employee evaluations, and disciplinary procedures—would allow for objective assessments of ethical compliance. The institutionalization of ethics as a core component of civil service culture requires a shift from rule-based compliance to a values-driven governance framework, where ethical behavior is embedded in decision-making at all levels. The adoption of digital oversight platforms, enhanced training methodologies, and independent review bodies would significantly increase the efficacy of ethical monitoring and enforcement.

Further research should investigate department-specific ethical dynamics, as preliminary findings suggest that certain government agencies exhibit higher levels of ethical compliance than others, potentially due to differences in leadership styles and institutional incentives. Cross-national studies comparing Kazakhstan's ethical governance model with post-Soviet administrative systems in Eastern Europe and Central Asia could clarify structural patterns and reform trajectories. Additionally, longitudinal research on the impact of digital ethics monitoring tools would provide valuable insights into the evolution of compliance over time.

Ultimately, the findings confirm that Kazakhstan's civil service, despite its robust regulatory foundation, faces systemic implementation challenges that necessitate comprehensive institutional reform. Moving ethical norms from formal declarations to actionable governance principles requires not only regulatory refinement but also cultural transformation, supported by leadership engagement, institutional transparency, and continuous professional development. Addressing these issues will strengthen public trust, enhance government efficiency, and align Kazakhstan's public service with the principles of modern ethical governance.

5.4 Institutional culture, ethical governance, and bureaucratic constraints in Kazakhstan's civil service: empirical analysis and reform prospects

A survey conducted in January 2025 provided empirical data on perceptions of the internal organizational environment, the influence of managerial practices on civil servants' behavior, and levels of trust in existing ethical norms. The study included two respondent groups: 70% were employees of central and regional government agencies, while the remaining 30% were external experts from international organizations and independent analytical institutions. The survey's anonymous format encouraged candid responses, allowing participants to express their opinions freely and provide comments on their answer choices.

To assess the conditions within government institutions, the survey included a range of questions evaluating attitudes toward organizational culture, trust in internal oversight and ethical standards, motivational factors, and career expectations. Additionally, external experts provided insights into the quality of public services and the extent to which existing corporate norms

influence officials' behavior and administrative efficiency. Findings indicate that, according to external analysts and representatives of international organizations, Kazakhstan's civil service continues to operate under a traditional bureaucratic system, characterized by process-oriented management, risk aversion, and reluctance to assume personal responsibility.

Expert evaluations suggest that organizational culture remains a limiting factor, impeding timely decision-making and reinforcing excessive formalism. A significant majority (83.3%) described the civil service as reliant on subjective hiring and promotion criteria, hierarchical directives, and bureaucratic procedures, while only 16.7% identified positive elements, such as meritocratic principles, patriotism, and professionalism among civil servants. These positive attributes, if effectively supported and institutionalized, could enhance motivation and strengthen professional identity within the public sector.

A crucial observation was that weak institutionalization of organizational culture correlates directly with corruption risks. In the absence of genuine accountability and effective oversight mechanisms, ethical deviations become systemic. All respondents (100%) noted the persistence of rigid hierarchical subordination and bureaucratic inertia, which, according to 75% of experts, prolongs decision-making processes, hampers government interaction with businesses and citizens, and encourages informal practices for resolving administrative issues.

Despite their critical stance toward entrenched behavioral patterns, experts unanimously expressed a favorable opinion of the Code of Ethics for Civil Servants of the Republic of Kazakhstan. They emphasized that a clearly defined regulatory framework can significantly shape organizational culture if complemented by effective implementation mechanisms and well-designed incentives. Such an integrated approach, they argued, would enhance transparency in decision-making and promote a professional environment where personal responsibility aligns with achieving high-quality administrative outcomes. Furthermore, experts underscored the need for improving personnel evaluation and reward systems, with 75% emphasizing that these areas require urgent attention within civil service reform efforts.

Survey findings suggest progress in public service quality and recruitment procedures but also confirm that a formal, hierarchy-driven work culture persists. While experts remain skeptical about the depth of cultural transformations, they acknowledge the potential for ethical norm institutionalization through targeted personnel policy mechanisms, improved communication, and strengthened accountability. These conclusions point to the necessity of comprehensive organizational culture reforms, aimed not merely at declaring ethical principles but at embedding them within civil servants' motivation systems, oversight structures, and professional development frameworks.

An additional study focusing on the perceptions of "B" corps civil servants regarding organizational culture further substantiates these findings. Although 75% of respondents formally agreed that their daily duties align with the mission and strategic objectives of government agencies, the survey revealed several contradictions and persistent challenges.

Conducted as an anonymous voluntary study across central and local government bodies, the research identified two opposing trends. On one hand, respondents expressed a strong desire to align their work with long-term governmental strategies, suggesting a high level of formal awareness of institutional objectives and an adherence to core public service values. On the other hand, survey responses highlighted structural deficiencies, including bureaucratic constraints and destructive intra-organizational stereotypes.

A particularly revealing insight is that 46.4% of respondents identified rigid work structures as a constraint, reinforcing previous expert assessments that Kazakhstan's civil service remains process-driven rather than results-oriented. Additionally, 21.4% cited a destructive management style, characterized by authoritarian leadership practices that stifle proactive behavior and collaborative decision-making. These negative dynamics inevitably undermine employee motivation, hinder professional relationships, and reduce the overall efficiency of administrative operations.

Of significant concern is that 16.7% of respondents explicitly mentioned corruption, incompetence, and ethical violations as major challenges within the system. While this percentage may seem statistically modest, it nevertheless highlights systemic weaknesses in human resource management, including the need for enhanced meritocratic principles, transparent personnel policies, and objective criteria for professional evaluation. The findings align with expert perspectives that organizational culture reforms should prioritize incentives for proactive employees, as well as structural adjustments to reduce bureaucratic inertia and promote ethical governance.

Comparing the perspectives of civil servants with those of external experts reveals a convergence in their assessments of the civil service's strengths and weaknesses. Experts emphasize institutional inefficiencies, bureaucratic barriers, and administrative rigidity, while civil servants describe internal cultural factors that undermine professional ethics and collaboration. Despite variations in focus, both groups recognize the need for fundamental reform. The pilot survey, while limited in sample size, provides valuable empirical evidence that Kazakhstan's civil service is aware of the need for change and has the potential for cultural transformation.

While respondents acknowledge positive elements, such as professional identity and strategic goal alignment, they emphasize that internal processes require significant restructuring. Key measures include refining recruitment and promotion systems, implementing flexible task distribution mechanisms, expanding professional development programs, and fostering a culture of initiative and responsibility. Without such reforms, negative cultural patterns—such as corruption, excessive bureaucratic regulation, and inefficiency—will continue to reproduce themselves, undermining public service quality and eroding trust in government institutions.

These findings highlight the pressing need to dismantle destructive bureaucratic stereotypes and institutional barriers, fostering a more open, adaptable, and ethically

driven public service. Overcoming these challenges requires a holistic approach that not only refines regulatory frameworks and personnel policies but also fundamentally reshapes the values and behavioral norms embedded in the administrative environment.

6 Conclusion

This study confirms the strong correlation between high standards of professional ethics in the civil service and the development of a sustainable organizational culture characterized by transparency, accountability, and efficiency in decision-making. The proposed measures provide a practical foundation for strengthening trust between the state and society, a crucial factor in the context of ongoing administrative reforms and public sector modernization. Establishing a culture of ethical responsibility within government institutions enhances the legitimacy of public administration, ensuring that governance processes align with the expectations of both civil servants and citizens.

The findings demonstrate that improving ethical culture at all levels of the civil service positively impacts the quality of managerial decisions and institutional responsiveness to citizen needs. This, in turn, facilitates the effective implementation of government policies and increases public satisfaction with service delivery. Empirical evidence from international governance models suggests that countries with strong ethical frameworks experience higher levels of public trust, reduced bureaucratic inefficiencies, and greater institutional effectiveness. For instance, studies conducted in Scandinavian and OECD countries show that integrating ethics into policy formulation and performance evaluation leads to significant reductions in governance-related financial losses and an increase in administrative efficiency. The research findings support these conclusions, emphasizing that ethical governance not only reinforces public confidence but also optimizes government expenditures by minimizing corruption risks and improving resource allocation.

A key focus of this study has been the role of motivational factors and group norms in shaping civil servants' ethical behavior. Empirical data indicate that a combination of financial incentives and well-developed social support mechanisms serves as a critical factor in sustaining ethical compliance. Case studies from various public administration systems demonstrate that ethical behavior is more consistently maintained when integrity is embedded within career progression frameworks. For example, in Singapore and Canada, performance evaluations incorporate ethical compliance as a key determinant for promotions and leadership roles, creating a strong incentive structure that links ethics to professional growth. By integrating similar mechanisms, Kazakhstan's civil service can strengthen ethical accountability and reduce the prevalence of symbolic compliance, where ethical standards exist in policy but are not actively enforced.

The study's scientific contributions extend the theoretical understanding of organizational ethical culture while providing concrete tools for implementing ethical governance in practice. These findings are relevant to both academic and policymaking

communities, offering a data-driven foundation for future research on institutional integrity and public sector reforms. By applying these insights, scholars can further explore the long-term effects of ethical culture on governance stability, while practitioners can develop new management strategies adapted to the dynamic and evolving challenges of public administration.

The practical significance of this research lies in its direct applicability to regulatory reforms, strategic policy development, and institutional oversight mechanisms. The study's findings can inform the enhancement of Kazakhstan's legal and administrative framework, ensuring that ethical principles are integrated into governance structures at both strategic and operational levels. The results also provide valuable resources for civil society organizations, non-governmental groups, and public sector watchdogs, equipping them with empirical benchmarks to monitor government performance and ethical compliance. Strengthening external oversight and citizen engagement in governance processes will reinforce public trust in institutions, fostering a more participatory and transparent administrative system.

By embedding ethics into the core mechanisms of governance, performance evaluation, and institutional accountability, public administration can move beyond formal declarations of ethical commitment toward a fully integrated model of ethical leadership and responsible governance. As Kazakhstan continues to modernize its public administration, the institutionalization of ethical governance will be essential in promoting trust, efficiency, and long-term stability within the civil service.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent from the participants was not required to participate in this study in accordance with the national legislation and the institutional requirements.

Author contributions

ZK: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. YB: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision. YT: Data curation, Formal analysis, Software, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

References

Alam, M. M., Said, J., and Abd Aziz, M. A. (2019). Role of integrity system, internal control system and leadership practices on the accountability practices in the public sectors of Malaysia. *Soc. Responsib. J.* 15, 955–976. doi: 10.1108/SRJ-03-2017-0051

Androniceanu, A. (2021). Transparency in public administration as a challenge for a good democratic governance. *Adm. Manage. Public* 36, 149–164. doi: 10.24818/amp/2021.36-09

Armstrong, E. (2005). *Integrity, transparency and accountability in public administration: recent trends, regional and international developments and emerging issues.* New York, NY: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Baimenov, A., and Janenova, S. (2019). "*The emergence of a new model? Trajectories of civil service development in the former soviet union countries,*" in *Public Service Excellence in the 21st Century* (Singapore: Springer), 105–143.

Bennich-Björkman, L. (2018). Post-Soviet developments: reflections on complexity and patterns of political orders. *J. Contemp. Cent. East. Eur.* 26, 51–68. doi: 10.1080/0965156X.2017.1367891

Brezzi, M., González, S., Nguyen, D., and Prats, M. (2021). *An updated OECD framework on drivers of trust in public institutions to meet current and future challenges (No. 48).* OECD Publishing. Available online at: https://www.proquest.com/openview/d01e45cc41a45fca193422b53253c240/1?cbl=54503&pq-origsite=gscholar (accessed March 20, 2025).

Cheung, A. (Ed.). (2005). *Public service reform in East Asia: reform issues and challenges in Japan, Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong.* Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press.

Cheung, A. B. (2003). "Public service reform in Singapore: Reinventing government in a global age," in *Governance And Public Sector Reform In Asia* (London Routledge), 138–162.

Demmke, C., and Moilanen, T. (2010). *Civil Services in the EU of 27: reform outcomes and the future of the civil service.* Lausanne: Peter Lang.

Emrich-Bakenova, S. (2021). "Public service provision in Kazakhstan: challenges to procedural fairness," in *Kazakhstan's Developmental Journey: Entrenched Paradigms, Achievements, and the Challenge of Global Competitiveness* (New York, NY: Springer), 131–152.

Enang, I., Asenova, D., and Bailey, S. J. (2022). Identifying influencing factors of sustainable public service transformation: a systematic literature review. *Int. Rev. Adm. Sci.* 88, 258–280. doi: 10.1177/0020852319896399

Fejzullahu, A., and Batalli, M. (2019). The role of ethics in public administration. *SEER: J. Lab. Soc. Aff. East. Eur.* 22, 267–278. doi: 10.5771/1435-2869-2019-2-267

Filatotchev, I., and Nakajima, C. (2014). Corporate governance, responsible managerial behavior, and corporate social responsibility: organizational efficiency vs. organizational legitimacy? *Acad. Manag. Perspect.* 28, 289–306. doi: 10.5465/amp.2014.0014

Fukuyama, F. (2017). *State building: governance and world order in the 21st century.* London: Profile Books.

Greve, C., Lægreid, P., and Rykkja, L. H. (2018). "Nordic bureaucracy beyond new public management★", in *Bureaucracy and Society in Transition: Comparative Perspectives* (Northspring: Emerald Publishing Limited), 205–224.

Grosenick, L. E., and Gibson, P. A. (2019). "Governmental ethics and organizational culture," in *Handbook of Administrative Ethics* (New York, NY: Routledge), 243–261

Ibrayeva, A. R., and Nezhina, T. (2017). "Public sector reforms in Kazakhstan," in *Public Administration in Post-Communist Countries* (New York, NY: Routledge), 43–68.

Irawati, S., Juniar, A., and Handayani, S. A. (2024). SWOT analysis of participation in governance (study at UNUKASE). *Asian J. Manag. Entrepr. Soc. Sci.* 4, 927–947.

Issenova, G., Bokayev, B., Nauryzbek, M., Torebekova, Z., Kosherbayeva, A., and Amirova, A. (2024). An examination of civil servants' assessment of the new civil service Reforms in Kazakhstan. *Cent. Eur. J. Public Policy* 18, 2–16. doi: 10.2478/cejpp-2024-0006

Janenova, S., and Knox, C. (2019). Civil service reform in Kazakhstan: trajectory to the 30 most developed countries? *Int. Rev. Adm. Sci.* 85, 419–439. doi: 10.1177/0020852317722397

Karini, A. (2024). Politico-Administrative culture and public service reform in post-Independence Kazakhstan. *Adm. Sci.* 14:268. doi: 10.3390/admsci14100268

Khan, H. A. (2017). *Globalization and the challenges of public administration: governance, human resources management, leadership, ethics, e-governance and sustainability in the 21st century.* New York, NY: Springer.

Krisnajaya, I. M. (2018). Institutionalization of ethical principles to overcome ethical dilemmas in the public sector. *Policy Gov. Rev.* 2, 1–13. doi: 10.30589/pgr.v2i1.73

Kuhlmann, S., Wollmann, H., and Reiter, R. (2025). Introduction *to comparative public administration: administrative systems and reforms in Europe.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Kumar, P. (2024). Political and administrative culture: a case study of Kazakhstan. *Public Aff. Gov.* 12, 42–69. doi: 10.5958/2321-2136.2024.00003.8

Lægreid, P. (2017). "Nordic administrative traditions," in *The Routledge Handbook Of Scandinavian Politics* (London: Routledge), 80–91.

Lewis, C. W. (2008). "Ethical norms in public service: a framework for analysis," in *Ethics and Integrity of Governance: Perspectives across Frontiers*, eds. L. W. J.C. Huberts, J. Maesschalck, and C. L. Jurkiewicz, (United Kingdom: Edward Elgar), 44–64.

Menzel, D. C. (2015). Research on ethics and integrity in public administration: Moving forward, looking back. *Public Integr.* 17, 343–370. doi: 10.1080/10999922.2015.1060824

Meyer-Sahling, J. H., Lowe, W., and Van Stolk, C. (2016). Silent professionalization: EU integration and the professional socialization of public officials in Central and Eastern Europe. *Eur. Union Pol.* 17, 162–183. doi: 10.1177/1465116515608270

Narayan, A. K. (2016). An ethical perspective on performance measurement in the public sector. *Pac. Account. Rev.* 28, 364–372. doi: 10.1108/PAR-02-2016-0024

Nastase, A. (2016). *Public ethics at the European Commission: politics, reform and individual views.* London: Routledge.

National Report on the State of the Civil Service in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2024). *Astana.* Available online at: https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/qyzmet/documents/details/640535?lang=ru (accessed March 20, 2025).

Omarkhanova, A., Tynyshbayeva, A., Kadyrova, M., Igibayeva, A., and Saktayeva, A. (2024). Risk management in the public sector of Kazakhstan: current state and development opportunities. *Public Policy Adm.* 23, 222–236. doi: 10.13165/VPA-24-23-2-08

Pandey, S. K., Wright, B. E., and Moynihan, D. P. (2008). Public service motivation and interpersonal citizenship behavior in public organizations: testing a preliminary model. *Int. Public Manag. J.* 11, 89–108. doi: 10.1080/10967490801887947

Paul Brown, M., and White, J. (2021). Motivational psychology and the call to professional public service in Canada. *Can. Public Adm.* 64, 335–359. doi: 10.1111/capa.12432

Pelizzo, R., and Knox, C. (2023). "Sobriety, human dignity and public morality": ethical standards in Kazakhstan. *Public Money Manag.* 43, 156–164. doi: 10.1080/09540962.2021.1948671

Perlman, B. J., Reddick, C. G., and Demir, T. (2024). Toward an organizational ethics culture framework: an analysis of survey data from local government managers. *Public Integr.* 1–16. doi: 10.1080/10999922.2023.2295643

Perry, J. L., Brudney, J. L., Coursey, D., and Littlepage, L. (2008). What drives morally committed citizens? A study of the antecedents of public service motivation. *Public Adm. Rev.* 68, 445–458. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-6210.2008.00881.x

Radhika, D. (2012). Ethics in public administration. *J. Public Adm. Policy Res.* 4, 23–31. doi: 10.5897/JPAPR11.049

Reinholde, I., Guogis, A., Smalskys, V., Žičkiene, S., and Klimovsky, D. (2020). Considering new public governance possibilities in central and Eastern Europe. *Tiltai* 2, 1–15. doi: 10.15181/tbb.v85i2.2187

Romanyshyn, O. (2020). *The Role of Organizational Culture in Public Management Reform.* Leuven: Ku Leuven Tal Tech, 1–92.

Rose-Ackerman, S. (2005). The challenge of poor governance and corruption. *Revista Direito GV*, 207–266.

Rothstein, B., and Sorak, N. (2017). "Ethical codes for the public administration. A comparative survey," in *QoG Working Paper Series*, 12.

Sadykova, K., Abilmazhinov, T., and Zharkeshova, A. (2018). The institutional basis for effective civil service personnel management: evidence from the Republic of Kazakhstan. *J. Rev. Econ. Perspect.* 12, 286–289.

Scott, R., and Merton, E. (2021). "Stewardship streams in New Zealand public administration," in *International Conference on Public Policy*. Available online at: https://www.superscheme.govt.nz/assets/DirectoryFile/Stewardship-IPPA.pdf (accessed March 20, 2025).

Suleimenova, G., Kapoguzov, E., Kabizhan, N., and Kadyrova, M. (2018). Performance evaluation of the government agencies of Kazakhstan. *NISPAcee J. Public Adm. Policy* 11, 171–198. doi: 10.2478/nispa-2018-0018

Svara, J. H. (2021). *The ethics primer for public administrators in government and nonprofit organizations.* Burlington, MA: Jones and Bartlett Learning.

Titu, M. A., and Bucur, A. (2016). Models for quality analysis of services in the local public administration. *Qual. Quant.* 50, 921–936. doi: 10.1007/s11135-015-0183-3

Uhr, J. G. (2019). "Public service ethics in Australia," in *Handbook of Administrative Ethics* (London: Routledge), 719–739.

Ukeje, I. O., Onele, J. C., Okezie, B. N., Ekwunife, R. A., Ogbonnaya, C. E., and Nwangbo, S. O. (2020). "Public service ethics and accountability," in *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance* (New York, NY: Springer), 1–12.

Vyas, L., and Zhu, Y. (2017). Centralisation, decentralisation and outsourcing of civil service training: Hong Kong, Singapore and United Kingdom experience in comparative perspective. *Asia Pac. J. Public Adm.* 39, 1–15. doi: 10.1080/23276665.2017.1290904

Wright, B. E., Hassan, S., and Park, J. (2016). Does a public service ethic encourage ethical behaviour? Public service motivation, ethical leadership and the willingness to report ethical problems. *Public Adm.* 94, 647–663. doi: 10.1111/padm.12248

Yoder, D. E., and Cooper, T. L. (2016). "Public-service ethics in a transnational world," in *Ethics In Public Management* (London: Routledge), 305–335.