# PUBLIC SERVICE IN TRANSITION: PAY FAIRNESS, CAREER CLARITY, AND ORGANIZATIONAL ADVOCACY AMONG KAZAKHSTANI CIVIL SERVANTS

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**Abstract.** This study provides the first nationwide, mixed-methods portrait of motivational drivers, job satisfaction and reform priorities among Kazakhstan's civil servants. A purposive-stratified survey of 886 officials from five economic regions and five ministries (March–April 2025) combined validated quantitative scales — Public Service Motivation (PSM), Job Satisfaction Index, organizational-climate items and an employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS) — with an open-ended reform question. Multivariate regression and thematic coding were applied. Job security (63%) and the desire to contribute to society (49%) dominate entry motives, confirming a coexistence of instrumental and altruistic rationales. Managerial support and working conditions strongly predict overall satisfaction ($\beta = 0.34$ and $0.27$, $p < 0.01$), while career opportunities are the main retention lever ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$). Salary dissatisfaction triples the odds of intending to exit for the private sector (OR = 2.8). Despite high educational attainment (18% master's degrees), only 27% of respondents are institutional "promoters", yielding an eNPS of +6 and signalling fragile advocacy. Gender and cohort effects are pronounced: women exhibit higher loyalty (+10 eNPS points), whereas officials under 30 show the highest exit propensity. Qualitative data highlight inadequate pay, burnout and opaque promotion as chief dysfunctions; yet proposed solutions remain technocratic (digitalisation, salary grids), overlooking relational legitimacy. By integrating PSM theory with eNPS in a hybrid post-Soviet context, the article extends motivation research and identifies policy levers — pay realignment, meritocratic mobility and manager-as-coach models — to stabilise Kazakhstan's civil-service talent pipeline.

**Key words:** Public Service Motivation, Job Satisfaction, Civil-Service Reform, Kazakhstan, Retention

**Аңдатпа.** Зерттеу Қазақстанның мемлекеттік қызметкерлеріне арналған алғашқы ұлттық аралас әдісті портретті ұсынады. 2025 жылғы наурыз–сәуірде бес экономикалық аймақ пен бес министрліктен 886 қызметкерге мақсатты-стратификацияланған сауалнама жүргізілді. Қоғамға қызмет ету мотивациясы (PSM), Жұмысқа қанағаттану индексі, ұйым ішіндегі ахуал өлшемдері, қызметкердің Net Promoter Score (eNPS) қолданылды және реформалар жөніндегі ашық жауаптар жиналды. Талдауға көпөзгермелі регрессия мен тақырыптық кодтау енгізілді. Қызметке келу уәждерінің алдыңғы қатарында жұмыс орнының тұрақтылығы 63% және қоғамға үлес қосу ниеті 49% тұр, бұл утилитарлық және альтруистік себептердің қатар өмір сүретінін көрсетеді. Жалпы қанағаттануды басшылықтың қолдауы ($\beta=0.34$) мен жұмыс жағдайлары ($\beta=0.27$, $p<0.01$) айқындайды. Қызметкерлерді ұстап қалуда мансаптық өсу мүмкіндіктері шешуші ($\beta=0.41$, $p<0.001$). Жалақыға қанағаттанбау жеке секторға ауысу ықтималдығын үш есе арттырады (OR=2.8). Білімі жоғары болғанымен (18% магистр), небәрі 27% «ұстанушылар» қатарына кіреді; eNPS +6, ішкі адвокаттық әлсіз. Гендер мен жас бойынша айырмалар байқалады: әйелдердің адалдығы жоғары (+10 eNPS), ал 30 жасқа дейінгілер жұмыстан кетуге бейім. Сапалық деректер ең үлкен түйткілдерді жеткіліксіз жалақы, күйзеліс (burnout) және мансап айқындығының жоқтығы деп сипаттайды. Ұсыныстар көбіне технократиялық сипатта қалып, сенім мен қатынастың маңызын ескермей қояды. PSM мен eNPS-ті ұштастыра отырып, зерттеу постсоветтік контексттегі мотивацияны кеңейтеді және үш саясаттық тетік ұсынады: жалақыны қайта теңестіру, меритократиялық мансап жүйесі, «коуч-басшы» моделін енгізу.

**Түйінді сөздер:** мемлекеттік қызмет мотивациясы, жұмысқа қанағаттанушылық, мемлекеттік қызметті реформалау, Қазақстан, кадрларды ұстап қалу

**Аннотация.** Исследование представляет первое общенациональное описание мотивации, удовлетворённости и приоритетов реформ среди госслужащих Казахстана на основе смешанных методов. Целенаправленно-

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стратифицированный опрос охватил 886 сотрудников из пяти экономических регионов и пяти министерств (март—апрель 2025). Использованы проверенные шкалы: мотивации госслужбы (PSM), индекс удовлетворённости, элементы организационного климата и eNPS, а также открытый вопрос о реформах. Применены множественная регрессия и тематическое кодирование. Ключевые мотивы прихода на службу — стабильность 63% и стремление приносить пользу обществу 49%, что подтверждает сосуществование инструментальных и альтруистических установок. Удовлетворённость сильнее всего связана с поддержкой руководства (β=0,34) и условиями труда (β=0,27; p<0,01). Главный фактор удержания — карьерные перспективы (β=0,41; p<0,001). Недовольство зарплатой втрое повышает вероятность перехода в частный сектор (OR=2,8). При высоком уровне образования (18% — магистры) лишь 27% — «промоутеры»; итоговый eNPS +6 указывает на слабую вовлечённость. Женщины демонстрируют большую лояльность (+10 пунктов eNPS), сотрудники до 30 лет чаще склонны к увольнению. Качественные данные фиксируют основные проблемы: низкая зарплата, выгорание, непрозрачная карьера. Предлагаемые решения преимущественно технократичны (цифровизация, тарифные сетки) и игнорируют доверие и отношения. Интеграция PSM и eNPS в постсоветском контексте позволяет наметить рычаги стабилизации: пересмотр оплаты, меритократическое продвижение, модель «руководитель-наставник».

**Ключевые слова:** мотивация государственной службы, удовлетворённость работой, реформа государственной службы, Казахстан, удержание кадров

### Introduction

In the evolving landscape of public-sector governance - especially within transitional economies - understanding the motivational and institutional factors that shape civil-service dynamics is critical for designing effective administrative reforms [1]. Kazakhstan holds a unique position in this spectrum: as a post-Soviet state actively engaging with international public-management doctrines, yet still retaining elements of traditional hierarchical governance [2]. Considering this complex system, the functionality and long-term viability of its civil service depend on how well it aligns internal motivations with external performance mandates - and how it cultivates legitimacy, both internally among employees and externally among citizens [3].

Theoretical foundations suggest that public service motivation in such contexts is shaped by both universal human needs and country-specific constraints. Classical theories - such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's two-factor model, Vroom's expectancy theory, and Self-Determination Theory - emphasize the importance of intrinsic rewards, psychological needs, and perceived fairness. However, their application» must be adapted to reflect Kazakhstan's post-Soviet bureaucratic culture, where hierarchy, job stability, and limited autonomy influence how motivation and satisfaction manifest in daily work.

This study is particularly timely in light of the new strategic vision outlined in the Concept for the Development of Civil Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2024-2029, approved by Presidential Decree No. 602 dated July 17, 2024, which emphasizes client-centered service, hybrid HR models, and talent-based professionalization [4].

In such institutional settings, where informal networks may still influence promotions and where bureaucratic rigidity suppresses initiative, understanding how job satisfaction, organizational culture, and motivational incentives interact becomes essential. A growing body of literature shows that civil servants' motivation and commitment are heavily affected by leadership support, procedural fairness, and opportunities for career development - even more so in environments where material incentives are constrained.

A substantial body of public-administration research shows that organizational performance, employee satisfaction, and institutional resilience depend on how well motivation, HR practices, and procedural fairness fit together [1]. However, most evidence still comes from either long-established OECD democracies or fragile states, leaving "hybrid" bureaucracies such as those in Central Asia under-examined [2].

To close this gap, the present study asks:

1. Why do people choose public service in Kazakhstan?

2. How do civil servants judge their work experience-especially managerial support, career mobility and pay?

3. Which reforms do they consider most urgent, and what do those priorities reveal about institutional trust and commitment?

### Literature Review

2.1 Key Research Areas in Public Service Motivation.The motivation of public servants is an actively studied topic in public administration and human resource management. The literature identifies several key areas of focus [1, 10]. The first is the analysis of the interaction between intrinsic

and extrinsic motivational factors. Theories such as Public Service Motivation (PSM) and Self-Determination Theory help to understand motivation as a combination of intrinsic desire to serve society and external incentives like salary and social benefits [1]. The second area concerns the impact of organizational climate, leadership, and fairness on motivation and employee performance. Effective leadership and a supportive environment increase employee engagement and satisfaction [9]. The third area examines career mechanisms and professional development. Career opportunities significantly affect the retention and motivation of qualified personnel [3]. A fourth stream of research explores how institutional and cultural characteristics - particularly in transitional and post-Soviet economies -affect public service motivation. These studies highlight the influence of administrative legacies and socio-cultural values on civil servant behavior and motivation patterns [2, 10].

2.2 Specifics of Public Service in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's public service system is undergoing gradual institutional transformation, with reforms focused on enhancing efficiency, transparency, and professionalism [11, 12]. These include the implementation of a new career-based public service model, the introduction of performance evaluation tools, and the establishment of the Agency for Civil Service Affairs [11, 13].

However, the legacy of Soviet-style bureaucracy and administrative culture continues to present challenges. Empirical data show persistent contradictions between the stated goals of public service reform and the actual motivational landscape, which is still largely shaped by material stability and job security [14]. Similar issues are observed across other post-Soviet countries. Transitional administrative systems are often characterized by limited civil servant autonomy, patronage practices, and rigid bureaucratic procedures [10]. Although some intrinsic motivation is present, extrinsic drivers such as stable income, benefits, and social status dominate. Key structural problems - including non-transparent recruitment, underdeveloped meritocracy, and corruption risks - undermine professional loyalty and reduce service efficiency [15].

2.3 Institutional Reforms: Progress and Remaining Challenges

In recent years, Kazakhstan has been implementing a series of administrative reforms, including the formation of talent pools, merit-based promotion procedures, and digital tools for performance monitoring. These reforms aim to enhance motivation and professional development within the civil service [11, 13, 14]. Despite measurable progress, significant challenges remain. There is a lack of empirical assessment regarding the real impact of these reforms on motivation, job satisfaction, and employee retention. Moreover, institutional inertia, limited feedback mechanisms, and informal practices still constrain effective reform implementation [16].

2.4 Research Gaps and Methodological Limitations

The existing literature reveals a clear gap in empirical research focusing on the motivation and job satisfaction of civil servants in Kazakhstan, particularly in the context of ongoing administrative reform. There is insufficient analysis of how institutional and cultural factors interact with intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Furthermore, very few studies apply integrated research frameworks that combine both quantitative and qualitative methods. This methodological limitation reduces the explanatory depth of current findings. This study aims to fill these gaps by providing a comprehensive and context-sensitive analysis of civil servant motivation in Kazakhstan, taking into account regional diversity, institutional variation, and functional roles.

**Methodology**

3.1 Research design and data collection

To explore the motivational dynamics of civil servants in Kazakhstan, we designed a mixed-methods nationwide study combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. A large-scale online survey was conducted from 1 March to 1 April 2025, targeting public officials across various administrative levels. The invitation was distributed via the state-authorized e-Otinish platform, ensuring both legal traceability and broad institutional coverage. To reduce social desirability bias, responses were collected anonymously through Google Forms [1].

The questionnaire integrated standardized instruments - including Perry's Public Service Motivation (PSM) scale, job satisfaction and organizational climate indices, and selected items from the OECD Survey on the Quality of Public Employment. Additionally, respondents were invited to provide reform suggestions through an open-ended question, enriching the dataset with qualitative insights. This combination allowed for multivariate statistical modeling, complemented by thematic

analysis of open responses, thus offering a comprehensive understanding of motivational drivers, institutional barriers, and reform attitudes.

3.2  Sampling strategy

To ensure a diverse and representative sample while maintaining feasibility, we applied a hybrid purposive–stratified sampling design. Stratification followed two parallel logics:

Territorial representation - Local executive bodies (akimats) from each of Kazakhstan's five macro-regions were included. Valid responses were obtained from Karaganda oblast (Central), Pavlodar oblast (North), Kyzylorda oblast (South), West Kazakhstan oblast (West), and Abai oblast (East). This ensured balanced regional input (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Territorial Coverage of the Survey by Economic Regions of Kazakhstan**



*Note. Compiled by the authors based on a national survey of 886 Kazakhstani civil servants conducted in March–April 2025*

Functional diversity: At the national level, officials were selected from five ministries with varying policy areas: Trade and Integration; Agriculture; Labour and Social Protection; Ecology and Natural Resources; and Energy. This approach provided a multifaceted perspective on civil servant experiences across administrative functions.Together, these dimensions created a robust and contextually rich sample, suitable for generalizing key findings within the limits of applied research.

3.3  Respondents

Following data cleaning (removal of incomplete, patterned, or out-of-range responses), 886 valid questionnaires were retained. This number exceeds conventional thresholds for response reliability and indicates high engagement among targeted participants. The final sample reflects both central and regional levels of administration, as well as demographic and professional diversity. Respondents varied in gender, age, tenure, education, and rank-all of which were later incorporated as control variables in the regression models [17].

3.4  Measures

Motivation and job satisfaction were assessed using validated scales. The core items were adapted from Perry's Public Service Motivation Index and the Job Satisfaction Index (JSI) [9].

To evaluate organizational climate and perceived institutional challenges, selected items from the OECD Quality of Public Employment Survey were used [3].

Three primary outcome variables were modelled:

1)  Propensity to leave for the private sector (binary).
2)  Overall job satisfaction (five-point ordinal).
3)  Net Promoter Score-likelihood of recommending public service as a career (11-point scale).

All multi-item scales exhibited satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.79–0.83) [17].

3.5  Analytical strategy

Descriptive statistics were initially calculated to profile the sample [19]. Subsequently, Binary logistic regression estimated the likelihood of participants intending to exit to the private sector; Ordinal logistic regression examined determinants of job satisfaction; and Linear regression was modelled to analyze Net Promoter scores.

Age, gender, educational attainment, tenure, and position level were included as covariates. Robust standard errors were applied to mitigate heteroskedasticity [18]. Qualitative comments (n ≈ 420) were thematically coded in NVivo 14, enabling triangulation between narrative insights and statistical findings.

**Results**

4.1 Profile of Respondents: Gender, Age, Tenure, and Hierarchy

The survey revealed a number of demographic and positional patterns that help contextualize motivational trends within Kazakhstan's civil service. Gender Distribution. The data demonstrate a notable gender imbalance: women make up 63.5% of all respondents, confirming the continuing feminization of the post-Soviet civil service. This trend is often associated with perceptions of public employment as a stable and socially acceptable career path for women, particularly in the absence of aggressive competition or performance-based selection systems (see Figure 2).
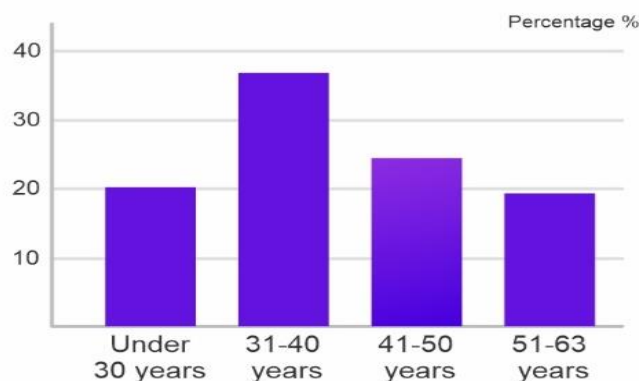
**Figure 2: Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents.**
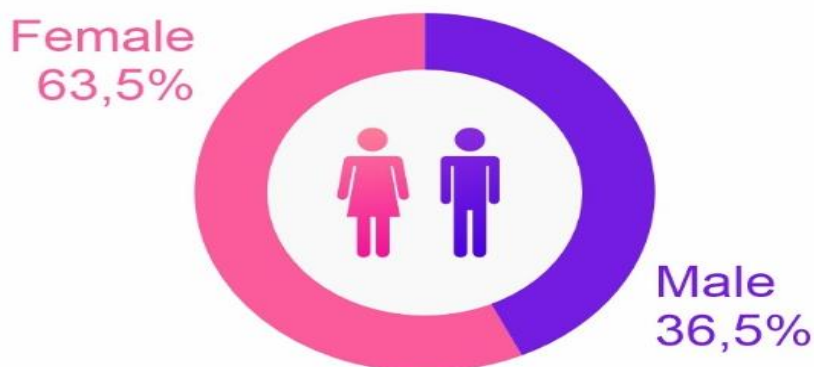


*Note. Compiled by the authors based on a national survey of 886 Kazakhstani civil servants conducted in March–April 2025*

Age Structure. The civil service is predominantly composed of mid-career professionals, with the largest cohort (36.5%) aged 31–40, followed by 24.2% aged 41–50. Together, these groups represent a socially embedded bureaucratic core, often responsible for both operational continuity and informal institutional knowledge (see Figure 3).
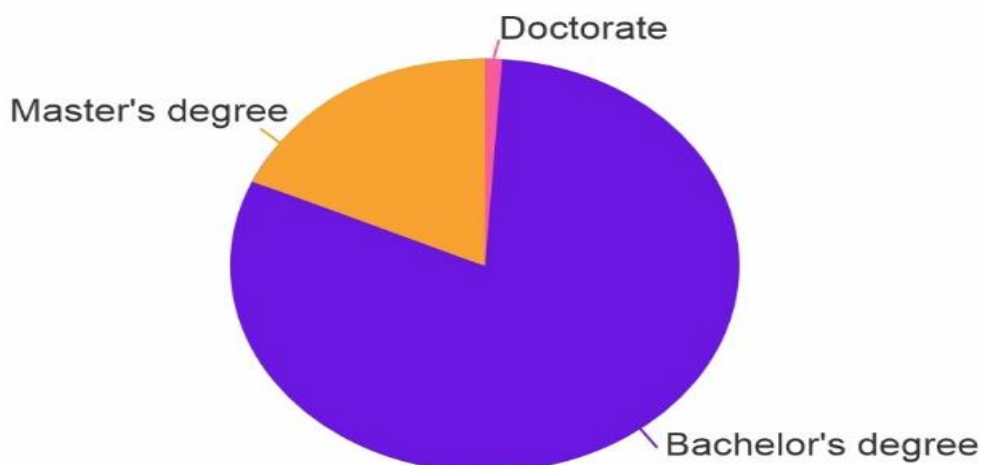
**Figure 3: Age distribution of survey respondents.**



*Note. Compiled by the authors based on a national survey of 886 Kazakhstani civil servants conducted in March–April 2025*

Educational Attainment. The majority of respondents (81.6%) hold at least a bachelor's degree. A further 17.9% have earned a master's degree, forming a potential pool for advanced analytical and managerial roles. However, only 0.4% of civil servants report holding a PhD, pointing to a significant underutilization of academic expertise in policy development and evaluation. This suggests a civil service oriented toward applied competencies, with limited integration of research-based or strategic thinking (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Level of Education of Public Sector Employees**



*Note. Compiled by the authors based on a national survey of 886 Kazakhstani civil servants conducted in March–April 2025*

Tenure. Nearly half (49.7%) of respondents have served in government for more than ten years, indicating a stable and experienced workforce. However, only 10.7% have less than one year of experience, highlighting low new entry rates and possible barriers to generational renewal (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Length of service among survey respondents.**



*Note. Compiled by the authors based on a national survey of 886 Kazakhstani civil servants conducted in March–April 2025*

Positional Status. Consistent with the vertical nature of public institutions in Kazakhstan, a large majority (84.5%) work in specialist, non-managerial roles. Only 15.5% report managerial duties, and fewer than 8% hold senior executive posts. This reflects a steep hierarchical structure with limited upward mobility (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Positional status of survey respondents.**



*Note. Compiled by the authors based on a national survey of 886 Kazakhstani civil servants conducted in March–April 2025*

4.2  Motivational Patterns: Security, Altruism, and the Limits of Careerism

The motivational profile of respondents reveals a blend of instrumental and value-based drivers. The most frequently cited reason for joining the civil service was job security (63%), followed by a desire to contribute to society (49%), and access to social benefits (18%). Strikingly, fewer than 10% identified career growth or income as their primary motivation, underscoring the secondary role of ambition or performance-based incentives in current recruitment logics. These findings resonate with Public Service Motivation (PSM) theory, which posits the coexistence of altruistic and pragmatic motives. However, the near-absence of meritocratic aspirations points to a potential disconnect between reform rhetoric and actual career system incentives.

4.3  Satisfaction, Organizational Support, and Predictors of Loyalty

The survey results provide nuanced insight into satisfaction levels and their drivers. Respondents gave relatively positive evaluations to managerial support (mean = 3.95) and working conditions (3.74), while career development opportunities received a lower average score (3.47)—suggesting an area for urgent improvement.

Regression analysis confirmed several significant predictors of satisfaction and loyalty:

• Perceived managerial support ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$) and working conditions ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$) emerged as strong correlates of overall job satisfaction.

• Career development opportunity ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$) was the most significant positive predictor of intent to remain in public service.

• Salary dissatisfaction was a strong driver of exit intentions, with an odds ratio (OR) of 2.8 (95% CI: 1.9–3.9) for leaving to the private sector.

• Female employees were more likely to express institutional loyalty (OR = 1.6, $p < 0.05$), while younger staff (<30) were more inclined to consider leaving.

These findings suggest that while work environment and support can mitigate discontent, the absence of transparent career pathways and competitive pay continues to undermine morale. This is further confirmed by qualitative responses, where lack of procedural justice in promotions was a recurring theme.

4.4  Institutional Dysfunction and Reform Preferences

A cluster analysis of perceived institutional problems reveals four dominant themes: (1) inadequate pay (90.7%), (2) high stress and psychological burnout (53.2%), (3) motivational decline (31.5%), and (4) bureaucratic inefficiency (24.6%). Respondents overwhelmingly identified salary reform (84%) and administrative digitization (38%) as top reform priorities. There is also significant concern regarding the lack of transparency in recruitment and promotion systems, reinforcing perceptions of procedural injustice.

Interestingly, the majority of reform proposals remain within a technocratic frame: respondents prioritize systemic efficiency over political or normative change. This suggests that legitimacy crises

are less driven by regime dissatisfaction and more by everyday dysfunction—what Rothstein terms «quality of government».

4.5  Loyalty and Advocacy: Measuring Institutional Resilience

A key indicator of institutional robustness is employees' willingness to act as ambassadors of their organization. Using the Net Promoter Score framework, only 27% of respondents can be classified as «Promoters» while 21.1% are «Detractors» and 40.5% are conditional advocates («Passive»). The resulting eNPS of +6 is considerably lower than international benchmarks for public institutions and implies a tenuous psychological contract between civil servants and the state.

Ordinal logistic regression showed that higher levels of career dissatisfaction ($\beta = -0.38$, $p < 0.01$) and salary concerns ($\beta = -0.26$, $p < 0.05$) significantly decreased the likelihood of a respondent being a Promoter. Conversely, high scores for managerial support positively predicted advocacy ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$) [18].

**Discussion**

The survey paints a picture of a civil service that is simultaneously mission-driven and structurally hamstrung. On one hand, high educational attainment and strong public-service motivation (PSM) provide the human-capital and values base that international experience associates with resilient bureaucracies. On the other, enduring deficits in pay, career advancement, and procedural justice hinder motivation and increase turnover risk—especially among younger officials who have fewer sunk costs and stronger private-sector alternatives. This tension is hardly unique to Kazakhstan, yet the country's hybrid governance model and post-Soviet legacy give it distinctive contours and policy levers.

5.1  Reconciling intrinsic and extrinsic incentives

The dominance of job security and societal contribution as entry motives confirms the salience of PSM, but the regression results show that extrinsic factors (salary and career ladders) now largely determine retention and advocacy. This is consistent with self-determination theory: when basic needs for fairness and competence are unfulfilled, pro-social motivation erodes, producing the burnout cluster identified in the qualitative data. Sustaining engagement, therefore, requires «crowding-in» — aligning tangible rewards with the intangible rewards of public impact [8].

5.2  Gendered opportunities and risks

Kazakhstan's continued feminization of the civil service can serve as a strategic asset. International research links gender-balanced bureaucracies to higher levels of citizen trust, transparency, and innovation. However, this potential can only be realized if institutional structures—particularly those related to pay and promotion—do not implicitly penalize women through slower advancement, informal caregiving burdens, or lack of leadership opportunities. The observed loyalty of female civil servants may, in some cases, reflect constrained external alternatives rather than genuine job satisfaction, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive talent management approaches such as targeted leadership pipelines, mentorship programs, and flexible work arrangements. Analysis of gender-based differences in loyalty and advocacy among Kazakhstani civil servants reveals notable variations (Table 1). Women demonstrate lower intentions to leave the organization and a significantly higher eNPS, despite perceiving slightly lower managerial support compared to men. This suggests that women may serve as institutional stabilizers, helping maintain organizational cohesion. In contrast, male employees, although reporting similar or even higher levels of managerial support, are more likely to position themselves as critical observers. This may stem from greater confidence in external labor market opportunities or heightened expectations for procedural fairness.

**Table 1. Gender Differences in Loyalty and Advocacy Indicators**

| 5 | Men (*N ≈ 324*) | Women (*N ≈ 562*) |
|---|---|---|
| Manager support | 3.997 | 3.927 |
| Exit intention (mean) | 3.73 | 3.42 |
| eNPS | 0.0 | +10.6 |
| Note. Compiled by the authors based on a national survey of 886 Kazakhstani civil servants conducted in March–April 2025 | | |

These findings reinforce the importance of not only addressing gender gaps in formal HR policies but also recognizing the relational and motivational dynamics that shape how men and women engage with the civil service. Gender-responsive management practices may therefore play a critical role in enhancing both retention and institutional trust across the workforce.

5.3  From technocratic fixes to relational legitimacy

Respondents overwhelmingly frame reforms in technocratic terms (digitalization, salary grids), yet the strongest statistical predictors of satisfaction and eNPS are managerial support and transparent career systems—both relational, not merely technical. This echoes Rothstein's argument that legitimacy flows from impartial and predictable government, not just efficient processes. Reforms that establish independent promotion boards, publish vacancy shortlists, and involve employees in change initiatives are therefore likely to yield higher returns than ICT upgrades alone [22]. Despite significant advances in ministry digital-maturity indices, the motivational returns are lagging. Burnout affects 53.2 % of staff; eNPS stagnates. The socio-technical gap theory applies here: digital progress has outpaced relational adaptation, eroding employee engagement.

5.4  Unlocking the knowledge premium

With fewer than 1% of officials holding a PhD, Kazakhstan is under-utilizing advanced analytical talent at a time when evidence-based policy is gaining global traction. Creating dual career tracks—one managerial, one expert—would allow research-oriented officials to contribute without abandoning technical mastery, while also signaling that intellectual capital is rewarded, not sidelined [24].

Bachelor's and Master's degrees dominate, but vertical promotion is the only recognized path. Without an expert track, PhD holders are relegated to routine tasks. This talent waste not only frustrates individual ambition but also weakens internal policy design capacity.

5.5  Anchors of Motivation and Exit

Young civil servants report relatively high career satisfaction (mean = 3.62), yet they remain highly prone to exit, especially for private-sector opportunities. This high-expectation/low-patience dynamic exemplifies the PSM-retention paradox: early motivation, often rooted in pro-social ideals, quickly collides with the constraints of a stagnant system.

Managerial support emerges as the strongest predictor of both retention and advocacy, though its effectiveness varies considerably ($\sigma$ = 1.21), suggesting a "boss lottery" effect. While strong leadership can offset structural deficits, weak management tends to amplify disengagement and turnover risk.

Survey data also reveal that employee advocacy-measured via the employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS)—declines significantly with increasing tenure (see Table 2). Although 0-1 year employees exhibit high advocacy (+26.4), this drops to –5.5 among those with 6–10 years of experience. Notably, advocacy recovers only modestly after ten years, reflecting a lingering erosion of psychological contract.

**Table 2. Tenure vs. Employee Advocacy (eNPS)**

| Tenure | eNPS |
|---|---|
| < 1 yr. | +26.4 |
| 1–5 yrs. | +12.1 |
| 6–10 yrs. | –5.5 |
| > 10 yrs. | +4.2 |
| *Note. Compiled by the authors based on a national survey of 886 Kazakhstani civil servants conducted in March–April 2025* | |

To better understand this trajectory, Table 3 summarizes key engagement indicators—managerial support, career satisfaction, exit intent, and eNPS-across tenure groups. While support from supervisors remains relatively constant, satisfaction with career development consistently declines with tenure, even as exit intentions remain steady. This suggests that disengagement is driven not by poor management per se, but by stalled advancement and unmet expectations.

**Table 3. Tenure-Based Differences in Engagement Indicators**

| Tenure band | Support | Career | Exit intent | eNPS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0–5 yrs. | 4.11 | 3.64 | 3.58 | +26.4 |
| 6–10 yrs. | 4.00 | 3.49 | 3.59 | −5.5 |
| > 10 yrs. | 3.89 | 3.44 | 3.43 | +4.2 |
| *Note. Compiled by the authors based on a national survey of 886 Kazakhstani civil servants conducted in March–April 2025* | | | | |

Examining tenure-based differences reveals not only a numerical decline, but also a qualitative shift in engagement patterns. Initial enthusiasm among early-career employees is evident in their strong advocacy scores, despite moderately high exit intentions. In contrast, long-serving employees—though less openly critical—become passive carriers of institutional memory rather than active promoters. Their continued presence may indicate institutional inertia rather than genuine commitment, signaling a deeper erosion of trust and motivation.

Further analysis shows a linear drop of –0.31 eNPS points per year beyond six years of tenure ($R^2 = 0.18$). This cumulative disengagement likely results from repeated promotion denials and diminished perceptions of procedural fairness. Although many long-serving staff remain, their willingness to publicly recommend the civil service is diminished—posing risks for both reform legitimacy and intergenerational collaboration.

This disengagement also manifests in retention dynamics. Intent to leave is most strongly associated with lower ratings of career opportunities, weak managerial support, and unsatisfactory working conditions. A one-point difference across "stay" and "leave" groups in these categories suggests that failure in any one area—daily experience, leadership, or mobility—can drive attrition.

This finding is supported by disaggregated perception data (see Table 4), which compares ratings from respondents intending to stay (score ≤ 2) versus those intending to leave (score ≥ 4).

**Table 4. Perception Gaps by Exit Intent**

| Metric | «Stay» (≤ 2) | «Leave» (≥ 4) |
|---|---|---|
| Manager support | 4.32 | 3.69 |
| Working conditions | 4.25 | 3.44 |
| Career opportunity | 4.04 | 3.08 |
| *Note. Compiled by the authors based on a national survey of 886 Kazakhstani civil servants conducted in March–April 2025* | | |

A one-point gap across all three pillars—daily experience → leadership → future outlook—confirms a tri-contour retention architecture. When any single dimension falters, it can trigger a cascade effect that undermines institutional loyalty and accelerates exit intention.

Gendered differences intersect with these findings: despite receiving comparable managerial support, male employees report zero eNPS, indicating that perceived fairness-particularly in promotion-outweighs relational warmth in shaping their advocacy. This reinforces the notion that trust in institutions, not just individual supervisors, is critical to engagement.

Finally, although nearly half of respondents cite societal contribution as a core motivator, nearly as many express frustration with opaque advancement processes. This moral dissonance-between initial idealism and perceived injustice-contributes to a culture of passive compliance rather than proactive commitment.

5.6  Limitations and Future Research

The cross-sectional design cannot untangle causality or capture reform momentum. A panel study tracking the same officials through upcoming pay-scale and HR reforms would clarify directionality. Moreover, the purposive–stratified sample, though wide, excludes law-enforcement and SOE personnel; extending coverage would offer a fuller view of the state's employment ecosystem. Finally, the Central Asian context would benefit from comparative studies—for example, contrasting Kazakhstan with Uzbekistan's recent merit-based hiring pilot—to test which levers travel well across similar institutional legacies [18].

5.7  Policy agenda

− Compensation realignment: Peg base pay to a weighted mix of complexity, scarcity, and performance; publish salary bands and annual review criteria.

− Transparent, meritocratic mobility: Introduce career-path roadmaps, mandatory vacancy advertising, and independent appeals to reduce perceptions of arbitrariness.

− Manager-as-coach model: Train supervisors in developmental feedback and psychological safety; tie part of their bonus to team engagement scores.

− Gender-responsive HR: Monitor promotion gender gaps; pilot flexible schedules and re-entry fellowships.

− Expert track & research links: Fund competitive doctoral scholarships tied to ministry needs; create secondment schemes with universities and think tanks.

− Voice and co-design: Institutionalize periodic, anonymous culture surveys and joint labour-management task forces to keep reforms grounded in frontline realities.

**Conclusion**

This article has offered the first nationwide, mixed-methods portrait of Kazakhstan's civil service at a pivotal moment of governance reform. It makes three main contributions. First, it demonstrates that public-service motivation coexists with-and is increasingly moderated by-extrinsic grievances over pay, promotion, and procedural justice. This shifts the debate beyond the technocratic fixes that dominate the transition literature and suggests that motivation is not a static cultural residue but a renewable resource shaped by credible, day-to-day signals of fairness and recognition. Second, the findings highlight that managerial support, transparent career pathways, and gender-sensitive talent management exert a stronger influence on retention and advocacy than digitalization or structural downsizing. In this light, legitimacy appears to be relational before it is procedural, and reform strategies that neglect this dimension risk reinforcing cynicism even as they streamline workflows. Third, the study provides baseline data—survey instruments, reliability metrics, and analytical models-that can be replicated across Central Asia and other hybrid regimes. This comparative leverage is critical for understanding which levers of reform are transferable and which are context-bound.

At the same time, several limitations should be acknowledged to properly interpret these findings and inform future research. Methodologically, while the sampling was stratified and diverse, it was not fully probabilistic, and participation was voluntary and online—potentially introducing self-selection bias. Reliance on self-report questionnaires also raises risks of social desirability bias or self-censorship, particularly on sensitive issues such as corruption or managerial quality.

Thematically, important constructs like burnout, psychological safety, innovation engagement, and trust in leadership were outside the scope of the study, yet likely influence civil servant behavior. Temporally, the cross-sectional design (Q1 2025) restricts insight into longitudinal dynamics, limiting inferences about reform impact over time. Contextually, the application of international motivational models-such as Public Service Motivation and Self-Determination Theory-must be approached cautiously in Kazakhstan's post-Soviet context, where informal norms and historical legacies shape how motivation is experienced and expressed. Cross-cultural validation with peer countries is essential to distinguishing universal from context-specific mechanisms.

The practical implications of the study are clear: administrative capacity and public trust are inextricably linked. Pay reform, merit-based mobility, and manager-as-coach models are not perks but pre-conditions for turning latent commitment into measurable performance gains. Investing in an expert career track and structured employee voice mechanisms can further convert knowledge capital and frontline insight into continuous improvement.

Future research should build on these findings by employing panel designs to track changes over time and by expanding the sampling frame to include state-owned enterprises and enforcement agencies. Comparative studies-for example, contrasting Kazakhstan's reforms with Uzbekistan's merit-based pilots-could also strengthen the diagnostic framework and its applicability across contexts.

Kazakhstan's public service is at a crossroads: abundant in education and intrinsic commitment, yet held back by outdated incentive structures. Aligning motivational drivers with equitable, transparent, and empowering institutions is therefore not a peripheral HR exercise but the cornerstone of sustainable state capacity. Recognizing methodological and contextual limitations, future reforms and research must center both rigorous empirical design and the lived experience of

civil servants. As the country advances its next wave of governance reforms, centering the lived experience of its civil servants will be the decisive step from diagnosis to traction - and ultimately, from reform ambition to public value.

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**ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ КЕЗЕҢІНДЕГІ МЕМЛЕКЕТТІК ҚЫЗМЕТ: ЖАЛАҚЫНЫҢ ӘДІЛЕТТІЛІГІ, МАНСАПТЫҚ ЖОЛДЫҢ АНЫҚТЫҒЫ ЖӘНЕ ҚАЗАҚСТАНДЫҚ МЕМЛЕКЕТТІК ҚЫЗМЕТШІЛЕРДІҢ ҰЙЫМҒА АДАЛДЫҒЫ**

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**ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЙ СЛУЖБЫ: СПРАВЕДЛИВОСТЬ ОПЛАТЫ ТРУДА, ПРОЗРАЧНОСТЬ КАРЬЕРНЫХ ТРАЕКТОРИЙ И ОРГАНИЗАЦИОННАЯ ПРИВЕРЖЕННОСТЬ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫХ СЛУЖАЩИХ КАЗАХСТАНА**

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