

EFFECTIVENESS OF INTEGRITY: EVALUATING ETHICS COMMISSIONERS THROUGH A CITIZEN-CENTRIC LENS

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Annotation. This article examines the institutional effectiveness of ethics commissioners within Kazakhstan’s civil service through a citizen-centric governance framework. The study combines data from a national survey of 1188 respondents and the 2024 state evaluation report on ethics commissioners’ activities. Despite a 70% decline in ethical violations between 2016 and 2024, the analysis reveals persistent structural gaps, including insufficient independence of commissioners, lack of standardized performance indicators, and low public awareness of ethics oversight. This research advances understanding of integrity systems in transitional governance contexts and offers evidence-based strategies for strengthening public trust and administrative efficiency. It also highlights the growing demand for accountability.

Keywords: citizen-centricity, human resource management, ethics commissioners, civil service, ecosystem, digitalization.

Аңдатпа. Мақала Қазақстанның мемлекеттік қызмет жүйесіндегі әдеп жөніндегі уәкілдер институтының тиімділігін адамға бағытталған басқару тұрғысынан зерттейді. Зерттеу 1188 респондентке жүргізілген ұлттық сауалнамаға және 2024 жылғы уәкілдердің қызметіне талдау есебіне сүйенеді. 2016–2024 жылдары әдеп нормаларын бұзу жағдайлары 70%-ға төмендегеніне қарамастан, уәкілдердің тәуелсіздігінің жеткіліксіздігі, бірыңғай тиімділік көрсеткіштерінің жоқтығы және азаматтардың әдептілік тетіктері туралы хабардарлығының төмендігі сияқты жүйелі мәселелер анықталды. Сонымен қатар, зерттеу уәкілдердің кәсіби әлеуетін арттыру мен олардың қоғаммен өзара іс-қимыл жасау тетіктерін жетілдірудің маңыздылығын және өзектілігін айқындайды. Бұл зерттеу өтпелі кезеңдегі мемлекеттік басқару жүйелеріндегі адалдық инфрақұрылымын зерттеуге үлес қосып, қоғам сенімін және мемлекеттік қызметтің тиімділігін арттыруға бағытталған нақты ұсыныстар береді.

Түйін сөздер: адамға бағдарлану, адами ресурстарды басқару, әдеп жөніндегі уәкіл, мемлекеттік қызмет, экожүйе, цифрландыру.

Аннотация. Статья посвящена анализу института уполномоченных по этике в системе государственной службы Казахстана с позиций человекоцентрированного управления. Исследование опирается на данные национального опроса 1188 респондентов и отчета о деятельности уполномоченных по этике за 2024 год. Несмотря на снижение нарушений этических норм на 70 % в 2016–2024 годах, выявлены системные проблемы: недостаточная независимость уполномоченных, отсутствие единых показателей эффективности и низкая осведомлённость населения о механизмах этического надзора. Кроме того, исследование подчеркивает необходимость повышения профессиональной компетентности уполномоченных и укрепления их взаимодействия с гражданским обществом для формирования культуры этического поведения. Работа вносит вклад в исследование систем обеспечения

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добропорядочности в странах с переходной моделью государственного управления и предлагает практические рекомендации для повышения доверия общества и результативности государственной службы.

Ключевые слова: человекоцентричность, управление человеческими ресурсами, уполномоченный по этике, государственная служба, экосистема, цифровизация.

Introduction

Public trust in government institutions is a cornerstone of effective governance, particularly in transitional political systems where administrative legitimacy is still consolidating. In this context, ethics oversight plays a critical role in safeguarding professional standards and ensuring accountability within the civil service. Kazakhstan's introduction of ethics commissioners in 2016 marked an ambitious step toward institutionalizing integrity mechanisms, aligning with the broader strategy of building a "Listening State" that prioritizes citizen engagement and transparency (Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan, 2021; Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan 2024), (Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021; Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024).

However, nearly a decade after this reform, questions remain regarding the effectiveness and institutional maturity of the ethics commissioner model. Cook, Dickman, and Parry (2022) highlight a human-centered HR approach that strengthens organizations and society, a priority amid post-COVID-19 uncertainty and Industry 5.0 digitalization (Cooke F. L., Dickmann M., Parry E, 2022). Building on this, Budhwar et al. (2023) analyze generative AI in HR policy, noting its potential to reshape employment, alter stakeholder relations, and create ongoing uncertainty for workers [4]. While previous research on ethics (Shishkina, 2010; Margherita, 2022) oversight and human resource management has largely focused on advanced OECD democracies, there is limited empirical evidence from post-Soviet and transitional governance contexts [5, 6]. International practice shows that engaging citizens in decision-making and evaluating civil servants, yields positive results. Although ethics commissioners have been established nationwide, there is no standardized framework for evaluating their performance, and their visibility among citizens remains low, particularly outside major urban centers (Zakon Respubliki Kazakhstan, 2015; The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2015). (Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan, 2015, Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015).

Literature review

AI technology is transforming workplace dynamics by causing multiple employment changes that deplete certain positions and generate new career roles. Artificial intelligence-driven automation systems have substantially impacted multiple sectors since they substitute manual and repeated operations, specifically within manufacturing industries, retail establishments, and logistics operations (Tiwari, R., 2023). Job losses at an industrial scale have emerged due to the implementation of robotics in factories, self-checkout systems at retail outlets, and AI-powered call center customer service agents (Shaukat, K. et al., 2020). Implementing AI produces dual effects because it displaces some workers while establishing fresh job openings. Organizations that use AI in their operations need more AI specialists, data scientists, cybersecurity experts, and AI ethics consultants (Martens, B., & Tolan, S., 2018). The essential difficulty lies in helping workers who lost their jobs move to new positions requiring training programs and governmental policies.

The growth of AI adoption has enlarged the market need for employees with advanced technical skills and digital competency. The skills of the past face replacement through the expertise needed in artificial intelligence domains like machine learning along with data analytics and automation, according to (Sholler, D., & MacInnes, I., 2024). AI transformations in the workplace lead workers to develop more potent abilities in complex thinking and problem-solving instead of maintaining repetitive manual tasks. Enterprises are establishing professional development initiatives so that employees can become ready for the changes that AI brings to their workplaces. Organizations and government bodies dedicate funding to digital literacy instruction so employees can succeed in the AI era (Tabbassum, A. et al., 2024). The shortage of skilled professionals persists, especially in developing nations, because these locations have inadequate access to AI education and training programs.

AI has different effects on job availability depending on each business sector. AI automation tools in financial services now perform risk analysis and fraud detection and develop trading strategies. This results in a decline in employment for traditional banking workers but creates new

opportunities for developers of AI systems and financial analysts who can make decisions based on data (Martens, B., & Tolan, S., 2018). AI diagnostic systems, alongside robot-assisted surgical machines, have enhanced healthcare efficiency. At the same time, medical staff need to gain new technological abilities, according to (Sholler, D., & MacInnes, I., 2022). Adopting AI automation through manufacturing facilities resulted in significant workforce cuts among assembly workers yet produced new engineering and maintenance positions for AI systems (Tiwari, R., 2023). AI technology produces two opposing effects in the labor market since it replaces some positions yet creates opportunities for roles that demand new specific skills.

Economic and Social Implications

Managers use AI technologies that generate economic inequality and increase individual salary differences. High-level professionals receive enhanced productivity and better pay because they collaborate with AI systems. Yet, lower-skilled workers experience job insecurity and static salaries (Shaukat, K. et al., 2020). The rising job polarization has inspired dialogue about basic income distribution that should assist workers with displaced labor (Martens, B., & Tolan, S., 2018). Organizations and governments should implement AI governance programs with equal salary provisions, workforce training initiatives, and staffing transition assistance.

Mutual forces of automation drive the transformation and testing of today's workforce. Artificial intelligence has eliminated various industrial positions through automation, generating new roles that demand sophisticated technological qualifications. Organizations must work in tandem to develop workforce planning strategies, up-skilling initiatives, and fair AI-based economic policies. The future success of AI requires governmental institutions to partner up with businesses and educational organizations to prepare a workforce able to use AI effectively.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly changed recruitment practices through automated functions, including resume evaluation, interview planning, and potential candidate evaluation. Combining AI capabilities, machine learning algorithms, and natural language processing (NLP) helps screening tools analyze large pools of resumes to identify qualified candidates following programmed requirements (Pan, Y., & Froese, F. J., 2022). The automated system increases the productivity levels of recruiters through automated screening procedures, which deliver unbiased candidate selection methods. AI-powered chatbots make recruitment efficient by running initial candidate interviews with simultaneous real-time query responses to enhance candidate experiences (Madanchian, M. 2024). The workforce benefits from predictive analytics that uses historical recruitment data to anticipate candidate performance and cultural match in the organization (Modak, K. C., et al 2025). The advancements in HR technology enable professionals to make data-based hiring choices, resulting in better workforce quality and improved retention outcomes.

The educational systems powered by AI conduct staff performance evaluations, which generate customized training solutions that match personal learning behaviors and job advancement plans (Bhagyalakshmi, R., & Maria, F, 2021). The systems implement adaptive learning technology, which enhances employee engagement while developing their skills to establish ongoing learning across organizational culture. Predictive models deployed for employee attrition risk assessment utilize behavioral pattern analysis and survey and performance-level data (Oladele, Sunday et al., 2025). Through predictive models, HR managers can solve potential retention issues by providing professional elevation possibilities and improved workplace settings for their valuable staff members. Organizations implementing AI into their employee development programs develop high-performing, motivated workers who stay loyal to their organization.

Workplace productivity sees optimization through AI solutions because they execute administrative repetition tasks and boost workplace decision abilities. Many human resources departments use Artificial Intelligence tools for automation tasks to enhance payroll management, attendance tracking, and compliance reporting operations (Modak, K. C., et al 2025). When manual processes are eliminated, HR professionals gain time to perform strategic activities focusing on talent management and organizational development. AI enhances workplace efficiency by using performance analytics that supplies immediate assessments of employee productivity along with distribution insights for workload management (Pan, Y., & Froese, F. J., 2022). Through employee engagement monitoring, AI technology suggests workflow modifications while providing suggestions for task order and enhancing workflow agility in the work environment. Virtual assistants powered by AI technology address the administrative concerns of staff members, thus freeing up HR resources while improving staff contentment in the workplace.

Challenges and Ethical Considerations in AI-Driven HRM

Adopting AI systems in HRM operations creates three primary ethical issues: bias-related problems, privacy issues, and transparency worries. Researchers have criticized AI evaluation algorithms that maintain current biases through distribution models built with historical data having discriminatory patterns (Madanchian, M. 2024). Employee privacy risks exist because AI surveillance tools gather substantial amounts of employee data for productivity monitoring. Still, this practice raises questions about data protection and workplace monitoring ethics (Bhagyalakshmi, R., & Maria, F.6 2021). Organizations need to guarantee that their AI systems maintain openness and clarity. This enhances the possibility of detecting unfair practices while requiring continuous evaluation for equality throughout the systems. The combination of AI analytical tools with human supervision through a hybrid methodology becomes vital to execute ethical decision-making throughout HR systems (Modak, K. C., et al 2025).

Organizations use Artificial Intelligence to achieve better operational results in their human resource management framework, including recruitment systems, employee development programs, and productivity enhancement at work. HRM organizations get enhanced efficiency from AI-driven tools because these tools improve hiring procedures and provide customized learning opportunities while optimizing workforce control. The increased integration of AI in HRM requires organizations to handle ethical challenges about bias, transparency concerns, and employee privacy issues. Organizations must create an equilibrium between automated processes and human involvement to develop fair and employee-oriented HR practices promoting inclusion. Proper governance and ethical AI implementation methods enable HRM to build an effective, future-ready, and agile workforce.

Methods

This study addresses the mentioned gaps by providing a comprehensive evaluation of Kazakhstan's ethics commissioner system through a mixed-methods approach: a national survey of 1,188 respondents. Sampling ensured geographic and occupational diversity. Respondents were asked about awareness of ethics commissioners, perceptions of their effectiveness, and trust in ethics oversight; a systematic analysis of the 2024 national audit of commissioners' activities, which reveals persistent challenges in reporting, institutional independence, and engagement strategies. This combination allows to cross-check public perceptions against institutional performance data.

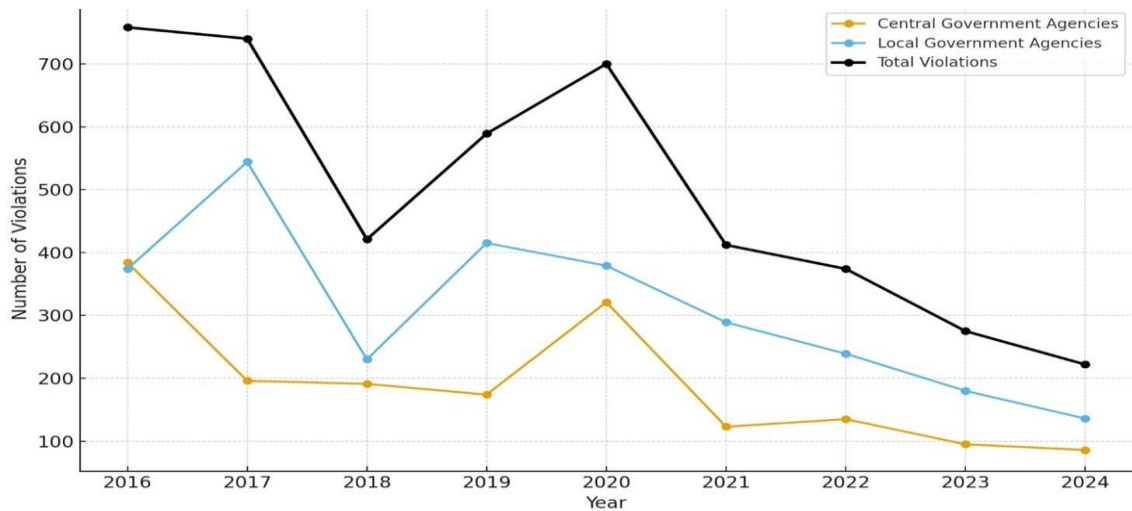
Results

The integrated analysis of Kazakhstan's civil service workforce as of 01.01.2025 reveals a total staffing plan of 91,555 positions, with 84,482 filled and 7,073 vacancies (7.7%), alongside a gender distribution skewed slightly toward women (55.8%) and an age profile dominated by mid-career officials aged 30-50 years (~62%). Linking these personnel metrics to ethics oversight outcomes shows that 218 disciplinary sanctions were issued in 2024, with 87% of cases concentrated in local executive bodies.

Regional scatterplots constructed from Agency for Civil Service Affairs' monitoring data show that per-1,000 dismissal rates vary widely, with Pavlodar (5.4), North Kazakhstan (5.1), and Ulytau (6.7) leading, while turnover ranges between 0.2% in Astana and 5.1% in Shymkent; Pearson correlation between dismissals per 1,000 and turnover is $r \approx 0.18$, indicating a weak positive association [19, 20].

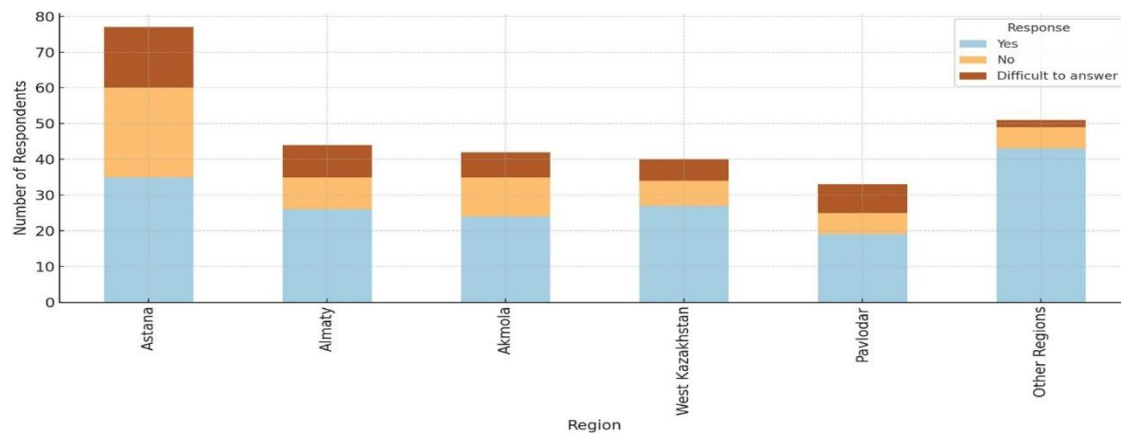
Central-level analysis of ministries and core agencies reveals higher concentration of ethics risk in Transport (20 dismissals per 1,000, turnover 10.9%), Emergencies (6.3 per 1,000, turnover 16.7%), and Agriculture (7.6 per 1,000, turnover 3.9%), while stable ministries (Foreign Affairs, Justice, Health) exhibit low rates; correlation strengthens to $r \approx 0.36$ at this level, consistent with a link between workforce instability and ethics failures [9, 10]. These findings support the institutional value of ethics commissioners, who conducted 32,090 trainings, 2,395 outreach events, and resolved 672 citizen complaints nationally.

The analysis of survey data and the 2024 national evaluation of ethics commissioners' work reveals a paradox: while the overall number of disciplinary cases for ethical violations in Kazakhstan's civil service declined by more than 70% from 2016 to 2024 (from 758 to 222 cases), structural weaknesses persist in ethics oversight mechanisms. The evidence indicates that this decline is uneven across regions, with several ministries and local governments either failing to appoint independent ethics commissioners or assigning these responsibilities without adequate resources or remuneration. This highlights the institutional undervaluation of ethics oversight roles and explains why citizen awareness remains low despite the system's nearly decade-long existence (Figure 1).



Note: Author's calculations based on Agency for Civil Service Affairs data, 2024 analysis

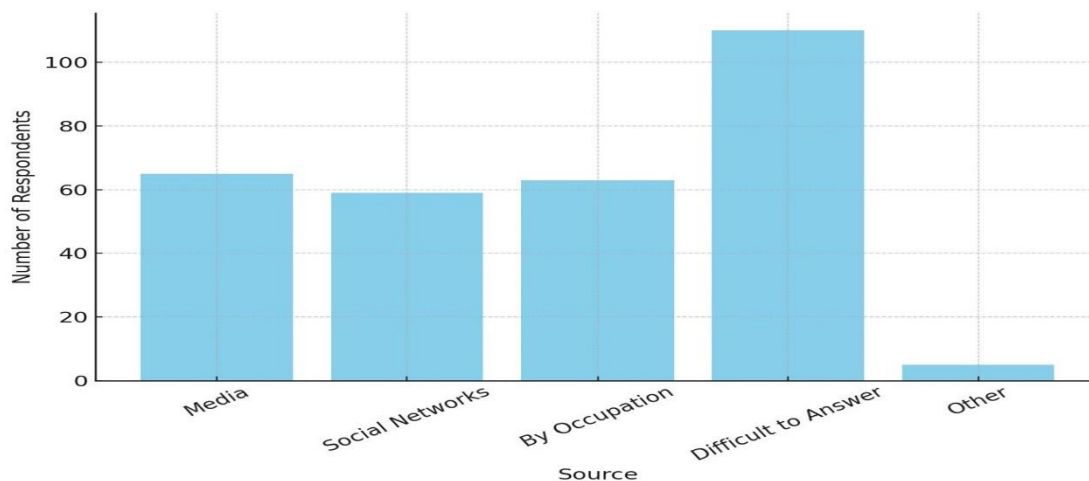
Figure 1 - Trends in Ethical Violations in Kazakhstan's Civil Service, 2016-2024



Note: Survey results

Figure 2 - Public Awareness of Ethics Commissioners by Region

The awareness of ethics commissioners is highest in Astana and Almaty, where commissioners are more active and ministries are concentrated (Figure 2). In contrast, awareness is very low in rural regions, which reinforces the need for regional outreach programs.



Note: Survey results

Figure 3 - Sources of Information on Ethics Commissioners

More than a third of respondents could not identify how they learned about ethics commissioners, indicating a communications gap (Figure 3). Media remains the most prominent source, followed by professional exposure, while social media outreach is underutilized.

Economic Dimension of Ethics Oversight in Public Administration

Ethics oversight is often perceived as a compliance cost, but international research highlights its role as an economic efficiency driver. Corruption, misconduct, and non-compliance increase administrative costs, erode tax revenue, and reduce citizen trust, which in turn discourages investment and business confidence. According to OECD estimates, corruption can reduce GDP growth rates by 0.5-1% annually in emerging economies. Kazakhstan's 70% decline in recorded ethical violations since 2016 indicates significant cost avoidance in terms of administrative investigations, reputational losses, and staff turnover (Table 1).

Table 1. Cost-Benefit Framework

Economic Factor	Costs of Weak Ethics Oversight	Benefits of Strengthened Oversight	Evidence
Administrative Costs	Investigations, audits, litigation, hiring replacements due to misconduct-related dismissals	Savings from reduced misconduct; lower investigation costs	Decline from 758 cases (2016) to 222 cases (2024) leads to 70% drop in investigation costs
Public Sector Efficiency	Staff disengagement, morale issues, and absenteeism linked to unethical environments	Higher productivity, retention, and trust	OECD studies link ethical culture to 5-10% productivity gains
Investor Confidence	Corruption perception negatively impacts FDI inflows	Transparency improves global rankings, attracts investment	World Bank governance indicators show +1 point rise in control-of-corruption that leads to +0.5% FDI growth
Citizen Trust and Tax Compliance	Low trust leads to reduced voluntary tax compliance	Ethical culture strengthens willingness to pay taxes	IMF studies estimate 1% trust increase leads to 0.5% rise in tax revenue

Note: created by authors

This framework shows that investment in ethics infrastructure (training, independent commissioners, monitoring) generates returns exceeding operational costs, especially in transitional economies seeking global competitiveness.

The economic analysis quantifies two direct value channels:

1) administrative savings: with 349 fewer disciplinary cases per year and per-case handling costs between 0,3-1,2 mln. tenge, generating 105-419 mln. tenge in avoided time and investigation costs;

2) retention savings assuming ethics improvements reduce 10-30% of total turnover and replacement costs range 2,0-4,5 mln. tenge.

Analysis of the 2024 performance audit reveals systemic inefficiencies:

1) 33.5% of commissioners receive no additional compensation for oversight duties, leading to formalistic reporting and inconsistent monitoring;

2) ministries with high staff counts lack independent ethics officers, which increases risks of misconduct and costly disciplinary actions.

Limitations include reliance on formal dismissal data as a proxy for ethics risk, lack of commissioner-activity granularity by region and ministry, and potential inconsistencies in classification practices. However, the results of the study offer a transparent, reproducible evidence base: they demonstrate that investments in a professional, independent ethics oversight system not only strengthen institutional trust and fairness but also deliver quantifiable efficiency gains, as reflected in both national turnover dynamics and ministry-level ethics outcomes.

Discussion

The results obtained make it possible to rethink the institutional dynamics of the ethical supervision system in the civil service of Kazakhstan, almost a decade after the introduction of the institute of ethics commissioners. Despite a significant reduction in the number of officially registered violations of ethical standards by more than 70% between 2016 and 2024, the data indicate heterogeneity in this decrease across regions, departments, and levels of public service. This discrepancy suggests the model's incomplete institutional maturity and the ongoing structural differences in the effectiveness of ethical control.

Comparing the results with international studies confirms that the effectiveness of ethical supervision is determined not only by formal control mechanisms, but also by the state of organizational culture, the stability of the personnel system, and the quality of personnel management. As Cooke, F. L., Dickmann, M., & Parry, E. (2022) point out, a human-centered management system helps build trust and reduce the risk of unfair behavior, especially amid digitalization and dynamic change in the public service sector. Our data are consistent with these conclusions: ministries characterized by increased staff turnover also exhibit higher rates of ethical violations, confirming Budhwar, P., et al. (2023) findings that institutional instability increases an organization's vulnerability to violations and reduces key accountability parameters.

The regional asymmetry is also consistent with the work of researchers in the post-Soviet space, pointing to differences in access to information, levels of professional training, and civic engagement. As Margherita, A. (2022), notes, ethical oversight mechanisms have a sustainable effect only if communication channels are equally accessible and reporting standards are in place. Our data, which shows that more than a third of citizens cannot provide a source of information about ethics commissioners, confirms the weakness of the communication infrastructure, especially in rural areas, where awareness remains minimal.

The identified structural problems are also consistent with previous studies that emphasize the importance of providing resources to ethical supervisors. Shishkina A.A. (2010)., noted that the lack of independence and insufficient professionalization of supervisory structures lead to the formal implementation of moral standards. Our results show a similar pattern: 33.5% of ethics commission members do not receive additional compensation, and there is a shortage of independent ethics specialists in several ministries, which increases the likelihood of procedural violations and the burden on personnel and disciplinary units.

The contribution of this study is that it is the first to empirically identify a link between staff turnover and the level of ethical violations in government agencies in Kazakhstan. In addition, the paper presents new data on the regional and departmental heterogeneity in the effectiveness of the ethical supervision system, and, for the first time, empirically shows how differences in the resource availability of ethics commissioners affect citizens' perceptions of their activities. These results provide new evidence on the institutional maturity of the ethical control mechanism and reveal the relationships among personnel stability, economic consequences, and the level of moral culture.

From a practical point of view, the study's results demonstrate that reducing ethical violations has a tangible economic effect: fewer disciplinary cases reduce administrative costs, lower reputational risks, and promote the growth of institutional trust. The analysis also shows that investments in training and in improving the competence and independence of ethics commissioners yield significant economic returns, as confirmed by international research in public administration. Thus, enhancing the effectiveness of the ethical oversight system is not only a tool for strengthening fairness and transparency but also a mechanism for optimizing government spending, especially in a transition economy.

However, the study has several limitations. The use of official data on disciplinary violations does not capture cases that do not reach registration; the lack of detail in commissioners' work by region and ministry does not allow for a more nuanced analysis of functional differences; and existing differences in classification approaches can create statistical distortions. Despite this, the presented evidence base is transparent and reproducible, and it provides grounds for asserting that the institutional development of the ethics mechanism has a direct impact on both personnel stability and the functioning of public administration bodies.

The prospects for further research include expanding comparative analysis across other Central Asian countries, developing predictive models of the impact of personnel stability on ethical behavior, studying the factors influencing citizens' awareness of ethics commissioners, and

evaluating the effectiveness of digital solutions in ethical supervision. Strengthening horizontal links, expanding communication channels, and increasing the independence of ethics commissions can be the next steps in shaping a more sustainable public administration system in which institutional trust is based not only on reducing violations but also on developing a mature administrative culture.

Conclusion

This study provides assessment of Kazakhstan's ethics commissioner system, combining a nationwide survey of 1,188 respondents with the 2024 national performance audit. The results highlight significant progress in institutionalizing ethical oversight: ethical violations have declined by over 70% since 2016, and the ethics commissioner role is now embedded across central and local government structures. However, this positive trajectory masks persistent structural weaknesses that limit the system's transformative potential. Key challenges include:

- 1) limited independence and undervaluation of commissioners, with over one-third serving without compensation and dual-role assignments reducing oversight quality;
- 2) formalistic reporting practices that hinder data-driven decision-making;
- 3) lack of standardized performance evaluation metrics, preventing meaningful comparison across ministries or regions;
- 4) low public awareness and weak citizen engagement, especially in rural areas.

To address these gaps, this article proposes:

- 1) institutionalization and professionalization: establish independent ethics commissioners in every ministry and regional administration, supported by adequate funding and clear career pathways;
- 2) citizen-centric engagement and digital transparency: implement digital dashboards, biannual public hearings, and NGO partnerships to strengthen trust and make oversight processes more accessible.

These reforms are cost-effective compared to the long-term benefits of reducing corruption risks, improving staff morale, and reinforcing public trust in government institutions. The findings also have theoretical significance: they position Kazakhstan's ethics commissioner model as a transitional integrity innovation in post-Soviet public administration.

This research makes three key contributions:

- 1) empirical contribution: provides the first combined dataset on public perceptions and official performance metrics of ethics commissioners in Kazakhstan, offering a rare case study for post-Soviet governance research;
- 2) policy contribution: proposes actionable reforms to strengthen ethics oversight, including commissioner professionalization, digital transparency mechanisms, and citizen-centric engagement strategies;
- 3) theoretical contribution: conceptualizes integrity oversight in transitional governance systems, contributing to comparative public administration and anti-corruption policy.

Ultimately, this research demonstrates that ethics oversight must move beyond compliance to become a dynamic governance function that shapes institutional culture. The integration of robust performance metrics, international benchmarks, and citizen participation can transform ethics commissioners from administrative roles into drivers of systemic integrity reform in Kazakhstan's civil service.

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ЭФФЕКТИВНОСТЬ ДОБРОПОРЯДОЧНОСТИ: ОЦЕНКА ИНСТИТУТА УПОЛНОМОЧЕННЫХ ПО ЭТИКЕ ЧЕРЕЗ ЧЕЛОВЕКОЦЕНТРИЧНУЮ ПРИЗМУ

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