

PROFESSIONALISM AND TRANSPARENCY OF THE BUREAUCRACY'S ACTIVITIES

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Abstract. Professionalism in the public administration system is an important factor in the efficiency of state and municipal bodies, as well as the most important factor in maintaining public trust. In modern conditions, governments around the world have complex challenges, which is why the role of professional civil servants increases. Transparency is another factor in increasing efficiency in the public administration system, since it ensures the accountability of public authorities to society, and this directly affects public trust in government bodies. This article considers the theoretical foundations of professionalism and transparency of bureaucracy in the public administration system, as well as the actual aspects of their implementation in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The purpose of this article is to assess the state and problems of professionalism and transparency of bureaucracy in the public administration system of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the present stage. To achieve the goal of the article, the theoretical aspects of professionalism and transparency of bureaucracy are considered, and

the analysis and assessment of professionalism and transparency of bureaucracy in the public administration system of Kazakhstan are carried out.

Keywords: *professionalism of bureaucracy, transparency of bureaucracy, professionalism in public administration, transparency in public administration, public administration, public administration efficiency, sports physical training, public administration accountability*

Introduction

Professionalism and transparency are key factors for the successful and efficient operation of public administration bodies (bureaucracy). These qualities are important for a number of reasons. For bureaucracy, professionalism means the competence of civil servants (a high level of qualification) and the effectiveness of their work in the civil service (taking into account the possibility of solving problems and saving resources). In addition, a high level of qualification allows civil servants to effectively solve the tasks of public administration set before them, improving the quality of work and public services for the population and business. A clear understanding by civil servants of their role and responsibilities contributes to the stable functioning of the state administration system. For example, the continuous professional development of civil servants in the state administration system and their physical training (intellectual sports and game sports) form a fair and reasonable civil servant structure. In order for a human being to use their physical resources to the maximum, they undergo special sport-related physical training. Behind every decision made in the creation of a professional state apparatus, a special role is played by stable, healthy, and mentally sound civil servants who are necessary for the implementation of state policy in the right direction. One of the features of bureaucracy in the state apparatus is that it arises from the biological, physical, and moral fatigue of a person as a being. Transparency implies ensuring public confidence in government agencies (due to openness and accessibility of information), accountability, reputation management, and the involvement of citizens in solving socially significant issues. That is why professionalism and transparency are the fundamental principles of the effective functioning of the state apparatus, ensuring the stability and development of society.

The Concept of Development of the Civil Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2024–2029 (2024) envisages “the formation of a civil service model based on the principles of service and customer focus and professionalization of the civil service,” as well as “strengthening the responsibility of civil servants for decisions and actions taken before citizens and the state,” ensuring transparency and openness of the civil service and government agencies. At the same time, in the Republic of Kazakhstan, there are certain problems related to the professionalism and transparency of the civil service and public administration bodies, reflected in the National Reports on the Development of the Civil Service in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2024, 2025), in the results of sociological research.

These problems boil down to the problems of low efficiency of public administration and insufficient trust on the part of society in the activities of government agencies.

Therefore, the stated objective of the study is to assess the state and problems of professionalism and transparency of the public administration system's bureaucracy in the Republic of Kazakhstan at the present stage. To achieve this, the following tasks should be solved: theoretical substantiation of the concept and importance of such aspects as professionalism and transparency in ensuring the effectiveness of the bureaucracy; generalization of assessments of professionalism and transparency in the activities of state bodies of Kazakhstan, and public trust in public administration institutions.

Materials and Methods

This study is primarily theoretical in nature, but it also reflects data from statistics of the civil service in the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as the results of studies conducted by other authors on issues of the population's trust and perception of the work of public administration bodies of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The materials of the study, firstly, were scientific articles devoted to the issues of professionalism and transparency (openness and accountability of activities) among civil servants and government agencies. Both the theoretical approaches of the authors of the articles to defining these key parameters and the main aspects of their application in foreign practice were studied. The articles of authors such as Hughes (2023), Batista and Michener (2023), Mendy (2023), Azkiya et al. (2025), Syadiyah et al. (2024), Pananrangi et al. (2024), Setyasih (2023), Mofuoa (2025) (taking into account the practice of implementing these principles in South Africa), and Pambudi et al. (2023) (taking into account the practice of implementing these principles in Indonesia) were used. Practical research, the results of which are used in the article, included research by the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Civil Service Affairs (2024, 2025), as well as the results of research by the Economic Research Institute (2023), the Qalam Foundation (2022), the Institute for the Study of Europe, Russia and Eurasia at the George Washington University (2024).

The main methods included the analysis of concepts characterizing “professionalism” and “transparency” in the activities of the bureaucracy as a system of public administration bodies and civil servants, in their relationship with such terms as “accountability,” “public trust,” and “efficiency of activities.” Synthesis and comparison were used. The analysis of the results of sociological research and the synthesis of conclusions on them regarding the assessments of the effectiveness of public trust in the activities of public administration bodies in the Republic of Kazakhstan were carried out. The study was done in two stages: theoretical analysis with an analysis of the practice of application abroad and an analysis of the results of sociological and statistical research.

Results

First, the role and essence of bureaucracy in the public administration system were assessed. Weber (1966) assessed the place of bureaucracy in the system of legitimate political domination as follows. He defines bureaucracy as a rational organization of public administration, and bureaucratic rule means domination based on knowledge. Therefore, the domination of the bureaucratic elite is the basis of modern public administration. Weber believed that in a bureaucratic system, power does not come from one person but is distributed among bureaucrats, i.e., officials and employees. Serpa and Ferreira (2019, 13–14) point out that Weber identified the following main aspects of bureaucratic activity:

- Officials (employees) are free, independent, and focused only on the responsible performance of their official duties.
- A strict service hierarchy is observed.
- Employees have clearly defined knowledge (competence).
- Employees work under a contract on the basis of free choice, and receive monetary compensation for their work.
- The service is considered the main profession, while career growth is carried out according to the order of transition to higher positions and based on one's abilities.

These statements substantiate the fact that the basis of bureaucracy is knowledge, which provides opportunities for the approval of activities. That is, it was knowledge or professionalism that he considered as one of the important foundations of bureaucrats' activities. At the same time, in addition to Weber's bureaucratic theory, the theory of New Public Management (NPM) is now used, which emphasizes the importance of professional management in the public sector and also proposes management methods characteristic of the private sector to improve efficiency and effectiveness (Indahsari and Raharja 2020, 73). There is also the theory of Public Service Motivation (PSM), which assumes that civil servants should be motivated by the desire to serve the public interest, but in it, professionalism is also crucial for the effectiveness of their work (Ritz et al. 2016, 414).

In modern studies, the professionalism of bureaucrats is also given sufficient importance. The professionalism of bureaucracy is defined as high productivity of the bureaucracy, corresponding to its capabilities and powers (Pambudi et al. 2023, 244). Professionalism is demonstrated through the efficiency of the bureaucracy. Unlike commercial structures, where the assessment of efficiency is determined by the company's profit, in the public sector, it is determined by the solution of tasks that are set before the government body, taking into account time and resource constraints (Pambudi et al. 2023, 243).

Hughes (2023, 1159–62), Batista and Michener (2023, 1260), and Azkiya et al. (2025, 4245) describe the following components of professionalism of a civil servant: technical skills (specialized knowledge and skills in the area in which employees work), managerial skills (the ability to manage subordinates, teams, projects—for executive employees), and communication skills (the ability to communicate both within the bureaucratic system and with external parties, including citizens and business representatives).

Mofuoa (2025), using the example of South Africa, where large-scale reforms of the civil service aimed at professionalization have been carried out since 1994, after the fall of apartheid, defines the specifics of the use of the principle of professionalism in the civil service:

- Preliminary assessment and selection for civil service
- Adaptation and professional development of civil servants
- Promotion and career growth solely based on assessment of competence, experience, and performance

It should be noted that in Kazakhstan, the Civil Service Development Concept (2024) reflects this approach, as the system of competitive selection, professional training, and systematic assessment is applied. However, Mofuoa (2025) points to the importance of transparency and assessment of the professionalism of civil servants, and to the control and accountability of the bureaucracy as another basis for the growth of professionalism.

Pambudi et al. (2023, 242–43) also point to retirement age as another professionalism factor. For example, in Indonesia, the retirement age for civil servants is set at 58 years (or 60 for managers). It is noted that this is a young age for a modern person, and a civil servant reaching it is just gaining the necessary experience and competence when they are forced to leave the service by virtue of the provisions of the law. In Kazakhstan, the retirement age for civil servants is 63 years for men and 61 years for women, as stipulated in the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On the Civil Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan” (2015). Just as in Indonesia, reaching retirement age is grounds for termination of civil service, and there are few exceptions for retaining a position. The problem of the “washing out” of professionals in certain areas of work may, therefore, be even more acute in the civil service than in private companies Pambudi et al. (2023, 245).

The importance of transparency in the work of bureaucracy can also be highly appreciated, along with professionalism. Max Weber did not exclude the possibility of using “plutocracy” (deception) and “lack of respect for the individual” (formalism) in the work of bureaucracy, which did not contribute to the effective solution of the tasks set before bureaucrats (Serpa and Ferreira 2019, 14). Weber distinguished between bureaucrats and politicians, noting that a politician is accountable to the voter and strives for a positive image, whereas a bureaucrat does not (Serpa and Ferreira 2019, 14). The concept of “bureaucratic pathology” is used, which Setyasih (2023) defines as “a disease of state bureaucracies caused by the actions of bureaucrats and the social, cultural, political, and technological environment in which they thrive.” Here are its varieties that he names:

- 1) Pathology based on the views and management style of officials, which manifests itself in abuse of power, corruption, and nepotism
- 2) Pathology associated with the violation of legal norms by bureaucrats (kleptocracy and total corruption)
- 3) Pathology based on the low abilities, competence, or experience of civil servants

- 4) Pathology as a result of internal problems in government agencies, which manifests itself in the exploitation of subordinates, inadequate motivation, excessive workload, and poor working conditions

Control, as an important part of public policy, can reveal the pathology of bureaucracy, based on which decisions can be made to eliminate it (Setyasih 2023, 141).

In general, the activities of the bureaucracy are actively connected with the development of the executive power and the increase in the number of tasks assigned to it. The competence of civil servants working in the executive power system includes making important decisions on which certain social processes may depend. At the same time, as many researchers estimate, the “privileged” position of the executive power in comparison with other branches of power (legislative and judicial) is also ensured by the fact that it is the least subject to public control. In addition, the executive power itself often seeks to make its activities more closed and uncontrolled than is necessary by its nature and purpose (Mendy 2023, 110). Therefore, public control over the functioning of executive bodies is becoming increasingly difficult, complex, and bureaucratic. All this determines the importance of the issue of transparency in the activities of executive bodies. Transparency will identify and prevent those decisions of government bodies that do not meet the criteria of efficiency and are directed against the interests of society (Batista and Michener 2023, 1270).

Transparency is becoming one of the important principles of public administration ethics, along with professionalism. Transparency ensures not only a reduction in negative phenomena in the organization of bureaucracy and an increase in the results of bureaucracy, but it also becomes a key element in strengthening public trust in the government (Syadiyah et al. 2024, 118). Transparency in the activities of the bureaucracy is largely determined by the accountability system, in which Mendy (2023, 110–15) distinguishes the following levels:

- 1) Vertical accountability in the system of bureaucratic hierarchy, when a higher authority personally or through special control structures checks the work of an accountable subordinate authority, determining the effectiveness of the work and identifying violations that have been committed or may be committed (in order to prevent them)
- 2) Horizontal accountability in the system of separation of powers, when supervisory, judicial, or specially created legislative bodies under legislative bodies, and the participants in legislative activity themselves, through special procedures, can control various executive bodies
- 3) Public accountability, when executive authorities report to the public and provide feedback to the population and businesses, thus making their activities transparent

Taking into account the above, one can imagine the relationship between the professionalism of the bureaucracy and the transparency of the work of government agencies (see Figure 1).

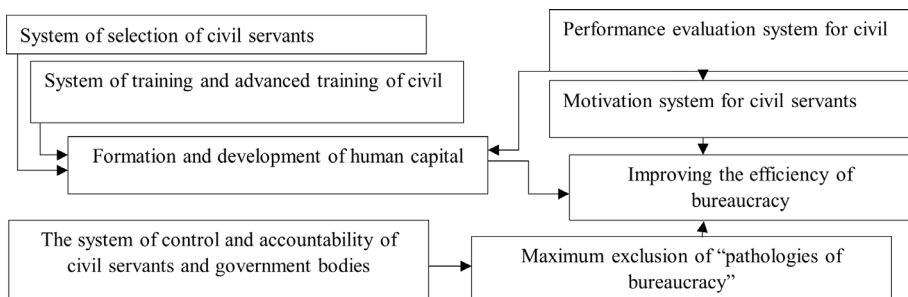


Figure 1. The relationship between the professionalism of the bureaucracy and the transparency of government agencies

Source: compiled by the author based on Batista and Michener (2023), Syadiyah et al. (2024), and Mendy (2023)

Thus, to improve the efficiency of bureaucracy, which is manifested through the solution of socially significant problems and the satisfaction of end users of public services and the results of public administration, both the professionalism of the bureaucracy (achieved through selection, training and advanced training, and assessment and motivation) and transparency (as a system of control and transparent assessment of results to eliminate the pathologies of bureaucracy) are important.

If we consider modern assessments of the effectiveness of the bureaucracy in Kazakhstan, the research results have obvious differences. For example, the National Reports on the State of the Civil Service in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2024, 2025) note that in recent years, Kazakhstan has adopted new standards for selection for the civil service, professional standards for the work of civil servants, and standards and methods for assessing the performance of civil servants, and it is also working on the creation of a reserve system for political servants. However, according to the survey results, 73% of respondents (employees of central and local government agencies) note a shortage of employees in structural divisions, and about 7.5 thousand vacancies are not filled, 1.4 thousand of which have not been filled for a significant amount of time. This in itself already creates the basis for reducing the opportunities for selecting the most professional personnel. Moreover, over 50% of respondents have already thought about changing their activities. At the same time, generally positive results are noted in the assessment of the activities and competencies of civil servants (94% received a good assessment based on the results of 2024).

According to the results of the 2024 public service quality assessment, conducted annually among the population and businesses, the average score reached 4.88 (out of 5) with 91.4% satisfaction, while in 2023, it was only 4.83 and 82.6%, respectively. This is a fairly high figure, and the best places in the ranking were taken by the National Security Committee (5 points and 100% satisfaction), the Civil Service Agency, and the Agency for the Protection and Development of Competition (4.98 points each). Even the lowest assessments of government agencies were above 4 points and above 80% satisfaction, with

growth rates compared to 2023 (Eksendirova 2025).

Independent assessments conducted by non-governmental organizations reveal more problems of professionalism and transparency of the civil service in Kazakhstan. For example, according to the results of the assessment in 2024 by the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies of the George Washington University, based on 556 civil servants, a significant part of respondents (57.6%) assessed the level of professional development programs as low (including 12.9% who rated them as “low” and “very low”). Additionally, 14.6% of respondents assessed career prospects as poor, and a significant part of civil servants assessed the current level of salaries as low (Drobný 2024).

The Economic Research Institute's research showed a significantly lower level of public trust in government agencies. For example, according to the results of population surveys, in three large cities (Shymkent, Almaty, and Astana), in 2023, the lowest levels were found in *maslikhats* (26.9%, 36.5%, and 27.9%, in each city respectively), and a low level of trust was also found in *akimats* (33.3%, 40.3%, and 35.2%, in each city respectively), but it is higher in the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the police. The level of corruption in government agencies is assessed differently in different regions on a 10-point scale (the lowest score is 3.99 in the North Kazakhstan region, the highest is 7.2 in the Zhambyl region, and in Almaty, Shymkent, and Astana, it is also quite high, at 6.87, 6.84, and 7.12 out of 10, respectively). Therefore, the authors of the survey concluded that the population has low trust in government agencies in the megacities of Kazakhstan due to the high level of corruption (ERI 2023).

The Qalam Foundation conducted a similar study on trust in government bodies in 2022. The survey results showed that while the level of trust in the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan is 48%, the government has 37%, and *akims* and *akimats* (regional and local administrative bodies) have an average of 31% (but this differs by region, and on average, 41% of the population distrusts *akims*) (Exclusive 2022).

Such independent social surveys are more important than those conducted by government bodies, since they help ensure greater transparency in the work of government bodies of Kazakhstan and identify problems and pathologies of bureaucracy and citizen satisfaction with the work of bureaucracy. That is why on March 16, 2022, in the Address to the Nation, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan pointed out the need to conduct independent social surveys in this direction.

Discussion

Considering the current problems of professionalism and transparency in the activities of government agencies in the Republic of Kazakhstan, one can reflect on problems such as:

- 1) A shortage of professional personnel for the civil service, which is a factor in the large number of vacancies and the understaffing of government agencies with specialists, and this in itself creates the basis for reducing the efficiency of their work,

as well as for reducing competition and opportunities for high-quality selection for the civil service

- 2) Low motivation, meaning dissatisfaction of civil servants with their level of well-being, working conditions, wages, and career prospects, which negatively affects turnover in the civil service and also does not contribute to the growth of professionalism
- 3) Low assessments of the system of training and advanced training for civil servants, which also does not contribute to the high-quality formation of human capital in the civil service of the Republic of Kazakhstan
- 4) Insufficient transparency of the activities of state bodies, which forms the basis for corruption, low efficiency of state bodies, and this worsens the reputation of the civil service and bureaucracy as a whole in the eyes of citizens and businesses

The development of the civil service and bureaucracy as a total human capital in this area is seen in improving the system of personnel training and the formation of a personnel reserve, which is noted by authors such as Sergaliyeva et al. (2021). However, as noted, without the development of a motivation and career management system, only measures for improving qualifications, assessment, and selection, as well as professional standards, are not enough (Issenova et al. 2024, 13).

In addition, improving public control over the work of the bureaucracy in the person of specific officials or in the person of certain state bodies seems to be a completely obvious direction for increasing the efficiency of the bureaucracy. The instruments of such control include independent surveys conducted on a regular basis, the creation of public councils under state bodies, and public reporting by state bodies (Öge 2017, 135).

Conclusions

1. Bureaucracy is a layer of state and municipal employees who work professionally in public administration bodies. Their activities are aimed at solving important, socially significant problems, and the effectiveness of their work is assessed by solving these problems.
2. The professionalism of the bureaucracy is determined through the competence of civil servants, training, quality of human capital, personnel potential in the bodies, and the ability to solve the tasks set. Transparency is associated with the organization of control both within the bureaucratic system and from the outside to evaluate the results of work and eliminate the “pathologies of bureaucracy,” and, therefore, it is associated with the professionalism of the bureaucracy.
3. In modern Kazakhstan, there are certain problems both in terms of professionalism and in terms of transparency of bureaucracy. Insufficient material and non-material motivation negatively affect the staffing and formation of human capital of state bodies, reducing the efficiency of their work. And the high level of corruption in

this area, assessed by the population, is closely associated with the low performance of state bodies, especially at the local level.

4. Therefore, in addition to measures to improve the selection, qualifications, and motivation of civil servants (in order to increase the prestige of the civil service and promote the development of human capital), it is necessary to develop transparency and control by society in this area.

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