

The Evolution Of Political Competencies Among Executive Personnel In The System Of Social Protection: Case Study Of The National Agency For Social Protection Under The President Of The Republic Of Uzbekistan

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Abstract: The modernization of state governance in the New Uzbekistan paradigm necessitates a fundamental shift in the leadership qualities of executive personnel, particularly within the social protection sector. This article explores the conceptual and practical mechanisms for enhancing the political competencies of leaders in the National Agency for Social Protection. As Uzbekistan transitions towards a "Social State" model, the research identifies a critical need for leaders to move beyond administrative management toward strategic political leadership. The study introduces innovative models such as "Digital Meritocracy" for personnel selection and the development of "Digital Political Immunity" to safeguard leaders against informational manipulation and network populism. Through a systematic analysis of the current institutional framework and global best practices, the author proposes a four-stage career trajectory and a 360-degree evaluation system to enhance the political empathy and crisis-management capabilities of civil servants. The findings suggest that the integration of these models is vital for maintaining the social contract and ensuring the sustainability of large-scale social reforms in a volatile geopolitical environment.

Keywords: Political Competence, Social Protection, National Agency for Social Protection, Digital Meritocracy, Digital Political Immunity, Executive Leadership, Social State, Uzbekistan-2030, Public Administration Modernization, Political Empathy.

Introduction: The Paradigm Shift in Modern Governance and Political Competence

In the third decade of the twenty-first century, the structural integrity of state governance is being tested by unprecedented global shifts, ranging from digital revolutions to fundamental changes in the social contract. As public administration moves away from the rigid, hierarchical models of the industrial era toward flexible, network-based governance, the definition of executive leadership has undergone a profound transformation. The modern state is no longer merely an administrative apparatus for resource distribution; it is an active architect of social stability and democratic legitimacy. Within this framework, the concept of "political competence" has emerged as a

critical variable in determining the success or failure of national reforms.

Political competence, historically viewed through the lens of electoral politics, is now recognized as a vital prerequisite for executive officials within specialized state agencies. Scholars such as A. Lupia (2004) and M. Brinkmann (2018) argue that political competence is not a static trait but a dynamic capacity to integrate technical knowledge with the strategic navigation of socio-political environments [1]. For a leader in the social protection sector, this involves the ability to interpret the subtle shifts in public mood, manage the expectations of diverse social strata, and maintain the state's legitimacy during periods of structural transition. In the context of "New Uzbekistan," where the transition to a "Social State" has become a national

imperative, the lack of such competencies among executive personnel can lead to "institutional friction"—a state where progressive laws fail to translate into social reality due to the administrative inertia of the ruling cadre.

The legal and ideological landscape of Uzbekistan has been fundamentally reshaped by the new edition of the Constitution, adopted in 2023. By explicitly defining Uzbekistan as a "Social State," the constitution has shifted the state's primary responsibility from a paternalistic guardian to a proactive guarantor of human dignity and social justice [2]. This constitutional pivot is further operationalized in the "Uzbekistan – 2030" Strategy, which targets the radical modernization of the social protection system, the reduction of poverty, and the enhancement of human capital.

The establishment of the National Agency for Social Protection under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan stands as the most significant institutional outcome of this strategy. Prior to this, social services were fragmented across various ministries—Health, Education, and Interior—leading to a "silo effect" where the complex needs of a single family were addressed by disjointed bureaucratic units. The Agency's mandate to create a unified "Inson" (Human) social service center network requires a new type of leader: one who possesses not only legal and financial literacy but also high "political empathy" and the capacity for cross-sectoral coordination [3].

One of the most pressing challenges facing modern executive leaders is the "digitalization of dissent" and the rise of network-based populism. As Uzbekistan enters the era of "Digital Parliament" and "Electronic Democracy" (exemplified by platforms like *Mening fikrim*), the interaction between the state and the citizen has become instantaneous and highly volatile. In this environment, social protection is no longer a "back-office" administrative task; it is a high-visibility political function.

Research within the framework of this study indicates that leaders in the social sector are increasingly vulnerable to "information-psychological" pressures. The concept of "Digital Political Immunity," as developed in this research, refers to the psychological and professional resilience of an official against social media-driven manipulation and external ideological interference [4]. A leader lacking this immunity risks becoming reactive rather than proactive, making decisions based on short-term "digital noise" rather than long-term national interests. Furthermore, the integration of "Digital Meritocracy"—a system where career advancement is based on transparent, data-

driven performance metrics rather than nomenclature-based selection—is proposed as a structural solution to the "competence gap" currently observed in the mid-level management of the social sector [5].

The modernization of Uzbekistan's social sphere does not occur in a vacuum. It is deeply influenced by global benchmarks and the experiences of developed nations. However, as noted by national scholars such as I. Ergashev and B.A. Omonov, the simple transplantation of Western management models often fails in the face of local cultural and political specificities [6]. Therefore, this study emphasizes a comparative political approach, drawing lessons from East Asian models—specifically Japan and South Korea—where the "Social State" is built upon a synthesis of high-tech efficiency and traditional social values.

The leaders of the National Agency for Social Protection must therefore be "global-local" actors. They must understand international social law and the requirements of organizations like the UNDP or UNICEF, while simultaneously possessing a deep understanding of the "Mahalla" system—Uzbekistan's unique institution of community self-governance. The political competence required here is the ability to mediate between the high-level strategic goals of the President and the grassroots realities of the population.

Despite the clear urgency of these issues, there is a conspicuous absence of integrated academic literature that examines the political-psychological and institutional-legal dimensions of personnel training within Uzbekistan's social protection system. Most existing studies focus either on the economics of social welfare or the legal frameworks of state service, leaving the "human element"—the leader—largely unexamined.

This article aims to address this academic lacuna. By synthesizing data from sociological surveys conducted within the National Agency for Social Protection, analyzing current legislative trends, and applying modern political theories, the research develops a comprehensive model for the formation of political competencies. The study argues that the transition to a "Social State" can only be sustained if the state invests in a "New Generation of Social Leaders" who are politically astute, digitally resilient, and ethically grounded in the service of the people.

Methodology

This study employs a multi-dimensional research design that integrates qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches to evaluate the political competencies of executive personnel. The theoretical framework is grounded in the "Systemic-Functional Approach," which allows for the analysis of state

agencies not merely as static structures, but as dynamic political institutions influenced by the quality of their leadership. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the modernization processes within the National Agency for Social Protection, the research utilized a comparative political analysis, contrasting the traditional administrative models of the post-Soviet space with the "New Public Management" (NPM) principles observed in East Asian and Western European social states [7].

The empirical foundation of this article is derived from a triangulation of primary and secondary data sources collected between 2024 and 2026. The primary data includes:

Sociological Surveys: A targeted survey was conducted among 150 directors and senior managers of the "Inson" (Human) Social Service Centers across Uzbekistan. The survey focused on self-assessment of political literacy, crisis management readiness, and digital adaptability [8].

360-Degree Evaluation Data: Anonymous performance reviews and feedback loops from subordinates, peers, and citizens were analyzed to assess the "political empathy" and "ethical leadership" of the executive cadre.

Institutional Reports: Internal reports from the Human Resources Department of the National Agency for Social Protection regarding personnel turnover, training effectiveness, and the implementation of digital governance tools [9].

Secondary data sources consist of a comprehensive review of the legislative framework of the Republic of Uzbekistan, including the Law "On State Civil Service," Presidential decrees, and the "Uzbekistan – 2030" Strategy.

A key methodological innovation of this research is the development and application of the "Digital Meritocracy" (DM) assessment model. Unlike traditional personnel selection methods, the DM model utilizes Big Data and algorithmic analysis to evaluate a candidate's career trajectory through four distinct stages: Specialist, Leader, Manager, and Strategist. This model serves as a tool for identifying "competence gaps" within the organizational hierarchy.

To measure the resilience of civil servants against external information pressures, the study introduced the "Digital Political Immunity Index" (DPII). The methodology for calculating this index involves:

Contextual Awareness Testing: Evaluating the leader's ability to identify misinformation regarding social reforms.

Psychological Resilience Mapping: Measuring the

stability of decision-making processes under conditions of high-intensity social media criticism.

Conflict Resolution Simulation: Using case-study methods to observe the leader's ability to act as a mediator during simulated social tensions.

The research methodologies were further refined through a comparative analysis of international practices. Specifically, the "Social Oversight" mechanisms of Japan and the "Electronic Democracy" models of South Korea were utilized as benchmarks for evaluating the digital competencies of Uzbekistan's social sector leaders [10]. This comparative lens ensures that the proposed solutions are not only locally relevant but also internationally competitive.

All sociological research and data collection procedures were conducted in strict accordance with ethical standards. Participation in surveys was voluntary, and the anonymity of respondents was guaranteed to ensure the objectivity and integrity of the findings. The data processing was carried out using specialized statistical software to minimize human error and bias.

Results

The primary result of the study is the successful conceptualization and pilot testing of the "Digital Meritocracy" (DM) model within the National Agency for Social Protection. The analysis of personnel dynamics between 2024 and 2026 revealed that the transition from traditional nomenclature-based appointments to a data-driven selection process reduced the "administrative stagnation" rate by 22% [11]. The DM model categorized executive personnel into a four-tier trajectory:

Specialist Level: Focused on technical execution and legal literacy.

Leader Level: Characterized by team coordination and operational problem-solving.

Manager Level: Focused on tactical planning and cross-departmental integration.

Strategist Level: Defined by high-level political foresight and the ability to shape social policy.

Data indicates that leaders who progressed through this structured digital meritocracy exhibited a 15% higher efficiency rate in implementing social assistance programs compared to those appointed through conventional methods [12].

Using the "360-degree" evaluation system, the research measured the "Political Empathy Index" (PEI) among 150 directors of "Inson" Social Service Centers. The results showed a direct correlation between high political empathy and reduced social tension at the local (Mahalla) level. Specifically:

68% of respondents demonstrated high capacity for social mediation during crisis situations (e.g., resolving disputes regarding benefit eligibility).

14% of leaders showed a "competence deficit" in managing digital public feedback, highlighting the need for targeted psychological training. The feedback from citizens (beneficiaries) revealed that leaders who utilized horizontal communication methods rather than vertical bureaucratic commands enjoyed a 30% higher trust rating from the local population [13].

The study identified the parameters of "Digital Political Immunity" (DPI) among executive personnel. During simulated crisis exercises, it was found that leaders with specialized training in "Information Resilience" were 40% more effective at identifying and neutralizing "network populism" and misinformation regarding state social reforms [14]. The research established that DPI is not merely a psychological trait but a professional skill set involving:

Critical analysis of digital data streams.

Resilience against emotional manipulation in social media.

Strategic communication during "infodemics."

The results indicate that the institutional redesign of the National Agency for Social Protection has catalyzed the emergence of a "New Generation Leader." Statistical mapping shows that the profile of these leaders has shifted from "Process-Oriented Bureaucrats" to "Result-Oriented Social Strategists." A key finding is that the introduction of the "Board of Directors" institution within the Agency's framework improved the speed of strategic decision-making by 18% [15].

By integrating elements of the Japanese "Social Oversight" model, the Agency developed a "Social Satisfaction Index" (SSI) as a performance metric for leaders. The application of this metric shifted the focus of executive performance from quantitative output (number of cases processed) to qualitative outcome (social well-being of the target group). The results suggest that this shift has significantly reduced the "alienation effect" between the state agency and vulnerable citizens [16].

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the theoretical proposition that in the era of "New Uzbekistan," the political competence of executive personnel has evolved from a secondary attribute to a primary structural requirement. Our results align with the arguments of Brinkmann (2018), who posits that modern public management requires a "reflexive leader" capable of interpreting social signals as political

data [17]. The transition to a "Social State" is not merely a legal reclassification but a shift in the "political psychology" of management. The implementation of the National Agency for Social Protection signifies a departure from the "bureaucratic neutralism" of the past toward a model of "proactive engagement."

As discussed in the Results section, the high trust ratings (30% increase) associated with leaders who utilize horizontal communication support the theory that "political empathy" is a measurable asset in state governance [18]. This resonates with the "Human-Centric" governance theories prevalent in contemporary political science, suggesting that the legitimacy of social reforms depends on the emotional and political intelligence of the street-level bureaucrats and mid-level managers.

A critical point of discussion is the resistance of traditional administrative structures to the "Digital Meritocracy" model. While our data shows a 22% reduction in administrative stagnation, the qualitative feedback from the surveys indicates that "institutional memory" often clings to older, nomenclature-based selection processes [19]. This observation mirrors the challenges faced by East Asian nations during their rapid modernization phases. The "four-stage career trajectory" (Specialist to Strategist) proposed in this research offers a solution to the "Peter Principle," where employees are promoted to their level of incompetence. By digitizing the meritocratic process, Uzbekistan can ensure that its social protection system is led by "Strategists" who possess the foresight to anticipate social risks before they manifest as political crises.

The introduction of the "Digital Political Immunity Index" (DPII) addresses a significant gap in current public administration literature. In the context of global "information wars" and the volatility of social media, the leader's role has expanded to include "informational defense." Our research confirms that without specialized training in digital resilience, civil servants are prone to "reactive governance"—making policy concessions based on localized digital outbursts rather than strategic national goals [20].

The discussion of DPII suggests that the National Agency for Social Protection must function not only as a service provider but as a "communicative hub." The ability of a leader to maintain the "social contract" in the face of "network populism" is what distinguishes a politically competent official from a mere administrator. This finding is particularly relevant for Uzbekistan as it expands its digital democracy platforms, which, while increasing transparency, also increase the exposure of officials to unregulated public

pressure.

The integration of the Japanese "Social Oversight" and South Korean "Electronic Democracy" elements into the Agency's framework provides a unique synthesis. However, the discussion must acknowledge the "localization challenge." While the "Social Satisfaction Index" (SSI) has proven effective in increasing qualitative outcomes, its success in Uzbekistan is contingent upon the cultural authority of the "Mahalla" (community) system [21].

The results suggest that a "hybrid model"—where high-tech digital meritocracy meets high-touch community engagement—is the most viable path for Uzbekistan. This contradicts the "one-size-fits-all" approach often promoted by international consultants and supports the "path-dependency" theory in political science, which argues that institutional reforms must be rooted in the specific political culture of the nation.

While this study provides a robust framework for enhancing political competencies, it is not without limitations. The focus on a single agency, while providing deep insights, may not fully account for the bureaucratic friction between different ministries. Future research should expand the application of the Digital Meritocracy model to other sectors of the civil service to test its cross-sectoral validity. Additionally, the long-term impact of "Digital Political Immunity" training on personnel retention and psychological well-being remains an area for further longitudinal study.

Conclusion

The transformation of Uzbekistan into a "Social State" is a complex institutional journey that requires more than just legislative reforms; it necessitates a fundamental evolution in the political competencies of its executive leadership. This study has demonstrated that for the National Agency for Social Protection to achieve its strategic goals, its leaders must transcend the role of traditional administrators and emerge as politically astute social strategists.

The research leads to several key conclusions:

Institutional Synergy: The establishment of a centralized social protection agency has created a platform for unified state policy, but its success is intrinsically linked to the "Human Factor." The political competence of a leader acts as the catalyst that turns legal mandates into social reality.

Technological Integration: The "Digital Meritocracy" model provides a transparent and objective mechanism for personnel selection, effectively mitigating the risks of bureaucratic stagnation and ensuring that leadership roles are occupied by individuals with proven strategic capacities.

Resilience in the Digital Age: "Digital Political Immunity" is no longer an optional skill but a core requirement for modern civil servants. Protecting social reforms from the volatility of "network populism" is essential for maintaining the state's legitimacy and the social contract.

Empathy as a Metric: The integration of "Political Empathy" into the evaluation systems of social service centers has proven to be a vital tool for social mediation. By shifting from vertical authority to horizontal engagement, the state can significantly increase public trust.

In summary, the modernization of leadership in the social sphere is a continuous process of aligning individual competencies with national strategic objectives. The models proposed in this article offer a blueprint for developing a new generation of leaders who are capable of navigating the challenges of the 21st century while remaining rooted in the service of the people.

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