

# Comparative Analysis Of Administrative Reforms In Central Asian States And Uzbekistan's Experience (2017-2024)

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**Abstract:** This article provides a comparative analysis of administrative reforms carried out in the Central Asian states between 2017 and 2024, with a particular focus on Uzbekistan's experience. The main emphasis is placed on public administration and personnel policy. In Uzbekistan, the Concept of Administrative Reforms and the adoption of the Law on Civil Service laid the foundations for a professional bureaucracy, transparency, and mechanisms of dialogue with citizens. In Kazakhstan, special attention was given to political modernization and anti-nepotism measures. In Kyrgyzstan, reforms were initiated to reduce bureaucracy and simplify public services. In Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, however, reforms largely remained declarative, while authoritarian governance structures persisted. The article identifies general trends in public administration across the region and highlights opportunities for mutual learning and exchange of best practices among Central Asian states.

**Keywords:** Reform, governance, state, policy, personnel, system, meritocracy, digitalization, service, constitution, nepotism, public participation, institution, stability, transparency, dialogue, law, apparatus, corruption, independence.

**Introduction:** After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian states (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) initiated administrative reforms aimed at developing independent state institutions, transitioning to a market economy, and modernizing governance. The general objectives of these reforms were to simplify state services, establish a competitive personnel policy, introduce electronic governance, and create greater convenience for citizens. Each country pursued its own model of reform. In particular, during the years 2017–2024, the modernization of governance systems and the implementation of administrative reforms in Central Asia entered a new stage. Following the change of leadership in Uzbekistan in 2016, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev launched comprehensive reforms. During this period, Uzbekistan and other regional states experimented with different approaches in the areas of public administration, personnel policy, and anti-corruption efforts.

Since 2017, Uzbekistan has embarked on a fundamental transformation of its system of public

administration. On 8 September 2017, by decree of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the "Concept of Administrative Reforms in the Republic of Uzbekistan" was adopted.[1] This concept was designed to establish an effective and transparent system of governance, safeguard citizens' rights, and enhance the country's international competitiveness. The Concept outlined six strategic directions for radically renewing public administration: Improving the institutional, organizational, and legal foundations of executive authorities; Clarifying the functions and responsibilities of state bodies, enhancing their accountability, and strengthening inter-agency coordination; Reducing state intervention in the economy and expanding market mechanisms; Optimizing the vertical governance system and improving interaction between local executive authorities and the central government; Introducing strategic planning, innovative ideas, and modern technologies into governance practices; Establishing a professional civil service system and implementing effective anti-corruption mechanisms in executive bodies. These six directions of reform, aimed

not merely at departmental adjustments but at systemic transformation, serve to create a governance model that is competitive, efficient, transparent, accountable, and above all oriented toward the interests of citizens.[2]

## METHOD

During the years of independence, the Central Asian states undertook comprehensive political, institutional, and organizational measures to fundamentally reform their systems of public administration. Gradually moving away from the centralized, bureaucratic, and authoritarian governance model inherited from the Soviet period, the countries of the region set as their strategic goal the establishment of administrative systems based on modern democratic principles. Although reforms did not proceed uniformly across all states, their main direction was clearly aimed at creating efficient, transparent, and citizen-oriented governance. This process has also been carried out in cooperation with international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Organization of Turkic States (OTS).

In recent years, Uzbekistan has been recognized on the international stage as the most reform-oriented state in Central Asia, owing to the rapid implementation of broad political, economic, and social reforms. In particular, following the change of national leadership in 2016, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev initiated the Development Strategy for 2017-2021, which marked the beginning of a new stage in Uzbekistan's development.

This strategy encompassed five priority areas: democratization of the system of public administration, ensuring the rule of law, liberalization of the economy, development of civil society, and the promotion of an open foreign policy [3]. The essence of these reforms was to reconstruct the relationship between the state and society on new, transparent, and effective foundations. As a result of the Development Strategy, numerous administrative reforms were implemented, allowing Uzbekistan to move away from the Soviet-era vertical governance model.

In particular, the activities of ministries, agencies, and committees were reviewed. By 2021, more than 40 state bodies had been merged or had their functions reduced. The reorganized Presidential Administration and the Cabinet of Ministers were consolidated into powerful strategic coordination centers. According to analyst A. Zayniddinov, "the new governance model served to balance central authority with local self-government and reduced the bureaucratic character of the administration" [4].

Since 2017, governance has been directed toward a people-oriented paradigm under the principle that "it is not the people who should serve state institutions, but state institutions that must serve the people." In this context, the President's Virtual Reception Office (pm.gov.uz) was launched, registering over 10 million citizen appeals within five years. Public reception offices were opened in every district, establishing direct communication channels between local authorities and citizens. Regular meetings between governors (hokims) and voters became institutionalized, fostering accountability and responsiveness at the local level.

Within the Development Strategy, the advancement of the "E-Government" concept was identified as a priority. Through the unified interactive public services portal my.gov.uz, more than 300 services were digitalized. Open data platforms such as data.gov.uz and regulation.egov.uz ensured transparency in the activities of state bodies. At the same time, "One-Stop Service" centers (Yagona darcha) began providing nearly 100 services to citizens in a single location.

The Development Strategy of 2017-2021 played a crucial role in implementing administrative reforms in Uzbekistan in a systematic, conceptual, and phased manner. These reforms produced the following outcomes:

- The bureaucratic burden was reduced, and public services were simplified.
- The operations of government institutions shifted to a transparent and accountable system.
- A professional pool of qualified personnel was developed.
- Trust between citizens and the state was strengthened.

As a result, Uzbekistan has emerged as a leading source of advanced experience in public administration modernization within the Central Asian region.

Kazakhstan was among the earliest countries in Central Asia to embark on the modernization of public administration. Through the "100 Concrete Steps" program announced in 2015, along with other initiatives, Kazakhstan began to promote professional civil service and transparency in governance. With the assumption of the presidency by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in 2019, the reform process entered a new stage [5]. From the outset of his administration, Tokayev emphasized the transformation of state governance institutions, the expansion of civil society participation, and the formation of a "new political culture."

To this end, President Tokayev established the National

Council of Public Trust in 2019—a platform that brought together state officials and civil society representatives at the same table to develop proposals for reform. During its three years of operation, discussions within the Council resulted in the adoption of more than 100 normative acts. In 2022, the Council was replaced by the *Ulttyq Quryltay* (National Assembly), a broader public dialogue platform with wider representation. According to experts, such councils and assemblies have played an important role in amplifying citizens' voices and ensuring their engagement in the reform process [6].

In the course of democratizing its state structure, Kazakhstan adopted an anti-corruption law in 2020 that prohibited civil servants from hiring their relatives. Under this provision, every official was required to disclose family members employed in the same institution and to prevent such conflicts of interest. By 2022, constitutional reforms were implemented with the aim of dismantling the super-presidential model and strengthening the role of parliament. At the same time, the Constitutional Court was re-established, and a new rule was introduced prohibiting close relatives of the president from holding state political positions. These updated provisions of 2022 thus created a direct legal barrier to the appointment of presidential family members to high-ranking offices [7].

In recent years, Kazakhstan has also undertaken a series of innovative measures in personnel policy and civil service. Since 2020, recruitment into state bodies has been conducted through open competition, while restrictions were imposed on kinship-based employment within public institutions. Within the framework of the Digital Kazakhstan program, considerable emphasis has been placed on digitalizing public services and providing citizens with interactive e-services. As a result, steps have been taken to facilitate user-friendly services for citizens, as well as to simplify interaction between businesses and government institutions through the integration of artificial intelligence, 5G, and "smart city" technologies. These measures have contributed to accelerating the operations of public institutions and reducing bureaucratic obstacles.

Between 2017 and 2024, Kyrgyzstan implemented a series of important administrative reforms in the fields of public administration and bureaucracy. This period was marked by presidential successions and fundamental changes in the governance system. Following the October 2020 events, Sadyr Japarov came to power and initiated reforms that profoundly altered the state administration. In the referendum held on 10 January 2021, a new draft constitution was approved, returning Kyrgyzstan to a presidential form

of government [8].

Under the new Constitution, which entered into force in April 2021, the powers of the president were significantly expanded: the head of state assumed full leadership of the executive branch, gained the right of legislative initiative, and the previous restriction of serving only one term was abolished. According to Central Asia specialist Bruce Pannier, Japarov, by means of his expanded authority, achieved a level of policy implementation and removal of critics that no previous Kyrgyz leader had managed [9].

The new Constitution also introduced an unusual institution—the People's Kurultai (National Assembly). Defined as the "supreme body of popular representation," the Kurultai was even granted a form of "moral oversight" over parliament. According to the new provisions, parliament and other central institutions were obliged to report annually to this assembly on their activities.

Japarov also paid attention to the practical aspects of administrative reforms. In 2021–2022, a series of documents were adopted to modernize the civil service sector. In June 2022, the president signed the decree "On Certification and Probation of State and Municipal Employees." This decree introduced a new system for assessing the qualifications and competencies of civil servants and established procedures for probationary periods within the state civil service.

Kyrgyzstan's recent administrative reforms have produced mixed results. Positive steps have been taken to modernize the state apparatus, advance digitalization, and reduce excessive bureaucracy—developments recognized by the international community (for example, the World Bank has noted improvements in the quality of public service delivery in Kyrgyzstan). At the same time, however, the reforms appear to have served the consolidation of political power, which has diminished transparency and accountability in public administration.

Accordingly, the lessons of the 2017–2024 period indicate that achieving effectiveness in public administration reform requires balancing political will with civil society participation and the principles of the rule of law. Otherwise, as the Kyrgyz case clearly demonstrates, reforms—no matter how well intentioned—may fail to deliver the expected outcomes and can even lead to regression.

Tajikistan implemented a series of reforms between 2017 and 2024 aimed at modernizing the system of public administration and reducing excessive bureaucratic barriers. These reforms sought to optimize the structure of government bodies, improve managerial efficiency, and cut unnecessary formalities

for citizens and business entities. During this period, the government established new agencies and committees, while reorganizing or abolishing certain institutions. At the same time, significant steps were taken to digitalize administrative processes, streamline document exchange, and expand the provision of public services online.

During this period, the Government of Tajikistan undertook several measures to improve the structure of public administration by creating a number of new state institutions and reorganizing existing ones. In particular, at the end of 2017, a government session approved the establishment of four new state bodies. In 2019, further steps were taken to optimize state oversight agencies. Within the framework of reforming the inspection system for economic entities, the national parliament abolished seven compliance and supervisory inspectorates and transferred their functions to two newly created structures.

This reorganization significantly reduced the number of state control bodies and contributed to saving budgetary resources. According to official data, the staff of inspection agencies was reduced from 386 to 279 employees, cutting 107 positions. As a result, the number of inspections of business entities dropped from 78,700 in 2016 to 39,200 in 2018. Overall, these reforms lowered the total number of state oversight bodies to 25, which represented an important step toward eliminating overlapping functions and reducing bureaucratic procedures within the administrative system.[10]

In subsequent years, efforts to improve the structure of public administration continued. In his 2021 address to parliament, President Emomali Rahmon proposed the creation of a special Agency for Innovation and Digital Technologies to accelerate the development of the digital economy and e-government processes. In January 2023, the president appointed the head of this new Agency, thereby launching its activities.

The education sector also received attention within the framework of reforms. By 2023, the government established the Committee on Primary and Secondary Vocational Education under the Government of Tajikistan, with the aim of advancing the system of primary and secondary vocational training.

Overall, between 2017 and 2024, Tajikistan's system of public administration underwent significant structural transformations. Through the establishment of new agencies and committees, as well as the consolidation or elimination of overlapping and ineffective institutions, the government sought to streamline the administrative apparatus. A notable trend in this process has been the gradual centralization of certain

powers within agencies operating under the President. The success of these reforms, however, will largely depend on the degree to which the newly created institutions are able to function effectively and deliver tangible results.

The reforms of 2017-2024 brought certain achievements in Tajikistan's system of public administration: institutional structures were streamlined, excessive procedures were reduced, and the foundations for digitalization were established. The international community has recognized these steps and given the country a generally positive assessment, while at the same time recommending that the continuity and depth of reforms be further strengthened.

The key challenge facing Tajikistan is to consolidate the results achieved and transform governance into an effective, transparent system that genuinely serves the interests of the people. In this regard, it is of decisive importance to harmonize the political, economic, and social dimensions of reforms, to pursue scientifically grounded policymaking, and to adapt international best practices to local conditions.[11]

Turkmenistan remains the most closed and authoritarian governance system in Central Asia, and this situation changed little between 2017 and 2024. In 2017, former President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov initiated several organizational changes, including the re-establishment of the Halk Maslahaty (People's Council, or National Council) named after Makhtumkuli, and a restructuring of the parliament. A bicameral legislature was introduced, with the Halk Maslahaty serving as the upper chamber, to which Berdimuhamedov himself was elected chairman. However, these changes served more to consolidate the existing power structure than to increase genuine representation. Although in 2022 the presidency was formally transferred to his son, Serdar Berdimuhamedov, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov has remained actively involved in governance through his newly established status as "Turkmen halkynyň Milli Lideri" (National Leader of the Turkmen People) and his position as chairman of the Halk Maslahaty (People's Council). [12] Turkmenistan's personnel policy has likewise remained distinctly closed and authoritarian. All senior officials in the country are directly appointed by the president, who can replace or reassign them at will-without any form of collective consultation or the involvement of an independent commission. Between 2017 and 2024, virtually no genuine administrative reforms were carried out. On the contrary, power remained concentrated in the hands of a single individual, kinship-based governance persisted, and citizens were entirely excluded from participation in



decision-making processes. This situation has set Turkmenistan apart from other Central Asian states, making it the most closed and unreformed country in the region from the standpoint of public administration.

Between 2017 and 2024, the Central Asian states pursued diverse approaches to public administration and administrative reforms. Uzbekistan undertook the most active and consistent reforms during this period, marking a significant shift from an authoritarian system toward a comparatively more open and effective model of governance. As a result of President Mirziyoyev's initiatives, the state apparatus was made more accountable to citizens, mechanisms for listening to public grievances were introduced, and a legislative framework aimed at building a professional civil service and curbing corruption was established. Scholars note that these reforms were designed to address problems that had remained unresolved for three decades, drawing on the views of international experts and academics.

Kazakhstan also entered a reformist stage-particularly after 2019-by attempting to restore balance in governance and strengthen public participation through political modernization. Its experience demonstrates how anti-nepotism legislation, civil service meritocracy, transparency, and large-scale digitalization programs can serve as a model for other countries in the region.

Kyrgyzstan followed a somewhat different path: while politically more open, frequent changes of government undermined the consistency of reforms. Nevertheless, during 2021-2023, under President Japarov, decisive steps were taken to streamline the state apparatus, abolish inefficient structures, and reduce bureaucracy. Kyrgyzstan's comparatively strong civil society has played a key role in shaping periodic demands for administrative reforms, although political instability has sometimes led to reversals or stagnation.

By contrast, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan lagged far behind in reform efforts. In Tajikistan, reform strategies were officially announced, but in practice the system of state authority remained entrenched in an authoritarian-patrimonial form. Scholars argue that many of the reforms proclaimed in Tajikistan served more as a means of cultivating an international image than as evidence of real political will, which remains lacking for substantive implementation. Turkmenistan, meanwhile, saw virtually no meaningful administrative renewal; instead, hereditary power succession continued, and any criticism or independent initiatives in governance were suppressed. These two cases illustrate how post-Soviet bureaucratic culture persists

in the form of reform imitation rather than genuine transformation.

Overall, two distinct trends in administrative reform emerged in Central Asia during 2017-2024. On one side, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and-partly-Kyrgyzstan pursued "modernizing authoritarianism," introducing improvements in governance structures, enhancing transparency in personnel policy, and strengthening engagement with society. The rhetoric of these leaders emphasized improving people's lives and making state institutions serve citizens. For example, President Mirziyoyev advanced the principle that "State bodies must serve our people," while President Tokayev, through his "New Kazakhstan" concept, sought to decentralize authority and renegotiate the social contract with society by strengthening the role of parliament and limiting presidential powers.

On the other side, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan opted for stable authoritarianism without crisis, clinging to declarative forms of reform while maintaining centralized decision-making and loyalty-based personnel policies rooted in regional and kinship ties. According to professors and international observers, in such an environment state governance remains inefficient, with limited capacity to generate or implement innovative policy solutions.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be stated that the experiences of Central Asian countries in the sphere of administrative reforms have been diverse. The cases of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan demonstrate positive examples of efforts to modernize the state apparatus, develop mechanisms of communication with citizens, and pursue greater transparency in personnel recruitment-although these processes remain ongoing. Kyrgyzstan has maintained elements of democratic principles and decentralized governance, yet the lack of institutional stability has hindered the continuity of reforms. In Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, reforms have remained largely on paper, while in practice the traditional authoritarian style of governance has persisted.

This comparative analysis shows that the success of public administration reform is closely tied to factors such as political will, the vision of national leadership, the activism of civil society, and international commitments. In the coming years, Central Asian states have much to learn from one another, particularly in the areas of meritocracy and transparency in personnel policy, the digitalization of public services, and uncompromising anti-corruption measures. These principles will remain crucial for ensuring sustainable development and building governance systems that truly serve the interests of citizens.

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