

CITIZEN-CENTRIC SERVICE DELIVERY IN KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract. Kazakhstan has adopted adequate legislation and platforms to improve citizen-centered service delivery. The Concept on public administration development till 2030 unveiled the agenda of citizen-focused public administration in Kazakhstan. Given these institutions in place, it is appealing to examine how well is citizen-centered service delivery is implementing in Kazakhstan. This study draws on World Bank's citizen-centered service delivery framework and aims to study it from the

public officials' perspectives. For that purpose, this inquiry employs the survey with 384 public officials and one focus group with acting civil servants of Kazakhstan. Findings suggest that Kazakh citizens prefer traditional modes of communication with state agencies, implying that e-government is not a panacea in citizen-centric service delivery. Also, vertical responsiveness to higher level state agencies is gradually shifting toward citizens. Civil servants still lack analytical skills to manage "citizen feedback", whereas citizens are reluctant in participating in decision- and policy-making along with state officials. Regarding public integrity, there are good policies against favoritism and bribery, while transparency of public procurement and local budget is still questionable.

Keywords: *civil service, citizens, public administration, citizen-centeredness.*

ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ АЗАМАТҚА БАҒДАРЛАНҒАН МЕМЛЕКЕТТІК ҚЫЗМЕТТЕР КӨРСЕТУ

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Андатпа. Қазақстан азаматқа бағытталған қызмет көрсетуді жақсарту үшін тиісті заңнама мен платформалар қабылдады. 2030 жылға дейінгі мемлекеттік басқаруды дамыту тұжырымдамасы Қазақстандағы азаматтарға бағытталған мемлекеттік басқаруды күн тәртібіне шығарды. Осы институттардың бар екенін ескере отырып, Қазақстанда азаматқа бағытталған қызмет көрсетудің қаншалықты жақсы жүзеге асырылып жатқанын зерттеу маңызды болып табылады. Бұл зерттеу Дүниежүзілік банктің азаматқа бағытталған қызмет көрсету жүйесіне сүйенеді және оны мемлекеттік қызметкерлердің көзқарасы тұрғысынан зерттеуге бағытталған. Осы мақсатта 384 мемлекеттік қызметкер қатысқан сауалнама және бір фокус-топ арқылы деректер жиналды. Зерттеу нәтижелері Қазақстан азаматтарының мемлекеттік органдармен дәстүрлі байланыс тәсілдерін қалайтынын көрсетеді, бұл электрондық үкімет азаматқа бағытталған қызмет көрсетуде панацея емес дегенді білдіреді. Сонымен қатар, жоғары деңгейдегі мемлекеттік органдарға вертикалды жауап беру біртіндеп азаматтарға қарай ауысуда. Мемлекеттік қызметкерлерде әлі де «азаматтардың кері байланысын» басқару үшін аналитикалық дағдылар жетіспейді, ал азаматтар мемлекеттік қызметкерлермен бірге шешім қабылдауға және саясатты әзірлеуге қатысуға құлықсыз. Қоғамдық адалдыққа келетін болсақ,

жағымпаздық пен паракорлыққа қарсы жақсы іс-шаралар қолданылған, алайда мемлекеттік сатып алулар мен жергілікті бюджеттің ашықтығы әлі де күмән туғызады.

Түйін сөздер: мемлекеттік қызмет, азаматтар, мемлекеттік басқару, азаматқа бағдарлану.

ЧЕЛОВЕКОЦЕНТРИЧНОЕ ПРЕДОСТАВЛЕНИЕ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫХ УСЛУГ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ

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Аннотация. Казахстан принял законодательство и создал платформы для улучшения предоставления услуг, ориентированных на граждан. Концепция развития государственного управления до 2030 года Казахстана обозначила повестку дня государственного управления, ориентированного на граждан. Учитывая наличие этих институтов, назревает необходимость изучения насколько успешно в Казахстане реализуется предоставление услуг, ориентированных на граждан. Данное исследование опирается на концепцию Всемирного банка о предоставлении услуг, ориентированных на граждан, и направлено на изучение этого вопроса с точки зрения государственных служащих. Для этой цели в исследовании использованы опросы 384 государственных служащих и одна фокус-группа с действующими государственными служащими Казахстана. Результаты показывают, что граждане Казахстана предпочитают традиционные способы общения с государственными органами, что подразумевает, что электронное правительство не является панацеей в предоставлении услуг, ориентированных на граждан. Кроме того, вертикальная подотчетность на государственные органы более высокого уровня постепенно смещается в сторону граждан. Государственным служащим по-прежнему не хватает аналитических навыков для управления «обратной связью от граждан», в то время как граждане неохотно участвуют в принятии решений и разработке политики наряду с государственными служащими. Что касается государственной добросовестности, существуют эффективные

меры по борьбе с фаворитизмом и взяточничеством, в то время как прозрачность государственных закупок и местного бюджета по-прежнему вызывает вопросы.

Ключевые слова: государственная служба, граждане, государственное управление, ориентация на граждан.

Introduction

The government once was the single actor in designing and delivering services and goods to citizens according to traditional Weberian model of public administration. Weber-type bureaucracy that highlights rigid regulations, hierarchy and centralized control, does no longer meet citizens' growing needs and expectations from their governments [1]. Traditional service delivery entails lengthy processing time, corruption risks, hardship in physical access and lack of transparency [2]. Since 1970s, this paradigm has been changing as the government realized that it cannot be isolated from other stakeholders like civil society, businesses, markets and citizens. With the launch of New Public Management (NPM) reforms in 1980s, the government contracted out some functions to market entities and decentralized the service delivery [3, 4]. Through adopting the managerial approaches into state bodies, the government contracted healthcare, education and other social service provision to private entities in belief that it is cost-efficient, time-efficient and citizen-oriented. At this stage, the countries saw a wide range of privatization, decentralization, public-private partnership and contracting out. NPM-like reforms focused on intermediate outputs, thereby ensuring the reduction of economic waste and the appropriate use of available resources. Efficiency is the cornerstone of NPM-led service delivery. Meanwhile, the cost-benefit approach in service delivery does not necessarily lead to citizen satisfaction of services. This is why the government has started incorporating citizens and other stakeholders in addition to private actors. That said, citizen-centric approach gradually emerged as a result of the government's engagements with citizens, civil society and other non-state actors in decision-making and co-production of public services. This shift emerged from government toward governance, wherein the citizens are not passive recipients of services. It was labeled as network governance, new public service and new public governance [1, 5, 6, 7]. By engaging the citizens, it is expected to improve the quality of life, citizen satisfaction and trust toward state institutions [1, 8]. Citizens and other non-state actors are involved in decision-making in policy design, which in turn impact on them during policy implementation cycle. Engagement of citizens and other non-government actors in policy design and decision-making allows to formulate policies from the user's perspectives, which is an essence of citizen-centric governance [9]. Effectiveness of service delivery (not efficiency) is the hallmark of citizen-centric governance. It is public agents' responsibility to tailor social services to population's expectations and needs. Platforms such as citizen juries, citizen conferences and participatory budgeting are direct means on the way toward citizen-centric governance. Through meeting citizens' needs and expectations, the government can enhance citizen satisfaction and trust, and demonstrate the state as transparent and accountable [7].

Since the dissolution of the USSR, Kazakhstan gained more freedom in adopting

different governance approaches into its public administration. From 1990s to 2010s the country saw the introduction of New Public Management mechanisms, while contracting pension system to private sectors [10]. Provision of education and healthcare services have been gradually subjected to privatization. These practices emerged as a result of economic liberalization promoted by the World Bank and other international assistant institutions [10]. Despite some inherent limitations like a weak private sector, Kazakhstan is the leading Central Asian country with a liberal agenda and adoption of innovative approaches into its public administration. Since 2010 Kazakhstan has been pursuing its goal to enter the OECD club [11], thereby adhering to OECD recommendations on access to information and participatory governance. As a result, Kazakhstan adopted the Law on access to information [12] and introduced public councils under state bodies at all levels of government [13, 14]. This gradual shift toward engaging citizens into policy- and decision-making led to the transformation of public administration from command and control toward citizen-centric public administration in the 2020s [15]. Legislative shift along with platforms like participatory budgeting, e-government mechanisms like e-otinish (i.e. e-complaint in Kazakh) and open legislation, demonstrate the Kazakh state's long-term commitment to open government reforms [16, 17, 18].

The state has been adopting numerous legislations (e.g. Concept on public administration of Kazakhstan until 2030; Law on civil service of Kazakhstan) that put forward citizen-centric governance in Kazakhstan. Open akimats (in Kazakh Open executive bodies) at local levels allow the front-line managers interact with citizens directly. These institutions are in place; however, the implementation of citizen-focused service delivery is under researched. Previous studies on civil service and public administration reforms of Kazakhstan raise concerns regarding the implementation of policies on the ground [19]. It is, therefore interesting to examine how well citizen-centric service delivery is performing according to Kazakh public officials.

This study refers to Kazakhstani case of citizen-centric governance and applies World Bank's citizen-centric service delivery conceptual framework [7]. The state agents have to understand citizen needs, experiences and key drivers of their wellbeing in order to place citizens at the forefront of decision-making rather than at periphery [7]. This inquiry addresses the following question: "How is citizen-centric service delivery performing according to civil servants of Kazakhstan?" This query allows us to look at the supply side of service production. The majority of studies on services such as healthcare and education in Kazakhstan mainly depict users' perspectives [20]. Contrary, this study examines citizen-centric service delivery from provider's perspectives. To address the research question, we conducted a large-scale survey among administrative civil servants of Kazakhstan while drawing on Southern, Northern, Eastern and Western regions of Kazakhstan. Survey questions have been derived from the World Bank's citizen-centric service framework, including four criteria such as access to information, user centeredness and responsiveness, reliability and quality of service delivery, public sector integrity [7]. Findings suggest that Kazakh citizens prefer traditional modes of communication with state agencies, implying that e-government is not a panacea in citizen-centric service delivery. Also, vertical responsiveness to higher level state agencies is gradually shifting toward citizens. Civil servants still lack analytical skills to manage "citizen feedback", whereas citizens are reluctant in participating in decision- and policy-making along

with state officials. Regarding public integrity, according to public officials, there are good policies against favoritism and bribery, while transparency of public procurement and budget is still questionable.

First, we carry out a literature review on practices of citizen-centric services across the globe, followed by methodology and research design. Then, we demonstrate the major findings and discussion. Finally, we draw conclusions and policy recommendations for state bodies.

Literature Review

The gradual shift from government to governance led to the emergence of New Public Service in the 1990s [5], which pushed the governments from governing for citizens toward governing with citizens [7]. NPM reforms highlights the managerial approach, whereas New Public Service aims to empower citizens through democratic principles [1]. Citizen-centric focus prioritization of public interest in planning, implementation and evaluation programs [21]. According to New Public Service, public interest is not a priori defined by the state institutions, but rather is constructed with citizens based on negotiation, acknowledgment and open dialogue [5]. Also, this approach allows to serve to citizens and move beyond performance indicators toward democratic responsibility [1]. In this process, citizens, state officials, service providers and businesses are co-producing public goods. In delivering social services, there are three fundamental objectives of citizen centricity including improved quality of services, anytime and anywhere availability of services, transparent and efficient service delivery [9]. To perform citizen-centric service delivery, the state representatives need to acquire skills of building connections with communities, fostering trust relationships with citizens and designing policies geared toward citizen-focused services [22].

The application of citizen-focused approach allows to delineate the boundaries between politics and administration, because public managers are more engaged in service delivery. Nevertheless, civil servants need some discretion to fulfill service delivery according to citizen-centric model as in real circumstances pre-defined regulations and policies do not work perfectly. At the same time, there are certain hurdles related to vertical and horizontal reporting across the government bodies, which makes the cooperation and information flow hard to achieve [23]. More emphasis has been placed on citizen charters, co-creation platforms and citizen feedback mechanisms [1]. Services provided to citizens should be timely, of high quality and accessible, affordable as well as responsive [1, 4, 6]. Also, the literature on citizen-centric governance incorporated a notion on citizen engagement in decision- and policy-making [9, 23]. However, while engaging citizens and businesses into decision-making (i.e. policy formulation cycle), there is a question who will take the responsibility for the final outcome. Given the space for co-production and collaborative decision-making, it becomes a problematic to set the boundaries, because on certain issues citizens can only share their needs, expectations, experiences and perspectives, which are unnecessarily Pareto efficient for the whole society. Citizen centric-governance is not only about capturing public interest, but it should also increase common public good [21]. Finally, as the society is comprised of various social groups, on certain issues it is hard to achieve a consensus among them. According to Arrow's theorem of impossibility [24], it is impossible to find common

solution or preference that satisfy all members of the society. This implies that in performing citizen-centric governance, we still need to acknowledge the dominant role of the state agency, which takes a greater responsibility in these processes.

The literature on citizen-centric service delivery widely incorporates e-governance mechanisms, which resulted from the deep penetration of ICTs. E-governance ensures the service delivery be accountable, responsive and transparent, while engaging citizens and other interest groups in decision-making [9]. Indeed, according to United Nations Development Goal 16.6, governments are urged to “develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels” [23]. E-governance mechanisms transform the service delivery from agency-centric to citizen-centric, while delivering personalized, cost-effective and relevant services [25]. E-governance services should be available and provide confidence through offering credible information to citizens [26]. For ensuring appropriate e-governance services through relevant ICT channels, the state should apply legislative and regulatory basis [27]. Several studies show that e-governance tools are not panacea for citizen-centric approach [28, 29]. Aikins and Krane examine why public officials do not fully grasp the opportunity of online engagement with citizens in American Midwestern states [28]. They revealed that the state officials prefer offline traditional modes of citizen engagement to Internet-based citizen participation. There are also challenges inherent to e-governance in developing countries such as understanding the real needs of citizens, governments are primarily interested in technology imposition rather than the quality of services [25], bureaucratic resistance and problems with an access to internet [1].

There are plenty of practices on how citizen-centric service delivery is performing worldwide. The first Citizen's Charter project was unveiled in 1991 in the U.K. Citizen charter informs citizens clear service standards, what to expect, complain system and compensation if services fail, better treatment by public managers. Citizen charter empowers citizens by equipping them with information, whereby residents can demand services according to standards [9]. In Canada, citizens' intensive engagement with state bodies increased customer satisfaction and generated greater trust in public [7]. Another example comes from Uganda, for instance, E-governance platform called District Net started in 2002, allows to apply for electronic business licenses [7]. In the UK, the Scottish governments applies “all channels open” approach, by maintaining traditional ways of interaction with citizens and complementing it with online platforms. As a result, electronic information facilitated face to face interactions between Councilors and residents [27].

There are mixed findings on how citizen-centric governance and service delivery is performing in Eastern European countries [29, 30, 31]. Estonia is ranked as 9th in Europe according to the Digital Economy and Society index [29]. Kozak examines whether e-government policies entail citizen-centric approach or should the government apply more citizen-friendly approach in e-government policies in Estonia. Findings suggest that Estonia's e-government can be considered as a role model of citizen-centric governance, which outperforms similar economies such as Check Republic and Slovakia [29]. Likewise, another study demonstrates Estonian case, where 99% of services are provided online, as a benchmark for other countries [2]. The X-Road program integrates all state-led databases while maintaining privacy and security for users. Velicu investigates to what extent the application of e-government measures contributes to citizen-centric services in Romania [30]. They

are implemented according to the top-down political decisions, facing administrative hurdles during the implementation period and resulting in not very citizen-focused services. Similarly, Hungarian government adopts people-centered policies, which do not work very well, because not all people are involved and not everyone benefits equally [31]. Although policies related to family support, tax cut and immigration control are in place, they are viewed as populist measures that serve for legitimization of elites.

In Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are actively promoting the agenda of citizen-centric governance. As a part of this initiative, governments are adopting the legislation on access to information, e-governance service delivery, responsiveness to citizen complaints and policies related to public integrity [13, 17, 18]. Although embracing some challenges such as bureaucratic resistance, elite's entrenched interests, these institutions can empower citizens to a certain extent and contribute to collaborative governance in this context [14, 18, 19, 32].

Methodology

This study refers to the World Bank's citizen-centric service delivery framework and examines how well it is performed from the civil servants' perspectives. The survey questions were adapted from the World Bank's citizen-centric framework and comprised 40 questions, including those on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. All survey questions and the survey program were reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee. Before proceeding with the larger-scale survey, we pilot-tested the survey questions with five civil servants and clarified several questions based on their feedback and suggestions. World Bank's citizen-centric service delivery framework is an overarching model. It covers e-government related process such as access to information and responsiveness. Another criterion on reliability and quality of service delivery is outcome-based, which is essential in New Public Service [21]. This criterion is closely connected to quality of life and citizen satisfaction. As such quality of life and well-being of citizens are crucial for political trust and legitimacy in Kazakhstan [13, 32]. Finally, criterion on public trust generates citizen trust in public sector institutions. To capture this criterion there are questions related to transparency of budget, signed contracts with third parties and agency's policies toward favoritism/bribery.

During data collection, we emailed survey questions to 450 civil servants and received answers from 384 civil servants from Northern, Eastern, Western and Southern regions of Kazakhstan. Administrative civil servants (corpse B), who participated in the survey, represent the following eight oblasts of the country: Turkestan, Atyrau, North-Kazakhstan, East-Kazakhstan, Karaganda, Akmolinsk, Pavlodar and Ultau. Response rate represents 85.5%. Sampling frame included around 40% of men and 60% female. We recruited administrative civil servants who work closely with citizens. Public officials from local governments are appropriate respondents as they frequently interact with citizens in service delivery. Prior studies that examine e-government in citizen-focused governance also recruited public officials for study [28]. Survey questions are derived from the World Bank's citizen-centric service delivery survey toolkit (Table 1). Respondents were asked questions related to four criteria identified by the World Bank: access to information, user centeredness and responsiveness, reliability and quality of service delivery, public sector integrity [7].

Additionally, we conducted one focus group (number of participants accounted for 15) with acting civil servants who are undergoing Master's program at the Academy of Public Administration under the President of Kazakhstan. Referring to purposive sampling procedure we included those civil servants, who are responsible for citizen-centric governance at regional levels of state bodies. In other words, sampling covers front-line civil servants who work closely with citizens. Similar four questions (related to World Bank's framework, Table 1) were asked to civil servants during the focus group in October 2025. Focus group questions have been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Academy of public administration under the President of Kazakhstan.

Data analysis of focus group has been conducted manually. Deductive coding technique was employed, where two authors of this paper coded the data independently from one another. Inter-coder reliability strengthens the internal validity of findings. Four themes have been generated: access, user centeredness, reliability and quality of data, and public sector integrity. Survey data has also been analyzed manually by two authors; this technique allowed as to cross-check our findings while improving internal validity of findings.

Table 1 – Citizen-centric service delivery

Criteria	Survey Questions
Access to information	Which of the following access channels can citizens use to contact the agency? - In-person, face-to-face interaction at a physical facility - Posted letter and/or facsimile - Telephone - Email - Online form on agency website - Tablet/smartphone application - Social media
	The ease with which citizens can contact the agency Poor -Below average -Average -Good -Excellent

	How would you evaluate the agency's online interface in terms of Information/documents availability? Poor -Below average -Average -Good -Excellent
User centeredness and responsiveness	Over the past 12 months, has the agency involved citizens in the design of its services -Yes -No -Other
	Does the agency's service standards reflect citizens' expectations? -Yes -No -Other
	What modes of responsiveness are practiced in your agency? -Reports to higher level state agency -Public hearings -Publication of reports -Collect citizen feedback -Internal audits -Other, please specify
	How often do your agency consults the citizens in important issues? -Always -Often -Sometimes -Rarely -Never

Reliability and quality of service delivery	Effectiveness of information delivery -Poor -Below average -Average -Good -Excellent
	Clarity of language used to provide information and advice (for example, is content conveyed in plain language that citizens find easy to understand?) - Poor -Below average - Average - Good - Excellent
Public sector integrity	Does the agency publish current budget figures in a clear and understandable way -Yes -No -Other
	Contracts signed with third parties, including names of parties, contract value, subject, date of publishing, and termination -Yes -No -Other
	How effective are the agency's policies and mechanisms in place to avoid the following? Favoritism, bribery (separately) - Excellent -Good -Average - Bad -Very bad

Source: adapted from the World Bank (2018) [7]

Findings and discussion

Access to information

The question related to the ease with which citizens can contact the agency. 50.8% answered as excellent and 39.1% as good. It means that civil servants are very optimistic regarding the access to information for citizens. Likewise, civil servants are positive about the agency's online interface in terms of information/documents availability. 37.5% of civil servants answered as "excellent" and 43.5% answered as "good."

There is an insightful finding concerning the channels citizens can use to contact the state agency (face-to-face, email, telephone, website forms, social media). 22.8% of respondents indicated the face-to-face channels and 19.8% indicated telephone as a channel for communication. Website forms and social media still remains as an emerging form of communication, 13.7% (website) and 15.5% (social media) of respondents indicated that these means of communication are also in place. This finding is similar to those from Slovakia and Czech Republic, as citizens also prefer traditional modes of interactions with public sector organizations [29]. In addition, other studies also show that in the US public officials also prefer traditional forms of service delivery [28]. This urges Kazakh state officials to undertake more balanced policies, because more recently there were some discussions to close down offline one-stop shops and transfer all services to online mode of operation [33]. Total transfer of service delivery to online mode might affect vulnerable groups, whereby the citizens with limited access to internet and digital literacy skills might be affected the most. Likewise, focus group participants raised this issue by referring to rural areas wherein not all rural settlements equally have access to internet. "It is hard for rural citizens to submit their requests through 'e-complaint' system, simply because they have limited digital skills in using technologies. Some people even do not know how to use electronic signatures (ECP in Russian). Then we need to offer alternative – traditional paper-based – ways for their interactions with the state. One-stop shops are very helpful in that sense" (Focus group, participants 1, October, 2025).

The state provides an access to information, however, digital tools cannot replace traditional modes of information. Based on these findings, the government should consider the risk that some groups in society may be excluded if all public services are delivered online, particularly at the local level of public administration.

User centeredness and responsiveness

Answers to question on "Over the past 12 months, has the agency involved citizens in the design of its services?" only 21.1% of respondents answered "yes" and 76.3% answered "no." Focus group participants noted that "citizens are not active when we discuss important problems, but they frequently raise their concerns afterwards when the decisions have been made. They become active as the decision affects them" (Focus group, participant 10, October, 2025). Citizens are not sufficiently engaged in the design of services. This is not surprising, because earlier studies explain it as a phenomenon of "contacting and complaining" attitude of citizens [34, 14]. Since Soviet times, citizens hold passive views that services should be delivered by state bodies. Lack of experiences in collaborative designing the services still constrain citizens' active engagement in co-production of services. In contrast, in mature European countries with long history of democratic institutions there are platforms like citizen conferences and juries, whereby the residents are engaged in decision-

making and collaborative service designs. Meanwhile, civil servants of Kazakhstan are moderately active in engaging their constituencies in decision-making of key issues. The responses on question how often their agencies consult with citizens on important questions show emerging trends of user centeredness. 23.4% answered “always”, 32.3% answered “frequently”, 25.5% answered “sometimes” and around 20% answered as “never” and “rarely.”

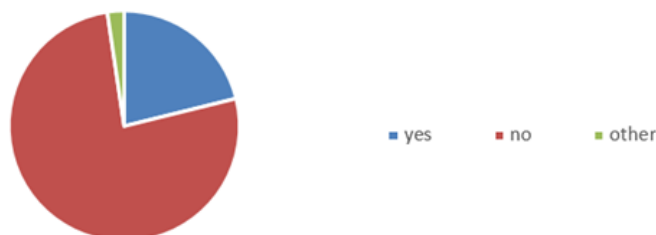


Figure 1 – Over the past 12 months, has the agency involved citizens in the design of its services?

Source: survey responses

The following question on user centeredness and responsiveness addresses to what extent the agency’s service standards reflect citizens’ expectations. 66.1% answered “yes” and 31.3% answered “no”. This implies that one-thirds of survey respondents acknowledge that services do not meet citizens’ expectations. This finding calls for more user-centeredness in delivering services. Interesting findings are related to modes of responsiveness practiced in the agency. 34.1% of respondents chose the reports to higher level state bodies, 16.7% indicated public hearings, 19.9% indicated publication of state reports, whereas only 12.4% of respondents chose “citizen feedback analysis” as a way of responsiveness in their agencies. It demonstrates that vertical responsiveness to higher level public officials remain as the dominant way of responsiveness. State bodies receive citizen feedback, but not all of them are subjected to scrutiny. Citizen-focused service delivery includes examination of citizen feedback in order to meet their needs and satisfy their expectations. This finding shows that Kazakhstan is still at early stages in citizen-focused public administration. Indeed, focus group participants acknowledge that civil servants have limited analytical skills to manage the raw data. “We have a gap in public administration: the departments in their respective fields are very poor at developing methodologies. There are data sets, myriad of citizen appeals, I don't know what to do with them. Okay, you've collected them, but the average civil servant doesn't know how to process them, what to use them for, how to work with them” (Focus group, participants 4, October, 2025). This means that measures for user centeredness and responsiveness are in place, but they are not well utilized by civil servants for service improvements.

Criteria on reliability and quality of service delivery

52.9% of respondents answered “very good” and 30% of them answered as

“good.” Likewise, around 90% of respondents are very confident that service delivery is carried out in a clear language. The content of information is communicated in a plain language. In addition, according to focus group participants: “Citizen Reception Centers function in all regions, where the representative of each government agency shows up physically and citizens come to ask questions, file complaints, and resolve other issues. Furthermore, all our government services are primarily focused on the public through the one-stop-shop principle, they are all digitized. At a maximum, over 90% of government services are provided electronically. Of course, some government services are partially electronic and partially paper-based, but in many government agencies, electronic government services reach 100%, which is about a people-centered approach” (Focus group, participant 13, October, 2025).

The Law of Kazakhstan on “Public Services” states that the government ensures the quality and accessibility of services; continuous improvement of the process of providing public and socially significant services; cost effectiveness and efficiency in the provision of public and socially responsible services [35]. Legally, the quality of services is measured through its timeliness, accessibility and equality, transparency and accountability [35]. Focus group participants noted that the quality of services is largely dependent upon inter-agency collaborations. “We had an online meeting led by the Ministry of Information”, which was attended by local governments, police and other stakeholders. The question was related to services provided by the police. It progressed quickly. When one national state body is responsible for service quality, it is easier to improve the quality of services. It becomes hard when there are many state agencies in service delivery cycle” (Focus group, participant 3, October, 2025).

Criteria on public integrity

53.3% of respondents answered that the current budgets are published in a clear and understandable way, whereas around 40% answered “no.” This implies that almost half of respondents accept the fact that the budget figures are not well-demonstrated for citizen review. Prior studies by O'Connor et al. and Janenova and Knox on open government reforms in Kazakhstan raised concerns on open budget and open legislation data, arguing that they are impenetrable and hard to understand [19, 36]. Similarly, civil servants also acknowledge that budget figures are not well-presented for citizen review. The following question that addresses public integrity relates to contracts with the third parties. Contracts concluded with the third parties (indicating the parties, cost, subject of the contract, date of publication and termination) are published on the internet (Figure 2). Surprisingly, only 36.5% of respondents answered “yes”, whereas 53.1% answered “no.” This implies that there is low transparency in procurement integrity. In this regard, Khamitov et al. argue that public procurement of Kazakhstan remains as a high-risk for corruption with weak oversight mechanisms [37]. The final question that captures public integrity relates to agency’s policies toward favoritism and bribery. Respondents hold somewhat positive evaluation on their effectiveness. Regarding favoritism, 68% answered as “excellent” and “good”, 18% view them as “average”, whereas the remaining 14% view them ineffective. Similarly, 74% think that anti-bribery policies are “very effective” and “effective”, 10% evaluate them as average, whereas the remaining respondents evaluate them as ineffective.

We reveal positive trend toward public integrity in civil service delivery except for public procurement and budget figures. This is consistent with Janenova and Knox's claim that Kazakhstan was able to decrease bribery in service delivery, but the grand corruption remains very challenging [36].

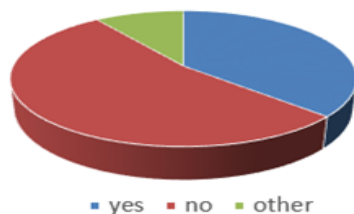


Figure 2 – Contracts concluded with third parties (indicating the parties, cost, subject of the contract, date of publication and termination) are published on the internet

Source: survey

Conclusion

Prior studies on open government and service delivery of Kazakhstan mainly examine citizen- centered service delivery from user's perspectives [18, 19]. This study examines citizen-centric service delivery from the perspectives of public officials in Kazakhstan. For that purpose, the study draws on World Bank's citizen-centeredness service delivery framework while addressing four criteria such as access to information, user centeredness and responsiveness, reliability and quality of services as well as public integrity. Findings demonstrate minor positive shift from command-and-control mode of service delivery toward citizen-focused approach. Along with a wider penetration of ICT and e-government mechanisms in Kazakhstan, there is a better access to information. However, this study reveals that citizens still prefer traditional forms of engagement with state officials. Therefore, the government should adopt a differentiated approach at the local and rural levels of public administration, combining traditional forms of interaction with online modes of engagement with citizens.

Findings of this study also show emerging features of public officials' user centeredness. Nevertheless, citizens are passive in participating service design along with public officials. This is in line with Soviet legacy of contacting and complaining [34], where citizens are recipients of services rather than co-producers of services. Finally, although there are adequate state policies that address bribery and favoritism in service delivery, public procurement and budget transparency remains questionable. These challenges demonstrate that the citizen-centric governance at its early stage of implementation, requiring cultural shift and introduction of best practices in engaging citizens in co-designing and decision-making. Estonian case provides insightful recommendations for Kazakhstan [29]. The government should conduct awareness campaigns, improve digital literacy of users and adopt incentives for engaging citizens in decision-making and co-design of services. Finally, citizen-centric service delivery should cover the whole policy cycle, wherein citizens are

engaged in policy formulation, implementation and evaluation [38].

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