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Understanding the Social Status of Civil Servants in Kazakhstan: An Analysis of Determinants and Public Perception

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Abstract:

This study analyzes the social status of civil servants by examining survey data from 10,942 civil servants and conducting 22 expert interviews. The research aims to define the social status of civil servants and analyze the factors influencing this status in Kazakhstan. The findings reveal that, according to international practices, several key factors impact the social status of civil servants. These include economic conditions, public perception and the professional competencies of civil servants. Socioeconomic conditions of civil servants significantly influence how civil servants are perceived and valued in society. Additionally, the behavior of civil servants in public settings and their professional skills play a critical role in shaping their social status. Effective

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management of these factors can enhance the perception of civil servants and contribute to their social status. This comprehensive analysis provides valuable insights for improving the status and public perception of civil servants in Kazakhstan and beyond.

Keywords:

civil servants, economic factors, Kazakhstan, professional competence, public perception, social status

JEL Classification: D73, Z13.

1. Introduction

The social status of civil servants is a key indicator of public perception and recognition of their work. Civil officials are crucial in ensuring the stability and welfare of society today. These individuals have significant responsibilities in establishing and executing public policies, managing public resources, and delivering essential services to residents. Although their work has significant importance, civil servants in many countries continue to have a low social status, which can detrimentally impact their motivation and effectiveness.

Social status is generally defined as the position of an individual or group in a social hierarchy, encompassing aspects such as prestige, respect, and access to resources (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Weber, 1922). Studies indicate that the social status of civil servants can have a substantial impact on their motivation, job satisfaction, and consequently, their effectiveness in serving the public. Low social status can negatively affect the public's perception of and trust in public institutions (Perry et al., 2010).

In Kazakhstan, the public sector employs a substantial workforce, although the examination of their socioeconomic status and the underlying determinants has received limited attention. As per the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the total number of government servants in the country exceeds 90,000 individuals. The above is a significant part of the working population that determines the quality of public administration and the level of satisfaction among the population regarding the services delivered. However, in contrast to countries with well-established democratic institutions, Kazakhstan lacks comprehensive research that analyzes the perception of civil servants on their societal role and the variables that influence their social status.

The purpose of this study is to address this gap by conducting a thorough examination of the social status of civil servants in Kazakhstan, to address the following research questions:

Q1: How is the social status of a civil servant determined in Kazakhstan?

Q2: What factors shape a civil servant's social status in Kazakhstan?

2. Literature Review

The studies demonstrate that economic incentives, such as salaries and welfare benefits, play a key role in shaping the social status of civil servants (Van der Meer, Steen, & Wille, 2018). According to researchers Steijn & Knies (2019), adequate and competitive salaries positively affect civil servants' motivation and commitment to serving the public. At the same time, lower income levels reflect a negative assessment of civil servants' performance.

Based on the study of Catterberg and Moreno (2005), in developed states, income and social status are inversely correlated with political trust, meaning those with higher incomes have less political trust in government institutions. This finding contrasts with the patterns observed in transitional democracies, where higher income and status often correlate with greater political trust. The comparative analysis conducted by Van der Meer, Steen & Wille (2008) demonstrated that in countries with higher public sector salaries, civil servants have a higher social status. High salaries serve as an indicator of the social value of their work.

The salary level in a country and the matter of trust significantly influence how financially secure civil servants are perceived and how their social position is evaluated. This perception is based on whether they are seen as reputable professionals who receive high compensation for significant work they perform or as individuals engaged in corrupt practices.

The correlation was found between lower levels of financial satisfaction and education and lower levels of public trust in government institutions (Catterberg & Moreno, 2005). The status of civil servants is significantly influenced by public perceptions of the value and prestige of public sector work (Demirgüç-Kunt, Lokshin & Kolchin, 2023). The assumption of corruption decreases when trust levels are high, implying that civil servants are recognized and respected by the public. It also demonstrated that economic incentives, including competitive salaries and social benefits, have a substantial impact on the social status and corruption levels of civil servants. In countries with substantial economic incentives for civil servants, corruption is diminished due to the reduced likelihood of employees pursuing illicit income (Demirgüç-Kunt, Lokshin & Kolchin, 2023). Thus, government institutions must understand these dynamics to develop proper human resource policies that support civil servants' socioeconomic status and efficiency.

Qualifications are a significant component in determining the social position of civil servants (Becker, 2009). A greater number of professionally qualified government employees identified their social status at a higher level. Government entities should

proactively design initiatives to enhance qualifications and professional growth (Perry et al., 2010).

A study undertaken by researchers Bertram & Meijer (2024) establishes a correlation between highly skilled civil workers and their occupation of more prestigious positions in civil service, as well as their receipt of more public attention. This association had a favorable impact on their social status.

Existing qualitative studies indicate that graduates of prestigious universities prefer to work in the private sector due to the low socioeconomic status of civil service workers (Manstead, 2018). It implies that those with high-paying positions in the private sector and graduates with promising careers negatively perceive the public sector.

The recent studies support the view that economic rewards, such as salaries, benefits, and job security, play a crucial role in attracting and retaining civil servants. Competitive compensation packages are essential for maintaining a motivated and competent workforce (Demirgüç-Kunt, Lokshin & Kolchin, 2023).

However, bridging from salary-focused research to qualification and professional development requires considering how modern performance frameworks affect both compensation and skill-building. For instance, scholarship on civil service motivation (PSM)—which emphasizes individuals' intrinsic desire to serve the public interest—shows that competitive pay alone may not suffice if workplace structures do not also nurture professional growth and recognition (Fiori, Piergallini, & Shadaydeh, 2023). In transitional and post-Soviet contexts, the interplay between salary, professional qualifications, and PSM may be significant for explaining how civil servants perceive and maintain social status.

Other studies stress the bureaucratic procedures and burdens that are associated with civil service, which affects the establishment of a negative attitude of civil servants towards their profession, and this pressure is especially prevalent among civil workers who have a lower socioeconomic position (Brodkin & Majmundar, 2010; Hattke et al., 2019). In addition, administrative service demands quality human capital with high cognitive capabilities to handle government services (Prendergast & Stole, 2023).

These findings highlight the primacy of adequate material incentives that compensate for the challenges of this service and enable the recruitment of qualified personnel, which, in turn, will lead to accomplishments in civil service that benefit society and, consequently, enhance the social status of civil servants.

Some researchers assert that the level of rank significantly determines the social status of civil servants (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). The authors observe that cultural and institutional differences between countries affect civil servants' social position. In countries with a tight hierarchy, job-level social status inequalities are greater, reinforcing social stratification. Better financial conditions and social advantages are associated with higher positions, which in turn elevate one's social status (Steijn &

Knies, 2019).

All discussed research points to the significance of social status determinants, especially those related to income and qualification levels.

The high concentration of employees in public organizations exerts pressure on budgetary resources, frequently resulting in reduced individual compensation levels. The public's view of the social status of public workers can be weakened by inadequate compensation, especially if it does not match the responsibility and expertise required for official duties. Inadequate remuneration can diminish the appeal of pursuing a career in civil service (Fiori, Piergallini, & Shadaydeh, 2023). As Fiori, Piergallini, & Shadaydeh, (2023) revealed, there are significant disparities in the quantity of public employees and their remuneration across different nations. These disparities are influenced by a range of economic, cultural, and political factors that shape how countries handle their public sector workers.

Some researchers frequently emphasize the link between long tenure and heightened esteem and recognition from colleagues and society. Extended tenure increases a government employee's status by accumulating expertise and knowledge, as well as establishing steadfast social networks within and beyond the institution (Oliveira & Dunn, 2024). The elevation of social status increases when a government employee consistently demonstrates high performance and dedication to their profession over their tenure.

Public opinion management influences the perception of civil servants' social status. Utilizing strategic information campaigns and highlighting the achievements of civil servants can significantly enhance their societal status.

3. Materials and methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating a large-scale survey of civil servants with expert interviews to examine the determinants of social status among public officials in Kazakhstan. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical research guidelines, ensuring compliance with human subject protections. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of their anonymity, and provided consent before participating. No personally identifiable information was collected during the survey or interviews.

The survey was designed to assess civil servants' perceptions of their social status, factors influencing their professional standing, and overall work conditions. Conducted between April and May 2023, it aimed to capture diverse perspectives across various levels of government employment in Kazakhstan. The survey instrument used a social ladder framework, where respondents self-assessed their position on a scale from 1 to 10. It is important to note that these responses reflect subjective perceptions rather than

an objective ranking of social status. To address potential misinterpretations of the term 'social status,' the survey distinguished between self-perception and external perception.

A total of 10,920 civil servants participated in the survey, representing all regions of Kazakhstan and a range of administrative levels. The survey was distributed electronically via secured government email networks and an anonymous online survey platform to ensure confidentiality (Bokayev & Amirova, 2023).

Table 1:

Survey Respondent Profile (Percentage)

Parameters	Percentage (%)
Gender	
Male	36.3%
Female	63.7%
Age	
20-30 years	23.5%
31-40 years	34.7%
41-50 years	24.7%
Over 51 years	17.1%
Education	
Secondary education	0.1%
College graduate	7.9%
Bachelor's degree	83.1%
Master's degree	8.2%
Doctoral degree	0.7%
Marital Status	
Married	62.9%
Single	22.7%
Divorced	11.2%
Widowed	3.2%
Employment	
Executive positions (regions)	81.1%
Managerial positions (regions)	16.1%
Executive positions (center)	0.9%
Managerial positions (center)	1.3%
Other	0.6%

Sources: authors' own, 2025

According to Table 1, the survey respondents are distributed across various demographic and professional categories. In terms of gender, 36.3% of respondents are male, while 63.7% are female. Regarding age, 23.5% of respondents are between 20 and 30 years old, 34.7% are between 31 and 40 years old, 24.7% are between 41 and 50 years old, and 17.1% are over 51 years old.

In terms of educational background, only 0.1% of respondents have completed

secondary education, 7.9% are college graduates, 83.1% hold a bachelor's degree, 8.2% have a master's degree, and 0.7% have a doctoral degree.

Regarding marital status, 62.9% of respondents are married, 22.7% are single, 11.2% are divorced, and 3.2% are widowed.

In terms of employment, a significant 81.1% of respondents hold executive positions in regional offices, 16.1% occupy managerial positions in the regions, 0.9% hold executive positions in central offices, 1.3% are in managerial positions in the center, and 0.6% occupy other roles.

The survey utilized a comprehensive questionnaire with 39 key questions, which was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee. This survey provided valuable firsthand data on the social status of civil servants, including insights into income levels, competencies, career prospects, and personal perceptions of social status. The data were coded and analyzed using STATA software.

Surveys engage a wide range of respondents and allow the collection of statistically significant data on wages, education, social benefits, and other factors that influence social status.

Bertram, Bouwman and Tummers (2022) used surveys in their study to examine civil servants' perceptions of their social status compared to the private sector. The research findings emphasized the significance of social benefits and employment stability as key factors determining social status in the public sector.

While the survey was the primary tool for data collection in the study, the interview with the expert was crucial for providing a comprehensive assessment of both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the topic. Expert interviews provide deep contextual analysis and allow us to explore complex social dynamics and motivations that are difficult to assess through standard survey forms. The interviews can complement quantitative data by providing unique insights into the impact of policy change on social status.

The study included 24 expert interviews, selected based on their professional experience in civil service, academia, public administration, or governance consultancy. To ensure credibility, experts were required to meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Former or current high-ranking civil servants.
- Academics with research specialization in public administration and governance.
- Consultants and policymakers with expertise in civil service reforms.
- Representatives from international organizations involved in public sector analysis.
- External experts representing the quasi-governmental sector

The authors developed an interview guide containing 17 questions, which the Ethics Committee approved. The questions sought to gain insights into the respondents' perspectives on ongoing reforms in the civil service system and the social status of civil

servants. The study focused on the following key questions:

1. How would you assess the current social status of civil servants in Kazakhstan?
2. What factors influence the social status of civil servants?
3. What criteria would you use to determine the social status of civil servants in Kazakhstan?
4. How do you evaluate the social status of civil servants in the context of the “New Kazakhstan”? What criteria would you propose for assessing their social status?

The expert interviews were conducted using a combination of in-person meetings and secured online video conferencing platforms to ensure accessibility and confidentiality. All interviews were recorded with the explicit consent of the participants and subsequently transcribed for further qualitative analysis. The selection of experts was based on professional networks, referrals from public sector institutions, and recommendations from academic and policy research organizations. To ensure the robustness of the findings, direct quotations from expert interviews are incorporated into the empirical section, providing deeper insight into recurring themes and divergent perspectives on the social status of civil servants in Kazakhstan.

A semi-structured interview format was employed, allowing for open-ended discussions while maintaining consistency across key thematic areas. The role of these interviews was to contextualize quantitative survey findings, explore discrepancies, and identify explanatory factors behind trends observed in the survey responses.

The combination of these two methods in one study allows for the most complete coverage of the topic, providing not only a superficial understanding but also a deep analytical look at issues related to civil servants’ social status. This approach facilitates the development of more well-founded and effective recommendations for policy formation.

The study situates Kazakhstan within a broader discourse on civil service status in transition economies. Kazakhstan’s public administration has undergone significant transformations, moving from a Soviet-era bureaucratic structure to a more performance-based civil service.

The evolution of Kazakhstan’s civil service follows key historical and institutional developments. The Soviet period established a centralized, top-down governance model. Post-independence reforms initiated the transition to a national public administration, and modernization efforts introduced merit-based recruitment, performance evaluations, and anti-corruption measures.

The Civil Service Law of Kazakhstan, adopted in 2015, establishes civil servants as professionals tasked with executing state functions, providing them with legal protections, responsibilities, and defined career advancement paths. The law enforces meritocratic recruitment, ethical standards, and performance-based evaluations. It also

outlines specific restrictions and obligations, such as prohibitions on political engagement and business activities to ensure impartiality. However, while the law ensures job stability and structured progression, salary levels remain a challenge, contributing to concerns about motivation and retention compared to private sector employment.

Kazakhstan provides a valuable model for other emerging economies seeking to reform civil service structures while balancing historical legacies and governance challenges. This study offers insights into salary structures, career stability, and public trust, contributing to discussions on governance and institutional effectiveness in transitional states.

The study incorporates comparative elements drawn from international literature on social status determinants in public administration. Existing studies from European, Latin American, and post-Soviet contexts were used to inform survey question design and interpret findings. Prior research highlights the importance of financial compensation (Van der Meer, Steen, & Wille, 2018), public trust (Catterberg & Moreno, 2005), and bureaucratic hierarchy (Steijn & Knies, 2019) in shaping civil servants' social standing.

4. Results

4.1. The determination of civil servant social status in Kazakhstan

By analyzing the survey's results, we will see the following picture regarding the definition of the social status of civil servants in Kazakhstan: a total of 10,942 civil servants participated in the survey, representing all regions of Kazakhstan, including both central and local executive bodies. The responses reflect subjective self-perceptions rather than an objective ranking of social status, and respondents' experiences and institutional environments shape these perceptions (Bokayev et al., 2022).

We constructed a 'social ladder' to conduct the analysis, representing people's position in society. The most affluent individuals are at the top of the ladder, with the most money, the highest level of education, and the best jobs. Individuals at the bottom are those with the least money, the lowest education level, the worst job, or no job at all, which facilitated the categorization of social status based on hierarchy into three tiers: low, moderate, and high.

Table 2:

Ranking of the social status levels on a scale from 1 to 10

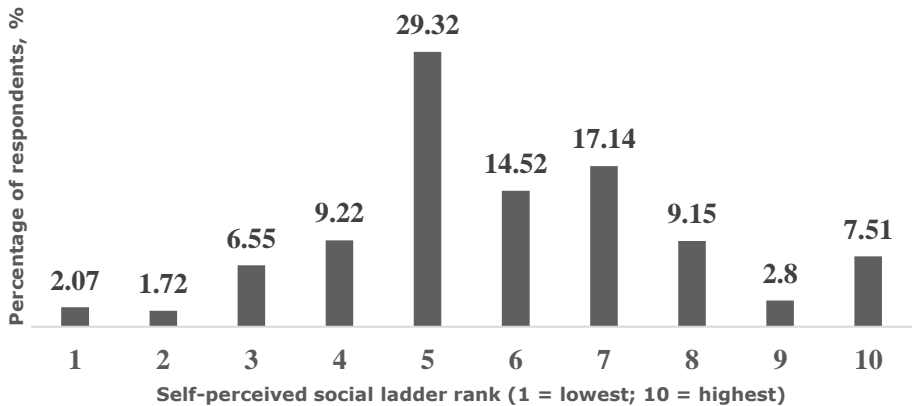
Rating	Level of social status
1-3	Low
4-7	Moderate
8-10	High

Sources: Authors' own, 2025

The findings of the self-determination survey on social status indicate that a majority of government servants perceive their position as average, with a mean score of 5.89. Simultaneously, approximately 10% of participants believe they are at a low level, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1:

Self-identification of the social status of civil servants

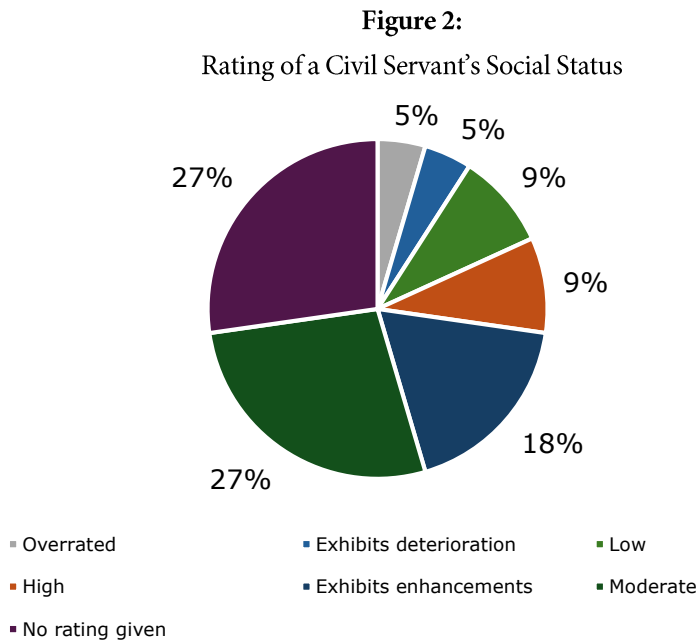


Sources: Authors' own, 2025

We analyzed social status through the lens of a government agency and also determined personal social status. We asked respondents to rank themselves on a 'social ladder' in relation to other individuals in their department. This approach sought to distinguish between perceptions of broader social status and internal workplace hierarchies. At the top of the ladder are employees holding the highest positions, while at the bottom are workers holding the lowest positions.

Although respondents held relatively low formal positions within the administrative hierarchy, their subjective assessment of status proved significantly higher. The mean score on the social ladder was 6.11, highlighting a notable discrepancy between formal position and self-perceived social standing. Several factors may account

for this phenomenon. First, perceived status is often shaped not only by one’s official rank but also by the perceived importance of their role, their level of involvement in decision-making processes, and the degree of respect they receive from colleagues and the surrounding social environment. Second, in the context of public administration, the prestige associated with civil service and affiliation with state structures may confer a sense of social significance regardless of rank. Third, subjective status is also influenced by individual expectations, educational attainment, career aspirations, and professional community affiliation, which together inform a sense of self-worth and identity. Thus, the divergence between formal and subjective status reflects not merely hierarchical differences, but a complex interplay of structural and symbolic factors that shape the social identity of civil servants.

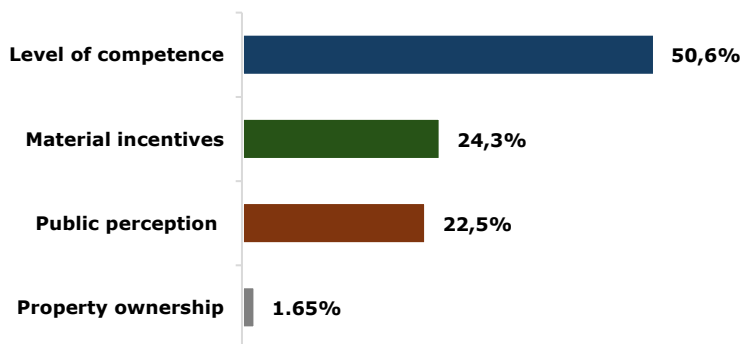


Sources: Authors’ own, 2025

These findings align with the average assessments derived from expert interviews. Based on expert responses, we categorized their evaluations of the current state of civil servants’ social status in Kazakhstan. We calculated the distribution across categories, enabling us to identify both dominant and less common perspectives. Several experts highlighted perceived differences in status between employees at the central and local government levels. In their view, such variation may stem from career development prospects, public visibility, and working conditions, including the scope of responsibilities and access to administrative resources. It is important to note that these are subjective assessments and perceptions of the respondents rather than objective classifications.

Figure 3:

Frequency of associations with a civil servant's social status



Sources: Authors' own, 2025

Government employees have identified their understanding of civil servants' social status. According to the results, civil servants view professional knowledge and skills (50,6%), salary (24%), and public perception (22.5%) as social status determinants (Figure 3).

Both methodologies demonstrated that the degree of proficiency plays a crucial role in ascertaining the social status of a government worker. Nevertheless, while public workers consider professional qualities to be the main attribute, experts rank incentives—specifically material benefits—as the highest priority. This analysis covers several perspectives and highlights important issues related to the position of civil authorities in Kazakhstan.

Perceptions of rank and social status among various study participants were heterogeneous. These divergences reflect the diversity of interpretations shaped by personal experience and professional context. Civil servants tended to assess status primarily in terms of their own position and working conditions, whereas experts adopted a broader interpretive framework that incorporated institutional, cultural, and normative dimensions. Based on expert interviews, several typologies of approaches to assessing social status were developed and classified.

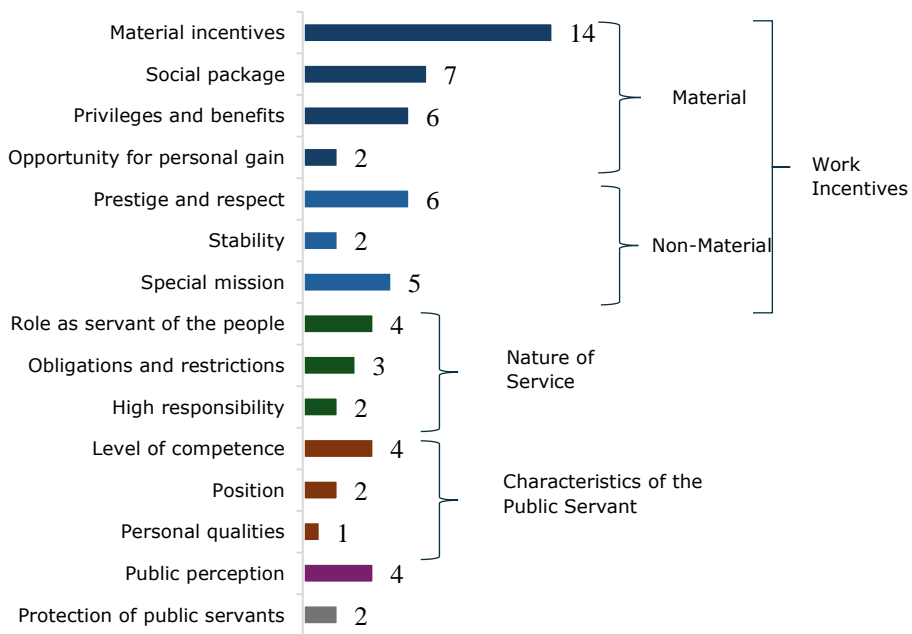
Before delving into the substantive analysis of expert evaluations, it is worth noting that some experts refrained from directly characterizing the social status of civil servants. A number of them expressed skepticism that this professional group occupies a distinct societal position. In their view, recognizing a special status for civil servants may imply privilege, symbolic exclusivity, and social distance, perceptions that contradict the principles of openness, equality, and public accountability that underpin contemporary civil service. This perspective is often grounded in an institutional-legal

or material interpretation of status, overlooking its broader sociological dimensions.

For instance, expert-22 pointed out that reliance on social benefits and privileges as tools for retaining qualified personnel requires critical reflection regarding both their effectiveness and the sustainability of public expenditure.

The data also reveal significant variation in how different experts assess the relationship between social status and financial incentives. Some experts argue that salary and benefits remain the most important determinants of perceived status, while others stress that professional reputation and societal recognition carry equal weight. This divergence suggests that perceptions of social status in the civil service are shaped by multiple, and sometimes conflicting, criteria.

Figure 4:
Frequency of associations with a civil servant’s social status



Sources: Authors’ own, 2025

Figure 4 reveals a significant correlation between the civil servant’s social status and the 42 times mentioned work incentives. Some experts evaluate the social standing of public officials based on the material benefits they provide, while others emphasize the profession’s inherent value, which lies in its service to society.

We divided the work incentives into material and non-material attributes of social status; the material ones proved to be the priority. Twenty-two experts mentioned the material incentives, which include salary and bonuses; the social package, typically covering medical security and day care for children; housing benefits; and the opportunity to obtain a Master's or PhD while maintaining employment and salary. Experts argue that these features differentiate the status and contribute to the attractiveness of government service.

Another recurring theme, raised in expert interviews though not directly related to social status, was corruption. Roughly half of the interviewed experts addressed this issue in a broader discussion of civil service. Corruption was viewed as a factor that affects public trust and the societal image of government institutions.

Some experts described corruption as a reputational challenge that undermines the prestige of the profession and obstructs institutional recognition. Others proposed that raising salaries and expanding social protections could serve as preventive mechanisms against unethical behavior. In this context, material incentives were seen as potentially compensatory in situations where institutional trust is low. Thus, in expert discourse, corruption functions more as a marker of the institutional environment than a structural determinant of low status (Bokayev et al., 2023).

While some experts argued that higher wages could mitigate corruption risks, others pointed out that negative public perceptions of the civil service persist regardless of financial incentives, suggesting that deeper institutional reforms may be necessary to improve status.

"The income level of civil servants must be high so that the civil servant is not tempted to take any other steps" (expert-16, personal communication).

The intangible benefits of civil servants are the second most significant factor in determining social status. The strain of civil service should be compensated with further remuneration in the form of prestige and respect from society. The experts emphasize the importance of recognizing the specific mission's significance in advancing the country's progress and effecting change, which should be the primary reason for continuing this duty. As Expert-1 points out, "one line in the law, and you have done something for the whole country's future" (personal communication).

The social status of civil servants is also viewed by experts in terms of the nature of the civil service. According to four experts, social status is determined by the fundamental nature of civil service as an activity. According to experts, the transition from a command-administrative position to a service provider role negatively influenced the status of social servants.

According to experts, the self-perception of certain civil servants as a superior class hinders the state apparatus from accepting and adapting to their new role. While civil personnel may not be eager to prioritize a customer-oriented approach, society tends to exaggerate the notion of being a 'servant of the people' and often disregards ethical

boundaries.

Two participants expressed concern about the limited availability of state mechanisms to protect and support civil servants in Kazakhstan, both institutionally and in their role as providers of civil services. They noted that increasing public expectations and heightened accountability have generated workloads and risks not always addressed through institutional support. According to them, these pressures may influence both professional motivation and the perceived status of civil servants:

“We really need to know who will defend the service provider, us! Those in difficult situations publicly attack and show contempt toward civil servants. Now we need protection from them in this domain” (Expert-3, personal communication).

Three other experts contend that the social status of civil servants is established by restrictions and obligations, such as the prohibition on engaging in private business activities and the requirement to adhere to ethical standards in both their professional and personal lives. These aspects also justify providing civil servants with greater material benefits compared to ordinary citizens.

Regarding the characteristics of government servants, it is important to acknowledge that the employees' level of competency strongly determines their social status. Numerous experts contend that low salaries attract low-competence specialists, which in turn contributes to the poor performance of the civil service and, as a result, to the low social status. A specific interrelation should be emphasized. Simultaneously, the poor salary level is inconsistent with the high level of responsibility, restrictions, and obligations that are associated with the civil service.

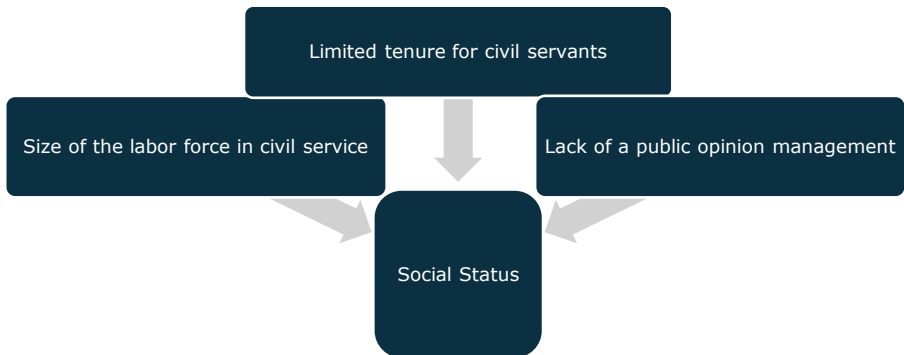
The status of a public servant is determined by her position, as emphasized by three experts who point out that occupying a high position is associated with a particular degree of wealth.

Four experts have identified the public perception as a critical aspect of social status.

4.2. The factors influencing the social status of a civil servant in Kazakhstan

The experts discussed various significant factors that influence the social status of civil servants. The expert opinions and proposals can serve as a foundation for developing policies aimed at enhancing the work environment and status of civil workers, while also modifying public perception and interaction with the state. It is crucial to acknowledge that the viewpoints were not duplicated; each position offers a fresh perspective on the topic. Each expert proposed the factors based on her individual expertise in civil service.

Figure 5:
The factors influencing the social status of a civil servant



Sources: Authors' own, 2025

Expert-11 is concerned about the excessive number of civil servants, which is affecting the average wages in the public sector, a key determinant of the social status of civil servants. This factor hinders the attractiveness of a civil service to highly competent staff. Based on the interview comments, we have determined that the public sector's material benefits are not comparable to those of the private sector. Competent professionals typically prioritize building their careers in the private or quasi-public sectors before transitioning to the civil service on a residual basis.

In the context of building a sustainable human resource base within the civil service, experts emphasize that the primary category of new employees consists of young professionals. Among the key motivating factors, they typically highlight opportunities for professional growth, skills development, and the accumulation of practical experience (Bokayev et al., 2024). At the same time, expert interviews pointed to a statistically observable trend of high turnover among younger civil servants: a significant proportion of them leave civil service within the first three years of employment.

This dynamic can be interpreted as a reflection of the challenges associated with adaptation and professional development within the context of civil service (Issenova et al., 2024). These challenges encompass the constraints of a bureaucratic environment, limited institutional flexibility, and a possible mismatch between the expectations of young professionals and the actual opportunities for career advancement, responsibility, and incentives. According to several experts, such factors may contribute to a decline in sustained motivation and lead to the attrition of qualified personnel, which in turn may affect the overall level of professionalism and the perceived prestige of civil service.

Expert-12 emphasizes the need for stability and continuity in the civil service,

asserting that it is crucial to allow new experts sufficient time to execute their goals and showcase tangible outcomes. Consequently, the limited availability of time hinders the attainment of desired outcomes, thereby exacerbating the lack of trust among citizens.

This factor contributes to the prevalence of low trust and negative views among citizens towards civil servants in society, as highlighted by experts. To change the perception of civil servants, it is crucial to transform the image of the public servant by implementing public opinion management strategies. Expert-13 addressed the issue of common myths and misconceptions about civil servants that can distort public perception and contribute to corrupt ideas. They then argue that the perception of civil servants is not altered by citizens' tendency to resolve their issues through corrupt connections. The only way to overcome this is for civil servants to perform their duties transparently and responsibly.

5. Discussion

The discussion of findings in relation to theoretical frameworks and international comparisons reveals a need for a more structured approach to interpretation. The social status of civil servants is determined by education, profession, qualifications, position held, income level, social benefits, the potential for social interaction, and political connections. Simultaneously, the social status of a civil servant is regarded as a specific position in society, along with a title and prestige.

The study findings indicate that the majority of government servants in Kazakhstan regard their social position as moderate, with an average self-assessment score of 5.89 on a scale of 1 to 10. The above aligns with our analysis of the 'social ladder', which categorizes individuals into low, middle, and high tiers based on income, education, and job performance. Civil personnel frequently assess their performance within their agencies as superior to their social rank, achieving an average score of 6.11, which aligns with studies conducted in transitional economies, where self-perception is often linked more to internal organizational hierarchies than external public perceptions (Braams, & van der Voet, 2024).

Economic variables, such as remuneration and material advantages, significantly influence the social status of civil personnel. Comparative analysis with other nations suggests that lower financial compensation is a consistent determinant of lower perceived status, especially in post-Soviet states where financial incentives in the public sector are often perceived as inadequate (Demirgüç-Kunt, Lokshin & Kolchin, 2023).

A study by Van der Meer, Steen, & Wille (2018) found that in European countries with higher public sector salaries, civil servants tend to have a higher perceived social status. In contrast, countries with lower public sector wages, such as certain Eastern European nations, experience a persistent struggle to attract qualified professionals to civil service, leading to an overall decline in social status.

The poll revealed that 24% of participants considered compensation to be the primary factor influencing social status. The substantial workforce in public sector organizations was identified as a factor leading to salary stagnation, which discourages highly qualified persons from seeking careers in civil service.

The research highlighted material incentives, including income, bonuses, housing advantages, and access to higher education, as essential elements of social status. These findings align with Van der Meer, Steen, & Wille (2018) research, which highlighted the significance of financial incentives in enhancing motivation and social esteem. Conversely, non-material elements like social prestige and recognition were deemed secondary yet remained influential. The experts underscored that public officials should receive compensation that reflects respect and acknowledgment for their contributions to national advancement, in line with Prendergast & Stole's (2023) perspective on the significance of intrinsic rewards.

Further comparisons indicate that in Scandinavian countries, civil servants tend to enjoy higher social status due to a combination of professional autonomy, transparency, and competitive compensation. These countries have successfully elevated the attractiveness of civil service careers by ensuring that salaries remain competitive with those in the private sector while maintaining strong public trust in government institutions. Conversely, in some Asian countries with rigid bureaucratic hierarchies, social status is often tied to seniority rather than salary or performance, reinforcing traditional prestige structures rather than meritocratic incentives (Poocharoen, & Brillantes, 2013).

Corruption, as mentioned in the expert interviews, continues to shape public perceptions of the civil service. Several experts suggested that improving remuneration and social protections could help deter unethical behavior—a finding supported by international studies such as those by Demirgüç-Kunt, Lokshin & Kolchin (2023), which identify an inverse correlation between compensation levels and susceptibility to corruption.

At the same time, persistent public stereotypes associating civil service with corruption may undermine the professional reputation of public employees and diminish institutional legitimacy, regardless of actual levels of misconduct. Hence, in expert discourse, corruption is portrayed more as a contextual and reputational factor than a root cause of low status.

The experts commonly mentioned that low salaries tempt existing staff to seek illicit forms of income (Demirgüç-Kunt, Lokshin & Kolchin, 2023). However, simply raising pay does not automatically eliminate corrupt practices if oversight is weak. Better compensation packages, tied to transparent performance metrics and ethical behavior, reduce the appeal of bribes or other illegal gains. At the same time, publicly disclosing salaries, budgets, and project expenses can discourage malfeasance by making financial data open to scrutiny (Porumbescu, 2017). When combined, fair pay scales and strong accountability measures can transform corruption from a 'risk worth taking' into a

high-risk, low-reward proposition. This shift, in turn, may help repair public trust in civil servants, as ordinary citizens see that governance structures genuinely uphold integrity. Over time, reducing corruption should improve the civil service's external image, attracting better-qualified individuals seeking stable, reputable careers.

Public impression was recognized as a pivotal element affecting the social status of civil servants, with 22.5% of survey participants indicating it as a decisive component. That finding emphasizes how media representation and public opinion influence the prestige of government employees across different nations.

The experts observed that pervasive public criticism, encompassing allegations of corruption and inefficiency, diminishes the credibility of the civil service. The results align with the study by Braams & van der Voet (2024), which emphasizes the impact of public opinion on the status of civil personnel. Resolving these difficulties necessitates focused public relations initiatives to emphasize the contributions and accomplishments of public leaders.

Fifty percent of respondents identified the degree of professional knowledge and abilities as the paramount factor influencing social standing. The experts concurred, highlighting the correlation between expertise and social esteem. Nonetheless, inadequate compensation was recognized as a barrier to recruiting highly skilled professionals, resulting in a cycle of inefficiency and diminishing status. The findings align with Bertram & Meijer (2024) claim that advanced degrees and professional growth are essential for elevating the standing of civil servants.

The research revealed that hierarchical frameworks within public institutions substantially influence social status. The experts observed that senior officials receive enhanced material advantages and social acknowledgment, aligning with the conclusions of Bertram, Bouwman and Tummers (2022). This stratification exacerbates inequality by restricting advancement prospects for lower-level employees. Addressing these disparities necessitates fundamental reforms to foster equality and mobility within the public sector.

The shift from command and control jobs to service-oriented positions has adversely impacted the status of federal servants. The experts ascribe this reduction to public expectations and heightened scrutiny that frequently overlook the achievements of civil personnel. This conclusion aligns with the research of Braams & van der Voet (2024) regarding the difficulties civil servants encounter in adjusting to evolving roles and expectations.

The experts emphasized the necessity for enhanced safeguards against public scrutiny and legal disputes, especially for service providers. These findings corroborate claim that institutional support is crucial for fostering a healthy work environment and improving public impressions of the civil service.

Moreover, measures for managing public opinion, such as informational campaigns, are essential for altering public attitudes and emphasizing the significance

of the civil service. By confronting these difficulties, policymakers can cultivate a more appealing and efficient public sector, thereby enhancing trust and respect among citizens (Bokayev et al., 2024).

This study explores the complex factors influencing civil servants' subjective perception of their social status, highlighting the interplay of economic incentives, professional skills, public perception, and institutional support.

6. Conclusion

The social status of civil servants in Kazakhstan is an intricate and diverse concept characterized by various features, including economic situations, legislative norms, public opinion, and professional competencies.

The results of the surveys and expert interviews indicate that, according to respondents, material incentives—such as salary levels, access to social benefits, and the provision of decent working conditions—are significant factors influencing the perceived social status of civil servants. The experts' opinions further emphasize the importance of strategies to enhance the competitiveness of the civil service in the labor market, such as establishing a fair remuneration system, developing workplace infrastructure, and providing institutional support for professional development.

Some of the experts express concern that reducing social guarantees or providing insufficient material incentives may limit the attractiveness of civil service careers for qualified professionals, particularly among younger cohorts. However, it is stressed that the issue is less about directly deterring potential candidates and more about the need for a comprehensive approach to shaping a positive image of civil service as a stable, professional, and socially meaningful career path.

Alongside material factors, the level of professional qualification among personnel is also perceived as a key component in status-related assessments. According to expert evaluations, a misalignment between the complexity of assigned tasks and the available resources (including human and organizational capacities) may negatively affect public perceptions of the civil service and diminish the prestige of the profession. Some participants pointed out that the combination of low wages, high regulatory workloads, and bureaucratic barriers can hinder sustainable professional growth, thereby influencing how civil servants perceive their own social standing.

Thus, the findings confirm that both material and non-material aspects of professional activity are interrelated with perceptions of social status among civil servants. However, they do not fully capture its complex and multi-component nature, which also includes dimensions such as prestige, public trust, professional recognition, and societal perception.

Public opinion is a significant factor often shaped by perceptions of corruption

and the effectiveness of government entities. An elevated level of societal trust serves to enhance the social status of public officials, whilst unfavorable stereotypes and criticism can significantly erode it.

Improving the social status of civil servants in Kazakhstan requires a comprehensive and balanced approach that considers both ongoing governmental initiatives and persistent challenges in human resource management. In particular, the Concept for the Development of Civil Service in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030 underscores the importance of creating a positive image of the civil service, increasing its attractiveness to qualified professionals, and ensuring fair conditions for remuneration and merit-based career advancement (Adilet, 2022).

Special attention should be given to strengthening public trust in the civil service through systematic communication policies, regular monitoring of public opinion, and actively engaging citizens in evaluating the quality of civil services. Advancing these areas, in combination with existing regulatory and institutional instruments, may contribute to the long-term enhancement of professional prestige, legitimacy, and the perceived social relevance of the civil service.

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