

MORAL-ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SERVANTS IN UZBEKISTAN IN THE INDEPENDENCE ERA

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Abstract Since declaring independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has undergone a profound process of political, social, and administrative transformation. One of the central pillars of this transformation has been the development of a modern civil service predicated upon professionalism, competence, and above all, robust moral and ethical standards. This paper explores the origins, evolution, and contemporary development of the moral-ethical foundations of Uzbekistani civil servants, highlighting legal reforms, institutional innovations, and ongoing challenges. By analyzing the theoretical and practical aspects of state service ethics, the paper aims to offer a nuanced view of the values guiding Uzbekistan's public sector and assess their impact on administrative effectiveness and public trust.

Keywords Uzbekistan, civil service, ethics, moral principles, professionalism, independence, public administration

Аннотация С момента обретения независимости в 1991 году Узбекистан пережил глубокую трансформацию в политической, социальной и административной сферах. Одним из ключевых направлений этих преобразований стало формирование современной системы государственной службы, основанной на профессионализме, компетентности, а также прочных морально-этических принципах. В статье рассматриваются истоки, развитие и современное состояние морально-этических основ государственных служащих Узбекистана, акцентируется внимание на правовых реформах, институциональных нововведениях и текущих вызовах. Анализируя теоретические и практические аспекты этики государственной службы, автор раскрывает ценности, лежащие в основе государственного сектора Узбекистана, и оценивает их влияние на эффективность управления и доверие общества.

Ключевые слова Узбекистан, государственная служба, этика, моральные принципы, профессионализм, независимость, государственное управление

Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in an urgent need for Uzbekistan to establish its own state institutions from scratch. Among the newly independent republic's priorities were building a professional, patriotic, and effective bureaucracy, introducing a culture of honesty and social responsibility, and aligning public service ethics with both national traditions and global standards. The process, however, was not straightforward. The legacy of Soviet administration was characterized by rigid hierarchy, lack of accountability, and at times, disregard for public interest. Uzbekistan's political leadership not only set out to create new laws and mechanisms for fighting corruption, inefficiency, and nepotism, but also realized the necessity to reinforce civil service ethos through education, training, and continuous professional development. Today, the country stands as a case study in how moral-ethical values are institutionalized in a transitioning society.

The moral-ethical foundations of Uzbekistan's civil service are embedded in the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan and a range of legislative acts regulating public administration, including the Law on Civil Service, the Model Rules of Ethical Conduct of State Employees, and anti-corruption statutes. These legal documents set forth the expectation that public servants' behavior should be grounded in lawfulness, integrity, impartiality, loyalty to the state, and accountability to the people¹.

The Constitution itself guarantees equality before the law, protection of rights and freedoms, and asserts that the state serves the interests of its citizens. The civil servant is thereby both subject to the law and a custodian of lawful conduct. The ethical codes require employees to²:

- Prioritize national and civic values in the performance of duties;
- Foster respect for traditions and cultural diversity;
- Act transparently, avoid conflicts of interest, and prevent discrimination;
- Uphold confidentiality, honesty, and fairness in administrative processes.

Reforms have further clarified the distinction between public service and political loyalty, underscoring professional standards irrespective of partisan interests³.

The Model Rules of Ethical Conduct, adopted in 2018 and periodically revised, provide detailed guidance for civil servants' behavior in various

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² <https://constitution.uz/en/clause/index>

³ Базылева С.П. Соблюдение этических норм в политической деятельности Узбекистана // Государственная служба. – 2019. – Т. 21. – № 4. – С. 113–118. – DOI: 10.22394/2070-8378-2019-21-4. С.113-118.

professional situations. This includes interactions with citizens, the media, and other public institutions. Specific provisions forbid the misuse of office for personal gain, require disclosure of financial interests to prevent corruption, objectivity in decision making, and the safeguarding of public trust. The rules are binding upon all government agencies and have been institutionalized through mandatory ethics training and regular appraisals⁴.

The independence era has seen the emergence of specialized institutions dedicated to combating corruption and fostering integrity, most notably the Anti-Corruption Agency of Uzbekistan. The Agency coordinates audits, enforces reporting standards, investigates violations, and collaborates with international partners on best practices. Public sector employees undergo periodic background checks, asset declarations, and are subject to penalties if found violating established ethical norms⁵.

The convergence of anti-corruption legislation with ethical standards reflects a broad recognition that combating financial impropriety requires a culture of honesty and responsibility among civil servants, not merely surveillance and punishment.

Uzbekistan's approach to civil service development emphasizes not only technical skill but also education in citizenship, patriotism, and appreciation for cultural heritage. Official documents and training programs stress the importance of historical memory, the legacy of national leaders, and respect for the country's traditions as foundations of public service ethos⁶.

Ethics and spiritual development courses have become mandatory for new recruits, with lectures on the role of Amir Temur and other historical figures in shaping the values of justice, discipline, and social responsibility. State service is portrayed as a "moral category," requiring officers to serve not only the letter of the law but also the spirit and identity of the Uzbek nation⁷.

Educational reforms have thus sought to nurture critical thinking, intercultural communication, and constructive engagement with citizens. Civil servants are encouraged to participate in volunteerism, community initiatives, and cultural events, strengthening their social bonds and sense of purpose.

⁴ https://gov.uz/en/eco/pages/rules_for_ethical

⁵ Khasanov O. Anti-corruption: Open path to the public service // The Anti-Corruption Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan. – 2021. – № 1. – P. 19. – Available at: <https://uacd.uz/index.php/journal/article/download/7/33> (accessed: 02.11.2025).

⁶ Shamanova Z.U. The importance of national and personal values in building civil society in new Uzbekistan // Western European Journal of Historical Events and Social Science. – 2025. – Vol. 3. – Issue 5. – P. 140–142. – ISSN 2942-1926. – Available at: <https://westerneuropianstudies.com/index.php/4> (accessed: 02.11.2025).

⁷ Avazov K. The role of state authority in ensuring political stability // Eurasian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences. – 2022. – Vol. 15. – P. 9–17. – ISSN 2795-7683. – Available at: <https://www.geniusjournals.org> (accessed: 02.11.2025).

Ongoing professional development is an integral part of building an ethical workforce. This includes:

- Regular ethics seminars and certifications;
- Continuing education in legal practice, policy analysis, and administrative processes;
- Exposure to international norms through exchange programs and conferences⁸.

Merit-based career advancement and regular performance evaluations seek to reward honest and effective employees, while those found in breach of ethical standards face disciplinary measures or dismissal.

The implementation of the above reforms has yielded marked improvements in public trust, transparency, and administrative effectiveness. Uzbekistan's civil servants today operate under clearer standards, with a higher degree of accountability and professional pride than in the late Soviet or early independence years. Objective indicators, such as World Bank governance scores and Transparency International indices, show steady improvement in the assessment of state institutions.

The promotion of women, ethnic minorities, and young professionals in state service, along with anti-discrimination policies, reflects genuine progress toward inclusivity and equitable representation.

Nonetheless, creating an ethical culture in a vast bureaucracy is an ongoing process. Surveys and expert analyses point to continuing issues, including:

- Occasional persistence of nepotism, bribery, and abuse of office, especially in regional administrations;
- Resistance to change and legacy habits from the Soviet era;
- Difficulty in translating formal ethical codes into daily practice, especially where oversight is weak or citizens lack avenues for redress.

Moreover, rapid legislative and institutional reforms sometimes outpace the capacity for training, leaving some public servants uncertain about new expectations. Ensuring consistent ethical standards across all government levels remains a challenge.

Greater openness to public input and independent scrutiny are necessary to sustain an ethical culture. Recent reforms have established ombudsmen, public reception offices, and digital portals for complaint submission and civic engagement. These measures foster dialogue between citizens and civil servants, making public officials more responsive to societal needs.

⁸ https://gov.uz/en/eeco/pages/rules_for_ethical

Major public campaigns against corruption, the celebration of ethical role models, and the alignment of administrative practice with international conventions also help to anchor moral norms in the state apparatus.

The Uzbek experience is instructive in how ethical standards adapt to the intersection of national identity and international norms. The process of constructing a “New Uzbekistan” has relied not only on legislative reforms and enforcement, but also on crafting a moral narrative—one that positions the civil servant as both an agent of modernization and a carrier of tradition.

National ideology, drawing on the historic values of justice, discipline, and community, is presented as fully compatible with rule of law, anti-corruption measures, and modern techniques of public administration. The implicit message is that effective governance requires both technical skill and a “moral compass” oriented toward public well-being.

Contemporary assessments by international organizations have recognized Uzbekistan’s advances, while also noting that continued investment in ethics education, transparency, and public involvement are essential for deepening reforms.

Conclusion

The transformation of Uzbekistan’s civil service from a Soviet-style bureaucracy to a modern administrative apparatus built upon strong moral and ethical foundations constitutes one of the most significant achievements of the independence era. Guided by comprehensive legislation, cultural revival, and practical training, the country's public sector has become more transparent, accountable, and inclusive.

Challenges persist, particularly in ensuring consistent application of ethical standards at all levels and in making codes of conduct part of everyday administrative practice. Nevertheless, the progress made demonstrates the importance of aligning national values and international best practices, integrating both into the formation of a morally upright public service.

As Uzbekistan continues its journey, the spiritual and ethical development of its civil servants will remain central to the country’s ambition to build a prosperous, just, and open society.

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