Heading Towards 'New' Kazakhstan?: Public Administration Reforms after 'Bloody January' conflict

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Abstract: Until recent time, Kazakhstan was considered an example of successful public sector modernisation in the post-Soviet Eurasia region (Janenova & Knox, 2019). Nursultan Nazarbayev, the founder of the state after the end of the Soviet Union, finally stepped down as president in 2019 and made Tokayev, a former prime minister, his successor. In January 2022 Kazakhstan experienced unprecedented mass protests against political regime, corruption and social injustice. The national public unrest in Kazakhstan has left over 200 dead, over 4,000 wounded, nearly 10,000 in detention, and faced a deep political and socio-economic crisis (Kudaibergenova & Laruelle, 2022). The situation was brought under control with the intervention of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and crackdowns by the Kazakh security forces.

This study presents a critical analysis of the impact of 'Bloody January' protests on public administration reforms. The present situation is challenging for Kazakhstan and its political leadership in many areas including managing political and business elites, maintaining social stability, addressing social injustice, and diplomatic balancing between two powerful neighbours: Russia and China.

This study will analyse the government response to the internal conflict through open government framework (McDermott, 2010; Wirtz & Birkmeyer, 2015). Kazakhstani government has announced its commitment to the open government agenda towards a more transparent, accountable and participatory government (Kurmanov & Knox, 2022; O'Connor et al., 2019). Open government agenda has been used by the Kazakhstani governments as a tool for gaining external legitimacy from international community and internal legitimacy from their citizens.

This paper will address the following question:
1.   What has been the impact of internal conflict on the public administration reforms in Kazakhstan? Do we see any change in the trajectory of PA reforms?
2.   What lessons can we learn from this case?

Methodology:
This study will be based on the secondary data analysis (legislation, media articles, and policy reports).

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