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Public Service Evolution in the 15 Post-Soviet Countries: Diversity in Transformation, Edited by Alikhan Baimenov and Panos Liverakos (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 579 pp., ISBN: 9789811624612, <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-16-2462-9>

For those looking for an innovative perspective on comparative or transnational administration, whether they study governance innovation, public sector reform, civil service reform, or comparative politics, *Public Service Evolution in the 15 Post-Soviet Countries*, edited by Alikhan Baimenov and Panos Liverakos is a must read. Baimenov and Liverakos collaborated with more than two dozen experts who were familiar with the reforms and changes in the public sector of post-Soviet countries, and deeply analysed the processes and dynamics of the public sector and civil service reforms in post-Soviet countries.

The Soviet Union's disintegration was followed by the restoration of independent states in 1991, and the post-Soviet states are the 15 sovereign states that were union republics of the Soviet Union. The 15 states can be divided into four subregions: Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine), the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), and the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia). These states began the transition from a command economy to a market economy after the Soviet Union's disintegration and made efforts to reconstruct administrative and economic systems, with varying results.

For a better understanding of the nature of the changes in the political, economic, and social situation occurring within post-Soviet countries, several questions arise: What reforms have the post-Soviet countries promoted in the public sector over the past three decades? What has been successful and what has not been successful in the public sector reform process? What have been the reasons for the success and failure of such reforms, and what have been the most difficult challenges and obstacles? In addition, in what direction do post-Soviet countries intend to develop their administrative and civil service systems in the future? What policy lessons can be learned from the reform process? The answers to these questions hold useful lessons and implications for policymakers pursuing reforms in the public sector, as well as for scholars and students studying these topics.

The book comprises 16 chapters. The first chapter, written by Baimenov and Liverakos, provides a comprehensive overview of the reforms that these states pursued in nurturing a professional public administration and a competent public service capable of accomplishing the countries' sustainable development objectives. In other words, the first chapter presents a critical review of public administration reform experience with an emphasis on civil service transformation and subsequent development with an analytical presentation of the 15 countries' performance on several international indices over time to grasp the range and depth of administrative changes that have taken place in the course of a generation. The countries that display higher scores have established strong institutions of democratic governance by pursuing relatively consistent reform policies, resulting in an institutional transformation that is more advanced than other post-Soviet republics.

The remainder of the book focuses on each individual country's experience in a broad range of transformations. In fact, each of the post-Soviet republics pursued the transformation of their public administration and civil service systems over the course of a generation. Such a review

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and comparison of post-Soviet countries sheds light on the transformational dynamics of the varying national outcomes that have begun to crystallize a generation after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and reveals the influence of various factors on the trajectories of these countries since 1991.

Baimenov and Liverakos assert that the 15 post-Soviet republics underwent complex reforms, politically, economically, and socially, resulting in significant changes in the role of the state over the past 30 transformative years, although to a varying degree across countries. They state that a common characteristic of all reforms across these countries is the non-linearity of the reform process, as stops and reversals took place during this difficult process many times. It seems that political dynamics have played a major role in the outcomes and have driven effective reforms while simultaneously inhibiting the progress of certain reforms. Another characteristic of the reforms is that there is no uniformity in the models of reform or development to which the countries have adhered in their transformation efforts, and it is also possible to observe a wide array of activities and degrees of speed and thoroughness in the governments' attempts to modernise their public administration and civil service systems.

In the preface of the book, Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations Development Programme, states that the conclusion of the book is that these countries' common historical experience while they were part of the Soviet Union and their subjugation to its ideological and institutional regime left them with problems that haunted them in their pursuit to establish and consolidate good governance and market-based economic systems. Nonetheless, each country's reform efforts have been remarkably diverse, as it has been repeatedly demonstrated that institutional transformation is highly dependent on specific conjunctures, in particular historical and cultural, but also geopolitical contexts that may lead to divergent outcomes. In other words, some countries achieved their goal of establishing pluralistic governance systems, whereas in others, substantial gaps existed between their declarative intentions and the actual outcomes achieved.

Although the book makes important contributions, there are a couple of areas where it can be improved for future editions. First, it would be beneficial for prospective readers to have a concluding chapter summarising the overall results. To this end, adding a concluding chapter that effectively uses summary tables of key findings, including similarities and differences, will help in targeting important audiences. Second, it is necessary to discuss the trajectory of public sector reform. The most basic and fundamental reform in the public sector is civil service reform. The starting point for civil service reform is to enact a civil service law at the legal level. Several post-Soviet countries have already enacted civil service laws, but some remain in the form of ordinances rather than civil service laws. Even if the civil service act is enacted, there are cases where there is no independent central agency in charge of public personnel management. Therefore, there is a need for a central agency that can independently conduct public personnel management and promote civil service reform. After conducting such basic reforms, various additional reforms (anti-corruption, corporatisation or privatisation, decentralisation, deregulation, digital transformation, financial and budgetary reform, and organisational restructuring) are needed.

Overall, this book offers valuable contributions to our understanding of public sector reform and civil service reforms in post-Soviet countries. Baimenov and Liverakos, and their colleagues provide a worthy read and a rich source of information for scholars studying public administration and public sector reform in post-Soviet countries. Thus, this book is highly recommended to public administration scholars and practitioners.

Reference

Baimenov, Alikhan, and Panos Liverakos (2022). *Public Service Evolution in the 15 Post-Soviet Countries: Diversity in Transformation*, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.