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The modernization of Burkina Faso's state civil service: between legal ambitions and the challenges of effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the modernization of Burkina Faso's state civil service, analyzing the gap between the legal and institutional ambitions articulated in reform strategies and the persistent challenges of implementation and effectiveness. Using a documentary analysis approach combining legal texts, government reports, and performance assessments, this study assesses the achievements and limitations of the modernization agenda from 2015 to 2025. The analysis reveals that the legal framework has been substantially reformed, notably through Law No. 081-2015/CNT on the General Statute of the State Civil Service, which introduced a competency-based approach organized around professions, employment, and workstations. The National Strategy for the Modernization of Public Administration (SN-MAP) achieved a physical execution rate of 74.89 percent in 2024, up from 31.86 percent in 2023. Digital transformation has accelerated, with the launch of citizen participation platforms, the overhaul of the SIGASPE personnel management system, and the introduction of biometric attendance control. However, the study identifies significant constraints on effectiveness: low equipment levels (one computer for every five agents), limited budget allocations for administrative reform (averaging CFAF 200 million annually), weak coordination among reform actors, and persistent issues of corruption, absenteeism, and low motivation linked to inadequate compensation. The findings contribute to the literature on public administration reform in West Africa by demonstrating that legal modernization does not automatically produce administrative effectiveness, and that the binding constraints are institutional, financial, and cultural rather than legal.

Keywords: Civil service modernization, public administration reform, legal ambitions, effectiveness, digital transformation, Burkina Faso, SN-MAP, civil service statute

RESUME

Cette étude examine la modernisation de la fonction publique d'État au Burkina Faso, en analysant l'écart entre les ambitions juridiques et institutionnelles articulées dans les stratégies de réforme et les défis persistants de mise en œuvre et d'efficacité. Utilisant une approche d'analyse documentaire combinant les textes juridiques, les rapports gouvernementaux et les évaluations de performance, cette étude évalue les réalisations et les limites de l'agenda de modernisation de 2015 à 2025. L'analyse révèle que le cadre juridique a été substantiellement réformé, notamment par la loi n° 081-2015/CNT portant Statut général de la fonction publique d'État, qui a introduit une approche par compétences organisée autour des métiers, des emplois et des postes de travail. La Stratégie nationale de modernisation de l'administration publique (SN-MAP) a atteint un taux d'exécution physique de 74,89 pour cent en 2024, contre 31,86 pour cent en 2023. La transformation digitale s'est accélérée, avec le lancement de plateformes de participation citoyenne, la refonte du système de gestion du personnel SIGASPE et l'introduction du contrôle biométrique de présence. Cependant, l'étude identifie des contraintes significatives sur l'efficacité : faible niveau d'équipement (un ordinateur pour cinq agents), allocations budgétaires limitées pour la réforme administrative (moyenne de 200 millions de FCFA par an), faible coordination entre les acteurs de la réforme, et problèmes persistants de corruption, d'absentéisme et de faible motivation liés à une rémunération inadéquate.

Les résultats contribuent à la littérature sur la réforme de l'administration publique en Afrique de l'Ouest en démontrant que la modernisation juridique ne produit pas automatiquement une efficacité administrative, et que les contraintes contraignantes sont institutionnelles, financières et culturelles plutôt que juridiques.

Mots-clés : Modernisation de la fonction publique, réforme de l'administration publique, ambitions juridiques, efficacité, transformation digitale, Burkina Faso, SN-MAP, statut de la fonction publique

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The modernization of public administration has been a central pillar of Burkina Faso's governance agenda for over two decades, gaining renewed momentum since the adoption of the National Strategy for the Modernization of Public Administration (SN-MAP) and the establishment of the National Council for the Modernization of Administration and Good Governance (CN-MABG). This reform agenda responds to longstanding critiques of the Burkinabè civil service: bureaucratic rigidity, procedural opacity, weak accountability, and limited responsiveness to citizen needs.

The legal foundation of the civil service was substantially reformed with the adoption of Law No. 081-2015/CNT of 24 November 2015, which established the General Statute of the State Civil Service. This law introduced a paradigm shift by organizing civil servants around "professions, employment, and workstations" rather than the traditional corps-based system that had characterized the Burkinabè civil service since independence. The reform aimed to create a more flexible, competency-based system capable of responding to evolving administrative needs.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite significant legal and institutional reforms, Burkina Faso's civil service continues to face persistent challenges of effectiveness. The National Strategy for the Modernization of Public Administration recorded a physical execution rate of only 31.86 percent in 2023 before improving to 74.89 percent in 2024. This improvement, while notable, masks underlying constraints that limit the translation of reform ambitions into administrative performance.

The fundamental problem addressed by this study is the gap between the legal and strategic ambitions of civil service modernization and the actual effectiveness of the administration in delivering services to citizens. This gap manifests in persistent delays in

document delivery, insufficient logistical means, weak coordination among services, and enduring issues of corruption and absenteeism.

1.3 Study Objectives

This study addresses the following objectives:

1. To analyze the legal and institutional framework for civil service modernization in Burkina Faso, including the 2015 Statute and subsequent reforms.
2. To assess the implementation of the National Strategy for the Modernization of Public Administration (SN-MAP) and identify factors explaining variations in execution rates.
3. To examine the digital transformation initiatives and their contribution to administrative effectiveness.
4. To identify the institutional, financial, and cultural constraints that limit the effectiveness of civil service modernization.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the literature on public administration reform in West Africa by examining the conditions under which legal modernization translates into administrative effectiveness. The findings have implications for policymakers, development partners, and civil society organizations engaged in governance reform in Burkina Faso and comparable contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Public Administration Reform in West Africa

Public administration reform has been a consistent theme in West African governance agendas since the wave of democratization in the 1990s. The literature identifies several common challenges: the legacy of colonial administrative structures that emphasize hierarchy and control over service delivery; the politicization of recruitment and promotion; inadequate compensation that breeds corruption and absenteeism; and insufficient investment in administrative infrastructure and technology.

Burkina Faso's reform trajectory reflects these broader patterns while exhibiting distinctive features. The country has pursued a comprehensive approach that combines legal reform (the 2015 Statute), strategic planning (the SN-MAP), institutional innovation (the CN-MABG), and digital transformation.

2.2 The 2015 Civil Service Statute: A Paradigm Shift

Law No. 081-2015/CNT introduced a fundamental restructuring of the civil service classification system. Under the previous system, civil servants were organized into corps (corps) based on their training and career paths. The new statute replaced this with a system organized around "professions" (métiers), "employment" (emplois), and "workstations" (postes de travail).

This reform aimed to achieve several objectives: greater flexibility in career management; improved alignment between training and job requirements; enhanced mobility across traditional corps boundaries; and better matching of human resources to administrative needs. The statute distinguishes three categories of employment: conception/direction (requiring at least a licence or baccalauréat plus three years of professional training), application (requiring at least a baccalauréat), and execution (requiring at least a primary school certificate).

2.3 The National Strategy for the Modernization of Public Administration

The SN-MAP provides the strategic framework for civil service modernization, organized around four axes: strengthening human capital, promoting electronic administration, strategic steering, and global governance. The strategy's implementation is overseen by the CN-MABG, chaired by the Prime Minister, which brings together national authorities, technical and financial partners, civil society, and the private sector.

The institutional framework was reinforced in 2025 with Decree No. 2025-0927/PF/PRIM/MEPTPS/MEF of 15 July 2025, which established a three-tiered governance structure: the CN-MABG at the strategic level, ministerial modernization committees at the sectoral level, and the Permanent Secretariat for technical coordination and monitoring.

2.4 Digital Transformation and Administrative Modernization

Digital transformation has become a central pillar of Burkina Faso's modernization agenda. The government has launched several initiatives: citizen participation platforms ("Pétitions Citoyennes au Burkina Faso") and an e-services portal; the overhaul of the SIGASPE personnel management system; biometric attendance control for civil servants; and the "Kasét Toumdé" attendance and citizen feedback system.

The digital transformation agenda is situated within the broader National Strategy for the Development of the Digital Economy (SN@DEN) and the "12 strategic projects for 2030" roadmap. However, assessments of digital maturity have identified persistent weaknesses: inadequate equipment, unstable network connectivity (particularly at decentralized levels), and insufficient attention to security and change management.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study is guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the principal legal and institutional innovations introduced by the 2015 Civil Service Statute and subsequent modernization reforms?

Research Question 2: To what extent has the National Strategy for the Modernization of Public Administration achieved its objectives, and what factors explain variations in implementation performance?

Research Question 3: How do digital transformation initiatives contribute to administrative effectiveness, and what constraints limit their impact?

Research Question 4: What institutional, financial, and cultural factors explain the gap between legal ambitions and administrative effectiveness?

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a documentary analysis approach, synthesizing data from legal texts, government reports, performance assessments, and academic literature. The analysis focuses on the period from 2015 to 2025, encompassing the adoption of the 2015 Statute, the implementation of the SN-MAP, and the acceleration of digital transformation initiatives.

4.2 Data Sources

The analysis draws on:

Primary sources:

- Law No. 081-2015/CNT of 24 November 2015 on the General Statute of the State Civil Service.
- The National Strategy for the Modernization of Public Administration (SN-MAP).
- Annual performance reports of the CN-MABG and the Permanent Secretariat.
- Decree No. 2025-0927 on the modernization governance framework.
- Government communications on digital transformation initiatives.

Supplementary sources:

- World Bank assessments of civil service reform and wage bill management.
- Reports from the National Assembly on civil service reform.
- Analyses of digital maturity of public administrations.
- Research on civil service recruitment systems.

4.3 Analytical Framework

The analysis is organized around three dimensions: legal-institutional (the reform framework), implementation-performance (the execution of reforms), and effectiveness-constraints (the factors limiting translation of reforms into outcomes). This framework permits assessment of the gap between ambitions and results.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Legal-Institutional Reform Achievements

The legal framework for the civil service has been substantially modernized. The 2015 Statute introduced a competency-based classification system organized around professions, employment, and workstations. This reform replaced the corps-based system that had been criticized for rigidity and limited mobility.

Key features of the new framework include:

Profession-based organization: Civil servants are grouped by "profession" (métier), defined as the set of employment in the same administration or service requiring qualifications of the same nature. A decree adopted in the Council of Ministers establishes the interministerial directory of state professions.

Employment and workstation: "Employment" (emploi) is the professional designation of a set of related attributions contributing to the execution of a determined mission. "Workstation" (poste de travail) is the set of tasks and responsibilities that can be assumed by a holder. The principles of workstation description are fixed by regulation.

Career mobility: The reform introduced "bridges" (passerelles) allowing agents to move from one employment to another through professional competitions or examinations, whereas previously such mobility was possible only within corporations.

Forward-looking management: The statute provides for a "forward-looking employment and staffing table" (tableau prévisionnel des effectifs) determining the number and nature of employment necessary for each administration, as well as medium-term staffing evolution.

5.2 Implementation Performance

The SN-MAP has shown significant improvement in execution rates. The physical execution rate reached 74.89 percent in 2024, compared with 31.86 percent in 2023. This improvement reflects better appropriation of reforms by central and decentralized administrations.

Specific achievements documented in performance reports include:

Human resources management: The proportion of agents whose career acts (integration, reclassification, and retirement) were signed within deadlines reached 80.92 percent at 31 December 2024, exceeding the annual target of 75 percent.

Digital transformation: Several initiatives have been launched or accelerated, including the overhaul of SIGASPE, the introduction of biometric attendance control from 1 March 2025, and the development of citizen participation platforms.

Institutional strengthening: The establishment of the CN-MABG and the adoption of Decree No. 2025-0927 provide a reinforced governance framework for modernization.

However, performance reports also document underachievement on certain indicators. The non-attainment of targets for two indicators was attributed to "inadaptation of examination rooms, instability and low internet connection speed, and insufficient equipment." A second indicator was not attained due to the suspension of career advancement acts for agents concerned by class advancement for 2022–2023.

5.3 Digital Transformation Initiatives

Digital transformation has emerged as a central pillar of modernization. Key initiatives include:

Citizen participation and e-services: In May 2026, the government launched "Pétitions Citoyennes au Burkina Faso" and the "Portail d'accès aux e-services de l'Administration publique." The Minister of Public Service emphasized that the petition platform constitutes "a veritable instrument of participatory governance, not a simple communication tool."

SIGASPE overhaul: The Integrated System for Administrative and Salary Management of State Personnel is being overhauled to become a true integrated platform. The reform aims to integrate other systems to improve service quality, with particular attention to the national database linked to the WURI project and biometric enrollment.

Biometric attendance control: From 1 March 2025, a biometric attendance control system was introduced for public administration agents, following a circular from the Prime Minister dated 10 February 2025. A platform capable of tracking each agent's daily position was developed and presented to the Minister of Public Service.

"Kasét Toumdé" system: A Burkinabè-developed solution named "Kasét Toumdé" ("Proof of Exemplarity" in Mooré) was presented to the Minister of Security in April 2025. The system uses facial recognition to control agent arrival and departure times, collect user feedback on service quality, and manage leave, permissions, and missions.

However, assessments of digital maturity have identified significant constraints. An official study on digital maturity of public administrations found weaknesses in six dimensions: competencies, equipment and technologies, services, organization/governance, security, and digital culture. Recommendations include deploying and standardizing local networks, establishing a Security Operations Center, developing information systems security policies, and taking change management into account in digital projects.

5.4 Persistent Constraints on Effectiveness

Despite reform progress, significant constraints on administrative effectiveness persist.

Equipment deficits: A 2019 statistic indicated 40,000 functional computers for nearly 200,000 public agents, equivalent to one computer for every five agents. The SN-MAP document noted that "the low level of equipment (offices, vehicles, and computer equipment) of the administration undermines the quality of public service delivery, manifested by non-respect of delivery deadlines, low agent motivation, corruption, and low administrative performance."

Budgetary constraints: The budget allocation for the "Administrative Reform" program averaged approximately CFAF 200 million annually between 2017 and 2020, a level described as "low relative to the objectives set in the sector."

Corruption and absenteeism: Stakeholders consulted in governance assessments stigmatized "the inefficiency of the Burkinabè administration due in part to laxity and low salary levels. Poorly motivated, agents are frequently absent from their posts and tend to succumb to the temptation of corruption." Impunity was consistently denounced, with magistrates deploring that corruption cases are never transmitted to justice.

Coordination weaknesses: The Minister of Public Service acknowledged that "slowness of procedures, insufficiencies in logistical means, and weak coordination between services remain major obstacles, sometimes causing delays in the delivery of administrative documents to users."

Wage bill pressures: World Bank analysis noted that personnel expenditure has risen to the detriment of spending on transfers and capital. In education, nearly 70 percent of resources spent by education ministries comprised salary payments and allowances, up from 50 percent in 2010.

6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 The Legal-Institutional Effectiveness Gap

The findings reveal a fundamental gap between legal-institutional ambitions and administrative effectiveness. The 2015 Statute introduced a sophisticated competency-based framework that aligns with international best practices in civil service management. The SN-MAP provides a coherent strategic framework, and the CN-MABG establishes high-level political oversight.

Yet the translation of these legal and strategic frameworks into administrative performance remains incomplete. The improvement in SN-MAP execution rates from 31.86 percent to 74.89 percent is encouraging, but it coexists with persistent service delivery failures: delays in document delivery, equipment shortages, and coordination weaknesses.

This pattern is consistent with the broader literature on administrative reform in developing countries, which has documented that legal modernization is a necessary but insufficient condition for administrative effectiveness. The binding constraints are typically institutional (capacity, coordination, and accountability), financial (resources for equipment, infrastructure, and compensation), and cultural (organizational norms, work ethic, and resistance to change).

6.2 Digital Transformation as a Double-Edged Sword

Digital transformation emerges as both a promising avenue for modernization and a source of new challenges. On the one hand, digital tools can enhance efficiency, transparency, and citizen engagement. The citizen petition platform, the e-services portal, and the biometric attendance system represent genuine innovations with potential for improving administrative performance.

On the other hand, digital transformation requires substantial investments in infrastructure (equipment and connectivity), human capital (digital skills), and governance (security, data protection, and change management) that may exceed current capacities. The digital maturity assessment identified weaknesses across all six dimensions evaluated, suggesting that the foundation for effective digital transformation remains fragile. The instability of RESINA (the national intranet) at decentralized levels, noted in the SN-MAP document, illustrates the infrastructure constraints that limit the reach of digital initiatives.

6.3 The Compensation-Motivation-Effectiveness Nexus

A recurrent theme in the findings is the relationship between compensation, motivation, and effectiveness. The governance assessment documented that "poorly motivated, agents are frequently absent from their posts and tend to succumb to the temptation of corruption." The World Bank analysis highlighted the need for compensation reform, recommending simplification of the compensation scheme to reduce disparities and increase the competitiveness of base salaries.

This finding points to a fundamental tension in civil service modernization: legal and procedural reforms cannot succeed if the material conditions of service provision remain inadequate. Agents who lack basic equipment, whose salaries are insufficient to meet their needs, and who observe impunity for misconduct have little incentive to embrace reform.

6.4 Institutional Coordination and Political Will

The establishment of the CN-MABG and the reinforced governance framework under Decree No. 2025-0927 represent an attempt to address coordination weaknesses by creating a hierarchical structure for reform steering. The Prime Minister's direct involvement signals high-level political commitment.

However, the persistence of coordination problems acknowledged by the Minister of Public Service suggests that institutional design alone cannot overcome the centrifugal tendencies of ministerial autonomy and corporatist interests. The "competition institutionnelle malsaine" (unhealthy institutional competition) denounced by the Prime Minister reflects these dynamics.

6.5 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to the literature on public administration reform by demonstrating the utility of an integrated framework that examines legal, institutional, financial, and cultural dimensions of modernization. The Burkina Faso case illustrates that the gap between legal ambitions and effectiveness is not a failure of legal design but rather a consequence of constraints operating in domains that legal reform cannot directly address: fiscal space, equipment and infrastructure, organizational culture, and the political economy of administrative change.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the modernization of Burkina Faso's state civil service, analyzing the gap between legal ambitions and the challenges of effectiveness. The analysis reveals that the legal framework has been substantially reformed, notably through the 2015 Statute that introduced a competency-based approach organized around professions, employment, and workstations. The SN-MAP has achieved improved execution rates, reaching 74.89 percent in 2024, and digital transformation has accelerated with the launch of citizen participation platforms and biometric attendance control.

However, significant constraints on effectiveness persist. Equipment deficits remain severe, with one computer for every five agents. Budget allocations for administrative reform are limited. Corruption, absenteeism, and low motivation linked to inadequate compensation continue to undermine administrative performance. Coordination weaknesses persist despite institutional reinforcement.

The policy implications are clear. First, legal and strategic reforms must be accompanied by sustained investment in administrative infrastructure and equipment. Second, compensation reform is essential to address the motivation deficit that underlies absenteeism and corruption. Third, digital transformation requires investment in connectivity, skills, and security to achieve its potential. Fourth, institutional coordination mechanisms must be strengthened and given real authority to overcome ministerial autonomy.

The findings suggest that civil service modernization in Burkina Faso is at a critical juncture. The legal and strategic foundations have been established. The challenge now is to create the material, institutional, and cultural conditions that will enable the administration to fulfill its mission of service to citizens.

8. LIMITS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

First, the analysis relies primarily on documentary sources and does not include primary data collection through interviews with civil servants, administrators, or citizens. Such data would provide richer understanding of the lived experience of administrative reform.

Second, the assessment of effectiveness is constrained by the availability of performance data. While the SN-MAP execution rate provides a useful indicator, it measures activity completion rather than service delivery outcomes.

Third, the study focuses on the state civil service and does not systematically examine territorial civil service or public establishment personnel, which are subject to different legal regimes.

Fourth, the analysis of digital transformation is preliminary, as many initiatives are recent or still under development. Their full effects remain to be observed.

Fifth, the study does not include a comparative dimension, which would help situate Burkina Faso's experience within broader regional patterns.

9. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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10. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms sole responsibility for the study conception, design, data analysis, interpretation, and manuscript preparation.

11. COMPETING INTEREST

The author declares no competing interests.

12. FUNDING INFORMATION

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13. DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting this study are derived from publicly available sources including legal texts, government reports, and performance assessments. Specific sources are identified in the Bibliography.

14. DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any institution. The analysis is based on publicly available information as of the date of writing.

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