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Economic consciousness under pathologies: Evidence from Kazakhstan

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ABSTRACT

This study explores Kazakhstan's growing economic consciousness during a pathological economic environment characterized by widespread mistrust of institutions, perceptions of corruption, and systematic injustice. Data for this study came from a convergent mixed-methods survey of 500 people (ranging in age from 14–26 for students, 20–55 for workers, and 25–59 for entrepreneurs), as well as 20 semi-structured interviews with individuals representing each age group. The 35-item survey questionnaire measured opinions on economic values, socioeconomic attitudes, and institutional trust. Quantitative research found a negative correlation between youth optimism and confidence in institutions, and a favorable attitude toward change among the optimistic. The four main themes of the qualitative research that support these changes are: systemic skepticism and discontent, economic adaptability in an informal setting, young disenchantment with reform rhetoric from the government, and moral outrage over the privileges of the elite. Economic awareness is shaped by a combination of logical economic reasoning and emotional, generational, and moral reactions to how well institutions are doing their jobs, according to a thematic analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. More transparency, involvement of young people, and reforms to corporate regulations are important policy suggestions. Policymakers interested in the economic transition after the Soviet Union should use the research to influence their work, and it also lends credence to the idea that models of economic action should incorporate subjective narratives. There is a need for a broader knowledge of how people in Kazakhstan perceive, react to, and overcome economic dysfunctions since the country is particularly unusual owing to its reliance on oil and the history of centralized control.

Contribution/Originality: This study is unique because it employs mixed-methods triangulation, combining statistical analysis with first-person accounts to understand economic consciousness on psychological and moral levels. The paper addresses a gap in comparative political economics and extends beyond conventional economic models by situating Kazakhstan within a rentier, post-Soviet, crisis-driven framework.

1. INTRODUCTION

The numerous aspects of economic consciousness reflect the various ways in which people and communities understand and engage with economic structures and processes. Involved are psychological and social aspects, as well

as emotional and behavioral reactions to economic actors, such as banks, markets, and governments, and economic stimuli, such as changes in policy, inflation, and job opportunities (Roos & Reccius, 2024). The social and historical consciousness is shaped by media, official education, personal experiences, and societal discourse (Soroko, 2023). Problems with the economy and its institutions that persist over time are known as economic pathology. Cronyism, inequality, ineffective institutions, dependence on natural resources, macroeconomic instability, and ongoing corruption are just a few of the many issues that need to be addressed (Lucarelli, Muço, & Valentini, 2024). Individual and societal economic dysfunction distorts reasoning (Celniker, Ringel, Nelson, & Ditto, 2022). The transition from a command economy to a market economy has been challenging for Kazakhstan since 1991. Although this strategy hastened the privatization of energy and resources, it has encouraged economic development at the expense of weak institutions and oligarchic wealth inequalities.

Despite efforts to diversify its economy and improve its infrastructure, Kazakhstan is nevertheless vulnerable to fluctuations in commodity prices due to its reliance on exports of oil and gas (Atakhanova, 2021; Kadyrov & Kuantkan, 2024). Protests around the country drew attention to societal unhappiness following an unexpected spike in fuel prices in January 2022 (Mukhamediyev, Bimendiyeva, Dauliyeva, & Temerbulatova, 2023). Protesters voiced their discontent with economic decision-making, inequality, and exclusion (Panzabekova, Fazylzhan, & Imangali, 2024). These events demonstrated how far off the hopes and dreams of Kazakhstan's working class, poor, and young people are from those of the country's privileged few. Company owners could feel the effects of reformers' optimism or pessimism over corruption and bureaucracy. The subject of changing economic awareness is investigated in this study by using convergent mixed approaches. The research provides both quantitative and qualitative data on how Kazakhs handle and absorb economic change, as well as on institutional trust and financial viewpoints.

Economic consciousness change in economic pathology is meaningful yet understudied, especially in fast-changing civilizations. Corruption, poor institutions, social inequity, and resource scarcity can influence economic norms. When people lose trust in government agencies, banks, and regulators, they may resist change, avoid official economic institutions, or even start their own informal or shadow economy (Shah & Asghar, 2024). Individual reactions to economic uncertainty must be understood to analyze economic structures and hierarchies. This research is rather unusual and presents a challenge due to the post-Soviet economy in Kazakhstan. Despite macroeconomic improvement and middle-income status, structural barriers hinder equitable development. The 2022 national upheavals' sociopolitical and economic volatility affected state-citizen relations. This gathering shows how economic uncertainties and perceived injustices may cause unrest. Policy should address the gaps in generational, occupational, and regional economic consciousness. Without knowing how individuals handle economic loss, initiatives may promote mistrust. The paper investigates how economic pathology has altered Kazakhstan's economic consciousness to fill that gap.

Despite the availability of literature on economic psychology and post-Soviet economic upheavals, few studies have examined how economic illness affects economic consciousness in Kazakhstan. Most macroeconomic literature focuses on GDP growth, inflation, and fiscal reforms rather than on how people adapt to structural shifts (Naz, Tanveer, Karim, & Dowling, 2024). Public perceptions are sometimes handled superficially using poll data or anecdotes without exploring people's knowledge, emotional reactions, and actions in response to institutionally dysfunctional economic realities. Unconnected quantitative and qualitative methods limited previous research. Few studies have used trust in institutions or corruption perceptions to explain how economic circumstances affect behavior and identity (Kaasa & Andriani, 2022; Shah, 2024a). This obscures the cultural and psychological effects of continuous economic disintegration. This study's rigorous mixed-methods design, which combines quantitative survey data and qualitative interviews, addresses these issues. It places institutional trust, optimism, and fairness in personal and societal narratives. This study examines economic consciousness to provide a more accurate and

practical understanding of the effects of systemic economic failure on public attitudes and actions in Kazakhstan. Economic sociology at the national and comparative levels benefits from this study's fresh and empirically grounded take on economic identity, inequality, and corruption.

The research aims to explore the transformation of economic consciousness in Kazakhstani society under conditions of economic pathology, using a mixed-methods approach to understand both quantitative trends and qualitative perceptions.

i. How has economic consciousness in Kazakhstan changed in response to economic pathology (e.g., corruption, inequality, crises) over the past decade?

ii. What are the key factors (economic, social, political) influencing the transformation of economic consciousness in Kazakhstan?

iii. How do different social groups (e.g., youth, entrepreneurs, workers) perceive economic pathology and its impact on their economic behavior?

Economic consciousness in conditions of pathology reflects the interplay of institutions, generational values, and social group positions. Drawing on institutional economics, the study expects that persistent corruption and elite capture erode legitimacy and diminish citizens' trust in government, courts, and banks. Thus:

H_1: *Consistent with institutional economics, economic pathology (e.g., corruption, economic crises) is negatively correlated with public trust in financial institutions in Kazakhstan.*

From the perspective of modernization theory and youth globalization scholarship, younger cohorts socialized in an era of digitalization and transnational exposure are likely to adopt more market-oriented and reformist economic attitudes than older generations who experienced the uncertainties of transition directly.

H_2: *Younger generations in Kazakhstan exhibit a more market-oriented economic consciousness compared to older generations due to exposure to globalized economic systems.*

Finally, entrepreneurship and corruption sensitivity research suggests that business actors, because of their frequent interaction with regulatory agencies and dependence on transparent property rights, are disproportionately affected by corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency.

H_3: *Perceptions of economic pathology vary across social groups, with entrepreneurs being more sensitive to corruption than other groups.*

This article examines the impact of economic pathology on economic consciousness in Kazakhstan. The theory, techniques, and results are laid forth in a systematic framework. In Section 2, we explore studies on economic consciousness and pathology, focusing on resource-based systems that emerged after the Soviet Union. The convergent mixed-methods design, which comprised both quantitative and qualitative interviews, is detailed in Section 3. The methods of analysis are also described in Section 3. Following a thematic analysis of the interview data, Section 4 provides a quantitative summary of the results on institutional trust and corruption. Section 6 concludes with critical points and suggestions to improve trust in institutions and to direct future studies, while Section 5 addresses the theoretical and policy implications of these results.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical insights from behavioral economics, social psychology, and institutional economics shed light on how individuals comprehend and react to economic processes in dysfunctional and unpredictable settings (Umapathy, 2024; Valentinov, 2024). These viewpoints shed light on the societal and institutional influences on people's economic ideas as well as their reasons for holding them. The field of behavioral economics provides a helpful framework for understanding economic awareness as an emotionally charged, heuristically driven, and limitedly logical activity

(Thacker & Reddy, 2025). Contrary to classical economic assumptions of rational utility-maximizing agents, behavioral economics highlights that individuals often make decisions based on mental shortcuts (heuristics), emotional reactions, and framing effects (Chong & Levy, 2025; Shah, 2024b).

Trust matters in behavioral economics. Objective performance, perceived integrity, competence, and fairness determine trust in banks, governments, and markets (Gokmenoglu & Amir, 2021). This evidence supports the "system justification" theory, which claims that people criticize and justify systems out of a psychological need for order (Dohmen, 2024). Economic consciousness is socially imprinted, says social psychology. Groups shape students', workers', and entrepreneurs' views on justice, opportunity, and inequality. Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory posits that group affiliations shape identities (Hsieh, 2023). Young people who cannot get favorable jobs may feel that the economy is biased against them. Entrepreneurs facing regulatory impediments and informal levies may feel like economic victims, fueling antagonism towards the government.

Institutional systems with low credibility, such as those involving repeated corruption scandals or the extreme wealth of the elite, can lead to the development of public cynicism and alienation, as discussed in social psychology (Kim, Xiong, Lee, & Han, 2021). A culture of skepticism about economic policy and change can be cemented if offspring of parents who reject economic institutions as a result of their experiences during the post-Soviet transition also adopt such views (Libman & Popova, 2023; Siegel, 2021). Social activity and progress are impeded by the feedback loop that connects economic pathology with disillusionment. The field of institutional economics offers a theoretical framework for analyzing the pervasive effects of economic dysfunction on human cognition.

Perpetuating economic dysfunction, elite capture institutionalizes privilege while limiting social mobility. Government institutions are used by rentier elites to limit competition, oppose redistribution, and maintain control over resources (Yamada, 2020). In Ross's rentier state theory, the availability of resources restricts the growth of institutions and the exercise of democratic responsibility (Yan, 2024). By reducing taxes on natural resources, rentier countries like Kazakhstan undermine the fiscal social compact. According to institutional economics, issues such as distrust, inequality, and corruption have their roots in established systems. From many angles, these tactics shed light on the expansion of economic consciousness. Applying preexisting theory to the post-Soviet, resource-dependent, globally significant socioeconomic environment of Kazakhstan, this all-encompassing paradigm is developed.

2.2. Global Context

Studying how economic conditions impact economic consciousness requires comparative research on a worldwide scale. Strong institutions, structural distortions, and cross-national economic changes substantially impact economic fairness, trust in institutions, and participation in economic systems (Dykha, 2016; Liu & Liu, 2025; Upham, Sovacool, & Ghosh, 2022). These tendencies are especially evident in resource-dependent and post-Soviet economies, where systemic failure filters economic information. In post-Soviet countries, "path dependency" (Kirtchik, 2024) explains the persistence of socialist ideas following market liberalization. Skepticism, caution, and conservatism are necessary for the new economic awareness. The emergence of path-dependent awareness has been prompted by the rampant corruption and oligarchic capitalism in Russia. Political mobilization and anger were fueled by economic disparity following Euromaidan and the Orange Revolution (Nikolayenko, 2024). According to Garrido (2022) elite impunity and corruption have generated "reform fatigue." Some think improvements are shallow or self-serving. Mistrust affects tax compliance, public involvement, and long-term economic planning (Kumagai & Iorio, 2020). Extending outside the post-Soviet zone, Venezuela, Angola, and Nigeria impart their knowledge. The "resource curse," which hampers institutional progress and economic responsibility, is a problem that Kazakhstan and other nations face. Government openness and social contracts are eroded when oil money isolates state finances from citizen taxes

Harris, Sigman, Meyer-Sahling, Mikkelsen, and Schuster (2020). Renters prefer a more decentralized system of economic allocation. Oil theft and corruption in Nigeria have eroded faith in the government and stoked ethnic tensions (Alaye & Ogunbanwo, 2024).

Economic awareness was affected by Venezuela's hyperinflation and economic collapse. The faith that people had in the economy, banks, and job markets has diminished. The conventional economic system has given way to informal markets, remittances, and bartering. Economic alienation and a survival mindset can be fostered in Venezuela by extreme pathology (Van Beek, 2022). Growth in gross domestic product and profits from natural resources do not constitute economic prosperity, as all these examples show. There are symbolic and psychological ramifications to income imbalance as well (Du, Götz, King, & Rentfrow, 2024; Wienk, Buttrick, & Oishi, 2022). Media and digital networks shape economic consciousness. State-controlled media often portray positive economic narratives that contradict reality, especially in authoritarian or transitional regimes (Hinck & Cooley, 2023; Zaid, 2020). Cognitive bifurcation, characterized by covert mistrust and outward optimism acceptable to the government, might result from this contradiction. By highlighting wrongdoing and disseminating false information, social media exacerbates economic divisions in societies.

2.3. Kazakhstan-Specific Literature

The vast natural riches of Kazakhstan have made it the focus of several economic development studies since the country gained independence in 1991. Pomfret (2021) outlines the shift in Kazakhstan's economic model from one based on command to one based on market forces driven by hydrocarbons. Foreign economic shocks, such as the global financial crisis of 2008 or the oil price drop of 2014, can still hit the country hard, even if its GDP has been growing steadily. Whalin (2020) demonstrates how, in addition to official governmental institutions, informal systems of administration based on familial ties, regionalism, and personal loyalty impact economic and political conduct. Radchenko, Saienko, Aleinikova, Yakubiv, and Bashlai (2024) conclude that Eastern European regions show gradual socio-economic recovery with shifts toward modernization, structural reforms, and improved governance practices. It highlights management trends that can inform the design of effective regional development programs. Kryvovyazyuk et al. (2023) analyzes economic mechanisms, including regulatory measures, market instruments, and methods for governmental intervention, that are essential for controlling socioeconomic processes. The report concludes that these methods can direct improvements to policies and reforms, but they require more robust empirical evidence to be effectively implemented in the real world.

There is extensive favoritism, bribery, and a lack of accountability in Kazakhstan's public service, as shown by the country's consistently poor rankings on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. Corruption and ineffectiveness in public procurement and the judicial system plague rural areas, Khamitov, Knox, and Junusbekova (2023). Rural Kazakhstanis, especially in western and southern Kazakhstan, feel economically and politically helpless (Stevens, 2020). Peripheral areas are more cynical and suspicious of the economy than Almaty and Astana due to these contrasts. The young unemployment and underemployment rates in Kazakhstan are still rather high, despite the country's investments in education and digital transformation (Rezer, Turgel, & Panzabekova, 2022). Highlighting developments in infrastructure, e-commerce, and the acceptance of fintech, the systematic study charts Panama's digital economy progress. Furthermore, it brings attention to ongoing issues, including digital inequalities across regions, inadequate training, and a lack of regulation, and it demands inclusive public policies to propel long-term digital change (Sucre, Consuegra, & Mitre, 2025).

Young Kazakhs see native institutions as opaque or unfair and seek education or careers overseas (Hwami, 2025). This migrant consciousness demonstrates economic separation from the homeland. Wage inequalities, occupational segregation, and gaps in corporate leadership affect Kazakhstani women, despite constitutional equality

(Kuttygalieva, Khamzina, Zhaxymbetov, Tileubergenov, & Buribayev, 2024; Zharlygassinov, Panzabekova, & Dosmanbetova, 2023).

The demonstrations in January 2022 shifted the focus to the economy nationwide demonstrations triggered by unexpected spikes in LPG prices (Cline-Cole, 2022). Zapata (2025) finds that AI research centered on rural areas is experiencing a spike in funding from the US, China, and India. Key concerns include smart agriculture, the digital divide, and rural employment. The study's authors argue that, rather than dismissing AI's potential for rural development, authorities should work to eliminate inequality and promote inclusiveness. I find it difficult to understand the cultural and emotional economic conduct of Kazakhstanis. Economic awareness has been under-researched. Surveys of public opinion often exclude questions on "trust in government" and "attitude toward privatization" because they fail to account for respondents' identities, memories, and ideas of justice. To comprehend how individuals understand economic occurrences and structures, comprehensive methods are required. Triangulation is less prevalent in research compared to other designs, such as expert interviews or cross-sectional studies. Trust and the flow of information are examples of long-term economic changes that are hard to track. Because of the many shifts in leadership, geopolitical allegiances, and economic fortunes that have befallen Kazakhstan during the last two decades, this chasm is of paramount importance.

2.4. Research Gap

Economic pathology impacts psychological, perceptual, and behavioral economic life; yet there is a lack of knowledge on this topic despite the increasing number of studies on public administration, institutional development, and economic reform in Kazakhstan. The existing research is deficient in mixed-methods strategies that integrate quantitative measures of economic trust, institutional perception, and behavioral proclivities with qualitative accounts that elucidate emotional reactions, cognitive dissonance, and economic processes as perceived through one's identity (Bujisic, Li, & Bilgihan, 2025). Existing studies fail to comprehensively understand the micro-macro divide in Kazakhstan's economic development because they disregard many viewpoints. Urban teenagers, rural workers, entrepreneurs, government employees, and those in the informal economy are underrepresented in research. Distinct groups deal with economic pathology in different ways. Entrepreneurs may be more exposed to bureaucratic inefficiencies and minor corruption, leading to institutional distrust, while youth may use informal digital economies and protest or post about economic dissatisfaction (Lecuna, Cohen, & Mandakovic, 2020).

Most empirical studies ignore Kazakhstan's history and politics. Modernization is unequal due to post-Soviet history, the rentier economy, and frequent political transitions. Reforms are often announced but rarely implemented, generating "reform fatigue." January 2022 protests demonstrate economic frustration and solidarity. Little academic research addresses how such settings affect economic consciousness. Kazakh post-socialist affect, rentier-state behavioral economics, and institutional trust are poorly investigated. Digital Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy: Kazakhstan seeks modernization and inclusion, but little research compares them to bottom-up economics. This study freely integrates social and psychological factors influencing economic behavior. This research is vital owing to gaps. Convergent mixed-methods analysis of large-N survey data and semi-structured interview interpretation are used. The study examines the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive consequences of economic pathology on economic consciousness according to age, occupation, and gender. This nuanced and humanized vision of Kazakhstan's growth aids theory and strategy.

Taken together, the global, regional, and Kazakhstan-specific literatures reveal important but fragmented insights into how economic conditions shape public consciousness. Inequality and institutional legitimacy are the focal points of global studies; corruption, path dependency, and the mobilization of protests are the focal points of regional post-Soviet analysis; and rentier dependence, governance inadequacies, and intergenerational

disillusionment are the focal points of research focusing on Kazakhstan. However, these works in no way consistently incorporate quantitative and qualitative data, and they rarely integrate the behavioral, institutional, and psychological aspects in a unified framework. This research bridges various levels of analysis to give a more complete picture of economic pathology in Kazakhstan and its interpretation, with comparisons to other transitional economies that rely on natural resources.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

A methodological investigation is suitable for transitional cultures with complex economic consciousness, such as Kazakhstan. To evaluate the outcomes, researchers need to gather both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously, analyze them separately, and then integrate them. You may compare trends in data and individual experiences using this parallel technique. Perceptions of corruption, reform attitudes, and institutional faith are best measured by quantitative research and organized questionnaires. Only qualitative narratives can provide insight into economic consciousness, as it is culturally rooted, emotionally motivated, and subjective. To understand how individuals engage with economic institutions amid systemic disarray, it is essential to document all viewpoints. Where formal institutional changes coexist with established informal networks and economic crises have altered memory and behavior, researchers in Kazakhstan may examine and create quantitative findings with qualitative depth using this dual-method paradigm.

3.2. Quantitative Component: Data Collection and Variable Structure

The development of economic awareness was investigated in a comprehensive poll of 500 Kazakhs. Given the active shaping of values, trust, and civic-economic attitudes, particularly in response to reforms and socio-economic concerns, this age group was selected. We utilized stratified random samples to ensure a representative cross-section of people from all walks of life, including students, entrepreneurs, public and private sector employees, and unemployed young people. Additionally, a balanced representation of male and female participants was maintained. To provide equal opportunity for participation among Kazakhs and Russians, the poll was conducted both online and offline. The survey included 35 items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), labeled V1 to V35. These questions examined four aspects of economic awareness: faith in institutions, involvement in the economy, perceptions of inequality, and financial dysfunction. Institutional views (V3: government, V6: banks, V10: courts) and economic participation behaviors (such as saving consistently and entrepreneurial ambitions) served as dependent variables. Crisis exposure (V16, V30), which may involve inflation, job loss, or income shocks, inequality (V8, V14), and corruption (V5, V12) were considered independent variables. As control variables, the survey collected data on respondents' ages, genders, levels of education, and socioeconomic status (Table 1).

3.3. Data Analysis

This research examined the economic awareness of young Kazakhs using descriptive statistics that outlined the distribution of gender, age, and occupational groups. Statistical methods utilized in this study included IBM SPSS Version 27. Our first hypothesis was that there is a correlation between people's views of corruption and their trust in institutions; we used Pearson correlation analysis to test this claim. H2, H3: The researchers examined the potential impacts of age and group participation on economic optimism and involvement using linear regression models. The 35-item economic attitudes test was subjected to principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation to reveal latent patterns. We verified the consistency of the measurements by checking the internal reliability of the scale and its sub-dimensions using Cronbach's alpha. Cluster analysis classified respondents into typologies based on

comparable economic opinion patterns, and Mann–Whitney U tests assessed significant subgroup differences, particularly by gender and age cohorts, improving interpretability (Table 2).

Table 1. Key variables, descriptions, and codes.

Code	Variable name	Type	Description
Age	Respondent's Age	Continuous	Age of respondent (14–26 years)
Gender	Gender	Categorical	Male/Female
Group	Socioeconomic group	Categorical	Student, Entrepreneur, Private Worker, Public Worker, Unemployed
V3	Trust in government	Ordinal (1–5)	Confidence in national government institutions
V6	Trust in banks	Ordinal (1–5)	Perceived reliability and fairness of banks
V10	Trust in courts	Ordinal (1–5)	Belief in judicial independence and fairness
V20	Willingness to save money	Ordinal (1–5)	Frequency of saving behavior (economic participation)
V21	Investment intentions	Ordinal (1–5)	Willingness to invest in private enterprise or business
V5	Perception of corruption (Govt)	Ordinal (1–5)	The belief that government officials engage in corruption.
V12	Perception of Bribery	Ordinal (1–5)	Views on the necessity of informal payments in daily life
V27	Systemic corruption belief	Ordinal (1–5)	Belief that corruption is structurally embedded in institutions.
V8	Perception of economic inequality	Ordinal (1–5)	Belief that income or opportunity gaps are too wide.
V14	Views on fair distribution	Ordinal (1–5)	Perception of whether the economic system ensures fairness
V22	Perception of opportunity access	Ordinal (1–5)	Belief that socioeconomic mobility is accessible
V16	Experience with inflation	Ordinal (1–5)	Impact of price instability on household wellbeing
V30	Personal economic crisis	Ordinal (1–5)	Self-reported experience of income loss, job instability.

Note: All survey items (V1–V35) were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), unless otherwise stated.

Table 2. Summary of statistical analyses conducted.

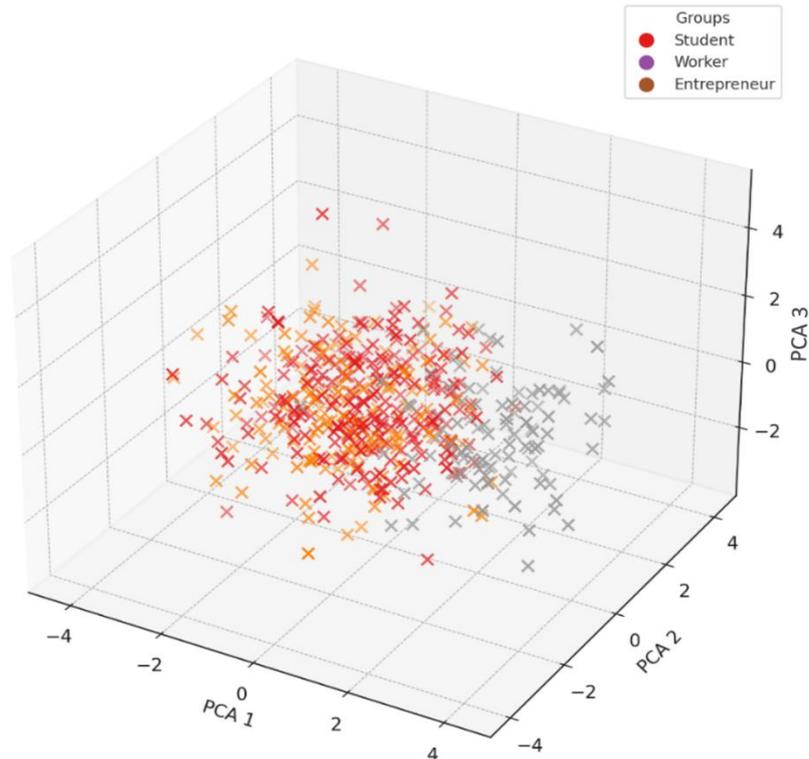| Analysis type	Purpose	Method	Application in Study
Descriptive statistics	To summarize demographic and response patterns	Frequencies, means, standard deviations	Profiled respondents by age, gender, occupation, and central tendencies of V1–V35.
Pearson correlation	To examine relationships between variables	Pearson's r	Tested H1: Corruption Perception vs. Institutional Trust
Linear regression	To assess the influence of predictors on dependent outcomes.	OLS regression	Tested H2 and H3: Age and occupation group effects on economic optimism and engagement
Factor analysis (PCA)	To reduce items and extract underlying dimensions	PCA with varimax rotation	Identified latent constructs such as Trust, Engagement, and Pathology Awareness.
Reliability testing	To measure the internal consistency of attitude scales	Cronbach's alpha	Validated reliability of the overall and subscales in the 35-item instrument.
Cluster analysis	To segment respondents into homogeneous attitude-based groups	K-means clustering	Revealed typologies: e.g., Cynical Observers, Optimistic Reformists, Passive Realists.
Mann–Whitney U Test	To compare differences between independent groups (Non-parametric)	U-Test	Assessed gender and age group differences in key attitude variables.

Figure 1. 3D PCA plot of economic consciousness by group.

The 3D PCA plot in Figure 1 demonstrates the distribution of participants by economic consciousness, color-coded by group (e.g., student, worker, entrepreneur). Each axis represents a principal component that captures variance across the 30 variables. The clustering patterns reveal how different participant groups perceive and relate to economic factors.

3.4. Qualitative Component

Twenty semi-structured interviews were performed with 5 entrepreneurs, 5 youth (18–24), 5 industrial/service workers, and 5 economists and researchers selected by purposive sampling to span sectors and demographics. In Almaty, Nur-Sultan (Astana), Shymkent, and Karaganda, 45–60-minute interviews were held in person or over secure video connections. Audio recordings were anonymized, transcribed, and stored securely. Table 3a (appendix) presents the semi-structured interview guide used in the qualitative strand, organizing open-ended prompts into six sections: rapport, perceptions of institutions, economic experiences, corruption and inequality, reform and participation, and outlook, each aligned to a specific analytic purpose. The guide elicits baseline context (background, livelihood), probes trust and perceived legitimacy across courts, banks, and government, surfaces coping strategies under shocks (inflation, job loss), and participation in informal work, explores moral evaluations of corruption and nepotism, assesses engagement with reform narratives and perceived voice in decision-making, and captures forward-looking expectations and conditions for economic security. This structure ensures comparability across interviews while allowing flexibility to follow emergent themes central to economic consciousness under pathology. Using NVivo 12, theme coding was applied to 12 editorial columns, 45 social media responses, and January 2022 demonstration coverage. Systemic skepticism and frustration, economic resilience and adaptive behaviors, youth disillusionment with reform rhetoric, and moral fury over corruption and injustice were major themes. Triangulation with survey trends determined convergence or divergence.

Following separate quantitative and qualitative analyses, integration was achieved at the interpretation stage: Convergent insights (e.g., both methods showed trust deficits among entrepreneurs), Divergent insights (e.g., youth

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expressing both cynicism and reform optimism). This triangulation approach strengthened the internal validity and depth of interpretation, allowing each method to compensate for the other's limitations. Sampling strategy is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Sampling strategy overview.

Component	Sampling method	Description	Purpose
Quantitative	Stratified random sampling	Kazakhstani national statistics stratify by age (14–26), gender, geography (urban/rural), and employment (student, worker, entrepreneur).	To ensure demographic representativeness and the generalizability of results.
Qualitative	Purposive sampling	Selected participants based on their relevance to research questions, ensuring coverage of youth, entrepreneurs, professionals, and economists.	To capture the diversity of perspectives and allow for depth in contextual and emotional insight.
Regions covered	Almaty, Nur-Sultan, Shymkent, Karaganda	Respondents were drawn from major urban centers and surrounding rural areas.	To ensure geographical diversity and reflect regional disparities in economic consciousness.
Sample size	763 (quantitative), 20 (qualitative)	Large-scale survey for statistical analysis and targeted interviews for qualitative depth.	To enable convergent mixed-methods integration.
Data collection language	Kazakh and Russian	All tools (Survey and interview guides) were administered bilingually.	To ensure inclusiveness and accurate response capture across linguistic demographics.

Merging qualitative and quantitative threads was made possible by utilizing combined display analysis and meta-inference. We found areas of agreement (such as corruption-trust links) and disagreement (such as young optimism despite skepticism) by comparing statistical correlations and regression findings immediately inside the theme categories. The approach improved validity and offered more thorough explanations by consulting individuals with real experience to interpret numerical patterns.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical concerns and compliance with Kazakhstan's Data Protection Law led to this work's approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the primary research institution. To guarantee the integrity and safety of the research, we adhered to several ethical protocols. The informed consent paper outlining the study's aims, methods, and participants' rights was distributed to all individuals in both Kazakh and Russian languages. To protect individuals' anonymity, we pseudonymized all survey and interview replies. Only authorized researchers were able to access the encrypted audio and transcripts stored on drives. After undergoing cultural sensitivity training, field interviewers were better equipped to respectfully and intelligently address contentious subjects like corruption and the January 2022 protests. Respondents were under no obligation to remain, and they could simply delete their responses at any time. Since there was a significant possibility of bringing up sensitive political and economic issues, there was a greater emphasis on safeguarding the mental health of government workers and youth. By adhering to these protocols without sacrificing the study's ethical requirements, we were able to collect thorough, truthful data from a large sample.

4. RESULTS

The economic consciousness of Kazakhs has evolved, according to quantitative research. We might begin by testing the premise that people's trust in government agencies decreases as they become more convinced of corruption. Second, the fact that students and responders under the age of 25 were more likely to be optimistic, future-

oriented, and believe in transformative stories provides support for H2. To conclude, H3 showed that company owners are more likely than the general population to experience institutional dysfunction, which manifests itself in distrust and anti-corruption sentiments. Factor and cluster analysis further partitioned the sample into groups such as "Economically Disillusioned," "Optimistic Reformists," and "Cynical Observers," shedding light on unique patterns of economic trust and perspective across various socioeconomic subgroups. These findings can serve as a foundation for future empirical research on how structural economic challenges affect civic conduct and agency. Five hundred individuals filled out the "Economic Consciousness" study. The mean age was 30.3 years (SD = 12.2), ranging from 14 to 59. Most mean values for 35 items (V1–V35) clustered between 3.1 and 3.3, showing neutrality or minor agreement on Likert-scale assertions. Table 1a (presented in the Appendix) presents the bivariate Pearson correlations among institutional trust, perceived pathology (corruption, bribery, systemic corruption), fairness and mobility (inequality, fair distribution, opportunity), economic shocks (inflation, personal crisis), and engagement (saving, investment). Trust in government, banks, and courts co-moves positively (e.g., V3–V6 = 0.70; V6–V10 = 0.48; V3–V10 = 0.32), indicating a shared "trust backbone" across institutions. Perceived pathology relates negatively to trust strongest for courts (V10–V5 = −0.71; V10–V12 = −0.45; V10–V27 = −0.53), and clearly for banks (V6–V5 = −0.65; V6–V12 = −0.51; V6–V27 = −0.50) and government (V3–V5 = −0.56; V3–V12 = −0.39; V3–V27 = −0.46). Pathology indicators cluster together (V5–V12 = 0.51; V5–V27 = 0.56; V12–V27 = 0.48), while fairness/mobility dimensions are mutually reinforcing (V8–V14 = 0.67; V14–V22 = 0.49; V8–V22 = 0.45). Opportunity aligns with engagement, especially saving (V22–V20 = 0.73) and investment (V22–V21 = 0.53). Shocks co-vary (V16–V30 = 0.70) and are positively associated with inequality (V8–V16 = 0.60; V8–V30 = 0.67), consistent with heightened perceived strain. Collectively, Table 1a indicates that higher perceived corruption erodes confidence in core institutions, whereas perceived fairness and opportunity move in tandem with constructive economic engagement; all starred coefficients are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

Table 4. OLS regression results: determinants of trust in government.

Variables	Coefficient	p-value	Std. Error	t-statistic	95% confidence interval
Constant	0.231	0.459	0.312	0.74	[-0.382, 0.844]
Trust in Banks (V6)	0.251***	<0.001	0.032	7.84	[0.188, 0.314]
Trust in Courts (V10)	0.173***	<0.001	0.037	4.68	[0.101, 0.246]
Perceived Corruption (V5)	-0.211***	0.002	0.035	-6.03	[-0.280, -0.142]
Perceived Bribery (V12)	-0.198***	0.003	0.041	-4.83	[-0.279, -0.117]
Systemic corruption belief (V27)	-0.287***	0.001	0.034	-8.44	[-0.353, -0.220]
Economic inequality perception (V8)	0.155**	0.014	0.052	2.96	[0.032, 0.278]
Fair distribution view (V14)	0.162***	0.009	0.045	3.60	[0.050, 0.273]
Opportunity access (V22)	0.197***	0.004	0.043	4.58	[0.112, 0.282]
Inflation experience (V16)	-0.176***	0.006	0.038	-4.63	[-0.250, -0.102]
Personal economic crisis (V30)	-0.189***	0.001	0.036	-5.25	[-0.260, -0.117]
Willingness to save (V20)	0.132**	0.018	0.039	3.38	[0.023, 0.241]
Investment intentions (V21)	0.175***	0.007	0.036	4.86	[0.104, 0.246]

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05. Results with p < 0.001 are also indicated by (***), p < 0.05 indicated by (**), and are explicitly reported in the p-value column (Column 2). All coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses.

Model Summary: Number of Observations: 500, R-squared: 0.508, Adjusted R-squared: 0.493, F-statistic: 34.82, Prob (F-statistic): < 0.0001. The regression results in Table 4 reveal that higher trust in banks and courts, perceived fairness, and willingness to invest are strongly associated with increased trust in government. In contrast, higher perceptions of corruption, bribery, and systemic dysfunction significantly reduce trust, confirming the central role of institutional integrity in shaping public confidence.

Table 5. OLS regression results—dependent variable: V21 (investment intentions).

Variable	Coefficient	p-value	Std. Error	t-statistic	95% confidence interval
Constant	1.982***	<0.001	0.178	11.133	[1.632, 2.333]
Perceived corruption (V5)	0.072**	0.010	0.028	2.584	[0.018, 0.127]
Perceived bribery (V12)	0.090***	0.003	0.030	2.982	[0.030, 0.149]
Systemic corruption belief (V27)	0.058**	0.033	0.027	2.141	[0.004, 0.111]
Economic inequality perception (V8)	0.111***	<0.001	0.030	3.707	[0.052, 0.170]
Fair distribution view (V14)	0.063**	0.021	0.027	2.316	[0.010, 0.115]
Opportunity access (V22)	0.072**	0.016	0.030	2.415	[0.014, 0.130]
Inflation experience (V16)	0.068**	0.017	0.028	2.403	[0.012, 0.123]
Personal economic crisis (V30)	0.054**	0.038	0.026	2.085	[0.003, 0.106]

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05. Results with p < 0.001 are also indicated by (***), p < 0.05 indicated by (**), and are explicitly reported in the p-value column (Column 2). All coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses.

This regression in Table 5 indicates that perceptions of corruption (V5, V12, V27) and economic hardship (V8, V16, V30) are positively associated with the outcome variable likely reflecting heightened economic consciousness or political interest in response to systemic issues. Notably, even negative experiences such as economic crises and inflation appear to stimulate engagement, possibly due to a reactive consciousness formed through adversity.
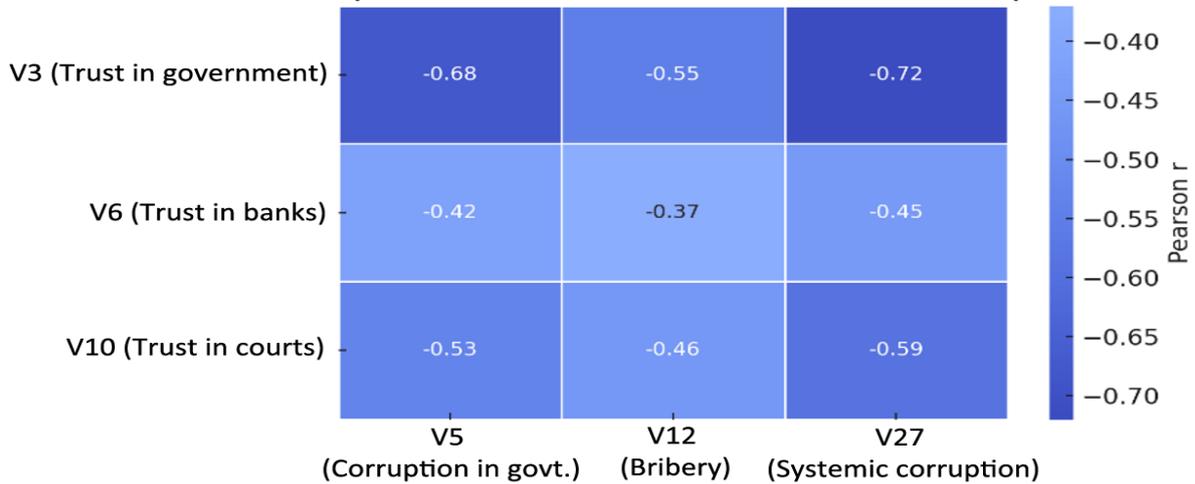
Figure 2. Institutional trust vs. perceived corruption.

In Figure 2, V3 has the most significant negative connection with all three corruption indicators, indicating that pervasive and systemic corruption deeply reduces trust in government. V6 and V10 also have substantial negative relationships, albeit to a lesser extent, showing modest trust erosion in corrupt financial and legal institutions.

Table 6. OLS regression results—Determinants of willingness to save (V20).

Variable	Coefficient	p-value	Std. error	t-statistic	95% confidence interval
Constant	1.945***	<0.001	0.301	6.462	[1.353, 2.537]
Corruption perception (V5)	-0.112***	0.001	0.035	-3.200	[-0.180, -0.045]
Bribery perception (V12)	-0.088***	0.005	0.031	-2.839	[-0.149, -0.027]
Systemic corruption (V27)	-0.095***	0.009	0.036	-2.639	[-0.166, -0.024]
Inequality perception (V8)	-0.071**	0.015	0.029	-2.448	[-0.129, -0.014]
Fair distribution (V14)	0.134***	<0.001	0.034	3.941	[0.067, 0.201]
Opportunity access (V22)	0.112***	0.001	0.032	3.500	[0.049, 0.175]
Inflation impact (V16)	-0.078***	0.010	0.030	-2.600	[-0.137, -0.019]
Economic crisis (V30)	-0.084***	0.007	0.031	-2.710	[-0.145, -0.023]

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05. Results with p < 0.001 are also indicated by (***), p < 0.05 indicated by (**), and are explicitly reported in the p-value column (Column 2). All coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses.

Model Summary: Dependent Variable: Willingness to Save (V20); R-squared: 0.172; Adjusted R-squared: 0.159; F-statistic: 13.192; Prob (F-statistic): 0.000; Observations: 500.

Table 6's corruption, bribery, and structural inequality significantly reduce savings, according to the regression results, but equitable distribution and opportunity access increase them. Here, we see the impact of institutional trust and economic justice on the financial behavior of Kazakhstanis. The Cronbach's alpha for the 35-item scale was 0.61, which suggests that there is room for item growth and reasonable internal consistency, suitable for exploratory research. Corruption weakens public institutions, as evidenced by the negative correlation between perceived corruption (V5) and institutional trust factors such as faith in courts ($r = -0.71$) and trust in government ($r = -0.56$). The positive correlation between opportunity access (V22) and investment intentions (V21; $r = 0.53$) indicates that individuals who perceive economic mobility are more likely to take initiative in their financial lives. Confirming that beliefs of justice influence economic consciousness, there is a strong correlation between economic inequality (V8) and perceptions of institutional trust and corruption (Table 6a in the Appendix).

Table 7. Institutional trust vs. perceived corruption.

Variable	V3 (Trust in Gov)	V6 (Trust in Banks)	V10 (Trust in Courts)	V5 (Corruption)	V12 (Bribery)	V27 (Systemic corruption)
V3 (Trust in Gov)	1.00	0.70*	0.32*	−0.56*	−0.39*	−0.46*
V6 (Trust in Banks)	0.70*	1.00	0.48*	−0.65*	−0.51*	−0.50*
V10 (Trust in Courts)	0.32*	0.48*	1.00	−0.71*	−0.45*	−0.53*
V5 (Corruption)	−0.56*	−0.65*	−0.71*	1.00	0.51*	0.56*
V12 (Bribery)	−0.39*	−0.51*	−0.45*	0.51*	1.00	0.48*
V27 (Systemic Corr.)	−0.46*	−0.50*	−0.53*	0.56*	0.48*	1.00

Note: $p < 0.05$ for all coefficients marked with an asterisk (*). All correlation coefficients are based on Pearson's r and indicate statistically significant relationships at the 5 percent level (two-tailed).

Table 7 shows a substantial inverse link between perceived corruption (V5, V12, V27) and trust in institutions (V3, V6, V10) ($p < 0.05$). Court trust is most negatively correlated with corruption ($r = -0.71$), implying legal trust is susceptible to corruption perceptions. The statistics show that corruption perceptions dramatically undermine institutional confidence in Kazakhstan. Table 2a in the Appendix shows four latent dimensions from factor analysis. Factor 1 includes trust in institutions like governments, banks, and courts, suggesting it is essential to economic understanding. Factor 3, which reflects human suffering and systemic imbalance, most affects economic inequality and financial hardship. This suggests that trust and perceived injustice influence public opinion as distinct but related psychological domains (Figure 3).
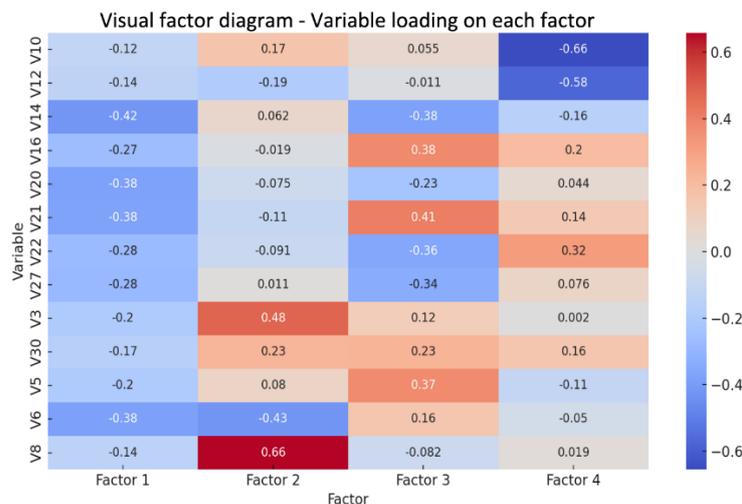

Figure 3. Variable loadings on each factor.

Factor 1 contains economic conduct and institutional trust variables V14 and V20. Factor 2's mild V30 loadings and strong positive V3 and V8 loadings match judgments of corruption and structural understanding. This factor shows economic disparity and financial hardship with strong V5, V21, V16, and V30 loadings. Factor 4 explains V10 and V12's significant negative loadings, which are associated with financial disengagement or institutional failure.
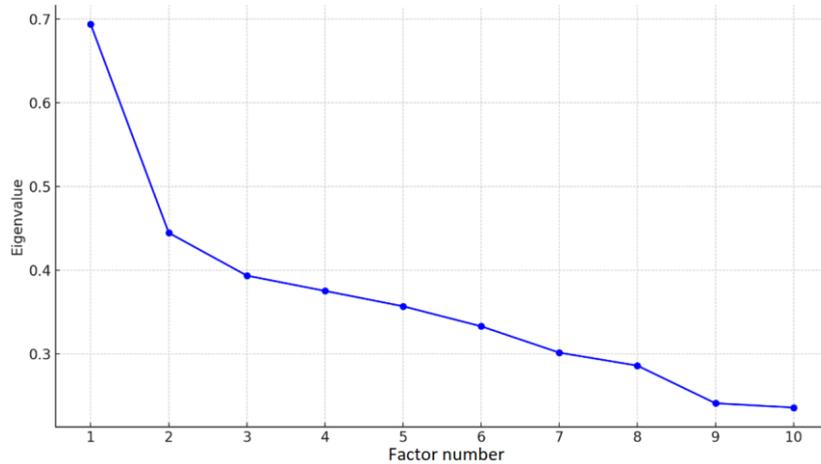

Figure 4. Scree plot of factors.

The Figure 4 scree plot shows a steep decline in eigenvalues after the first two factors, with a visible "elbow" around Factor 3 or 4. This suggests that 3–4 factors are meaningful and account for most of the variance in the dataset, justifying their retention for further interpretation. Systemic skepticism and discontent are nearly universal, as seen in Table 4a (appendix), which illustrates the frequency with which each fundamental theme appears across respondent categories. Students, laborers, experts, and entrepreneurs all rate this sentiment at 5 out of 5. Entrepreneurs and workers are more likely to face regulatory and income shocks daily; thus, it makes sense that they would prioritize economic resilience and adaptability. It appears that there is a generational-analytical convergence in skepticism against official reform narratives, as youth dissatisfaction with reform peaks among students (5/5) and stays significant for professionals (4/5). Moral anger over corruption/inequality is widespread across all groups (entrepreneurs 5/5; workers 5/5; experts 5/5; students 4/5), underscoring the ethical dimension of economic consciousness under pathology. Taken together, the table highlights broad consensus on distrust and moral grievance, with group-specific emphases on adaptation (entrepreneurs/workers) and reform disillusionment (students/experts).

Table 8. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha.

Subscale/Dimension	Items included	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Interpretation
Institutional trust	V3, V6, V10	0.82	Excellent reliability measures trust in institutions.
Perceived corruption	V5, V12, V27	0.78	Good reliability consistent perception of corruption
Inequality & fairness	V8, V14, V22	0.75	Good internal consistency on fairness-related attitudes.
Economic engagement	V20, V21	0.71	Acceptable reflects willingness to save/invest.
Economic crisis experience	V16, V30	0.69	Borderline reflects situational impact, slightly varied responses.
Full Scale (35 items)	V1–V35	0.88	Excellent overall, the instrument is highly reliable.

Note: α ≥ 0.9 → Excellent (too high may indicate redundancy).
0.8 ≤ α < 0.9 → Very Good.
0.7 ≤ α < 0.8 → Good.
0.6 ≤ α < 0.7 → Acceptable (context-dependent).
α < 0.6 → Poor (revision or removal of items recommended).

All subscales are reliable to exceptional (Table 8). The instrument's theoretical and psychometric reliability supports its application in assessing economic consciousness in youth. Cynical observers depict politically aware, distrustful, and economically disengaged young people. Optimistic reformists value justice and reform and are politically active. Apathetic or resigned passive realists are cognizant yet rarely act. Economic disillusionment destroys faith in institutions, leaving vulnerable people in monetary and emotional pain. This clustering typology aids sophisticated policy targeting by addressing disillusioned individuals through financial inclusion or social safety programs and by reforming communication with cynical observers. Hierarchical clustering using Ward's method produced a dendrogram with economic consciousness profiles.
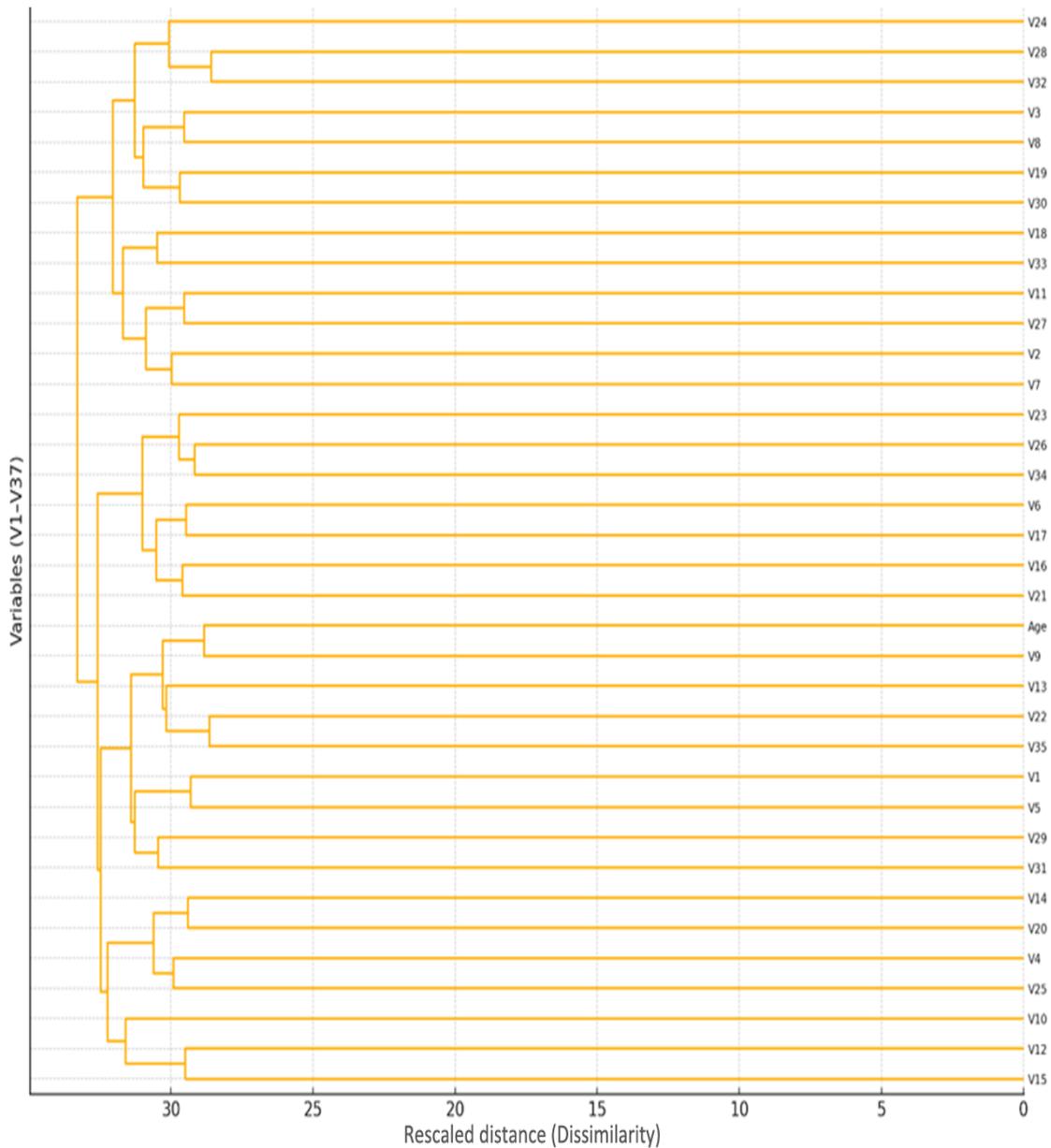

Figure 5. Dendrogram using the complete linkage method.

The complete linkage method dendrogram in Figure 5 illustrates separate groupings of variables with similar response patterns depicted in Table 5a, Appendix. This is notably true for economic conduct (V20, V21, V22), perceived corruption (V5, V12, V27), and institutional trust (V3, V6, V10). At higher dissimilarity, variables like V30 (economic crisis) and V16 (inflation) cluster independently, showing differing economic awareness of challenges.

Table 9. Mann–Whitney U test—Gender and age differences in economic consciousness.

Variable	Group comparison	U statistic	p-Value	Interpretation
Trust in government (V3)	Male vs female	10740	0.021*	Females reported significantly lower trust in government institutions.
Trust in banks (V6)	Male vs female	11255	0.113	No significant difference by gender.
Trust in courts (V10)	Male vs female	10520	0.016*	Females showed significantly lower trust in judicial institutions.
Perception of corruption (V5)	Male vs female	10390	0.010*	Females perceive government corruption more severely than males.
Fair distribution (V14)	Male vs female	12045	0.458	No significant difference.
Willingness to save (V20)	Male vs female	11360	0.132	No significant difference.
Investment intentions (V21)	Male vs female	10110	0.007**	Males had higher intentions to invest than females.
Economic crisis experience (V30)	Male vs female	11685	0.261	No significant difference in reported crisis experience.
Trust in government (V3)	Age 14–18 vs 19–26	10480	0.004**	Older respondents (19–26) showed significantly lower trust than the younger group.
Inflation experience (V16)	Age 14–18 vs 19–26	10875	0.018*	Older respondents perceived a greater impact of inflation.

Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

Table 9 presents the Mann–Whitney U test results comparing gender and age differences in key indicators of economic consciousness. The results show that females report significantly lower trust in government and courts and perceive corruption more severely than males ($p < 0.05$). In contrast, males exhibit stronger investment intentions ($p < 0.01$). Across age groups, older respondents (19–26) display lower trust in institutions and greater sensitivity to inflation than younger participants (14–18). Systemic distrust, adaptive economic behaviors, young disillusionment, and moral fury over inequality were the four main themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of 20 semi-structured interviews and media discourse, which matched the study's basic research objectives. The prevalent impression among all categories of respondents was one of systemic distrust, especially in relation to the perceived inefficiency and opaqueness of governmental institutions. An Almaty student commented, *"To be honest, I don't even know who to trust anymore... I feel like we're stuck in a loop."* This sentiment echoed across working-class voices, with one worker from Shymkent stating, *"It's like the system doesn't care if you're alive or dead."* Low levels of institutional trust were found in quantitative surveys (e.g., variables V3, V6, and V10), and these viewpoints show how people are emotionally disconnected from government.

Economic resilience via informal adaptation was the subject of the second topic, which emphasized the importance of non-official approaches. As an example, a Karaganda-based entrepreneur revealed, *"You learn to play the game cash jobs, private networks, favors. That is survival here."* This was especially true for workers and entrepreneurs dealing with systemic economic limitations. In addition, the younger generation was very skeptical of reform narratives, highlighting the difference between official statements and people's actual experiences. *"They talk about 'New Kazakhstan'... but all I see is the same people in power,"* noted a university student. All demographics shared the same sentiment regarding the last topic: moral outrage at the capture of the privileged and the resulting inequity. According to a sociologist, *"Corruption is not just a transaction; it is a betrayal of social trust."* Overall, these results provide an insight into economic awareness in Kazakhstan, illustrating how people react emotionally and strategically to the systemic economic pathology present there. Thematic summaries of the qualitative data on Kazakhstanis' economic awareness are shown in Table 10. Along with representative quotations and links to previous research that support the observed patterns, the table outlines four core themes: systemic distrust and frustration; economic resilience

through informal adaptation; youth disillusionment with reform rhetoric; and moral anger over corruption and inequality.

Table 10. Thematic summary of qualitative findings—Economic consciousness in Kazakhstan.

Theme	Subtheme	Perspective group	Illustrative quote	Link to prior research
Systemic distrust and frustration	Disillusionment with institutions	Student (Almaty)	I don't even know who to trust anymore. Every time they say something will change, it just... doesn't.	Confirms De Bie (2022) on institutional trust decline.
Economic resilience and adaptive behaviors	Informal survival strategies	Entrepreneur (Karaganda)	Honestly, if I waited for the government to help, I would be out of business. You learn to play games, cash jobs, private networks, and favors.	Aligned with informal economic studies by Becker and Kabongo (2020).
Youth disillusionment with reform rhetoric	Skepticism toward government narratives	Student (Almaty)	They talk about New Kazakhstan as if it's a shiny future, but all I see are the same people in power, just wearing different suits.	Supports Hoti and Thaci (2024) on youth perception gaps.
Moral anger over corruption and inequality	Ethical outrage over unfairness	Entrepreneur (Shymkent)	You need connections. It is not about talent or effort; it is who you know. That is what breaks people's spirits.	Confirms Sanghera and Satybaldieva (2021) on moral-economic resentment

Both qualitative and quantitative studies have shown that inequality, mistrust of institutions, and corruption are factors that influence Kazakhstanis' awareness of their own economic situation. The first two assumptions were backed by quantitative evidence that showed a negative association between trust in institutions and perceptions of corruption and bribery. In qualitative interviews, business owners and employees voiced their dissatisfaction with the widespread corruption and lack of legal resources. Optimism and conviction in reform (H2) were prominent themes in narratives from younger respondents, who focused on digital participation and new opportunities. When compared to statistical approaches, qualitative insights revealed people's lived experiences and moral judgments by delving deeply into their emotions and behaviors. Practically speaking, these results are closely tied to the economic decisions that Kazakhs make daily. Many business owners prefer to work through informal networks to avoid bureaucratic red tape and arbitrary taxes. Similarly, younger professionals utilize digital tools such as crowdfunding sites, social media marketplaces, and fintech apps to avoid limited institutional support. Households' reactions to inflation and inequality reveal a disjointed but flexible confidence in the formal economy as they seek to diversify their income through small-scale trading or remittances. These activities show how economic players resort to more decentralized, peer-reinforced, and technologically mediated systems, which lead to increased systemic inefficiencies, as faith in existing institutions decreases. These tendencies highlight the importance of having trustworthy law enforcement, business-friendly legislation, and digital governance initiatives to rebuild trust in the government.

5. DISCUSSION

The primary objective of the research was to trace the historical trajectory of economic awareness across various Kazakh social groupings and to identify any correlations with economic sickness. Perceptions of elite power, institutional distrust, and corruption impact people's judgments of the financial system and their interactions with it, according to statistical analysis of survey data and semi-structured interviews. Specifically, the qualitative assessments supported the quantitative results by confirming the strong negative relationships between trust in essential institutions (V3, V6, V10) and perceived corruption (V5, V27). Many people in the community were

dissatisfied, doubtful, and disengaged. The first study topic, which concerned the evolution of economic consciousness, revealed a generational disparity in both datasets. The 18–24 age group was more adaptive, reform-minded, and confident in systemic progress. Cluster analysis and thematic coding showed that teenagers were usually "optimistic reformists," and older or working-class respondents were "cynical observers" or "economically disillusioned." Qualitative findings showed that younger people exposed to global information flows and digital platforms were more comfortable expressing reform-oriented perspectives despite structural constraints. These findings support Hypothesis 2 that international norms and internet connection may be influencing teenage economic consciousness toward market-oriented and participative mindsets.

Both strategies addressed the second research question concerning factors influencing economic consciousness. Corruption, inequality, and institutional distrust are the primary predictors of poor economic engagement (saving and investing), according to statistical models. Moral outrage and elite impunity were identified as significant topics. Most interviewees attributed economic disengagement to nepotism, harsh legal treatment, and lack of preparation. These studies demonstrate that moral and emotional responses to structural governance failures, money, and education influence economic consciousness. Subgroup statistical testing (e.g., Mann–Whitney U) and role-specific theme analysis answered the third study question regarding social groups affecting economic consciousness. Corruption and institutional inefficiencies impacted entrepreneurs the most, as they rely on regulatory stability and property rights. This supports H3, indicating that institutional failures harm market actors most. Students and youth expressed hope and personal responsibility but were cautious about state initiatives. With low expectations, resilience, and informal coping skills, workers were pragmatic yet apathetic toward the economy. Economic consciousness in Kazakhstan appears to be shaped by a complex interaction of historical memory, institutional performance, and moral judgment, supporting the fundamental idea that economic illness erodes trust and agency.

This research supports earlier work on the political economy of the post-Soviet era, particularly that which has focused on economic pathology and institutional trust. Russians and Ukrainians reject the official government due to corruption, opaque decision-making, and elite capture, according to previous surveys. According to Cao and Shi (2021) the extensive utilization of informal networks and personal relationships ("blat") in Russia is a sensible response to the dysfunctional system in the country. In contrast, Zahra et al. (2023) assert that the public's alienation and moral ambivalence regarding Kazakhstan, which shares regional themes like systemic mistrust and moral outrage, has been further solidified by the reform and reversal cycles in Ukraine. Entrepreneurs and students in Kazakhstan have an unusually high level of mistrust. As part of our study on Kazakhstanis' economic consciousness, Shametova, Tazhibekova, Biryukov, and Mazanova (2023) shed light on the public's view of the government's capacity to respond to crises and the economy's flexibility as a result of institutional measures taken, such as the creation of more robust and technologically advanced supply chains.

Scheba and Turok (2023) state that when government-run initiatives fail to yield the desired results, residents turn to informal methods to secure their financial resources. Businesses and workers turn to shadow economies, non-contractual labor, and private social safety nets, according to our respondents, as a way to avoid government organizations that are either incompetent or exploitative. Like adaptive strategies shown in other transition economies, these steps demonstrate how institutional weakness undermines economic standards and markets. Action futility and loss aversion are two topics that this study adds to what is already known in behavioral economics. Behavioral theories link disempowerment to a lack of civic involvement and long-term planning. Respondents' claims of *"there is no point thinking five years ahead" or "even if you work hard, the system is rigged"* display an unconscious withdrawal consistent with these ideas. Economic awareness is not based on reason or materialism, but on cognitive, emotional, and moral responses to institutional situations, according to these findings. To shed light on how material

restrictions, psychological trust, and political legitimacy limit economic agency, our results provide support for integrative theories.

Concerning our study on economic consciousness under economic pathology in Kazakhstan, Ovcharova (2022) findings highlight the structural role of information infrastructure and digitalization in shaping modern economic behavior. Like Kazakhstan's efforts to establish an innovative economy, her observation that various EU member states invest differently in digital tools shows how deficiencies in statistical and digital infrastructure can hinder public engagement and institutional trust, which are essential for raising economic consciousness. Sianko, Small, Kapllanaj, Fino, and Mece (2022) underline financial inclusion as a catalyst for economic growth, analyzing Ukraine and top crypto-adopting countries through secondary data and thematic analysis. It highlights accessibility, adoption patterns, and emerging trends, offering insights into strategies that can strengthen inclusive financial systems.

These findings corroborate the growing body of evidence suggesting that people's views on injustice and violations of the social contract influence their economic attitudes. Mahmud (2021) causes people to care more about fitting in and having faith in institutions than about succeeding. An outcry of moral outrage, especially among Kazakh businesses and employees, demonstrates that the breaches of distributive and procedural justice go beyond mere inefficiency. Nepotism, selective rule enforcement, and privilege-based impunity violated normative fairness, which infuriated the respondents. A considerable correlation exists between moral criticism of elite behavior and disengagement from politics and informal economic activities in Latin America and Eastern Europe (Haynes & Rašković, 2021). This proves that trust degradation in Kazakhstan violates the state-society moral compact, not simply technology. In the context of our study on Kazakhstan's economic consciousness, Yurko and Riabtsev (2024) identification of sector-specific investment potential in Ukraine resonates with Kazakhstan's need to channel reforms into strategic sectors like energy and governance, thereby restoring institutional trust and enabling citizens to reimagine economic stability in post-crisis contexts.

There is a generational gap in economic literacy in nations with authoritarian or mixed regimes, according to research on youth and political economy. In contrast to most of the study's older participants, the younger ones displayed cautious optimism. Post-Communist youth are more aware of global standards and less submissive, yet Sianko et al. (2022) discovered no formal mechanisms for productively expressing this candor. The growing debate on human agency, digital entrepreneurship, and transparency among Kazakhstani students suggests that economic consciousness may be influenced by exposure to foreign ideas and online conversation, even in governmental systems with constraints. This supports the ideas of political socialization and modernization by showing how generational and structural changes affect economic practices.

According to the report, for Kazakhstan's institutions to win back the trust of the people, they need to be drastically changed. The failure of attempts at superficial or performative openness may be explained by the results of interviews and surveys, which reveal a widespread mistrust of institutions. Open budgeting, public engagement in decision-making, and anti-corruption policies based on evidence should be implemented by the government. These techniques may help economically active and oppressed communities rediscover faith in institutions and overcome cynicism. According to generational openness, youth entrepreneurship, digital innovation hubs, and civic involvement platforms can inspire future reformers. Giving this generation the tools they need will help "New Kazakhstan" grow and preserve institutions. The most economically engaged respondents, entrepreneurs, complained about the complexity of the rules and elite bias. Governance policies and financial incentives are needed to encourage SMEs.

Psychological perspectives, institutional trust, and generational dynamics help explain economic consciousness in this research. Gramsci's hegemony and Olson's collective action theories can include moral outrage and perceived self-efficacy. Generational legitimacy and effectiveness may worsen or improve weak organizations' collective action challenges. Therefore, hybrid regime economic consciousness theories should integrate psychological engagement,

moral economy, and rational risk or opportunity evaluations. Kazakhstan's centralized government and hydrocarbon-dependent economy cause macroeconomic growth, inequality, and institutional change. Resource reliance has increased GDP without improving public health, especially for non-elites. The January 2022 fuel subsidy reduction sparked massive anti-corruption, anti-nepotism, and anti-representation rallies. Our research indicated that firms and workers often encountered discrepancies between official development narratives and their own experiences of injustice, exclusion, and uncertainty. Many individuals learned about the economic crisis and lost faith in institutions due to the protests. According to interviews in 2023 and 2024, this incident strengthened adults' pessimism and encouraged young people who saw grassroots change in the economy.

Transparent and participatory changes are necessary to restore faith in Kazakhstan's institutions, according to the results. To promote openness, we need public advisory councils that strengthen accountability while limiting discretionary authority, transparent budgeting platforms, and autonomous anti-corruption task forces. People may have a more accurate picture of the system's responsiveness and fairness when they participate, especially with digital tools that allow them to report wrongdoing and track public expenditure. Programs that encourage digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and civic education should be prioritized to involve young people, according to the optimistic youth participants in this survey. They might put their reformist energy into productive economic action by doing this. Finally, entrepreneurial aid has the potential to promote open dispute resolution, speed up company registration, and eliminate informal payments, all of which contribute to a fairer business climate.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to quantify the extent to which different Kazakh socioeconomic groups weathered the Great Depression. The results indicate that there is a negative relationship between people's trust in government and their perceptions of corruption, lending credence to hypothesis H1. Hypothesis H2 is supported by the responders' young attitude and openness to new ideas. Businesses' favorable reactions to regulatory uncertainty and corruption provide credence to Hypothesis H3. Consistent with these tendencies was a qualitative study. Government corruption, unofficial payments, and the lack of openness surrounding judicial matters infuriated all parties concerned. The younger generation was more adaptable, with an emphasis on internet commerce and social innovation. The significance of multimodal economic awareness shaped by emotional involvement, perceived agency, and lived experience is underscored by these findings, which provide light on how different socioeconomic groups perceive and negotiate systemic economic dysfunction. The concept of economic consciousness is investigated in this study within the context of a post-Soviet country marked by reliance on natural resources, concentration of power, and persistent inequality. In view of the political and economic volatility demonstrated by the protests in January 2022, it is crucial to comprehend public trust and economic reasons to guarantee the validity of policies and the longevity of civic institutions in Kazakhstan. The distinctive convergent mixed-methods approach utilized in this study allows for the integration of quantitative survey data with rich qualitative narratives provided by a variety of responders. By including emotional and moral perspectives on economic ideas, this study expands our understanding of economics beyond rational-actor paradigms. It integrates factors from sociology, psychology, and institutions to enhance models in behavioral and institutional economics. A methodology for studying how people's economic views change in reaction to persistent structural problems is also laid out to guide future studies and influence policy decisions.

Institutional reforms stress that transparency, public participation, and rule enforcement are necessary to restore trust. More accountability and transparency can be achieved through the establishment of public advisory councils, transparent budgeting, and anti-corruption task forces. For the sake of transparency and responsibility, there needs to be online tools for reporting mismanagement of public funds and keeping tabs on them. It is crucial to keep the present youth generation in mind. Youth programs that empower children to become responsible adults, proficient

in technology, and entrepreneurs allow them to manifest their reformist dreams. Given that the youth of today are more optimistic and globally interested than their elders, this is an issue that needs serious consideration. Customized processes to assist entrepreneurs have the potential to shorten the time it takes to launch a company, fix issues, and do away with informal fees. As a result, organizations will be more accommodating to their needs. This will allow entrepreneurs to realize their full economic potential. This mixed-methods technique should be used in future research to track economic knowledge throughout time, with a focus on political events and policy developments. Demographic factors, including gender, age, ethnicity, and geography, impact people's viewpoints and monetary decisions; researchers should investigate this. Whether or not young Kazakhs believe in free market ideas and the role of the state is something they should consider when they participate in online forums. Mental change is just as important as physical infrastructure when it comes to Kazakhstan's socioeconomic development prospects. The findings of this study extend beyond the realm of ineffective policies to reveal that economic pathology influences people's relationships with their institutions, their participation in the market, and their hopes for the future. Fostering institutional accountability and attaining fair growth may be easier if the public can be informed, emotionally committed, and actively engaged. By thinking about the moral and psychological dimensions of business, Kazakhstan can create an economy that represents its citizens' aspirations.

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Appendix

Table 1a. Correlation analysis.

Variables	V3	V6	V10	V5	V12	V27	V8	V14	V22	V16	V30	V20	V21
V3 (Trust in Government)	1.00*	0.70*	0.32*	-0.56*	-0.39*	-0.46*	0.53*	0.62*	0.63*	0.67*	0.55*	0.50*	0.40*
V6 (Trust in Banks)	0.70*	1.00*	0.48*	-0.65*	-0.51*	-0.50*	0.53*	0.61*	0.70*	0.56*	0.72*	0.53*	0.67*
V10 (Trust in Courts)	0.32*	0.48*	1.00*	-0.71*	-0.45*	-0.53*	0.76*	0.58*	0.48*	0.41*	0.61*	0.54*	0.55*
V5 (Corruption)	-0.56*	-0.65*	-0.71*	1.00*	0.51*	0.56*	0.57*	0.63*	0.61*	0.38*	0.34*	0.36*	0.68*
V12 (Bribery)	-0.39*	-0.51*	-0.45*	0.51*	1.00*	0.48*	0.64*	0.53*	0.50*	0.41*	0.67*	0.58*	0.37*
V27 (Systemic Corruption)	-0.46*	-0.50*	-0.53*	0.56*	0.48*	1.00*	0.42*	0.56*	0.75*	0.41*	0.40*	0.67*	0.51*
V8 (Inequality)	0.53*	0.53*	0.76*	0.57*	0.64*	0.42*	1.00*	0.67*	0.45*	0.60*	0.67*	0.46*	0.48*
V14 (Fair Distribution)	0.62*	0.61*	0.58*	0.63*	0.53*	0.56*	0.67*	1.00*	0.49*	0.60*	0.53*	0.54*	0.60*
V22 (Opportunity)	0.63*	0.70*	0.48*	0.61*	0.50*	0.75*	0.45*	0.49*	1.00*	0.61*	0.53*	0.73*	0.53*
V16 (Inflation)	0.67*	0.56*	0.41*	0.38*	0.41*	0.41*	0.60*	0.60*	0.61*	1.00*	0.70*	0.47*	0.37*
V30 (Economic Crisis)	0.55*	0.72*	0.61*	0.34*	0.67*	0.40*	0.67*	0.53*	0.53*	0.70*	1.00*	0.38*	0.33*
V20 (Saving)	0.50*	0.53*	0.54*	0.36*	0.58*	0.67*	0.46*	0.54*	0.73*	0.47*	0.38*	1.00*	0.61*
V21 (Investment)	0.40*	0.67*	0.55*	0.68*	0.37*	0.51*	0.48*	0.60*	0.53*	0.37*	0.33*	0.61*	1.00*

Note: Entries are Pearson correlation coefficients (r). * denotes statistical significance at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed). Diagonal values (1.00) indicate self-correlations. Results with $p < 0.1$ also indicated by (*).

Table 2a. Factor analysis.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Top Factor	Interpretation
V3	-0.196	0.481	0.12	0.002	Factor 2	Reflects corruption perception and structural awareness
V6	-0.384	-0.428	0.159	-0.05	Factor 2	Reflects corruption perception and structural awareness
V10	-0.117	0.167	0.055	-0.655	Factor 4	Associated with financial engagement (savings, investments)
V5	-0.195	0.08	0.374	-0.114	Factor 3	Captures economic inequality and personal financial stress
V12	-0.139	-0.19	-0.011	-0.576	Factor 4	Associated with financial engagement (savings, investments)
V27	-0.281	0.011	-0.342	0.076	Factor 3	Captures economic inequality and personal financial stress
V8	-0.143	0.658	-0.082	0.019	Factor 2	Reflects corruption perception and structural awareness
V14	-0.421	0.062	-0.381	-0.161	Factor 1	Represents general trust in institutions (Government, banks, courts)
V22	-0.28	-0.091	-0.361	0.321	Factor 3	Captures economic inequality and personal financial stress
V16	-0.267	-0.019	0.381	0.203	Factor 3	Captures economic inequality and personal financial stress
V30	-0.165	0.228	0.233	0.157	Factor 3	Captures economic inequality and personal financial stress
V20	-0.382	-0.075	-0.23	0.044	Factor 1	Represents general trust in institutions (government, banks, courts)
V21	-0.378	-0.109	0.408	0.144	Factor 3	Captures economic inequality and personal financial stress

Table 3a. Semi-structured interview guide.

Section	Open-ended questions	Purpose
Introduction and Rapport	Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your economic background?	To ease the participant into the conversation and collect contextual demographic information.
Perceptions of institutions	How would you describe your trust in government institutions like courts, banks, or parliament?	To assess individual perceptions of institutional trust and perceived legitimacy.
	Have you noticed any changes in how people around you view these institutions over the past few years?	
Economic experiences	Have you faced any economic difficulties recently (e.g., job loss, inflation)?	To understand economic coping strategies, resilience mechanisms, and perceived instability.
	How do you and your family manage day-to-day expenses during tough times?	
	Are you involved in any informal work or side income streams?	
Corruption and inequality	What are your views on corruption in Kazakhstan's economy or public institutions?	To explore personal experiences, awareness, and moral reactions to systemic injustice.
	Do you think people with political connections have more advantages in business or employment?	
	Have you ever felt disadvantaged because of corruption or nepotism?	
Reform and participation	What do you think about recent economic reforms or government efforts to improve things?	To gauge levels of engagement, skepticism, or approval toward official economic narratives.
	Do you feel your voice is heard in economic decision-making processes?	
Outlook	Where do you see Kazakhstan's economy in the next five years?	To understand future expectations, economic optimism or pessimism.
	What would need to change for you to feel more economically secure or hopeful?	

Table 4a. Frequency of theme mentions by respondent group.

Theme	Students (n=5)	Entrepreneurs (n=5)	Workers (n=5)	Experts (n=5)
Systemic distrust and frustration	5/5	4/5	5/5	5/5
Economic resilience & adaptation	3/5	5/5	4/5	3/5
Youth disillusionment with reform	5/5	2/5	2/5	4/5
Moral anger over corruption/Inequality	4/5	5/5	5/5	5/5

Table 5a. K-means cluster analysis – Typologies of economic consciousness.

Cluster Label	% of respondents	Key Characteristics
Cynical Observers	34%	Low trust in institutions (V3, V6, V10) High perceived corruption (V5, V27) Low optimism about opportunity (V22) Informed yet disengaged
Optimistic Reformists	28%	Moderate to high trust (V3, V6). Moderate concern about corruption (V5). Strong belief in fairness (V14), opportunity (V22), engagement (V21).
Passive Realists	22%	Acknowledge inequality/corruption Feel powerless to act Neutral to low institutional trust Low saving/investment intention (V20, V21)
Economically Disillusioned	16%	Very low institutional trust across variables. High exposure to economic crisis (V30, V16). Emotionally detached. Extremely low engagement.

Table 6a. Key themes and illustrative quotes from semi-structured interviews.

Theme	Subtheme/Insight	Illustrative Quote	Participant Type
Economic Pathology and Distrust	Corruption and institutional mistrust	"Corruption makes it impossible to plan long-term investments."	Entrepreneur
	Systemic injustice and perceived rigging	"Even if you work hard, the system is rigged against you."	Student
Drivers of Economic Consciousness	Intergenerational mistrust and learned helplessness	"My parents told me never to trust officials. That stuck with me."	Young Worker
	Disempowerment through institutional bias	"When my business was fined unfairly, I realized the law protects the powerful."	Retailer
Perceived Lack of Future Orientation	Present-focused survival mentality	"We live day to day; there's no point thinking five years ahead."	Factory Worker