

# Representative Bureaucracy and Ethical Responsibility in Public Service Delivery

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## Abstract

Representative bureaucracy plays an important role in understanding how diversity within the public sector influences the ways in which public problems are addressed. Public administration theory has undergone substantial transformation since its emergence, shifting from an understanding of bureaucracy as a neutral instrument in the hands of elected officials to its recognition as an active participant in the policy-making process. Historical experience demonstrates that an efficient and obedient civil service, particularly under authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, may become a dangerous instrument when detached from ethical judgment.

This article examines the democratic and ethical challenges associated with representative bureaucracy, especially its involvement in the public arena without direct popular mandate. It explores the benefits and risks of bureaucratic discretion, highlighting its potential to foster sensitivity and responsiveness toward minority groups, while also creating conditions for unjustified favoritism toward allies, cronies, or socially proximate groups. While descriptive representation does not guarantee active advocacy for minority interests, the likelihood of empathetic administrative behavior appears higher among representatives who share relevant background characteristics.

The article argues that professional education and organizational culture play a decisive role in shaping the ethical use of discretion. Strengthening training programs and fostering inclusive professional norms may help reconcile representative bureaucracy with democratic accountability while reducing the risks of favoritism. The article concludes by suggesting directions for further research on education and human resource development in public administration.

**Keywords:** representative bureaucracy, bureaucratic discretion, administrative ethics, favoritism, democratic accountability

## 1. Introduction

*“Civil servants must fulfill their duty without grudges and passions, without love and enthusiasm, without thinking about people.”*

Max Weber (Karakoyunlu, 2022, p. 65)

How does diversity within the public sector workforce influence government decision-making? For a long period, public administration theory assumed that civil servants should remain as distant as possible from the people they served in order to perform their duties professionally and impartially. This view was articulated most clearly by Max Weber in his model of ideal bureaucracy and later reinforced by Woodrow Wilson, the founder of modern public administration theory, as well as by Frederick Taylor, whose principles of scientific management shaped administrative thinking across both public and private sectors.

In recent decades, however, expectations of the civil service have undergone significant transformation. Bureaucrats are no longer understood solely as neutral and distant executors of political decisions but increasingly as actors who exercise discretion and engage with the social realities of the populations they serve. Within this evolving context, the concept of representative bureaucracy has gained growing prominence. It suggests that a public workforce reflecting social diversity may be better positioned to understand public needs and respond to historically marginalized groups.

At the same time, this development raises important democratic and ethical questions. Civil servants are not elected representatives, yet their discretionary decisions can shape policy outcomes, resource allocation, and distributive justice. While representative bureaucracy is often associated with greater sensitivity and inclusiveness, it may also challenge traditional assumptions of administrative neutrality and open space for partiality or favoritism. The same discretionary authority that allows bureaucrats to act creatively and empathetically may also produce unequal treatment based on social proximity, informal loyalties, or personal identification with particular groups.

Against this background, this article addresses the following research question: Under what conditions does representative bureaucracy enhance ethically responsible and equitable public service delivery, and under what conditions does it instead contribute to favoritism in the exercise of bureaucratic discretion? To address this question, the article develops a conceptual and normative analysis that integrates classical debates on administrative neutrality with contemporary scholarship on representative bureaucracy and street-level discretion. By placing historical administrative experiences and philosophical interpretations in dialogue with modern theoretical literature, the study examines how ethical expectations toward public administration have evolved and how they shape contemporary governance dilemmas.

Beyond its substantive focus, the article also seeks to contribute methodologically to

conceptual research in public administration. It demonstrates how historically grounded case reasoning and philosophical reflection can be systematically integrated into normative and theoretical analysis. Historical episodes and canonical theoretical debates are therefore used not as illustrative background narratives but as analytical instruments for examining the ethical limits of administrative neutrality and the discretionary role of bureaucrats. Through this historically informed conceptual approach, the study aims to clarify the relationship between representation, discretion, and ethical responsibility in democratic governance.

The central argument advanced in this article is that descriptive representation alone is insufficient to ensure ethical or equitable administrative outcomes. While shared social or cultural background characteristics may increase the likelihood of empathetic administrative behavior, the ethical use of bureaucratic discretion is fundamentally shaped by professional socialization, organizational culture, and education. Strengthening professional training and fostering inclusive administrative norms may therefore help reconcile representative bureaucracy with democratic accountability while reducing the risks of favoritism.

By clarifying these relationships, the article contributes to ongoing scholarly debates in public administration and political science concerning the evolving ethical role of the civil service in increasingly diverse democratic societies. It also identifies directions for future research focusing on education, professional development, and institutional design as mechanisms that shape ethical discretion within representative bureaucracies.

## **2. Conceptual Methods**

This article adopts a conceptual and normative analytical approach to examine the ethical and democratic conditions under which representative bureaucracy shapes public service delivery. Rather than seeking to test causal relationships empirically, the study aims to clarify theoretical assumptions, identify normative tensions, and develop analytically grounded propositions concerning bureaucratic discretion and ethical responsibility.

The study is situated within established traditions of conceptual and normative research in public administration and political theory. Such approaches play an important role in administrative scholarship by refining key concepts, interrogating underlying value assumptions, and linking institutional analysis with broader ethical debates. By engaging interpretively with foundational and contemporary theoretical contributions, conceptual research helps illuminate how public institutions operate within evolving democratic and moral expectations. Within this tradition, the present study seeks to contribute to ongoing theoretical discussions by integrating representative bureaucracy theory with scholarship on administrative discretion and professional ethics.

The analysis is based on a systematic engagement with classical and contemporary literature in public administration, political theory, and administrative ethics. Foundational works on bureaucratic neutrality, the politics – administration dichotomy, and administrative responsibility are examined alongside modern scholarship on representative bureaucracy, street-level bureaucracy, and ethical governance. By placing these bodies of literature in dialogue, the article traces the historical evolution of normative expectations toward public administration and identifies tensions between democratic accountability, professional

autonomy, and ethical responsibility.

Methodologically, the article employs theoretical synthesis and interpretive analysis to construct a coherent conceptual framework. Historical experiences and canonical theoretical debates are used as analytical reasoning devices rather than as illustrative historical narratives or empirical evidence. These cases function as theoretical boundary situations that help reveal the ethical limits of administrative neutrality and the moral implications of bureaucratic obedience and discretion. By examining historically consequential episodes and influential philosophical interpretations, the study uses these cases to test and refine conceptual arguments concerning the relationship between representation, discretion, and ethical responsibility. This approach allows historically grounded reflection to inform the development of generalized normative insights while avoiding claims of empirical generalization.

The conceptual framework developed in this study is guided by three interrelated analytical dimensions:

1. the relationship between administrative neutrality and moral responsibility;
2. the role of bureaucratic discretion as a mediating mechanism between representation and ethical outcomes;
3. the influence of professional socialization, education, and organizational culture on discretionary behavior.

Together, these dimensions provide a structured analytical lens through which both the ethical potential and the normative risks associated with representative bureaucracy are examined. By linking these dimensions, the study demonstrates how representation alone does not determine administrative behavior but instead interacts with institutional and professional environments that shape discretionary judgment.

Methodologically, the article contributes to public administration scholarship by demonstrating how historically informed conceptual analysis can be used to integrate ethical theory, representative bureaucracy research, and discretion literature into a unified analytical framework. By systematically combining historical case reasoning with normative conceptual synthesis, the study illustrates how philosophical and historical materials can be employed to generate theoretically grounded propositions about contemporary governance challenges.

The findings of this analysis should therefore be understood as theoretically reasoned insights intended to clarify conceptual relationships and inform scholarly debate. The study aims to provide analytically structured arguments that may guide future empirical research exploring how education, professional training, and organizational culture influence ethical behavior in representative bureaucracies.

### **3. Theoretical Background: The Politics – Administration Dichotomy**

Woodrow Wilson, often regarded as the founder of modern public administration, articulated the dichotomy between politics and administration in his influential article *The Study of Administration*. This work marked the beginning of public administration as a distinct field of

scholarly inquiry and reflected the political challenges facing American society in the late nineteenth century. Wilson's argument was not purely theoretical but emerged from historical circumstances that shaped debates about governance and administrative reform.

In the decade preceding the publication of Wilson's article, the United States was shaken by the assassination of President James A. Garfield by Charles Guiteau. Following the long-standing spoils system, Guiteau expected a government position as a reward for his political support. When President Garfield opposed patronage appointments, Guiteau's frustration contributed to the tragic outcome (Ehrhardt et al., 2018, p. 1712). The assassination intensified public debate about the dangers of patronage politics and accelerated demands for administrative reform. Within two years, the Pendleton Act introduced merit-based recruitment and strengthened efforts to professionalize the civil service. It was within this reform context that Wilson developed his reflections on the role and purpose of public administration.

To protect bureaucracy from political exploitation, the principle of bureaucratic autonomy was advanced as a safeguard of professionalism and expertise. According to this model, the executive branch should operate independently of partisan pressures. Such autonomy was expected to promote stable and reliable public service delivery while protecting bureaucrats from the uncertainties of electoral turnover. This vision of administration as a professional and enduring institution laid the foundation for the lasting influence of the politics-administration dichotomy in public administration theory.

#### **4. Analytical Findings**

The discussion that follows interprets historical experiences and philosophical reflections as analytical lenses through which broader ethical patterns in public administration can be examined, rather than as illustrative historical narratives.

##### *4.1 Ethical Limits of Administrative Neutrality*

Wilson's metaphor about learning how to sharpen a knife from a criminal without being influenced by his intention to commit murder (1887, p. 220) reveals much about the neutral stance he attributed to bureaucracy in public office. He suggested that it was possible to learn from continental Europe how to organize a professional public administration without being influenced by the political regimes under which it operated. In this analysis, Wilson's argument is treated as a conceptual point of departure that allows examination of the normative assumptions underlying administrative neutrality and its potential ethical limitations. However, obedience and political neutrality may also be intrinsic features of authoritarian and totalitarian systems, where a silent and disciplined executive branch is often accepted as a trade-off between the government and a population that lacks real political freedom but at least receives services from a professional civil service.

The most severe challenge to the dichotomy between public administration and politics emerged from the role of bureaucracy in the Nazi regime. Adolf Eichmann, tried and sentenced to death in Jerusalem for crimes against humanity committed during the Holocaust, defended himself by repeatedly claiming that he was innocent because he had merely

followed rules and orders issued by his superiors. Hannah Arendt, who attended the trial expecting to encounter a figure of radical evil, instead observed an ordinary bureaucrat. She concluded that an obedient individual operating within a cruel system could commit horrific crimes without fully recognizing their moral significance. She famously described this phenomenon as the “banality of evil,” attributing responsibility not only to individuals but to the system as a whole (Trotta, 2012).

As Bauman observed, “When they take out their uniforms these people are exactly as we are. They love their wives, fuss over their kids, and have friends whom they help and from whom they get support when they are upset... The most terrible fact about the Holocaust is not that it could be done to us, but that actually we ourselves could do it” (Bauman, 1995, pp. 195–196).

Arendt’s interpretation provoked strong criticism, particularly within Jewish intellectual circles, and for a period she was treated as *persona non grata*. Yet her work later gained recognition as a profound reflection on moral responsibility within modern bureaucratic systems. As Albert O. Hirschman argued in *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, ethical behavior ultimately involves choice (Hirschman, 1970). Individuals may choose loyalty and conform to organizational expectations, turning a blind eye to wrongdoing and justifying silence through personal or economic dependence, as Eichmann attempted in his defense. Alternatively, individuals may challenge prevailing norms and accept the personal consequences of dissent, as Arendt did when she publicly criticized her own community. A third option involves exit — withdrawing from organizational or societal structures while continuing resistance from outside institutional boundaries.

The question of collective responsibility and the so-called “problem of many hands” was later addressed by Thompson through the ethics of neutrality and the ethics of structure. Both approaches emphasize the limited role of individual officials in policymaking and tend to defend bureaucratic innocence. Thompson rejected this position, arguing that moral responsibility cannot be dissolved through fragmentation of action. As he noted, “If a gang of ten thugs beats an old man to death, we do not punish each thug for only one-tenth of the murder” (Thompson, 1985, p. 559). He maintained that bureaucrats retain personal responsibility regardless of resignation or reassignment, and leaving office does not absolve individuals of responsibility for previous actions (Thompson, 1985, p. 560). In this respect, Thompson’s argument stands in tension with Arendt’s systemic interpretation and aligns more closely with the justification of Eichmann’s punishment.

#### *4.2 Discretion and the Politicization of Administration*

The dichotomy between politics and public administration remained largely unquestioned until the mid-twentieth century, when scholars increasingly acknowledged a symbiotic relationship between the two. The theoretical debates discussed in this section are examined interpretively in order to trace how changing understandings of administrative discretion reshape normative expectations toward public officials. As Waldo famously argued, “Administration is not a value-neutral activity... Administration is politics.” Like politics itself, administration engages with fundamental philosophical questions, including competing

conceptions of the “good life” and the appropriate distribution of power in society (Frederickson et al., 2012, p. 41). This recognition marked a decisive shift away from the assumption that administrative action could be reduced to technical execution.

Civil servants inevitably exercise discretion shaped by their own values, ethical judgments, and professional norms. Although they occupy lower positions within organizational hierarchies, they are responsible for implementing policy and, in practice, for interpreting and adjusting it to concrete circumstances (Lipsky, 1980). From a conceptual perspective, the street-level bureaucracy framework functions as a mechanism for examining how institutional discretion translates abstract principles of representation into concrete administrative behavior. As a result, administrative decisions often acquire political significance regardless of formal separation from the political sphere.

Max Weber was among the first sociologists to emphasize the importance of distinguishing between private and public life, arguing that professional bureaucrats should leave personal attachments and dislikes outside the office (Karakoyunlu, 2022, p. 65). Yet the feasibility of such separation remains open to question. Beliefs about justice, equity, and fairness cannot be entirely suspended at the workplace, particularly when civil servants are tasked with resolving morally charged situations. This raises a fundamental dilemma: should bureaucrats primarily serve political authorities or the broader public interest? In this sense, street-level bureaucrats may function not only as implementers of policy but also as potential obstacles to the execution of policies perceived as harmful or unjust. As Aberbach and Rockman observed, political leaders have increasingly realized that when bureaucrats are instructed “to jump,” they are more likely to ask “to where?” rather than “how high?” (1988, p. 608).

Within this analytical context, the concept of representative bureaucracy has gained renewed attention. Bureaucrats may display greater empathy toward individuals with whom they share certain social or cultural background characteristics (Frederickson et al., 2012, p. 60). At the same time, this development raises concerns about democratic legitimacy. Civil servants are not elected by the public and are often trained within selective institutions of public administration, such as France’s Institut national du service public, which introduces elements of elitism into the administrative system. Nevertheless, the risks associated with administrative influence must be evaluated alongside the limitations of electoral legitimacy itself. Historical experience demonstrates that democratic procedures alone do not guarantee ethical or humane outcomes, as even profoundly destructive regimes have at times emerged through formally legitimate elections.

## **5. Discussion**

The analysis presented in this study uses historically informed conceptual reasoning to examine the ethical and democratic implications of representative bureaucracy. By placing classical theoretical debates and historically significant administrative experiences in dialogue with contemporary scholarship, the discussion explores how discretionary authority interacts with representation and professional norms in shaping public service delivery.

### *5.1 Discretion, Favoritism, and Ethical Risk*

Contemporary empirical research on representative bureaucracy provides important support for the theoretical relationships discussed in this study. A growing body of scholarship demonstrates that bureaucrats who share demographic or social characteristics with service recipients are often associated with more equitable service outcomes and increased responsiveness toward minority communities. At the same time, empirical findings reveal that representation effects are conditional and shaped by institutional settings, professional norms, and accountability mechanisms. These findings reinforce the argument advanced in this article that descriptive representation alone is insufficient to guarantee ethical administrative behavior and that discretionary authority must be structured by organizational and professional safeguards.

Bureaucrats are not passive executors of public service delivery. Faced with heavy workloads, limited resources, and complex client needs, they often develop informal strategies to manage their responsibilities. In a systematic study of coping during public service delivery, Tummers et al. identified three broad categories of such strategies. The first, described as “moving toward clients,” includes practices such as rule-bending, rule-breaking, instrumental action, prioritizing among clients, and the use of personal resources in the interests of service recipients (Tummers et al., 2015, p. 1108). These strategies are examined here not only as behavioral patterns but also as conceptual indicators of how discretionary authority may generate ethical trade-offs in public service delivery.

Prioritizing among clients plays an important role in understanding the ethical stance and discretionary authority of civil servants. In a vignette study conducted by Jilke et al. (2018), clients were divided into three categories reflecting different deservingness criteria: “hardworking” – those who invest significant effort to achieve results; “needy” – individuals experiencing systematic disadvantage and requiring support; and “successful” – those whose outcomes are less dependent on public assistance and who are likely to succeed regardless of bureaucratic intervention (p. 227).

The study found that teachers were more likely to support needy students. Hardworking students also received favorable attention, whereas students’ expected future success received less priority when teachers faced limited time and resources. Gender differences were also observed. Male teachers tended to focus primarily on students’ level of need, while female teachers considered a broader range of prioritization criteria. Nevertheless, neither male nor female teachers demonstrated favoritism toward students of their own gender (Jilke et al., 2018, p. 235).

Research examining racial prioritization presents more complex and sometimes contradictory findings. Some studies indicate the existence of a white teacher bias against Black students, including lower probabilities of being recommended for gifted programs (Andersen et al., 2019, p. 431). Other studies suggest that White teachers may provide more positive feedback to African-American students, possibly to support self-esteem and avoid the perception of racial prejudice (Jilke et al., 2018, p. 231). In one study, African-American students received the highest level of prioritization at 12%, while students of Hispanic origin received 9%

compared with White students (Jilke et al., 2018, p. 234). Additional findings indicate that Hispanic teachers tended to focus more strongly on student effort and performance, while White teachers continued to prioritize minority students, and African-American teachers did so at an even higher rate (Jilke et al., 2018, p. 235). However, vignette-based experiments examining implicit responses to minority-associated names suggest that teachers may demonstrate greater willingness to support minority students in less demanding or less personally accountable contexts (Andersen et al., 2019, p. 442).

At first glance, prioritization may reflect the compassion and responsiveness expected from public servants. Yet these practices raise ethical concerns when considered from the perspective of the public good. Public resources are inherently limited, and civil servants are entrusted with their fair allocation. Prioritizing one client over another may unintentionally compromise the rights of others, while dedicating disproportionate time and effort to individual cases may reduce access to essential services for broader populations.

The second category of coping behavior, referred to as “moving away from clients,” involves emotional distancing and procedural responses such as routinizing and rationing. A third category, “moving against clients,” includes rigid rule-following and, in some cases, openly hostile interactions with service users (Tummers et al., 2015, p. 1108). These strategies reflect forms of disengagement that may produce dehumanized administrative interactions, echoing some of the negative consequences associated with rigid administrative neutrality. Such patterns may also reinforce discriminatory outcomes. Empirical studies have shown that people of color may face disadvantages in accessing welfare services and that African-American men are disproportionately subjected to harsher criminal justice outcomes (Andersen et al., 2019, p. 430).

Within this discretionary space, representative bureaucracy introduces additional ethical risks. The exercise of discretion may generate various forms of favoritism shaped by personal relationships and social identities. Close family ties may produce nepotism, shared identity may encourage tribalism, and broader social networks may facilitate cronyism or other forms of preferential treatment. In certain circumstances, personal or intimate relationships may further blur professional boundaries. Moreover, low public sector salaries and weak accountability mechanisms may create incentives for more explicit forms of corruption.

Conceptually, these patterns illustrate how discretion functions as a mediating mechanism between representation and ethical outcomes. Discretion creates opportunities for empathetic and responsive governance, yet it simultaneously introduces the risk that representation may translate into unequal treatment rather than equitable service delivery. These findings highlight the importance of institutional safeguards, professional norms, and organizational accountability in guiding the exercise of discretionary authority.

These risks become particularly pronounced in contexts where public trust in the civil service is low and violations of professional ethics carry limited consequences. Under such conditions, discretion may function less as a tool for equitable and responsive governance and more as a mechanism through which inequality and partiality are reproduced within public administration.

### *5.2 Representative Bureaucracy as a Sign of Moral Circle Expansion*

One might assume that Woodrow Wilson, who bequeathed to public administration both the politics–administration dichotomy and the principle of self-determination, should be regarded as a coherent moral figure. Yet his documented attitudes toward race reveal a striking contradiction. Wilson’s role in reinforcing racial segregation at Princeton University, which became widely known only later, provoked strong public reactions, including student demands to remove his statue as a symbol of institutional racism (Yaffe, 2016). This tension between intellectual legacy and moral failure invites deeper reflection.

One way to interpret this paradox is through the theory of moral circle expansion, which suggests that moral concern has gradually widened throughout history to include groups previously excluded or ignored (Singer, 1981). Throughout history, many societies have simultaneously advanced ideals of justice and maintained systems of exclusion. From this perspective, Wilson’s racial views appear less as a personal anomaly than as a reflection of the moral boundaries of his historical context.

Moral change, however, rarely occurs uniformly or simultaneously. Societies, institutions, and individuals often adopt new ethical standards at different speeds, while others remain anchored in familiar beliefs. The tendency to idealize influential thinkers through a “halo effect” may further obscure these contradictions, encouraging selective admiration while minimizing moral shortcomings. It is therefore plausible that future generations may judge contemporary societies for ethical blind spots that currently appear normalized, just as earlier generations failed to recognize the moral claims of groups now widely acknowledged as deserving equal consideration.

Within this broader ethical evolution, representative bureaucracy can be understood as an institutional response to moral circle expansion. As societal expectations change, public administration is increasingly expected to reflect and accommodate groups historically marginalized or excluded from decision-making processes. Accordingly, ethical expectations placed on bureaucrats are often higher than those applied to ordinary citizens, precisely because bureaucrats exercise discretionary authority over others (Thompson, 1985, p. 559).

At the same time, the relationship between representation and ethical outcomes remains complex. The distinction between passive and active representation highlights that shared background characteristics do not automatically translate into advocacy for minority interests. Empirical research indicates that neither belonging to a minority group nor working alongside minority colleagues necessarily produces more favorable attitudes toward marginalized populations (Coleman et al., 1998, p. 735). Political leadership offers a similar illustration: former German Chancellor Angela Merkel consistently resisted being framed as an advocate for women’s interests and instead adopted a gender-neutral political stance (Davidson-Schmich, 2011, pp. 326–327).

However, recent studies suggest an alternative mechanism linking passive or symbolic representation to policy outcomes, referred to as “contagion effects” (Meier, 2023, p. 29). This concept suggests that the mere presence of minority representatives within an

organization may influence the attitudes and behavior of their colleagues, increasing awareness of the challenges, experiences, and specific needs of underrepresented groups. This effect draws on insights from diversity management literature and contact theory in psychology, which emphasize the role of interpersonal interaction and organizational environment in shaping attitudes toward diversity (Meier, 2023, p. 29). More broadly, diversity, equity, and inclusion policies play an important role in fostering acceptance, tolerance, and responsiveness toward minority and socially vulnerable populations.

This conclusion also suggests a more hopeful implication. Effective representation does not require personal membership in a particular group. Education in public administration, combined with supportive organizational cultures, can equip bureaucrats with the knowledge and ethical competence necessary to act empathetically and responsibly toward diverse populations (Coleman et al., 1998, p. 738). This perspective highlights the importance of professional training and institutional design as mechanisms through which representative bureaucracy may contribute to ethical governance. Further research is therefore needed to examine educational and training programs that strengthen awareness and responsible action regarding minority issues among street-level bureaucrats.

## **6. Conclusion**

Does greater heterogeneity within the bureaucracy necessarily lead to increased equity and fairness in the public sector? Historically informed conceptual analysis suggests that the relationship is neither automatic nor straightforward. The evolution of the politics–administration dichotomy, particularly when examined through the ethical consequences of administrative indifference, reveals the potential risks of a bureaucracy that is formally neutral yet detached from social realities.

Representative bureaucracy emerged from the assumption that a civil service whose composition more closely reflects the society it serves would be more empathetic and responsive to the needs of historically marginalized groups. While shared background characteristics may increase the likelihood of sensitivity and understanding, representation alone does not guarantee ethical or equitable outcomes. Discretion remains the central mechanism through which administrative values and institutional norms are translated into everyday public service practices.

The conceptual analysis developed in this study demonstrates that representative bureaucracy operates within a broader institutional environment shaped by professional socialization, education, and organizational culture. If the question of representative bureaucracy is considered through the lens of nature versus nurture, both dimensions appear relevant. Individuals may be more inclined to empathize with those with whom they share certain social or cultural experiences, yet ethical sensitivity is not fixed or biologically determined. Professional norms and institutional learning processes can shape how discretion is exercised, allowing empathy and fairness to be cultivated rather than merely inherited.

The central implication of this study is that representative bureaucracy should not be treated as a self-sufficient solution to problems of inequality in public administration. Instead, its

ethical potential depends on the institutional contexts in which bureaucrats are trained, socialized, and held accountable. By integrating historical ethical reflection with contemporary representative bureaucracy theory, this study illustrates how conceptual and normative analysis can contribute to understanding governance challenges that are difficult to capture through empirical observation alone.

The conceptual framework developed in this study also provides several directions for future empirical research. First, scholars could examine how professional education and training influence the ethical exercise of bureaucratic discretion within representative bureaucracies. Longitudinal research designs could track cohorts of public administration graduates over time to assess whether exposure to diversity-focused curricula and ethics training affects discretionary decision-making patterns in professional practice.

Second, comparative cross-sectional studies could investigate how organizational culture moderates the relationship between workforce diversity and service equity. Research comparing agencies with strong diversity management programs to those with more traditional administrative cultures could help identify institutional conditions that strengthen or weaken the positive effects of representative bureaucracy.

Third, future research could explore how street-level bureaucrats navigate tensions between professional neutrality and empathetic responsiveness toward minority clients. Qualitative field studies and mixed-method approaches conducted in policy areas such as education, social welfare, healthcare, and immigration services would provide valuable insight into how discretionary authority is exercised in practice.

Fourth, experimental or quasi-experimental research designs could be used to examine whether citizens perceive services delivered by representative bureaucracies as more legitimate and trustworthy. Such studies could contribute to understanding the relationship between representation, public trust, and democratic accountability.

Finally, future research could investigate the potential risks associated with favoritism and social proximity within representative bureaucracies. Survey-based and organizational network analysis could examine whether shared identity between bureaucrats and clients influences resource allocation patterns, particularly in environments with weak accountability structures.

By pursuing these research directions, scholars can empirically evaluate the theoretical propositions developed in this study and deepen understanding of how representative bureaucracy operates within diverse democratic contexts.

More broadly, the study demonstrates the value of historically grounded conceptual analysis as a methodological strategy for examining ethical dilemmas in modern public administration. The arguments developed here are intended to clarify theoretical relationships and generate analytically grounded propositions that may guide future empirical research. Further investigation is therefore needed to examine how education and training programs in public administration can effectively promote equitable discretion while limiting the risks of favoritism and partiality.

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## Glossary

### *Administrative Neutrality*

The principle that civil servants implement policies impartially, without personal or political bias.

### *Bureaucratic Discretion*

The authority of public officials to interpret and apply rules in specific situations.

### *Descriptive Representation*

The extent to which bureaucrats’ demographic characteristics reflect those of the population.

### *Favoritism*

Unequal treatment based on personal relationships or social proximity rather than merit.

*Halo effect*

A cognitive bias in which a general positive or negative impression of a person, group, or institution shapes judgments about its specific characteristics or actions.

*Moral Circle Expansion*

The historical widening of ethical concern to include previously excluded groups.

*Politics–Administration Dichotomy*

The idea that policy-making belongs to elected officials, while administrators execute policy neutrally.

*Representative Bureaucracy*

The theory that a socially diverse public workforce enhances responsiveness and equity in public service.

*Street-Level Bureaucrats*

Frontline public servants who directly interact with citizens and exercise discretion.

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