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## **Between a rock and a hard place: The effect of conflicting norms in the bureaucracy on bureaucratic interference in politician preferences**

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### **Citation**

Hoksbergen, L. (2024). *Between a rock and a hard place: The effect of conflicting norms in the bureaucracy on bureaucratic interference in politician preferences.*

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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# **Between a rock and a hard place**

## **The effect of conflicting norms in the bureaucracy on bureaucratic interference in politician preferences**

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Public Administration: Economics & Governance

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Date: January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Understanding the process that influences the lives of millions of people in a democracy is of great importance, understanding always precedes improving. In the realm of Public Administration, the intricate yet much examined dynamic between bureaucrats and politicians stands as a cornerstone, their roles being indispensable to the seamless operation of a democratic system (Peters, 2010). If one wants to understand the process of how political decisions are made, one simply has to involve both the bureaucracy and politicians in their consideration. This inquiry extends beyond the theoretical realm; it reaches into the heart of governance, where policy choices hold the power to shape the lives of millions.

The relationship between bureaucrat and politician is ever-changing. If one wishes to understand how a political system operates, what precedes implementation of political decisions or which tasks within the system are responsible for which aspects of governance, it is of utmost importance to understand this complex relationship between politician and bureaucrat. Part of understanding this relationship includes knowing about the role of bureaucrats; what drives them to interfere in politician preferences? How do they go about this interference? What is deemed important by these bureaucrats, and how does their perspective on what is important impact their work and relationship with politicians? This thesis investigates these questions and delves into the complicated and unique relationship between politicians and bureaucrats.

Historically, scholars such as Weber and Wilson, who made several of the earliest important contributions to the topic of Public Administration and bureaucrat-politician relationships, have feared the disadvantageous consequences of a bureaucracy that is too powerful (Bach & Wegrich, 2020; Baekgaard et al., 2015; Christensen & Opstrup, 2018; Weber, 1922; Wilson, 1887). A bureaucracy that amasses too much power, could drive out the influence of an elected body of representatives, therefore seriously damaging the democratic justification of power exercised by the government. Even when elected representatives

remain powerful, we should be aware of how political decisions come to be, and what role is played by the bureaucracy. This is important for understanding the roles of different stakeholders in governance, and it helps us think about the system's possible flaws and how these can be improved. Understanding bureaucrats' reasons behind interfering in, or responding to, the preferences of their political principals is important in ensuring a fair process in a democratic system (Baekgaard et al., 2015). Recent examples of great influence in political decision-making by the bureaucracy can be found all around the world during the Covid-19 pandemic, with some scholars arguing that during this pandemic, a significant amount of power flowed from the political executive to the experts of bureaucracy, resulting in the exercised power not being as democratically justified as before the pandemic, leading to many protests by dissatisfied citizens (Andersen, 2022; Andersson et al., 2022).

### **The puzzle**

In an era marked by unprecedented challenges, where the forces of globalization and shifting societal values constantly reshape the landscape of public decision-making, understanding the motivations behind bureaucrats' capacity to sway politicians' preferences has never been more pertinent (Christensen & Opstrup, 2018). For well over a hundred years, students and scholars of Public Administration have studied the dilemma between the bureaucracy and politicians, wondering about how both bodies of power influence each other, and which role both have played in policy outcomes (Blom-Hansen et al., 2015). Some bureaucrats are motivated by public interest and have the public good in mind when influencing politicians. In other cases, bureaucrats are motivated by self-interest or a strong connection to their political superior at the cost of adherence to legal constraints. Explanations for both these types of motivations mentioned here are found in the work of Blom-Hansen, Baekgaard and Serritzlew (2020).

Depending on the what drives bureaucrats to influence politician preferences, societal problems could be identified. In order to address these, one has to understand the underlying mechanisms and norms that drive the work of bureaucrats. Do they blindly follow the orders of their political principals? This can be problematic because the expertise of the bureaucracy would be of no use in this case. Or are they affected by conflicting

norms, driving them to interfere in their political superiors' preferences? In this case, it is important to know to what extent these norms are prioritized by bureaucrats over political responsiveness, because according to democratic ideals, civil servants should be loyal to their political superiors (Baekgaard et al., 2015). But depending on the norms prioritized by civil servants, interference by bureaucrats in political superiors' preferences can also be beneficial for democratic ideals. For example, if transparency and adherence to legal constraints are prioritized over an order by the political principal that would go against these norms, one could argue for the beneficial effect on democratic ideals (Gailmard, 2010). That is why it is important to understand the mechanisms behind the decision-making process, as well as the roles played by various actors in politics, ranging from elected officials to the bureaucracy.

The three most important articles that provided the background and inspiration for this thesis are those of Christensen and Opstrup (2018), Blom-Hansen, Baekgaard and Serritzlew (2020) and Rimkuté and Van der Voet (2023). All of these studies examine the dynamics between politicians and the bureaucracy, focusing particularly on how the bureaucracy, influenced by specific norms and demands, influences politicians. This thesis studies the same relationship while building upon and adding to the literature mentioned here, as well as many other articles that have contributed to knowledge on the subject. The approach of this study is empirical. A qualitative design is used, utilizing both discrete choice models preceded by vignettes as well as open follow-up questions in a semi-structured interview to delve into how bureaucrats themselves perceive the importance of norms in the bureaucracy as compared to responsiveness to their political superiors. A more comprehensive explanation regarding the methodology of this thesis is found in chapter three.

## **Norms**

What is important to know for understanding the research question, and the rest of the thesis in general, is the definition of a norm. Cambridge dictionary offers several, more or less similar, definitions of a norm. All definitions presented are directly extracted from the Cambridge dictionary, but are similar to definitions from other sources such as the American

dictionary and Oxford dictionary. Three definitions will now be presented here (Cambridge dictionary, n.d).

*“An **accepted standard** or a way of **behaving** or **doing things** that most people agree with”*

*“A situation or type of **behaviour** that is **expected** and considered to be **typical**”*

*“An **accepted standard** or a way of **being** or **doing things**”*

Words that are repeated throughout these definitions are *expected, accepted, standard, way of doing things* and *behaviour*. It would be difficult to create clear consensus on what types of behaviour or “ways of doing things” can be considered accepted, expected or standard, and therefore the norm. However, for each of the independent variables, arguments will be given for why this behaviour is expected and/or accepted and therefore a norm. These can be found in the second chapter. During the interviews, respondents will also be asked whether these norms are familiar to them and their organization, to gain more knowledge about whether the respondents see these as norms within the bureaucracy.

### **Interference**

It is also helpful to briefly introduce the term interference in the context of this thesis. Bureaucrats can be said to interfere in politician preferences when, instead of directly obeying the orders received by their political superior, they try to interfere in order to make them change their mind. In order to be classified as interference, this interference does not need to be successful. Keep in mind that bureaucrats that do not directly obey the orders of their political superior because they wish to supply their superior with more context or information, can also be said to interfere in their politician’s preferences, even when the politician appreciates this interference. More on bureaucrat interference in politician preferences can be found in chapter two, under the conceptualization of the dependent variable.



## Research question

In this section, the research question is introduced, and the methods used to answer the question are briefly as well. To investigate the important relationship between politicians and bureaucrats, and the effects of this relationship on the decision-making process, this thesis addresses the following research question: *“How do conflicting norms influence bureaucrats’ interference in politician preferences?”*

To answer this question, a qualitative design has been utilized. Using vignettes, bureaucrats were presented with situations in which certain conflicting norms demand a response from them that oppose direct responsiveness to their political superior. Six bureaucrats were interviewed for this research, all of which work for Dutch municipalities. All of these respondents work and advise on tasks that come from an elected body, or representative in the municipality. These are either “wethouders” (aldermen) or members of the “gemeenteraad” (local council). These representatives are the politicians, and therefore relevant for this research. The characteristics of the respondents allow us to investigate how conflicting norms would influence whether and how these bureaucrats interfere in the preferences of their political executive. More details on the participants of the interviews can be found in chapter three.

The norms that are investigated are adherence to legal constraints, adherence to transparency; responsiveness to public demands, and responsiveness to reputational threats. These were chosen based on existing literature and because these norms can conflict with responsiveness to a political superior. More justification for the choice of these norms can be found in chapter two, where the independent variables are discussed in more depth.

After choosing a response to the vignettes, respondents were asked to elaborate on their decision through open questions in a follow-up semi-structured interview. The answers to these questions provide a better perspective on the respondents’ role and whether the situations presented were deemed realistic by them. The answers to these follow-up questions are the most important data in this research for answering the research questions.

This thesis focusses on reasons for why the bureaucracy would want to interfere in politician preferences; the trade-off between being politically responsive and thus obeying their political “masters”, and being adherent to conflicting norms faced by the bureaucracy that come at the cost of political responsiveness. In situations where demands to the bureaucracy are conflicting, do they prioritize serving the politicians’ needs at the cost of adherence to other norms? In order to understand the relationship between politicians and the bureaucracy, it is first important to understand the individual roles of both, and then the interplay between them.

### **Role of bureaucrats**

When studying the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats, it is important to know the role of bureaucrats in a well-functioning democracy. Bureaucrats often provide critical insights and expertise on complex policy matters, helping elected officials make informed decisions that align with the best interests of the public and the politicians they serve (Baekgaard et al., 2018). The role of bureaucrats is not to decide on the normative aspect of policy like elected politicians might do, but to offer well-researched recommendations and implement the policies formulated by the elected representatives through neutral competence (Gailmard, 2010; Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2023). As this is their main task, too much bureaucrat interference in politician preferences can have negative implications for a democracy. But be aware; their task it is not as simple or narrow as it might seem at first. On the one hand, their complex combination of responsibilities includes serving and obeying politicians, but on the other hand they also serve the public, as their task includes influencing policy decision-making in order to reach outcomes that benefit the public as a whole, all the while adhering to the legal constraints and bureaucratic norms, ensuring a fair process (Pfister & Horvath, 2014). For example, bureaucrats analyse policy plans of politicians and judge their feasibility, in this they are supported by their expertise which helps them to dissect the technical details of proposed policy. In a way, their task includes influencing the preferences that politicians have on policy based on the technical feasibilities and by introducing attractive potential alternatives that benefit both the public good and the politician that they serve. However, bureaucrats influencing politician preferences can be a sensitive topic. Earlier in this thesis, the consequences of a

bureaucracy that is too powerful were discussed; it can have negative implications for democratic governance (Bach & Wegrich, 2020; Baekgaard et al., 2015; Christensen & Opstrup, 2018; Peters, 1995). Interference by bureaucrats in politicians' preferences is not necessarily with bad intentions; bureaucrats might choose to respond to the public's demands because they lack democratic legitimacy and want to correct for this by responding directly to public demands and concerns (Alon-Barkat & Gilad, 2016; Rimkuté & Van der Voet, 2023). Interference by bureaucrats is in many situations even expected, as it is part of their consulting role.

### **Role of politicians**

Another important role discussed in this thesis, is that of a politician. A politician's power is legitimized by an electoral mandate, and people expect politicians to serve their interests. As representatives, politicians derive their power from the democratic process where citizens exercise their right to vote for individuals who they believe will effectively advocate for their concerns.

The essence of a politician's primary role lies in translating the needs and desires of their electorate into tangible policy outcomes. Through legislative actions, advocacy, and decision-making, politicians aim to implement policies that align with the interests and preferences of the constituency that has placed their trust in them during elections. Their preferences, as understood in this thesis, relate to their opinions, stances and decisions on any topic that they might work on (Epstein & Mershon, 1996). Understanding and dissecting these preferences are vital for comprehending the intricate dynamics of the political landscape and for understanding the mechanisms at play in the specific relationship between politicians and bureaucrats that this thesis is interested in.

### **Politicians and bureaucracy; their relationship**

Politicians and bureaucrats have a special relationship within governance. Understanding this relationship is of great importance for studying this topic and this relationship is therefore briefly introduced in this section.

Politicians are elected by the people and therefore justified to exercise power and introduce legislation. The role of the bureaucracy involves analysing policy legislation through a lens of expertise, judging the feasibility of proposed plans as well as other possible consequences. The main function of bureaucrats is to assist and advise politicians, and implement the decisions that they make while guiding them through the technical difficulties that politicians might overlook because of their focus on the normative aspects of policy (Alesina & Tabellini, 2007). Bureaucrats often interfere in politician preferences, it is inherent to their job. They might interfere in order to steer politicians in a policy direction that is more feasible, or because they believe a certain norm requires them to do so. A reason for not interfering in politicians' preferences is to serve them by being responsive to their demands, as civil servants might believe that responsiveness to their political superiors is an important part of their role; they should simply obey their principals. If politicians would have full control over the bureaucracy, or if bureaucrats would have total control over politicians, then what situations would come to be?

In the hypothetical case that the bureaucracy has full control over politicians, bureaucrats will rule the system, from the implementation of policy to judging the normative aspects of it. In this unlikely situation, voting yields no benefit as the politicians one would vote into office are under full control by the bureaucracy. As mentioned, this situation is highly unlikely, but it does show why bureaucratic influence over politician preferences can be a sensitive topic. In the opposite hypothetical situation where politicians have full control over the bureaucracy, politicians will have full control over policy implementation without any expertise ensuring efficient, feasible and/or fair implementation. In both these hypothetical situations, the bureaucracy has strayed far from its intended role of being an impartial body of experts to the political body.

### **Introduction of norms**

In this section, the norms chosen to be investigated in this thesis briefly introduced. This section provides only a brief introduction of the norms, a more elaborate discussion of the chosen norms can be found in chapter two. Relevant articles related to these norms are referenced and examples are provided of situations in which the corresponding norms generate demands conflicting with direct political responsiveness. These particular norms

have been chosen to build upon the important work mentioned in the introduction, mainly the work of Christensen and Opstrup (2018), while retaining a norm that is deemed of extra importance in previous literature, therefore investigating this important norm through a new lens and method, while adding new norms to the study as well. The effect of the norm of adherence to legal constraints on political responsiveness has been investigated by Christensen and Opstrup (2018), but was deemed so influential that the decision was made to include this norm in this research as well. The qualitative design of this study also leads to a different analysis than that of Christensen and Opstrup, therefore building upon their work. The choice of the other three norms is inspired by previous literature on the topic, and these norms were chosen as they are more specific and allow us to even better demarcate specific factors driving bureaucrats to try and influence the preferences of their political superiors.

This thesis examines how conflicts between political responsiveness and four competing norms affect bureaucrats' willingness to influence political preferences. One of these norms faced by civil servants in the bureaucracy, is **adherence to legal constraints**. This affects to what extent they try to interfere in politician preferences in a situation where demands from political superiors and the norm of adherence to legal constraints conflict (Christensen & Opstrup, 2018). Bureaucratic choices and procedures can be, and are, limited by legal constraints as courts can judge the legality of these actions (Hammond & Knott, 1996). If a court decides that the actions taken by a bureaucratic organization are unjust or illegal, it would have a negative impact on the agency represented by the corresponding bureaucrat. A prominent example of a bureaucrat that had to make a choice in this trade-off, is of Mark Felt, a high ranking FBI agent and director involved in the Watergate scandal. Government officials were pressured by political superiors ranking as high as the president to remain silent and cover up the scandal (O'Connor, 2006). Mark Felt chose to share details about the scandal to the public under a secret alias, knowing that the FBI operation in which buildings were broken into, was illegal. At a later age he revealed himself to be the person that revealed the scandal to the public. He chose to prioritize adherence to legal constraints over responsiveness to his political superiors.

The second norm to be introduced, which can conflict with political responsiveness, is the norm of **adherence to transparency**. This norm is often associated with democratic governance and adherence to transparency might therefore be expected of a bureaucrat in a democracy (Hood, 2007). Examples that show how the norm of transparency can conflict with responsiveness to political superiors can be found in the many cases of whistleblowing where bureaucrats share sensitive government secrets with the public. One particular example being the leak of classified NSA documents by Edward Snowden (Hosenball, 2013). He chose to prioritize transparency at the cost of responsiveness to his political principal. His adherence to transparency and choice not to be responsive to his superiors was not appreciated; he was prosecuted and fled to Russia looking for political asylum, spending the rest of his days there (CNN, 2013).

**Responsiveness to public demands** is the third bureaucratic norm to be introduced that might conflict with political responsiveness. Public demands, as conceptualized in this thesis, refers to demands originating from citizens. This norm is unique among the four chosen as it is the source of the demand that defines it, instead of the content as is the case with the other three norms. A reason for bureaucrats to prioritize public demands over political responsiveness can be the need to correct for their democratic legitimacy deficit (Alon-Barkat & Gilad, 2016). As discussed earlier, bureaucrats' power is not legitimized by an electoral mandate, therefore they might feel the need to legitimize their power by directly responding to public demands at the cost of political responsiveness in situation where these two norms bring about conflicting demands from the bureaucracy. The mechanism explaining this behaviour is known as the legitimacy-deficit mechanism. An example of this norm influencing bureaucrats, is when a civil servant might interfere in the preferences of political superiors when these preferences clearly oppose strong public demands. A servant might, as in the example of Covid policy, tell their superior to think twice about a policy that limits the freedom of citizens after protests by these citizens have increasingly become more common and intense. This choice can again be motivated by the bureaucrats' adherence to the public good, grounded in Public Service Motivation (PSM) (Gailmard, 2010). Informing political principals on demands by the public can also be seen as an inherent part of a bureaucrat's advising job, as they are there to sketch the complete picture for politicians so that these politicians can make a well informed decision.

**Responsiveness to reputational threats** is the fourth and last norm to be introduced.

Bureaucrats represent an organization, they are interested in their organization being as best equipped as possible to handle the tasks that they are assigned. The capacity in handling these tasks rests heavily on the reputation of their organization as perceived by the public, those responsible for funding and/or overseeing the organization and other stakeholders. We define reputation following the work of Carpenter and Krause; *“...organizational reputation [is] a set of beliefs about an organization’s capacities, intentions, history, and mission that are embedded in a network of multiple audiences”* (2012, p. 26). For bureaucrats, a good organizational reputation is critical. A better reputation for their organization results in more credibility and therefore more effectiveness in approaching tasks (Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2023). Empirical studies have also shown that bureaucrats are driven by intrinsic motivations to do their work, such as norms and values related to professionalism and loyalty (Gailmard, 2010; Pierre & Peters, 2017). Part of what constitutes these values, is upholding a good organizational reputation. We focus on reputational threats originating from sources that, if prioritized, would come at the cost of political responsiveness. For example, bureaucrats might want to interfere in politician preferences if they prioritize the reputation of their organization over the demands by their political principals, if these demands pose a danger to the reputation of their agency.

The norms introduced here are similar, but still different as is explained in this brief section. All norms can be said to find their roots in responding to interests other than those of political principals. While it's therefore very simple to envision scenarios where a demand could fall into multiple, or even all of the norms discussed in this thesis, we ensure that the demands stemming from the outlined norms are specified. This specification enables a clearer categorization of a norm under one particular category rather than another, even if one could argue that more than one norm categories can cover the content. This allows us to introduce vignettes that clearly cover one specific norm, instead of being able to be categorized under more than one norm. More information regarding these vignettes can be found in the operationalization section of chapter three. All norms introduced here are elaborated on in chapter two.

### **Prior research on the topic of politician-bureaucrat relationships**

In this section, existing literature on the topic of politician-bureaucrat relationships is presented, as well as its contributions to this thesis. At the same time, this section also introduces how this thesis builds upon this existing literature by making new contributions, resulting in a thesis that is different in its approach, narrower in scope and content, and poised to advance the understanding of bureaucrat-politician relationships in new ways. This work adds to the topic mainly by studying the effect of the bureaucracy on the political executive instead of the other way around, and by using qualitative methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the relationship as opposed to the many large-N studies already conducted. Four ways in which this thesis adds to the prior research on the topic will be discussed.

This study is inspired by, and builds upon, other Public Administration literature on the topic of politician-bureaucrat relationships. The three most important articles being Christensen and Opstrup (2018), Blom-Hansen, Baekgaard and Serritzlew (2020) and Rimkuté and Van der Voet (2023). These three studies all investigate the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians. Christensen and Opstrup, as well as Blom-Hansen, Baekgaard and Serritzlew have used large-N survey methods to conduct their research. Rimkuté and Van der Voet use a similar, mixed-method design using a survey combined with a semi-structured interview. These authors all rely on quantitative data to establish a relationship, just like the research conducted by Baekgaard, Blom-Hansen, and Serritzlew (2022). In their concluding remarks, Baekgaard and his colleagues advise that researchers with an interest in the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats delve deeper into the relationship. They state that their large-N survey-based approach lacks the capacity to reveal the underlying factors contributing to the considerable variation in interaction dynamics between politicians and bureaucrats. Pierre and Peters (2017), also pave a path for us to dive into the question of what motivates bureaucrats to influence politician preferences. However, they give the same advice for future research as the work discussed in the prior section. They state: “Understanding the incentives and motivations of public sector employees is a prerequisite for effective management, and for effective administrative reform and auditing reform”



(2017, p. 158). Pierre and Peters encourage a comprehensive exploration of the factors driving bureaucrats to interfere in shaping political preferences.

A first contribution that this thesis makes to the existing literature, is that it relies on small-N, qualitative data rather than quantitative data. As we are interested in “how” conflicting norms influence bureaucrats, a qualitative approach is essential to gaining a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms driving a bureaucrats’ prioritization of one issue over the other. This is essential to understanding how, when and why bureaucrats influence their political superiors.

Rimkuté and Van der Voet advise future researchers to “consider using richer and more context-specific manipulations to strengthen external validity” (p. 22). Hence, this study aims to extend their research by offering additional contextual insights into the trade-off scenarios used to elicit responses from the participants.

Therefore, a second way in which this study adds to the existing literature is by using the semi-structured design of the interview to give more context to the respondents about the situations they are presented with. This design also allows the interviewer to change or add questions depending on whether the respondent understands the question and whether the respondent’s answer is satisfactory. Such an answer can also provide more insights that might not have been apparent before, the semi-structured design of the interview allows the interviewer to adapt to these new insights and ask extra questions based on these insights. The interviews also allow respondents to sketch context themselves in order to give a clear answer to the questions, this adds to the in-depth knowledge that is obtained, while also creating a clearer image of which situations are encountered by respondents at work.

A third way in which this study adds upon existing literature, and the work of Rimkuté and Van der Voet specifically, is that it focusses on the effect of specific conflicting norms on bureaucrat interference in politician preferences, whereas the study of Rimkuté and Van der Voet focusses on the effect of external demands’ sources, content and salience. Although there are definitely similarities, the approach and content of this study is different from, and adds to, that of Rimkuté and Van der Voet.

Consensus appears to emerge among scholars who have delved into this subject; the bureaucracy has been left out for too long when studying who or what influences the policy agenda (Baekgaard et al., 2018; Workman, 2015). Many studies in this field have primarily examined whether and how politicians influence bureaucratic actions (May & Winter, 2009; Meier & O'Toole, 2006; Nyadera & Islam, 2020).

Therefore, a fourth way in which this thesis adds to the prior literature on the topic is by studying the same relationship, but then inversed; the influence of bureaucrats on politicians. This direction of the relationship is less commonly researched than the influence of politicians on bureaucrats.

This thesis builds upon the literature available on the topic by using a different method and goal, and by following the advice that authors have given in existing literature on the topic. In this way this thesis will be unique among the work discussed, while still building on the data obtained by these authors.

### **Societal relevance**

This study can have relevant implications for society and Public Administration practice in three ways. First, implications for democratic governance are discussed. Secondly, the importance of knowing how, when and why bureaucrats influence politicians is discussed. Finally, the relevance of this study in the academic world is briefly touched upon.

If bureaucrats adhere to politicians' preferences while ignoring legal constraints and other professional norms, concerns about the implication for democracy can be valid (Pfister & Horvath, 2014; Enste & Heldman, 2017). However, bureaucrats that are totally unresponsive to the requests of their political masters also go against what we generally understand to be democratic ideals (Baekgaard et al., 2015). If such a relationship is discovered, it would also open the door to contemplating the concept of a representative bureaucracy. Studying this concept in future research might help to counteract the possibly undemocratic nature of unelected officials affecting political decision making to a high extent. The study of this topic holds societal relevance in part due to the prevailing concerns regarding the state of democracy. As also found in the work of Pierre and Peters (2017), studying the relationship

between bureaucrats and politicians is essential for effective management, administrative reform and auditing reform.

The potential revelation of bureaucrats interfering in politicians' preferences for the betterment of the public raises concerns about the legitimacy of a democratic system in two distinct ways. Firstly, it prompts us to think about whether bureaucrats, even with the intention of benefiting the public, should intrude upon the shaping of elected politicians' preferences. Secondly, if we accept that bureaucrats' intervention in altering politician preferences is indeed beneficial, implying that politicians may not be effectively fulfilling their duties on their own, we must contemplate whether the political system has properly allocated the responsibilities of safeguarding the public welfare. Although these are normative questions, this study is not a normative and therefore does not take a stance on categorizing interference by bureaucrats as inherently "good" or "bad." However, it does lay the groundwork for future research to assess the normative implications of the results.

The goal of this thesis is to understand how, when and why bureaucrats interfere in the preferences of their political superiors. This information can help us better understand the relation between bureaucrat and politician. Understanding this relationship is essential for creating and maintaining a political system that is effective, ethical and accountable. Gaining knowledge about how, when and why bureaucrats influence politician preferences, brings us a step closer to correctly understanding the complex political system that forms the platform where the decisions made impact the lives of millions. Understanding this complex system is essential for identifying problems and points of improvement. At the same time, understanding this system might help to find ways to solve current problems and to improve the system, or to maintain and protect that which is essential to it. Even just the simple improvement of peoples' understanding of the system that rules them can be deemed relevant for society.

Another addition of this thesis will be to the academic community. As discussed in the section on prior research, this thesis' approach to the topic and question are new and therefore add to the existing literature. At the same time, this work will become part of the

research on the topic, and might inspire and help other scholars to continue research on this topic. This adds to the societal relevance of this work.

### **Organization of thesis**

So far, the research question and background for studying this topic prior to this section have been discussed.

In the following chapter, chapter two, theoretical background is presented. Here, the variables relevant for this thesis are discussed, and what is already known about the relationship between professional norms influencing bureaucrats, and their interference in politician preferences when faced with conflicting norms, is outlined.

Chapter three introduces the appropriate methodology for our goals and discusses how the design is suitable for answering our research question. In this chapter, the field work of this study is explained, from the operationalization of the variables to the empirical setting of the study.

In chapter four, the results are presented. The most relevant results that were obtained from the respondents are outlined here. This is done with help of tables and examples in the form of citations extracted from the interview transcripts.

In the fifth and last chapter, the main elements of this thesis are briefly summarized. Most importantly, answers to the research question are presented here as we reflect back on the main elements of this thesis. Limitations are presented, logically followed by recommendations for further research and implications of the conclusion.

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical framework

In this chapter, the theoretical framework that underpins our exploration of the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians is discussed. Our endeavour is driven by three primary objectives, each essential in shaping the lens through which we perceive this complex dynamic.

First, the relevant independent and dependent variables are examined as well as conceptualized in order to provide a clear framework that this study is based upon. First the dependent variable is examined by conceptualizing the variable and then discussing research on this variable, relevant for the exact relationship that we are interested in. Similar research by scholars on the same variables is used in order to provide a theoretical background of the variable.

Secondly, we do the same for the identified independent variables, as well as relating these to the dependent variable.

Thirdly, for the relationship between the dependent variable and each of the independent variables, hypotheses are formulated. These are grounded in literature on the topic of Public Administration and bureaucrat-politician relationships specifically.

#### **Dependent variable**

In this thesis, the goal is to answer the following question: *“How do conflicting norms influence bureaucrats interference in politician preferences?”*

The relationship here is that between conflicting norms and bureaucrat interference in politician preferences. Therefore, our dependent variable is *bureaucrat interference in politician preferences*. As this variable includes several concepts, it is dissected in two parts that are defined separately before being discussed as one part. This clarification of separate parts is essential for establishing the variable as a concise and coherent concept.

## **Bureaucrat**

The first term encountered in the dependent variable is bureaucrat, this term is crucial in this thesis. In the very least, a bureaucrat is a member of a bureaucracy. Therefore we have to define and conceptualize a bureaucracy, and we can see a bureaucrat as someone who is a member of a bureaucracy in the way that it is conceptualized here. Oxford Dictionaries defines a bureaucrat as “an official in a government department, in particular one perceived as being concerned with procedural correctness at the expense of people's needs” (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d). An interesting point comes to mind. This dictionary states that bureaucrats are concerned with procedural correctness at the expense of people’s needs. Most will agree that bureaucrats are concerned with procedural correctness, but this thesis argues that being responsive to people’s needs can actually be seen as a part of a bureaucrat’s job, without procedural correctness necessarily being at the expense of people’s needs. This shows that however one would define a bureaucrat, there is not necessarily a clear consensus on the details of the definition.

## **Characteristics of a bureaucrat**

Max Weber, one of the earliest scholars researching the bureaucracy in the topic of public administration, named several characteristics inherent to a bureaucrat. Essentially all research on the topic of bureaucracy is built upon his work in some way, be it indirectly. A few important and relevant points are presented here in order to better understand our conceptualization of a bureaucrat (Constas, 1958; Weber, 1922, 1925):

*“They are personally free and appointed to their position on the basis of conduct.”*

A bureaucrat is appointed on the basis of merit, which makes them distinct from politicians who are elected by the people.

*“They must exercise their judgment and their skills, but their duty is to place these at the service of a higher authority. Ultimately they are responsible only for the impartial execution of assigned tasks and must sacrifice their personal judgment if it runs counter to their official duties.”*

This relates to a point previously made in this thesis; a bureaucrat should remain neutral in their work, and not let personal opinion or ideology interfere in their judgment of policies and regulation. Neutral competence is expected of a bureaucrat.

*“Bureaucratic control is the use of rules, regulations, and formal authority to guide performance. It includes such things as budgets, statistical reports, and performance appraisals to regulate behaviour and results.”*

This point shows that bureaucrats deal with the technical aspects of regulating, analysing, judging and guiding the work by politicians, e.g. policy-making.

*“They are organized in a clearly defined hierarchy of offices.”*

This is inherent to bureaucracies of all types and helps in identifying bureaucratic organizations. Bureaucrats are always accountable to an office higher up which characterizes the interactions that they have with their colleagues.

The most important characteristic of a bureaucrat for this thesis is that they should advise politicians on issues through neutral competence. One can argue that not all bureaucrats advise politicians, but the ones that we are interested are concerned with delivering advice, directly or indirectly through different methods. This is important as this thesis is interested in the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians, and bureaucrat with no ties to political superiors are therefore of no use for answering the research question investigated by this study. We can therefore see the bureaucrats in our dependent variable as experts who work on tasks assigned to them, directly or indirectly, by a political executive. As the bureaucrats that this study is interested in are public servants, both terms are used interchangeably to refer to the same individuals performing the task described in this section.

In this section, our dependent variable, bureaucrat interference in politician preferences, has been dissected and the focus has been on the bureaucrat part of the variable. Several definitions and characteristics for bureaucrats have been presented, as well as the fact that there is no clear and strict consensus on what defines a bureaucrat. The type of bureaucrat that this thesis investigates is conceptualized, and an explanation is given for this

conceptualization. In the next section, the remaining part of the dependent variable, “interference in politician preferences”, undergoes the same treatment.

### **Bureaucratic interference in politician preferences**

In this section, the second part of our dependent variable, interference in politician preferences, is conceptualized and an answer is given to the question; When can a bureaucrat be said to have interfered in politician preferences?

Our study investigates the choice a bureaucrat makes in a trade-off between political responsiveness and conflicting norms. Showing when a bureaucrat does not interfere in politician preferences can be helpful in understanding when they do. I argue that one can speak off no (or very little) interference in politician preferences when bureaucrats prioritize political responsiveness over other conflicting norms. When a bureaucrat is politically responsive, he is responsive to the demands of his political principal and directly obeys them, which essentially entails that he does not interfere in politician preferences (Christensen & Opstrup, 2018).

This study does not conceptualize interference in preferences as the successful altering of politician preferences, but rather as an attempt by a bureaucrat to change politician preferences. We call this attempt to alter politician preferences, interference. For example; in a situation where a bureaucrat prioritizes anything else other than full and immediate responsiveness to his political principal, he might try to interfere and convince the principal to change his mind on a subject while still, even if delayed, executing the task in question.

If the bureaucrat, in this same situation, chooses to prioritize the preferences of the politician (e.g. quick implementation of a policy) over the conflicting norm, the bureaucrat can be said to not have interfered in politician preferences. We therefore see interference in politician preferences as an opposite to full political responsiveness.

To conclude, a bureaucrat can be said to interfere in politician preferences when they do not directly obey the order by their political executive and therefore make an attempt, whether successful or unsuccessful, to influence and change the preferences held by a politician regarding a given subject. Bureaucratic interference in politician preferences is



therefore seen as a type of behaviour that is acted upon by a bureaucrat when they prefer adherence to a certain bureaucratic norm over direct political responsiveness.

### **Independent variables**

In this section, the independent variables are discussed in more detail, and hypotheses for each independent variable's relation to the dependent variable are stated. When these hypotheses are reflected upon in chapter five, we treat "bureaucrats" in the hypothesis as the ones that have taken part in this research as respondents to the interviews.

As this study investigates the effect of conflicting norms on bureaucrat interference in politician preferences, the independent variables consist of several professional norms experienced by bureaucrats that can, in certain situations, form a trade-off between these norms and political responsiveness, the dependent variable in this study. In this section the norms that were chosen for this study are presented and the choice for these norms is justified. Each norm presented is accompanied by a discussion of possible effects the norm could have on the dependent variable. An explanation for why specific types of behaviour conceptualized in these independent variables can be regarded as norms, is also given in each second paragraph of an independent variable subheading.

Therefore, the discussion also addresses why the norm could conflict with political responsiveness, which relates to the assessment of bureaucrat interference in politician preferences. The pertinent information regarding these norms is introduced, drawing upon previous research conducted by scholars in the same field to provide a comprehensive foundation for the discussion.

The independent variables to be discussed are the following; adherence to legal constraints, adherence to transparency; responsiveness to public demands, and responsiveness to reputational threats.

#### **Adherence to legal constraints**

The first independent variable to be discussed is adherence to legal constraints. This is a professional norm that can conflict with political responsiveness when faced by bureaucrats, and therefore provoke interference in politician preferences by bureaucrats. Political principals, such as ministers, might urge bureaucrats to circumnavigate certain rules or rig policy analysis to help them quickly arrive at their preferred outcome (Christensen &

Opstrup, 2018). Adherence to legal constraints is conceptualized in the following manner. In this research, we can speak of adherence to legal constraints (over political responsiveness) when a public servant interferes in politician preferences by invoking the legality of the content or procedure associated with a demand from a political principal. This includes adherence to all regulations and rules set out by the government and, more specifically, the organization employing the bureaucrat. Our conceptualization therefore relies on the arguments used by the public servant in question and/or how bureaucrats themselves would label the reason for their interference in the preferences of their political superiors.

Adherence to legal constraints can be seen as a norm, as bureaucrats are bound by legal constraints in their day to day work, and are expected to take these in consideration (Pierre & Peters, 2017). Adherence to legal constraints therefore is an accepted, and even expected and standard type of behaviour. Bureaucrats working in their organization would expect their colleagues, regardless of their rank, to keep in mind the legal constraints guiding their work. Under normal circumstances, not adhering to legal constraints would be frowned upon in a Western bureaucracy. Because of these simple reasons, adherence to legal constraints is without a doubt a norm within the context of public servants working in a bureaucracy.

Pierre & Peters (2017) name adherence to legality and procedural integrity as one of the important characteristics of a bureaucracy, at least in a trust-based regime, the type most often found in Western democracies. In the earlier mentioned Watergate scandal, public servants were urged to break rules by their political principals (O'Connor, 2016). The trade-off between adherence to legal constraints and political responsiveness is therefore one that can be deemed realistic in a bureaucrat's career. Even in certain situations where political principals do not urge bureaucrats to break the rules, and where these principals might not even be aware of the legal ambiguity of their requests, a trade-off might have to be made by public servants. Do they question the legality of the requests made by their political principals and therefore try to interfere in their preferences? Or do they prioritize political responsiveness and obey their superior without question?

Research has found that adherence to legal constraints is important to bureaucrats for several reasons. First of all, when not adhering to legal constraints, bureaucrats are at risk of losing their job (Zwerling & Silver, 1992). Secondly, as research has shown that most bureaucrats choosing to serve the public are motivated by PSM, we would assume that these people, interested in providing what is best for the public and their organization that serves the public, would adhere to the legal constraints set out by the organization that employs them (Gailmard, 2010). Thirdly, in trust-based regimes which form the basis of governmental bureaucracies in most Western democracies, adherence to rules and regulations is a fundamental part of what characterizes a bureaucracy. Public servants' idea of proper behaviour is based on the legal framework constraining the bureaucracy (Christensen & Opstrup, 2018; Pierre & Peters, 2017). In combination with the belief that bureaucrats truly value proper behaviour, grounded in PSM, one could argue that the very framework a bureaucracy is built upon inspires its public servants to adhere to legal constraints. This also provides another argument for why adherence to legal constraints can be seen a norm in the bureaucracy. Lastly, to uphold organizational image, believed to be deemed important by most public servants representing an organization, it is important to adhere to legal constraints to prevent losing credibility among the public or superior departments or organizations (Carpenter & Krause, 2012; Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2023).

Based on the logic and theories expounded, hypothesis 1 is articulated as follows:

- *Hypothesis 1: When faced by demands grounded in the norm of adherence to legal constraints, bureaucrats will interfere in politician preferences.*

### **Adherence to transparency**

Transparency is often seen an important characteristic of democratic government organizations. A general definition of transparency, in the context of governance, is the following: *“the notion of government according to stable and known rules, the notion of maximum social openness and exposure to public scrutiny from every quarter and the notion of freedom of information in the sense of public access to government documents”* (Hood, 2007, p. 193). Transparency can come at the cost of political responsiveness. As mentioned in the example given in the introductory section of this thesis, a typical case of transparency

at the cost of political responsiveness is the occurrence of whistleblowing; a situation where a government official or someone else with access to sensitive and/or classified information shares this information with the public, even though their superiors demand this information to remain hidden. Bauhr and Grimes provide a definition of whistleblowing in the context of the public sector: *“the disclosure by organization members (former or current) of illegal, immoral or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to effect action”* (2012, p. 8). Whistle-blowers possess a personal connection to, and are susceptible to, reprisals from individuals in positions of authority. Some whistleblowers, like Mark Felt, are lucky and are not sanctioned or prosecuted. This might be explained by changing leadership sharing certain interests with Mark, allowing him to stay incognito until a late age (O’Connor, 2006). Others, like Edward Snowden, are less fortunate and have to spend their lives in exile. These examples clearly show that adherence to transparency, in the context of public sector bureaucracy, can be a difficult trade-off between being transparent and being responsive to a political superior.

These extreme examples are used to sketch an image of why transparency could conflict with political responsiveness. However, they do not show why adherence to transparency can be deemed a norm. Within Western bureaucracies, as the one studied in this thesis, openness of affairs can be regarded as accepted and standard behaviour. Fenster (who has made important contributions to the topic of transparency as an administrative norm) even calls the importance of transparency as an administrative norm for bureaucrats “self-evident” (2015, p. 1). A more transparent government, of which the bureaucracy would be an important part, will increase the accountability and legitimacy of a state. Within Western states, public servant behaviour that increases transparency is therefore often expected, and at least accepted and preferred. Adherence to transparency within the bureaucracy can therefore be seen as a norm within the bureaucracy.

Adherence to transparency, as conceptualized in this thesis, refers to allowing the public access to (sensitive) government documents, decisions and many other forms of information. We conceptualize adherence to transparency as bureaucrats being open to the public. Inherent to this is allowing the public access to information and exposing this

information to public scrutiny. Also important to this openness, is transparency in cases where bureaucrats are aware that sharing the sensitive information in question with the public is of great importance for general democratic values (as is the case in the information shared by Mark Felt and Edward Snowden) (Satter, 2020). This conceptualization is inspired by the definition given by Hood (2007). In measuring this, we only focus on situations where the norm of adherence to transparency comes at the expense of political responsiveness, and therefore provokes interference in politician preferences. This makes measurement of the trade-off that bureaucrats would make more feasible.

Adherence to transparency comes with the danger of disapproval by political principals, as well as dangers of losing bureaucratic efficiency. However, it might also lead to appraisal by the public. But most importantly, transparency can be regarded a norm within the bureaucracies supporting democratic states, and we can therefore imagine public servants to interfere in the preferences of politicians for the sake of adherence to this norm of transparency. Hypothesis 2 of this thesis is therefore as follows:

- *Hypothesis 2: When faced by demands grounded in the norm of adherence to transparency, bureaucrats will interfere in politician preferences.*

### **Responsiveness to public demands**

Another norm faced by public servants, is responsiveness to public demands. This norm is unique among the others as it is defined by source rather than content. Responsiveness to public demands can be understood as being aware of, and taking into account, demands from the public. In this research that would mean that bureaucrats who are responsive to public demands, try to interfere in politician preferences based on demands from the public. Many believe elected politicians to be the only legitimate representatives on the wishes of the public, and public bureaucracies to only attend to elected officials. Bureaucracies, according to this line of reasoning, are structured to primarily heed their elected political superiors, while democratic principles often imply that civil servants should be responsive only to their political executive (Baekgaard et al., 2015; McCubbins, 1985; Rimkuté & Van der Voet, 2023). Why can responsiveness to public demands by bureaucrats even be argued

to be a norm? And why would bureaucrats try to be responsive to the public demands directly?

In this thesis, we can say that a bureaucrat interfering in the preferences of his/her political executive (whether successful or not) for the sake of shining light on demands from the public, is being responsive to public demands. Public servants, having chosen their job mostly for the betterment of the public, are expected to involve preferences of the public in their considerations during their day to day job (Gailmard, 2010). An example of a bureaucratic organization being responsive to public demands is the European Central Bank (ECB). The ECB, without political intervention, responded to complaints stemming from the public by enhancing the quality of its public communications (Moschella et al., 2020). This was done to confront democratic legitimacy concerns among the public, this idea will be further discussed in following sections to explain why bureaucrats would be responsive to public demands. This behaviour of addressing public demands among public servants is accepted, and bureaucrats are expected to serve the state for the betterment of the public. More importantly, bureaucrats are expected to consult their political principals, this includes taking into account public demands when advising the executive. We therefore argue that responsiveness to public demands can be deemed a norm within the bureaucracy.

There are however also reasons for bureaucrats to not interfere in politician preferences in the face of conflicting wishes by the public. As mentioned earlier in this section, bureaucracies are designed to have bureaucrats be accountable to elected officials. Some would argue that interfering in politician preferences to respond to public wishes is not justified, as being responsive to the public is the job of the elected superior (Baekgaard et al., 2015; McCubbins, 1985; Rimkuté & Van der Voet, 2023). In other words, it is simply not part of their job, and this behaviour and prioritization might not be rewarded by the organization they work for. Secondly, bureaucrats' strategic prioritization of certain political principals' demands is not a result of blind adherence to all directives but a deliberate approach aimed at fostering a bureaucratic image that corresponds with credibility, legal diligence, and effectiveness. It is not just about adhering to legal requirements and ethical norms, but also about optimizing the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the bureaucracy

and the organization's image. This gives reason to believe bureaucrats could prioritize political responsiveness over responsiveness to public demands (Rimkuté & Van der Voet, 2023).

However, the work of Gailmard (2010) provides some important arguments for us to believe that public servants do at times respond to public demands as opposed to only their elected superiors.

First, according to the theory of PSM, bureaucrats are motivated by achieving what they believe to be beneficial to the public. Gailmard also argues that on top of public servants being motivated by responsiveness to public demands, there is no reason to believe that this vision that bureaucrats have of "good public policy" is the same vision as adopted by the elected officials they are supposed to be serving by design of the bureaucracy.

Another reason for bureaucrats to respond to public demands, apart from through the wishes of their political principals, is that bureaucrats can be motivated by the need to correct for their democratic legitimacy deficit (Alon-Barkat & Gilad, 2016). Bureaucrats have no electoral mandate that justifies their position of power which can result in them trying to correct for this deficit by directly responding to the public, as is the case in the example of the ECB, discussed in a prior section. This might come at the cost of responsiveness to political superiors as they will have to interfere in politician preferences (Peters, 1995).

Following the arguments made, the third hypothesis is as follows:

- *Hypothesis 3: When faced by demands grounded in the norm of adherence to public demands, bureaucrats will interfere in politician preferences.*

### **Responsiveness to reputational threats**

Another objective within the public bureaucracy is the preservation of organizational reputation. This preservation requires responsiveness to reputational threats. In many cases it is in the interest of both the bureaucrat as well as the political superior to preserve the reputation of the organization represented. But in other cases, upholding the reputation of the organization as perceived by those external to it, means interfering in the preferences of the political executive. For example, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) is regularly

confronted with the task of having to make a decision when faced by conflicting norms. The EMA has to remain independent, but political leaders of member states play a strong role in the decision-making process, resulting in most EMA members stating the agency is neither fully independent nor fully dependent (Makhashvili & Stephenson, 2013). This means that public servants in the agency are faced with having to make a trade-off decision between providing independent analysis and good outcomes as to preserve their organizational reputation, and being responsive to their political superiors that fund, and decide on, the organization's future.

Again, it is important to explain why responsiveness to reputational threats can be deemed a norm. A bureaucracy is defined by a hierarchy of offices, and these agencies often deploy hundreds of people. These people all share common goals, that are defined by the shared objectives of the organization they represent. The theory of bureaucratic reputation underscores strategic factors, proposing that bureaucrats exhibit higher responsiveness to external demands when these pose a threat to the reputation of their organization (Carpenter 2010; Carpenter and Krause 2012). In following sections, the importance of reputation within a bureaucracy will be discussed more in depth. For the point of this section, however, it is important to understand that bureaucrats are expected, by superiors, peers and other colleagues, to protect the reputation of their bureaucratic organization. The behaviour of being responsive to reputational threats is therefore expected and accepted among colleagues within the bureaucracy, and can be categorized as a norm.

This norm can also be seen as different from the ones introduced so far. Reputational threats as conceptualized in this thesis can originate from different sources. Some would also argue it is also not about content. An example to highlight the uniqueness of this norm is the following; bureaucrats that are responsive to public demands, or adhere to transparency, might choose to do this purely to be responsive to reputational threats. A bureaucrat not being responsive to public demands, or not being transparent in his/her work, might damage the reputation of the organization represented by the bureaucrat in question. However, there are also other reasons for bureaucrats to be responsive to public demands or to adhere to transparency. These reasons do not all necessarily represent responsiveness to reputational threats. A bureaucrat might choose to be responsive to



public demands, because of the discussed democratic legitimacy deficit they want to correct for, and not for the specific reputation of them or their organization (Alon-Barkat & Gilad, 2016). And adhering to transparency sometimes does the opposite of protecting the organization against reputational threats; being transparent can devastate the image of an organization. Examples for this were also discussed; Edward Snowden has irreversibly damaged the reputation of the NSA (Hosenball, 2013). I argue that this norm is about content, and the value it adds to this thesis is in the focus on reputation, directly and specifically. This ensures that there is no doubt about the specific factors that would influence bureaucrats to interfere in politician preferences. Yes, we could theorize about how responsiveness to public demands, for example, is about reputation, but that simply is not always the case. Adding this variable gives us a great measure of the role of this specific norm in bureaucrats' decisions.

Much research is available on different conceptualizations of responsiveness to reputational threats, but it is conceptualized in the following manner in this research. Responsiveness to reputational threats involves a bureaucrat's choice to adapt and react to potential risks that could harm the organization's intentions, credibility or capacity in the eyes of stakeholders, the public, or the broader community (Carpenter & Krause, 2012). The focus on the organization represented is important; reputational threats are threats to the organizational reputation of the bureaucracy in question. As we study norms that conflict with political responsiveness, political superiors are left out of the range of stakeholders that can influence the organization's reputation and provoke a response by bureaucrats to try and preserve this reputation. This study focusses on examples where responding to reputational threats coming from sources external to the concerned bureaucratic agency, entails interference in politician preferences. To use the EMA example, in instances where there are pressures from political stakeholders to fast-track the approval of certain drugs due to political or economic reasons, the EMA may resist such pressures, prioritizing its reputation for scientific integrity and public health over political responsiveness (Makhashvili & Stephenson, 2013). In conceptualizing reputation, we include performative-, moral-, procedural- and technical organizational reputation as defined by Carpenter and Krause (2012).

In their work, and referring to several empirical studies, Bertelli and Busuioic state that “...powerful reputations can be deployed to tie the hands of legitimate political principals...” (2021, p. 45). As most public servants are believed to be motivated by PSM and policy discretion, we can believe that bureaucrats might prioritize organizational reputation over political responsiveness, as more policy discretion is achieved by bureaucratic agencies with a better reputation, following the logic of Reputation Sourced Authority (RSA) (Bertelli & Busuioic, 2021). Rimkuté and Van der Voet also show in their work that organizational reputation is prioritized over many other norms by bureaucrats faced by conflicting demands (2023). They also state that bureaucrats obey demands from political principals not because they blindly adhere to demands originating from superiors, but rather because it would be the best strategy to preserve bureaucratic reputation.

The usual motivations remain for bureaucrats to prioritize political responsiveness over responsiveness to reputational threats as with the other conflicting norms, that would result in no interference in the preferences of politicians. In many cases, political principals have more power over the future of a bureaucrat’s career than the audience who is responsive to the reputation of an agency. Elected politicians can alter the course of a bureaucratic organization and some would argue that responding to reputational threats is a task for the elected principal (Alesina & Tabellini, 2007). However, it is important to realize that because this study focusses on norms conflicting political responsiveness, situations in which preserving reputation goes hand in hand with being responsive to political superiors are left out. Situations, for example, in which high responsiveness to political principals at the same time preserves or improves bureaucratic reputation, are omitted in order to better judge bureaucratic decision-making in the light of conflicting norms. This is an important aspect leading the formulation of hypothesis 4.

- *Hypothesis 4: When faced by demands grounded in the norm of responsiveness to reputational threats, bureaucrats will interfere in politician preferences.*

# Chapter 3

## Methodology

In this chapter, the method used to investigate the research question is discussed. The first focus of this chapter is on the research design, here the choice of research design will be explained and arguments are given for its suitability. In this same section, the empirical setting of the study will also be discussed.

After this, the research methods will be the topic of discussion. In this section, the methodology used to obtain the data will be elaborated upon, as well as the target sample of participants for this research.

Then, the operationalization section introduces how the variables of interest are measured through the empirical part of this study, a table is presented which creates a clear overview of the operationalization of the variables and the material used for the fieldwork of this research.

The analysis strategy will be discussed after, here we elaborate on how the obtained data is analyzed as to create material that can be used for answering the research question of this thesis. As this study is a qualitative one that utilizes vignettes and an interview to obtain data, the coding process will also be discussed here. The codebook will also be presented in this section

Lastly, we reflect on the validity and reliability of this study, as well as the measures taken to create a study that is as reliable and valid as possible for the research design used in this thesis.

### **Research design**

This section elaborates on the design used in this thesis and its benefits for finding an answer to the research question, as opposed to other potential designs. The research is done through a qualitative design utilizing vignettes and a semi-structured interview. First, respondents choose an option in a discrete choice model for four vignettes. However, answers to the vignettes will rather serve as a platform for the follow-up questions than as data useful for answering the research question. Through answers to these follow-up questions, respondents elaborate on their choice made in the discrete choice model, these

are the answers of interest. In other words, the mere answers in the discrete choice model are not analysed through a quantitative method, the small-N design means that looking only at the amount certain options in the discrete choice model have been chosen will not help much in answering the research question. This also makes our study rather unique in its kind. Studies, discussed in this thesis, on the topic of Public Administration and bureaucrat politician relationships specifically, have often used vignettes and surveys (Baekgaard et al., 2020; Baekgaard et al., 2022; Christensen & Opstrup, 2018; Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2023). However, they have relied on quantitative methods to derive answers based on the options chosen alone.

The qualitative design, using both vignettes and an interview, is more suitable than its potential alternatives. As discussed, studies that this research has been inspired by and build upon, have used several methods. One such method is a pure quantitative design based on vignettes. Here, the analysis is based upon quantitative methods where the focus is on the amount of times certain options in the vignette were chosen. Then, based on these numbers, the research question is answered. This is a great method to get to know more about what choices people would make, which is important inspiration and background for this thesis.

However, this thesis is interested in how, when and why people arrive at their decision, and the mere choices that respondents would make in a discrete choice experiment, while interesting, offers little data to answer the research question of this thesis. We therefore rely on qualitative methods. The vignettes combined with the discrete choice model used in this research has respondents make a trade-off between two choices, but the most useful information is obtained when the follow-up questions in the interview are answered. This shines light upon the underlying mechanisms that drive the respondents to make a certain choice, this qualitative data is what is needed to answer the research questions investigated in this thesis.

Another potential design that could have been used, is a qualitative study using only the interview, leaving out the discrete choice vignette. This method would already be more useful in answering the thesis' question than a pure quantitative method, however, the

addition of the vignette brings advantages. If we were to ask the same questions that are asked in the vignettes and discrete choice model, in an open interview, it increases the risk of social desirability bias. Respondents could answer anyway they seem fit, and might form their answers as to avert any response that includes behaviour that might not be in order with how they are expected to behave by their organization or the public. The discrete choice options in the vignette forces respondents to make one of two decisions in the trade-off. This allows us to see which of the two options they would prioritize in a certain scenario where demands stem from conflicting norms, both of which might not be seen as “good” or desirable answers from certain perspectives. By adding the discrete choice model to the design, a basis is created that forces respondents to show their preference between two options of interest, introducing an interesting discussion that might not have surfaced without the discrete choice model. Through the following interview they are then asked to elaborate and show why they prefer one option over the other. This is a good way of generating data that helps in answering the question of how conflicting norms influence bureaucrats’ interference in politician preferences.

This design does have limitations. The first limitation is a result of the discrete choice model. The benefits of having respondents choose between two options have been discussed, but it comes with limitations as well. Because of the fact that there are only two options to choose from, a respondent might initially not be able to pick an option that they would have chosen in real life, because this option is missing from the choice model. However, respondents do get the chance to elaborate because of the semi-structured interview design. During this time they are able to explain that they might make another choice, were this option present. The interviewer can also ask the respondent to share any other options they might come up with themselves, outside of the discrete choice model.

A second limitation is a result of the vignettes. In order to limit the effects of phrasing bias, all four vignette situations are phrased in a similar manner (see table 2). Although this might counter the effects that the phrasing of the sentences could have on the choice a respondent makes, it does limit the context that can be given. Respondents have confirmed this as well, and sometimes requested more context. The choice that a person would make in such a difficult trade-off often heavily relies on the contextual circumstances. In order to try to limit the negative effects stemming from the initial lack of context in the vignettes,

the semi-structured design of the interview can be used. This allows the interviewer to add context throughout the interview to see how this additional context affects the choice and justification given by the respondent.

A third limitation of this design is social desirability bias. As discussed, measures have been taken to try and counter the possibility of social desirability bias, such as the discrete choice model. However, the truth is that interviews often bring about the danger of social desirability bias. Especially when interviewing public servants, who are expected to demonstrate neutral competence and refrain from letting personal opinions and beliefs influence their work choices, one can understand why the risk of social desirability bias still exists. To find measures to limit social desirability bias effects in interviews, inspiration was taken from the article by Bergen and Labonté (2020), which goes into interview methods to reduce social desirability bias. Even with the measures taken to counter the possibility of this bias affecting the results, one should keep in mind that the possibility still exists and is difficult, if not impossible, to completely control. In the concluding chapter we once again reflect on the limitations and measures taken to restrict the effect of these limitations.

For the fieldwork of the study, six interviews were conducted with six different respondents. In order to make it as easy as possible to conduct the field work that this research requires, each respondent was asked individually for their preferences on how to conduct the interview. Each of the respondents expressed a preference for conducting the interview by phone, and thus each interview was conducted by calling the respondents and audio recording the conversation. Some respondents said they preferred this method because it increases the feeling of anonymity. Most preferred conducting the interview by phone because it did not require them to either travel or open their place of work or home to someone they did not know well. All six respondents who took part in the empirical fieldwork of this study are public servants working for a Dutch municipality. Some respondents work for a notoriously big municipality and others for smaller ones. Among the respondents, their tasks within these municipalities may slightly differ from each other, but all are tasked (at least sometimes) with advising the elected political body of their organization, this is either the “gemeenteraad” (city council) or the “wethouder” (alderman). The six interviews varied between thirty and fifty minutes in length and lasted

thirty-nine minutes on average. All transcripts were typed out by hand. More details about the respondents of the fieldwork will be discussed under research methods.

### **Research methods**

In this section, the methods used to obtain the data needed for answering the research question are discussed, as well as the specifics of the vignettes and interview. First, the vignettes are discussed. Secondly, the questions that directly follow a choice in the discrete choice model for the corresponding vignettes are discussed. Thirdly, the open interview questions that conclude the research part used to obtain the relevant data is explained. Finally, characteristics of the respondents subject to this study are briefly discussed.

The vignettes sketch four hypothetical situations in which a trade-off has to be made, the respondent's answer is limited to only one response out of a possible two proposed and pre-formulated options. One of the formulated responses represents a preference to one of the four norms introduced in chapter two, the other response option represents, in all four vignette situations, a preference for direct responsiveness to the political executive of the respondent.

To use the qualitative design of this study to the fullest extent, respondents are asked to elaborate on their decision after each of the four vignette situations are administered and an option is chosen. This allows us to even better understand the interviewee's reasons and thought process behind choosing a specific response. To maximize the internal validity of the study, three identical questions were asked after each vignette was answered. Answers to these questions also allow us see whether the situation sketched in the vignette is deemed realistic and/or recognizable by the respondent in order to judge the conceptualization, operationalization and methods used in this thesis. To obtain as much relevant data as possible, questions outside of the pre-formulated questions are asked depending on the answers given by the respondent. This helps us think about how, when and why bureaucrats interfere in politician preferences.

Finally, open interview questions are asked to enhance validity of the research and to obtain final data on mechanism at play among bureaucrats that affect whether they interfere in

politician preferences or not. The questions asked to the respondent might deviate from the original formulation of the questions, depending on answers and questions from the respondent. The answers to the final questions also allow us to gain knowledge about the position of the respondent in their organization. This, in turn, aids in determining the alignment between the interviewed respondents and the conceptualization of a bureaucrat as outlined in this thesis. These questions also quite directly ask respondents whether they have tried to interfere in their political executive's preferences before, and if yes, how they chose to approach this. These questions are asked in the end of the interview in the hope that the vignettes directly followed by questions have already shown the prioritizations that the respondents have in certain trade-off situations, therefore decreasing the chance of social desirability bias when answering these final questions.

As has been briefly introduced, the target audience for participants in the research consists of bureaucrats that are accountable to an elected political executive of some sort. As this thesis investigates how conflicting norms influence bureaucrat interference in politician preferences, certain characteristics are deemed especially important for one in order to be a useful respondent in this study. Firstly, the respondents need to be bureaucrats, working in a political environment. We are interested in how bureaucrats are affected by conflicting norms, and not in the direct effect of conflicting norms on politicians. This explains why one should interview bureaucrats in order to answer the question investigated by this thesis, and not politicians. Secondly, these bureaucrats working in a political environment should also be familiar with the idea of receiving tasks that originate from an elected political body. Not all bureaucrats are familiar with this, and some are a great distance removed from any politicians in their day to day work. All interviewed respondents in this study indirectly receive tasks from an elected political body. They are in direct contact with their political executive, varying from at least once a month to daily. In order to find such respondents, the choice was made to interview bureaucrats in municipalities. In Dutch municipalities, bureaucrats often work together relatively closely to an elected representative, or in other words, a politician. Looking for respondents in these municipalities also increased the feasibility of the study, as personal contacts can often lead to a local bureaucrat, or a politician who can help you find a bureaucrat to take part in the interview. Many emails



were sent out to many different municipalities, but the six respondents that eventually took part in the interviews were all found through personal connections.

All respondents agreed to share the municipality they worked in, as well as their function within this municipality. They also read an information sheet and signed an informed consent form, as well as a debriefing statement, all of which can be found in the appendix. Respondent 1 works as an advisor to several municipalities via a public-private advisory body, usually changing their place of work each year to work on another project regarding energy transition. Respondent 2 is an advisor to an alderman of the municipality of Amsterdam. Respondent 3 is an advisor to the alderman of the municipality of Bunnik, who mainly works on issues concerning youth and sport, and the facilities needed for this. Respondent 4 works as a clerk to the municipal council of Bunnik. Respondent 5 is a policy advisor on health for the small municipality of Waadhoeke. Respondent 6 advises on social real estate in the municipality of Rotterdam. Both men and women were interviewed, ranging from bureaucrats working in a very small municipality, to the biggest municipality in the Netherlands. All are experienced bureaucrats, with the least experienced respondent working as a public servant for more than two years in their municipality.

This target audience comes with some dangers to be mindful of as well. We have to consider that the respondents represent an organization rather than themselves as individuals, leading to the danger of social desirability bias as these individuals might want to answer the questions in the vignette accordingly to what their municipality stands for. Potential consequences of this, as well as measures taken to limit these effects, were discussed and will be discussed in the last chapter as well.

### **Operationalization**

In this section, the operationalization of the variables and concepts is elaborated upon. All of the variables that have been conceptualized so far, are measured partly through answer options using a vignette method. In the vignette, one of the two options available to the respondents represents a preference for one of the independent variable norms. The other option will, in each vignette situation, represent a preference for political responsiveness. Respondents will have to choose one of two options. Follow-up interview questions are asked after each vignette response, thus utilizing the benefits that a qualitative, in-depth approach brings to the table when it comes to answering the research question. Other pre-

formulated interview questions are also asked to see whether the respondents fit into the conceptualization of a bureaucrat used in this thesis. As this thesis investigates “how” conflicting norms influence interference in politician preferences, the most valuable data will be obtained through the interviews rather than the vignettes, the vignettes form the basis for the interviews while also clearly showing the preference of the respondent in that hypothetical situation.

In table 1, the four vignette situations are presented. These situation sketches precede the answer options presented in table 2. Keep in mind that the original forms of all field work are in Dutch. Any English versions of either the vignettes, follow-up questions and answer options, are translated.

**Table 1: Situations presented in discrete choice vignettes (translated)**

<b>Vignette #</b>	<b>Situation presented</b>
<b>Vignette 1</b>	<p style="text-align: center;">Imagine the following situation:            You are working on a task assigned to you by the political executive of your organization. To complete the task as quickly as possible, your political executive suggests accelerating the procedure, potentially exceeding legal limitations. You face the demand to obey your political executive, but at the same time, you have concerns about violating legal limitations.            You...</p>
<b>Vignette 2</b>	<p style="text-align: center;">Imagine the following situation:            You are working on a task assigned to you by the political executive of your organization. To complete the task as quickly as possible, your political executive suggests keeping the task secret from the public to avoid potential delays, objections, and/or other obstacles. You face the demand to obey your political executive, but at the same time, you have concerns about the lack of transparency in your organization.            You...</p>

**Table 1 (continued): Situations presented in discrete choice vignettes (translated)**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Vignette 3</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Imagine the following situation:          You are working on a task assigned to you by the political executive of your organization. Due to the controversy surrounding the execution of this task and protests from many citizens, it is clear to you that a significant portion of the population is against carrying out this task. You face the demand to obey your political executive, but at the same time, you have concerns about disregarding the opinion of a clear majority of the people.          You...</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Vignette 4</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Imagine the following situation:          You are working on a task assigned to you by the political executive of your organization. You know that, once completed, the outcome of this task will have a negative impact on the public's perception of the organization you represent as a public servant. You face the demand to obey your political executive, but at the same time, you have concerns about the image of your organization among the public.          You...</p>

In table 2, the dependent variable and the norms in question are all linked to their operationalization as an answer option in the vignettes. Here, respondents are faced with a situation in which they have to show their preference for either political responsiveness or a conflicting norm. The answer options that indicate a preference for political responsiveness differ per vignette situation, so that for each situation the option is realistic in the context and the trade-off is made apparent.

**Table 2: Operationalization of variables as answer options in vignette trade-off (translated)**

<b>Variables (norms)</b>	<b>Operationalization in vignettes</b>
↓ Dependent variable ↓	<b>Option 1</b>
<b>Adherence to political responsiveness (all vignettes)</b>	You choose to follow the advice of your political executive, [ignoring option 2] to promote a rapid execution of the task, in order to obey the recommendations of your political executive.
↓ Independent variables ↓	<b>Option 2</b>
<b>Adherence to legal constraints (vignette 1)</b>	You choose to go against the advice of the political executive and try to influence their preferences, because you believe that these rules and constraints are important for civil servants and their organization.
<b>Adherence to transparency (vignette 2)</b>	You choose to go against the advice of the political executive and try to influence their preferences, because you believe that transparency is important for civil servants and their organization.
<b>Responsiveness to public demands (vignette 3)</b>	You choose to go against the advice of the political executive and try to influence their preferences, because you believe that including demands of the people in considerations is important for civil servants and their organization.
<b>Responsiveness to reputational threats (vignette 4)</b>	You choose to go against the advice of the political executive and try to influence their preferences, because you believe that the reputation your organization among the people is important for civil servants.

The response options for operationalizing the independent variables have been deliberately kept similar in wording. This design choice aims to mitigate potential biases stemming from the phrasing itself, allowing participants to express their genuine preferences or attitudes without influence from the phrasing of the questions. Option 1 always indicates a

preference for adherence to political responsiveness, option 2 always indicates a preference for a certain norm over political responsiveness.

Table 1 and 2 both correspond to the vignette part of the operationalization of the variables, but the most important data generated by the fieldwork is rooted in the answers to the follow-up questions. As discussed there are two parts to these questions; questions that directly follow the discrete choice answers, and questions that aim to enhance the validity of this research by getting to know more about the respondents and whether they fit into our conceptualization of a bureaucrat. Table 3 shows the questions that directly follow each vignette, table 4 shows the other questions.

**Table 3: Follow-up questions presented after each vignette (translated)**

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Questions</b>
<b>1</b>	Why did you choose option (x)? Can you elaborate on this choice?
<b>2 (asked when option 2 is chosen)</b>	How would you go about doing this?
<b>3</b>	Do you recognize this situations from your own job?
<b>3B (If answer to 3 is yes)</b>	Could you give an example? Is this situation common or rare?
<b>4</b>	Does this hypothetical situation remind you of a difficult decision you had to make in your career?
<b>4B (If answer to 4 is yes)</b>	Can you provide an example? How did you approach this? Is this trade-off common or relatively rare?

**Table 4: open questions asked at end of interview (translated)**

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Questions</b>
<b>1</b>	Can you tell me about your job? And about your position in particular?
<b>2</b>	How would you say you are connected to the elected political executive in your daily work? Are you frequently in contact with this executive?
<b>3</b>	In which ways does your relationship with the elected political executive affect your work?

**Table 4 (continued): open questions asked at end of interview (translated)**

<b>4</b>	Have you ever attempted to influence the preferences, demands, or thoughts of your political executive? If so, how did you approach this?
<b>5</b>	Can you rank the following norms from most to least important (for you personally)? Are these norms and values that you would say are considered by you or colleague civil servants in their work? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Obedience to elected political leadership</li><li>• Taking into account legal constraints</li><li>• Taking into account the openness of affairs</li><li>• Considering demands from the public</li><li>• Responsiveness to threats to the image of your organization among the public</li></ul>

The questions asked in the actual interviews with the respondents can differ from the ones presented here for two primary reasons. Firstly, as previously discussed, the actual questions asked in the actual interviews are all in Dutch, and the versions presented in the figures in this thesis are translations. While various translations may exist, the outcomes across different translations of the questions are expected to show minimal variance. Secondly, the questions asked during the interviews may include additional context. Respondents might seek further clarification on the intended meaning of the questions or request repetitions and rephrasing. Regardless of the specific phrasing or translation, it is ensured that the questions cover precisely the same topics and meanings as presented in the figures. It is important to note that, due to the choice of a semi-structured interview design, questions will be asked that are not presented in the tables at all, as discussed.

## **Analysis strategy**

In this section the analysis strategy used in this thesis is elaborated on and its choice is explained. Here, the coding process is also discussed and the codebook is presented.

This thesis relies on qualitative methods to answer our question. The data that we obtain solely through the options chosen by the vignette will therefore not be the main focus of the analysis. Although the amount of times option 1 or option 2 in the discrete choices has been chosen will be mentioned and briefly discussed, it will offer little help in answering the research question. First of all, we rely on too little respondents in order to do an effective quantitative analysis of the options chosen. Secondly, we are mainly interested in the answers given to the interview questions. For reasons already thoroughly discussed, the qualitative method used in this study brings more advantages for answering our research question than quantitative methods would. This choice is also better for building upon the research that has already been done on this topic as opposed to replicating this research. However, the choices made by the respondents in the accompanying discrete choice model remain valuable information, shedding light on the preferences of the sample of Dutch bureaucrats who participated in this study.

An inductive approach is used for the coding process. The codebook is made after interview data is obtained. Based on what is said in these interviews, significant themes and patterns are identified, allowing for a flexible and responsive coding framework that captures the richness and nuances of the data. This approach has been chosen as there is little to no qualitative research that has been done on the topic of bureaucrat-politician relationships utilizing interviews. Therefore, no existing codebooks could be found that might be helpful in coding the data obtained in this research. Another rationale for adopting an inductive approach is the limited utility of pre-formulating a codebook, given that every relevant code emerges organically during the inductive coding process. In other words, all reasons that drive the respondents to make the choices they do, will come up in the interview and will therefore be coded through the inductive process.

When coding the data that is obtained, it is important to think about what the data should reveal. In the case of this thesis, we are looking at how conflicting norms affect bureaucratic

interference in politician preferences. Respondents either show a preference for adhering to a certain norm, or they prefer being responsive to their political superior. If they prefer adherence to a certain norm and therefore choose to interfere in politician preferences, there are reasons for them to make this choice, these reasons are the main focus of the analysis. Such a choice can be affected by, for example, experience. Bureaucrats might choose to prioritize adherence to a norm over political responsiveness partly because of the years of experience they have in their discipline. Such a reason might be revealed by the respondent saying something in the likes of; “Well, some time ago I would not have made this same choice, but after all these years I feel comfortable arguing against my boss.” By reading through the transcripts of the interviews and looking for reasons that explain their choice in the vignette trade-off, we can code these reasons and by doing this, the most useful data is obtained for answering the research question. Other reasons for interfering in politician preferences that were coded can be found in the full codebook (see table 5).

In a similar manner, reasons for choosing to be politically responsive can be identified and coded. One might say; “I usually have no problem going against my political superior, but I wouldn’t want to bother him with this minor development.” This can be coded under “reasons for bureaucrats to be politically responsive”, and under “lack of importance” in particular, as some codes are categorized under a collection of specific codes, such as “reasons for bureaucrats to be politically responsive”. What we can retrieve from this statement is that the respondent is in doubt about whether the topic is important enough to bother his political executive. This helps in determining the mechanisms behind the choice to be politically responsive over adherence to the norms in question. Other reasons for respondents to not interfere in politician preferences can be found in the full codebook presented in table 5.

Other statements not relating to the preferences expressed are also coded. Bureaucrats might ask for more context in order to be able to correctly answer a question. Statements requesting more context are therefore coded as well, so that we can eventually see how many respondents asked for more context and why. This is useful information, and can be used recommending improvements for future research. Statements by respondents referring to other similar trade-offs they might have had to make are coded as well, as these



statement shine light upon realistic trade-offs and add context to the real life problems that these bureaucrats run into. This information too can be relevant for future research.

Respondents were also asked whether the situation sketches in the vignettes are deemed realistic or relatable. Statements regarding relatability are therefore also coded, as this information is helpful in determining whether the answers given in the discrete choice model can actually be seen as choices the respondents would realistically make in their work, or whether they are just answers to an unrealistic, hypothetical situation.

Respondents were also asked to explain their job and what they do. Important characteristics of their job and tasks are coded in order to see whether the obtained data is comparable between the different respondents. Coding this data also helps in determining whether there is a link between certain job characteristics, and choices made as well as explanations given by these respondents.

Under results, the choices made in the vignettes are shared for each respondent, however, the reasons for these choices are coded separately from the four trade-off scenarios. This means that two statements defending choices in two separate vignette trade-off's can be coded under one specific code. For example, respondents might refer to integrity as a reason for interference because they choose defending organizational reputation over political responsiveness, but they might also choose adhering to legal constraints over political responsiveness while giving integrity as a reason for this choice as well. These two statements are then coded under the single code of "integrity" and is therefore separated from the vignette answer option that is it elaborating upon. All codes were marked in the transcripts document for the relevant arguments, using the comment tool in Word.

**Table 5: Codebook (examples translated)**

	<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Reasons for interfering in politician preferences (Option 2 in discrete choice model)</b>	Long term vision	Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences by referring to a long term vision	“Executives are by definition a bit more short-term because they have 4 years to get something done, which is completely fine, but sometimes you have to make the long-term perspective even clearer to them.” (Respondent 2)
	Best intentions for political executive	Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences by saying it is the best choice for the politician(s) in question	“Yes, because you don't want the board to say afterwards; If I had known that, I would have decided something differently or I would have done this.” (Respondent 1)
	Integrity	Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences because of integrity	“...you are there to provide independent and honest advice, which of course means that you sometimes have to adhere to rules...” (Respondent 5)
	Experience	Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences because of their experience on the job	“Well look, I have been doing this job for quite a long time, but when I was young I found it much more difficult to go against a director compared to now that I have been doing it for much longer.” (Respondent 2)

**Table 5 (continued): Codebook (examples translated)**

<p><b>Reasons for interfering in politician preferences (Option 2 in discrete choice model)</b></p>	<p>Risk carried</p>	<p>Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences because of the risk involved for the respondent</p>	<p>“From my own perspective, it is really your own responsibility and ultimately they can always hold you accountable if it comes down to it if you have not followed certain procedures or rules.” (Respondent 6)</p>
	<p>Best intentions for the people</p>	<p>Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences by saying it benefits the people</p>	<p>“So you say; I'm here for you, and to do what is best for the city.” (Respondent 2)</p>
	<p>Norms and values</p>	<p>Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences by referring to norms, values and/or personal beliefs</p>	<p>“And because I just know how hard you and many fellow colleagues work and in my opinion it cannot be the case that a political director is wrongly asking something of you that gives the municipal organization a negative image. I just think that those are really my norms and values.” (Respondent 6)</p>
	<p>Part of job</p>	<p>Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences by saying it is simply part of their job</p>	<p>“Well, I think that as a civil servant you should also know a lot about the content because as a board you do not know in detail, that is what you are there for. So you must always inform them fully...” (Respondent 1)</p>

**Table 5 (continued): Codebook (examples translated)**

<b>Reasons for not interfering (option 1 in discrete choice model)</b>	Not part of job	Statements by respondents that explain not interfering in politician preferences by saying it is not part of their job	"Then I have to put myself in the position of the political executive, when it comes to the council I assume that they represent the residents." (Respondent 4)
	Risk not carried	Statements by respondents that explain not interfering in politician preferences by saying the risk involved rests on someone else	"Well, for example, when a refugee asylum process has to be completed, the board can indicate that we want to keep this under wraps until we have made a decision, yes, that has consequences, but on the other hand, those are consequences for the board, and they must then explain why they chose that speed for transparency." (Respondent 4)
	Lack of importance	Statements by respondents that explain not interfering in politician preferences by saying the topic is not important enough to bother executive with	"Look, I would now assume that what you outline is not a huge risk, in that case, I choose option 1." (Respondent 2)
	Best intentions for the people	Statements by respondents that explain not interfering in politician preferences by saying it benefits the people	"Then I have to put myself in the position of the political executive, when it comes to the council I assume that they represent the residents." (Respondent 4)

**Table 5 (continued): Codebook (examples translated)**

<p><b>Reasons for not interfering (option 1 in discrete choice model)</b></p>	<p>Minority interests</p>	<p>Statements by respondents that explain not interfering in politician preferences by saying it benefits a certain minority</p>	<p>“And that depends because sometimes you have to make decisions as a political board that is not supported by the majority. For example, that [park] there, we are going to build affordable housing for young people there.” (Respondent 1)</p>
	<p>More context</p>	<p>Statements by respondents that indicate that their answer depends on missing context or information</p>	<p>“Whether I adhere to transparency depends on whether the permit has been granted” (Respondent 3)</p>
	<p>Relationship with executive</p>	<p>Statements about the relationship between the interviewed bureaucrat and the political executive</p>	<p>“If I have a lot of contact with the political executive, I can better empathize with what they want and therefore respond better to that as a civil servant. That really makes a difference than standing a little more at a distance.” (Respondent 1)</p>
	<p>How to interfere</p>	<p>Statements that explain how respondent would interfere in politician preferences</p>	<p>“...make an appointment, come by, explain. I never do such feedback alone. Because when meeting the council there are always 2 or 3 of them. So always with my colleague, and if he wants to interfere then I go with him to just cover for each other like; hey that's been said this has been said , one writes, the other talks.” (Respondent 3)</p>

**Table 5 (continued): Codebook (examples translated)**

<b>Relatability</b>	Relatable	Statements that show respondent leans towards recognizing the proposed situation from his/her own work	“Yes, [it happens] a lot, there is always pressure from outside on the decisions you make as a government and often you only hear the people who are against it. So then it sometimes seems indeed, well maybe sometimes it is, but as if everyone is against it.” (Respondent 1)
	Not relatable	Statements that show respondent leans towards not recognizing the proposed situation from his/her own work	“No, I don't really recognize that, I've never actually had this happen to me.” (Respondent 2)
	About respondent's work	Statements in which the respondent gives information about the work he/she does	“Yes, I am an advisor to the board, I am directly in such a team around an alderman. And as a result, you always have your nose on top of what is happening at the table with such a board.” (Respondent 2)
	Ranking	Statements related to the ranking of the norms (relates to question 5 in table 4)	“Well, at the top is transparency (1), then, well, listening to people in society (2).” (Respondent 5)

**Table 5 (continued): Codebook (examples translated)**

	Characteristics of municipality	Statements related to the characteristics of a municipality	<p>“I work for the municipality of Waadhoeke, which is a relatively small municipality. So there is not a very large distance between the director and the policymaker. Which is very nice!”</p> <p>(Respondent 5)</p>
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### **Reflection on validity and reliability**

The methods used in this study have implications for the validity and reliability of the study. In this section, these implications are touched upon, as well as the measures taken to try and increase the reliability and validity of this research.

The small-N characteristic of this study brings the danger of low external validity. Because of the small-N design, the danger of the answers given by the respondents not being applicable to a wider audience increases, this is something to be mindful of. However, the choice for small-N has been a conscious one, as much of the literature on this topic has used large-N methods (Baekgaard et al., 2022; Blom-Hansen et al., 2022; Christensen & Opstrup, 2018; Rimkute & Van der Voet, 2023), and small-N research focussing on in-depth mechanisms behind the phenomenon studied adds more to the current gap in the literature and is better suited for answering the research question because of reasons discussed. This small-N method therefore increases the internal validity of this study. To increase this internal validity, the vignette situations, as well as answer options, were phrased to be as similar as possible in each vignette. The original, pre-formulated follow-up questions are also the same for each vignette. This is done to mitigate the effect that different phrasings would have on answers given by the respondents, and therefore decreasing the chance of wording bias. Another limitation of the research design regarding the external validity, is that the empirical setting of the study is Dutch. Respondents are Dutch officials, representing Dutch public organizations. Organizational culture in similar organizations in different countries might be very different, and other norms and values might be leading depending on the country of the bureaucracy studied. Arguments can be made for why the

results of this study could be generalizable to the Dutch population of bureaucrats, and municipal bureaucrats specifically. Many arguments and reasons shared by the respondents to explain their answers and choices contained elements relating to specific features of Dutch municipalities. Consequently, extending the findings of this study to a broader, international cohort of bureaucrats would result in a less reliable generalization, and would come at the cost of the reliability of the results.

Directly asking follow-up questions after each discrete choice vignette, allows us to get a better in-depth understanding of the mechanisms behind the choices made by respondents. This is important, as our research question focusses on “how” conflicting norms influence bureaucrat interference in politician preferences. The large-N studies have paved the path by showing that this interference does indeed occur, but the qualitative design of this study allows us to touch upon the specific “how” part of the question as respondents are asked about the underlying motivations driving their choice in the vignettes. This increases the validity of our answer to how conflicting norms influence bureaucrats’ interference in politician preferences, at the cost of proving that it actually happens on a large scale.

The measures undertaken in order to decrease social desirability were discussed prior; a discrete choice model using vignettes that depict hypothetical situations was used to force respondents to prioritize one options over another. This decreases the danger of the response options not being discussed at all because of social desirability bias. However, social desirability bias is still a risk in this study. Respondents could have elaborated on their choices in ways that they see as socially desirable or acceptable behaviour, at the cost of honesty in their answers and therefore reliability. Another way in which this study tries to mitigate this effect, is by granting the respondents and their organization full anonymity in the hope that they feel free to answer as honestly as possible. Interviews methods inspired by Bergen and Labonté (2020) were also used to limit the possibility, including indirect questioning, providing assurance, probing for more information and changing context of the question to see whether it affects the answers given by the respondents. Yet, when using qualitative interview methods to study topics that might be sensitive, one has to understand that the danger of social desirability bias cannot be completely dissolved.



Phrasing bias is another danger for the reliability of the results. Although pre-formulated questions, as well as the different vignettes, are all designed to be as similar as possible, phrasing bias is still a threat to the reliability. This is because the semi-structured design of the interviews has allowed the interviewer to change context based on requests and answers by the respondents, resulting in some question being phrased differently among respondents while concerning the same vignette.

## Chapter 4

### Results

In this chapter, the results of the fieldwork will be presented. First, we look at the choices made by the respondents in the discrete choice model, these will be presented in table 6. Then, four sections are made for each trade-off scenario found in the vignettes. For these scenarios, we showcase the most popular reasons provided by respondents to elucidate their choices in the discrete choice model, supplemented by examples extracted from the interview transcripts. The reasons presented can all be categorized under the codes that are presented in the codebook (see table 5). After this, we present the results on whether these situations are deemed relatable by the respondents. Then, results are shared on how the respondents would interfere in preferences of their politicians. Finally, we present how the respondents have ranked the importance of the four norms and political responsiveness. In this chapter the results are only presented, discussion will follow in chapter five.

#### **Discrete choice model results**

In this segment, the findings from the discrete choice model are presented, aided by a corresponding table. Option 1 means respondents have chosen the option of political responsiveness over the conflicting norm corresponding to the vignette. If the respondent has chosen option 2, it means they interfere in the preferences of their political executive as they deem the corresponding norm in the vignette situation more important than complete political responsiveness, which means obeying the political executive without question. Some respondents were not able to make a choice between the two options. Respondents that were not able to make a choice between the two options are indicated by an “=” symbol in table 6. The reason behind this is almost always that the respondent in question needed more context to make a well informed decision in the discrete choice model, as can be seen in the following extracts from the transcripts.

*“So you may well find out after careful consideration; Yes, you know, let's continue with project x or initiative a, so yes, that depends.” - (Respondent 5, vignette 3)*

*“But I always find it my job that if there are really fundamental risks, which in this fictional case I don't know how bad they are, so to speak, I find it a bit difficult to assess...” –*  
 (Respondent 2, vignette 1)

The respondents generally show a preference for interfering in politician preferences, with this choice being made seventeen times in the four vignettes divided amongst all six respondents. Four respondents were not able to choose between the two options in one vignette for each respondent. The choice to be politically responsive and directly obey the orders from the political executive was only made three times in two vignette situations, of which two by respondent 3.

**Table 6: Options chosen by respondents in discrete choice model vignettes**

	<b>Respondent 1</b>	<b>Respondent 2</b>	<b>Respondent 3</b>	<b>Respondent 4</b>	<b>Respondent 5</b>	<b>Respondent 6</b>
<b>Vignette 1</b>	2	=	2	2	2	2
<b>Vignette 2</b>	2	2	1	=	2	2
<b>Vignette 3</b>	=	2	1	1	=	2
<b>Vignette 4</b>	2	2	2	2	2	2

### **Section for each vignette sketch**

In the following segments, results from the four vignette situations are presented. Per trade-off scenario, the most common reasons given by respondents to back up their choice are presented. Some arguments might be left out of the results section per vignette, when this is the case, these arguments were rarely made compared to the ones presented. As addressed, deeper discussion of the results will follow in chapter five. For now the focus is

merely on presenting the results themselves. All respondents will be referred to in they/them pronouns to guarantee anonymity to the greatest degree.

### **Vignette 1: Political responsiveness vs. Adherence to legal constraints**

In vignette 1, respondents are asked to show their preference between direct political responsiveness and adherence to legal constraints. As can be seen in table 6, five respondents have chosen adherence to legal constraints over political responsiveness. Several different arguments are given for their choices, with the ones presented in this section being referred to by at least half of the respondents.

Only respondent 2 could not decide between the two options in the first vignette. This respondent points to lack of context to explain their inability to make a choice;

*“But if that's not enough and you violate the rules, then yes, it depends a bit on which rules these are, I think.” - (Respondent 2)*

Respondent 2 stated that if they would interfere in politician preferences for the sake of adherence to legal constraints, it would be mainly out of best intentions for the executive. However, they would choose to be fully politically responsive based on the rules at stake;

*“Look, I would now assume that what you outline is not a huge risk, if I make that as an assumption, I'd choose option 1.” - (Respondent 2)*

Respondent 3, 4 and 6 all mention the risk involved for themselves in several arguments made to explain their choice for interference in politician preference in vignette 1. One respondent, while comparing the vignette situation to a similar relatable experience at work, said;

*“If something goes wrong during construction, or in the final phase of construction, and the permit has not yet been obtained, I am responsible.” – (Respondent 3)*

These same respondents, 3, 4 and 6, all refer to a long term vision to elaborate on their choice made. All three explain that a political executive often has a short term vision on issues, and that they as public servants should look beyond that. This long term vision seems to be the dominant reason for these respondents, but comes combined with arguments grounded in the belief that it is part of their job to have this long term perspective. One respondent also mentions how in years from now, files might be come up with their name on it, therefore also combining the long term perspective argument with an argument grounded in the risk involved for themselves;

*“...because you have to account for yourself as a civil servant and a political board changes every four years. And with regard to files, it can sometimes be the case that they surface a number of years later for whatever reason and are then investigated.”* – (Respondent 6)

Another popular argument among respondents in this vignette to back up their choice for option 2, is integrity. Respondents 1, 5 and 6 all use arguments grounded in integrity at least once. This argument is often combined with respondents saying that this integrity is part of their job;

*“Look, I am a policy advisor and I am there to provide independent advice to my councilor. So if he puts pressure on me and I have to do things where I... for example, lack integrity, I wouldn't like that myself. Then I would try to convince him too.”* – (Respondent 5)

Respondents 2, 4, and 5 expressed their willingness to interfere in their political executive's preferences in this hypothetical situation, citing their best intentions for the executive. Referring to interfering in the political executive's preferences, one respondent said;

*“Yes, because they don't look good if they don't do it well.”* – (Respondent 5)

The most popular argument for respondents to choose option 2, is that advising the board and interfering when legal constraints create certain dangers, is part of their job. Interfering in the preferences of the political executive when risks involving legal constraints are involved is therefore also an integral part of their tasks, even when this same executive

shows a preference for direct implementation of the task involved. Respondent 1, 2, 5 and 6 all refer to this argument at least once in answering the first vignette. Respondent 2, who was not able to make choice, could imagine choosing option 2 simply because it is part of being an advising bureaucrat;

*“Yes, but contradiction is a very important part of my work. So I really have to say very often, I understand the wish, sometimes I want to find out; what is the underlying need of that wish?”* – (Respondent 2)

### **Vignette 2: Political responsiveness vs. Adherence to transparency**

In vignette 2, respondents are asked to choose between direct political responsiveness and adherence to transparency. Four respondents chose option 2, one respondent chose option 1 and another respondent showed doubt between the two options.

Let us begin with the odd one out. Respondent 3 chose option 1 in this situation. Reasons given for this choice are very specific to the task of respondent 3. This respondent’s main task involves the oversight of facilities used by the youth for matters such as sports and childcare. The only reason this respondent gives for their choice, is that interfering in their politician’s preferences is not seen as part of their job once permits are in order. This respondent claims not to be worried about, nor involved in, the transparency of their organization;

*“Yes, because a permit must be applied for and it will be made public by a municipality. This will be published in ‘t Groentje (local magazine), and people can use it to submit objections or ask questions or have a say. And once that has been done and has been granted, we are quite reluctant to provide information. They can come and see it when it's done.”* – (Respondent 3)

Respondent 4 could not decide between the two options. What is unique about this case of doubt, is that this respondent did not mention missing context as a reason for their doubt. The respondent rather states that the ideal choice would be somewhere in between the two options. While on one hand, this respondent can envision the importance of transparency,

prompting interference in politician preferences, on the other hand, they believe this responsibility rests with the executive;

*“The answer here will be more between 1 and 2. Because here too, I think that if I really think transparency is important, I would give it back to the board, but on the other hand, it is up to the board to justify that transparency to residents at a later time. So I think that's more up to the board, if they consciously choose to do so.”* – (Respondent 4)

The other respondents, 1, 2, 5 and 6, chose option 2; interfering in politician preferences because they deem transparency important enough to do so. Three types of arguments are the most popular, being mentioned at least once by at least three respondents. Integrity is one of those reasons mentioned for interfering in politician preferences for the sake of adherence to transparency. Respondent 1, 2 and 6 mention integrity in their answers on three separate occasions each for this vignette, this means that each of these respondents come up with at least three statements that can be coded under integrity. One respondent mentions how problems regarding integrity in the past have inspired their choice for option 2;

*“Yes, because certainly, you know, you used to be able to do more. After all those integrity issues that have come up quite often among directors recently, there is often backroom dealing, or well, just not being honest, and I think that is also increasingly under a magnifying glass.”* – (Respondent 2)

Other arguments given for choosing to interfere in politician preferences are grounded in the belief that is simply part of the respondents' job. Three respondents mention that interfering for the sake of transparency in their organization is inherent to their task. One respondent explains how in some cases involving transparency, one just simply has to interfere;

*“But then again, you just have to publish some things, make them available for inspection. Some things just need to be published.”* – (Respondent 1)

The most popular argument given in this vignette is the argument related to norms and values. All four respondents that chose option 2, all refer to this at least once in their argumentation. Arguments are deemed grounded in norms and values as well when personal beliefs or emotions are mentioned. Two examples are the following;

*“And being transparent is part of that for me, it really is based on core values in my opinion.”*  
– (Respondent 2)

*“My gut feeling would be to be transparent about this from the start.”* – (Respondent 5)

Arguments grounded in other codes that were mentioned by the respondents that chose option 2, were found in less than half of these respondents’ explanations.

### **Vignette 3: Political responsiveness vs. Responsiveness to public demands**

The results of the third vignette appear unique. Out of the three instances where option 1 was chosen, two occurred in vignette 3. This also makes this vignette situation the only one with just as many choices for option 1 as for option 2, as both are chosen twice. Two respondents could not choose between the two options.

Respondent 1 and 5 both could not choose between the two options. Respondent 1 needed more context to make a decision, and said it depends on certain factors. This respondent wants to listen to the people on one hand, grounded in best intentions for the inhabitants of the municipality. But on the other hand, this respondent says that sometimes you have to make choices that are not popular among the majority of these inhabitants for the sake of minority protection;

*“And that depends because sometimes you have to make decisions that are not supported by the majority. For example, that lawn there, we are going to build it with affordable housing for young people. The neighborhood may not like that very much. Then in principle the majority of the people are against it, but perhaps it also offers social interests that you find much more important as a political executive or as a civil servant.”* – (Respondent 1)



Respondent 5 has trouble choosing between the two options because of doubts about whether deciding on these matters is part of their job, stating both arguments for why it would and would not be part of their job. This respondent does believe that the local council should always invite people to listen to them in order to create trust in the organization among the inhabitants of the municipality, but actually acting on their demands is another story;

*“What I really see now, because we have been imposed, and I don't mean that disrespectfully, to always and everywhere involve residents, but it must really have a purpose and residents often see things from their own island, if a substantial part of the population is against something, then you just want to know why, so you should start a conversation with them anyway because that also increases confidence in your local government.”* – (Respondent 5)

Respondents 3 and 4 have chosen option 1, indicating a preference for direct political responsiveness over responsiveness to public demands. They choose not to inform their political executive about the demands of the public as they do not see this as part of their job. Both these respondents explain their choice only by referring to the belief that being responsive to public demands is not part of a bureaucrat's job. They state that this responsibility rather lies with the council who represents the people;

*“Yes, ultimately it is up to the political executive to argue why they have made this choice. And not up to me.”* – (Respondent 4)

Option 2 was chosen by respondents 2 and 6. Good intentions for the people, good intentions for the executive and a long term perspective are the leading argument types for respondent 2. Respondent 6 rather points to the idea that it is still part of their job to interfere, as well as mentioning personal norms and values. Both respondents agree on that a long term perspective plays a role in their choice to interfere;

*“Directors are by definition a bit more short-term because they have four years to get something done, which is completely fine, but sometimes you have to make the long-term perspective even clearer to them.” – (Respondent 2)*

#### **Vignette 4: Political responsiveness vs. Responsiveness to reputational threats**

In the fourth vignette, there seems to be consensus among the respondents; all chose option 2, to interfere in politician preferences for the sake of defending their organization against reputational threats.

Two types of arguments rise above the others, both being mentioned by five out of six respondents. One of these are arguments grounded in a long term perspective.

Respondents 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 all gave arguments that were coded as long term perspective arguments. Most respondents can envision that political executives, who hold their positions for a maximum of four years in Dutch municipalities, might make choices that could damage the organization's reputation due to their short-term outlook. Many respondents therefore choose to interfere, arguing that they want to protect their organization's reputation for the long term. One such argument is the following;

*“Because the damage it would have on [the reputation of] the municipal organization could have a huge impact on colleagues and could also have a much longer-term effect on your work.” – (Respondent 6)*

Another argument mentioned by just as many respondents, is that they would interfere in politician preferences, for the sake of these politicians themselves. Respondent 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 all give such arguments. They argue that informing the political executive of the reputational threats benefits the executive, as they are often the ones carrying the responsibility for the choices made. These arguments can often also be coded under “part of job”, as they are a combination of stating the interference is for the sake of the executive, and interfering for the sake of the executive is part of the respondent's job as a bureaucrat. Two examples of such arguments are the following;

*“I do think that as a civil servant, when you advise your board about this, you should make it very clear and say, “Well, if you are going to decide this, take this and that into account, so that you present the complete assessment to them, so to speak. Then it is still up to them whether or not to continue.” – (Respondent 5)*

*“Yes, because you don't want the board to say afterwards; if I had known that I would have decided something differently or I would have done this.” – (Respondent 1)*

Therefore, as briefly mentioned, another popular argument in this vignette situation is grounded in the idea that interference is part of a bureaucrat’s job. Respondent 1, 4 and 5 all gave explanations for their choice in the fourth vignette that could be coded under “part of job”. One such argument is the following;

*“So basically because I think that everyone who works for a municipality, you also take an oath to do so, has the interests of the municipality at heart, so it is important to go against [the executive] if things go wrong.” – (Respondent 4)*

Personal norms and values were also mentioned by respondents 2, 4 and 6 to explain their choice for option 2 in the fourth vignette situation. These respondents said that they would interfere partly because of certain personal beliefs in what would be right. One such argument is;

*“So it's a bit of both, a bit of norms and values, you have to remain decent and remain imitable, but also, look a little further into the long term...” – (Respondent 2)*

Other arguments that were given in any of the vignette sketches, but not mentioned in the results chapter, will be discussed in chapter five. The reason for not mentioning these types of arguments under the results section, is these arguments were relatively uncommon as compared to the ones presented and therefore not as relevant for the results.

## Relatability

In order to judge whether the hypothetical situations that the respondents were asked to respond to were deemed realistic by them, the respondents were asked whether they had experienced similar situations in real life or whether they could imagine being in such a situation. Answer to this question varied from no (not relatable) to yes (relatable), with some answer falling somewhere in between. Some respondents said that they recognized the situation from their work because they heard similar stories from colleagues, but did not have to deal with such situations personally. Others said that they had experienced similar situations, but that the occurrence of those is rare. If respondents have said that they have experienced similar situations “sometimes”, then their answer is still recorded as “relatable” in the table. This is because the respondents were explicitly asked whether occurrence of such situations is rare or not, when their answer is that it occurs “sometimes”, we deem such a situation relatable for the respondent. An example of such an answer is the following;

*“Well, sometimes yes. ... for example, our clerk who has to provide the documents for the municipal council, they have extremely long procedures.” – (Respondent 2, vignette 1)*

The respondent here says such a situation is sometimes experienced, this indicates that the respondent can relate to the hypothetical situations as similar situations are “sometimes” experienced at work. Other respondents clearly show that such situations are relatable and experienced commonly. These statements indicate relatability and are therefore also coded as “relatable”. Often, statements indicating relatability are simply a “yes” as an answer to the question asking the respondents about whether the situation is recognizable from personal work experience.

Some respondents clearly indicate the rarity of some situations occurring at work. This is most often indicated by a “yes” answer to the question of whether such situations are rare. Others clearly state the rarity themselves;

*“Rare. Yes, I don't want to say never.” – (Respondent 6, vignette 1)*

As briefly mentioned, other respondents can better imagine their choice in presented vignettes, not because they have experienced such situations themselves, but because colleagues of them have experienced similar situations and shared this experience with the respondents. As this does have an impact on their ability to relate to the situation, but fits in neither relatable nor not relatable, a separate category is made. Such an answer is indicated by “from colleagues” in table 7. An example is the following;

*“Yes, I am not concerned with the issue... but of course I hear it a lot from colleagues around me, so yes.” – (Respondent 5, vignette 3)*

A fourth and last answer category, is “not relatable”. Answers that clearly indicate that the vignette is not relatable at all to the respondents, are categorized as such. These are clear statements by respondents, and mostly answers to the question of whether the situation is relatable, such as the following;

*“No, but that is also because I work for the municipal council and they generally consider transparency more important than the council [of mayor and aldermen] when it comes to political administrations.” - (Respondent 4, vignette 2)*

All answers are categorized as discussed in the prior segments, and are presented in table 7.

**Table 7: Respondents on whether the situations were relatable**

	<b>Respondent 1</b>	<b>Respondent 2</b>	<b>Respondent 3</b>	<b>Respondent 4</b>	<b>Respondent 5</b>	<b>Respondent 6</b>
<b>Vignette 1</b>	From colleagues	Relatable	Relatable	Relatable	Rare	Rare
<b>Vignette 2</b>	Relatable	Rare	Not relatable	Not relatable	Rare	Relatable
<b>Vignette 3</b>	Relatable	Relatable	Relatable	Rare	From colleagues	Not relatable
<b>Vignette 4</b>	Relatable	Not relatable	Relatable	Rare	Relatable	Relatable

### **When and how to interfere**

Respondents were not only asked whether they would interfere in their politicians' preferences, but were also asked how they would go about such interference in the case that they choose to do so. Several interesting methods came up, which will be briefly discussed in this section. Other factors that influence how the respondents go about interfering are discussed as well.

Many respondents indicate that they would interfere as early on in the process as possible, and take no chances. One respondents indicates that their reason for doing so is to prevent that some issues are solved informally, without bureaucrat interference;

*“Then you use your network and everything to prevent, for example, those questions from not being asked or from being answered in an informal way. So then you really start playing the political game to achieve what you want to achieve.” – (Respondent 6)*

Many respondents seem to be seriously influenced by their relationship to the political executive, and characteristics of the municipality, in choosing their methods to interfere

with the executive. Respondents working for large municipality indicate that they have to enter a formal process in some cases, to reach the political executive at a certain point in the process of a task;

*“If you are a little further away, you do this through your official organization, i.e. through the people. So you essentially try to influence a director of a department or a department head, so that that person then takes that to the board.”* – (Respondent 6)

Other respondents from smaller municipalities generally indicate that interfering in their political executive’s preferences is relatively easier, because of a smaller distance to the executive, sometimes literally;

*“For example, I have a colleague who worked at the municipality of Leeuwarden and that is a huge municipality. Look, I have no experience with other municipalities myself, so I find it a bit difficult to estimate, but they indicated that there really is a large distance. Sometimes literally because the board is in a different building, and because there really is a hierarchy there, I don't really have that feeling myself here. They are all very approachable and accessible on our board in any case.”* – (Respondent 5)

Almost all respondents make some reference to their relationship to the political executive when asked how they would go about interfering. These statements point both to the effect of the professional environment on this relationship, but also to a personal connection with the executive;

*“...and I also think that I can give more honest and better advice if I find that person to be a more pleasant person.”* – (Respondent 5)

Another method of interfering that stood out because it was mentioned by several respondents, is to find support within their organization before going to the executive;

*“I never do such feedback alone. Because at the municipality [council] there are always two or three of them. So always with my colleague, and if he has something at the municipality*

*then I go with him to just cover for each other, like hey that's been said this has been said , one writes, the other talks.” – (Respondent 3)*

Then finally, most respondents indicated that experience plays a role in deciding how to interfere, and whether to interfere at all. All respondents were relatively experienced in their job, with the least experienced respondent working as a bureaucrat for over two years. Experience was mentioned in the first two interviews, which lead to the decision to include a question about the effect of work experience on interference in politician preferences. The general answer to this question was that interference was deemed more difficult by respondents when they first started their job as compared to now. An example of such a statement is the following;

*“Well look, I have been doing this job for quite a long time, but when I was young I found it much more difficult to go against a director than now that I have been doing it for much longer.” – (Respondent 2)*

Many respondents seem to be affected by experience and their relationship to the executive in deciding whether to interfere or not. This also affects their method of interference, as bureaucrats working for bigger municipalities generally indicated a more difficult process for interfering, whereas those working for smaller municipalities indicated that interfering in politician preferences is quite easy due to a small organization and a more informal atmosphere. Respondents showed a clear preference for interfering as early on in the process as possible, while finding support among colleagues is also a popular method.

### **Ranking**

All respondents were asked to rank the norms discussed in the vignette sketches, as well as adherence to political responsiveness, from most important for them personally to least important. A “1” indicates most important, while a “5” indicates the norm or political responsiveness is least important among the rest. The results can be found in table 8. Although the reasons given by the respondents for their decision on how to rank the variables are interesting and gave insights in how these conflicting norms influence



bureaucrat interference in politician preferences, there seems to be much variance across the respondents on how which variables are deemed most important.

*Table 8: Personal ranking of importance by respondents*

	<b>Respondent 1</b>	<b>Respondent 2</b>	<b>Respondent 3</b>	<b>Respondent 4</b>	<b>Respondent 5</b>	<b>Respondent 6</b>
<b>Adherence to political responsiveness</b>	5	2	5	3	4	5
<b>Adherence to legal constraints</b>	1	3	1	2	3	3
<b>Adherence to transparency</b>	2	1	4	4	1	4
<b>Responsiveness to public demands</b>	3	4	2	5	2	2
<b>Responsiveness to reputational threats</b>	4	5	3	1	5	1

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and conclusion

In this final chapter, the results are discussed. We reflect on the hypotheses in light of the obtained results, focusing solely on the bureaucrats who participated as respondents in this research. The generalizability of these assessments will also be discussed later on in this chapter. The most important results will also be briefly summarized in this chapter. Some ways in which conflicting norms influenced the respondents' interference in politician preferences that were not discussed in the results chapter because of their rarity will be mentioned here too, as well as what it means for answering the research question investigated in this thesis. The results are analyzed by reflecting on them with the main research question in mind. Limitations and measures taken to try and restrict these limitations will be discussed as well. Finally, based on the results of this investigation and the limitations involved, recommendations for future research on this topic will be presented.

#### Hypothesis 1

Let us first reflect on the first hypothesis. This hypothesis states that *“when faced by demands grounded in the norm of adherence to legal constraints, bureaucrats will interfere in politician preferences.”* When looking at the results (see table 6), one can see that five out of six respondents choose to interfere in their politicians' preferences when confronted with demands of adherence to legal constraints. The remaining respondent could not choose an option, stating that their choice would depend on the severity of the legal constraints at stake. Following these results, we cannot reject the first hypothesis.

Let us reflect on this hypothesis by looking back on the main research question; *“How do conflicting norms influence bureaucrats' interference in politician preferences?”* When faced by the norm of adherence to legal constraints, respondents seem to be influenced by several factors to interfere. The most popular reasons for respondents to interfere in a situation where they are faced by demands of adherence to legal constraints, are the idea that they themselves as bureaucrats are at risk, but also a long term professional

perspective and out of good intentions for the political executive that they serve. The reason most often brought up in the concerned vignette to explain a choice for interference, is that they simply see it as part of their job to advise the political executive on legal constraints, whether this executive wants to hear it or not. We can therefore say that the norm of adherence to legal constraints mainly influences bureaucrat interference through these reasons.

Other explanations for interfering that were mentioned were grounded in integrity and norms, values and personal beliefs. However, these types of arguments were made by fewer respondents than the ones discussed in the preceding section.

## **Hypothesis 2**

The second hypothesis is as follows; *“When faced by demands grounded in the norm of adherence to transparency, bureaucrats will interfere in politician preferences.”* Four out of six respondents chose to interfere in a vignette where political responsiveness was put against the norm of adherence to transparency. One respondent could not make a choice, and another respondent chose political responsiveness over adherence to transparency based on the vignette. Looking at the results obtained from the respondents, we cannot reject the second hypothesis.

When looking at how respondents were influenced by the conflicting norm regarding interference in politician preferences, certain dynamics emerge. Respondent 4 who could not make a choice, did not necessarily need more context, but was influenced by factors that support both interference and political responsiveness. On the one hand this respondent was affected by norms, values and personal beliefs to interfere, but on the other hand this respondent does not believe it is part of their job to interfere in such a case, and believes the risk is carried by the executive. This is interesting, as respondent 3 who chose political responsiveness over adherence to transparency, was also motivated to do so because of the idea that interference in this case is not part of their job. The norm of adherence to transparency therefore affects these two respondents to not interfere, following their belief that it is not their responsibility to do so. The remaining respondents chose to interfere. They mentioned that when faced with demands grounded in the norm of

transparency, they are mainly influenced by integrity and the idea that interfering in this situation is part of their job. Norms and values were mentioned by all four respondents who chose to interfere, making it the most popular reason among the respondents to interfere.

Other more uncommon reasons mentioned by respondents to interfere in the second vignette include a long term perspective, best intentions for the executive and the risk involved for the respondent.

### **Hypothesis 3**

The third hypothesis is phrased in the following manner; *“When faced by demands grounded in the norm of adherence to public demands, bureaucrats will interfere in politician preferences.”* The results of the discrete choice model corresponding to the third vignette on which the hypothesis is based are relatively divided. Two respondents were unable to choose between the two options, two respondents chose not to interfere, and the other two respondents chose to interfere. Still, based on these results obtained from the respondents, the third hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Respondents were influenced in distinct ways when faced by public demands. First, respondents that chose not to interfere were influenced mainly by the idea that it is not part of their job to represent the interests of the people. Both respondents say that representing the people is a task inherent to the elected political executive, and that they would therefore not interfere in this executive’s preferences when faced by demands from the public, even if these demands come from a clear majority of the municipality’s inhabitants.

The two respondents that could not choose between the two options needed more context. On the one hand, they felt like interfering out of best intentions for the people involved and to create more trust in the organization that they represent, but on the other hand they recognized that interference in such a case is not part of their job. At the same time one of these respondents recognized the importance of unpopular decisions for some minority groups, stating that sometimes unpopular decisions have to be made in order to protect and serve minority groups.

The respondents that chose to interfere in their politicians' preferences because of public demands, were influenced to do so partly out of best intentions for the executive. They do recognize, like the other respondents, that representing the interests of the people is their executive's job, but at the same time it is the respondents' job to serve this executive. When the executive seems to want to ignore the demands of a majority of the inhabitants, these two respondents interfere in their preferences as they want to serve them, making them aware of the potential consequences of their choices. Norms, values and a long term perspective also influenced these two respondents to choose to interfere in the third vignette.

All reasons mentioned by the respondents to defend and explain their choice in the third discrete choice model have been mentioned, no uncommon reasons stated are left undiscussed.

#### **Hypothesis 4**

Finally, we reflect on the fourth hypothesis. The fourth and last hypothesis is formulated in the following manner; *"When faced by demands grounded in the norm of responsiveness to reputational threats, bureaucrats will interfere in politician preferences."* All six respondents chose to interfere in politicians' preferences when faced by demands grounded in responsiveness to reputational threats, making in the only vignette in which all respondents chose to interfere. Based on these results among the respondents, the fourth hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Many reasons were mentioned by respondents to elaborate on their choice to interfere. The most popular arguments given by the respondents to defend interference when influenced by the demands grounded in the norm of responsiveness to reputational threats, were grounded in a long term perspective and best intentions for the executive. Arguments grounded in a long term perspective were made by bureaucrats who argued that where a political executive remains for four years at most, the bureaucracy of the organization will continue to exist. They therefore argue that any reputational damage will be experienced longer by the public servants than by the executive, therefore making this argument also one that could fall under "risk carried" as the respondents mentioned the potential personal

consequences. Best intentions for the executive was just as popular of an argument, as the executive will most likely be the body in the organization that will be held responsible for the reputational damage according to the respondents. Then, other popular arguments given for interference included that interference is part of a bureaucrat's job, also in this trade-off. Norms and values also played a role for many respondents when choosing to interfere for the sake of the organizations' reputation. These respondents personally believe that protecting their organization and even more so their colleagues from reputational threats, simply feels like the right thing to do.

Other less popular arguments given to defend interference in politician preferences in the fourth vignette, were grounded in the risk involved for the respondent and integrity. However, one could argue that the reasons given by the respondents that were coded as "long term vision" could in some cases also be categorized under the code of "risk carried", as discussed.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude this thesis, we once more reflect back upon the main research question; *"How do conflicting norms influence bureaucrats' interference in politician preferences?"*

Examining the research findings reveals that conflicting norms impact the bureaucrats' decision to interfere in several ways. Individual respondents varied in their choices within the discrete choice model, depending on the conflicting norms presented alongside the demand for political responsiveness. Only respondent 6 chose the same option in each vignette, choosing to interfere in all scenarios. This shows that five out of six respondents are influenced in different ways, choosing to interfere or not based on the conflicting norms they are introduced to. In vignette 1, 2 and 4, a majority of the respondents said that proposed situations were relatable in some sort. Only in the third vignette there were as many respondents saying the situation was relatable, as there were respondents saying the situation was unrelatable, with the remaining two respondents saying the situation was rare. This shows that the vignettes that the respondents were introduced to can generally be deemed more or less realistic, as each vignette was seen as relatable by some respondents, as can be seen in table 7.

Another interesting finding of this research, is that there is a clear difference in the main reasons driving the respondent to interfere or not based on the vignette trade-off they are introduced to. Based on the findings among the six respondents, the conflicting norms can therefore be said to influence bureaucrats' interference in politician preferences in distinct ways. An example is that when faced by demands grounded in adherence to legal constraints, most respondents choosing to interfere argue that interfering in such a case is inherent to their task. On the other hand, reasons grounded in norms and values are the most popular when the respondents were faced by demands grounded in adherence to transparency. Conflicting norms therefore influence the bureaucrat respondents in different ways, even when their jobs and type of municipality they work for are similar, based on which of the norms is at play against the demand to be politically responsive. We can therefore say, based on results obtained from the respondents, that personal reasons and assessment play a role when bureaucrats decide on their course of action in the introduced vignettes. This conclusion is also supported by the fact that several respondent cited norms, values and/or personal beliefs as reasons for their choice.

This research also made clear that when choosing how and whether to interfere in politician preferences, most respondents clearly said to be influenced by their years of experience on the job and by certain characteristics of the municipality they work for. First of all, almost all respondents said that choosing to interfere becomes easier and a more preferable option as one gets more experienced throughout their time on the job. Then secondly, respondents working as bureaucrats in smaller municipalities said they believed the small size of their municipality influenced them to interfere in politician preference easier and more often. This is because they believe that the small size of their municipality decreases the relative distance to the executive, as well as increasing informality in the relationship with the executive. Respondents working for bigger municipalities seemed to, in some situations, have more trouble interfering as their organizations sometimes require going through a formal process before being able to interfere in the preferences of the political executive. This makes interference more difficult, which even seems to discourage some of these respondents from interfering. When asked how to interfere in politician preferences, the most popular responses stated that this interference should be as early on in the process as

possible, and that finding support among colleagues before interfering should also result in a more successful interference in politician preferences.

### **Research limitations**

It is important to reflect upon the limitations of this research, and well as on the measures undertaken to try and restrict the effect of these limitations. First and foremost, the primary limitation has to do with the generalizability of the results. Although interesting results were obtained through the in-depth qualitative method of this thesis, one has to keep in mind that the respondents are six Dutch bureaucrats, working for municipalities. First of all, these respondents' characteristics might limit the applicability of the results to a Dutch context only. Secondly, because the respondents work for local municipalities, the results might not even be generalizable to a bureaucrats working for a national government, even in the Netherlands. Respondents indicated that many of their decisions were influenced by factors that relate to characteristics of a local government, such as the size of the municipality and a close connection to the inhabitants. So while the results obtained and conclusions made in this thesis might not be generalizable to an average bureaucrat working in another country, or even to a Dutch bureaucrat working for an organization other than a municipality, it does give in-depth insides in the minds and reasoning of some local government bureaucrats. However, these findings might inspire similar research in bureaucracies of other levels of government and in other countries, which would shine light on the applicability of these results to a greater extent. Adding to this limitation, is the fact that the method used in this thesis is qualitative. This method increases the in-depth understanding of decisions made by bureaucrats, but comes at the cost of limited generalizability as opposed to a quantitative approach.

Another limitation that has been discussed prior in this thesis, is the danger of social desirability bias. Social desirability bias occurs when respondents feel the need to answer certain question in a way that they believe others see as desirable or "right". As this study uses interviews in order to obtain data useful for answering the research question, the danger of social desirability bias is present. What further amplifies this possibility is the fact that the interviewed respondents work for the government and are expected to adhere to specific conduct standards. Consequently, their responses may be influenced by societal



perceptions of desirable public servant behavior by the general public. To try and limit the potential influence of this bias on the results, certain measures were taken. First of all, full anonymity was guaranteed and respondents were asked what method of conducting the interview they felt most comfortable with. Some respondents indicated that a phone call increased their sense of anonymity, so this was chosen as the standard method for conducting the six interviews. Other measures to limit social desirability bias, included providing assurance, probing for more information and referring to answers given by other respondents to assure that they might not be the only ones giving answers that might be deemed undesirable by some. The contexts of certain questions were also changed in some cases, based on the answers given by the respondents. This was done in the hope that by making the question refer to a less sensitive topic, respondents might feel more at ease to share their real preferences and choices in a situation. To find these methods to limit social desirability bias effects in interviews, inspiration was taken from the article by Bergen and Labonté (2020).

Response bias might also have affected the results. Over seventy potential respondents were contacted and asked to participate in the study, of which only six were eventually willing to participate. Some factors or characteristics that have driven these respondents to participate in the study, might also affect the way in which these respondents assess the scenarios introduced to them in the vignettes. However, some characteristics of the six respondents varied considerably. The respondents work for different municipalities, they work on different topics and tasks, and differ in age, gender and experience.

Another limitation of this study is the restricted contextual information provided in the vignettes, combined with the danger of phrasing bias. While the reason behind providing limited context in the vignettes was to prevent phrasing bias by maintaining similarity, several respondents expressed a desire for additional context. They emphasized the importance of more context for accurately assessing the situations as they would do in their daily work. This might result in the respondents sharing their preference for a certain option in the discrete choice model that they, with some additional context, might not have chosen in real life. In order to try and have these respondents judge the situations as realistically as possible, they were asked to provide their experience with similar situations they

encountered in their work. Through respondents' answers to this question we can accurately measure the choices respondents make in real-life scenarios in which one of the studied conflicting norms is put against the demand to be politically responsive. This limits the effect of missing context on the accuracy of the answers. However, changing context based on respondents' request does introduce the danger of phrasing bias. Whereas the measures taken to prevent this include similar phrasing of the vignettes, the need for additional context introduces differences in the exact phrasing of situations between respondents. A limitation of this study is therefore the difficult trade-off between providing the respondents with the context they need to accurately make choices in the discrete choice model, and keeping phrasing as similar as possible among respondents' interviews to limit phrasing bias.

### **Recommendations for further research**

As studies have inspired and paved the way for this thesis, the results of this thesis inspire recommendations for future research on the topic of bureaucrat-politician relationships within the domain of Public Administration.

The first recommendation is to replicate this study under different circumstances. In order to judge the generalizability of the results of this thesis, and therefore also the further implications of these results, future researcher should replicate this study, changing mainly two things. Firstly, replicating this study in other countries and examining local governments there would help in determining the generalizability of the results across a broader spectrum, transcending national borders and therefore working on the biggest limitation of this study. Secondly, one could replicate this study by researching bureaucrats working for the national government or different governmental organizations to see whether the results are similar along different levels of government. This too would help solving the limitation regarding generalizability.

A second recommendation is to study the effects of experience and organizational characteristics on the decisions made by bureaucrats. Many respondents expressed that these factors affected their choices, this led to the decision to include these results in this thesis. However, these factors were not part of the main topic of this study; conflicting

norms. Therefore the recommendation is made to study these effects on bureaucratic decision-making, inspired by the results obtained among the respondents of this thesis.

A third recommendation is to increase contextual information in the vignettes introduced to the respondents. As discussed, many respondent indicated the need for more context on several occasions in the interview. To enhance our understanding of bureaucrat decision-making and the bureaucrat-politician relationship, it would be beneficial to introduce bureaucrats to vignettes with more comprehensive context. This approach would enable respondents to better assess the situations, drawing connections to decisions made in their previous work. Consideration should be given to the potential impact of phrasing bias when augmenting vignettes with additional context

A last recommendation for future research is to judge the normative implications of the results of this thesis. Especially when, as recommended here, more qualitative research is done on the subject, it is up to other researcher to study what the effects truly mean for governance and whether the results are a reason to think of improvements for, or worry about, the current system. When comparing the results obtained in this thesis to what behaviour is deemed “correct”, researchers could recommend improvements to the political system which can be realized through, for example, training programs for bureaucrats or different hiring requirements for public servants. In other words, the practical implications and policy recommendations that might arise from this thesis, rely on the normative judgement of the results.

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## Appendices

### Vignettes + answer options and interview guide (Dutch)

#### Situatie 1

Stelt u zich de volgende situatie voor:

U werkt aan een taak die u is toegewezen vanuit het politieke bestuur van uw organisatie. Om de taak zo snel mogelijk te voltooien, suggereert uw politiek bestuur om de procedure te versnellen, waardoor regels mogelijk worden overschreden. U staat voor de eis om uw politieke bestuur te gehoorzamen, maar u heeft tegelijkertijd zorgen over het overschrijden van legale beperkingen.

U...

Optie 1	Optie 2
...kiest ervoor om het advies van uw bestuur op te volgen, waardoor u potentiële overschrijdingen van de regels negeert om een snelle uitvoering van de taak te bevorderen, om zo de aanbevelingen van uw politieke bestuur te gehoorzamen.	...kiest ervoor om in te gaan tegen het advies van het politieke bestuur en probeert hun gedachtegang te beïnvloeden, omdat u gelooft dat regels en beperkingen belangrijk zijn voor ambtenaren en hun organisatie.

#### Situatie 2

Stelt u zich de volgende situatie voor:

U werkt aan een taak die u is toegewezen vanuit het politieke bestuur van uw organisatie. Om de taak zo snel mogelijk te voltooien, suggereert uw politiek bestuur om de transparantie van zaken te beperken, om zo mogelijke vertragingen, bezwaren en/of andere obstakels te voorkomen. U staat voor de eis om uw politieke bestuur te gehoorzamen, maar u heeft tegelijkertijd zorgen over het gebrek aan transparantie van uw organisatie.

U....

Optie 1	Optie 2
...kiest ervoor om het advies van uw politieke bestuur op te volgen ten koste van de transparantie om een snelle uitvoering van de taak te bevorderen, om zo de aanbevelingen van uw politieke bestuur te gehoorzamen.	...kiest ervoor om in te gaan tegen het advies van het politieke bestuur en probeert hun gedachtegang te beïnvloeden, omdat u gelooft dat transparantie belangrijk is voor ambtenaren en hun organisatie.



### Situatie 3

Stelt u zich de volgende situatie voor:

U werkt aan een taak die u is toegewezen vanuit het politieke bestuur van uw organisatie. Vanwege de controverse rondom de uitvoering van deze taak en protesten van vele burgers is het voor u duidelijk dat een groot deel van het volk tegen de uitvoering van deze taak is. U staat voor de eis om uw politieke bestuur te gehoorzamen, maar u heeft tegelijkertijd zorgen over het negeren van de eisen van een duidelijke meerderheid van het volk.

U....

Optie 1	Optie 2
...kiest ervoor om het advies van uw politieke bestuur op te volgen, u negeert de eisen van het volk om een snelle uitvoering van de taak te bevorderen, om zo de aanbevelingen van uw politieke bestuur te gehoorzamen.	...kiest ervoor om in te gaan tegen het advies van het politieke bestuur en probeert hun gedachtegang te beïnvloeden, omdat u van mening bent dat eisen van het volk betrekken in afwegingen belangrijk is voor ambtenaren en hun organisatie.

### Situatie 4

Stelt u zich de volgende situatie voor:

U werkt aan een taak die u is toegewezen vanuit het politieke bestuur van uw organisatie. U weet dat, eenmaal uitgevoerd, de uitkomst van deze taak een negatieve invloed zal hebben op de reputatie van de organisatie die u als ambtenaar vertegenwoordigt. U staat voor de eis om uw politieke bestuur te gehoorzamen, maar u heeft tegelijkertijd zorgen over de reputatie van uw organisatie.

U....

Optie 1	Optie 2
...kiest ervoor om het advies van uw politieke bestuur op te volgen, u negeert de potentiële schade aan de reputatie van uw organisatie om een snelle uitvoering van de taak te bevorderen, om zo de aanbevelingen van uw politieke bestuur te gehoorzamen.	...kiest ervoor om in te gaan tegen het advies van het politieke bestuur en probeert hun gedachtegang te beïnvloeden, omdat u gelooft dat de reputatie van uw organisatie belangrijk is voor ambtenaren.

### **Opvolgingsvragen die direct worden gepresenteerd na elk antwoord op een situatie**

1. Waarom kiest u voor optie (x)? Kunt u deze keuze onderbouwen?
2. Hoe zou u dit aanpakken? (Bij keuze optie 2)
3. Herkent u deze situatie van uw eigen werk?  
  
3b. Zo ja, zou u een voorbeeld kunnen geven? En is deze situatie veel voorkomend of vrij zeldzaam?
4. Doet deze hypothetische situatie u denken aan een lastige afweging die u ooit zelf heeft moeten maken in uw carrière?  
  
4b. Zo ja, kunt u een voorbeeld geven? Hoe heeft u dit benaderd? Is deze afweging veel voorkomend of vrij zeldzaam? Door welke ideeën, normen of andere overwegingen heeft u uw keuze laten leiden?

### **Open vragen**

1. Kunt u mij iets vertellen over het werk dat u doet? En over uw positie in het bijzonder?
2. Hoe dichtbij zou u zeggen dat u staat aan het verkozen politieke bestuur in uw dagelijkse werk? Bent u vaak in contact met dit bestuur?
3. Op welke manieren beïnvloed uw band met het verkozen politieke bestuur uw werk?
4. Heeft u ooit geprobeerd de voorkeuren, eisen of gedachtegang van uw politieke bestuur te beïnvloeden? Zo ja, hoe heeft u dit dan benaderd?
5. Kunt u de volgende normen rangschikken van meest tot minst belangrijk (voor u persoonlijk)? Zijn dit normen en waarden waarvan u zou zeggen deze door ambtenaren worden overwogen in hun werk?
  - Gehoorzaamheid aan verkozen politiek bestuur
  - Naleven van juridische beperkingen
  - Naleven van openheid van zaken
  - Het overwegen van eisen vanuit het volk
  - Responsiviteit ten opzichte van bedreiging aan het beeld van uw organisatie onder het volk

## Vignettes translated to English (Table 1)

*Table 1: Situations presented in discrete choice vignettes (translated)*

Vignette #	Situation presented
<p><b>Vignette 1</b></p>	<p>Imagine the following situation:            You are working on a task assigned to you by the political executive of your organization. To complete the task as quickly as possible, your political executive suggests accelerating the procedure, potentially exceeding legal limitations. You face the demand to obey your political executive, but at the same time, you have concerns about violating legal limitations.            You...</p>
<p><b>Vignette 2</b></p>	<p>Imagine the following situation:            You are working on a task assigned to you by the political executive of your organization. To complete the task as quickly as possible, your political executive suggests keeping the task secret from the public to avoid potential delays, objections, and/or other obstacles. You face the demand to obey your political executive, but at the same time, you have concerns about the lack of transparency in your organization.            You...</p>
<p><b>Vignette 3</b></p>	<p>Imagine the following situation:            You are working on a task assigned to you by the political executive of your organization. Due to the controversy surrounding the execution of this task and protests from many citizens, it is clear to you that a significant portion of the population is against carrying out this task. You face the demand to obey your political executive, but at the same time, you have concerns about disregarding the opinion of a clear majority of the people.            You...</p>

**Table 1: Situations presented in discrete choice vignettes (translated)**

<b>Vignette 4</b>	Imagine the following situation: You are working on a task assigned to you by the political executive of your organization. You know that, once completed, the outcome of this task will have a negative impact on the public's perception of the organization you represent as a public servant. You face the demand to obey your political executive, but at the same time, you have concerns about the image of your organization among the public.
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## Vignette answer options and interview guide translated to English (Table 2, table 3, table 4)

*Table 2: Operationalization of variables as answer options in vignette trade-off (translated)*

<b>Variables (norms)</b>	<b>Operationalization in vignettes</b>
↓ Dependent variable ↓	<i>Option 1</i>
<b>Adherence to political responsiveness (all vignettes)</b>	You choose to follow the advice of your political executive, [ignoring option 2] to promote a rapid execution of the task, in order to obey the recommendations of your political executive.
↓ <i>Independent variables</i> ↓	<i>Option 2</i>
<b>Adherence to legal constraints (vignette 1)</b>	You choose to go against the advice of the political executive and try to influence their preferences, because you believe that these rules and constraints are important for civil servants and their organization.
<b>Adherence to transparency (vignette 2)</b>	You choose to go against the advice of the political executive and try to influence their preferences, because you believe that transparency is important for civil servants and their organization.
<b>Responsiveness to public demands (vignette 3)</b>	You choose to go against the advice of the political executive and try to influence their preferences, because you believe that including demands of the people in considerations is important for civil servants and their organization.
<b>Responsiveness to reputational threats (vignette 4)</b>	You choose to go against the advice of the political executive and try to influence their preferences, because you believe that the reputation your organization among the people is important for civil servants.

**Table 3: Follow-up questions presented after each vignette (translated)**

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Questions</b>
1	Why did you choose option (x)? Can you elaborate on this choice?
2 (asked when option 2 is chosen)	How would you go about doing this?
3	Do you recognize this situations from your own job?
3B (If answer to 3 is yes)	Could you give an example? Is this situation common or rare?
4	Does this hypothetical situation remind you of a difficult decision you had to make in your career?
4B (If answer to 4 is yes)	Can you provide an example? How did you approach this? Is this trade-off common or relatively rare?

**Table 3: Follow-up questions presented after each vignette (translated)**

<b>Question #</b>	<b>Questions</b>
1	Why did you choose option (x)? Can you elaborate on this choice?
2 (asked when option 2 is chosen)	How would you go about doing this?
3	Do you recognize this situations from your own job?
3B (If answer to 3 is yes)	Could you give an example? Is this situation common or rare?
4	Does this hypothetical situation remind you of a difficult decision you had to make in your career?
4B (If answer to 4 is yes)	Can you provide an example? How did you approach this? Is this trade-off common or relatively rare?

**Table 4: open questions asked at end of interview (translated)**

Question #	Questions
1	Can you tell me about your job? And about your position in particular?
2	How would you say you are connected to the elected political executive in your daily work? Are you frequently in contact with this executive?
3	In which ways does your relationship with the elected political executive affect your work?
4	Have you ever attempted to influence the preferences, demands, or thoughts of your political executive? If so, how did you approach this?
5	<p>Can you rank the following norms from most to least important (for you personally)? Are these norms and values that you would say are considered by you or colleague civil servants in their work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obedience to elected political leadership</li> <li>• Taking into account legal constraints</li> <li>• Taking into account the openness of affairs</li> <li>• Considering demands from the public</li> <li>• Responsiveness to threats to the image of your organization among the public</li> </ul>

## Codebook English, examples translated (Table 5)

Table 5: Codebook (examples translated)

	Code	Description	Example
<b>Reasons for interfering in politician preferences (Option 2 in discrete choice model)</b>	Long term vision	Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences by referring to a long term vision	“Executives are by definition a bit more short-term because they have 4 years to get something done, which is completely fine, but sometimes you have to make the long-term perspective even clearer to them.” (Respondent 2)
	Best intentions for political executive	Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences by saying it is the best choice for the politician(s) in question	“Yes, because you don't want the board to say afterwards; If I had known that, I would have decided something differently or I would have done this.” (Respondent 1)
	Integrity	Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences because of integrity	“...you are there to provide independent and honest advice, which of course means that you sometimes have to adhere to rules...” (Respondent 5)
	Experience	Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences because of their experience on the job	“Well look, I have been doing this job for quite a long time, but when I was young I found it much more difficult to go against a director compared to now that I have been doing it for much longer.” (Respondent 2)



**Table 5: Codebook (examples translated)**

<p><b>Reasons for interfering in politician preferences (Option 2 in discrete choice model)</b></p>	<p>Risk carried</p>	<p>Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences because of the risk involved for the respondent</p>	<p>“From my own perspective, it is really your own responsibility and ultimately they can always hold you accountable if it comes down to it if you have not followed certain procedures or rules.” (Respondent 6)</p>
	<p>Best intentions for the people</p>	<p>Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences by saying it benefits the people</p>	<p>“So you say; I'm here for you, and to do what is best for the city.” (Respondent 2)</p>
	<p>Norms and values</p>	<p>Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences by referring to norms, values and/or personal beliefs</p>	<p>“And because I just know how hard you and many fellow colleagues work and in my opinion it cannot be the case that a political director is wrongly asking something of you that gives the municipal organization a negative image. I just think that those are really my norms and values.” (Respondent 6)</p>
	<p>Part of job</p>	<p>Statements by respondents that explain interfering in politician preferences by saying it is simply part of their job</p>	<p>“Well, I think that as a civil servant you should also know a lot about the content because as a board you do not know in detail, that is what you are there for. So you must always inform them fully...” (Respondent 1)</p>

**Table 5: Codebook (examples translated)**

<b>Reasons for not interfering (option 1 in discrete choice model)</b>	Not part of job	Statements by respondents that explain not interfering in politician preferences by saying it is not part of their job	"Then I have to put myself in the position of the political executive, when it comes to the council I assume that they represent the residents." (Respondent 4)
	Risk not carried	Statements by respondents that explain not interfering in politician preferences by saying the risk involved rests on someone else	"Well, for example, when a refugee asylum process has to be completed, the board can indicate that we want to keep this under wraps until we have made a decision, yes, that has consequences, but on the other hand, those are consequences for the board, and they must then explain why they chose that speed for transparency." (Respondent 4)
	Lack of importance	Statements by respondents that explain not interfering in politician preferences by saying the topic is not important enough to bother executive with	"Look, I would now assume that what you outline is not a huge risk, in that case, I choose option 1." (Respondent 2)

**Table 5: Codebook (examples translated)**

<p><b>Reasons for not interfering (option 1 in discrete choice model)</b></p>	<p>Best intentions for the people</p>	<p>Statements by respondents that explain not interfering in politician preferences by saying it benefits the people</p>	<p>“Then I have to put myself in the position of the political executive, when it comes to the council I assume that they represent the residents.” (Respondent 4)</p>
	<p>Minority interests</p>	<p>Statements by respondents that explain not interfering in politician preferences by saying it benefits a certain minority</p>	<p>“And that depends because sometimes you have to make decisions as a political board that is not supported by the majority. For example, that [park] there, we are going to build affordable housing for young people there.” (Respondent 1)</p>
	<p>More context</p>	<p>Statements by respondents that indicate that their answer depends on missing context or information</p>	<p>“Whether I adhere to transparency depends on whether the permit has been granted” (Respondent 3)</p>
	<p>Relationship with executive</p>	<p>Statements about the relationship between the interviewed bureaucrat and the political executive</p>	<p>“If I have a lot of contact with the political executive, I can better empathize with what they want and therefore respond better to that as a civil servant. That really makes a difference than standing a little more at a distance.” (Respondent 1)</p>

**Table 5: Codebook (examples translated)**

	How to interfere	Statements that explain how respondent would interfere in politician preferences	“...make an appointment, come by, explain. I never do such feedback alone. Because when meeting the council there are always 2 or 3 of them. So always with my colleague, and if he wants to interfere then I go with him to just cover for each other like; hey that's been said this has been said , one writes, the other talks.” (Respondent 3)
<b>Relatability</b>	Relatable	Statements that show respondent leans towards recognizing the proposed situation from his/her own work	“yes, [it happens] a lot, there is always pressure from outside on the decisions you make as a government and often you only hear the people who are against it. So then it sometimes seems indeed, well maybe sometimes it is, but as if everyone is against it.” (Respondent 1)
	Not relatable	Statements that show respondent leans towards not recognizing the proposed situation from his/her own work	“No, this is certainly not a problem that I often encounter.” (Respondent 4)
	About respondent's work	Statements in which the respondent gives information about the work he/she does	“Yes, I am an advisor to the board, I am directly in such a team around an alderman. And as a result, you always have your nose on top of what is happening at the table with such a board.” (Respondent 2)

**Table 5: Codebook (examples translated)**

	Ranking	Statements related to the ranking of the norms (relates to question 5 in table 4)	“Well, at the top is transparency (1), then, well, listening to people in society (2).” (Respondent 5)
	Characteristics of municipality	Statements related to the characteristics of a municipality	“I work for the municipality of Waadhoeke, which is a relatively small municipality. So there is not a very large distance between the director and the policymaker. Which is very nice!” (Respondent 5)

## Results (Table 6, table 7, table 8)

*Table 6: Options chosen by respondents in discrete choice model vignettes*

	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5	Respondent 6
<b>Vignette 1</b>	2	=	2	2	2	2
<b>Vignette 2</b>	2	2	1	=	2	2
<b>Vignette 3</b>	=	2	1	1	=	2
<b>Vignette 4</b>	2	2	2	2	2	2

*Table 7: Respondents on whether the situations were relatable*

	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5	Respondent 6
<b>Vignette 1</b>	From colleagues	Relatable	Relatable	Relatable	Rare	Rare
<b>Vignette 2</b>	Relatable	Rare	Not relatable	Not relatable	Rare	Relatable
<b>Vignette 3</b>	Relatable	Relatable	Relatable	Rare	From colleagues	Not relatable
<b>Vignette 4</b>	Relatable	Not relatable	Relatable	Rare	Relatable	Relatable

*Table 8: Personal ranking of importance by respondents*

	<b>Respondent 1</b>	<b>Respondent 2</b>	<b>Respondent 3</b>	<b>Respondent 4</b>	<b>Respondent 5</b>	<b>Respondent 6</b>
<b>Adherence to political responsiveness</b>	5	2	5	3	4	5
<b>Adherence to legal constraints</b>	1	3	1	2	3	3
<b>Adherence to transparency</b>	2	1	4	4	1	4
<b>Responsiveness to public demands</b>	3	4	2	5	2	2
<b>Responsiveness to reputational threats</b>	4	5	3	1	5	1

## Information form for respondents (Dutch)

### Informatie formulier

Naam van Student:	Linden Hoksbergen
Studie:	Public Administration MSc, Leiden University
Naam van scriptiebegeleider:	Joris van der Voet
Titel van scriptie:	Between a rock and a hard place: The effect of contradicting norms in the bureaucracy on bureaucratic interference in politician preferences

#### Introductie

Mijn naam is Linden Hoksbergen, en ik voer dit onderzoek uit als onderdeel van mijn afstudeerscriptie voor de Master Public Administration. De verzamelde gegevens van dit interview zullen mij waardevolle inzichten verschaffen in de mechanismen die een rol spelen in de relatie tussen ambtenaren en gekozen bestuurders. Daarom nodig ik u, een ambtenaar die direct of indirect, taken krijgt van een door het volk verkozen bestuur(der), uit om deel te nemen aan mijn onderzoek.

#### Doel van het onderzoek

Ik ben geïnteresseerd in het begrijpen van het effect van tegenstrijdige normen waarmee ambtenaren in een bureaucratie worden geconfronteerd op hun keuze om zich te mengen in de voorkeuren van hun leidinggevende. Met dit onderzoek hoop ik waardevolle inzichten toe te voegen aan het onderwerp van ambtenaar-politicus relaties binnen het domein van Public Administration.

#### Deelname

Uw individuele deelname aan mijn experiment is vrijwillig en anoniem. De organisatie die u vertegenwoordigt zal, indien gewenst, ook anoniem blijven.

#### Recht op verlaten van het onderzoek

U heeft het recht om uw toestemming voor het gebruik van de gegevens in te trekken. U hoeft uw beslissing om uw toestemming in te trekken niet te rechtvaardigen, en er zijn geen gevolgen voor het intrekken van uw toestemming. U kunt tot 1 maand na afname van het onderzoek uw toestemming nog intrekken.

#### Procedures

Allereerst wordt u gevraagd om een reactieoptie te kiezen in 4 hypothetische situaties. U wordt eerst gevraagd een korte schets te lezen van de hypothetische situatie waarop u reageert. Vervolgens krijgt u twee reactieopties, die beide een norm vertegenwoordigen waarmee publieke ambtenaren te maken kunnen krijgen. U mag maar één optie kiezen, degene die u verkiest boven de andere optie.

Vervolgens, nadat er voor alle 4 hypothetische situaties een optie is gekozen, worden vervolgvragen gesteld. Dit stelt u, de respondent, in staat om uitvoerig in te gaan op de redenen voor het kiezen van de gekozen reactie voor de hypothetische situaties. Andere vervolgvragen worden gesteld om een beeld te vormen van hoe u, de respondent, past binnen de definitie van het onderwerp van interesse, zoals geconceptualiseerd in de scriptie.

#### Potentiële Risico's en Ongemakken



Ik verwacht niet dat u tijdens mijn experiment enig ongemak zult ervaren. Echter, als u enig ongemak ervaart, kunt u te allen tijde terugtrekken uit de studie zonder opgave van enige reden.

### **Vragen**

Voelt u zich alstublieft vrij om ten alle tijden, alle vragen die u heeft aan mij te stellen.

### **Privacy**

De volgende gegevens worden verzameld:

1. Opties gekozen in de hypothetische trade-off situaties
2. Antwoorden gegeven op de vervolgvragen
3. Organisatie vertegenwoordigd en uw rol hierin (tenzij u of uw organisatie wil dat deze informatie anoniem blijft)
4. Geluidsopname van het interview (wordt verwijderd na voltooiing van het onderzoek)

### **Behoud en Delen van Gegevens**

Na verzameling worden de gegevens gepseudonimiseerd en zijn ze daarom niet traceerbaar. Na afronding van het project wordt het onderzoeksmateriaal overgebracht naar het archief van de Universiteit Leiden. De gegevens kunnen worden gedeeld met andere onderzoekers voor vervolgonderzoek wanneer dit nodig is voor de publicatie van een paper. Ook in dit geval zal dit in geanonimiseerde vorm gebeuren.

Tijdens, en 1 maand na, afname van het onderzoek, kunt u het aangeven als u uw gegevens wilt intrekken.

De geluidsopname zal alleen toegankelijk zijn voor de onderzoeker en zal slechts bij grote uitzondering worden beluisterd door een scriptiebegeleider. Buiten deze personen zal niemand ooit de geluidsopname horen, en bij afronding van de studie worden de opnames verwijderd. Ook krijgt u de kans om de transcripten zelf in te zien voordat deze gepubliceerd worden, indien u dit laat weten aan mij.

### **Delen van de resultaten**

De bevindingen zullen worden gecommuniceerd in de vorm van een onderzoek artikel. Als u geïnteresseerd bent in de resultaten, kunt u uw e-mailadres achterlaten.

### **Contactgegevens onderzoeker**

Linden Hoksbergen - [L.hoksbergen@umail.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:L.hoksbergen@umail.leidenuniv.nl) – 

## Informed consent form for respondents (Dutch)

### Toestemmingsformulier

Voor deelname aan het afstudeeronderzoek Master Public Administration uitgevoerd door Linden Hoksbergen, onder begeleiding van Dr. Joris van der Voet aan de Universiteit Leiden.

Ik bevestig dat ik duidelijk ben geïnformeerd over de aard en methode van het onderzoek, zoals beschreven in de informatiebrochure. Mijn vragen zijn naar tevredenheid beantwoord.

Ik stem vrijwillig in met deelname met dit onderzoek en begrijp dat ik het recht heb om op elk moment mijn deelname in te trekken. Mochten mijn onderzoeksresultaten worden gebruikt in wetenschappelijke publicaties of op andere wijze openbaar worden gemaakt, dan zal dit volledig anoniem gebeuren. Geluidsopnames van mijn antwoorden zullen worden verwijderd na afronding van het onderzoek.

Voor verdere informatie over het onderzoek, zowel nu als in de toekomst, kan ik contact opnemen met:

Linden Hoksbergen via L.Hoksbergen@umail.leidenuniv.nl of op 

Naam, Achternaam: .....

Locatie en datum: .....

Handtekening

## Debriefing form for respondents (Dutch)

### Debriefing Verklaring

Dank u voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek. De verzamelde gegevens uit dit experiment zullen mij waardevolle inzichten verschaffen in de mechanismen die zich afspelen tussen ambtenaren en politieke principes. Alle situaties afgebeeld in de vignetten zijn bedacht en dus fictieel.

#### Recht om gegevens in te trekken

U heeft het recht om de verstrekte gegevens tijdens het onderzoek in te trekken. Als dat het geval is, neem dan alstublieft contact met mij op. Ook 1 maand na afname van het onderzoek kan ik mijn gegevens intrekken.

#### Als u vragen heeft

De hoofdonderzoeker die dit onderzoek uitvoert, is Linden Hoksbergen. Het onderzoek staat onder supervisie van Joris van der Voet aan de Universiteit Leiden. Stel gerust vragen die u nu heeft. Als u later vragen heeft, kunt u contact opnemen met Linden Hoksbergen via [L.hoksbergen@umail.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:L.hoksbergen@umail.leidenuniv.nl) of op [REDACTED]

Als u vragen of zorgen heeft met betrekking tot uw rechten als deelnemer aan dit onderzoek, kunt u contact opnemen met de begeleider Joris van der Voet, via [j.van.der.voet@fgga.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:j.van.der.voet@fgga.leidenuniv.nl), of met Linden Hoksbergen op de eerder verstrekte contactgegevens.

Indien u een kopie van het eindrapport van dit onderzoek wenst te ontvangen wanneer het is voltooid, kunt u gerust contact opnemen met de onderzoeker.

Uw handtekening hieronder geeft aan dat u bent geïnformeerd na afloop van deelname en dat al uw vragen zijn beantwoord.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Naam van Onderzoeker

\_\_\_\_\_  
Handtekening

\_\_\_\_\_  
Datum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Naam van deelnemer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Handtekening

\_\_\_\_\_  
Datum

Onderteken alstublieft beide kopietjes, u mag er een houden en de ander is voor de onderzoeker.