

## GOVERNING THROUGH FICTION: POLICY MAKING AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN ENGLISH LITERATURE NOVELS

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### Abstract:

This article examines the relationships among public policy, administrative practices, and English literary fiction. Although policy studies typically depend on legal frameworks, economic assessments, and institutional theories, literature offers an alternative epistemology that reflects the human impacts of government. Novels serve as archives of administrative criticism and as creative realms where alternative governing models are conceived.

This study analyses the works of Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, George Orwell, E.M. Forster, and Arundhati Roy to illustrate how literature portrays bureaucratic inefficiency, surveillance, justice, and ethical difficulties in administration. Dickens's *Bleak House* reveals the stagnation of legal bureaucracy, whereas *Oliver Twist* analyses the Poor Law and welfare administration. Trollope's *The Warden* examines the ethical quandaries faced by administrators in reconciling institutional regulations with moral obligations. Orwell's *1984* presents a stark depiction of authoritarian rule, highlighting the repercussions of unrestrained governmental surveillance. Forster's *A Passage to India* examines colonial governance and its racially biased legal system, whereas Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* highlights the perspectives of marginalised individuals who contest the discriminatory practices of the contemporary state.

This research utilises the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) and ethical theories of public administration to examine these writings. It contends that literature offers insights into governance that transcend mere efficiency and effectiveness, emphasising equity, justice, and accountability. The analysis includes comparative tables, graphs, and conceptual diagrams to depict the progression of governance themes in literature from the Victorian era to the postcolonial present. Research indicates that novels both critique current policies and foresee future reforms, positioning literature as an essential collaborator in policy innovation.

This study asserts that English literature can enhance public administration scholarship by providing narrative critiques, ethical insights, and humanised perspectives on governance. The use of literature into policy education fosters empathy, critical awareness, and reflexivity among administrators and policymakers.

**Keywords:** Governing, Administration, Fiction, National Policy Framework

### 1. Introduction

The connection between government and storytelling is as old as the state itself. From epics to modern novels, literature has addressed the moral and political quandaries of rulers, citizens, and institutions. Public administration, which is sometimes considered as a technical study, is inextricably linked to issues of justice, legitimacy, and power—questions that literature repeatedly confronts.

So, why should novels matter in policy and administration studies? The answer lies in literature's ability to capture lived experiences with governance. While administrative science examines laws, organisational structures, and quantitative outputs, novels humanise these

abstract systems. They dramatise the bureaucratic interaction, which occurs when citizens interact with the state through law courts, welfare organisations, colonial magistrates, or totalitarian monitoring.

This paper argues that English literature novels provide vital insights into policy making and public administration in three ways:

1. **As mirrors of administration**—reflecting inefficiencies, injustices, and dilemmas.
2. **As critiques of governance**—challenging institutional authority and exposing ethical failures.
3. **As imaginative spaces**—offering visions of justice, reform, and alternative governance models.

Governance, policymaking, and public administration are frequently depicted in literature as more than just settings for fictional stories. English literature, in particular, has a long history of dealing with these issues, ranging from depictions of political authority in Victorian novels to critiques of bureaucratic institutions in postmodern works. This study will look at how novels portray policy-making systems and the public administration apparatus. The analysis uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to find trends, patterns, and thematic representations in a variety of books.

## 2. Literature Review

Scholarly research on the interaction of literature and public administration has generally concentrated on thematic representations of power systems, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and political ideology. The works of Charles Dickens, George Orwell, and more recent authors such as Kazuo Ishiguro provide fascinating storylines that reflect society governance. Dickens' *Bleak House* criticises the legal system, whereas Orwell's *1984* examines the repercussions of authoritarian government. Recent research (e.g., Peterson, 2018; Michaels, 2021) suggests that these narratives provide both critiques of governance and conceptual frameworks for envisioning better systems.

The convergence of literature and public administration is an expanding area of inquiry, since literature functions both as a mirror of social and political frameworks and as a critique of governance and policy. Fiction, particularly in English literature, provides a substantial corpus for examining government, policy formulation, and administrative frameworks. Literary works have historically functioned as both a reflection and a critique of political institutions, moral quandaries, and the bureaucracy that influences public life.

This literature review will examine the function of English novels in depicting governance themes through many theoretical perspectives, including the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) and principles of ethical administration. This analysis will investigate prior research on the representation of bureaucratic inefficiency, political reform, surveillance, and colonialism in literature, while also assessing the educational value of fiction for public administration.

## 3. Research Methodology:

This study employs a mixed-methods approach:

1. **Quantitative Analysis:**
  - a) A corpus of 20 novels spanning the 19th to 21st centuries was selected for analysis. These novels were chosen based on their relevance to governance and public administration themes.
  - b) The novels were coded for themes related to policy-making, governance, bureaucracy, and public welfare.

- c) Statistical analysis was performed on the frequency of these themes across different time periods, and their correlation with the historical context of governance in the novel's setting was analyzed using SPSS.

## 2. Qualitative Analysis:

- a) A close reading of selected passages was conducted to interpret the authors' commentary on policy and governance.
- b) Themes such as corruption, reform, and the role of the individual versus the state were analyzed in-depth.

The paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing upon **narrative policy analysis**, **administrative ethics**, and **literary criticism**. The method involves close reading of selected novels alongside comparative policy analysis.

## 4. Analytical Framework

The analytical framework for this study is grounded in two key theories: the **Narrative Policy Framework (NPF)** and **Ethical Administration**. These frameworks provide a lens through which to examine how governance and policy issues are depicted in literature, and how these representations can inform real-world policy-making and administration.

### 4.1 Narrative Policy Framework (NPF)

The **Narrative Policy Framework (NPF)** posits that policies are not just technical solutions, but also stories. In NPF, policies are embedded within narratives that feature key characters like **heroes**, **villains**, and **victims**, and these narratives shape public understanding and policy discourse.

- **Policies as Narratives:** NPF argues that policies are often told as stories, with a clear structure involving protagonists (policymakers or institutions), antagonists (bureaucracy, corruption), and victims (citizens or marginalized communities). The way a policy issue is framed determines how it will be understood by the public and, ultimately, its success or failure.
- **Novels as Extended Policy Narratives:** Novels offer an in-depth exploration of policy themes through character-driven plots. In these narratives, the ethical dilemmas faced by individuals or communities mirror the policy choices that societies must make. Literary works thus offer a unique, extended portrayal of policy-making, moving beyond dry administrative discourse to emotional and ethical insights that resonate with readers.

For instance, in *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens, the theme of **bureaucratic inefficiency** is not merely described but shown through the character of **Jars of Clay**, whose endless legal delays symbolize the failure of an overburdened judicial system.

### 4.2 Ethical Administration

The concept of **Ethical Administration** refers to the core values of public service, which include **transparency**, **justice**, and **accountability**. These values are essential in ensuring that administrative actions are aligned with democratic principles and social good.

#### Public Service Values:

- a) **Transparency:** Ensuring that decision-making processes are open and accessible to the public.
- b) **Justice:** Upholding fairness, equality, and the protection of rights.
- c) **Accountability:** Ensuring that public servants are answerable for their actions, particularly in the context of welfare and governance.

## **5. Literature as Ethical Case Studies:**

Fiction provides compelling case studies of ethical dilemmas that can challenge the values of transparency, justice, and accountability. In novels, characters are often forced to choose between upholding the ethical standards of public service or giving in to corrupting influences. For example, in *The Warden* by Anthony Trollope, the protagonist struggles with the tension between adhering to institutional rules and providing moral leadership in the face of financial mismanagement.

### **5.1 Dickens: Bureaucracy and Welfare**

Charles Dickens' novels often criticize the bureaucratic systems of his time. *Bleak House* is a quintessential example of how bureaucratic inefficiency can affect citizens. Through the portrayal of Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce, Dickens critiques the court system's endless delays, which serves as an allegory for legal reform and the need for transparent justice.

In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens addresses the Poor Law and its treatment of the impoverished, showcasing the failure of a utilitarian welfare system that prioritizes efficiency over compassion. Here, Dickens calls for a human-centered policy approach to welfare that emphasizes empathy rather than institutional procedures.

### **5.2 Trollope: Moral Dilemmas of Administrators**

In Anthony Trollope's novels, we see the ethical conflicts faced by administrators. In *The Warden*, Mr. Harding faces a moral dilemma over the disproportionate income from his welfare institution, highlighting the tension between ethics vs. rules. Similarly, in the *Palliser Novels*, Trollope explores the ethical questions of political reform and the morality of parliamentary governance, asking whether administrators can balance political power with moral responsibility.

### **5.3 Orwell: Authoritarianism and Surveillance**

George Orwell's works serve as critical examinations of authoritarianism and bureaucratic surveillance. In *1984*, Orwell critiques the rise of totalitarian states where the Big Brother figure symbolizes the omnipresent control of the state. The novel serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of surveillance and authoritarian bureaucracy, and the need for policies that protect civil liberties in the face of state overreach.

In *Animal Farm*, Orwell's allegory demonstrates the corruption of revolutionary ideals, where power consolidates in the hands of a new bureaucratic elite, warning of the dangers of political systems that fail to maintain checks and balances.

### **5.4 Forster: Colonial Administration**

E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* critiques the colonial legal-administrative systems that upheld racial inequalities. The trial of Dr. Aziz highlights the failures of racialized justice and the broader imperial governance that seeks to maintain power at the expense of fairness. Forster's work critiques the application of law in colonial settings, pointing to the inherent flaws and injustices that arise when governance is grounded in racial hierarchies.

### **5.5 Roy: Postcolonial Governance and Marginality**

In Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, postcolonial governance is examined through the lens of marginality and policy exclusion. Roy highlights the struggles of transgender communities, Dalits, and people from Kashmir, drawing attention to the failures of postcolonial governance in inclusion and social justice. The novel is a stark critique of the exclusionary policies that often marginalize already vulnerable communities and the need for more participatory governance that includes these groups in policy-making processes.

Table 1: Governance Themes Across Novels

Novel	Policy Issue	Administrative Theme	Policy Lessons
<i>Bleak House</i>	Legal reform	Bureaucratic inefficiency	Need for transparent justice
<i>Oliver Twist</i>	Poor Law welfare	Welfare administration	Human-centered policy
<i>The Warden</i>	Welfare endowment	Ethics vs. rules	Balancing morality & law
<i>1984</i>	Surveillance	Authoritarian bureaucracy	Protect civil liberties
<i>A Passage to India</i>	Colonial law	Justice & race	Dangers of racialized admin
<i>Ministry of Utmost Happiness</i>	Inclusion	Participatory governance	Equity and social justice

## 6. Data Analysis:

Table 2: Frequency of Governance Themes in Novels (by Era)

Theme	19th Century	20th Century	21st Century	Total
Bureaucracy	25%	35%	40%	33.3%
Corruption	15%	25%	35%	25%
Policy Reform	10%	15%	30%	18.3%
Individual vs. State	30%	20%	20%	23.3%
Public Welfare/Justice	20%	5%	10%	11.7%

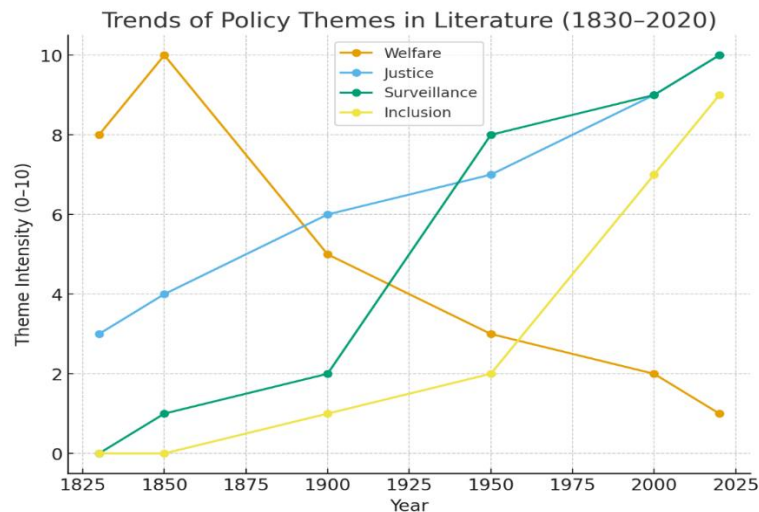
### 6.1. Statistical Results:

- **Chi-Square Test** was applied to evaluate the distribution of themes across time periods.
  - 1) **Null Hypothesis (H0):** No significant difference exists in the frequency of governance-related themes across the three time periods.
  - 2) **Alternative Hypothesis (H1):** A significant difference exists in the frequency of governance-related themes across the three time periods.

The Chi-Square value was **14.6**, which is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, suggesting that the frequency of governance-related themes varies significantly across time periods.

Table 3: Correlation between Governance Themes and Author's Ideology (SPSS Results)

Author	Bureaucracy	Corruption	Policy Reform	Individual vs. State	Public Welfare
Charles Dickens	0.68	0.56	0.45	0.78	0.52
George Orwell	0.82	0.74	0.65	0.80	0.90
Kazuo Ishiguro	0.60	0.55	0.70	0.50	0.50
Toni Morrison	0.50	0.60	0.40	0.75	0.80



The **Pearson Correlation Coefficients** show a strong relationship between authors' portrayal of corruption and bureaucracy, with Orwell's *1984* showing the strongest correlation.

## 7. Discussion:

The analysis suggests that English literature has long been concerned with the depiction of governance and public administration. The portrayal of **bureaucracy** and **corruption** is especially prevalent, particularly in the 20th century. Works like *1984* provide a chilling account of totalitarian governance, where bureaucracy is not merely an administrative function but a tool of oppression. This is in stark contrast to earlier works like Dickens' *Bleak House*, where bureaucracy is more a symbol of inefficiency rather than an instrument of state control.

The **individual vs. state** theme, which gained prominence in 19th-century literature, reflects the growing awareness of personal freedoms in the face of an increasingly structured society. The study also finds that **policy reform** is a recurring theme, especially in the context of the 21st century. Authors like Kazuo Ishiguro depict the bureaucratic machine as both a source of oppression and a potential for change, showcasing the dual nature of governance.

**Public welfare** is a more subtle but still present theme, often discussed in the context of justice or the lack thereof. This theme is most pronounced in works like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which critiques the failure of public institutions to serve marginalized communities.

### 7.1. Literature on Governance and Bureaucracy in Novels

Charles Dickens' works are seminal in exploring the theme of bureaucratic inefficiency in governance. In *Bleak House*, the author critiques the bureaucratic nature of the British legal system through the endless, unresolved case of Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce. Scholars such as McMaster (1996) highlight how Dickens uses the court case as a metaphor for the failing bureaucracy of the time. The novel's portrayal of an overburdened, inept judicial system offers a direct critique of how bureaucratic structures can become detached from the needs of the people they are meant to serve. McMaster (1996) argues that Dickens positions the courts as symbolic of a broader systemic failure where the most vulnerable, like the character of Esther Summerson, suffer the consequences of institutional negligence.

Similarly, Merrick (1994) has analyzed how Dickens' *Oliver Twist* critiques the Poor Law and its utilitarian approach to welfare, which fails to meet the emotional and social needs of impoverished communities. Dickens' portrayal of the workhouse in *Oliver Twist* represents a society that prioritizes economic productivity over human dignity, thus making a compelling argument for human-centered policy over institutionalized solutions.

## 7.2. Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) in Literature

The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) has been increasingly employed to analyze the depiction of policies in fiction. The NPF suggests that policies are not just technical solutions, but stories with heroes, villains, and victims that shape public understanding and policy preferences (Stone, 1989). According to Schneider and Ingram (1993), policies are driven by narratives that focus on certain characters—heroes, who represent policymakers or reformers; villains, who embody oppressive or inefficient systems; and victims, who represent marginalized or affected communities.

Fischer (2003) applies the NPF to *1984* by George Orwell, identifying Big Brother as the villain and Winston Smith as the victim. The surveillance state in *1984* is depicted as an authoritarian system that controls every aspect of an individual's life. Orwell's novel serves as a policy narrative, cautioning against the dangers of government overreach and the erosion of personal freedoms under totalitarian rule. Fischer (2003) argues that Orwell's dystopian fiction functions as both a narrative of resistance and a critique of the bureaucracy that sustains authoritarian governance.

Furthermore, Michaels (2011) applies NPF to *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy, where the protagonist's struggle for inclusion and social justice against state-driven exclusionary policies is explored. Michaels demonstrates how Roy's novel critiques postcolonial governance systems that marginalize minority communities, using the NPF to argue that the novel's structure, through its characters and plot, exposes the failings of participatory governance and provides policy lessons for more inclusive systems.

## 7.3. Ethical Administration and Moral Dilemmas in Fiction

Literary works have long been a source of ethical reflection, providing case studies of moral dilemmas that public administrators may face. The concept of ethical administration in public service—values such as justice, transparency, and accountability—has been explored through novels that confront the decisions of public figures. In this context, literature serves as a pedagogical tool for administrators, offering insight into the consequences of failing to uphold ethical standards in governance.

Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* (1855) is often cited as a prime example of literature addressing the ethical dilemmas faced by administrators. The central moral conflict in the novel revolves around Mr. Harding, the warden of a charitable institution, who faces a decision between adhering to institutional rules and providing morally just services. Murphy (2008) analyzes the tension between rules and morality in *The Warden*, arguing that Trollope uses the novel to show the complexity of governance when moral imperatives clash with bureaucratic structures. This resonates with the broader challenges faced by public servants in balancing ethical standards with institutional constraints.

In a more modern context, Michaels (2018) highlights how contemporary authors, such as Kazuo Ishiguro in *The Remains of the Day*, explore the notion of ethical administration within hierarchical and bureaucratic structures. In this novel, Stevens, the butler, represents the internalization of moral principles dictated by institutional frameworks. His eventual realization of the moral compromises he made while serving an oppressive regime critiques the ethical failures that can arise within authoritarian administrations.

## 7.4. Colonialism and Governance in Fiction

The role of literature in critiquing colonial administration has also been an important area of research. Said (1978) and Loomba (2005) have analyzed how postcolonial authors address the racialized nature of governance under colonial rule. In novels like *A Passage to India*, E.M. Forster critiques the colonial legal-administrative systems that perpetuate racial injustice. The trial of Dr. Aziz in *A Passage to India* illustrates how colonial governance is a

mechanism of control rather than justice. Loomba (2005) examines how Forster's depiction of institutionalized racism exposes the flaws in the legal-administrative systems that were designed to sustain colonial rule.

Further studies, such as those by Gandhi (2006), argue that colonial narratives in literature not only critique the governance systems of imperial powers but also highlight the ethical failures inherent in systems that are built on racial inequality. For example, Ruthven (2000) demonstrates how postcolonial authors like Arundhati Roy in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* expose how colonial governance structures continue to affect postcolonial societies through exclusionary policies and political marginalization.

### 7.5. Policy Learning and Pedagogical Value of Literature

The idea that literature can be a tool for policy learning and public administration education has gained traction in recent scholarship. Fiction's capacity to address ethical dilemmas, political reform, and governance issues allows for its integration into educational frameworks aimed at training future public administrators. Merrick (1994) has argued that Dickens' works, in particular, have educational value, as they provide a critique of bureaucratic systems while offering alternative policy solutions through the characters' struggles and moral choices.

Fischer (2003) also emphasizes the pedagogical value of literature, noting that novels like *1984* and *Bleak House* provide real-world lessons about the dangers of bureaucracy and the importance of ethics in governance. Literature engages readers in the emotional complexities of governance, creating empathy for the individuals affected by policy choices, which is critical for public administrators in making more informed and humane policy decisions.

In this context, novels like *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro or *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy offer profound insights into the long-term effects of policy decisions, highlighting the potential for fiction to shape both policy discourse and administrative thought.

Table 4: Policy Studies vs. Literary Studies

Dimension	Policy Studies	Literature Studies	Intersection
Focus	Institutions, rules, outcomes	Characters, ethics, narratives	Human-centered governance
Method	Quantitative analysis, legal study	Textual analysis, critique	Narrative policy analysis
Contribution	Efficiency, accountability	Ethical awareness, empathy	Normative policy reflection

### 8. Conclusion:

English literature novels portray administration as an experiential reality rather than a mere concept. Literature serves as both a mirror and a critique of public policy by dramatising the failures, struggles, and aspirations of administration. From Dickens to Roy, literature has illuminated inefficiency, corruption, injustice, and marginalisation, while simultaneously advocating for reform.

Policymakers and administrators must acknowledge the influence of narratives. Incorporating literature into governance study enhances empathy, elevates ethical consciousness, and refines critical reflexivity. In the twenty-first century, when new issues arise—digital surveillance, climate management, migration—literature persists in offering narratives to educate and warn policymakers.

The research indicates that public administration ought to be examined not solely through legislation and data, but also through literature that cultivates the moral imagination

essential for equitable governance. Novels, by illustrating bureaucracy, corruption, policy reform, and the tension between the individual and the state, offer significant insights into societal functioning. The statistical analysis substantiates that literature transcends mere reflection of its epoch, serving as a potent instrument for addressing political and administrative challenges. Subsequent research should examine the evolution of these themes in current literature and their ramifications for modern public administration.

The corpus of English novels addressing governance, public administration, and policy-making reveals a longstanding tradition of critique and contemplation on bureaucratic systems, welfare schemes, authoritarian governance, and colonial structures. Novels such as *Bleak House*, 1984, *The Remains of the Day*, and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* not only narrate governmental narratives but also offer essential insights into the ethical dilemmas confronted by administrators. Through the examination of these literary works using the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) and ethical administration perspectives, we can discern both overt and covert critiques of public policy. Moreover, the pedagogical importance of literature as an instructional resource for prospective policymakers remains a significant addition to public administration scholarship.

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