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## Efficiency in democratic accountability: A systematic literature review of Deborah Stone's framework

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### Abstract

This research advances the discussion on efficiency within the context of democratic accountability, drawing on Deborah Stone's framework and various scholarly contributions. It explores the connection between expert accountability, citizen participation, and the role of governance structures in upholding democratic integrity. It questions the traditional separation of politics and administration, advocating for a more varied approach to efficiency. Through a review of 53 scholarly articles, this study identifies four primary dimensions of efficiency: policy impact assessment, inclusivity in goal setting, acknowledgment of political and social factors, and adaptability in policy making. The analysis points to a shared focus on assessing policy impacts and identifies a gap in addressing inclusivity. The study promotes a governance model emphasizing adaptability, equity, sustainability, and alignment with societal values, suggesting a revised concept of efficiency that adheres to Stone's principles and is suitable for modern democratic frameworks.

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### Introduction

Synthesizing foundational perspectives and contemporary analyses enriches the discourse on efficiency within democratic accountability. Wilson's seminal advocacy for a distinct separation between politics and administration, advocating for efficiency, effectiveness, and equity in public administration, finds resonance with Stone's unique and comprehensive critique of efficiency. Stone challenges the conventional understanding of efficiency that often underpins such separations. She argues that efficiency cannot be neatly isolated from the political and social contexts that inherently shape administrative decisions. Stone's critique reveals that the quest for efficiency involves subjective judgments about what and whose values to prioritize, thus inevitably intertwining it with politics and broader social considerations.

Stone extends the conversation beyond traditional economic interpretations, emphasizing the importance of considering political, social, and ethical dimensions in assessing efficiency (Stone 2002; Wilson 1887) <sup>[51, 56]</sup>. Scholars like Langvatn & Holst (2022) <sup>[27]</sup> further explore this foundational argument and investigate expert accountability within democratic frameworks, showing the tension between technical expertise and democratic inclusivity. Similarly, Gaventa *et al.* (2023) <sup>[14]</sup> highlight the vital role of citizen mobilization in enhancing democratic accountability, showcasing grassroots efforts as essential in holding authorities accountable and reinforcing democratic governance. These perspectives collectively highlight the importance of a comprehensive and inclusive approach to efficiency, advocating for governance processes that integrate diverse stakeholder perspectives and values, thus aligning with democratic principles and enhancing public trust.

The unclear relationship between democratic institutions, financial policies, and efficiency is examined by Hansen (2023) <sup>[18]</sup>, who discusses how democratic responsiveness and financial vulnerabilities intersect to impact efficiency. This argument is complemented by the insights of Macdonald (2023) <sup>[32]</sup>, who navigates the broader systemic challenges of global environmental governance, suggesting that individual and organizational responsibilities must be linked with collective action to address these challenges effectively.

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Additionally, Bøggild & Pedersen's (2024) <sup>[6]</sup> exploration of the legislative cost of ruling within party governance and Hjermslev's (2023) <sup>[20]</sup> investigation into electoral dynamics in minority governments provide a shady understanding of political accountability and legislative efficiency. These analyses highlight the need for flexibility, adaptability, and inclusivity in policymaking, emphasizing the importance of aligning administrative functions with the citizens' evolving needs and preferences, ensuring that efficiency is a benchmark for administrative performance and a conduit for democratic legitimacy.

The discourse on the role of governance models, Benefit Corporations, and the media in enhancing democratic accountability and efficiency offers another rich angle of analysis. Bandini *et al.* (2023) <sup>[3]</sup> assess how Benefit Corporations balance commercial success with social impact, focusing on governance models and accountability mechanisms. This perspective aligns with Koop and Vettimo's (2023) <sup>[25]</sup> exploration of the accountability landscape of non-majoritarian institutions like the Bank of England, emphasizing the role of media in reinforcing transparency and public scrutiny. Also, Grubnic & Cooper (2019) <sup>[16]</sup> and Saz-Carranza *et al.* (2020) <sup>[4]</sup> investigate the unclear nature of accountability within public health governance and EU regulatory networks, respectively, highlighting the crucial role of diverse accountability configurations in achieving effective governance. These contributions advocate for a governance model that is not only efficient in the economic sense but also equitable, sustainable, and reflective of society's collective values and aspirations, thus resonating with Stone's call for policies that promote a comprehensive, inclusive, and adaptable approach to efficiency in democratic governance.

The exploration of bureaucratic efficiency, democratic values, and the impact of leadership on innovation within the public sector demonstrates the relationship between administrative competence and democratic engagement. Zhang *et al.* (2020) <sup>[57]</sup> investigate the tension between managerial confidence and citizen participation, suggesting that while bureaucratic efficiency is essential, it must be balanced with democratic values to ensure comprehensive governance. This perspective is complemented by the insights of Schwarz *et al.* (2020) and Trondal *et al.* (2021) <sup>[48, 53]</sup>, who focus on leadership styles and the adaptability of government agencies in multilevel administrative systems, emphasizing the importance of fostering an environment that encourages innovation and responsiveness. Furthermore, Overman & Schillemans (2022) <sup>[37]</sup> investigate the concept of "felt accountability" within public organizations, exploring how individual perceptions influence governance outcomes. These studies highlight the need for efficient but adaptable, inclusive, and responsive policies to the changing dynamics of society, thereby aligning with Stone's emphasis on the multidimensional nature of efficiency in democratic accountability. Through these synthesized perspectives, the scholarly discourse on efficiency in democratic accountability emerges as a multifaceted conversation transcending simple economic metrics. It advocates for a comprehensive approach to governance that is responsive to the evolving needs of society, emphasizing the importance of balancing efficiency with democratic principles to enhance the legitimacy, trust, and effectiveness of public institutions.

## Theoretical Perspective

The concept of democratic accountability within public administration and policy analysis has been a focal point of scholarly debate, reflecting an ongoing effort to reconcile the demands of effective governance with the foundational principles of democratic societies. Democratic accountability has been influenced by seminal thinkers such as Wilson, Stone, Simon, Ostrom, Gulick, Taylor, and Goodnow, each contributing to a dialogue on the interconnection between administrative actions and democratic ideals. These contributions, spanning over a century, show the evolving nature of this discourse, highlighting shifts in the understanding of what constitutes democratic accountability considering changing societal needs, governance challenges, and administrative practices. The dialogue initiated by Woodrow Wilson, emphasizing a clear boundary between politics and administration, laid the initial groundwork for subsequent explorations into the misconceptions of public administration in a democratic context.

Wilson's vision of an administration driven by meritocratic principles and insulated from political influences suggested a model of governance where administrative efficiency and democratic oversight were viewed as complementary rather than opposing elements. However, this notion contrasts sharply with Deborah Stone's critique, which underscores that efficiency is political and cannot be effectively separated from democratic processes. Stone argues that administrative decisions are shaped by political values and societal objectives, indicating that actual democratic governance involves continuous negotiation and engagement between administrative efficiency and democratic values. This reconceptualization has inspired investigations into the interconnections between administrative systems and democratic accountability, furthering the ongoing discourse on how governance structures can both reflect and fulfill democratic principles. This early delineation has catalyzed more in-depth inquiries into how administrative structures and processes can be designed to serve and be accountable to the democratic polity, sparking a century-long quest to delineate the boundaries and points of convergence between administration and democratic governance.

Building upon Wilson's foundational concepts, Deborah Stone's examination of traditional notions of efficiency injected a new dimension into the discourse on democratic accountability. By arguing for a reconceptualization of efficiency to include ethical, social, and political considerations, Stone challenged the prevailing economic paradigms that had hitherto dominated discussions on public administration. Her insistence on a comprehensive evaluation of policy impacts, including quantifiable and qualitative dimensions, calls for a holistic approach to understanding efficiency within the public sector. Stone's work advocates inclusivity in defining policy objectives, acknowledging the inherently political nature of administrative decisions, and the importance of flexibility and adaptability in policy implementation. These themes resonate with the broader quest for an administrative practice that is effective in achieving its goals and reflective of and responsive to the diverse values and needs of democratic societies. Through Stone's lens, efficiency emerges not as an end but to achieve the higher objectives of equity, participation, and accountability central to democratic governance.

Herbert A. Simon's introduction of bounded rationality further enriches the conversation by highlighting the cognitive and informational limitations that shape decision-making within administrative contexts. Simon's insights shift the focus toward the processes underpinning administrative actions, highlighting the complexities in aligning these processes with democratic principles. By acknowledging the constraints under which administrators operate, Simon's work illuminates the practical challenges of achieving both efficiency and accountability in governance. His emphasis on the need for satisfaction, seeking good enough rather than optimal solutions over purely maximizing outcomes, shows the trade-offs and judgments that administrators must navigate to serve the public effectively. Simon's contributions thus bring a comprehensive understanding of decision-making to the discourse on democratic accountability, suggesting that actual efficiency in public administration requires an appreciation of the human elements that influence administrative decisions.

Vincent Ostrom's exploration of polycentric governance structures introduces a pioneering approach to enhancing efficiency in public administration by decentralizing authority across multiple independent decision-making centers. This model counters traditional centralized governance frameworks, advocating for a more distributed and participatory system that enables faster, localized decision-making closer to the communities it affects. Ostrom argues that such a structure not only increases democratic accountability but also boosts efficiency by streamlining processes, reducing bureaucratic overhead, and improving the responsiveness of governance to citizen needs. His emphasis on the rule of law and constitutionalism supports a stable environment where these decentralized units operate effectively within a clear legal framework, enhancing both transparency and the engagement of citizens. By promoting a governance model that adjusts more readily to diverse community preferences and conditions, Ostrom's vision of polycentric governance outlines how public administration can be dynamically adaptable and efficient in meeting the evolving demands of a democratic society.

The contributions of Luther Gulick and Frederick Taylor have been pivotal in shaping the debate on balancing administrative efficiency with democratic accountability. Gulick's POSDCORB and Taylor's scientific management principles show the complexity of managing public administration while adhering to democratic values. Although their emphasis on efficiency has faced criticism for potentially diminishing democratic ideals, their work is foundational in navigating the managerial challenges of governance. Similarly, Frank Goodnow's distinction between politics and administration adds depth to understanding democratic accountability, proposing a framework that separates policy formulation from its execution. This distinction, despite its evolution and critiques, remains vital in discussions on crafting administrative systems that support democratic principles. Together, these intellectual legacies highlight the ongoing quest for governance models that achieve administrative effectiveness and embody democratic accountability, reflecting a shift towards a more varied understanding of how governance can uphold democratic integrity while ensuring operational efficiency.

### Dimensions of Efficiency

Deborah Stone's critique of efficiency introduces a

sophisticated evaluation model known as "Policy Impact Assessment," which moves beyond traditional economic frameworks of policy evaluation. This method emphasizes a comprehensive assessment of policy effects, incorporating tangible and intangible outcomes beyond straightforward economic indicators. The importance of such an inclusive approach is exemplified by research investigating the dynamics of citizen mobilization in politically fragile contexts (Gaventa, Joshi, and Anderson 2023) <sup>[14]</sup> and governance mechanisms relevant to environmental sustainability (Macdonald 2023) <sup>[32]</sup>. These studies underscore the necessity of integrating social and environmental considerations into the efficiency evaluations of governance, advocating for models that adeptly respond to the complex challenges of contemporary society. Applying the Policy Impact Assessment approach shows that effective governance must prioritize a balanced integration of economic, social, and environmental impacts, reflecting a deeper and more varied understanding of policy effectiveness.

The principle of inclusivity in defining objectives and outcomes is crucial to Stone's conception of efficiency, demanding that policymaking processes embrace all stakeholders' diverse perspectives and needs. This dimension finds resonance in the work of Bandini *et al.* (2023) <sup>[3]</sup>, who scrutinize the governance models of Benefit Corporations (BCs) and their commitment to balancing commercial success with social impact. Their exploration of BCs' attempts to implement multi-stakeholder governance models illustrates the practical challenges and opportunities in ensuring diverse voices are included in defining corporate objectives and outcomes. Similarly, Koop & Vettimo (2023) <sup>[25]</sup> investigate the accountability mechanisms of non-majoritarian institutions like the Bank of England, highlighting the role of media in democratizing information and fostering a more inclusive dialogue around policy decisions. Through their analyses, these authors demonstrate the importance of creating spaces where multiple stakeholders can influence policy objectives, aligning governance practices with Stone's vision of inclusivity and democratic engagement.

As Stone highlights, acknowledging political and social dimensions emphasizes the necessity of recognizing the inherently political nature of efficiency. This acknowledgment is exemplified in the works of Trondal *et al.* (2021) <sup>[53]</sup> and Overman & Schillemans (2022) <sup>[37]</sup>, who explore the complexities of administrative decisions in multilevel governance systems and the subjective experience of "felt accountability" within public organizations, respectively. Trondal *et al.*'s analysis of how government agencies navigate conflicting pressures across domestic and EU levels illustrates the political complexities inherent in achieving efficiency, reflecting Stone's assertion that policy decisions are deeply embedded in political and social contexts. Overman and Schillemans' focus on the psychological dimensions of accountability further enriches this discourse, revealing how individual perceptions and beliefs within public organizations can influence the implementation of policies that either support or undermine efficiency. Together, these scholars provide valuable insights into the dynamics that shape governance, reinforcing Stone's call for policies that are efficient but also just, equitable, and reflective of democratic principles.

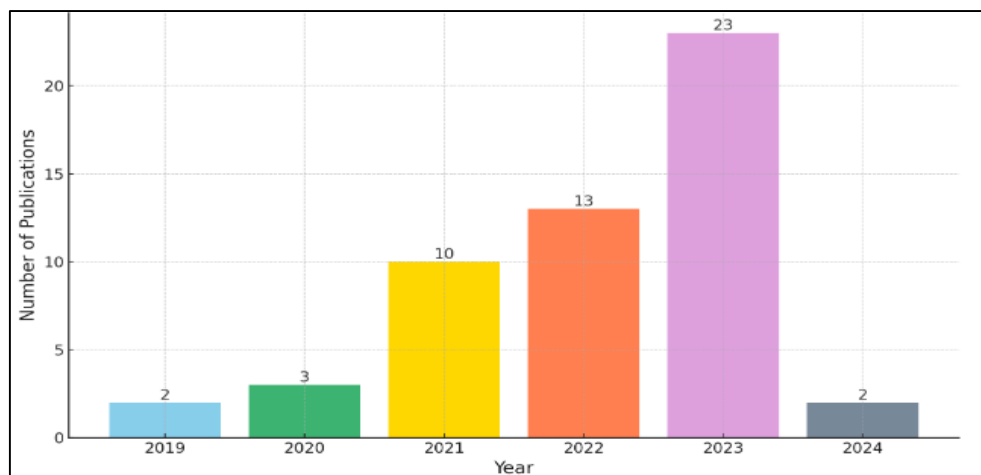
Flexibility and adaptability in policy implementation are

crucial elements in Stone's framework, acknowledging that static solutions are inadequate for addressing the evolving challenges of modern societies. This need for adaptable policies is echoed in the work of Schwarz *et al.* (2020) [48], who investigate the impact of leadership styles on public sector motivation and performance, suggesting that adaptable leadership can foster an environment conducive to innovation and responsiveness. Likewise, Elkomy *et al.* (2019) [11] assess the implications of outsourcing cleaning services within the NHS, pointing to the trade-offs between cost efficiency and quality of service. Their findings highlight the importance of incorporating flexibility in contractual arrangements and policy designs to ensure that efficiency does not come at the expense of service quality or public trust. These authors and Stone advocate for a governance approach responsive to society's changing needs and circumstances, underlining the

necessity of ongoing evaluation and adaptation to achieve efficiency that truly serves the public interest. Together, these perspectives weave a rich tapestry that not only broadens our understanding of efficiency but also illuminates the pathways through which governance can be made more effective, equitable, and aligned with the core values of democracy.

### Method

This research employed a rigorous methodology to investigate the efficiency within democratic accountability, guided by Deborah Stone's framework. It began with an exhaustive review of 75 articles from reputable public administration journals between 2019 and 2024, ensuring a wide range of scholarly perspectives and methodologies, as seen in Figure 1 below. 2023 emerged with the most publications, while 2019 and 2024 had the least.



**Fig 1:** Number of Publications per Year

The selection process involved thoroughly examining bibliography pages, leading to a systematic literature evaluation. Content analysis was then used to filter studies aligned with Stone's definition of efficiency, focusing on its four thematic pillars: policy impact assessment, Inclusivity in objectives and outcomes, acknowledgment of political and social dimensions, and Flexibility in policy implementation. This process resulted in 53 directly relevant articles. Figure 2 categorize them according to the primary dimension they addressed, marked by a highlighted X (for those with more than one category). This approach not only demonstrates the multidimensionality of efficiency within the context of democratic accountability but also enriches the study by providing a structured analysis of the literature, contributing significantly to understanding efficiency in public administration.

### Policy Impact Assessment

Deborah Stone's discussion on efficiency within democratic accountability necessitates a nuanced and comprehensive evaluation of policy outcomes beyond mere economic metrics. This broader approach to policy analysis is illustrated by examining Benefit Corporations within Italy, highlighting the essential integration of social values into economic evaluations, and advocating for a policy assessment encompassing various impact dimensions (Bandini *et al.* 2023) [3]. Further reinforcing this expanded evaluative framework, the complexities inherent in public health governance are explored, emphasizing the importance

of including economic, social, and political factors in policy evaluations (Grubnic and Cooper 2019) [16]. Additionally, the complexities of EU regulatory networks are delved into, illustrating the multifaceted nature of governance impacts (Saz-Carranza, Albareda, and Federo 2020) [4]. These assessments align with Stone's perspective, advocating for an inclusive approach that appreciates policy decisions' broader political and social dimensions.

This dialogue is further enriched by exploring democratic governance innovation and the effects of economic challenges on policy preferences among local government politicians, adding depth to the understanding of governance dynamics (Hendriks 2022; van der Voet 2022) [19, 54]. In parallel, the trade-offs between cost efficiency and service quality in the National Health Service, along with the implications of government openness on public trust, are analyzed, shedding light on the complex decisions faced by public administrators (Elkomy, Cookson, and Jones 2019; Schmidhuber, Ingrams, and Hilgers 2021) [11, 47]. These studies contribute to the discourse on achieving efficiency in public services while maintaining their integrity and quality, exemplifying the need for a policy impact assessment that includes many factors. This approach echoes Stone's advocacy for a comprehensive evaluation that accounts for both tangible and intangible outcomes in policymaking.

The dialogue further evolves with insights that illuminate the representation of Indigenous public servants and the democratic legitimacy of public participation as perceived by local politicians, enhancing our understanding of inclusivity

within governance structures (Althaus and O'Faircheallaigh 2022; Nederhand and Edelenbos 2023) <sup>[2, 35]</sup>. Additionally, the proposal of an integrative framework for understanding value creation in public service ecosystems emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive evaluation incorporating diverse stakeholders (Osborne *et al.* 2022) <sup>[36]</sup>. These show the nature of inclusivity and the need to consider the political and social dimensions in policy evaluations. This approach aligns with Stone's definition of efficiency, advocating for a broad assessment that accounts for the varied impacts of governance decisions on different community groups.

This enriched narrative also investigates the effectiveness of modern initiatives such as telework and collective citizen input via digital platforms within public organizations. Research illuminates how these technologies impact efficiency and enhance democratic accountability, highlighting the dynamic interactions between technology, policy, and public engagement (Mele, Belardinelli, and Bellé 2023; Schiff 2023) <sup>[33, 45]</sup>. Further depth is added by studies exploring the financial health of local governments after state takeovers and the consequences of policy dismantling in Brazil during Bolsonaro's administration, revealing the complex trade-offs required to maintain fiscal stability, uphold democratic governance, and ensure social equity (Milhorce 2022; Singla, Spreen, and Shumberger 2023) <sup>[34, 50]</sup>.

Additionally, the discourse extends to the challenges of internal governmental performance and the broader implications of EU disintegration, with studies examining the balance between bureaucratic performance management and the broader democratic costs and benefits of political changes (Patberg 2021; Shepherd 2022) <sup>[39]</sup>. Research focusing on public accessibility to hearings and strategic communication during crises emphasizes the importance of adaptability and comprehensive policy evaluation (Bukalova and Maland 2023; Lee 2022) <sup>[8, 28]</sup>. Further contributions assess public service expectations, the repercussions of politicized service, and the balance between bureaucratic competence and responsiveness, providing a rich tapestry of insights into how governance can be continuously adapted and improved to meet evolving public needs and expectations (Fernández-i-Marín *et al.* 2023; Podger and Kettl 2024; Rimkutė and van der Voet 2023) <sup>[13, 41, 42]</sup>.

### Acknowledgement of Political and Social Dimensions of Efficiency

Incorporating the political and social dimensions into the efficiency of democratic accountability is critical, as evidenced by the diverse inquiries of scholars across various fields. Langvatn and Holst (2022) <sup>[27]</sup> investigate the complexities of expert accountability within governance frameworks, illustrating the necessity of embedding expert opinions within democratic principles to ensure political legitimacy. Gaventa, Joshi, and Anderson (2023) <sup>[14]</sup> extend this dialogue by exploring citizen mobilization for accountability in fragile democracies, highlighting the importance of citizen-led actions in authoritarian contexts. Hansen, (2023) <sup>[18]</sup> also focuses on the economic domain, discussing how democratic institutions' interactions with financial vulnerabilities impact sovereign credit ratings, thereby showing the political varieties of economic policies. (Bøggild and Pedersen 2024) <sup>[6]</sup> analyze voter behavior's influence on legislative efficiency, revealing how electoral consequences affect governance. (Bandini *et al.* 2023) <sup>[3]</sup>

contribute to this discussion from a corporate perspective, examining Benefit Corporations' roles in democratic accountability and their governance challenges.

Building on the foundational work of the authors above, Schillemans *et al.* (2021) <sup>[46]</sup> investigate the concept of 'felt accountability' among CEOs of quasi-autonomous agencies, offering insights into the subjective experiences of accountability in public administration. Koop & Vettimo (2023) <sup>[25]</sup> explore the Bank of England's navigation of accountability landscapes, emphasizing the media's role in amplifying accountability mechanisms. Saz-Carranza *et al.* (2020) <sup>[4]</sup> turn our attention to the governance structures of EU regulatory networks, underscoring the importance of democratic accountability configurations. Thomann *et al.* (2023) <sup>[52]</sup> provide a granular analysis of how street-level bureaucrats' political ideologies shape policy implementation, reflecting on political-ideological accountability. Hendriks (2022) <sup>[19]</sup> offers a broader perspective on democratic governance, suggesting innovation as a pathway to enhancing democratic values and accountability. Petersen *et al.* (2022) <sup>[40]</sup> examine the administrative burdens on private businesses, revealing the political and social dimensions inherent in government-business interactions. Brenton & Bouckaert (2021) <sup>[7]</sup> discuss the dual pressures museums face, balancing financial sustainability with their social missions, thereby navigating the linkage between market forces and cultural policies.

Schmidhuber *et al.* (2021) <sup>[47]</sup> contribute to our understanding of government openness and its impact on public trust, arguing for a comprehensive approach to open government initiatives that includes considering political participation opportunities. Overman & Schillemans (2022) <sup>[37]</sup> extend the discussion on accountability by focusing on 'felt accountability' within public organizations, highlighting the psychological aspects of accountability mechanisms. Althaus & O'Faircheallaigh (2022) <sup>[2]</sup> draw attention to Indigenous public servants' unique challenges, thereby exploring the political and social challenges within public administration. Levin (2023) <sup>[29]</sup> critiques the outsourcing of public participation, pointing to the epistemic injustices that can arise, emphasizing the need for genuine engagement. Nederhand & Edelenbos (2023) <sup>[35]</sup> offer insights into local politicians' perceptions of public participation in the Netherlands, revealing the political considerations that shape participation frameworks.

Osborne *et al.* (2022) <sup>[36]</sup> propose an ecosystem perspective on public services, advocating for inclusivity in defining objectives and outcomes to ensure value creation across various societal levels. Curley *et al.* (2023) <sup>[10]</sup> discuss the dynamics of policymaking power delegation during crises, shedding light on the political calculations behind such decisions. George *et al.* (2023) <sup>[15]</sup> highlight the role of literature reviews in public administration, suggesting that they should reflect the field's diverse values and challenges. (Hansen 2023b) <sup>[18]</sup> examines the relationship between performance information and political attention, demonstrating how data can drive policy decisions. Huang & Villadsen (2023) <sup>[21]</sup> present a systems model for understanding the roles of top managers in public organizations, emphasizing the relationship between public values and political influence.

Singla *et al.* (2023) <sup>[50]</sup> investigates the ramifications of state interventions on the financial wellbeing of local governments, weaving into their analysis the political and

social fabric that such takeovers impact. This thread of investigation seamlessly connects with Milhorce's (2022)<sup>[34]</sup> scrutiny of policy dismantling under President Bolsonaro's administration, where the political underpinnings of policy shifts are laid bare. Shepherd (2022)<sup>[49]</sup> extends the discourse by critiquing the prevailing performance management frameworks, advocating for an accountability model that fosters learning and growth, thereby enriching the dialogue on governance. Meanwhile, Patberg (2021)<sup>[39]</sup> navigates the turbulent waters of EU disintegration, highlighting the democratic paradoxes that emerge in the quest for cohesive governance. Zhang *et al.* (2020)<sup>[57]</sup> highlight the relationship between managerial confidence and citizen engagement, spotlighting the challenges that democratic participation poses to bureaucratic efficiency. Farhang (2021)<sup>[12]</sup> contests the conventional narrative surrounding legislative stagnation in divided polities, advocating for a more diversified understanding of legislative efficacy and the challenges of administrative influence. Bertelli & Busuioc (2021)<sup>[4]</sup> contribute to this discourse by examining how reputation-sourced authority impacts democratic accountability, pondering the equilibrium between governance reputation and accountability. Bukalova & Maland (2023)<sup>[8]</sup> tackle the technological adaptation challenges facing local governments, showing the imperative of maintaining public access and participatory avenues that resonate with community identity and governance dynamics. Hjermslev (2023)<sup>[20]</sup> rounds out this scholarly journey by probing into the accountability and electoral strategies within minority governments, offering insights into how voter perceptions and support mechanisms shape democratic engagements.

### **Inclusivity in Defining Objectives and Outcomes**

Inclusivity in defining objectives and outcomes stands as a cornerstone of efficiency within the framework of democratic accountability, as shown by several scholars. Gaventa, Joshi, and Anderson (2023) and Langvatn and Holst (2022)<sup>[14, 27]</sup> provide foundational perspectives, emphasizing incorporating diverse viewpoints in policymaking. This approach ensures that governance structures reflect not only a wide range of societal needs but are also adaptive to the dynamic nature of democratic societies. Similarly, Bøggild & Pedersen (2024)<sup>[6]</sup> and Carelli & Pierre (2022)<sup>[9]</sup> explore the relationships between legislative impacts and administrative actions, highlighting the need for policies that resonate with the electorate's and stakeholders' preferences. This discourse is enriched by Bandini *et al.* (2023)<sup>[3]</sup> and Osborne *et al.* (2022)<sup>[36]</sup>, who argue that balancing commercial success with social impact and creating value in public service ecosystems are crucial for achieving actual efficiency. Their analyses suggest that inclusivity transcends mere consultation, demanding active and meaningful participation in defining what constitutes beneficial outcomes for all.

The dialogue on inclusivity further evolves when considering policymaking's political and social dimensions, as articulated by scholars like Schillemans *et al.* (2021)<sup>[46]</sup> and Thomann, Maxia, and Ege (2023)<sup>[52]</sup>. They investigate the felt accountability among CEOs and the dilemmas street-level bureaucrats face, respectively, illustrating the varied realities of implementing inclusive policies. Hendriks (2022)<sup>[19]</sup>, through his framework for democratic governance innovation, alongside Elkomy *et al.* (2019)<sup>[11]</sup> examination of the NHS's outsourcing practices, reinforces the argument

that inclusivity must be practiced in the creation and execution of policies. Such approaches ensure that the policy impact assessment considers the full spectrum of societal impacts, aligning with Stone's vision of efficiency.

The importance of inclusivity in the policymaking continuum is further highlighted by the works of Althaus and O'Faircheallaigh (2022; Levin (2023)<sup>[2, 29]</sup>, who discuss the efforts of indigenous bureaucrats and the challenges in outsourcing public participation. These studies show the imperative of ensuring that policy decisions are informed by the lived experiences and knowledge of all community segments, especially those historically marginalized. Nederhand & Edelenbos (2023)<sup>[35]</sup>; Singla *et al.* (2023)<sup>[50]</sup> contribute to this narrative by examining politicians' perceptions of public participation and the impact of state interventions on local governance, respectively, demonstrating that inclusivity can significantly influence the effectiveness and acceptance of policy outcomes.

Moreover, the critical analysis by Milhorce (2022)<sup>[34]</sup> on policy dismantling in Brazil and Shepherd's (2022)<sup>[49]</sup> investigation into performance management practices during the pandemic provides stark illustrations of the consequences when inclusivity is sidelined. These scenarios, juxtaposed with the strategies for enhancing public hearing access discussed by Bukalova & Maland (2023)<sup>[8]</sup> and the crisis communication strategies examined by Lee (2022)<sup>[28]</sup>, offer a comprehensive understanding of inclusivity's role in navigating the landscape of democratic accountability.

The exploration of inclusivity's role in achieving efficiency and democratic accountability is further enriched by the insights of Fernández-i-Marín *et al.* (2023)<sup>[13]</sup> and Podger & Kettl (2024)<sup>[41]</sup>. Their research, which touches on citizens' expectations and the Robodebt scandal, respectively, highlights the need for inclusive policies in their development implementation and evaluation stages. This perspective is echoed by Rimkutė & van der Voet (2023)<sup>[42]</sup> and Weißmüller & Zuber (2023)<sup>[55]</sup>, who emphasize the importance of bureaucratic responsiveness and the inclusion of diverse perspectives in understanding administrative corruption. Conclusively, Karimi (2021)<sup>[22]</sup>; Kennedy, Sayers, and Alcantara (2022)<sup>[23]</sup>; Kgobe and Mamokhere (2021)<sup>[24]</sup> synthesize the discourse on inclusivity within democratic accountability. These scholars argue for the embracement of participatory democracy, the enhancement of public accountability mechanisms, and the assessment of federalism's impact on democratic accountability during crises. Their work shows that true efficiency, as envisioned by Stone, is intrinsically linked to the inclusivity of the policymaking process. This inclusiveness ensures that diverse constituencies are heard and actively shapes the objectives and outcomes of governance, thus fostering a more democratic, accountable, and efficient society.

### **Flexibility and Adaptability in Policy Implementation**

This emerges as a pivotal component for achieving efficiency in governance, reflecting a varied understanding of democratic accountability. The discourse, enriched by Langvatn & Holst (2022)<sup>[27]</sup>; Hansen (2023)<sup>[18]</sup>, illuminates the balance between expert input and democratic responsiveness. These scholars highlight the necessity of governance structures that are receptive to expert advice and adaptable to the evolving socio-political landscape. This concept is further explored by Bøggild & Pedersen (2024)<sup>[6]</sup>, who investigated the legislative cost of the ruling, suggesting

that the electoral repercussions of policy decisions necessitate a governance approach that is flexible and responsive to voter preferences. Similarly, Thomann *et al.* (2023) <sup>[52]</sup> emphasize the dilemmas faced by street-level bureaucrats, advocating for policy frameworks that accommodate the complex realities of policy implementation on the ground. This adaptability is crucial, as Elkomy *et al.* (2019) <sup>[11]</sup> and Schmidhuber *et al.* (2021) <sup>[47]</sup> highlight the trade-offs between cost efficiency and service quality in outsourcing and the dynamics of government openness, respectively. Together, these authors lay the groundwork for understanding flexibility and adaptability as policy attributes and essential elements of a democratically accountable governance system.

The dialogue on the necessity of adaptable and flexible policy mechanisms gains further depth with contributions from Schwarz *et al.* (2020) <sup>[48]</sup> and Trondal *et al.* (2021) <sup>[53]</sup>, who explore leadership styles and the operational strategies of government agencies within multilevel administrative systems. Their research highlights the importance of leadership that encourages initiative, external collaboration, and resilient governance strategies in the face of ambiguous and turbulent environments. This need for adaptability is echoed in the work of Althaus & O'Faircheallaigh (2022) <sup>[2]</sup>, which examines the role of Indigenous bureaucrats in policy processes, highlighting how adaptability can leverage unique positions to effect change. Levin's (2023) <sup>[29]</sup> investigation into outsourcing public participation to citizen engagement consultants reveals the double-edged sword of attempting to innovate in democratic engagement without addressing underlying issues of epistemic justice, pointing to the necessity of flexible approaches that genuinely empower citizens. These insights, alongside those of Nederhand & Edelenbos (2023) <sup>[35]</sup> and Osborne *et al.* (2022) <sup>[36]</sup>, who respectively examine the perceptions of local politicians on public participation and the dynamics of value creation in public service ecosystems, affirm that policy implementation must be both adaptable and grounded in a deep understanding of the democratic context to be truly efficient.

Further exploring the theme, Singla *et al.* (2023) <sup>[50]</sup> examine state takeovers in local governments, indicating that the rigid application of such measures often fails to outperform local elected governance in fostering long-term financial health. This critique highlights the necessity for policy tools that are adaptable and sensitive to the local governance context. Shepherd (2022) <sup>[49]</sup> extends this conversation to performance management, advocating for systems capable of learning and evolving in response to new challenges, such as those posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This call for a dynamic approach to governance is reinforced by Bertelli & Busuic (2021) <sup>[4]</sup>, who discuss the implications of Relational Signal Analysis in public sector oversight, suggesting that efficiency in democratic accountability requires an ongoing process of evaluation and adjustment. The importance of adaptable and responsive policymaking is also underlined by Bukalova & Maland (2023) <sup>[8]</sup>, who address the challenges of conducting public hearings during the pandemic, and Lee (2022) <sup>[28]</sup>, who examines strategic communication during crises, both emphasizing the need for governance structures that can quickly adjust to unforeseen circumstances.

Ruijter *et al.*'s. (2023) <sup>[43]</sup> examination of the implications of data-driven public services on social equity brings a critical perspective to the discourse, highlighting the potential for digital governance to exacerbate social inequities if not

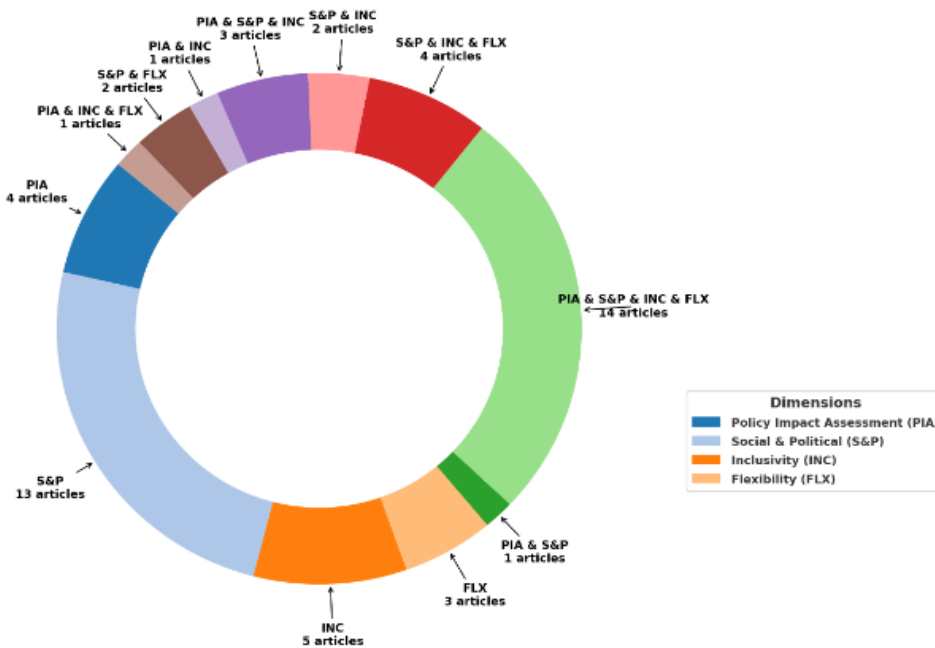
implemented with an adaptive and equitable approach. This perspective is crucial, as it extends the conversation on adaptability to include the responsiveness of policies to changing needs and their capacity to address and rectify inherent social inequities. Fernández-i-Marín *et al.* (2023) <sup>[13]</sup> contribute to this dialogue by examining how different reference points impact citizens' expectations, suggesting that a flexible and adaptive approach to policy implementation can enhance public satisfaction and trust. Podger & Kettl's (2024) <sup>[41]</sup> analysis of the Robodebt scandal in Australia further illustrates the dangers of inflexible policy mechanisms, where a lack of adaptability led to significant distress for many, underscoring the need for policies that are responsive to feedback and capable of correcting course.

Rimkutė & van der Voet (2023) <sup>[42]</sup> investigates the bureaucratic responsiveness to diverse demands, asserting that adaptability in policymaking is essential for addressing the multidimensional expectations placed on public officials. This acknowledgment of the diverse pressures bureaucrats face complements the insights offered by Weißmüller & Zuber (2023) <sup>[55]</sup>, who discuss the complexities of administrative corruption and the need for adaptable anti-corruption strategies that consider the dynamic factors influencing corruptibility. Integrating these diverse perspectives shows the critical role of flexibility and adaptability in navigating the balance between efficiency and democratic accountability. This balance is further complicated by the need to address corruption effectively, as highlighted by Kgobe & Mamokhere (2021) <sup>[24]</sup>, who call for more inclusive and adaptable governance mechanisms in South Africa, pointing to the broader applicability of these principles in diverse governance contexts.

These authors' insights forge a comprehensive understanding of flexibility and adaptability as not merely operational tactics but as fundamental principles underpinning efficient and democratically accountable governance. From the complexities of expert accountability and voter behavior to the challenges of implementing digital governance and addressing social equity, the necessity of an adaptable and responsive approach to policymaking emerges as a consistent theme. This discourse, enriched by the contributions of scholars across various domains, highlights the imperative for governance structures to be dynamic, responsive, and, ultimately, reflective of the evolving needs and values of the societies they serve. Through this lens, flexibility and adaptability are reimagined as essential attributes of efficient governance, ensuring that policy implementation is not only effective but also aligns with the principles of democratic accountability.

### Analysis

In the scholarly landscape delineated by Figure 2 below, the academic discourse on the dimensions of efficiency within the ambit of democratic accountability presents a rich tapestry of thematic exploration, interweaving the theoretical foundations posited by Stone with contemporary empirical analyses. The categorization of scholarly articles across four pivotal dimensions: policy impact assessment, social and political dimensions, inclusivity in defining objectives and outcomes, and flexibility and adaptability in policy implementation offers a varied vista into the prevailing focal points and emergent lacunae within current research paradigms.



**Fig 2:** Article Categorization by Dimension

From Figure 2 above, the discourse surrounding the Social and Political dimensions of public policy analysis is thoroughly represented, with 13 articles highlighting the preeminence of this theme in scholarly research. This significant focus reflects an academic alignment with Stone's argument that efficiency must be conceived within a broader framework that fully integrates the societal and political contexts in which policies operate. Articles in this domain look deeply into how policies are interpreted, shaped by, and reciprocally influence social values, political climates, and the public's perception of governance. Researchers probe into the complexities of policy implications within the polis, scrutinizing the interplay between governance structures and societal norms, the role of political discourse in shaping policy outcomes, and the impact of public perception on policy legitimacy. These studies highlight a dynamic, bidirectional relationship where policy affects society and is profoundly shaped by the social and political milieu.

Conversely, inclusivity as a stand-alone research theme, while recognized as critical, is less explored, with only five articles specifically focusing on it. This indicates a relative dearth of literature dedicated exclusively to studying inclusivity within policymaking processes. Given the importance of inclusivity in reinforcing democratic engagement and ensuring policies reflect diverse stakeholder interests, the lack of concentrated research represents a significant area for academic exploration and growth. The existing body of work that does tackle this dimension emphasizes the necessity of integrating varied stakeholder perspectives, suggesting that true policy efficacy can only be achieved through inclusive practices that bring myriad voices to the table. This approach extends beyond tokenistic engagement, advocating for meaningful participation that empowers traditionally underrepresented groups and ensures their needs and aspirations are central in policy formulation and implementation.

Regarding Flexibility and Adaptability, only 3 articles focus exclusively on this dimension, which significantly expands to

13 when combined with other factors. This illustrates that while flexibility is an essential component of contemporary governance, it is more frequently examined in conjunction with other dimensions rather than in isolation. The articles that concentrate on flexibility argue that governance systems can adapt to society's unpredictable and rapidly changing demands. They examine the extent to which policies can accommodate emergent challenges and the mechanisms by which policy frameworks can maintain relevance in the face of evolving social, technological, and environmental landscapes. Such research is crucial for developing policies that are not rigidly anchored to static frameworks but are fluid and capable of iterative refinement, aligning policy implementation with modern governance challenges' dynamic and often volatile nature.

The intersectional research incorporating all four dimensions, policy impact assessment, social and political factors, Inclusivity, and Flexibility, emerges as the most populated category with 14 articles. This confluence of themes signifies a research trend toward a holistic approach, echoing the scholarly belief that effective policy analysis cannot be siloed. Researchers in this area are crafting an integrative scholarly narrative that draws on multiple facets of public policy, emphasizing the intricate interdependencies among various policy dimensions. They challenge the traditional compartmentalization of policy studies, advocating instead for a comprehensive view that captures the myriad effects of policies on society. This synthesis of themes points to a research frontier where the complexities of policy impact are acknowledged and embraced, advocating for analyses that reflect the rich array of governance in all its complexity.

### Conclusion

The comprehensive analysis of the scholarly contributions, as synthesized from the extensive review presented in Figure 2, elucidates a dynamic linkage of concepts significantly extending Deborah Stone's delineation of efficiency within democratic accountability. The predominant focus on the



policy impact assessment, as evidenced by the works of scholars such as Gaventa *et al.* (2023) <sup>[14]</sup> and Macdonald (2023) <sup>[32]</sup>, exemplifies a concerted academic effort to transcend traditional economic evaluations. This shift towards a broader, more inclusive consideration of policy impacts encapsulates a critical evolution in the discourse on public administration, underscoring the necessity of integrating a multifaceted array of benefits and costs that encapsulate the true breadth of societal implications.

Despite the rich tapestry of exploration across most dimensions, the analysis needs more focused research on inclusiveness in defining objectives and outcomes. This area stands as pivotal for the advancement of democratic accountability. The imperative for future scholarship to address this gap is evident, particularly in light of the contributions from scholars like Bandini *et al.* (2023) <sup>[3]</sup> and Osborne *et al.* (2022) <sup>[36]</sup>, who have begun to chart the contours of this domain. The call for enhanced inclusivity in policymaking processes not only echoes Stone's advocacy for a democratic consensus in defining policy objectives but also aligns with the contemporary challenges faced by governance mechanisms in accommodating the diverse tapestry of

stakeholder voices and preferences. This shows an urgent scholarly and practical need to forge pathways toward more inclusive governance frameworks that reflect and respond to societal needs and aspirations.

Furthermore, the scholarly engagement with Political and Social Dimensions and Flexibility and Adaptability in Policy Implementation, as highlighted through the works of Trondal *et al.* (2021) <sup>[53]</sup> and Elkomy *et al.* (2019) <sup>[11]</sup>, respectively, signals an acknowledgment of the inherently dynamic nature of governance challenges. This recognition fosters an understanding that efficiency in governance transcends static formulations, necessitating adaptive frameworks responsive to the evolving societal, technological, and environmental landscapes. As this research concludes, it not only reaffirms the critical importance of Stone's comprehensive approach to efficiency but also catalyzes a forward-looking discourse inviting further exploration into inclusivity and adaptability. Such future inquiries are essential for developing governance strategies that are effective, efficient, fundamentally equitable, participatory, and reflective of the principles of democratic accountability in a rapidly changing world.

## Appendix: Table 1: Articles Appendix

Table 1: Articles

Articles	Policy Impact Assessment	Social and Political	Inclusivity	Flexibility
Bøggild and Pedersen (2024) <sup>[6]</sup>		X	X	X
Langvatn and Holst (2022) <sup>[27]</sup>		X	X	X
Levin (2023) <sup>[29]</sup>		X	X	X
Thomann, Maxia, and Ege (2023) <sup>[52]</sup>		X	X	X
Gaventa, Joshi, and Anderson (2023) <sup>[14]</sup>		X	X	
Kennedy, Sayers, and Alcantara (2022) <sup>[23]</sup>		X	X	
Bertelli and Busuioc (2021) <sup>[4]</sup>		X		X
Hansen (2023) <sup>[18]</sup>		X		X
Bandini <i>et al.</i> (2023) <sup>[3]</sup> ; Carelli and Pierre (2022) <sup>[9]</sup> ; Karimi (2021) <sup>[22]</sup> ; Macdonald 2023 <sup>[32]</sup> ; Schillemans <i>et al.</i> (2021) <sup>[46]</sup>			X	
Bitecofer (2020) <sup>[5]</sup> ; Brenton and Bouckaert (2021) <sup>[7]</sup> ; Curley, Federman, and Shen (2023) <sup>[10]</sup> ; Farhang (2021) <sup>[12]</sup> ; George <i>et al.</i> (2023) <sup>[15]</sup> ; HJERMITSLEV (2023) <sup>[20]</sup> ; Huang and Villadsen (2023) <sup>[21]</sup> ; Koop and Vettimo (2023) <sup>[25]</sup> ; Kousina and Voudouris (2023) <sup>[26]</sup> ; Li (2023); Overman and Schillemans (2022) <sup>[37]</sup> ; Papenfuß and Schmidt (2021) <sup>[38]</sup> ; Petersen, Hansen, and Houlberg (2022) <sup>[40]</sup>		X		
Ahmed <i>et al.</i> (2022); Grubnic and Cooper (2019) <sup>[16]</sup> ; López-Laborda, Rodrigo, and Sanz-Arcega (2023); van der Voet (2022) <sup>[54]</sup>	X			
Hendriks (2022) <sup>[19]</sup>	X	X	X	
Saz-Carranza, Albareda, and Federo (2020) <sup>[4]</sup>	X	X	X	
Milhorance (2022) <sup>[34]</sup>	X	X	X	
Elkomy, Cookson, and Jones (2019) <sup>[11]</sup>	X		X	X
Althaus and O'Faircheallaigh (2022) <sup>[2]</sup>	X	X	X	X
Bukalova and Maland (2023) <sup>[8]</sup>	X	X	X	X
Fernández-i-Marín <i>et al.</i> (2023) <sup>[13]</sup>	X	X	X	X
Kgobe and Mamokhere (2021) <sup>[24]</sup>		X	X	X
Lee (2022) <sup>[28]</sup>	X	X	X	X
Nederhand and Edelenbos (2023) <sup>[35]</sup>		X	X	X
Osborne <i>et al.</i> (2022) <sup>[36]</sup>	X	X	X	X
Podger and Kettl (2024) <sup>[41]</sup>	X	X	X	X
Rimkutė and van der Voet (2023) <sup>[42]</sup>	X	X	X	X
Schmidhuber, Ingrams, and Hilgers (2021) <sup>[47]</sup>	X	X	X	X
Shepherd (2022) <sup>[49]</sup>	X	X	X	X
Singla, Spreen, and Shumberger (2023) <sup>[50]</sup>	X	X		X
Weißmüller and Zuber (2023) <sup>[55]</sup>	X	X	X	X
(Schiff 2023) <sup>[45]</sup>	X	X	X	X
Ruijter <i>et al.</i> (2023) <sup>[43]</sup> ; Schwarz, Eva, and Newman (2020) <sup>[48]</sup> ; Trondal, Haslerud, and				X

Kühn (2021) <sup>[53]</sup>				
Mele, Belardinelli, and Bellé (2023) <sup>[33]</sup>	X		X	
Patberg (2021) <sup>[39]</sup>	X	X		

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