

BIAS IN GOVERNANCE

Understanding Stakeholder Bias

Stakeholder motivations shape biases, influencing decision-making and governance structures and outcomes. Recognizing these biases enables critical evaluation of governance processes. Explore these four common biases below.

Financial Pragmatism Bias

Stakeholders are motivated by the belief that minimizing financial risk should be the top priority in decision-making. They prioritize financial stability and risk management above other considerations, including ethical or social concerns.

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How It Shapes Governance

They favor centralized, efficient governance models, usually concentrating power in the hands of a small group, to ensure financial priorities dominate decision-making.

Ethical oversight is included in reviews, reports, or committees, but these hold no real decision-making power and function primarily as formalities.

Impact

Financial considerations dominate, sidelining ethical concerns. Decisions focus on short-term revenue generation and risk reduction, often at the expense of long-term institutional values like sustainability or equity.

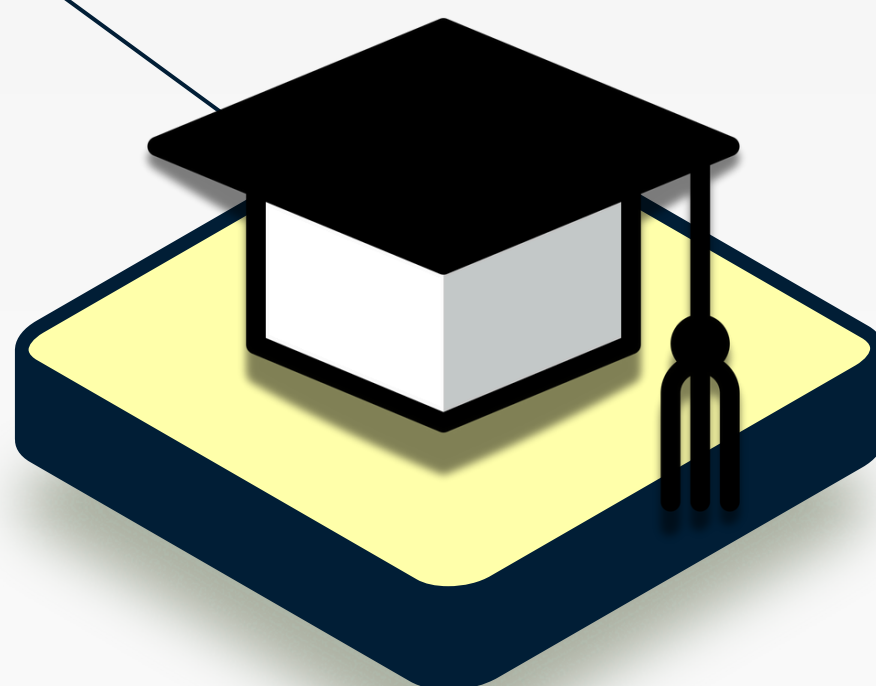


Departmental and Professional Biases

Stakeholders are motivated by a sense of loyalty to their department or professional group, believing that their survival depends on securing resources and influence. This behavior often arises from systemic pressures such as competition for funding, reliance on external grants, or disparities in institutional resource allocation.

How It Shapes Governance

They push for governance models that amplify their department's influence, such as weighted voting or representative systems that favour size, funding, or strategic importance. Ethical oversight is included in reviews, reports, or committees but is secondary to securing departmental advantages.



Impact

Decision-making reflects the interests of larger or better-funded departments, creating inequities across the institution. Smaller or underfunded departments, as well as broader ethical priorities, are often marginalized in favor of departmental self-interest.



Status Quo Bias

Stakeholders are motivated by the belief that existing governance structures and processes are reliable and effective. This belief is often driven by fear of destabilizing long-standing relationships, reluctance to take on the added labor or stress of learning new systems, or a preference for familiarity over complexity.



How It Shapes Governance

They advocate for preserving existing hierarchies and processes, with ethical considerations constrained by the boundaries of traditional practices. Ethical oversight is typically applied in ways that align with established norms, avoiding significant changes that could disrupt the status quo.

Impact

Entrenched practices persist, and ethical considerations are acknowledged only to the extent that they fit within familiar frameworks. Resistance to change limits opportunities for innovation or alignment with evolving ethical and institutional priorities.



Populist Bias

Stakeholders are motivated by the belief that broad community involvement ensures fairness and that decisions should reflect the voices of all students, faculty, and staff. This often stems from distrust of centralized or expert-led approaches and a desire for transparency.

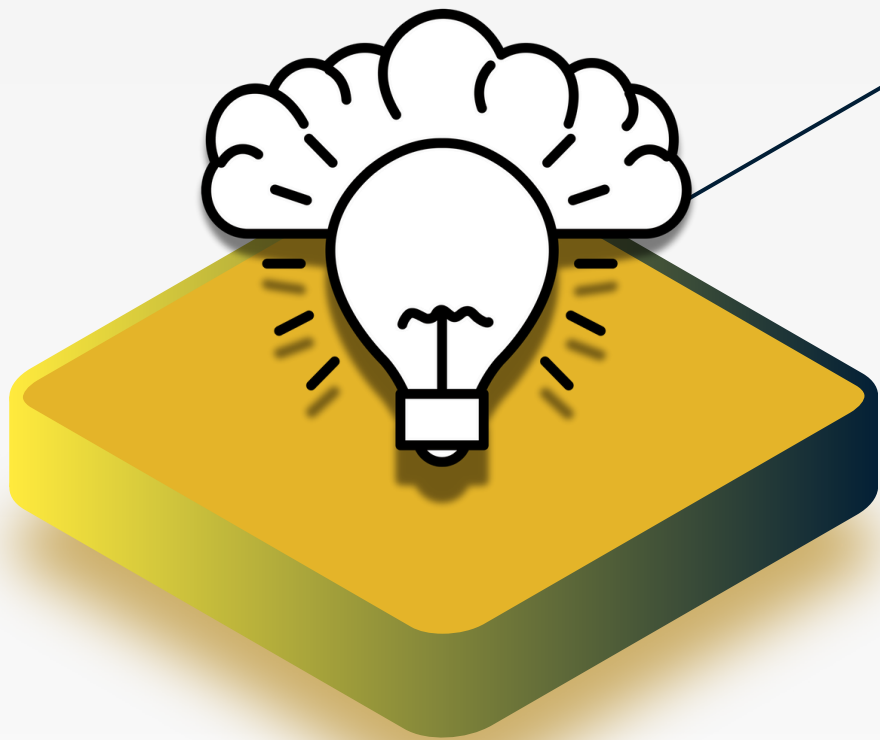
How It Shapes Governance

They promote governance models like open voting or referenda to maximize community participation. While expert input may be included, it often takes a backseat to majority preferences.



Impact

Decisions risk oversimplifying complex issues, marginalizing smaller or underrepresented voices, and neglecting long-term strategic considerations in favor of majority opinions.



OBSERVE

How each bias reflects different motivations and priorities, shaping governance structures and their impacts. Recognizing these biases can help ensure more thoughtful and equitable decision-making.

For tailored guidance specific to your context, please contact the Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism (EDI-R).