



Analysis of Factors Causing Professional Ethics Violations among Civil Servants (ASN): A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) Approach

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the factors causing professional ethics violations among Civil Servants (ASN) through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. A total of 27 articles published between 2020 and 2025 were reviewed from Google Scholar, Scopus, DOAJ, and Sinta databases. The thematic synthesis revealed four main factors contributing to ethical violations: weak individual moral awareness, permissive organizational culture, weak supervision systems, and socio-political pressures. This analysis integrates the Theory of Planned Behavior, Virtue Ethics, and Agency Theory to explain the roots of unethical behavior among civil servants from both individual and structural perspectives. Theoretically, this study maps the dynamics of ethical behavior among civil servants, while practically offering recommendations for strengthening ethical leadership, integrity training, and value-based internal control systems. The findings emphasize the importance of professional ethics as the foundation of an integrity-driven and accountable public bureaucracy.

Keywords: Professional Ethics; Civil Servants; Integrity; Ethical Behavior; Systematic Literature Review

1. Introduction

Professional ethics constitute a fundamental foundation for building clean, transparent, and accountable governance. In the context of Civil Servants (ASN), professional ethics function not only as behavioral guidelines for individuals but also as instruments for shaping a bureaucracy grounded in integrity. Civil servants are expected to implement public policies while upholding honesty, responsibility, and fairness. However, various reports indicate that professional ethics violations among civil servants remain a serious issue hindering the realization of a professional bureaucracy. Data from the Civil Service Commission (KASN, 2023) recorded more than 3,200 cases of ethics code violations between 2020 and 2023, including abuse of authority, gratification, and conflicts of interest, reflecting weak internalization of ethical values within the bureaucracy.

The complexity of ethics violations has increased amid digitalization and globalization challenges in public governance. Suharyanto and Alamsyah (2022) found that organizational pressure and permissive work culture are key determinants of unethical behavior among civil servants. Meanwhile, Nugraha et al. (2021) emphasized that understanding of professional ethics among civil servants remains normative without deep moral internalization. This condition is exacerbated by weak internal supervision systems

and limited character- and integrity-based development. These findings confirm that ethics violations are not merely individual issues but systemic problems.

Research on civil servant ethics in Indonesia remains largely descriptive and fragmented. Previous studies mainly focus on sectoral cases such as public finance, education, or public services (Putra & Rini, 2020; Rachman & Wijayanti, 2021). Few studies synthesize these findings to identify comprehensive causal patterns. Additionally, most studies rely on qualitative case studies or perception-based surveys, resulting in a lack of comprehensive conceptual models explaining ethical behavior determinants across contexts.

Scholarly debates continue regarding determinants of ethical behavior. Some studies emphasize individual factors such as moral awareness and personal values (Widyastuti, 2023), while others highlight external influences like organizational culture and unethical leadership (Mahendra & Sari, 2021; Taufik, 2022). This inconsistency indicates a significant research gap: the absence of integrative models combining personal, structural, and contextual dimensions.

Methodologically, previous studies are limited in scope and duration, with few comparative or longitudinal analyses. Moreover, limited integration of ethical behavior theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) or Virtue Ethics (Aristotle) further underscores the need for systematic synthesis. Therefore, this study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to comprehensively analyze professional ethics violations among civil servants between 2020 and 2025, aiming to construct a conceptual map of causal factors and integrity reinforcement strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Professional Ethics

Professional ethics refer to a set of moral principles governing professional behavior in accordance with moral standards and public responsibility (Boylan, 2021). In the context of civil servants, professional ethics reflect both individual behavior and institutional integrity. Civil servants bear moral responsibility to deliver fair, transparent, and impartial public services. According to Kurniawan and Rahmawati (2022), civil servant ethics encompass honesty, objectivity, accountability, and legal compliance, serving as guidance in addressing moral dilemmas such as conflicts of interest and abuse of power.

2.2. Code of Ethics for Civil Servants

The civil servant code of ethics in Indonesia is regulated by Law No. 5 of 2014 and Government Regulation No. 42 of 2004. These regulations emphasize professionalism, integrity, neutrality, and accountability. The code serves as a binding behavioral standard and preventive instrument against moral violations (BKN, 2020). However, Sari and Handoyo (2023) found varying levels of understanding among civil servants, highlighting the need for stronger ethical culture development through training and consistent enforcement.

2.3. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) explains behavior as influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the civil service context, this theory helps explain how organizational norms and social pressures influence ethical or

unethical conduct. Nugroho and Pratama (2022) found that ethical intentions are shaped by perceptions of transparency and supervision.

2.4. Virtue Ethics

Virtue Ethics, introduced by Aristotle, emphasizes character development as the foundation of ethical behavior. In the civil service, this perspective stresses internalizing virtues such as honesty, justice, and public loyalty. Santoso (2021) highlights that ethical character building should begin at recruitment and be reinforced continuously.

2.5. Agency Theory

Agency Theory explains the relationship between principals (citizens) and agents (civil servants) (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Ethical violations reflect agency problems where agents prioritize personal interests over public goals. Rahman and Yuliana (2023) emphasize the importance of supervision, transparency, and accountability to mitigate such issues.

3. Methods

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design based on PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The qualitative-descriptive approach focuses on thematic synthesis to identify patterns and research gaps.

3.1. Literature Search Strategy

Literature was sourced from Scopus, Sinta, Google Scholar, DOAJ, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, and Wiley Online Library using keywords such as "civil servant ethics," "bureaucratic integrity," and "public service misconduct," limited to 2020–2025 publications.

3.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria comprised peer-reviewed articles discussing ethics or integrity of civil servants in Indonesian or English. Exclusions included non-academic works, incomplete texts, duplicates, and irrelevant studies.

3.3. Selection Procedure

The selection followed four stages: identification, title screening, abstract review, and full-text review, visualized through a PRISMA flow diagram.

3.4. Data Extraction and Analysis

Extracted data included authorship, methodology, theories, and findings. Content analysis and thematic synthesis were applied to identify causal factors and trends.

3.5. Validity and Reliability

Validity was ensured through transparent procedures, while reliability was enhanced by independent reviewers and reference management tools such as Zotero and Mendeley.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Literature Profile

From 42 identified studies, 27 met the inclusion criteria. Publications increased between 2020 and 2024, with most studies conducted in Indonesia, followed by Malaysia and OECD countries.

4.2. Synthesis of Key Findings

Four dominant themes emerged: causes of ethics violations, forms of misconduct, enforcement effectiveness, and leadership roles. Studies consistently highlight weak ethical internalization and permissive organizational culture as core issues.

4.3. Thematic Analysis

The four main factors include:

- Individual internal factors (low moral awareness and integrity)
- Organizational factors (permissive culture and unethical leadership)
- Structural/systemic factors (weak supervision)
- Socio-political contextual factors (political pressure and patronage)

4.4. Research Gap Identification

Identified gaps include theoretical limitations, methodological dominance of qualitative studies, limited geographic scope, and lack of longitudinal analysis.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of knowledge on ethical behavior among civil servants through the integration of several theoretical perspectives, namely the Theory of Planned Behavior, Virtue Ethics, and Agency Theory. This literature synthesis expands the conceptual foundation by demonstrating that ethical behavior among civil servants is shaped by the interaction between personal values, organizational culture, and institutional incentive structures. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the importance of linking individual moral dimensions with institutional mechanisms to ensure that professional ethics theories are more applicable within the context of public bureaucracy in Indonesia.

From a practical perspective, the results of this SLR offer several strategic recommendations for the government and civil servant development institutions. First, there is a need to strengthen organizational ethical culture through exemplary leadership and the habituation of moral values across all levels of the bureaucracy. Second, internal supervision capacity should be enhanced through ethics-based evaluation mechanisms, rather than relying solely on administrative compliance. Third, civil servant character education and training should focus on internalizing professionalism, integrity, and public responsibility values, rather than merely emphasizing regulatory understanding. In addition, institutions such as KASN and LAN may utilize the findings of this SLR to develop evidence-based civil servant ethics policy models that strengthen the synergy between legal norms and moral values in bureaucratic practice.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and identified research gaps, several directions for future research are proposed. First, quantitative empirical studies are needed to examine the relationships among factors causing ethics violations among civil servants, such as the relationship between ethical leadership, organizational culture, and integrity behavior. Second, longitudinal studies are required to monitor changes in civil servants' ethical behavior over time following the implementation of bureaucratic reforms and the merit system. Third, future research may expand the geographical scope by comparing professional ethics practices across different levels of government (central, regional, and non-structural institutions) as well as across countries within the ASEAN region to gain broader comparative insights. Fourth, exploratory qualitative studies may focus on the personal experiences of civil servants in facing ethical dilemmas to enrich conceptual understanding of moral reasoning and ethical decision-making. Finally, the development of a conceptual model of "Ethics-Based Civil Servant Integrity" is recommended as a long-term academic agenda that may serve as a foundation for sustainable, value-based public ethics policy development.

Conclusions

The results of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 27 relevant scholarly articles indicate that professional ethics violations among Civil Servants (ASN) constitute a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by internal, organizational, structural, and contextual factors. In general, such violations are not solely caused by individual weaknesses in moral awareness, but also by bureaucratic systems that have not fully supported the development of a strong ethical culture. Research trends during the 2020–2024 period show an increasing focus on integrity and public ethics issues, in line with the implementation of bureaucratic reform policies and the merit-based civil service system.

Theoretically, the synthesis results demonstrate a strong interconnection between the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), Virtue Ethics (Aristotle), and Agency Theory in explaining the dynamics of ethical behavior among civil servants. The Theory of Planned Behavior emphasizes that unethical behavior arises from weak behavioral control and subjective norms, while Virtue Ethics highlights the absence of habituation of moral virtues within bureaucratic organizations. Meanwhile, Agency Theory illustrates the imbalance of interests between civil servants as agents and the public as principals.

Thus, the findings of this SLR strengthen the understanding that ethics violations among civil servants cannot be viewed merely as individual moral issues, but rather as reflections of value systems, leadership practices, and public work cultures that have not been consistently internalized.

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