Administrative Burdens: How Are They Implemented at the Frontline, and Who Supports Them?

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PhD Dissertation

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Aske Halling
Aarhus, February 2023

Preface

My dissertation "Administrative Burdens: How Are They Implemented at the Frontline, and Who Supports Them?" consists of this summary report and the five papers listed below. The summary report provides a theoretical framework that cuts across individual papers and discusses important common themes in my work. Details on both methods and theory can be found in the papers. Throughout the summary report, I refer to papers by their letter. The project was funded by a grant from the European Research Council (ERC) to Martin Bækgaard (grant agreement no. 802244) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program.

Table 1. Overview of Papers in Dissertation

Papers		Co-author(s)
A.	Taxing Language: Do Interpreting Fees Affect Healthcare Usage? Evidence from a Regression Discontinuity Design, under review	None
B.	Burden Feedback: When Citizens Communicate Burdens, Frontline Employees Respond. Evidence from a Survey Experiment, invited for a revise and resubmit in *Public Administration Review*	Niels Bjørn Grund Petersen
C.	How Difficult Should It Be? Evidence of Burden Tolerance from a Nationally Representative Sample, *Public Management Review,* https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2022.2056910	Pamela Herd & Donald Moynihan
D.	Do Justifications Affect Tolerance for Administrative Burdens? Evidence from a Survey Experiment among Policymakers, under review	Steven Van de Walle
E.	Administrative Burden in Citizen-State Interactions: A Systematic Literature Review, invited for a revise and resubmit in *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*	Martin Bækgaard

Chapter 1: Introduction

As citizens[1] in modern welfare states, we constantly interact with government. During a regular week, I will meet the pedagogues in my son's nursery several times (and they will also send messages through an online platform), I will take the public bus to work, and I might need to update my tax statement or consult my general practitioner. And I am certainly not among those most in need of government services. Take a Danish person without a job. In order to receive his unemployment benefits, he is required to apply for at least two jobs each week, to attend regular meetings at the unemployment agency, to attend job training courses, and after a certain period, he will be required to do either job training or a utility job for up to 37 hours a week. Factor in that he may also interact in many of the ways that I typically do, and it is clear that his interactions with government are comprehensive and very time-consuming.

At the same time, interactions with government are hugely important for most people. For me, the welfare of my son is my highest priority. Since he spends much of his day in the nursery, government (represented by pedagogues) is vital for his well-being. The man on unemployment benefits is also highly reliant on government, as his benefits are his main source of income. Further, we interact most frequently with government when we are most vulnerable (Christensen et al. 2020). For example, we rely extensively on public health care when we are sick, and we live at public nursing homes when we are old. In these and many other situations, interactions with government determine our health, well-being, and overall quality of life.

Yet, even though our interactions with government are hugely important, they are often difficult to navigate. In many interactions, citizens have to cut through sludge (Sunstein 2019, 2020) and burdens (Herd and Moynihan 2018) to gain access to public programs or services they need. While this may not be a problem for people who are less-frequent users of public services, a person such as the unemployed man described above may feel overwhelmed by the requirements and demands that he faces on an almost daily basis (Baekgaard et al. 2021). Even though citizen-state interactions have a long tradition as a topic in public administrative research, the study of burdens that citizens face when interacting with the state have traditionally not received much attention (Jakobsen et al. 2019). The introduction of the administrative

[1] I am aware of recent discussions regarding the term citizen in public administration research (Roberts 2021). I use the term citizen as a broad reference to individuals interacting with the state, regardless of their legal status.

burden framework has dramatically changed this. Since Pamela Herd and Donald Moynihan published "Administrative Burden: Policymaking by other Means" in 2019, scholarly interest in citizens' onerous experiences in encounters with the state have boomed: 69 papers about administrative burdens were published from January 2018 to December 2021. This is in stark contrast to the nine papers published from 2012, when the framework was introduced by Burden et al. (2012), to 2017 (Paper E).

According to a simple definition, administrative burdens can be understood as citizens' experiences of learning, psychological, and compliance costs in their interactions with government (Herd and Moynihan 2018). Learning costs refer to the time used learning about public programs; compliance costs are time and resources spent on complying with demands and requirements; and psychological costs are psychological reactions such as stress, stigma, and autonomy loss from interacting with government (Moynihan et al., 2015). Scholarship on administrative burdens have extensively documented that individuals actually face these costs in various interactions with government (see Paper E). For example, Barnes (2021) find that redeeming voucher-based public programs is associated with considerable learning and compliance costs, while Selin (2019) finds that individuals with felony convictions face psychological costs such as stigma and autonomy loss when trying to restore their voting rights. It is also by now well-documented that administrative burdens are distributive and hit harder on vulnerable groups (Christensen et al. 2020). Specifically, individuals with scarce resources (Larsson 2021; Madsen, Baekgaard, and Kvist 2022), women (Kyle and Frakt 2021), sick people (Collie et al. 2021), ethnic minorities (Olsen, Kyhse-Andersen, and Moynihan 2020; Jilke, Van Dooren, and Rys 2018), and people low in administrative literacy/capital (Döring and Madsen 2022; Masood and Nisar 2021) are more prone to experience administrative burdens when interacting with the state.

1.1 Research Question

Still, important questions about administrative burdens remain unanswered. First, frontline employees are key actors in any policy implementation process (May and Winter 2009) and are therefore often tasked with implementing burdensome state actions. Studies on street-level bureaucracy have comprehensively covered implementation practices at the frontline (e.g., Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003; Harrits and Møller 2014; Brodkin and Majmundar 2010). However, these studies do not explicitly draw on the administrative burden framework, and their main focus is therefore not on citizens' onerous experiences. Even though a few studies have examined frontline employees in relation to burdens (Bell et al. 2020; Bell and Smith 2022), we need more knowledge about the role of frontline employees in shaping citizens' experiences. Lipsky (1980) already mentioned the possibility of frontline employees affecting the burdens that citizens experience more than 40 years ago. Since frontline employees often have great discretion when implementing policies (Tummers et al. 2015), they hold the power to diminish and/or enhance citizens' experiences of administrative burdens. For example, in the Danish unemployment system, frontline employees have discretionary power to ease some of the requirements that citizens face, which may in turn make citizens' experiences less onerous. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to deepen our knowledge about how frontline employees shape citizens' experiences of administrative burdens.

Second, important questions are why administrative burdens exist in the first place and who support their existence. Herd and Moynihan (2018) subtitle their book "Policymaking by other means" because they argue that burdens can be used as an opaque policy tool in situations where more visible policy tools are infeasible. For example, they show that conservative politicians in the US have enhanced burdens associated with getting an abortion because federal laws (until recently) prevented them from tightening abortion laws at the state level. As burdens are political, it is important to study what shapes support for them, as this will likely determine the extent to which citizens face them in their interactions with government. A few recent studies have studied this question among elected politicians. They find that politicians' ideology, personality, personal policy experiences, and deservingness perceptions all matter for how supportive they are of administrative burdens in public programs (Aaroe et al. 2021; Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen 2021). However, we have no knowledge about whether such personal characteristics are also indicative of support for burdens among members of the public. Such attitudes are important to study because they will likely feed into the political system and thereby affect how policies are constructed. Further, existing studies all focus on individual-level explanations to explain support for burden. Therefore, we know relatively little about how characteristics of policies influence support for administrative burdens. My dissertation therefore studies support for administrative burdens among both politicians and members of the public to enhance our understanding of the determinants of support for administrative burdens.

Taken together, my dissertation provides insights about frontline employees' influence on citizens' experiences of burdens and on determinants of support for administrative burden. The overall research question that I answer is therefore the following:

RQ: How does frontline employees shape citizens' experiences of administrative burdens, and what determines support for administrative burdens?

1.2 Main Contributions

In answering the two subparts of the research question, this dissertation makes significant contributions to the still nascent literature on administrative burdens.

First, my work illustrates that frontline employees are important in shaping the administrative burdens that citizens face when interacting with the state. In Paper B, we show that experiences of administrative burden may feed back into the implementation of state demands. We find that when citizens voice the psychological cost they experience as a result of onerous demands from the state, frontline employees respond by lowering the same demands and by making an extra effort to help citizens. This creates a feedback loop where the same demands that caused experiences of burden in the first place are subsequently lowered because of citizens' communication and the responsiveness of frontline employees. Paper A finds that immigrants do not use their doctors less even though a new policy requires them to pay for interpreting services in health encounters. This is a rather surprising finding, as the prediction from the administrative burden framework is that the enhanced cost will increase experiences of burden, which should lower service take-up (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015). I suggest that frontline employees (doctors) lower the burdens that citizens face by allowing relatives to do the translation instead of a professional interpreter.

In combination, papers A and B highlight that implementation practices at the frontline are vital to understand the administrative burdens that citizens experience. Therefore, when analyzing the potential effects of a public policy, only considering the formal policy design is not sufficient. Rather, informal practices at the frontline are at least as important in shaping experiences of burden. Further, these findings illustrate that administrative burdens are dynamic and that they are constantly shaped and reshaped in interactions between citizens and frontline employees.

Second, my dissertation also improves our knowledge about the determinants of support for administrative burdens. In Paper C, we study public support for burdens in two major programs in the US, Medicaid and SNAP. We find that members of the public who are liberal, support social policies, have personal experiences with public policies, and have lower income are less supportive of work requirements and of making it difficult to access benefits. Paper D examines whether politicians are more supportive of administrative burdens when they are justified. We find that justifying burdens in terms of budget concerns makes local politicians more acceptant of them. However, we also find that only right-wing politicians react to justifications of administrative burdens.

Together, Papers C and D show that both personal characteristics and characteristics of policies shape support for burdens. Paper C is the first attempt to study burden tolerance among members of the public, which in itself is a valuable contribution to the literature. Paper D contributes by moving beyond the study of individual-level explanations for burden tolerance. It illustrates that characteristics of the policy and how it is justified are also important in shaping support for administrative burdens in public programs.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I, first, presents the general administrative burden framework. I then proceed to discuss the role of frontline employees in shaping citizens' experiences of burdens. Finally, I discuss what shapes citizens' and politicians' support for administrative burdens.

2.1 The Administrative Burden Framework

The canonical definition of administrative burden is that it is "an individual's experience of policy implementation as onerous" (Burden et al. 2012). Subsequent work has specified what constitutes onerous experiences. Specifically, Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey (2015) argue that citizens can experience three types of costs in their interactions with the state: learning, compliance, and psychological costs. Learning costs are time and effort spent on learning about rules, demands, and (eligibility) requirements associated with interacting with the state. Examples of learning costs for unemployment benefits are learning about which benefits you are entitled to and how to apply for them. Compliance costs are the work involved in gaining access to or keep having access to a public benefit or program. For example, an unemployed person in Denmark has to submit two job applications a week, attend regular meetings at the unemployment agency, and do job training or even utility jobs. Other classic examples of compliance costs are waiting in line and transportation cost/time (Ali and Altaf 2021). Finally, psychological costs are different discomforts from interactions with the state. Examples of psychological costs are autonomy loss, stress (Baekgaard et al. 2021), stigma (Selin 2019), confusion (Hattke, Hensel, and Kalucza 2020), and frustration (Cook 2021).

2.1.1 Citizens' Experiences of Administrative Burdens

The definition presented above focuses on *individuals'* experiences of onerous policy implementation. Hence, according to this definition, the study of administrative burdens can encompass experiences of both citizens and other actors, such as policymakers and bureaucrats. Therefore, some studies in the literature explore the onerous experiences of public employees (Burden et al. 2012) or prospective employees (Sievert, Vogel, and Feeney 2020; Linos and Riesch 2020). However, my work uses a slightly more restrictive definition of the concept by focusing only on the onerous experiences of *citizens*. As we show in Paper E, this is in line with the vast majority of articles on the topic.

Further, by focusing exclusively on citizens' experiences, the literature becomes more coherent, which makes it easier to build cumulative knowledge. Finally, burdens among public employees have been studied extensively in the red tape literature (see George et al. 2021 for a recent review of that literature). It is important to note that actors such as politicians and frontline employees play important roles in shaping citizens' onerous experiences and that a major contribution of my dissertation is to shed light on these roles. However, rather than examining the onerous experiences of these groups, my focus is on the role these groups play in shaping the experiences of citizens.

2.1.2 Separating Experiences from State Actions

As discussed above, administrative burdens are conceptualized as citizens' experiences in interactions with the state. This focus on experiences is important because it separates administrative burden research from the red tape literature that focuses on burdensome rules (Krogh Madsen et al., 2020). It is also important because it highlights that citizens' experiences are an important topic in public administration research – something it has typically not been in the past.

However, the focus on experiences can also be slightly confusing. Upon hearing the term "administrative burden", many people will think about complicated administrative processes and not about citizens' experiences of these processes. This confusion is also present in the administrative burden literature. As an example, Moynihan, Herd, and Ribgy (2016) study differences in Medicaid procedures across states at the aggregate level. The article does not study individuals' experiences of these procedures and is therefore slightly stretching the concept when applying it to their case.

As a solution to this problem, Bækgaard and Tankink (2022) argue that we should conceptually separate what the states does from what citizens experience. Specifically, they recommend that we use the term "'state actions' to cover what the state does broadly speaking, including laws, rules, requirements, and how such are implemented by public officials and street-level bureaucrats" (p. 17). I follow this recommendation in my work. Hence, any mention of a "state action" refers to something the state does, while I use terms such as "administrative burden", "experiences of burden" or the cost types presented above to reference citizens' onerous experiences resulting from these state actions.

2.2 Administrative Burdens in Frontline Service Delivery

Citizens seldom experience state actions directly. Instead, frontline employees are often tasked with implementing the demands that politicians adopt. Frontline employees therefore play a crucial role in shaping the experiences of citizens in their encounters with the state (May and Winter 2009). A whole literature on street-level bureaucracy has studied such implementation practices (e.g., Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003; Harrits and Møller 2014; Brodkin and Majmundar 2010) without explicitly discussing administrative burdens. My errand is not to systematically cover this literature. Rather, I discuss situations in frontline delivery where administrative burdens are highly salient. These are when citizens communicate their experiences of administrative burdens to frontline employees (Paper B) and when frontline employees influence the extent to which a state action affects citizens (Paper A).

2.2.1 Burden Feedback at the Frontline

Our starting point in Paper B is that citizens often experience psychological costs when dealing with government. Bækgaard et al. (2021) show that an exogenous reduction in state demands led to lower levels of stress and a higher sense of autonomy among unemployed Danes, while Hattke, Hensel, and Kalucza (2020) use a laboratory experiment to show that bureaucratic demands make citizens experience negative emotional reactions such as confusion, anger, and frustration. However, citizens are not passive observers in encounters with the state, and they will therefore not just accept such experiences of burdens. Instead, they will likely pursue different strategies to change frontline employees' decisions in their favor (Nielsen, Nielsen, and Bisgaard 2021). One such strategy is to voice their experiences of administrative burdens. A recent study from Israel shows that citizens indeed use such strategies (Gilad and Assouline 2022). The study also shows that inclinations to voice experiences of burden depend on client characteristics such as gender, self-efficacy, and education.

We argue that frontline employees are likely to react to such voicing of psychological costs by moving toward citizens, meaning they adjust to the needs of citizens (Tummers et al. 2015). Our argument for this is twofold. First, experiencing psychological costs is a strong signal of needed deservingness, and prior research shows that frontline employees tend to prioritize citizens in most need (Jilke and Tummers 2018; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003). Second, voicing experiences of burdens also sends indirect signals about citizens' capacity to handle encounters with the state. Previous studies show that some people, for example those low in administrative literacy (Döring and Madsen 2022), are more prone to experiencing psychological costs (Christensen et al. 2020). Hence, when citizens signal that they are experiencing psychological costs, frontline employees may infer that they are in need of help. Overall, this may prompt frontline employees to make an extra effort to help citizens who experience psychological costs, and also to make an effort to reduce the demands that they face. If, indeed, they reduce the demands, this creates a feedback loop where the same demands that caused the experiences of burden in the first place are subsequently lowered. We therefore coin this a burden feedback process.

2.2.2 Frontline Employees as Moderators of State Actions

An important argument in the administrative burden literature is that burdens are consequential because they determine whether citizens gain access to vital benefits (Herd and Moynihan 2018). The assumption is that experiencing burdens will prevent some citizens from taking up services and benefits they are otherwise entitled to. This proposition has been studied and documented extensively in the literature on non-take up of welfare benefits (e.g., Hernanz, Malherbet, and Pellizzari 2004; Currie 2006). However, we have limited knowledge about how frontline employees influence whether state actions affect citizens' service take-up. Paper A provides insights into this by studying a policy in Denmark that implements fees for interpreting services in health encounters.

As mentioned above, frontline employees often have discretionary power to alter the demands that citizens face and thereby reduce their experiences of administrative burdens. The policy that I study in paper A is such a case. Immigrants that have resided more than three years in Denmark are required to pay for their own interpreter. However, relatives or friends are allowed to translate if medical issues are classified as "uncomplicated". Doctors are responsible for classifying cases as complicated/uncomplicated, and they thereby have great discretionary power in determining whether immigrants are required to pay a fee or not. Previous work shows that fees in medical encounters typically lead to lower use of health services (Kiil and Houlberg 2014). This means that doctors are influential in determining whether the policy results in lower use of health care services among immigrants. In other words, they are moderators of the state action.

When might doctors decide to help immigrants by classifying their case as uncomplicated? As already discussed, doctors and other frontline employees are often responsive to deservingness signals from citizens (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003). Immigrants with scarce financial resources and low language skills are likely to be perceived as deserving of help, and doctors may therefore in many cases allow them to bring a relative who can translate the encounter. If that is the case, doctors moderate the effects of the policy by alleviating the burdens associated with it. In that way, the policy will not affect immigrants' use of health services as much as would otherwise be expected based on previous studies on administrative burdens and welfare take-up.

2.3 Determinants of Tolerance for Administrative Burdens

2.3.1 The Burden Tolerance Concept

It is only relatively recently that scholars have begun exploring why some individuals support administrative burdens and others do not. Hence, the concept of burden tolerance was introduced and defined by Bækgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen (2021) as "the degree to which policymakers and people have positive attitudes toward state actions that create administrative burdens and are willing to impose such actions upon individuals" (p. 185). As outlined in the definition, burden tolerance has two components: an active and a passive one. The passive component is individuals' attitudes towards state actions that create administrative burdens – are they supportive of such actions or not? The active component is individuals' actual willingness to impose burdensome experiences on others (Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen 2021, 186). In its original application, burden tolerance is applied to understand the attitudes and motives of elected politicians. However, it is explicitly developed to be applied to different types of actors. Therefore, I use the burden tolerance concept both when studying support for burdens among the general public and among policymakers.

2.3.2 Individual-Level Antecedents of Burden Tolerance

As discussed in the introductory chapter, we do have some previous knowledge about individual-level determinants of support for administrative burdens among elected politicians. First, ideology is an important predictor of burden tolerance. Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen (2021) find that conservative politicians are more supportive of burdens in welfare programs than politicians with more liberal viewpoints. This support may stem from higher concerns for government spending, waste, and fraud among conservatives (Keiser and Miller 2020). Conservatives also tend to believe that individuals are responsible for their own lives and that the state should therefore only support them to a minimal extent (Bell et al. 2020). Previous work studying differences at the state level rather than the individual level also finds that ideology matters for the presence of burdensome state actions (Moynihan, Herd, and Ribgy 2016).

The personality of politicians is also predictive of their tolerance for burdens. Specifically, local politicians high in conscientiousness and low in openness to experience are more supportive of administrative burdens (Aaroe et al. 2021). Those who have no personal experiences with welfare programs are also generally more skeptical of administrative burdens (Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen 2021). This is grounded in the policy feedback tradition, which argues that experiences of public policies feed back into people's beliefs and attitudes.

Paper C studies individual-level antecedents of burden tolerance in the general public. We extend the study of burden tolerance to the general public since it is important to know whether members of the public support the content of public policies. We hypothesize that ideology and personal experiences will also predict burden tolerance among citizens. Further, we also expect burden tolerance to be associated with people's abilities to deal with government. Some people are more willing to deal with administrative problems (Döring 2021; Döring and Madsen 2022), and we expect these people to be more acceptant of burdens because they will perceive them as a smaller hassle.

2.3.3 Burdens Are More Tolerable when They Are Justified

Apart from the finding that politicians are more supportive of burdens when welfare claimants are perceived as deserving (Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen 2021), all determinants of burden tolerance studied previously are individual-level characteristics. In Paper D, we change this by examining whether justifications for administrative burdens affect support for them.

Based on the literatures on administrative burdens and ordeal mechanisms (Zeckhauser 2019; Madsen, Mikkelsen, and Moynihan 2020), we derive three explanations or justifications for the existence of administrative burdens. First, burdens may be installed to curtail excessive demand for public services and thereby protect the public budget. Second, burdens may be installed to combat fraud and thereby protect the integrity of public programs. Finally, a classic argument from the ordeal mechanism perspective is that burdens are a sorting mechanism installed to make sure that only those in most need of the service use it. The assumption is that only those in most need will spend time and resources to overcome the burdens. The administrative burden framework is critical of this interpretation and instead argues that those in most need will lack the necessary skills, energy, or resources to deal with excessive burdens (Christensen et al. 2020; Herd and Moynihan 2018). Notwithstanding who is right, the argument that burdens are to screen out those who do not really need a policy may resonate with politicians and make them more burden tolerant.

We hypothesize that a reference to any justification for the presence of administrative burdens makes politicians more burden tolerant. We base this on account-giving theory. Account giving is the provision of a causal account: "We did this, *because*...", while justifications are a specific subtype of these: "accounts in which one accepts responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it" (Scott and Lyman, 1968: 47). Justifications have the potential to mitigate potential negative consequences of an otherwise negative story. In the context of administrative burdens, politicians may have a general expectation that procedures should be as easy as possible. When this expectation is not met, the presence of a justification may make them accept that additional requirements and burdens are added to public programs.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Providing credible answers to my research question, “How does frontline employees shape citizens’ experiences of administrative burdens, and what determines support for administrative burdens?” require a diverse methodological toolbox. I structure this chapter around the different types of actors that I study. Hence, some methods lend themselves well to examine behaviors and attitudes among elite actors such as politicians and frontline employees, while others are more suited to explore how citizens react to policies. This chapter presents the different research designs used in the four empirical articles and discusses their strengths and weaknesses. Table 2 summarizes the methodological characteristics of the papers and the data used in each of them.

Table 2. Overview of Designs and Data Sources

	Subjects	Data	Design	n[a)]	Setting	Outcome	Country
A	Immigrants	Registry	RDD	35,206[b)]	Health	Health usage	DK
B	Frontline employees	Survey	Experiment	1,048	Unemployment	Burden reduction	DK
C	Citizens	Survey	Cross-sectional	3,022	Means-tested welfare	Burden tolerance	US
D	Politicians	Survey	Experiment	397	Local govt. benefits	Burden tolerance	BE
E	N/A	Articles	Literature review	108	Administrative burdens	N/A	N/A

a. Number of individuals. In papers A, B, and D, the number of observations is higher because of panel and within-subject designs.
b. Varies between different specifications. See the paper for more details.

3.1 Research Designs

3.1.1 Citizens: A Natural Experiment

Studying how citizens respond to burdensome state actions is hard. Observational research methods such as interviews or surveys are great at capturing experiences and intended actions. However, they are susceptible to social desirability and are not apt at providing credible causal answers. Survey experiments can provide causal estimates, but it is impossible to manipulate the impact that a policy has on people’s lives in a survey experiment. Therefore, I turn to a natural experiment to examine how a burdensome state action affects behavior among affected individuals.

Natural experiments are instances where social or political processes "create situations that approximate true experiments" (Dunning 2012, 3). If the process that divides subjects into control and treatment conditions is truly – or as good as – random, natural experiments allow researchers to draw strong causal inferences. Hence, when combined with the right sources of data, natural experiments can combine a high internal validity with high external and ecological validity.

This is exactly what I seek to do in paper A. Here, I apply a natural experiment to individual-level population registrations to study how new monetary requirements affect immigrants' use of health care services. Specifically, a new law that was implemented in Denmark from July 2018 requires immigrants to pay for their own interpreter whenever they are using health care services. However, the requirement was only implemented for immigrants who have resided in Denmark for more than three years. This creates a natural experiment in a small bandwidth on either side of the three-year cut off that allows me to apply a regression discontinuity (RD) design. Immigrants who have resided just below three years in Denmark are not required to pay for interpreting services and therefore constitute the control group. By contrast, immigrants who have resided just above three years are required to pay for interpreting themselves and, hence, constitute the treatment group. To study the impact of the new burdensome legislation, I examine whether immigrants in the two groups use their general practitioners to the same extent.

3.1.2 Frontline Employees and Politicians: Survey Experiments

Not all questions can be answered with natural experiments. Two of the actors I hold an interest in, politicians and frontline employees, are what can be called elite actors. While I was able to utilize data from population registries for the natural experiment among target group members, nothing similar is available when it comes to studying (intended) behaviors and attitudes among these actors. I therefore turn to survey experiments. Survey experiments are well suited to study these populations because they combine the high internal validity of the experiment with the ability of the surveys to easily reach the targeted population. Hence, while for example laboratory experiments would also be useful in answering the research questions, it is really hard to get politicians into a lab.

However, a problem with many elite survey experiments is small sample sizes. This means that they are often underpowered, which is a major threat to the credibility of these experiments. Our survey of caseworkers in Danish unemployment agencies for Paper B received a high number of responses (1,048), while the survey among Flemish local politicians for Paper E received considerably fewer responses (397). Still, in both studies, we use experimental techniques that increase power and thereby remedy some of the problems stemming from small sample sizes.

Specifically, both experiments use a within-subject design in which respondents see variations of the same vignette multiple times (we use three iterations in our experiments, but any number is possible). The main strength of this design is that it triples the number of observations and thereby increases statistical power substantially. A classic critique of within-subject designs are that they suffer from experimenter demand effects, where respondents infer the purpose of an experiment and alter their answers accordingly (Mummolo and Peterson 2019). However, recent methodological pieces show that respondents seldom exhibit such behavior (Mummolo and Peterson 2019) and that the results of within-subject designs tend to yield results similar to those from between-subject designs (Clifford, Sheagley, and Piston 2021).

In the experiment among politicians, we further use a quasi-pretest-posttest design. Here, we measure politicians' general burden tolerance prior to the experiment, while we use their tolerance of the policies described in vignettes as the dependent variable. In the analysis, we use the pre-measure of burden tolerance as a covariate. This increases statistical power because we thereby collect more relevant information about each respondent. This design has also been shown to yield results similar to more commonly used experimental designs (Clifford, Sheagley, and Piston 2021). Table 3 summarizes the content of the two vignette experiments.

Table 3. Summary of Elite Survey Experiments

	Group	**Experimental Groups**	**Dependent variables**
B	Frontline employees	1: No psych. cost + majority client 2: No psych. cost + minority client 3: High psych. cost + majority client 4: High psych. cost + minority client	<u>Reduce burdens</u>: "How likely is it that you will grant the request of [name]?" <u>Help client</u>: "How likely is that you would make an extra effort to help [name] get a job? Assume that an extra effort means that you have a little less time to help other clients."
D	Politicians	1: Control (no justification) 2: Fraudulent applicants 3: Applicants not in need 4: Run on budget	<u>Requirements</u>: "How would you rate the extent of administrative requirements in this case?" <u>Time</u>: "How would you evaluate the amount of time/effort it takes to complete the required paperwork in this case?"

3.1.3 The Public: A Cross-Sectional Survey Approach

In Paper C about burden tolerance in the American public, we rely on a cross-sectional survey. Therefore, we are not able to draw causal inferences based on our analysis but can merely observe associations between variables. Still, the survey design allows us to examine individual-level correlation between several interesting characteristics and tolerance of administrative burdens among a representative sample of the public. Future studies could rely on, for instance, panel designs to obtain more precise estimates of what determines burden tolerance among members of the general public. Still, as a first attempt to study burden tolerance in the general public, our cross-sectional survey makes a useful contribution to the literature.

3.2 Overview of Data

Here, I briefly discuss the different data sources used in the papers. Paper C uses survey data from a representative sample of the American public. Data were collected by Morning Consult and the New York Times for another purpose (see Badger and Sanger-Katz 2020), and we were generously allowed to use it for our paper. As we show in the paper, the data generally does a good job of resembling the American public. Therefore, results should generalize to this population. However, the fact that we did not compose the survey ourselves limited our ability to study some important antecedents of burden tolerance. Most importantly, the survey did not include any questions on the deservingness of welfare recipients. We know from previous research that deservingness perceptions are important predictors of both burden tolerance (Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen 2021) and more general welfare attitudes (Aaroe and Petersen 2014). Therefore, it is a weakness of our study that we cannot test the extent to which deservingness perceptions matter for the publics' burden tolerance.

I collected the data for the two survey experiments in collaboration with Niels Bjørn Grund Petersen (frontline employees) and Steven Van de Walle (politicians). For the frontline worker survey,[2] we directly contacted the 94 managers of Danish unemployment agencies and asked them whether we could survey their employees. 32 agencies agreed to participate. Participating agencies are not statistically different from non-participating agencies on key characteristics such as size of municipality, share of immigrants, and share of unemployed citizens. In total, 1,048 caseworkers participated in the survey, which gave us a very satisfactory response rate of 45%. Data for the second

[2] Asdija Thangaratnam and Signe Sandager Bjerre provided excellent research assistance in collecting the survey among frontline employees.

survey experiment were collected among local politicians in Flanders. Here, we drew a random sample of around 3,000 respondents from an online database. Based on previous research, we were aiming for a sample of around 600 respondents. However, the response rate was lower than expected at 13.5%, and we ended up with just under 400 respondents. This was rather unsatisfactory, but because we use the within-subject and quasi-pre-post design, as described above, we still have enough power to detect reasonable-sized effects.

Finally, the data for Paper A comes from official Danish population registers. The registries hold highly detailed, longitudinal records on all Danish residents' usage of their general practitioners. I use this to measure immigrants' weekly visits to their general practitioners. This is coupled with data on their immigration status, most importantly when they immigrated to Denmark. I use this to construct a variable that measures whether immigrants have resided more or less than three years in Denmark in any given week. The use of registry data means that I observe immigrants' actual behavior, which is a huge advantage compared to most other studies on administrative burdens.

Chapter 4: Results

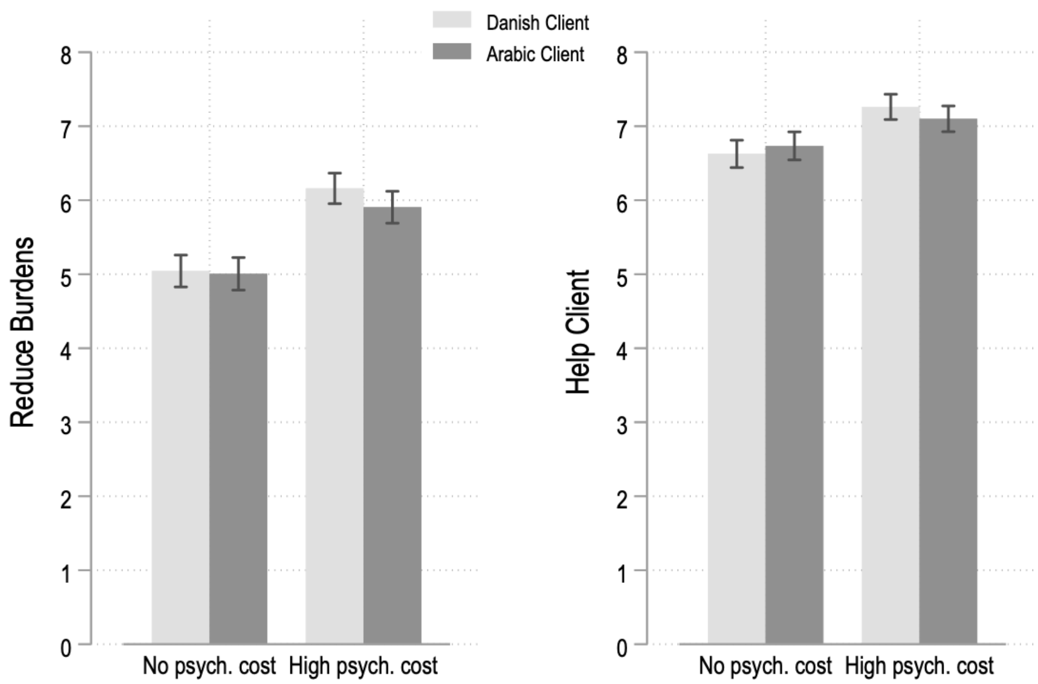
This chapter covers main conclusions on the role of frontline employees in shaping experiences of burden and on the determinants of burden tolerance. To simplify the presentation, I rely exclusively on figures to illustrate findings. More detailed regression tables and statistical analysis are available in the papers.

4.1 Frontline Employees Moderate and Alter Burdens

4.1.1 When Citizens Communicate Burdens, Frontline Employees Respond

Figure 1 shows unemployment caseworkers' reactions to vignettes where they are randomly assigned to a client who either communicates no experience of psychological costs or high psychological costs.

Figure 1. Frontline Employees' Reactions to Communication of Psychological Costs



Notes: Reprint from Paper B. Dependent variables are scaled from 0 to 10, where 10 indicates more willingness to reduce burdens and help clients. Danish/Arabic client was manipulated by randomly showing either a Danish or an Arabic name to respondents.

The figure shows that frontline employees react to communication of psychological costs by displaying a higher willingness to reduce administrative burdens and help the client when compared to the citizens communicating no psychological costs. The magnitude of the effects is significant, in particular when it comes to reducing burdens for the citizens. Here, the difference between the two conditions is about 1 on the scale from 0 to 10, meaning that the communication of psychological costs increase the willingness to reduce burdens by 1/10 of the entire scale. This is equivalent to an effect size of d = .34,[3] which is considered more than a small effect size by Cohen (1988).

Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen (2021) have previously found that Danish local politicians do not change their burden tolerance in response to cues about citizens' experiences of psychological costs. One explanation of these differing results is that organizational attachment influences how individuals react to citizens that experience psychological costs. Hence, frontline employees, who have direct contact with citizens and can directly influence their experiences of burden, are responsive when made aware of citizens' experiences. On the contrary, politicians are only indirectly responsible for experiences of burden through the policies they enact, which may be why they do not react to a psychological cost cue. Another explanation is that the results differ because of variations in the experimental treatment material. Even though there are many similarities between the vignettes used in the two studies, a notable difference is that we ask respondents to imagine that the citizen described in the vignette is their own client, while Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen (2021) do not include such a cue. This cue could enhance identification with the citizen, which in turn could make them more likely to respond to the citizen signal of psychological costs. None of the studies are able to test the hypothesis that identification with citizens affects acceptance and/or implementation of burdens, and this is therefore an interesting question for future research to pursue. I will return to this in chapter 5.

Figure 1 also shows that frontline employees do not differ in their willingness to help a citizen with an Arabic name compared to a citizen with a Danish name. Hence, we see that the reactions to Danish and Arabic citizens are not statistically significantly different from one another in any of the experimental conditions. This is somewhat surprising given that many studies (both field- and survey experiments) find that frontline employees discriminate against citizens with minority names (Andersen and Guul 2019; Einstein and Glick 2017; Pedersen, Stritch, and Thuesen 2018; White, Nathan, and Faller 2015, but see also Jilke, Van Dooren, and Rys 2018 for an example of a null effect study). This difference from other studies may be a result of the setting

[3] The effect size for the help measure is d=.22.

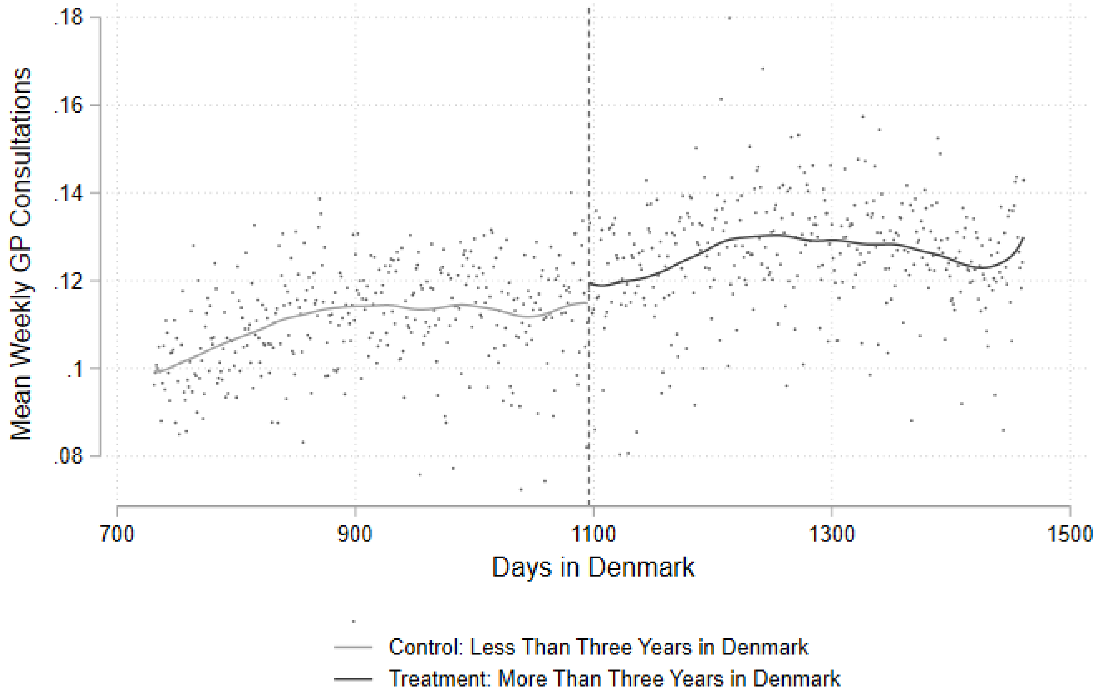
we study. Our experimental vignettes describe citizens that experience certain issues in both the versions with and without psychological costs. This might activate frontline employees' deservingness perceptions rather than stereotypes or implicit biases that are normally used to explain discriminatory behavior (Andersen and Guul 2019). For example, Jilke and Tummers (2018) find that American school teachers are more willing to help a student from the ethnic minority and ascribe this to teachers' beliefs that ethnic minority students are more in need of help than majority students.

Overall, the results from Paper B show that frontline employees respond to citizens' communication of psychological costs by lowering the barriers that citizens face and by making an extra effort to help citizens. Further, they do so irrespectively of the ethnicity of the citizens. These findings confirm the hypothesized feedback effect, where the same barriers that caused burdens in the first place are subsequently lowered because of citizens' communication of costs and frontline employees' responsiveness to this communication.

4.1.2 Frontline Employees Screen Citizens from Burdens

Paper A also provides insights on the role of frontline employees in implementing burdensome policies. In order to discuss this role, we first need to cover the main results of Paper A. Figure 2 shows the weekly use of general practitioners among immigrants who have resided in Denmark between 750 and 1,450 days. Remember that the law that requires immigrants to pay for interpreters is implemented for all immigrants who have resided more than three years in Denmark (1095-1096) days. Hence, if the fee affects the utilization of general practitioners, we should see a drop in usage among immigrants who have resided more than three years in Denmark. However, figure 2 does not show such a pattern. Instead, we see that the utilization of general practitioners rises during an immigrant's time in Denmark and that there is no downward trend immediately after immigrants are required to pay for interpreting themselves. In Paper A, I confirm this observation with more sophisticated statistical analysis.

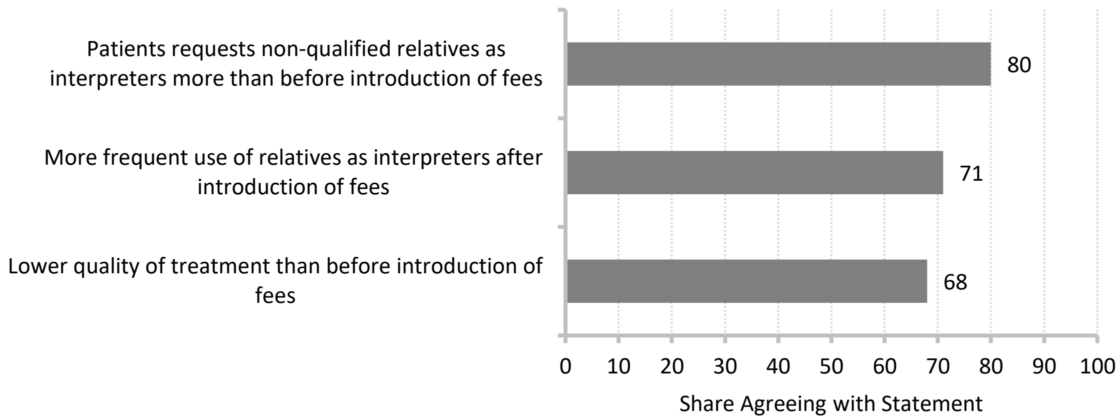
Figure 2. Weekly Use of General Practitioners (GPs)



Notes: Reprint from Paper A. The figure covers the period from July 2018 to December 2019. The figure shows predicted level of GP consultations per immigrant. Lines are generated by locally weighed regression (LOWESS) with no covariate adjustment.

I do not have access to data that can offer a detailed account of why the fees do not affect health care usage. However, figure 3 suggests that general practitioners play a key role. The results in the figure are from a survey among general practitioners conducted by the Danish Medical Association and the NGO the Danish Institute for Human Rights (Slot and Wessel 2019). The figure shows that four out of five general practitioners report that the request for non-qualified relatives to be used as interpreters are more frequent following the introduction of interpreting fees. Almost as many, 71% and 68%, say that relatives are also used as interpreters more often and that the quality of treatment is lower than before the introduction of fees. While the results should be interpreted cautiously since they are descriptive and from a non-representative, cross-sectional survey, they do offer a likely explanation of the overall results. Hence, even though they should only do so in uncomplicated cases, general practitioners allow that relatives are used to translate. As a result, immigrants' need for interpreters drops, and therefore, the legislation does not affect how often they visit their general practitioner. If this line of reasoning is true, an important implication is that the overall usage of interpreters drops after the introduction of fees.

Figure 3. Results from Survey among General Practitioners



Notes: The figure shows the percentage of doctors who agree or highly agree with statements. Results are from Slot and Wessel (2019).

While my micro-level data has some limitations in terms of testing this argument, Michaëlis, Krasnik, and Norredam (2021) have collected data on this directly from the Danish regions, which are responsible for providing interpreting services. This data shows a "steady decrease in the number of professional interpretation services from 2017, before the interpretation services fee was introduced, to 2019, after the introduction of the fee" (Michaëlis, Krasnik, and Norredam 2021, 706). In the North Region of Denmark, which saw the largest decrease, the use of interpreting services dropped by 41% from 2017 to 2019.

Overall, these different sources of data all support the argument that general practitioners (who are also a type of frontline employees) screen immigrants from the burdens that they would normally experience as a result of fees. These results are in many ways parallel to those I find in paper B in that frontline employees are responsive to citizens' needs and seek to minimize the burdens they experience. One difference is that in Paper B, caseworkers use the discretion given within the legislation to alter the burdens that citizens encounter, while in Paper A, general practitioners make a very lenient interpretation of the law when they classify a greater number of cases as uncomplicated.

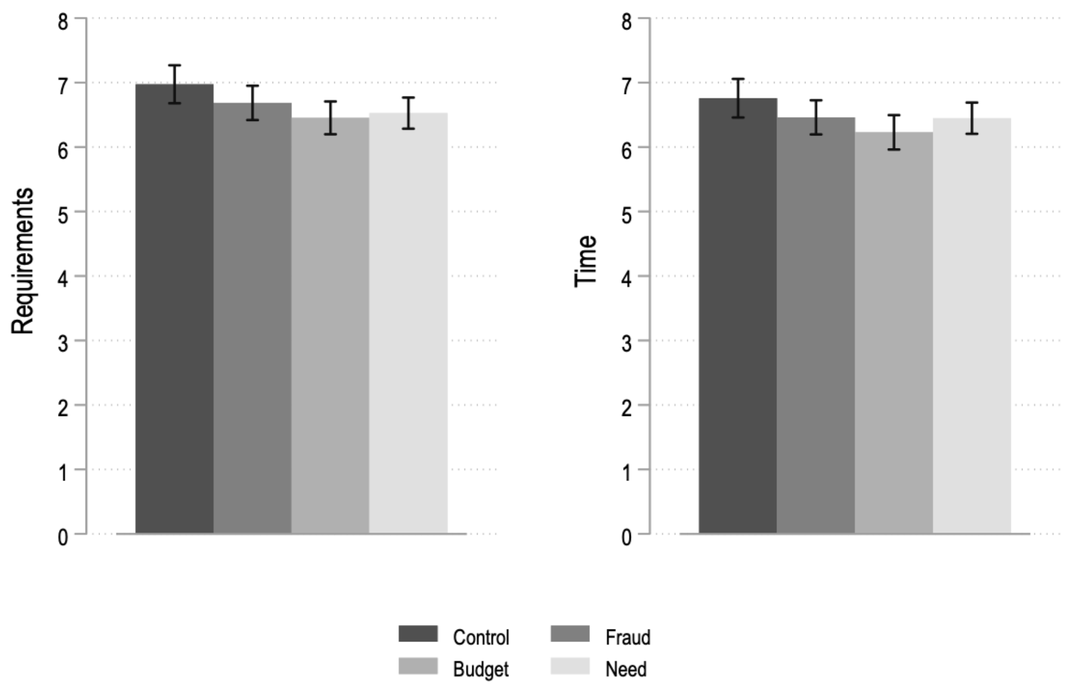
4.2 Determinants of Burden Tolerance

4.2.1 Policymakers Tolerate Burdens More When Presented with a Justification

In Paper D, we use a survey experiment among Flemish policymakers to test whether providing an explanation for the existence of administrative burdens makes them more burden tolerant. Before digging into the results of the specific types of justifications, I note that, in support of our hypothesis, policymakers in the control group are statistically significantly less tolerant of administrative burdens than those provided with a justification.[4] The effect size is d = .22 for the dependent variable that measures their general acceptance of requirements, while it is d=.19 for the other dependent variables, which measure respondents' acceptance of the time it takes to deal with requirements. These are considered small effect sizes (Cohen 1988). However, given that our treatment material in this experiment is quite subtle, even small effects are interesting and worth exploring further.

Figure 4 displays the results of the survey experiment we distributed to Flemish local politicians. Note that dependent variables are scaled so that higher values mean less tolerance for administrative burdens. The first thing to note is that policymakers have a higher acceptance of burdens in all experimental treatments. However, not all treatments are statistically significant from the control.

Figure 4. Effects of Experimental Treatments on Policymakers' Burden Tolerance



Notes: Reprint from Paper D. Dependent variables (DV) are scaled from 0 to 10, where 10 indicates that requirements are too harsh or takes too much time to fulfill.
Requirements: Control vs. Fraud: p>0.05, Control vs. Budget: p<0.01, Control vs. Need: p<0.05.
Time: Control vs. Fraud: p>0.05, Control vs. Budget: p<0.01, Control vs. Need: p>0.05.

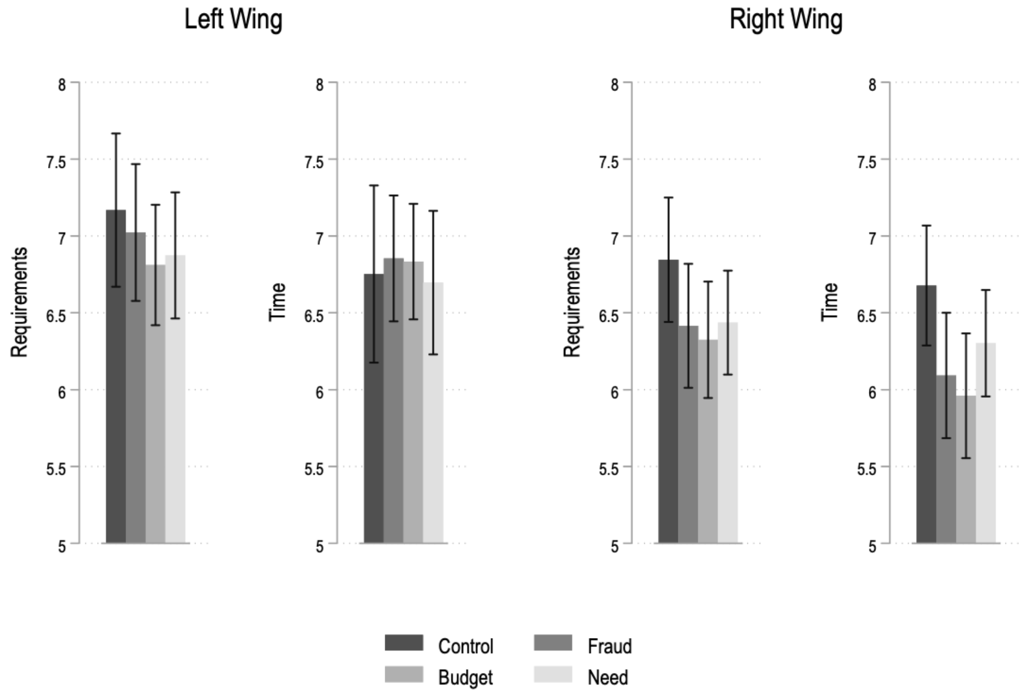
4 I tested this by collapsing the three treatment groups into one.

The treatment that justifies the presence of administrative burdens by referring to a run on the budget is significantly different from the control for both dependent variables.[5] Justifying burdens by mentioning that they are implemented so the program targets the neediest citizens is only statistically significant for the requirements measure, while justifying burdens as a means to avoid fraud is statistically insignificant for both dependent variables.

Overall, these results show that telling policymakers why the presence of administrative burdens is justified can make them more tolerant of administrative burdens, but only if the justification is a run on the budget or to target the neediest citizens. However, not all policymakers react in the same way to burden justifications. Figure 5 is equivalent to figure 4 but splits the respondents into left-wing- and right-wing politicians according to their self-placement on a 0-10 ideology scale. The figure reveals an interesting pattern where left-wing policymakers only react moderately to burden justifications (none of the differences between control and treatment are statistically significant for left wingers), while right-wing policymakers increase their burden tolerance quite significantly in response to justifications. This supports our expectation that the three justifications for administrative burdens are better aligned with a conservative than with a liberal ideology and that right-wing policymakers will therefore increase their tolerance of burdens more than left wingers when provided with a justification.

[5] As a rule of thumb, differences are statistically significant if the confidence interval of the treatment does not overlap with the mean of the control.

Figure 5. Effects of Experimental Treatments on Policymakers' Burden Tolerance Split by Ideology

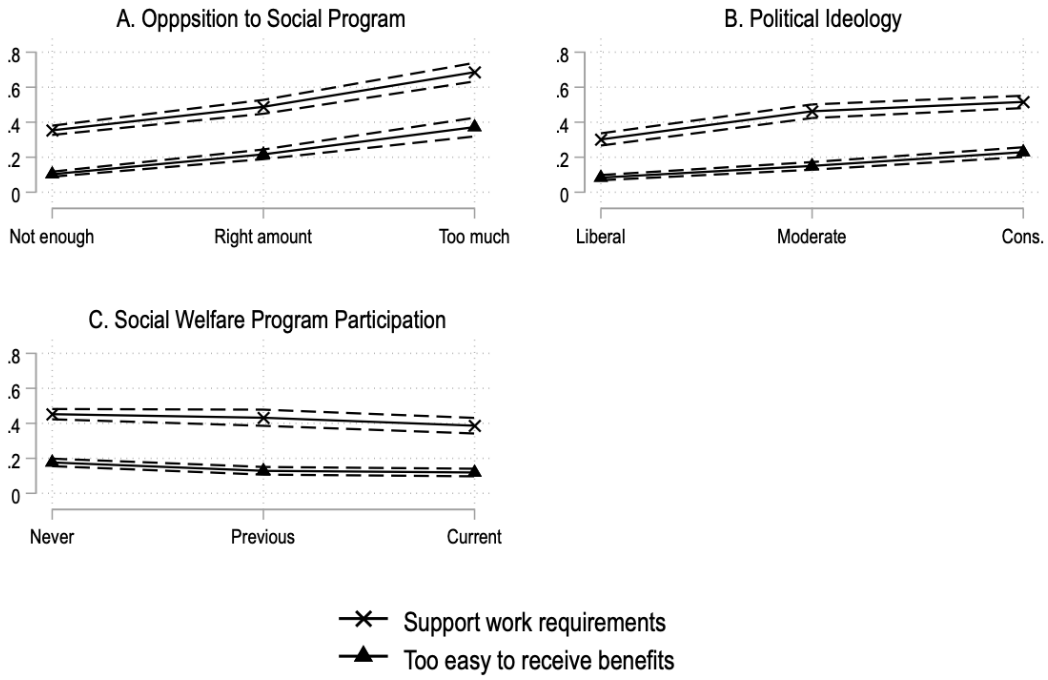


Notes: Notes: Reprint from Paper D. Dependent variables are scaled from 0 to 10, where 10 indicates that requirements are too harsh or takes too much time to fulfill. The figure splits the main results by respondents' self-reported ideology: Left Wing = 0-4 and Right Wing = 6-10. Because the ideology scale has 11 points, we excluded politicians that chose the middle category and thus neither self-identify with the left nor the right.

4.2.2 Ideology, Opposition to Social Programs, and Personal Experiences Predict Burden Tolerance

Finally, I turn to the results on public tolerance of administrative burdens, which we study using a representative sample of the American public. Figure 6 summarizes the main results of our analysis. Panel A shows that there is a strong association between being in opposition to social programs and being tolerant of administrative burdens in terms of supporting work requirements and finding that it is too easy to receive welfare benefits. This is not a surprising finding, but it is still important to parse out because we have limited empirical knowledge about the relationship between general policy support and burden tolerance (Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen 2021, 196).

Figure 6. Predictors of Burden Tolerance among Members of American Public



Notes: Reprint from Paper C. Figures show the predicated probability that respondents chose the category "highly agree" on dependent variables. In each figure, all other independent variables than the depicted is held at its mean value. Stipulated lines are 95% confidence intervals.

Second, in Panel B, we find the expected association between ideology and burden tolerance. The figure shows that liberals are generally less supportive of burdens than conservatives, with moderates falling in between. Third, Panel C shows support for our hypothesis, grounded in the policy-feedback tradition, that those who have personal experience with welfare programs or have family members who have such experiences, are less tolerant of administrative burdens in such programs. Finally, we do not find any support for our expectation that high administrative literacy is associated with a higher tolerance for administrative burdens. This may be a result of our non-conventional measure of administrative literacy.[6] We also find a non-hypothesized association between income and burden tolerance, where those with higher incomes are more tolerant of administrative burdens in social programs.

Overall, these results show that, in line with previous findings among elected politicians (Aaroe et al. 2021; Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen

[6] We measure administrative literacy in two ways. First, we combine questions about whether respondents have ever forgotten to renew their vehicle registration or have paper mail they plan to read that has been unopened for more than a week. Second, we ask them if they have ever received a government document that they did not understand. See Döring (2021) for a more carefully developed scale.

2021), individual characteristics are important in shaping public support for administrative burdens in welfare programs. In combination, my studies on burden tolerance show that both politicians and members of the public disagree over the number of administrative burdens that citizens should experience in encounters with the state. The studies also illustrate that both individual-level characteristics, for example ideology and personal experiences, and policy characteristics, how burdens are justified, are important in shaping individuals' tolerance of administrative burdens.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

In this final chapter, I discuss what can be learned from my findings both theoretically and practically. As a starting point, I discuss some limitations of my work and what these limitations mean for the conclusions we can draw from my research. Based on this discussion, I provide directions for future research on administrative burdens. Finally, I discuss the practical implications of my work before ending with a conclusion.

5.1 Limitations

5.1.1 Generalizability

The first limitation concerns the generalizability of my findings. The empirical studies are conducted in diverse settings (health, unemployment, means-tested welfare, and local government benefits) in multiple countries (Belgium, Denmark, and the US), and this contextual diversity is both a strength and a limitation of my work. It is a limitation because it reduces my ability to directly apply findings from one study to the others. For instance, we learn in paper D that members of the American public who are conservative and have no personal experience with welfare programs are more supportive of administrative burdens in public programs. This finding cannot be used directly to draw conclusions about the Danish public's support for the interpreting fees under study in Paper A or the unemployment polices in paper B. Still, since most findings on burden tolerance in the literature so far are quite consistent across different contexts, it is most likely that conservative Danes will be more tolerant of interpreting fees and various barriers targeted towards unemployed individuals.

However, diversity is also a strength because it shows the relevance and applicability of theoretical concepts across contexts. For example, my studies on burden tolerance show that political ideology is important in shaping acceptance of burdens among both policymakers in Flanders and members of the American public. Together with previous findings on ideology and administrative burdens in Denmark (Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen 2021), this shows that conservatives are more supportive of administrative burdens in diverse contexts. This indicates that my findings on burden tolerance could generalize to other western countries and maybe also beyond.

Likewise, even though my studies on frontline employees are both conducted in Denmark, health care and unemployment are two quite distinct settings. One obvious difference is that access to health care is almost unconditional and universal, while unemployment benefits are tightly regulated and citizens must meet several requirements to access them. Another difference is the relevant frontline employees in the two settings. Caseworkers in Danish unemployment agencies are typically social workers with a professional bachelor degree, whereas general practitioners are highly trained doctors with a master's degree. These groups have highly different levels of professional norms, which could influence how they treat citizens (Cecchini and Harrits 2022). Yet, both groups display a similar willingness to reduce and screen vulnerable citizens from administrative burdens in my two studies. This similarity in behavior across different settings suggest that the findings travel to other welfare areas in Denmark and possibly also in other high-developed welfare states.

5.1.2 Quantitative, Experimental Evidence

Other limitations relate to the fact that I exclusively use quantitative, mostly experimental, research methods. While these methods have many advantages, some of them already discussed in the methods chapter, they also come with limitations. An often-referred-to limitation of (survey) experiments are their low ecological validity (Kihlstrom 2021), which stems from the fact they are hypothetical and not set in the real world. In our survey experiments among frontline employees and policymakers, we seek to mitigate this limitation by discussing the vignettes with members of the groups and adjusting the experiments to make them look as much as real-world situations as possible. Further, I also mitigate the issue of low ecological validity by studying the same topic using different methods that complement each other. Hence, while Paper B provides solid causal evidence that frontline employees reduce burdens for citizens, Paper A uses registry- and survey data to render it even more probable that this actually takes place in the real world.

Another limitation of the quantitative methods I use is their limited ability to provide insights into the exact mechanisms driving the results. In Paper A, I am able to somewhat alleviate this concern by combining the registry data with survey responses from general practitioners. However, I am still not able to examine exactly what goes on in consultations between immigrants and general practitioners, and it is therefore possible that other mechanisms than the use of relatives as interpreters explain that immigrants still use their doctors to the same extent following the introduction of interpreting fees. This is also a limitation of Papers B and C. Specifically, the survey experimental designs we use in those studies provide us with average causal effects of the treatments, and therefore, the internal validity of the studies is high. However, we know less about what actually drives these results. We use theories about administrative burdens, frontline employees, and justifications to theorize the mechanisms, but we need more in-depth knowledge about frontline employees' and policymakers' thoughts and motivations to draw more firm conclusions about the exact mechanisms at play.

5.2 Directions for Future Research

One of the privileges of writing a dissertation is that you work in-depth with a topic for a prolonged period of time. In this process, ideas for interesting new research questions and studies emerge, and I present some of these ideas below.

5.2.1 How Do Citizens Affect Frontline Employees' Decision-Making?

Paper B illustrates that frontline employees are responsive to citizens' communication of psychological costs. A prerequisite for frontline employees to exhibit this responsiveness is that citizens actually voice their experiences of administrative burden. As discussed in chapter 2, Gilad and Assouline (2022) show in the context of an Israeli welfare program that citizens do voice their burdens. However, they also show that only a minority of recipients communicate their burdens and that those with no academic education or prior experience of welfare programs and with an Israeli Arabic background are less likely to voice them. Together with our findings in Paper B, these results raise a tension. If frontline employees react equally to communication of burden from citizens with different backgrounds (which our finding that there are no differences between citizens with a Danish and an Arabic name suggests), this is potentially concerning for the equal distribution of public service. Specifically, because certain types of citizens voice their burdens more often, these citizens will also be more likely to receive help from frontline employees and have their burdens reduced. This creates an almost paradoxical situation where frontline employees treat citizens fairly and equally, but this equal treatment still creates inequality in outcomes.

According to a classical view, a cornerstone of public organizations is to foster social equity by redressing "the imbalance that would otherwise occur in the distribution of services such as health, housing and education" (Boyne et al. 2003, 23). Therefore, it is important for future scholarship to investigate how frontline employees react to communication of burdens from citizens with different characteristics. This can quite easily be done in experiments similar to that in Paper B, where instead of ethnicity, other characteristics such as gender or educational background are manipulated. Another idea is to a use a conjoint experiment where multiple characteristics can be manipulated at the same time. This also forces frontline employees to prioritize – something they are also required to do in the real world.

If frontline employees indeed respond equally to communication from all citizens, the next step is to investigate how the resulting gap in outcomes can be reduced. For example, how do we make citizens from less privileged backgrounds voice their burdens to the same extent as those with a more privileged background? Or how do we make bureaucracies particularly attentive to communication from citizens from less privileged backgrounds? Possible answers to this question could be found in the representative bureaucracy literature, which argues that bureaucracies are better at creating equal outcomes when they resemble the populations they service (e.g., Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006).

Other questions related to our burden feedback model warrant more attention. In chapter 4, I discussed how identification with citizens may be important in shaping burden tolerance. The same could be true in instances where citizens voice their experiences of burdens. For example, do frontline employees respond more favorably to citizens' communication when they identify strongly with the citizen, and is this the same among frontline employees with different levels of professionalism? A simple hypothesis is that more professionalized employees are less affected by characteristics of, and their identification with, the citizen, and therefore, they respond more equally to requests from various citizens. Another interesting question concerns the way burdens are communicated. In our experiment, burdens are expressed quite politely. In the real world, burdens are communicated in various ways and attached to various emotions (Bell, Christensen, and Hansen 2022). Some are sad when voicing burdens, others are frustrated, and others again are polite. Such differences in communication style may also affect how frontline employees respond to communication of burdens, and this may even be contingent on characteristics of the frontline employees such as their personality (Aaroe et al. 2021).

5.2.2 Advancing the Study of Personal Experiences with Policies

Another avenue for future research is related to Paper C, where one finding is that individuals who have personal experiences with public policies are less burden tolerant. This is an interesting finding, but also one that merits more attention. In the paper, we rely on a rather crude measure of personal experiences: "Are/were you, or someone in your family, currently/previously enrolled in the program?" However, there is much more to personal experiences than being part of a program. For instance, Soss and Schram (2007) argue that public policies feed back into people's attitudes and values when they are proximate and visible to people.

One way to conceptually advance the study of personal experience would be to integrate it with construal level theory from social psychology (Trope and Liberman 2010). The theory argues that events differ in spatial distance (physical space), temporal distance (time), social distance (interpersonal relationships), and hypotheticality (whether an event is likely or not) (Trope and Liberman 2010). These different types of distance are also applicable to polices, where individuals vary along the same dimensions in their policy proximity. Specifically, some people currently benefit from a policy while others benefitted in the past. Therefore, they differ in temporal distance. Other will differ in social proximity in that they either benefitted from a policy themselves, a close family member benefitted (for example a spouse), or a more distant family member benefitted (for example a brother or sister). There will also be variation on hypothetical distance in that some people are more likely to be needing a policy in the future than others. Finally, for some types of policies (for example housing policies), physical distance may also be relevant.

Hence, integrating construal level theory into the administrative burden framework will allow us to test more specific hypotheses about how personal experiences with policies affect tolerance for administrative burdens. Further, in line with studies on policy feedback, personal experiences could also affect other outcomes such as democratic participation, welfare attitudes, and trust in government (Larsen 2019). It would also be possible to examine whether different types of policy proximity interact, and thereby reinforce the effects of one another.

5.2.3 When Do State Actions Result in Experiences of Administrative Burden?

A final topic that I believe deserves more attention is the conditions under which state actions result in experiences of administrative burdens. In Paper E, we show that the literature has so far focused extensively on how individual characteristics – such as health, cognitive abilities, and gender – make individuals more prone to experience burdens as a result of state actions (e.g., Döring and Madsen 2022; Bell et al. 2022). Perhaps because of the literature's tight connection to the behavioral public administration agenda (Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2017; Moynihan 2018), which puts the study of individual-level psychological mechanisms at the forefront of public administration research, less is known about how institutional characteristics and frontline employees condition the effect of state actions on experiences of burdens.

My work illustrates that the actions of frontline employees are key in shaping experiences and thus constitute an important moderator, but other more organizational characteristics may be important as well. A few studies have found or hypothesized that organizational capacity (Bell and Smith 2022), digitalization (Griffiths 2021), and the representativeness of the bureaucracy (Johnson and Kroll 2020) might be such moderators, but we still need more studies to draw certain conclusions. Another potential factor that may moderate the effect of state actions on experiences of burdens is political attention and prioritization. As discussed extensively throughout the dissertation, policymakers differ in their acceptance of administrative burdens. Policymakers with a high tolerance for administrative burdens may implement stricter state actions and thereby directly affect the burdens that citizens experience. We do not know whether they actually do so, and this is therefore an obvious task for future research. Further, burden-tolerant politicians may also affect citizens' experiences of burdens more indirectly by influencing the implementation practices among managers and frontline employees. These, and other organizational moderators of state actions, are important to study in future research, especially because they can also provide insight on how administrative burdens can be minimized.

5.3 Practical Implications

There are also a number of practical implications for public administrations in Denmark and beyond that can be derived from my research. Below, I discuss how my work contributes to ongoing debates in Denmark about unemployment agencies and interpreting fees. I also discuss whether my findings can help organize governments in ways that reduce citizens' experiences of administrative burdens.

5.3.1 Unemployment Agencies

The first implications concern Danish unemployment agencies. In recent years, these agencies have been heavily criticized by various actors in society for their impact on unemployed people's wellbeing and health. A survey from the Danish Mental Health Fund reported that 68% of unemployed citizens on sick leave believed that contact with the unemployment agency had made their overall quality of life worse. A shockingly 23% even replied that the contact had led them to thoughts about life not being worth living (Kaae and Bentzen 2019). One of the central arguments is that agencies are unable to meet the needs of individual citizens and instead treat citizens uniformly according to strict rules and requirements. As a consequence, several parties suggested during the recent election campaign that unemployment agencies should either close completely or undergo a considerable budget cut.

My findings cannot be used to resolve any of these issues or provide guidance on the appropriate organization of unemployment agencies. However, they do provide insights on the motivations and intended behaviors of a group that is sometimes overlooked in the public debate, namely caseworkers at unemployment agencies. While agencies are criticized for not responding to the needs of individual citizens, my findings illustrate that this inattention is not caused by a lack of motivation on the part of caseworkers. Instead, our findings in Paper B show that caseworkers are indeed attentive to citizens that experience various issues and that they even display a high willingness to resolve problems by either lowering requirements or in other ways make an extra effort to help citizens. This suggests that the issues that citizens experience when interacting with Danish unemployment agencies are not caused by caseworkers, but rather by the many demands and requirements that citizens face (as also documented by Baekgaard et al. 2021). Frontline employees surely also play a role as they are the main enforcers of rules and requirements, but our findings illustrate that their default is to make it easier, not harder, for citizens to handle the hassles of being unemployed. In cases where they instead make it harder for citizens, their actions may be driven by, for example, organizational pressures (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011) or a high work load (Andersen and Guul 2019).

5.3.2 Interpreting Fees Do Not Affect the Utilization of General Practitioners

My research also contributes to another topic that has been subject to public debate in Denmark. When the right-wing government enacted interpreting fees as part of its 2017 Finance Bill, it caused a great deal of controversy. Opponents of the policy, who span from left-wing parties over the Danish Medical Association to the Danish Refugee Council (DFH 2018; Laegeforeningen 2017), argued that such fees would increase medical errors, diminish patient safety, and even ruin the decade-long equal access to health care in Denmark. On the other hand, the government highlighted that the policy would provide an incentive to learn Danish and that “it is fair that you pay for an interpreter when you’re going to the doctor if you still haven’t learnt the language after three years” (Minister for Health Ellen Trane Nørby, quoted in Bloch 2018).

My findings show that interpreting fees did not affect how much immigrants use their general practitioners. This partly refutes the argument from opponents that the policy would impact the free access to health care. However, it is also important to acknowledge that my study only analyzes one potential effect of the policy in usage of general practitioners. Therefore, it is possible that the policy, for example, affected usage of hospital services among immigrants.[7] Further, the policy could also affect other important outcomes such as treatment quality. For instance, the general practitioners in the survey discussed in chapter 4 report that the quality of consultations is lower after the enactment of the policy. This may be a result of the increased use of relatives as interpreters since inadequate translation can affect both access to and quality of health care (Clarke and Isphording 2017; Rosse et al. 2016). In sum, my study provides valuable input to the still ongoing debate about the impact of interpreting fees in health encounters by showing that they do not affect the utilization of general practitioners. At the same time, it is important to remember that there are many other potential effects of the policy that are outside the scope of my research.

5.3.3 Reducing Administrative Burdens

An important discussion in the literature on administrative burdens concerns how experiences of administrative burdens can be reduced since such reductions can have positive impacts on citizens' wellbeing and take-up of public benefits. Recent studies have found that factors such as adequate framing of categories in forms (Moynihan et al. 2022), simplified (Linos, Reddy, and Rothstein 2022) and early commutation (Linos, Quan, and Kirkman 2020), and destigmatizing language (Lasky-Fink and Linos 2022) can all reduce experiences of administrative burdens and increase service take-up. Even though my dissertation does not directly study how burdens can be reduced, I believe it does offer some insight on the topic. Specifically, my studies illustrate that frontline employees can be key actors in reducing citizens' experiences of burden. Caseworkers at unemployment agencies and general practitioners both have considerable discretion in their day-to-day work, and this is probably a prerequisite for them to act in ways that minimize burdens. Further, they cannot be expected to always reduce burdens. A key task for frontline employees in any context is to implement and enforce rules and requirements, and this may sometimes contradict intentions to reduce burdens. Still, my findings demonstrate that if policymakers wish to reduce citizens' experiences of administrative burdens, frontline employees can play a considerable part in achieving this goal.

[7] My hypothesis is that the policy does not affect the use of hospitals either. Previous research shows that the use of general practitioners is more price elastic than the use of hospitals because of the often more acute nature of hospital usage (Kiil and Houlberg 2014).

5.4 Conclusion

In the introduction, I posed the following research question: How do frontline employees shape citizens' experiences of administrative burdens, and what determines support for administrative burdens? While all chapters of the dissertation contribute to answering the question, it is appropriate to conclude this chapter with a relatively concise answer to the question. The first part of the question deals with the role of frontline employees in shaping experiences of administrative burdens. The main conclusion to draw from my two empirical studies on this topic is that implementation practices at the frontline are hugely important in shaping citizens' experiences of administrative burdens. Specifically, I show that frontline employees respond to communication of psychological costs from citizens by lowering the demands they face. This creates a feedback loop where the same demands that caused experiences of burden in the first place are subsequently lowered because of citizens' communication and the responsiveness of frontline employees. Another important finding is that frontline employees in some cases make lenient interpretations of laws in order to screen citizens from experiencing administrative burdens.

The second part of the question concerns determinants of burden tolerance. Here, I show that support for welfare policies, political ideology, and personal experiences with policies are key in shaping acceptance of administrative burdens in public programs among members of the public. Moreover, the ways administrative burdens are justified also affects burden tolerance. Specifically, policymakers are more acceptant of administrative burdens when they are justified as a tool to control public budgets or as a means to target the neediest citizens. Together, these findings illustrate that both personal characteristics and characteristics of policies shape support for administrative burdens.

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English Summary

Governments across the world are responsible for providing services such as child-, elder-, and health care to their citizens. These services are hugely important for most people, and our interactions with government are therefore crucial in determining our well-being, health, and overall quality of life. At the same time, encounters with government are often onerous and burdensome. Studies on administrative burdens document how individuals experience learning-, compliance-, and psychological costs in their interactions with government and illustrate that these costs hit harder on vulnerable groups such as immigrants, senior citizens, and the sick. However, other important topics are still relatively unexplored in the rapidly growing literature on administrative burdens. This dissertation provides new theoretical and empirical insights on two of these topics.

The first topic is the role of frontline employees in implementing onerous state actions and thereby shaping administrative burdens. Frontline employees often have great discretion when implementing policies, and they therefore hold the power to diminish and/or enhance citizens' experiences of administrative burdens. Using a survey experiment, the dissertation finds that caseworkers at Danish unemployment agencies respond to citizens' communication of psychological costs by lowering the demands that the citizens face. This creates a feedback loop where the same demands that caused experiences of burden in the first place are subsequently lowered because of citizens' communication and the responsiveness of frontline employees.. Here, a regression-discontinuity design applied to actual health care data shows that the policy does not affect immigrants' health usage, while evidence from a survey supports the interpretation that doctors help citizens avoid burdens by interpreting the new law leniently.

The second topic concerns why administrative burdens exist in the first place and who supports their existence. Burdens can be used as an opaque policy tool in situations where more visible policy tools are infeasible, and therefore, burdens have been referred to as "policymaking by other means". Yet, we still have limited knowledge about who supports the presence of administrative burdens in welfare programs. Using a survey among a representative sample of the American public, the dissertation finds that members of the public who are liberal, support social policies, have personal experiences with public policies, and have a low income are less supportive of work requirements and of making it difficult to access benefits. Further, in a survey experiment, Belgian local politicians are more acceptant of burdens when provided with a justification for the existence of burdens.

In examining these topics, the dissertation makes significant contributions to the still nascent literature on administrative burdens. One key contribution is to show that both personal characteristics and characteristics of policies shape support for burdens among members of the public and policymakers. Another contribution is to highlight that implementation practices at the frontline are vital to understand the administrative burdens that citizens experience. Therefore, when analyzing the potential effects of public policies, only considering the formal policy design is not sufficient. Rather, informal practices at the frontline are at least as important in shaping experiences of burden. This illustrates that administrative burdens are dynamic and that they are constantly shaped and reshaped in interactions between citizens and frontline employees.

Dansk resumé

Moderne velfærdsstater er ansvarlige for at levere vigtige services såsom børnepasning, ældrepleje og sundhed til deres borgere. Disse services er vigtige for de fleste mennesker, og derfor er vores møder med staten afgørende for både trivsel, sundhed og generel livskvalitet. Møder med staten er imidlertid ofte både byrdefulde og besværlige. Studier om såkaldte administrative byrder viser, hvordan individer oplever lærings- efterlevelses- og psykologiske omkostninger i deres møder med staten, samt at sårbare grupper som indvandrere, ældre og syge typisk oplever disse omkostninger i særlig høj grad. Andre vigtige spørgsmål er imidlertid stadig relativt uudforskede i den hastigt voksende litteratur om administrative byrder. I denne afhandling belyser jeg to af disse spørgsmål ved hjælp af spørgeskemaundersøgelser foretaget i Belgien, Denmark og USA, en systematisk litteraturgennemgang samt data fra officielle danske befolkningsregistre.

Det første spørgsmål er, hvilken rolle frontlinemedarbejdere spiller i skabelsen og implementeringen af administrative byrder. Frontlinjemedarbejdere har ofte stort skøn i implementeringen af offentlige politikker, og de har derfor mulighed for at mindske og/eller forstærke borgernes byrdefulde oplevelser. I et af afhandlingens empiriske studier undersøges det, hvordan sagsbehandlere på danske jobcentre reagerer, når en borger fortæller dem, at han oplever psykologiske omkostninger som følge af de krav, han skal efterleve som ledig. Studiet viser, ved brug af et survey-eksperiment, at sagsbehandlerne reagerer ved at mindske de krav, borgeren møder. Derudover udtrykker de villighed til at gøre en ekstra indsat for borgeren. Et andet studie undersøger, om indvandrere, der efter en lovændring i 2018 selv skal betale for tolkeydelser i det danske sundhedsvæsen, benytter deres praktiserende læge mindre. I et regressions-diskontinuitetsdesign, baseret på indvandrernes faktiske brug af praktiserende læger, vises det, at tolkegebyret ikke påvirker indvandrernes tilbøjelighed til at besøge lægen. En sandsynlig forklaring på dette resultat er, at praktiserende læger i højere grad tillader, at pårørende bruges som tolke efter indførelsen af gebyret. Dermed hjælper de praktiserende læger, ligesom sagsbehandlerne, borgerne med at overkomme administrative byrder i deres møde med staten.

Det andet underbelyste spørgsmål er, hvem der støtter eksistensen af administrative byrder i velfærdsprogrammer. I situationer, hvor mere synlige politiske værktøjer ikke er anvendelige, kan administrative byrder anvendes som et mere uigennemsigtigt politisk værktøj. Administrative byrder er derfor blevet omtalt som ”policymaking by other means”. Vi har imidlertid stadig begrænset viden om, hvad der kan forklare, at borgere og politikere støtter tilstedeværelsen af administrative byrder. Afhandlingen bruger en spørgeskemaundersøgelse af et repræsentativt udsnit af den amerikanske befolkning til undersøge, hvilke individuelle karakteristika, der hænger sammen med opbakning til byrder. Studiet viser, at borgere, der er liberale, bakker op om eller har personlige erfaringer med velfærdsprogrammer eller har en lav indkomst, i mindre grad støtter administrative byrder i to amerikanske velfærdsprogrammer. Et andet studie, der anvender et survey-eksperiment, viser, at belgiske lokalpolitikere støtter administrative byrder i højere grad, når de præsenteres for en begrundelse for, hvorfor byrderne eksisterer.

Med belysningen af disse spørgsmål yder sammenfatningen vigtige bidrag til litteraturen om administrative byrder. Et væsentligt bidrag er at vise, at både personlige- og politiske karakteristika har betydning for støtten til administrative byrder blandt borgere og politiske beslutningstagere. Et andet bidrag er at fremhæve, at implementeringen af politikker på frontlinjen er afgørende for at forstå omfanget af administrative byrder, som borgerne oplever. Når man analyserer de potentielle effekter af offentlige politikker, er det derfor ikke tilstrækkeligt kun at tage hensyn til det formelle politikdesign. Uformelle implementeringspraksisser er derimod mindst lige så afgørende for, hvor byrdefulde borgernes møder med staten er. Dette illustrerer, at administrative byrder er dynamiske, og at de konstant formes og omformes i møder mellem borgere og frontlinjemedarbejdere.