

Does Favorable Outcomes Minimize Experiences of Administrative Burden?

Aske Halling¹, and Frederik Godt Hansen²

¹Department of Political Science, Aarhus University

²Department of Psychological and Behavioural Sciences, Aarhus University

November 23, 2023

Abstract

Several recent studies reveal an uneven distribution of administrative burdens, with disadvantaged groups often experiencing more burdens. However, less is known about other factors that may induce variation in experiences of administrative burdens. In this paper, we examine how aspects of service delivery itself may affect experiences of burden. Specifically, we argue that experiences of administrative burden depend on whether citizens receive a favorable outcome in their interaction with the state. Drawing on insights from the literatures on citizen satisfaction and trust in government, we theorize that citizens are more accepting of overcoming state demands when they achieve their desired outcome, leading them to experience less administrative burdens. Hence, we hypothesize that outcome favorability directly affects experiences of administrative burdens *and* moderate the effect of onerous state actions on burdensome experiences. We test these expectations in a vignette survey-experiment among a representative sample of 1,600 Danish citizens. The vignette describes a fictitious application for elderly care where we manipulated the level of compliance demands (low/high) and the outcome of the application (not mentioned/unfavorable/favorable). Results show that people receiving a positive outcome perceived significantly less compliance- and psychological costs compared to people in the other groups. Further, we find some evidence that outcome favorability moderates the effect of state actions on experiences of psychological and compliance costs.

Keywords

Administrative burden; citizen-state interactions; outcome favorability; survey experiment

Acknowledgments

This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 802244).

As you will see, this is a very early draft. Hence, we appreciate comments on all aspects of the manuscript and apologize if some aspects are unclear due to lack of details.

Introduction

In recent years, scholars have paid increasing attention to the administrative burdens that citizens experience in citizen-state interactions as a consequence of barriers, demands, and requirements (e.g., Burden et al. 2012; Moynihan et al. 2015; Herd and Moynihan 2018; Halling and Bækgaard 2022). Further, studies show that individuals vary in their capacity to handle the requirements imposed by the state (Christensen et al. 2020; Herd and Moynihan 2018). In particular, citizens who do not possess the necessary skills and capital (i.e., citizen resources) to handle state encounters experience more administrative burdens from the same barriers (e.g., Döring 2021; Döring and Madsen 2022; Masood and Nisar 2021).

While this line of research has provided valuable insights into how individual characteristics moderate the relationship between state actions and experiences of administrative burdens, the impact of other moderating factors remains understudied. We examine whether *aspects of service delivery itself* induce variation in experiences of administrative burdens. Specifically, we argue that experiences of administrative burden may depend on whether citizens receive a favorable outcome in their interaction with the state.

To develop our argument, we draw on existing public administration literature on how aspects of service delivery have implications for citizen satisfaction with or trust in service providers (e.g., Hansen 2022; Berg & Johansson 2019; Eckhard & Friedrich 2022). One important aspect is whether outcomes are in line with individual preferences (e.g., Hansen 2023). These studies teach us that outcome favorability leads to a more positive evaluation of the service experience. In this article, we theorize about the effects of outcome favorability on citizens' experiences of administrative burdens in citizen-state interactions. We argue that citizens to a larger degree accept that they have to overcome barriers when they get what they want (i.e., receive a favorable outcome), and, thus, are less inclined to experience barriers enforced by the state as burdensome. Accordingly, our main expectation is that outcome favorability mitigates the effect of state actions on experiences of administrative burdens.

To test our expectations, we rely on a pre-registered¹ vignette survey-experiment among a representative sample of 1,600 Danish citizens. Previous survey-experiments have successfully manipulated different independent variables by asking respondents to imagine a bureaucratic encounter (e.g., Berg and Johansson 2019; Hansen 2023). Following this design, respondents were asked to imagine helping their mother apply for elderly care. The level of state actions was manipulated by referring to extensive compliance demands that applicants had to comply with to apply for elderly care, while outcome favorability was manipulated by reference to whether the application was rejected (unfavorable outcome) or approved (favorable outcome). We exploited that Danish municipalities differ in which and how many demands and requirements citizens must comply with to receive elderly care. Thus, both the high and low state demands treatment resemble how compliance demands work in a real-world setting.

Theory

In this section, our main purpose is to argue how outcome favorability matter for citizens' experiences of administrative burden. A necessary component in this argument is a short overview of what administrative burdens are, and how state actions matter for experiences of burden. That is where we start below.

State Actions Affect Experiences of Burden

Administrative burdens have famously been defined as “individual’s experiences of policy implementation as onerous” (Burden et al. 2012: 741), though in practice most scholars use the three types of costs; learning, compliance, and psychological, to describe what administrative burdens are (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015). Learning costs are time and resources spent

¹ Pre-registration link: https://osf.io/y82je/?view_only=70c9e2a85fec4c819adfff09082f1a4a

learning about public programs, compliance costs are efforts used to comply with state requirements and demands, while psychological costs are stress, uncertainty, stigma, and other negative psychological reactions associated with interaction with the state (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015).

Probably *the* key question in the administrative burden literature is the extent to which various actions from the state lead to experiences of administrative burden (Halling and Baekgaard 2023). While administrative burdens are people's subjective experiences of costs, state actions "cover what the state does broadly speaking." (Baekgaard and Tankink 2022 17), including formal (laws and rules) and informal (frontline implementation) actions (Halling and Baekgaard 2023: 6). In this paper, we are specifically interested in formal state actions that citizens must comply with to get access to services or benefits. Previous research has defined such state actions as "compliance demands" (Baekgaard et al 2021) and we follow this terminology.

Studies have found that the presence of compliance demands in welfare programs increase experiences of administrative burdens. Most prominently, Baekgaard et al. (2021) combine quasi-experiments and survey experiments to document that decreases in compliance demands during a COVID-19 led to reductions in experiences of psychological costs among unemployed in Denmark. [add a few other notable studies].

Our first hypothesis follows directly from these studies. Hence, we expect compliance demands to affect experiences of both compliance and psychological costs:

H1: High compliance demands will lead to higher experienced compliance costs and psychological costs compared to low compliance demands.

Outcome Favorability and Experiences of Burden

[arguments to be added]

H2: Receiving a favorable outcome will lead to lower experienced compliance costs and psychological costs compared to receiving an unfavorable outcome.

Outcome Favorability Reduce Effects of State Demands

[arguments to be added]

H3: Receiving a favorable outcome will reduce the effect of compliance demands on experienced compliance costs and psychological costs. The effect of compliance demands on experienced administrative burden is stronger when outcomes are unfavorable compared to favorable.

Methods

To study our hypotheses, we need variation in both outcome favorability and strictness of state actions, as well as measurement of administrative burdens. To achieve these goals, we use a vignette survey experiment describing a fictitious application for a place in a nursing home.

Case: Danish Nursing Homes

The Vignette Experiment

Du skal hjælpe en 85-årig nær pårørende med at søge om plads på et kommunalt plejehjem. I ansøgningsprocessen har du brugt et betydeligt antal timer på blandt andet at udfylde ansøgningsskemaer, samle dokumentation og koordinere med forskelligt sundhedsfagligt personale. For at ansøge skal man leve op til følgende krav:

- [Udfylde et online ansøgningsskema med detaljeret personlig information og begrundelse for ansøgningen, herunder hvilke udfordringer man oplever i den nuværende bolig
- Fremsætte omfattende dokumentation for behovet for plejehjemsplads (f.eks. udtalelse fra egen læge)
- Have en telefonisk samtale med en visitator (en sagsbehandler) fra kommunen, hvor man igen skal begrunde ansøgningen og angive udfordringer i den nuværende bolig]
- Have en personlig samtale med visitatoren fra kommunen i eget hjem, hvor visitatoren skal afklare ansøgerens helbredsmæssige situation og generelle behov for en plejehjemsplads

Som en del af ansøgningsprocessen sidder du med i samtalen mellem din nære pårørende og visitatoren fra kommunen. Du fortæller visitatoren, at du ofte oplever, at din nære pårørende er afhængig af omfattende praktisk hjælp og pleje mange gange om dagen. Du har ikke mulighed for at varetage den nødvendige omsorg for din nære pårørende.

[Afgørelse

Ti dage efter besøget fra kommunen modtager din nære pårørende en skriftlig afgørelse. På baggrund af en indstilling fra visitatoren har kommunen besluttet at godkende/afslå ansøgningen om en plejehjemsplads.]

Note: The text in the first bracket is the high compliance demand manipulation. Respondents in the no outcome condition were not shown a decision.

Measures

Measure	Questions	Scale
Compliance costs	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Proceduren for at søge om plejehjemsplads til min pårørende er unødigt kompliceret2. Der er mange ting, der skal dokumenteres, for at søge om en plejehjemsplads til min pårørende3. Det ville kræve meget af mig at leve op til kravene for at søge om en	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Helt <u>u</u>enig2. Uenig3. Delvist <u>u</u>enig4. Hverken <u>u</u>enig eller enig5. Delvist enig6. Enig7. Helt enig

	plejehjemsplads til min pårørende	
Psychological costs	<p>Hvis jeg skulle leve op til kravene for at søge om en plejehjemsplads til min pårørende, forventer jeg, at jeg ville føle mig...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ... frustreret 2. ... i dårligt humør 3. ... stresset 4. ... respekteret 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Slet ikke 2. 2 3. 3 4. I nogen grad 5. 5 6. 6 7. I meget høj grad

Items were combined into indexes measuring psychological and compliance costs.

Data and Descriptive Statistics

Data were collected among a representative sample of adult Danes from YouGov's online panel from October 2 – October 24, 2023. The sample consists of 1,624 respondents. Table x reports descriptive statistics about both the weighted and non-weighted sample. In the results section, we report unweighted results of our experiment, while the weighted results are available in appendix table x. There are not substantial differences between the two analyses.

Results

A manipulation check shows that the state demand treatment was successful in making respondents in the treatment group perceive higher state demands ($\beta=.074$, $p<.001$). Further, between 74% and 84% of respondents identified the correct application outcome. This is rather low, which is probably because manipulations checks were placed at the very end of the survey. Therefore, some respondents may have forgotten the outcome by the time they reach the manipulation check. In supplementary analysis, we restrict the sample to only those that identified the correct outcome. This analysis (available in appendix xx) yield results very similar to those presented here in the main text.

Figure 1 reveals support for hypothesis 1 that high compliance demands will increase experiences of compliance and psychological costs. We see that respondents in the high compliance demand group express higher compliance costs ($\beta=.14$, $p<.001$) and psychological costs ($\beta=.08$, $p<.001$) than respondents in the low demands group.

Figure 1: Effect of Compliance Demands on Costs

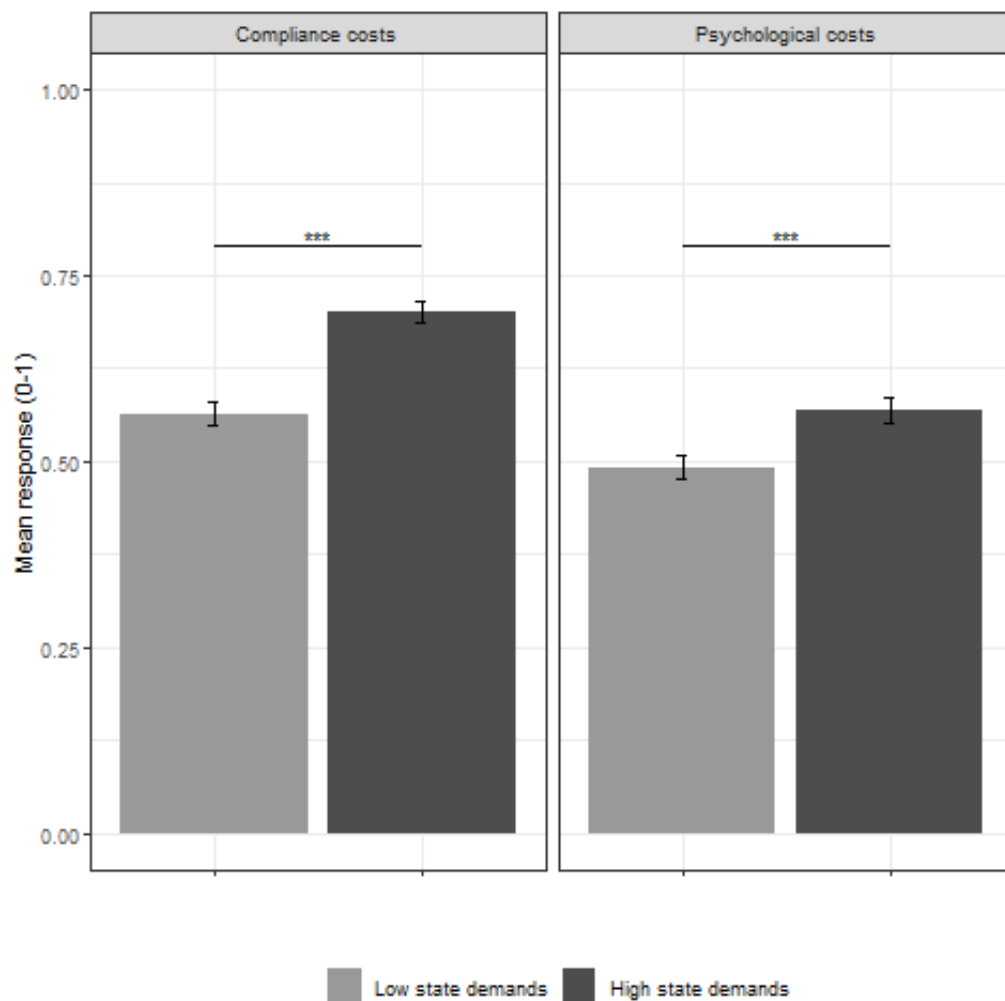


Figure 2 shows strong support for hypothesis 2 that receiving a favorable outcome will lead to lower experienced compliance costs and psychological costs compared to receiving an unfavorable outcome. Compared to respondents receiving an unfavorable decision, those getting a favorable outcome experience statistically significantly less compliance costs ($\beta=-0.12$, $p<.001$) and psychological costs ($\beta=-0.10$, $p<.001$). Respondents in that did not receive an outcome are experience less cost than those receiving an unfavorable outcome (comp costs: $\beta=0.07$, $p<.001$, psych costs: $\beta=0.07$, $p<.001$) and more than respondents getting a positive outcome (comp cost: $\beta=-0.05$, $p<.001$, psych costs: $\beta=-0.02$, $p<.001$).

Figure 2: Effect of Outcome Favorability on Costs

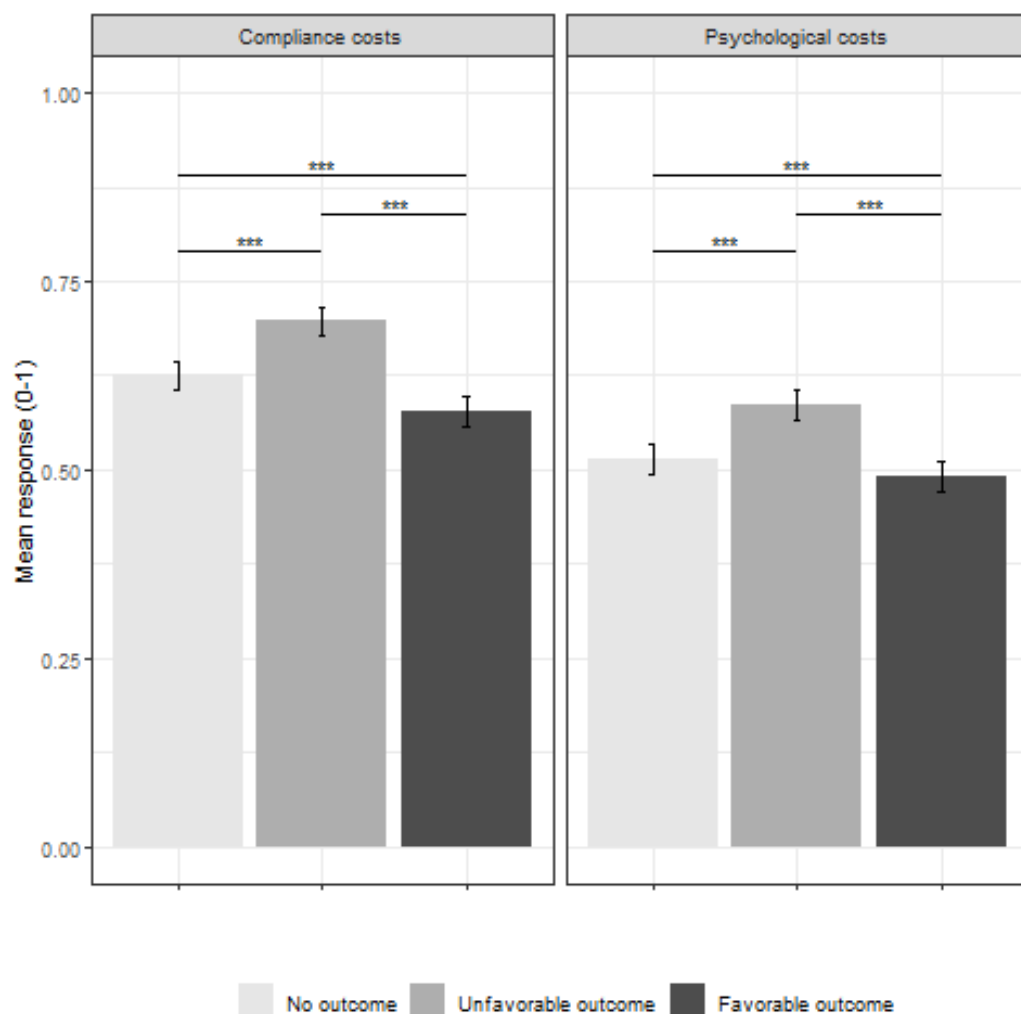
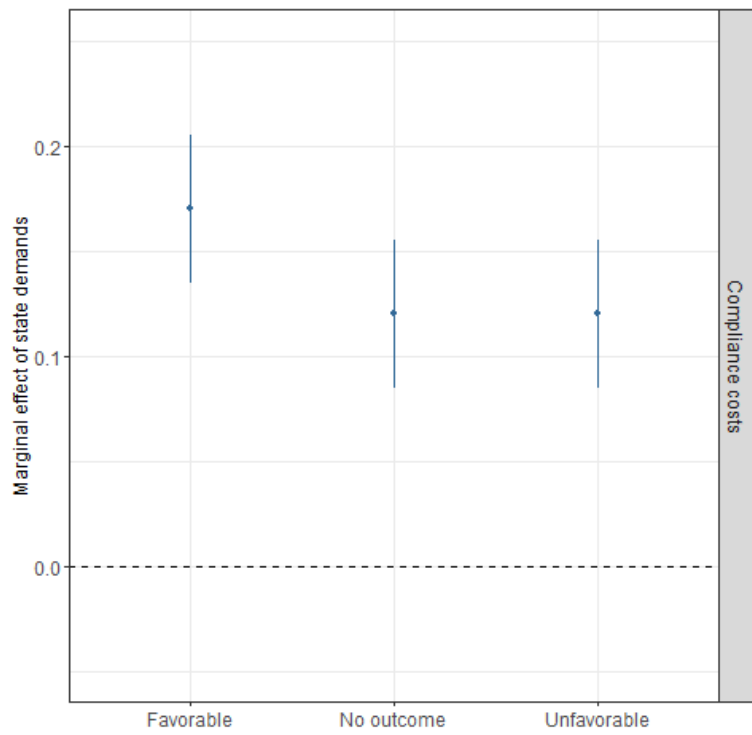
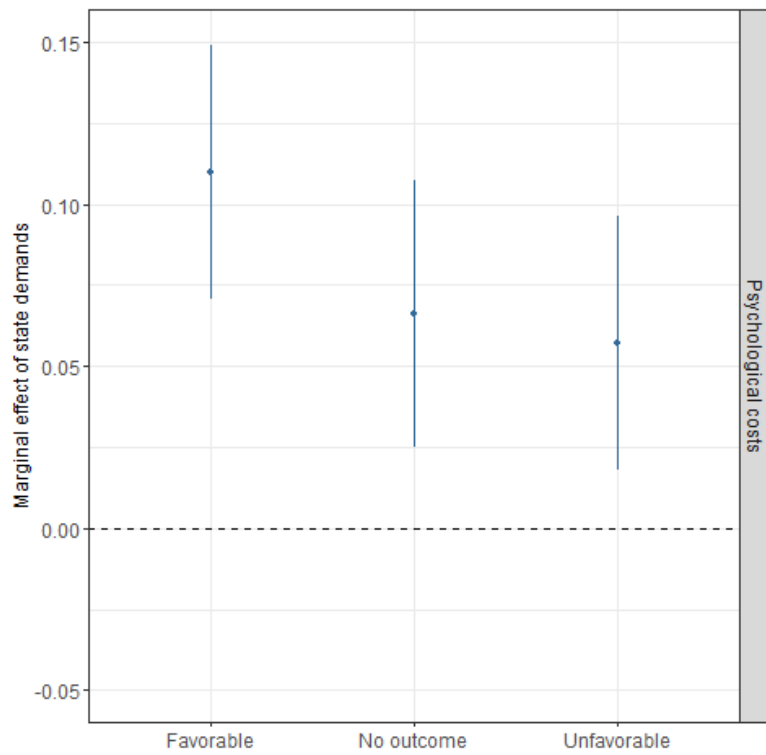


Figure 4



Discussion

Conclusion