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Article

Why Do Policymakers Support Administrative Burdens? The Roles of Deservingness, Political Ideology, and Personal Experience

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Abstract

Administrative burdens affect peoples' experience of public administration but there is, to date, limited evidence to as why policymakers are willing to accept and impose burdens. To address this gap, we draw from the policy design and administrative burden literatures to develop the concept of burden tolerance—the willingness of policymakers and people more generally to passively allow or actively impose state actions that result in others experiencing administrative burdens. Drawing on a survey experiment and observational data with Danish local politicians in a social welfare setting, we find that more right-wing politicians are more tolerant of burdens, but politicians are less willing to impose burdens on a welfare claimant perceived as being more deserving. Politicians with a personal experience of receiving welfare benefits themselves are less tolerant of burdens, while information about the psychological costs experienced by claimants did not reduce burden tolerance.

Introduction

Administrative burdens have substantial impacts on the daily lives of the public (Sunstein 2019). The nascent empirical literature on the topic focuses on how state actions—such as rules and processes—beget learning, compliance, and psychological costs for target populations, and how these costs, in turn, have consequences for individual outcomes, such as take-up of social benefits or access to basic rights (Christensen et al. 2020; Heinrich 2016; Herd and Moynihan 2018; Jilke, Van Dooren, and Rys 2018; Nisar 2018).

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Although evidence of the effects of administrative burdens has been rapidly growing, the question of why burdens are created has received less empirical attention. Why, for example, would a government enthusiastically endorse a “hostile environment” policy that imposes bureaucratic hurdles for immigrants hoping to live in the UK? Or impose new requirements that make it harder for citizens to vote in US states? Or remove resources that citizens rely on to get access to healthcare? Or compel mandatory work requirements in exchange for welfare benefits? Such questions compel us to examine the motivation of policymakers when they make decisions about the administrative state. We draw from the literatures on administrative burden and policy design to provide experimental and observational evidence about what factors shape policymaker's acceptance and willingness to impose burdens in the social welfare domain.

While there may be policy-specific rationales in each of the above settings, our goal is to document broader patterns that help to explain why the administrative state is constructed to be more onerous for those who interact with it. To do so, our article makes two contributions. Our first contribution consists of developing a concept to serve as our dependent variable: burden tolerance. We define burden tolerance 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. Since perceptions of administrative burdens may depend very much on the setting and the actors involved, we situate burden tolerance in a specific policy setting—social welfare policies—with real policymakers as a proof of concept. We develop four different measures of burden tolerance, which seek to reflect both passive attitudes toward policies that create burdens, and active willingness to impose those burdensome policies.

Our second contribution is to offer an empirical test of what drives burden tolerance among individual policymakers. We lay out four hypotheses. Prior work points to political ideology as an important predictor of whether burdens are imposed on target groups (Herd and Moynihan 2018; Moynihan, Herd, and Rigby 2016). We also test a basic claim of the policy design literature—that the perceived deservingness of the target population matters to the application of burdens (Schneider and Ingram 1997). Our third and fourth hypotheses address how the experience of burdens shape policymaker views, testing if personal experience—has the policymaker received welfare benefits?—and the psychological costs that claimants experience affect burden tolerance.

We test our hypotheses using a survey among 495 Danish local politicians including both experimental and observational data, explained in the research design and data collection section. Our case is mandatory job service (in Danish: *Nyttejob*), which is a public program placing unemployed recipients of social assistance into unpaid work in return for welfare benefits. We randomly assign respondents to a cue either describing a high or a low deservingness social assistance claimant as well as either a cue about the psychological costs experienced by the social assistance claimant or no cue.

The empirical results provide compelling contributions to prior work. Using actual policymakers and a real policy outcome, we provide evidence that political ideology and perceived deservingness do matter for both policymaker acceptance and willingness to impose burdens. Politicians are less tolerant of burdens if the individual claimant is seen as deserving, and right-wing politicians are more tolerant of burdens than

left-wing peers in the social welfare domain we study. When it comes to experiences of burdens, an experimental treatment that highlighted the onerous experience of the individual claimant by casting a light on psychological costs did not reduce burden tolerance. However, we find that personal experience appears to matter to burden tolerance: politicians who have previously received unemployment-related benefits themselves are less tolerant of burdens.

Burden Tolerance

In this section, we explain the concept of burden tolerance and its relevance to public administration. The concept is not, of course, entirely novel. Both the literatures on policy design and administrative burdens make reference to burdens and speculate on why policymakers make some policies more burdensome. Those burdens arise as a function of learning, compliance, and psychological costs that people encounter in policy implementation processes (Herd and Moynihan 2018). Learning costs include engaging in search processes to collect information: Are there services that can fulfill unmet needs? Would one qualify for them? What are the requirements for the application process? Compliance costs are the material hassles of following administrative rules and requirements. This is the time lost waiting in line, completing forms, providing documentation of status, or being compelled to complete mandatory tasks of the type we examine here. It is the money spent on hiring an accountant to do your taxes or the fees immigrants pay to process paperwork. Psychological costs include the stigma of applying for or participating in a program that carries negative associations, a sense of loss of personal power or autonomy in interactions with the state, or the emotional stresses and frustrations of dealing with administrative processes. Such burdens frequently fall harder on more vulnerable groups (Brodkin and Majmundar 2010; Christensen et al. 2020; Deshpande and Li 2019; Heinrich 2016, 2018; Herd et al. 2013; Jilke, Van Dooren and Rys 2018; Nisar 2018). Herd and Moynihan (2018) propose that such outcomes are partly a function of political ideology, with opposition toward redistributive programs translating into support for burdens as an alternative form of policymaking designed to limit the reach and effectiveness of those programs.

The concept of burden tolerance also reflects aspects of policy design research focused on social constructions of deservingness. Burdens in implementation are explicitly identified as part of policy design, though not defined in the way outlined above. Social constructions help to explain “why some groups get benefits and others get burdens” (Schneider and Ingram 1997).

Target groups with shared characteristics (e.g., elderly, minorities, disabled, criminals) can be attributed to positive or negative images or stereotypes. Positive social constructions convey deserving, honest, and hardworking images, whereas negative constructions do the opposite (Schneider and Ingram 1993, 1997). This work, in turn, builds on earlier research that portrayed government welfare policies as mechanisms of social control deployed upon more vulnerable groups (Piven and Cloward 1971). Such work generally does not separate burdens from other aspects of policy, including eligibility, but note that relative to more generous social insurance programs, welfare claimants face more intrusive administrative processes that are subject to bureaucratic discretion (Gordon 1988). The very conditionality of these types of programs creates a basis both for the existence of burdens, and the opportunity to target those burdens towards groups deemed undeserving (Abramovitz 2006; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011).

Our conceptualization draws on these basic points. We treat burdens partly as a function of policy design decisions made by policymakers, and model burdens in terms of the costs that individuals experience. Further, we test basic claims about the roles of ideology and deservingness made by these literatures. But establishing a distinct concept of burden tolerance offers a theoretical contribution by separating out attitudes toward burdens relative to other aspects of policy design. For example, policy design for programs like welfare includes both decisions about eligibility—who is entitled to apply for a benefit—and decisions about administrative burdens that shape the conditions under which they apply. Students of public administration should be properly interested in the latter, and in doing so can link their work to the broader study of policy design. Thus, we think of burden tolerance as one of a broader set of political attitudes about policy design and implementation, and one where scholars of both social constructions and administrative burdens can meet.

To date, empirical evidence on the question of why policymakers have positive attitudes toward state actions that increase burdens—as opposed to other aspects of policy design—and are willing to impose those burdens is scarce. In part, this is because of a lack of an actionable concept and associated measures. The concept of burden tolerance helps to solve this problem. Two individuals might vary on this factor for different reasons. Only by having a concept that embraces individual differences, and a strategy of capturing individual-level responses can the potential explanations for such differences be explored.

Isolating burden tolerance is also important because the creation of burdens often occurs via opaque processes, where policymakers offer disingenuous

rationales (Herd and Moynihan 2018). In standard policy processes, it is relatively straightforward to determine support for policies via legislative votes, or observing party platforms. But the use of state actions to impose burdens often do not come up for vote and involve discretionary power in interpreting and applying a policy. It could involve adding more questions or documentation requirements to a form, compelling people to undergo processes that are legal but not required, or slowing down administrative processes. In our case, it involves how much time policymakers are willing to assign claimants to spend engaging in compliance costs. It, therefore, becomes more critical to develop a set of scholarly tools to understand why such state actions emerge. Using the concept of burden tolerance allows us to theorize about how the attributes of policymakers and the target population matter to policymakers' attitudes towards burdens and their willingness to impose state actions that lead to burdens.

We conceptualize burden tolerance as incorporating both a passive and an active component that we explore in our empirical analysis. The passive component concerns policymakers' (positive and negative) attitudes toward state actions that create burdens, whereas the active component implies an explicit willingness to impose burdensome experiences upon individuals. Put another way, the passive aspect reflects a judgment, while the active component is closer to a willingness to make decisions. Part of our theoretical interest is whether such active and passive approaches are correlated in practice. Although people might have positive attitudes toward burdensome actions, they might not always in practice be willing to impose those burdens on individuals. For instance, social norms or considerations about the political costs and benefits of imposing burdens could sometimes lead to situations where policymakers are reluctant to impose burdens even though they have positive attitudes towards them.

While we study it in the context of local politicians, the concept of burden tolerance is also of relevance to groups of nonelected policymakers that directly or indirectly might influence the support for burdensome state actions such as senior civil servants and street-level bureaucrats, and can inform the political economy of burden creation within organizations (Peeters 2019; Peeters and Widlak 2018). The concept can also help to understand what stance third-parties take in imposing or buffering burdens, or how the mass public establishes beliefs about the roles burdens play in public programs (Keiser and Miller 2020). While we study burden tolerance in the context of conditional welfare programs, it applies to other venues where policy implementation may be experienced as onerous. This includes cases where people face burdens in order to comply with legislation—such as paying taxes or

registering a vehicle—and to interactions where no services are offered, such as police stops. The burden tolerance concept also is applicable to universal welfare benefits, such as signing up for public schools. In sum, burden tolerance is broadly relevant for assessing how multiple actors make sense of the costs involved in multiple types of citizen-state interactions.

A variety of options exist to measure burden tolerance. We assess policymakers' tolerance of a set of task requirements upon which receipt of social assistance benefits is conditional. In this, it can be considered conceptually similar to work requirements, or job training requirements commonly seen in other settings (e.g., [Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011](#)). Such options are salient for policymakers seeking to ensure a connection between work and receipt of benefits. For example, the Trump administration adopted an executive order that encourages federal agencies overseeing a wide variety of means-tested benefits for low-income Americans—such as health insurance, food stamps, and housing subsidies—to make such benefits conditional on satisfying work requirements. In our setting, since the population of the unemployed is already well-defined, the task-based conditionality of the work involved does not help to sort out eligible versus non-eligible recipients. Instead, it is designed to compel compliance among potential recipients who otherwise risk being excluded from the benefits.

What Drives Burden Tolerance among Policymakers?

Why do some policymakers have positive attitudes toward policies that create burdens and are willing to impose burdensome policies, while others are not? In the following sections, we outline four hypotheses. The first two reflect the attributes of policymakers and the latter two images of the target population. We start by discussing the attributes of policymakers.

Policymakers: Political Ideology and Personal Experience

The administrative burden framework gives a central role to politics, particularly the role of political ideology and partisan identification, in shaping attitudes about burdens “even if the outcomes are operationally dysfunctional” ([Herd and Moynihan 2018](#), 35). The role of ideology and partisan identification has been examined in a variety of ways. In some policy areas, policymakers leave legislative records that demonstrate how party identification predicts support for policies that impose new burdens upon target populations, such as voter identification laws ([Bentele and O'Brien 2013](#)), or laws that limit access to abortion ([Medoff and Dennis 2011](#)). But burdens, especially those that arise in the

implementation state of the policy process, are often not enacted via legislative vote. Another approach is to employ a historical case study that traces how burdens change over time and connect those changes to the beliefs and actions of partisan actors ([Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015](#)). Yet another approach is to correlate the degree of burden with the ruling party. Using such an approach, [Moynihan, Herd, and Ribgy \(2016\)](#) find that Medicaid forms across the 50 US states tend to be longer and more complex in states where there was historically Republican control.

Each of these approaches provides evidence that ideology and partisan identification are associated with the support for burdens, with more right-wing parties being more tolerant of burdens in social welfare policies, voting, and abortion, even as we note that the nature of the relationship is likely to vary between policy areas. We, therefore, propose the following hypothesis:

H₁: Right-wing policymakers are more tolerant of burdens for social welfare target populations than left-wing policymakers.

Policymaker's personal experiences may also affect their burden tolerance. There is mixed evidence on how identity and experiences matter to policymaker attitudes and actions. For example, increases in underrepresented castes in elected office in India had little effect on policy outcomes ([Jensenius 2015](#)). However, [Carnes and Lupu \(2015\)](#) argue that the conventional wisdom that socio-economic status matters little once politicians are in office is incorrect, showing that legislators with working-class backgrounds have different policy preferences in Latin American legislatures. As working-class politicians were replaced with more affluent career politicians, the UK Labour party took a more critical approach toward welfare policies ([O'Grady 2019](#)). Personal and vicarious unemployment experiences generate favorable perceptions of unemployed people more generally ([Danckert 2017](#)). Such personal experiences may therefore also cause policymakers to identify with members of the target population, creating a sense of group-based solidarity.

For our question about burden tolerance in welfare programs, the most straightforward type of experiences of relevance to policymaker beliefs is whether they have personal experiences as welfare claimants. The policy feedback literature proposes that personal interactions with the state are venues for policy learning ([Soss 1999](#)). Through personal experience, politicians may be taught about the usefulness of spending on these areas, and gain first-hand understanding of the hassles that claimants face. Relative to politicians with no direct experience of these administrative processes, politicians who are former welfare claimants are therefore more likely

to be aware of burdens embedded in such programs, as well as the risk that burdens will reduce participation. This leads to the second hypothesis.

H₂: Policymakers are less tolerant of burdens when they have personal experience of administrative processes as a member of the target population compared to those without such experience.

Target Population: Deservingness and Psychological Costs

We next consider how images of the target population, including how they experience burdens, affect policymaker's burden tolerance. The logic for the social construction literature is described in the prior section, and [Herd and Moynihan \(2018, 246\)](#) draw explicitly from it in predicting how policymakers assign burdens, concluding that "Citizens who are poor, powerless, and seen as undeserving can expect to spend their lives struggling against burdens in their encounters with the state." Such logics of social construction apply not just to elected officials, but also to street-level bureaucrats using their discretionary judgment ([Jilke and Tummers 2018](#)). Similarly, research on the mass public shows that the perceived efforts of welfare recipients have substantial effects on whether they are categorized as cheaters or deserving beneficiaries ([Petersen 2011](#)). Perceptions of deservingness also have large effects on public support for pushing welfare recipients into requirements such as job training ([Petersen et al. 2011](#)).

We, therefore, expect policymakers to be more likely to assign burdens to an unemployed individual welfare recipient deemed undeserving (because of a voluntary decision to quit his job, meaning their condition reflects a lack of effort) compared to a more deserving claimant (one whose status is due to events beyond his control, i.e., job loss because their employer closed down). Further, being exposed to an individual framed as undeserving will make policymakers more accepting of policies that create burdens for broader groups of eligible beneficiaries. This leads to our third hypothesis.

H₃: Policymakers are more tolerant of burdens when an individual member of a target population is framed as low deserving relative to one framed as high deserving.

In the administrative burden framework, state actions—such as rules and processes—are distinct from, but related to, citizen experiences of such costs ([Christensen et al. 2020](#)). This raises the question of whether policymakers fully understand the costs that policies, rules, and processes impose upon individuals. After all, burdens are often a negative externality imposed upon members of the public but rarely experienced by the public official. By extension, it

also implies that policymakers might be more attentive to those costs if information about burdens were conveyed to them. After all, one of the characteristics of administrative burdens is that they tend to be opaque, neither terribly well documented nor their effects well-understood ([Herd and Moynihan 2018](#)). Nowhere is this more true than with psychological costs. Policymakers may fail to recognize that people are forced to deal with humiliating requirements that reduce their sense of personal autonomy.

Providing information about the psychological costs experienced by specific welfare claimants may therefore call attention to the downsides of state actions that create such costs. Research on the effects of performance information demonstrates that anecdotal evidence about specific individuals may have substantial effects on people's attitudes ([Olsen 2017](#)). We, therefore, test if the provision of anecdotal information about the psychological costs experienced by one welfare claimant makes policymakers more opposed to burdens for that individual and target population as a whole.

H₄: Policymakers are less tolerant of burdens when informed about an individual experiencing psychological costs compared to if no such information is provided.

Empirical Setting and Case

To test our hypotheses, we need individual-level data on burden tolerance from a large sample of policymakers who have discretionary power to implement policies that give rise to burdens. Elected Danish city councilors provided such a sample. Denmark has 98 municipalities, each governed by a council consisting of between nine and 55 elected members depending on population size. Most municipalities use a committee form of government with one compulsory finance committee and a series of standing committees ([Baekgaard, Mortensen, and Seeberg 2018; Blom-Hansen and Heeager 2011](#)). While the local government statute stipulates that all decisions are made by a majority in the city council, the mayor is by far the most influential politician.

Danish city councilors are useful for our purposes for several reasons. First, focusing on a group of local politicians within the same overall national framework allows us to obtain comparable answers to the same set of questions from a large sample of politicians, something which would be difficult with truncated N provided by samples of national politicians. Second, Danish local governments are directly responsible for and have wide discretion in implementing national law and setting policy in a wide number of key policy areas, including but not limited to job training, public schools, daycare, and eldercare ([Baekgaard,](#)

Mortensen, and Seeberg 2018: 243). Third, while comparatively speaking the universal Danish welfare state is characterized by its generosity, the size of welfare benefits, as well as the rights and obligations applying to welfare claimants, are greatly contested (Laenen and Larsen 2018) and thus there is likely to be considerable variation in burden tolerance among politicians.

We focus on the case of mandatory job service (or *Nyttejob* in Danish), a program where unemployed claimants of social assistance benefits are placed in unpaid job service in return for welfare benefits in up to 37 hours a week and up to 13 weeks (Law no. 548 2019). Most program participants are males (65%). Forty-nine percent of program participants are in the age span 30–44 years. Most respondents receiving social assistance benefits (73%) are native Danes while 27% are immigrants from other countries.

Tasks are practical, requiring no prior qualifications. Examples are maintenance of public buildings and furnishings, collecting trash, and removing dog feces from public space. The program is targeted at claimants who have been declared ready for work by the local job center. The stated purpose is to ensure that claimants work in return for benefits, and to motivate them to find a job or begin an education (Law no. 548 2019; STAR 2019). The program has been greatly debated in Danish media. Some consider it a way to upgrade the qualifications of unemployed welfare claimants or ask them to make an effort in return for benefits. Others—who note tasks like collecting garbage and cleaning—consider it a humiliating program that signals distrust about claimants and which is aimed at forcing vulnerable individuals to accept less than ideal jobs (Politiken 2013). Regardless of perspective, participation in mandatory job service is required in return for receiving social assistance benefits. It is, therefore, a form of compliance costs, one that is not uncommon in welfare and employment programs. In addition to being a compliance cost, the program may also generate psychological costs, to the extent that it stigmatizes and humiliates recipients. Recipients lose personal autonomy by being required to participate, may find the work demeaning, and are subject to public stigma to the degree the tasks take place in the public sphere. While such costs may be debatable, they are part of the public discussion around this program, and so inform any consideration of burden tolerance.

Mandatory job service is explicitly mentioned in national law as an option for municipalities to implement (Law no. 548 2019; STAR 2019). Municipalities have full discretion to decide to what extent they want to make use of the program (if at all), the criteria by which individuals are included, the number of hours of participation per week, and which tasks must be completed. In practice, there are huge differences in

the extent to which and how the program is implemented across municipalities (STAR 2019). In 2019, the program was not used at all in 25 of Denmark's 98 municipalities, while on the other hand more than 10% of social assistance claimants were mandated to take part in the program in 34 other municipalities. Our setting is therefore one where policymakers have strong control over the details of implementation. Given that we model the dependent variables, explained below, on a real policy that policymakers are quite familiar with, this improves the ecological validity of the results relative to more abstract questions about burdens.

Research Design and Data Collection

Data were collected using an email survey of elected politicians. While email surveys of elected politicians have been shown to generate samples that are similar to those of mail surveys in terms of representativeness and responses, they tend to produce lower response rates (Fisher and Herrick 2013). Thus, email surveys of elites require large samples to ensure enough statistical power. We collected email addresses for all 2,427 politicians elected to Danish city councils from the homepage of each city council. Politicians on leave were excluded from our final sample of 2,347. We sent an email to our sample on April 25, 2019 and, after two reminders, data collection was closed June 18. With 495 responses, our response rate is 21%. A comparison of responders to the nonresponders on observable characteristics (see Table 1) shows close similarity between the two groups, though politicians from left-wing parties are somewhat over-represented ($p < .01$; two-tailed t -test).

Dependent Variables

We first presented politicians with a scenario about a hypothetical social assistance claimant named Anders who has been placed in mandatory job service by the job center. Being a male of Danish heritage, Anders is representative of the typical program participant. Subsequently, the respondents were asked questions to measure burden tolerance. To explore the extent to which our findings generalize across different measures (Mutz 2011: 146), we use four distinct indicators of burden tolerance which capture both the passive component (policymakers' attitudes toward actions that create burdens) and the active component (policymakers' explicit willingness to impose burdensome experiences upon individuals). Moreover, our four indicators also differ in terms of whether they are specifically linked to the vignette description that the respondents have read (targeting the specific individual mentioned) or not (targeting the broader target

population). This strategy allows us to test effects for different operationalizations of the dependent variables, providing more confidence in the findings than would be the case if relying on a single measure.

Passive Component

Our first dependent variable, which we label “Attitudinal Benefits of Burdensome Policies” consists of items asking respondents to evaluate the mandatory job service across a wide range of values, including whether it will help with the instrumental goal of improving labor force participation, whether it facilitates a normative communal goal of having participants contribute back to society, and whether participants are treated with some measure of dignity. These items are calculated into a single factor (Table A1). The passive component reflects whether politicians have positive or negative attitudes toward the imposition of burdensome actions upon individuals—in this case in relation to the benefits received. We compute the measure as an index of seven Likert-scaled items in which each item counts equal. Our second dependent variable, which we label “Attitudinal Fairness of Burdensome Policies” is inspired by research on procedural fairness. Here, we examine if politicians view whether the policies that create burdens are fair to the individual (Bisgaard 2018; Cohn, White, and Sanders 2000). Answers are provided on an 11-point scale running from not fair to very fair.

Active Component

Our third and fourth dependent variables examine an explicit willingness to impose state actions on individuals that create burdensome experiences. The third dependent variable, which we label “Willingness to Use Burdensome Policies” captures politician’s agreement that social assistance recipients who are declared ready for work should be placed in mandatory job service in their constituency. The question is a Likert-scaled five-category question running from completely disagree to

completely agree. Finally, we include a more specific measure of active willingness to impose burdensome experiences, which we label “Weekly hours Assigned,” where respondents choose how many hours a week they would place Anders in mandatory job service. Answers are given on a scale running from 0 to 37 hours. Including two different measures of active willingness is useful for two reasons. First, it allows us to observe whether the willingness to impose burdens on the individual (Anders) is correlated with a more general willingness to impose burdens on the broader target population. Put another way, do politicians distinguish between the individual and the broader target population when asked to make decisions based on information about the individual? Second, the hourly measure provides a “dose” measure of willingness to impose burdens, grounding the response in a concrete indicator of how much politicians are ready to expose the individual to burdens.

Appendix A contains information on the exact question wording of the items (and factor scores for the first dependent variable). All dependent variables except for the question about weekly hours which has a straightforward interpretation are re-scaled to run from 0 to 100 in order to improve comparability across analyses using different dependent variables.

Independent Variables

To test our four hypotheses, we apply a combination of a survey experiment and observational data. The hypotheses concerning the impact of level of deservingness of an individual (H_3) and information about an individual’s experience of psychological costs (H_4) are tested using a 2x2 factorial survey experiment with random assignment to a deservingness cue (high/low) and a psychological cost cue (mentioned/not mentioned) in the vignette description of Anders.

Our experimental manipulation of low and high deservingness aims to cause variation in the extent

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (Comparing Responders and Nonresponders)

	Responders (<i>n</i> = 495)		Nonresponders (<i>n</i> = 1,932)		All (<i>n</i> = 2,427)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Representing mayor party	0.38	0.49	0.42	0.49	0	1
Backbencher	0.88	0.32	0.89	0.32	0	1
Left-wing party	0.50	0.50	0.44	0.50	0	1
Male	0.67	0.47	0.67	0.47	0	1
Municipality population size (10,000s)	7.01	9.47	7.14	9.69	0.18	62.34
Municipal social assistance expenditures (1,000s DKR per inhabitant)	3.19	1.22	3.18	1.16	0.79	8.06
Number of people in mandatory job service per municipality	90.80	9.54	94.08	4.87	0	1,416

Note: Differences between responders and nonresponders were tested using two-tailed *t*-tests. The only statistically significant difference where $p < .1$ is for the left-wing party.

Table 2. Experimental Vignette

Anders is unskilled, 41 years old, and unemployed. [*Deservingness cue for H3:* He lost his latest job because the company closed down/ he quit his last job because of late work hours.] After 3 months on social assistance benefits, the job center places him in mandatory job service at a nursing home. The job consists of washing down cabinets and assistive devices, weeding, collecting trash, and removing dog feces. [*Psychological cost cue for H4:* Anders finds it stressful and humiliating to do the job service while he has to look for other jobs.]

Table 3. Balance Check: Experimental Treatments

	Group 1 (N = 131)	Group 2 (N = 119)	Group 3 (N = 122)	Group 4 (N = 123)
High deservingness condition?	Yes	No	Yes	No
Psychological costs condition?	Yes	Yes	No	No
Representing mayor party	0.35	0.37	0.43	0.37
Backbencher	0.87	0.90	0.86	0.90
Left wing politician	0.48	0.53	0.52	0.48
Male	0.63	0.71	0.69	0.66
Municipality population size (10,000s)	6.11	6.68	6.80	8.48*
Municipal social assistance expenditures (1,000s DKR per inhabitant)	3.23	3.34	3.09	3.13
Number of people in mandatory job service per municipality	63.07+	101.83	103.05	97.48

Note: Entries for the variables “representing Mayor Party,” “Backbencher,” “Left wing politician,” and “Male” are proportions. Entries for the bottom three variables are means.

* $p < .05$; + $p < .10$ in two-tailed t -test.

to which Anders is seen as responsible for being unemployed, drawing on the control criteria widely used in deservingness studies (Van Oorschot 2000: 36). In the high deservingness condition, Anders is expected to be seen as not responsible for losing his job because the company closed down. In the low deservingness condition, he is deemed responsible because he decided to quit the job. We included a manipulation check of the deservingness treatment. This effectively serves as a measure of perceived deservingness of Anders. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree that Anders is responsible for being placed in mandatory job service (Appendix A). A two-sided t -test demonstrates that the deservingness manipulation successfully created the intended variation in responsibility ($p < .000$; $t = 11.91$). Thus, the average agreement on a 1–5 scale is 3.59 in the low deservingness condition and 2.31 in the high deservingness condition.

To manipulate psychological costs, we rely on episodic information on a specific individual since people are often more attentive to such information relative to aggregate population data (Olsen 2017). The treatment is inspired by administrative burden literature according to which stress and stigma are two important psychological costs that people may experience from burdensome state actions (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015). We randomly assign respondents to either a psychological cost condition in which it is described that Anders finds it stressful and humiliating to take part in the program or a condition not including

this text. The exact wording of the vignette experiment is reported in table 2.

As demonstrated in table 3, the experimental treatments are generally well balanced on background characteristics. Of 28 two-tailed t -tests conducted, only one produces a statistically significant result at the 0.05-level as the low deservingness, low cost-condition tends to contain more respondents from municipalities with larger populations, while the high deservingness, high-cost condition contains politicians from municipalities with fewer people placed in mandatory job service ($p = 0.08$).

The two last hypotheses are tested using observational data. To test the hypothesis on policymakers’ personal experience with being a member of the target group (H_2), we ask respondents to indicate if they have received one of nine different unemployment-related benefits within the last 5 years. The variable is coded as a dummy taking the value 1 if they have received any of the benefits and 0 if not. We use a standard measure of ideological self-placement on a left-right scale to test the hypothesis on political ideology (H_1) and in robustness tests use objective indicators of partisan identification. The exact wording of these items are presented in Appendix A.

Survey Flow and Covariates

The survey flow is presented in table 4. Because of the vignette description which explicitly focuses on one welfare recipient, Anders, there is a natural ordering where questions that specifically asks about Anders

Table 4. Survey Flow

1. Political ideology (ideological self-placement) (independent variable: hypothesis 1)
2. City council seniority
3. Experimental vignette with random assignment to deservingness and psychological cost cues (independent variables: hypothesis 3 and 4)
4. Attitudinal Fairness of Burdensome Policies (dependent variable 2)
5. Manipulation check (deservingness perceptions)
6. Weekly Hours Assigned (dependent variable 4)
7. Willingness to Use Burdensome Policies (dependent variable 3)
8. Attitudinal Benefits of Burdensome Policies (dependent variable 1)
9. Gender
10. Age
11. Level of education
12. Benefit recipient within the last 5 years? (independent variable: hypothesis 2)

are placed prior to the more general questions about perceptions of the target group as such (“Willingness to Use Burdensome Policies” and “Attitudinal Benefits of Burdensome Policies”). We, therefore, decided on a fixed order of questions.¹

Since hypothesis H_1 and H_2 are tested by observational data, we are careful about making causal claims. However, to account for confounders and improve the precision of our estimates we add a number of covariates in the tests using observational data. Previous research has identified these covariates as influencing preferences for spending on various policy areas for this group: gender, level of education, whether politicians are front- or backbenchers, whether they are part of the ruling mayor party, and their membership of either the powerful finance committee or the relevant standing committee (in this case the committee responsible for employment affairs) (Baekgaard 2010; Baekgaard, Larsen, and Mortensen 2019).² The

- 1 The queuing of the variables may have had some effect in the sense that responses to the first questions may affect responses to consecutive questions. While this is a limitation of our design, the overall purpose of including four dependent variables is to test effects using different operationalizations of burden tolerance. In that sense, spillover is less of a concern than if the purpose had been to examine more theoretically distinct dependent variables. Also, it is reassuring that the correlations between the four dependent variables (Table 6) are considerably stronger than the correlations between any of the dependent variables and the deservingness question even though the latter was placed in between the four dependent variables in the questionnaire.
- 2 In robustness checks, we also ran our models without including these covariates (Supplementary Table B3). Results from the specification without covariates are very similar to the ones obtained from the models including covariates, the main difference being that results tend to be slightly more significant when covariates are not included.

hypotheses are tested using linear regression where municipality fixed effects are included to account for differences in conditions across municipalities such as fiscal stress, political attention, and the number of social assistance benefit recipients, while municipality-level cluster robust standard errors are used to account for the dependency of error terms within municipalities.³ Descriptive statistics for all variables used in our analysis are presented in table 5.

Results

Before we present the results we first examine the alignment between our dependent variables, as well as perceptions of deservingness in the manipulation check. Table 6 presents correlations between these items. Two main points emerge. First, there is a partial correlation between deservingness perceptions and our dependent variables, ranging between .45 and .57. While the two concepts are related and correlate significantly ($p < .001$ for all correlations), they are also clearly distinct. Second, the correlations between the four dependent variables, which range between .69 and .85, are significantly stronger ($p < .001$ in all tests where correlations between two dependent variables are compared with the correlation between any of the dependent variables and deservingness perceptions). Overall, the results suggest that burden tolerance is different from deservingness perceptions.

Moreover, the results suggest that passive attitudes about the benefits of state actions that lead to burdens are highly correlated with active willingness to impose such burdens. This point is not just theoretically interesting—measures of passive support are easier to collect in observational surveys, meaning that future research that relies on passive measures has some reason to believe these measures are also valid indicators of willingness to impose burdens. Further, attitudes about imposing burdens on individuals (Anders is mentioned in three of the variables) are highly correlated with attitudes about imposing burdens on target populations more broadly (the “Willingness to Use Burdensome Policies” measure). This raises the troubling implication that anecdotal evidence, and the way this information is frame, can shift policy judgments and decisions about aggregate populations.

- 3 The dependent variable, Willingness to Use Burdensome Policies (see model 3 in Table 7) is based on a five-point Likert-scaled question. However, for ease of interpretation and to improve comparability, we present the results from a linear model specification. An analysis in which we use an alternative ordered logit specification (Supplementary Tables B1 and B2) produces results that are consistent with the results presented in Table 7. For the hypotheses, the main difference is that the “former benefit recipient-variable” becomes significant at a .05-level in the ordered logit specification rather than a .1-level as in the linear specification.

Table 5. Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Source
Attitudinal Benefits of Burdensome Policies (DV1)	75.04	21.31	0	100	Survey
Attitudinal Fairness of Burdensome Policies (DV2)	71.93	31.35	0	100	Survey
Willingness to Use Burdensome Policies (DV3)	76.09	34.56	0	100	Survey
Weekly Hours Assigned (DV4)	26.17	12.60	0	37	Survey
Right-wing ideology (H1)	0.46	0.26	0	1	Survey
Former benefit recipient (H2)	0.11	0.32	0	1	Survey
High deservingness cue (H3)	0.52	0.50	0	1	Survey
Psychological cost cue (H4)	0.50	0.50	0	1	Survey
Male	0.69	0.46	0	1	Survey
University degree or alike	0.69	0.46	0	1	Survey
Mayor party member	0.37	0.48	0	1	Register
Backbencher	0.88	0.32	0	1	Register
Finance committee member	0.35	0.48	0	1	Register
Employment committee member	0.28	0.45	0	1	Register

Note: $N = 415$ except for 'Fairness' ($N = 414$), 'Weekly Hours' ($N = 390$), and 'Willingness to Use' ($N = 413$). Backbencher is measured as a dummy variable that takes the value '0' if politicians are either mayors or vice-mayors and '1' if not.

Table 6. Correlations Between Deservingness Perceptions in Manipulation Check and Burden Tolerance Items

	Deservingness perceptions	Attitudinal Benefits	Attitudinal Fairness	Willingness to Use	Weekly Hours
Deservingness perceptions	1.00				
Attitudinal benefits	0.52	1.00			
Attitudinal fairness	0.57	0.85	1.00		
Willingness to use	0.45	0.73	0.73	1.00	
Weekly hours	0.57	0.78	0.79	0.69	1.00

Note: Entries are Pearson's R correlation coefficients. $N = 423$. All pairwise correlations are statistically significantly correlated ($p < .001$ in all cases). The correlations between deservingness perceptions and the dependent variables are in all cases significantly lower than any correlation between two dependent variables ($p < .001$ in all cases).

Our hypotheses are tested in [table 7](#). We find support for the hypothesis that political ideology is associated with burden tolerance in the policy area of social benefits (H_1). Right-wing politicians to a higher extent support imposing burdens as a condition of receipt of welfare benefits. The size of the correlations is substantive. For instance, a one standard deviation increase in being more right-wing is associated with a 17 percentage point increase in expressing that Anders is fairly treated and a 6-hour increase in the weekly number of hours policymakers think Anders should be placed in mandatory job service. To test if the results of H_1 hold if we use an objective indicator based on party identification, we replace our measure of self-reported ideology with a pre-coded measure of whether the politicians represent a left-wing party (either the Social Democrats, the Red Green Alliance, The Socialists People's Party, or The Alternative). The results are very consistent with the results presented in [table 7](#) ([Supplementary Table B5](#)).

Turning to the role of personal experience and the experience of others, we find that former recipients of

social benefits are substantially less supportive of burdens than politicians who report not having received such benefits (H_2). It is worth noting that these are not policymakers who are former recipients of this particular program, but of unemployment benefits more broadly. The result—though based on cross-sectional data—suggests that personal experience of burdens in the past can represent a counterweight to the negative framing of target populations. While it is routine to evaluate policymaker beliefs, such as ideology, and other aspects of their identity, such as age gender, and education, it is relatively rare to examine how policymaker's personal experiences with the state might affect their judgments and decisions about administrative factors. An intriguing possibility deserving of more attention is that electing politicians with direct experience of burdens will make policymakers more sensitive to the cost of those burdens.

Consistent with H_3 , we find that when individual clients are portrayed as more deserving, policymakers view state actions that give rise to burdens more negatively, and become less willing to impose burdens.

Table 7. Explaining Burden Tolerance

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Attitudinal Benefits	Attitudinal Fairness	Willingness to Use	Weekly Hours Assigned
Right-wing ideology (H1)	42.27** (0.000)	67.00** (0.000)	61.56** (0.000)	24.88** (0.000)
Former benefit recipient (H2)	-7.056+ (0.060)	-9.732* (0.031)	-11.15* (0.056)	-6.150** (0.002)
High deservingness cue (H3)	-4.024* (0.038)	-11.46** (0.000)	-8.671** (0.009)	-3.141** (0.008)
Psychological cost cue (H4)	1.633 (0.411)	4.375 (0.115)	3.071 (0.348)	-1.358 (0.288)
Male	0.115 (0.951)	1.817 (0.604)	-1.323 (0.690)	-0.342 (0.786)
University degree or alike	0.758 (0.668)	2.587 (0.368)	5.309+ (0.090)	0.503 (0.659)
Mayor party member	5.205** (0.010)	4.512 (0.128)	3.036 (0.408)	2.148 (0.106)
Backbencher	-8.345** (0.005)	-6.542+ (0.078)	-12.22** (0.008)	-1.505 (0.393)
Finance committee member	-0.985 (0.639)	-0.638 (0.785)	-6.647+ (0.098)	-0.009 (0.993)
Employment committee member	0.153 (0.942)	0.649 (0.817)	-2.382 (0.551)	1.903 (0.123)
Intercept	62.40** (0.000)	46.90** (0.000)	61.42** (0.000)	17.38** (0.000)
R ² within	0.360	0.400	0.292	0.371
R ² between	0.521	0.500	0.243	0.437
R ² overall	0.381	0.406	0.268	0.369
N	422	421	420	395

Note: Entries are municipality fixed effects regression coefficients from a linear regression with municipality fixed effects and municipality robust standard errors. *p*-values in parentheses.

+*p* < .10, **p* < .05, ***p* < .01.

Respondents who received the ‘high deservingness’ cue score 11.5 points less than respondents who received the ‘low deservingness cue’ on the question about whether Anders is treated fairly while they on average would place Anders in mandatory job service 3.1 hours less per week. The significant findings for the “Willingness to Use Burdensome Policies” indicator suggest a willingness to not just impose burdens on the specific client, but also the broader target population as a result of receiving information on that client.

We do not find any support for the hypothesis that highlighting the psychological cost that welfare recipients experience (as compared to not mentioning costs) makes policymakers less burden tolerant (H₄). The results suggest that highlighting psychological costs may leave policymakers unmoved, or even create a backlash effect, where such costs are dismissed as whining or reflecting a lack of gratitude that becomes another form of perceived undeservingness. The surprising nature of this result calls for more research to establish if it holds in other policy domains. In

the domain of social welfare, recipients are generally perceived as benefiting from state largesse, and so increasing the salience of psychological costs may be more effective in reducing tolerance of burdens where recipients are seen as more sympathetic and deserving (although as discussed below, we did not observe any interaction effect between the framing of deservingness and experimentally highlighting psychological costs).

One potential reason that psychological costs fail to generate a significant result is that we compare a psychological cost to a description where psychological costs are absent. If politicians have strong prior beliefs about the psychological costs experienced by people like Anders, this may have made our experimental treatment less strong. We consider this explanation less likely because the vignette explicitly contained information about a fictitious person that the politicians could not possibly know, but future research could look into the possible interplay between prior beliefs and new information about psychological costs

or implement a treatment where the psychological cost cue is compared to a no psychological cost cue instead. Another reason is that policymakers may distrust client's own accounts of what is a subjective phenomenon, and might be more persuaded by a third-party account or aggregate data, for example, documented rates of use of medications or depression. Future research could test this possibility.

Among our covariates, we find that backbenchers, that is politicians who are neither mayors nor vice-mayors, are less burden tolerant, while there is some indication that mayoral party members tend to be more burden tolerant than other politicians. The latter finding aligns well with prior results which suggest that supporters of parties in power are more likely to act as spending guardians (Baekgaard, Mortensen, and Seeberg 2018). The results for backbenchers and mayoral party members may be taken as evidence that majority party politicians are more concerned about guarding the budget and hence more likely to support burdens. Alternatively, part of the correlation may be ascribed to politicians receiving votes partly based on their tolerance for burdens. Future research could seek to sort through these competing explanations.

Robustness Checks and Heterogeneous Effects

We conducted a series of additional checks to test the robustness of our results and to explore possible heterogeneous effects. We replaced the fixed effects analysis reported in table 7 with a random-effects specification in which we include three covariates on the municipality-level from public registers (municipality population size, social assistance expenditures, and number of people placed in mandatory job service). This re-specification has little impact on our main effects, the only exceptions being that the effect of the deservingness cue now is insignificant on the Willingness to Use Burdensome Policies variable and that the psychological cost cue becomes statistically significant on the .1-level but in a negative direction (Supplementary Table B4). Interestingly, the burden tolerance measures are negatively correlated with the number of people placed in mandatory job service (statistically significant with $p < 0.01$ in all four regressions) and—to some extent—social assistance expenditures (statistically significant with $p < .05$ in the regressions focusing on fairness and attitudinal benefits of using burdensome policies). Since these variables are highly endogenous we are hesitant to infer too much from them.

We explored possible interaction effects between our experimental treatments and between each of our experimental treatments and political ideology (reported in Supplementary Figures B1–B3). Eleven out of the 12 interactions are not statistically significant. However, we find that the effect of the high deservingness cue

on attitudinal fairness varies across respondents with different ideological viewpoints (Supplementary Figure B2). Left-wing respondents report that Anders is treated less fairly when they are being presented with the high deservingness cue, while right-wing respondents do not change their perception of fairness in response to the cue. With this being the only statistically significant effect we are careful not to infer too much from this result. Thus, while it seems plausible that right-wing policymakers are more skeptical of the claims of psychological costs of welfare recipients and more easily convinced by the low deservingness cue, our additional tests overall do not support such claims. We also tested whether prior experience with receiving benefits moderate our experimental treatment effects (Supplementary Figure B4). We do not observe any significant interactions here.

Finally, we explored interaction effects between ideology and whether politicians represent the incumbent party as measured by the mayor party variable (Supplementary Figure B5 and B6). These results provide some intriguing results. We find that ideology matters significantly less to burden tolerance for politicians from incumbent parties. For instance, there is a 52 point difference in the 100-point “Attitudinal Benefits of Burdensome Policies” measure and a 29-hour difference in the “Weekly Hours Assigned” variables between politicians most to the right and most to the left if we look only at politicians representing parties without the mayoral post. This difference is significantly reduced to 43 points and 18 hours if we turn to politicians representing a mayoral party. Being in power makes left-wing politicians more burden tolerant and right-wing politicians less burden tolerant. Together with the other findings of incumbency reported above, such significant effects deserve further investigation in other settings, since they imply that being at the levers of power changes both how politicians think about burdens and how political ideology matters in forming their judgments and decisions. While the interaction effects are substantial and significant and demonstrate that ideology and roles are acting together in shaping burden tolerance, they have only minor impact on our other estimates.

Discussion: Laying Out a Burden Tolerance Research Agenda

The exploratory nature of the study comes with both limitations and a broad potential agenda for others interested in this topic. Future work could better examine how burden tolerance is related to policy support. It seems plausible that policymakers opposed to a policy will support burdens that limit access to policy benefits (Herd and Moynihan 2018;

Van Oorschot 2006: 23). While data limitations prevent us from addressing this issue here, we argue that burden tolerance is a distinct concept from policy support, and worth conceptualizing and developing for a number of reasons, all of which raise future research opportunities.

First, we have limited empirical evidence of how policy support and burden tolerance are related. Future work should better establish rather than assume this relationship, including if, and under what conditions, policy beliefs mediate the effects of other variables such as political ideology on burden tolerance. Second, variables that predict burden tolerance may not predict support for burdens. Burdens involve how individuals are treated by the state, not just the benefits accorded to them, and variables might influence the former differently than the latter. In our experiment, the policy is held constant, but the tolerance for burdens changes depending on whether the individual is seen as deserving or not. One might also imagine that people will be more tolerant of burdens on outgroups than they would be of burdens for others they share characteristics with, even if the policy remains unchanged. Third, while we propose a relationship where opposition to policies predicts supports for burdens, the reality may be more nuanced. For example, [Keiser and Miller \(2020\)](#) show that conservative voters become more supportive of welfare policies when burdens are increased. Without a clear conceptualization of burden tolerance, such nuances are less likely to be discovered. Finally, in some contexts, there are no identifiable policies that predict burdens or policy beliefs will be unrelated to the specifics of how people are treated by the state. For example, it seems unlikely that policy beliefs will shape public beliefs about experiences at the DMV or police stops because most people will struggle to identify an upstream policy related to the burden. The public still may be more or less supportive of burdens in those contexts, and burden tolerance might affect how policy actors, including street-level bureaucrats, behave in this context. Not having a specific concept of burden tolerances minimizes our ability to study these contexts where policies are less clearly related to burdens.

We do not attempt to develop a general scale of burden tolerance, but instead, seek to show how the concept arises in a specific policy setting. Future work should develop such a scale and further examine the dimensionality of the concept. While it is a logical first step to study burden tolerance in the context of elected politicians, the concept is also relevant for other actors engaged in public administration and beyond. Future research could obtain more insights about how experiences matter by, for instance, studying burden

tolerance in the context of street-level bureaucrats who meet welfare claimants on an everyday basis. Insights about the general support for burdens might be further obtained by comparing the burden tolerance of politicians and the mass public.

A related limitation is that our analysis only examines burdens in one program, within the area of social policy, where benefit recipients are required to complete mandatory work tasks. While many of the findings from our Scandinavian setting align with expectations for other types of social policies derived largely from US studies (such as the role of political ideology), there is clear value in studying this topic in other settings and in other policy areas where political orientations might operate differently, and the deservingness of target groups might be constructed in other ways. Even within the area of social policy, there are other types of programs and other types of burdens to examine. As a type of burden, the task-based conditionality we study generalizes to work or job-training requirements, and thus falls within a gray area between burdens such as paperwork, and criteria for program eligibility. Other work could examine burden tolerance for requirements such as additional paperwork, greater frequency of certification of status, complex forms or instructions, or more intensive monitoring in a way that reduces a personal sense of autonomy.

Our findings rest upon a mixture of experimental variables and observational factors (such as political ideology and personal experiences) that are impossible to fully recreate in an experimental setting. As with any experimental treatment, there is the question of external validity. It is perhaps telling that the experimental treatment that generated predicted effects (the deservingness cue) has a well-established track record in other settings. This is not the case for our other experimental treatment of psychological costs, a topic where the evidence is not well-developed.

We find that personal experience of the state matters to how people perceive burdens, and so future work may do more to leverage those experiences. Future research should replicate this finding, by, for example, examining if this finding applies to the mass public. Such research could explore other ways to convey the experience of burdens: by, for example, exploring if personal bonds to people who have experienced burdens matters to politicians' burden tolerance. Another important question for future research is if a similar null finding applies when legislators are presented with information about the learning and compliance costs they impose on constituents. While we limited our focus on psychological burdens because of a concern for statistical power, these questions could be studied in future experiments in which participants are provided

with information on the learning and compliance costs experienced by program participants.

The results provide additional evidence on the relationship between ideology and support for burdens (Herd and Moynihan 2018). We caution that this connection is not axiomatic but likely depends upon policy area. For some areas such as social welfare policies, right-wing parties are likely to be more tolerant of burdens, whereas left-wing parties likely are more tolerant of burdens for others such as regulation of weapons, environmental regulation, and business regulation. Future research therefore may explore the policy settings in which the relationship between ideology and burden tolerance holds, and in which direction it runs. Studies that examine burden tolerance across policy areas could improve our understanding of how much tolerance is conditional on target populations and policy attitudes, and how much it reflects some general attitude that holds across settings. Alternatively, future research could examine more nuanced measures of ideology, such as beliefs about the role of individual effort rather than external factors (Tetlock et al. 2013), which could plausibly be associated with a belief that individuals should be capable of overcoming hassles that they face in life, including in their interactions with government. On the other hand, conservatives are also generally more suspicious of government intervention, which might make them more critical of burdens in some circumstances. Sorting out such differences requires not just tests in different policy areas, and would be helped by generic measures of burden tolerance that are not specific to a policy area.

Future research should also look for explanatory factors beyond ideology and policy support. While we focus on personal experience, another possibility is relatively fixed individual traits, such as personality. Our exploratory analyses also suggest that power plays a role. We show that the correlation between ideology and burden tolerance is contingent on whether our respondents represent the mayoral or opposition parties. Future work could examine how political incumbency or other types of policymaking or bureaucratic roles are associated with burden tolerance.

Conclusion

To improve our understanding of what motivates the construction of burdensome experiences in the policy process, we have developed and tested the concept of burden tolerance. Limitations notwithstanding, the article offers novel and important findings. We find

that administrative burdens in welfare policies are supported to a greater extent by right-wing politicians. While our work seeks to understand political preferences, the next logical step is to look at how those preferences translate into actual administrative arrangements. However, our approach advances upon existing research that relies on aggregate indicators to study outcomes (e.g., correlating partisan control and paperwork complexity in Moynihan, Herd, and Rigby 2016) in that it shows how individual factors are associated with preferences. In that respect, it provides individual-level confirmation of connections that have until now largely relied on aggregate indicators (e.g., partisan control). Our approach is consistent with the assumption that political preferences are an important precondition for state actions that impose burdens on the public (e.g., Van Oorschot 2006: 23), but not a sufficient condition since there may be constraints on policy actors.

We also find that the framing of the deservingness of an individual social assistance recipient predicts policymakers' willingness to impose requirements on their constituents. Such policymaker beliefs may be based on limited information and represent imperfect understanding of how people experience the state. By contrast, we find that politicians who have direct experience of welfare programs are less tolerant, suggesting they are more sensitive to burdens relative to those without such experience. While one potential implication is that it might be possible to "teach" policymakers about the effects of burdens by presenting the psychological costs they impose on constituents, our experimental analysis does not provide evidence that explaining the experiences of others matters, even as it shows that direct personal experiences do.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available at the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* online.

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Data Availability

The data underlying this article cannot be shared publicly due to the privacy of individuals that participated in the study. The data will be shared on reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Appendix A: Questionnaire Questions Used to Test Hypotheses and Factor Analyses

Table A1. Attitudinal Benefits of Burdensome Policies (Passive Component) Exploratory Factor Analysis.

How much do you agree/disagree with the following statements? Placing people like Anders in mandatory job service at a nursing home (five-point Likert-scaled questions running from “Completely disagree” to “Completely agree”)

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Eigenvalues	3.40	0.30	0.18	0.01
1. ... is treating them with dignity and respect	0.83	-0.11	0.01	0.01
2. ... is a sincere attempt to help them find work	0.81	-0.15	0.23	-0.02
3. ... does not factor in their competences	-0.23	0.29	-0.06	-0.02
4. ... equals an employment-focused effort	0.66	-0.17	0.26	0.01
5. ... signals that it is important that they give something back to society in return for their benefits	0.66	0.03	-0.16	0.00
6. ... keeps them dependent on benefits	-0.51	0.15	-0.07	0.06
7. ... makes it as uncomfortable for them as possible to be on benefits	-0.48	0.34	-0.10	0.02
8. ... allows them to contribute actively to society	0.79	-0.13	-0.09	-0.02

Note: Exploratory factor analysis. Orthogonal varimax rotation. Factor scores > 0.40 marked with bold writing.

Based on the factor analysis, we compute one measure of Attitudinal Benefits of Burdensome Policies based on item 1–2 and 4–8. Item 6 and 7 was reversed in the construction of the measure. The alpha value of the index is 0.89.

Attitudinal Fairness of Burdensome Policies (Passive component)

All things considered, how fair do you think it is to place Anders in this mandatory job service?

(Scale running from 0 = “Not fair” to 10 = “Very fair”).

Willingness to Use Burdensome Policies (Active component) Social assistance benefit recipients in my municipality should be placed in mandatory job service if they are able to work.

(Five-point Likert-scaled question running from “Completely disagree” to “Completely agree”).

Weekly Hours Assigned (Active component)

In your opinion, how many hours per week would it be fair to place Anders in this mandatory service job? Please pick a number between 0 and 37 hours per week.

Deservingness Perceptions (manipulation check) It is Anders’ own fault that he is being placed in mandatory service job. (Five-point Likert-scaled question running from “Completely disagree” to “Completely agree”)

Former benefit recipient (measure of personal experience H2)

Have you, within the last 5 years, received one or more of the benefits listed below? (please check all benefits you have received within the last 5 years) (Response categories: Unemployment benefits; Social assistance benefits; Temporary labor market benefits; Educational benefits; Integration benefits; Vocational rehabilitation benefit; Flexible wage grant; Income support; Rehabilitation benefit; None of the above)

Ideological self-placement (H1)

In politics, we often talk about left and right. Where would you place yourself on this scale?

(Scale running from 0 = “Mostly to the left” to 10 = “Mostly to the right”).

Recoding of ‘Don’t know’ responses

Only a minor share of our respondents used the option to respond ‘Don’t know’ to our questions. In constructing variables and indexes, ‘Don’t know’-responses were recoded to neutral values to retain as much statistical power as possible in our analysis.

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