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WHEN TO FOLLOW, WHEN TO BREAK, WHO TO BLAME:

CITIZEN PERCEPTIONS OF STREET-LEVEL SERVICE INTERACTIONS

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WHEN TO FOLLOW, WHEN TO BREAK, WHO TO BLAME:

CITIZEN PERCEPTIONS OF STREET-LEVEL SERVICE INTERACTIONS

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Alisa Hicklin Fryar, Co-chair

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Dr. Allyson Shortle

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Acknowledgements

Earning a doctorate is a ridiculous thing to do. To be honest, if I could do it all again, I'd at least consider doing something else. People sometimes say things to me like, "A Ph.D.? I could never do that," or, "Wow, you must be really smart!" Maybe I am. But I don't think that's what earning this degree should signal.

Instead, I think it means that I have a unique capacity to learn a lot—like *a lot* a lot—about exceedingly niche topics that most people don't care about. I think it also means that, to my surprise, I have the capacity to learn about topics that *even I* don't care about. I think it means that I am stubborn and more willing to read inordinate amounts of literature than admit that I'm wrong. I think it might even mean that I am not, in fact, as lazy as I thought I was and that I have the ability to produce excellent work.

The main thing that I think earning this degree shows, though, is that I am surrounded by people who believe in me—people who have invested in me, sacrificed for me, and given me the opportunity to do a *ridiculous* thing I am *incredibly proud* to have done.

These acknowledgements are listed in no particular order. Everyone I mention has contributed to my journey and all have been crucial to my success in their own, wonderful ways. I would not have started this, kept going, or finished my degree without these people. At the same time, that I am starting with Sarah is no accident. She deserves to be first.

I never believed in soulmates—in fact, I still don't. But I have one, and I will always be grateful that she chose me. She is everything that is good about me. She makes little walks and short talks and fifth servings of leftovers special, turning them into everyday highlights that have kept me going. Some people live for the breaks—the trips to other countries, the five-star restaurants and

hotels, the oceans, the mountains, the not here, the not doing *this* for a while. While she has given me those kinds of breaks (because she has absolutely supported me financially), she has also, and more importantly, given me breaks through the ways that she has made the work not feel as much like work—through the ways that she has made every one of our days together special. I love a good break as much as the next guy, but I don't live for them now. I live for the next minute of whatever the next thing is that we do together.

A lot of this process has been very difficult. It has often required a lot of work. It has often sucked. It has not paid well. It has often been lonely and isolating. It has, from time to time, required significant sacrifices—from me, from Sarah, and probably even from Winston and Olive. At the end of my first year, I was ready to quit. I had had enough. I couldn't give any more. That happened again about four months later, and again two months after that. All said, I've probably thought about quitting dozens of times, and was a conversation away from quitting three times in particular.

I would not have made it to this point without Aimee Franklin. This sounds like a cliché—oh, I couldn't have done it without you!—and is something people probably toss around too casually. But I mean it and mean it sincerely: I would not have been able to finish this program, write this dissertation, or earn this degree without Aimee Franklin. I will forever appreciate Aimee's "back away from the ledge" talks, the kindness and hospitality she repeatedly showed me, Sarah, and even Winston by welcoming us into her home, the longer-than-scheduled Zoom talks during COVID, and her willingness to read and provide feedback on even the longest, most scattered manuscripts. (By the way, I have no idea how she was able to do any of this, somehow able to set aside the responsibilities of the half-dozen-or-so businesses that she runs, the boards on which she serves, and her numerous research and teaching obligations to field my questions or just listen for a few minutes.)

Aimee's brand of mentorship is a remarkable one, one I hope to emulate regardless of whether I ever have doctoral students of my own. She has pushed me to think more wholistically, often playing the devil's advocate to expose blind spots in my arguments. She has wisely known exactly when to tell me to keep moving, when to chew on something for a while, and when to take a break. She has deciphered many an email, knowing when emails were just emails and when they were really a "I'm having a hard time, can you call me?" Perhaps most relevant to this dissertation is that, as much as anyone, she taught me how to see the field, and believed so firmly in my ability to ask good, interesting research questions that I eventually started to believe it myself. I hope that her influence comes through in my work—that those who read anything I do can see just a bit of Aimee Franklin in it—and that it makes her as proud as I am to call myself one of her students.

I am lucky to not only be an Aimee Franklin student, but an Alisa Fryar student, too—something for which I am also incredibly thankful. But it's a different kind of thankful because Alisa is a different kind of advisor. Before that, though, I'd like to say that I credit two conversations with inspiring me to even *try* getting a Ph.D., and one of them was with Alisa. When I was working on my MPA, I stayed after class one evening and asked her a question. I wish I could remember what it was, but I don't. I remember her response, though, which was to pause for about three seconds (which is a long time when your professor is silently staring at you) before completely ignoring my question and saying, "Have you ever thought about a Ph.D.?" I like to think she became my advisor right then, as she was kind enough to spend a ton of time helping me navigate the application process—and to kind of plan my life for me.

But onto who Alisa is as an advisor, and why I'm thankful to be her student. Her trademark characteristic may be her honesty—her sometimes-brutal-but-always-necessary honesty. I have said before that she has killed dozens of my academic puppies. And she has—right in front of me, too.

It's the best way I've figured out how to communicate how terrible it has felt when she's rejected some of my ideas or dismantled some of my arguments (though I'm right about discretion and Deven agrees with me). But it really has always been for my own good, and as I've grown as a scholar, it has only become more apparent how right she was. Rather than looking back sadly, I look back at those poor, dead puppies and think, "yeah, that was the humane thing to do." In fact, as long as I've known her and been her student, I'm not *sure* that she's been wrong about something, and there have been a few times that I wanted her to be. But because she is unflinchingly honest and never wrong, and because she is my advisor and knows me and my faults *extremely* well, her support means more. When she gets behind one of your ideas, it feels like you have a guaranteed JPART or PAR article, and that anyone who thinks otherwise is either a jerk, an idiot, or both. It's not that I don't believe other people when they say something nice about me or my work, it's just that it's different coming from Alisa. I am, and will remain, tremendously grateful that I had an advisor who cared enough about me that she always told me the truth. Yet, what I am most grateful for is that she showed me that there was a place for someone like *me* in academia. What I treasure most about having Alisa as my advisor are all the times that I've been able to say, "well, you know what I mean," because I know that she does.

A lot of people will tell you a lot of great things about Deven Carlson. I believed them before Deven brought me on as his research assistant, but I didn't really know exactly *how good* he was—and is—until then. Those people I mentioned that say all the great things? I'm here to tell you that *they don't know the half of it*. No single experience was more important to my professional development than writing with Deven. He made all of my work—even things we never talked about—better and showed me how to do the job. Only a very small number of doctoral students get to work *with* someone who is as universally respected as Deven is. I am incredibly grateful that he

picked me to be his research assistant, but even more grateful that we're still working together now that the assistantship has ended. I am so proud of so many of the things I've accomplished at OU, but I'm not sure that any of them mean more to me than being one of Deven Carlson's coauthors.

The second conversation that inspired me to pursue this degree was with Allyson Shortle. She was, as is often the case, very upfront with me. I still have my notes from that conversation, in which I asked her whether she thought I should consider a doctoral program:

> Dr. Shortle: good idea! Could work together.
> - GRE math score is important. If it goes well, consider applying to a top program.
> "Don't let anyone push you around. Do what you want to do! Otherwise you'll be lazy."

I'm not sure if she knew how important the conversation was to me. I had (and still have) a tremendous amount of respect for her as a scholar. I'd taken a couple of classes with her and was also fortunate enough to be her undergraduate research fellow for a while, so I knew that she was both brilliant and someone who didn't pull her punches. The fact that *she* thought I could do this—and especially that she would even consider working with me—meant the world to me. When I got back to my apartment, I even told my longtime friend and roommate about it. Then, I called my mom and told her, too. But the most important part of the talk was her insistence that I study something I care about, something that really interests me. At times, I wish I'd listened to her more and been a little less afraid to take some bigger swings. Even still, I have come back to her advice over and over again, sometimes even reading my old notes, and it has regularly given me the courage to stand up for my ideas and pursue the things I care about.

Before and after joining my committee, Allyson made several important substantive contributions this dissertation for which I am deeply thankful. In fact, the survey experiment upon which it is based wouldn't have been possible without her advice and expertise. Her influence has also been important to the trajectory of my entire research agenda, as much of the political science

(and general behavioral work) comes out of things she taught me or encouraged me to read. Despite all of this, though, there are two things I appreciate most about having Allyson on my committee. The first is that she's known me longer than any other committee member, including my chairs, and chosen to stick by not only me, but the department. She's been a crucial asset to other students and faculty, she's published incredible work, and she's done it *here*. That means something to me. The second thing is that *I* have also *known her* longer than I've known any of my other committee members. This means that I have the privilege (and it is one) of remembering what it was like to know her as a 19-year-old undergraduate who was super intimidated by her intellect *while also* knowing that *she*, of all people, chose to be on my committee. The undergrad version of me would never believe it. And that means something to me, too.

When I go to conferences or see other junior scholars' CVs, I often think something like, "oh yeah, well my committee could beat up your committee." It's a little crazy, but I believe it, too. I am not sure it is possible to have a committee much better than mine, if at all, and Heyjie Jung is a huge reason why. It didn't take me long to realize that she was good. Now, though, I think that we made the hire of the year when we brought her in. It isn't often that a relatively new assistant professor is allowed to serve on a doctoral committee. It's asking someone with no time to take on a huge time commitment. And yet, somehow, Heyjie has done it and done it well. Her advice has been *invaluable*, among the most critical to this dissertation's completion. She has carefully read drafts, taken time to meet, shared job postings, emailed articles, attended job talks, and done all of this not only for me, but for many students. And because she is *so* good, it always matters. She doesn't just review a draft, she finds the hole in your argument that no one else has noticed (but that reviewers would've). She doesn't just come to your job talk, she brings the heat, asking the exact type of difficult-but-high-quality questions that you need to practice before the real thing. She doesn't just

serve on your committee as an assistant professor, she does it and does it so well that you have a hard time expressing just how important and valuable she was when drafting the acknowledgements section of your dissertation. Suffice it to say that, at some point, someone is going to offer her a more prestigious job in some fancy department. She'll deserve it—and she should take it if she wants it. But I will be supremely disappointed in our department, and really OU as a whole, if we don't do *everything* we can to keep her. I am so, so glad that she happened to come here when she did (while I was here!) and incredibly thankful for her advice, mentorship, and generosity. I'll be a new assistant professor myself in a few months and hope that I can make even a fraction of the impact she has already made in her time at OU. She makes OU better, and I can't wait to see what she can do when she starts chairing committees of her own. I suspect I'll want to hire her students.

Most of the time, outside members are only nominally members of doctoral committees, kind of checking in every now and then to make sure nothing crazy is going on. The bad ones are infamous for the damage they can do, though—so much so that picking someone for my outside member felt pretty stressful. Ryan Bisel has never made me feel stressed, though, and I am firstly grateful for that, as it is not a given. He has always read my materials thoroughly, listened carefully, and treated me with nothing but kindness. More than that, though, I am grateful that he has not been a nominal member, but a contributor to my committee and research. Every time we have interacted, he has provided shockingly excellent feedback. In fact, in the pages to come, I talk a lot about the just-world hypothesis, something I had literally (and I do mean literally) never heard of it until Ryan suggested I look into it after one meeting. There are, to my knowledge, only three pieces in public administration that even mention just-world beliefs so, without his advice, I probably wouldn't have found it. Now, an entire chapter of my dissertation centers around it. I hope that the infamy surrounding bad outside members is soon replaced by a better kind of infamy—one that

comes from other doctoral students finding outside members who are as exceptional as Ryan has been. He is no small part of the reason I would put my committee up against anybody's. He's part of the reason I'd win, too.

I also owe a huge acknowledgement to Scott Robinson. While Scott is no longer on my committee, I am grateful for the contributions he made while he was. Much as is the case with my other members, though, I most appreciate Scott for things that have nothing to do with my committee: his influence is bigger than that. I am only just starting my academic career, but I am certain I will never meet someone as well-read as Scott. The man has read enough to have earned doctorates in at least a half dozen other disciplines. Somehow, he seems to remember it all, too. I have no idea how many times Scott could've used what he knows—the *enormous* amount**s** of information he possesses—to make me feel stupid or tear me down (and that's not even mentioning his debate background). But he never did. Instead, he has always (enthusiastically!) *shared* what he knows with me, using it to make me a better scholar. He is exactly what a professor should be. While I have no aspirations of ever reading—and certainly not of remembering—even a tenth of what he probably read last week, I do hope that I always use the things I know to build others up just as he does. I also hope that I inspire the same intellectual curiosity that he inspires in me *every time* we talk in one of my students one day (even if it takes an entire course to do it). I have looked forward to every class period, meeting, and conversation I have had with Scott because he never fails to remind me why I love this job. I am immensely grateful for each and every one of them—I've learned something in all of them!—and look forward to being grateful for the next one, too.

If you've read this far, you are probably thinking that I have had an amazing group of people around me. You may also be thinking that this is the longest recorded acknowledgements section in all of human history. It might be. As such, I will try to make the remaining ones a bit shorter.

To Sarah, who is so good that she deserves a second acknowledgement: I love you.

To Kay, who gets me better than anyone not named Sarah: I have so enjoyed becoming not just your brother but your friend, too, since we both came to college (I even liked being your roommate). We're excited about moving—and I'm thrilled to be done with school!—but the hardest part about leaving for me will be being further away from you. Please come visit. Stay for as long as you'd like. Thank you for being my sister—a great one—and for always putting up with me.

To Mom: thank you for believing that I could do this long before I knew I could. I haven't always known what I would do, but I have always felt like you thought I could do anything—and known that you'd be there for whatever it was. I am not just here because I worked hard but because you did, too. I am proud to be your son, grateful that you're my mom, and hope you're celebrating as you read this because this is your accomplishment, too.

To Dad: you were also sure, from the beginning, that I could do something like this—and you have always made that very clear. I never had to wonder what you expected from me. You pushed me to be the best student I could be because you knew I could be a good one. As your support has changed over the years, from pushing to encouragement to now affirmation, I am so thankful that you've continued making it clear that you believe in me. Some dads don't tell their children things like this—that they're proud of and believe in their children. I'm lucky to have one that does.

To Clay, the absolute best stepdad there ever was: thank you for choosing Kay and me just as enthusiastically as you chose Mom. I am proud to be her son and I'm proud to be yours, too. For as long as you've been my stepdad, you've made me a better me. So many of my favorite things about myself are things I learned from you, and I am grateful for all of the ways in which I am like you.

To Claudia: There are probably a lot of great stepmoms out there, so what makes me feel truly thankful isn't just having a great stepmom, it's having *you* as my stepmom. No one else would've been able to show all of us the kind of big, warm, fierce, protective love that you do. Thank you for always making us feel at home, for feeding us delicious meals, and for always looking out for us.

To Dave and Jayne, who never fail to show that in-laws can actually be amazing: thank you for being so amazing! Please take a moment to celebrate the fact that your son-in-law is officially employed (thank goodness). Really, though, even calling you amazing in-laws seems unfair. It just doesn't really capture what you really are, which is more another set of incredible parents than just the people who raised Sarah (great job, by the way). Thank you for so quickly and wholeheartedly accepting me into your family, and for always making me feel like I am a Cabeen. I am so, so proud to be one.

To Justin, who generously hosted us for many hours of dissertation work: whether you know it or not, you often motivated me to keep writing and finish strong. Our visits to Utah (and your visits here) also helped me recharge through the joy and excitement you always bring. Huge, critical sections of this dissertation were completed when we were together, and it mattered that you were there. I've got the best partner and in-laws in the world, and that certainly includes you. Thanks for being you, being a tremendous brother-in-law, and for being my friend.

To Dalton, my brother and educational trailblazer: thanks for showing me how it's done, getting me excited about OU, and always reminding me of the value of an education. I am not sure I would've chosen OU way back when if not for your influence, and I'm so, so glad that I did.

To Avah: if I can do this, you can do whatever your version of earning a Ph.D. is, too.

To Morgan, my first friend in our cohort: thank you for pushing past the awkwardness, listening to Alisa, and reaching out to study with me in 2021. I am incredibly grateful that you took a chance on me—you not only became my first true friend in the program, you pulled me out of my shell and connected me with my other now-true-friends, too. Thanks for always listening (and intently, too), for the million times that you have patiently waited on us to get to wherever we were meeting, and for the kind, genuine friendship you never fail to show Sarah and me. From our very first study group meeting, you've made my time at OU better. I look forward to many years of continued friendship, reuniting at conferences, writing together, and getting to see what you do next. Along the way, I hope I can be as good a friend to you as you've been to me (I'll still be late for stuff though).

To Aarika: I am so thankful that we finally became friends! It took a while but it was worth waiting for. Thank you for dragging me around to network at conferences (and for letting me and Morgan kind of tag along as you evolve into conference Aarika), for letting me bounce ideas off you, for sharing your (incredible) work with all of us, and for, like Morgan, making my time here *so* much better. Please remember that I am always available to provide feedback on your book manuscript when it comes. I can't wait to one day tell my students, "Oh, Aarika? Yeah, she's my friend!", and I'm so grateful to be your friend now, too.

To Clint, who might be able to see the future: I can't remember exactly when we met, but I very clearly remember taking Aimee's Survey of Public Administration class with you. You didn't always say much but, when you did, it was profound every single time. It has been a true privilege to go from there, feeling a bit intimidated by you because of your insights, to now calling you a friend. I seem to always leave our conversations feeling encouraged, inspired by something you said, and a little cooler, too. More than anything, though, I leave feeling grateful to know you. Thank you for always building me up—for building *all of us* up—and not letting me spend too much time focusing on the negative. You make it easier to see the bright side of things, in part because you bring it with you wherever you go. Thanks for sharing it with me, being my friend, and helping us all survive this.

To Jeff Alexander: thank you for… kind of everything? And I really mean *every*thing. Your acknowledgement was one of the most difficult ones to write because of *how many* things you've done for me (and everyone else!) over the years. I wasn't sure if I should start with my MPA or jump straight to the Ph.D, neither of which I would've finished without your work. I wasn't sure which of the many critical things you've helped me with to mention, nor of how many of them I should cover. I thought of at least a dozen examples that I could've used to demonstrate just *how good* you are at your job, but surely that would've been too many. So, I thought the best route was to thank you, again, for *everything*, and all the things you did—the ones I know about and especially the ones I don't—that allowed me to take a risk, follow a dream, and complete this program (and the one before it, too). What I want to be a little more specific about, though, is who you are as a person, because you've not only done countless things for me over the years, you've done them all while being an absolute delight. You've answered likely hundreds of my (often dumb) questions and somehow made me feel like answering that day's dumb question was your top priority. Every single interaction we've had has been nothing less than a pleasure, sometimes even being the best part of

my day. I am not sure that there is anyone at OU who is better at their job, a harder worker, or a kinder, friendlier person than you—but I *am* sure there's no one who's better at all three. I know that it hasn't always been as easy as you make it seem. I suspect that you haven't always felt as sunny as you've been to all of us, too. But I hope that, at least for a moment, reading this makes you feel half as good as you always make us feel. Thank you, Jeff—for your work, for helping us all succeed, and for the kindness you've shown along the way. You are the best of us.

To Wayne and Alice, great neighbors and better friends: thank you for so often brightening our days with your kindness and company. Sarah and I are both so grateful to call you friends. Spending time with both of you is always a highlight—and not just for Winston and Olive! Thanks to Wayne for the Pupperonis that sparked our friendship and to Alice for trying to make sure that no one ate too many. Thanks to both of you for the warmth, generosity, and hospitality that you have shown Sarah and I from the very earliest days of knowing you. You changed our time here, making it so, so much better. Whether you know it or not, you have also helped me push through this dissertation through the ways that you've surprised us with baked goods, caught us during walks, or otherwise kindly shared some time with us. Rather than saying we'll miss your stories, the chats about OU football, or anything else, though, I'll say that I hope they continue.

To Winston, who cannot read this and does not know much of anything, least of all what a dissertation is: good boy.

To Olive, who, though perhaps smarter than Winston, is still, as far as I'm aware, unable to read: good girl.

Finally, to Ninny and Papa, who mean more to me than can be expressed in even the longest of acknowledgements: this dissertation is dedicated to you.

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I combine insights from public administration with those of political science, public policy, and social psychology to better understand how citizens think about and understand their governments. In each of three studies, I unpack a different decision-making process with relevance to public administration. The first explores how information about clients shapes citizens' agreement with street-level bureaucrats' rule compliance (or lack thereof). The second is similar, this time assessing how client information influences how citizens assign blame when clients experience negative outcomes. The third focuses on factors that drive bureaucrats to support other bureaucrats' rule compliance decisions, this time paying special attention to the effects of respondents' just-world beliefs.

While I expected that clients' identities—and particularly their identity congruence with respondents—would significantly affect each of these processes, what I find is more interesting and complex. Though they did not express strong disagreement with bureaucrats' prosocial rule-breaking decisions—or decisions to break the rules for the explicit purpose of better serving a client—citizens always preferred that bureaucrats followed agency rules, regardless of the client's identity, deservingness, and outcome. When assigning blame for a client's negative outcome, citizens overwhelmingly blamed *the client*, allocating over twice as much blame to the client than the serving bureaucrat or agency. While, this time, the client's deservingness had large effects on citizens' decisions, even deserving clients received more blame than any other category. Finally, respondents—both citizens and bureaucrats—with high just-world beliefs were much more likely to support bureaucrats' rule decisions, irrespective of the actual decision. As I will argue, together, the findings provide room for optimism in some ways while painting a worrying picture for social equity in others.

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is hard to be a human. Life too often feels like one big complication. The twists and turns keep coming. The days are unpredictable. People are erratic. It always keeps you guessing. But we really don't like the guessing. When stacked on top of the rest of life—our ever-growing list of responsibilities, our already-stretched capacities, our *everything else*—the guessing just feels like too much. So, we find ways to cope—ways to mitigate the uncertainty and minimize the guessing. Ways to make it.

One such way is the reliance on heuristics, little mental shortcuts that help make decisions easier and life more predictable (Kahneman 2003; 2011; Lindblom 1959; Simon 1947). Sometimes these shortcuts are innocent, like choosing between two movies based on their Tomatometer scores or ordering a meal that was good enough again rather than laboring over a restaurant's menu to find something better (Simon 1947). Other times, though, heuristics are far from innocent and can introduce biases into our decision-making processes, whether consciously or unconsciously, such as when a police officer uses a person's race to decide which cars to search during a traffic stop (Baumgartner et al. 2017; see also Keiser, Mueser, and Choi 2004). For better or worse, humans use heuristics constantly—based on things like social group membership (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1986), including stereotypical beliefs about groups (Greenwald and Banaji 1995), and deservingness (van Oorschot 2000; Jensen and Petersen 2017; Schneider and Ingram 1993)—to minimize the information they need to make decisions that reflect their preferences (Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1993).

These heuristics also help citizens make sense of—and decide how to feel about—the things their governments do. At a basic level, that is what my dissertation is about: the lenses and shortcuts citizens use to make sense of what the bureaucracy does. After explaining the theoretical framework

that underlies the dissertation in Chapter 2, I will discuss the three empirical studies around which the dissertation is organized in the following three chapters. Each empirical study is based on my analysis of data that I collected via an original survey experiment, and each study addresses a different public administration question by incorporating insights from literatures outside of public administration.

The study at the heart of Chapter 3 was inspired by my interest in bureaucratic rule compliance behavior (Bozeman 2022), and particularly cases of prosocial rule breaking, or decisions by street-level bureaucrats to break their organization's rules for the benefit of either their organization or on(Bell & Smith, 2021; Stensöta, 2019; Watkins-Hayes, 2009; Zacka, 2017)e of its stakeholders (Morrison 2006). While public administration scholars are often quick to praise bureaucrats for prosocial rule breaking—framing the acts not as deviance, but more a creative form of problem solving (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2022)—more work is needed to understand how citizens feel about such actions. So, in this chapter, I asked, seeking to understand whether the ends (i.e., a positive client outcome) ever justified the means (i.e., prosocial rule-breaking behavior) in citizens' minds. However, I also took advantage of my experimental design to vary for whom the rules were being broken, manipulating the client's identity across treatments to find out if citizens' agreement with a bureaucrat's prosocial rule-breaking decision hinged on whether they were being broken for someone *like them*. I also varied signals about the client's deservingness across treatments, asking whether perceptions of deservingness influenced citizens' assessments of street-level actions much like it influences their assessments of policies (Bell 2021; 2020; Schneider and Ingram 1993) and programs (Keiser and Miller 2020; Nicholson-Crotty, Miller, and Keiser 2021). Contrary to my expectations, I find that, regardless of for whom the rules were broken, citizens *vastly* prefer bureaucratic rule compliance, even when following the rules makes it more difficult for the bureaucrat to meet a client's needs.

The study upon which Chapter 4 is based uses insights from social psychology to better understand how citizens assign blame when social service recipients—the bureaucracy's clients—experience negative outcomes. While there is a rich public administration literature on citizens' attribution of blame, the vast majority of this work focuses on how citizens assign blame between a few categories, for instance, the bureaucracy vs. a politician (James et al. 2016; Rudolph 2003) or the government vs. a contractor (Leland, Mohr, and Piatak 2021; Mohr et al. 2023; Marvel and Girth 2016). However, my study contributes by including *clients* as a possible target of blame, in part because of the aforementioned insights from social psychology on which I draw. Here again, I was not only interested in how citizens assigned blame, but in how the perceived deservingness and social identities of the client discussed in my experiment influenced the direction and degree of citizens' blame assignment—in other words, in how the lenses and shortcuts citizens use in interpretation affect whom they blame when clients experience negative outcomes. Findings revealed that, once again, the client's social identities largely had no effect on citizens' blame allocations—the client's deservingness, however, had a major influence on both whom citizens blamed *and* how much blame they assigned to each possible target. As suggested by theories from social psychology, perceptions of control over the client's outcome seemed to matter to citizens, too, as will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

The final empirical chapter, Chapter 5, again focuses on rule compliance behavior, this time examining the influence of worldview—specifically respondents' just-world beliefs—on their support for street-level bureaucrats' decisions to follow or prosocially break organizational rules. Unlike Chapter 3, the study in Chapter 5 explores citizens *and bureaucrats'* perceptions of rule compliance behavior, taking advantage of key pieces of the research design and conducting a subgroup analysis on a sample of bureaucrat respondents to increase the generalizability of results to bureaucrats themselves. This study contributes by combining insights from public administration on

bureaucratic discretion and PSRB with those of several social psychology literatures. In doing so, I investigate the extent to which bureaucrats' responses to organization rules—particularly their rule compliance behavior—varies based on whom they are serving and on how they see the world. Much of the research on bureaucratic behavior has primarily focused on what bureaucrats do within the range of their allotted discretion, including on how these behaviors depend on how they perceive their clients. This study goes a step further by extending this research to bureaucratic behavior *outside* the bounds of their discretion.

Previewing the results from Chapter 5, I find that just-world beliefs are strongly associated with respondents' support for *both* rule-following and prosocial rule-breaking decisions. As I will argue, this has troubling implications regarding public managers with high just-world beliefs, as high-belief individuals are more likely to support *any* outcome in hindsight. I also explore the role of social identity congruence with the client on respondents' support for street-level bureaucrats' rule compliance behavior. Based on the findings from Chapter 3, I expected that identity congruence would have little-to-no influence on respondents' support, despite theoretically derived reasons for presuming otherwise. While I found that identity congruence did not significantly affect support among the full sample of respondents, restricting my analysis to a subgroup of bureaucrat respondents (i.e., public-sector employees) revealed that, this time, identity congruence significantly increased support for prosocial rule-breaking decisions, but only when bureaucrats shared *both* a racial *and* gender identity with the respondent. Sharing only one identity did not affect support for prosocial rule-breaking decisions, and no degree of identity congruence (or lack thereof) affected support for rule-following decisions. As will be further discussed in Chapter 5, this has important implications for the representative bureaucracy literature, suggesting both that: 1) prosocial rule-breaking could be a mechanism behind the improved outcomes generated by active representation

and, 2) bureaucrats' decision to actively represent (or not actively represent) a client may be more nuanced—less binary—than is often assumed in the literature.

Lastly, Chapter 6 serves as a conclusion for the dissertation, providing both a summary of findings and implications of all three studies as well as considerations for future research.

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Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will further explain the theoretical framework underlying the entire dissertation. The premise here is that citizens are boundedly rational beings with limited cognitive resources. In order to reduce cognitive strain, citizens use a number of strategies to make cognitive processes more efficient, including the use of heuristics. While effective simplifiers, these heuristics ultimately introduce a myriad of biases to the decision-making process, with many of these biases stemming from social sources such as social group identity, social group membership, and how groups are socially constructed. After laying out this general framework, I will then introduce key elements of the frameworks underlying each of my three empirical studies that illustrate the similarity between the chapters.

Heuristics: Extending Rationality, Introducing Bias

Citizens—and all humans—are boundedly-rational beings with limited attention spans (Jones, 2001; Simon, 1947). Often, rather than comprehensively analyzing a situation and determining the best of all possible responses, we choose the most adequate of a handful of responses that quickly came to mind (Kahneman, 2003; Lindblom, 1959; Tversky & Kahneman, 1986). While they sometimes seem unsophisticated, the strategies citizens employ to reduce life's uncertainty and make it more manageable are actually quite effective, allowing them to more efficiently allocate their limited attention while still making decisions that align with their core values. One such strategy is the use of heuristics to simplify decision making—a strategy that, though imperfect, helps individuals more efficiently make intendedly-rational decisions by reducing cognitive demands and maximizing the utility of even the smallest bits of information.

To illustrate how powerful heuristics can be, consider the example of elections. When faced with the task of casting a vote for, say, Joe Biden or Donald Trump, an individual *could* decide to

spend countless hours researching the ins and outs of each candidate's platform, painstakingly comparing and contrasting each individual position with their personal opinions and values until, finally, determining which candidate best reflects their preferences and voting for them. Alternatively, though, the individual could just decide to vote for Joe Biden because he is a Democrat and they usually like Democrats—and, indeed, this is often what happens (e.g., Bonneau and Cann 2015; A. Campbell et al. 1960; Bartels 2000). But again, while this may seem unsophisticated, using political party identification as a heuristic to simplify vote choice is quite efficient, allowing citizens to vote for the candidate that best represents their interests without, say, reading the 1,100+ page rule regarding tailpipe emissions recently issued by the Environmental Protection Agency under the Biden Administration (Aldrich, 1995).[1]

However, while efficient, heuristics come with tradeoffs, including the introduction of numerous biases to the decision-making process (Gilovich et al., 2002; Kahneman, 2011). In using heuristics, individuals are essentially looking for ways to make decisions less taxing (for a full overview, see Shah & Oppenheimer, 2008), which can include strategies like replacing a difficult question with an easier one and using the answer to the latter to address the former (Kahneman & Frederick, 2002). For instance, to build on the earlier example of a presidential election, using party identification as a heuristic allows individuals to answer the question, "Which candidate is from my party?" instead of, "Which candidate's platform most closely matches my political preferences?" The issue arises when the strategies individuals use—including the substitutions they make—lead to biased decision making. For example, when faced with low, uncertain, or ambiguous information, individuals are more likely to rely on stereotypes to aid in decision making, using information about

[1] For the EPA rule, "Multi Pollutant Emissions Standards for Model Years 2027 and Later Light-Duty and Medium Duty Vehicles," see: https://www.epa.gov/regulations-emissions-vehicles-and-engines/final-rule-multi-pollutant-emissions-standards-model

only a few individual members to form judgements about the entire group (Bodenhausen, 1990; Bodenhausen & Wyer, 1985).

Countless other biases can enter in similar ways that are very relevant to public administration, ultimately resulting in heuristics becoming prejudiced lenses that color individuals' decision-making processes. It is citizens supporting or opposing a public policy based on their perceptions of its target population's deservingness—perceptions often based on stereotypes—rather than a review of the policy's merits (Bell, 2020, 2021; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). It is bureaucrats treating clients discriminating against certain clients to simplify complex decisions and cope with the demands of their jobs (Assouline et al., 2022; see also (Andersen & Guul, 2019; Bell & Jilke, 2024; Fording et al., 2011; Guul et al., 2021; Schram et al., 2009) or assuming that in-group citizens will be easier to work with than out-group clients (Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2023). In sum, the often-unconscious strategies individuals use to decrease cognitive strain introduce many biases that insert error in decision-making processes and even systematically harm stigmatized citizens.

Boundedly Rational, Not Bumbling: Favoritism and Prejudice

In the previous section, bias was framed more as a consequence of simplifying decision-making processes than the result of prejudice. And while biases can be introduced unconsciously as boundedly-rational individuals seek to simplify complex decisions, they can also be introduced (both unconsciously and consciously) for other reasons.

Individuals are constantly overloaded with information, facing seemingly endless demands on their limited attention. To help make sense of a complicated world (and to avoid being overwhelmed and overstimulated), individuals automatically group stimuli—themselves, others, situations, items, etc.—into categories (Fiske & Taylor, 2013). These categories make many aspects

of life simpler and more efficient, aiding in prediction and promoting a greater sense of certainty by, among other things, maximizing the utility of information (Gilovich et al., 2016). To illustrate how these categories work, imagine taking a walk in a park. While meandering along a scenic pond or through a lush field, you notice a stray dog heading in your direction. If this stray dog is an ornately groomed, 10-pound miniature poodle wearing a bright pink collar, you might bend down, check the dog's collar for an address or phone number, and try to return the dog to its owner. However, if the dog had been a snarling, 120-pound rottweiler aggressively speeding towards you, you likely would've had a different reaction. In either case, you would have automatically categorized the dog as dangerous or not, likely in an instant. You would not need to do any research or spend any time deliberating before reacting, as the category gave you all the information you needed to respond.

Individuals categorize others much in the same way as the rottweiler: automatically and almost instantly. The issue arises when these categories lead to biases and differential treatment. According to social identity theory (SIT), individuals' need to categorize causes an outsized focus on the perceived similarities and differences between a particular person and the categories in their minds, with these similarities and differences ultimately determining into which category a person best fits (Tajfel, 1981b; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As individuals encounter more and more people, they continue to categorize, all the while becoming more aware of the groups with which they share (or do not share) similarities. The groups into which they fit ultimately form the basis of individuals' social identities, and individuals' sense of self and wellbeing becomes more closely tied to that of their member groups (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Tajfel, 1981a). Because of the strong ties between their self-identity and group membership, individuals become motivated to protect the groups to which they belong (in-groups) and maximally differentiate them from other groups of which they are not members (out-groups). The final result is that, in order to promote in-groups, individuals show favoritism toward fellow group members; however, because each group is ranked on a social

hierarchy, individuals are also motivated to discriminate against outgroups in an effort to strengthen their group's position (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). As such, while categorization processes are typically unconscious, they can eventually lead to conscious biases in behavior and treatment of others as individuals display favoritism to in-group members and prejudice toward out-group members. Though boundedly rational, in promoting their groups (and, thus, themselves), individuals demonstrate the classic kind of utility-maximizing, self-interested rationality. In this sense, social identity and group membership become heuristics in their own right: rather than comprehensively assessing the consequences of a given action, individuals answer the easier question, taking the course that benefits in-group members and/or burdens out-group members.

Before continuing, it is worth noting that categorization and biases are not new to public administration, as scholars have long shown that bureaucratic behavior is largely a function of how they see themselves (Bell & Smith, 2021; Oberfield, 2020; Stensöta, 2019; Watkins-Hayes, 2009; Zacka, 2017; see also March & Olsen, 2011) and their clients (Jilke & Tummers, 2018; Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022; Mennerick, 1974), with both of these interacting to result in bias toward certain clients (Assouline et al., 2022; Bell & Jilke, 2024; M. J. Pedersen et al., 2018) and favoritism toward others (Bishu & Kennedy, 2020; Riccucci, 2004; Sowa & Selden, 2003).

Background for Chapters 3 and 5: Rule Compliance and Motivations

In the public administration literature, scholars (including myself) tend to stick up for bureaucrats. This isn't surprising given that seminal books in our field include Riccucci's (1995) *Unsung Heroes* and Goodsell's (1983) *The Case for Bureaucracy* (not to mention the fact that many of us were/are bureaucrats). This may explain why we have painted a much more balanced picture of bureaucratic discretion than political scientists whose accounts, while certainly valuable, tend to

frame bureaucratic discretion as deviance, too often adopting a narrow view of accountability as political oversight (e.g., Epstein and O'Halloran 1994; McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast 1987; Weingast and Moran 1983; Wood and Waterman 1991; see also West 1995).[2] Public administration scholars, on the other hand, have tended toward a more nuanced view of bureaucratic accountability as stemming from external *and* internal sources (e.g., Hupe and Hill 2007; Waldo 1988) and discretion as a force that can work both for and against clients (Keiser et al., 2002; Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022; K. Z. Pedersen & Pors, 2022), going so far as to recognize that bureaucratic rule-bending (or even breaking) often leads to desirable outcomes (Brockmann, 2017; Fleming, 2020; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022; O'Leary, 2006; Zacka, 2017).

By illustrating that rule-breaking might sometimes be a good thing, public administration echoes centuries-old concerns about bureaucratic structure hindering bureaucrats' ability to serve clients. Weber's (1922) "iron cage" illustrates bureaucracy's potential as a neutralizing (i.e., constraining) force that limits discretion in favor of impersonal application of rules. Merton's (1939) arguments of means-ends conflation go a step further, demonstrating the loss of efficiency that results from a system of impersonal rule application that ignores idiosyncrasies between clients. Indeed, concerns about the adverse effects of bureaucratic structure have been raised by far more than can be exhaustively covered here (Gawthrop, 1998; Gore, 1993; Niskanen, 1968; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Thompson, 1965; Wilson, 1989).

This may partially explain our continued focus on the downsides of rules for citizens (Baekgaard et al., 2021; Bozeman & Feeney, 2011; J. W. Campbell et al., 2023; Herd & Moynihan, 2018; Madsen et al., 2022). Perhaps it is also why we are so quick to recognize the aforementioned positive aspects of bureaucratic discretion and even, in some cases, rule breaking. However, while

[2] For reviews comparing the political science and public administration approaches to bureaucratic discretion, see Brehm and Gates (1997, 2015), Golden (2000), and Meier and O'Toole (2006).

this work is vital, it too often focuses on citizens as subjects of a system rather than participants in a democracy. Knowing how discretion can benefit clients tells us little about how—and even whether—citizens want bureaucrats to use it. Similarly, knowing how bureaucratic rules and processes affect citizens tells us little about whether citizens ever agree with rule breaking or noncompliance.

Chapter 3 explores citizens' agreement with rule breaking in the name of improving service provision by better meeting client needs. It is inspired by Maynard-Moody and Musheno's (2022) *A Happy Ending*, an account from their groundbreaking book *Cops, Teachers, Counselors: Stories from the Front Lines of Public Service.* In the story, a client comes to an employment counselor (i.e., a bureaucrat) for help finding a job. However, agency rules prevent the bureaucrat from helping the client secure what they really need to get and keep a job: a vehicle. In the end, the bureaucrat breaks agency rules by providing the client with funding for a car. Everything works out well for the client—in fact, things go so well that the authors title the story "A Happy Ending," as the client, who now has access to transportation, thrives in a new job. Yet, one question is not addressed by the authors: for *whom* is this a happy ending? If citizens knew about this instance of rule breaking, would they support the bureaucrat given how well things worked out for the client?

Some seem to believe as much. In fact, a central assumption behind Liberation Management and New Public Management (NPM) reforms (Gore, 1993; Light, 1997; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992) is that citizens care more about outcomes than rules and processes, preferring a bureaucracy that is free to focus on results rather than procedural compliance (see: Van Ryzin 2011). If this assumption true, citizens would support the bureaucrat breaking the rules to better serve the client—in other words, the ending would be a happy one for citizens, too. The issue, however, is that we don't know whether this assumption is true.

One reason to expect that citizens may support following bad rules comes from the multidimensional nature of rules: even the most onerous and ineffective rules—the reddest pieces of red tape—narrow the range of bureaucrats' discretion while also conferring legitimacy on actions performed *within* that range (Bozeman, 1993; DeHart-Davis, 2017). For all the ways that they can negatively affect processes and outcomes, worsening the experiences of bureaucrats and clients alike, Kaufman's (1977) quote on rules still holds true: "one man's red tape is another's treasured procedural safeguard." Even poor rules, when consistently interpreted and enforced, promote procedural fairness and equal treatment, both of which are important to citizens (Edri-Peer & Cohen, 2023; Martin et al., 2022; Tyler, 1988). So, it is very possible that citizens may recognize the ways in which rules are burdensome while still preferring that rules are followed.

Of course, bureaucrats do not always comply or always comply for the same reasons, and it is likely that citizens' perceptions of bureaucratic rule compliance (or noncompliance) are contextual. There is a great deal of variance in both the extent of bureaucrats' compliance (Bozeman, 2022) and in the motivations behind their compliance (or noncompliance). There are many reasons why bureaucrats may choose to comply or not comply with rules. For example, bureaucrats may strictly follow and enforce rules because they are rule-followers by nature (Oberfield 2014; see also: Watkins-Hayes 2009) or temporarily in an effort to prevent clients they perceive as undeserving from accessing government resources (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022; Zacka, 2017). Additionally, bureaucrats may break rules for self-interested reasons including reducing their workload (Downs, 1967; Niskanen, 1968) or for the perceived benefit of a client or their organization (Borry & Henderson, 2020; Fleming, 2020; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022; O'Leary, 2006).

The latter type of rule breaking, rule breaking motivated by a desire to help another person or organization, is called prosocial rule breaking (PSRB; see Morrison 2006; Borry and Henderson

2020), and research has shown that prosocial motivations for rule breaking matter to citizens (Fleming & Bodkin, 2022). However, while bureaucrats' motivations matter to citizens, it is not clear that citizens would support PSRB, as Fleming and Bodkin (2022) find only that citizens recommend bureaucrats receive more lenient punishments for PSRB than self-interested rule breaking. It is still possible that citizens prefer rule compliance to noncompliance, even when rules are ineffective and even when rules are broken for prosocial reasons. It is also possible that NPM-style arguments are important here, too, and that client outcomes dictate how citizens perceive rule compliance behaviors. This is perhaps especially true for PSRB, as citizens' agreement with PSRB may depend on the extent to which the rule breaking "worked" for the client. At the end of the day, though, while the literature raises all of these possibilities, more work is needed to empirically evaluate each of them.

As such, Chapter 3 examines citizens' tolerance for bureaucratic rule breaking for the explicit purpose of better helping a client, or prosocial rule breaking (PSRB). Using a survey experiment, I compare the relative effects of the bureaucrat's compliance with agency rules with those of the client's race, gender, framed deservingness, and outcome on citizens' agreement with a bureaucrat's rule compliance decision. This allows me to examine the extent to which citizen agreement is driven by bureaucratic compliance vs. client outcomes and to explore why—and, indeed, whether—agreement with rule decisions might vary based on *why* and *for whom* the rules were broken (or followed).

Chapter 5 also centers around perceptions of bureaucrats' responses to agency rules. This time, though, the focus is on understanding what drives *bureaucrats'* support for other bureaucrats' rule compliance behaviors. I separately examine the effects of identity congruence between clients and respondents, the client's deservingness, and the client's outcome on bureaucrat respondents'

support for rule-following and prosocial rule-breaking decisions, assessing whether effects vary based on the bureaucrat's level of compliance.

At their cores, both chapters are concerned with understanding the heuristics respondents—whether citizens or other bureaucrats—use to evaluate bureaucratic behavior. Each chapter includes, for instance, the client's outcome to understand whether the ends justify the means for respondents, or whether the result—what happens to the client—is the primary shortcut respondents use to simplify a complex situation and decide how to evaluate a bureaucrat's actions. Similarly, both chapters include the social group identities of both clients and respondents to understand whether respondents use group identity as a heuristic for evaluating bureaucrats' rule compliance behaviors (e.g., by being more likely to agree with rule breaking when done to help an in-group client). This allows me to assess whether, as is often the case with public policies (Nelson and Kinder 1996; Mason 2018; Chong, Citrin, and Conley 2001; see also Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1993), whether respondents' support for bureaucrats' rule decisions depends on who the decision benefits (or burdens). I discuss these and other heuristics in more detail in their respective chapters.

Background for Chapter 4: Blame Attribution – A Different Kind of Decision

Chapter 4 continues exploring how heuristics influence respondents' perceptions of a street-level service interaction between a bureaucrat and client, this time focusing on how citizens allocate blame when clients experience negative outcomes. Much of the premise of this chapter overlaps with that of Chapters 3 and 5, as blame attribution is a decision—one that can also be compromised by the introduction of biases. As such, save much of the discussion here for the chapter itself, where I review many of the previous points on heuristics, biases, and social identity, tie them to blame attribution, and highlight previous literature specific to the subject. Another motivation for brevity

here is that the most significant contribution of this chapter is that it explores clients as a possible target of citizens' blame, which is very specific to Chapter 4, making it more appropriate to discuss it separately rather than as a part of the dissertation's general theoretical framework.

Additional Background for Chapter 5: Just-World Beliefs

In previous sections, I have focused on how individuals use heuristics to reduce uncertainty and simplify decision making, with the dissertation examining how various heuristics affect perceptions of bureaucratic behavior. However, heuristics are not the only way that individuals respond to uncertainty. Some individuals attempt to mitigate uncertainty by believing—and defending their belief in—a world that is fundamentally just. By believing in a world in which people "get what they deserve and deserve what they get," individuals are able to feel more control over their environment, as a just world will ensure they receive the outcomes they deserve (M. J. Lerner, 1965, 1980; M. J. Lerner & Matthews, 1967; M. J. Lerner & Miller, 1978).

These beliefs, called "just-world beliefs," shape how individuals interpret the world around them, including the behavior and deservingness of others. One important example of this comes through the just world effect (also called just world bias; see J. S. Lerner, Goldberg, and Tetlock 1998) whereby, in an attempt to protect and defend their belief in a just world, individuals with strong just-world beliefs are more likely to blame innocent victims for their misfortunes, as instances of innocent people receiving negative outcomes represent an uncomfortable challenge to just-world beliefs (Goldenberg & Forgas, 2012; M. J. Lerner, 1980). Research has often found evidence of the just world bias, with high-belief individuals being more likely to blame victims of sexual assault (Grubb & Harrower, 2008; Hafer, 2000) and blame people in poverty for their misfortunes (García-Sánchez et al., 2022; Harper et al., 1990). Similarly, scholars have also found that just-world beliefs

are negatively correlated with support for redistributive policies (García-Sánchez et al., 2020; Wilkins & Wenger, 2014).

Given that much of how bureaucrats treat clients hinges on the extent to which bureaucrats perceive their clients as deserving (Jilke & Tummers, 2018; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022; Wenger & Wilkins, 2009), it is likely that just-world beliefs affect how bureaucrats treat clients by moderating deservingness perceptions (Wilkins & Wenger, 2015). This is especially likely to be true when clients are social service recipients, or citizens who are benefiting from social programs, as a just world allocates outcomes based on deservingness. If a client finds themselves in an unfortunate situation, to a bureaucrat with high just-world beliefs, the client must deserve to be in that situation—if they did not deserve it, they would not be there. To high-belief bureaucrats, disparate outcomes are simply evidence of a just world *working* as it should. This may ultimately create a self-reinforcing cycle wherein which high-belief bureaucrats: 1) attribute clients' misfortunes to past undeservingness, 2) use those misfortunes to construct notions of their clients' deservingness in the present, and 3) "work against" clients perceived as undeserving (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2022), thereby increasing the likelihood of the client experiencing yet another negative outcome, restarting the cycle when the client next seeks help.

This just world bias is exactly what is investigated in Chapter 5, which explores the influence of bureaucrat respondents' just-world beliefs on their support for another bureaucrat working against a client by following agency rules that restrict their ability to help a client *and* on their support for another bureaucrat working towards a client by prosocially breaking agency rules to better serve a client. In doing so, I respond to calls from Wilkins and Wenger (2015) to investigate the effect of bureaucrats' just-world beliefs on bureaucratic behavior.

Summary

Taken together, this dissertation explores factors that influence how citizens—and, in the case of Chapter 5, bureaucrats—interpret and understand bureaucratic behavior. This includes the heuristics they use to simplify and make sense of what bureaucrats do, as well as the role that their worldviews—and their desire to believe in a world that is just to minimize uncertainty—have in shaping their perceptions of bureaucratic behavior. Additionally, all three empirical chapters examine these influences relative to each other, allowing me to both better understand whether/how they affect perceptions *and* compare the weights of each.

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Chapter 3: Is It Going Above and Beyond or Breaking the Rules? How Clients' Identities, Perceived Deservingness, and Outcomes Affect Citizens' Judgements of Bureaucrats' Rule Compliance Behavior

Public administration researchers have long noted that rules can create hindrances and inefficiencies for **public organizations** (Osborne and Gaebler 1992), **bureaucrats** (DeHart-Davis, Davis, and Mohr 2015; Thomann, van Engen, and Tummers 2018; Tummers and Bekkers 2014), and **citizens** (Hattke, Hensel, and Kalucza 2020; Herd and Moynihan 2018; Tummers, Weske, Bouwman, and Grimmelikhuijsen 2016). Though usually rule-followers by default (Golden 2000; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2022), bureaucrats have been known to bend/break rules for several reasons including to cope with the demands of their jobs (Brockmann 2017; Lipsky 1980; Tummers, Bekkers, Vink, and Musheno 2015), provide better (or worse) service according to how they view their clients and/or professional selves (Keulemans 2021; Stensöta 2010, 2019; Weißmüller, De Waele, and van Witteloostuijn 2022; Zacka 2017), and when rules conflict with their personal or professional ethics (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2022; O'Leary 2006). Considering the recent focus on rule-induced frictions (Madsen, Mikkelsen, and Moynihan 2022), it similarly unsurprising that scholars have begun to devote more attention to the potential positive origins (and consequences) of bureaucratic rule breaking, including through work on a subtype of rule breaking called prosocial rule breaking (PSRB), defined as *"…any instance where an employee intentionally violates a formal organizational policy, regulation, or prohibition with the primary intention of promoting the welfare of the organization or one of its stakeholders.*" (Morrison 2006, 6).

However, while rules can have adverse consequences for citizens and contribute to unfavorable stereotypes of the public sector (Döring and Willems 2021; Hvidman and Andersen 2016), citizens may not agree with bureaucratic rule-breaking, even if done for prosocial reasons. In fact, consistent rule application—i.e., never bending/breaking rules (DeHart-Davis 2009)—has been

shown to lower citizens' perceptions of rules as ineffective, unnecessary, and onerous (Kaufmann, Ingrams, and Jacobs 2021) while citizens' perceptions of procedural fairness are associated with higher levels of trust in government (Van de Walle and Migchelbrink 2022; Van Ryzin 2011, 2015; Vigoda-Gadot 2007) and satisfaction with public services (Van Ryzin 2015; Vigoda-Gadot 2007; Magalhães and Aguiar-Conraria 2019; Tyler and Caine 1981).

In this study, I explore how citizens weigh questions of why and for whom in their perceptions of street-level bureaucrats' rule behaviors, responding to calls to investigate how social identity influences citizens' judgements of bureaucrats' rule compliance behavior (Fleming and Bodkin 2022) and asking whether the ends (i.e., client outcomes) ever justify the means (i.e., whether the bureaucrat followed agency rules) for citizens. To do so, I use data collected via an original survey experiment (n = 3,485) to assess the relative effects of information about the identity, deservingness, and outcome of a client on citizens' agreement with a street-level bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior. Across vignettes in which a hypothetical bureaucrat either follows agency rules that limit their ability to meet client needs **or** breaks agency rules *for the explicit purpose of better serving the client* (i.e., makes a prosocial rule-breaking decision), I vary the positivity of the client's outcome along with the client's race, gender, and deservingness.

Findings reveal that citizens expressed significantly more agreement with bureaucrats' decisions to follow rather than pro-socially break rules. However, citizens' responses rarely indicated *strong* disagreement with the bureaucrat's PSRB decision, as the lowest average level of agreement across treatment combinations was a 2.49/5.00, almost exactly halfway between "2-disagree" and "3-neither agree nor disagree." Still, while citizens' disagreement with the bureaucrat's PSRB decision was not exactly strong, the gap in citizens' expressed agreement between rule-following and PSRB decisions was fairly constant, with only changes in the client's outcome inducing large increases in agreement. Interestingly, the effects of positive client outcomes on citizens' agreement

was primarily driven by increased agreement with the bureaucrat's PSRB decision: a positive client outcome boosted citizens' average agreement with PSRB decisions by almost 0.5pts (on a 1-5 scale) but only increased citizens' average agreement with rule-following decisions by 0.1pts. Overall, findings show that, while citizens are more neutral towards PSRB than one might expect, they always prefer that bureaucrats follow agency rules, no matter whom bureaucrats are serving—but also that the ends (i.e., client outcomes) can partially justify the means (i.e., pro-social rule breaking) for citizens.

Background: Pro-Social Rule Breaking in the Public Administration Literature

Recently, public administration scholars have begun to devote more attention to a subtype of rule breaking called prosocial rule breaking (PSRB), defined as *"…any instance where an employee intentionally violates a formal organizational policy, regulation, or prohibition with the primary intention of promoting the welfare of the organization or one of its stakeholders.*" (Morrison 2006, 6). PSRB was offered as an alternative to approaches that assume rule breaking is motivated by self-interest, allowing for the possibility of rule breaking done for the benefit of another person or organization (for overviews, see: Fleming 2020; Fleming and Bodkin 2022). While PSRB as a term is fairly new to public administration, scholars have long acknowledged that self-interest is far from the only variable in bureaucrats' decision calculi (Downs 1967; Friedrich 1940; Lipsky 1980; Wilson 1989; see also Perry and Wise 1990), including in the context of rule breaking (Blau 1963; DeHart-Davis 2007a; Goodsell 2003; O'Leary 2006) and for the explicit purpose of helping clients Portillo 2012).

There is still a tremendous amount to learn about PSRB's origins and consequences, though, and research is already being conducted (e.g., Bernards, Schmidt, and Groeneveld 2023; Fleming and Bodkin 2022). For example, scholars have found that attributes of organizations (Borry and Henderson 2020), individual bureaucrats' identities and personalities (Borry and Henderson 2020; Piatak, Mohr, and McDonald 2020; Weißmüller, De Waele, and van Witteloostuijn 2022), and of

organizational rules themselves (Fleming 2020; Piatak, Mohr, and McDonald 2020) all contribute to the frequency with which bureaucrats break rules for prosocial reasons.

Background: Prosocial Rule Breaking (And Why Citizens May or May Not Agree with It)

Questions of "Why?" and "How?" the Government Operates Matter to Citizens.

This paper adds to our understanding of citizens' perceptions of bureaucrats' rule compliance behaviors, particularly bureaucrats' prosocial rule-breaking decisions. I borrow the term "rule compliance behavior" from Bozeman (2022); like Bozeman, I conceptualize rule compliance behavior as an employee's response to organizational rules, with possible responses being full compliance, partial compliance, or noncompliance.[3] In this study, I explore factors that influence citizens' agreement with bureaucrats' decisions to follow rules or to break them *for the explicit purpose of better serving a client* (i.e., pro-socially break rules).

The literature demonstrates that attention to citizens' perceptions in this space is important. It is critical that citizens believe their government's decisions are fair, that bureaucrats follow rules, and that bureaucrats apply those rules equally to all citizens (Goldfinch, Yamamoto, and Aoyagi 2022). In fact, when it comes to determinants of citizens' trust in government, citizens' perceptions of procedural fairness may be just as important as their perceptions of governmental performance and service quality (Magalhães and Aguiar-Conraria 2019; Tyler and Caine 1981; Van Ryzin 2011, 2015). Citizens are also more likely to trust their government when they believe their government behaves ethically (Downe, Cowell, Chen, and Morgan 2013; Van de Walle and Migchelbrink 2022; Vigoda-Gadot 2007).

[3] Consistent with the literature (e.g., Borry 2017; Fleming 2020; Fleming and Bodkin 2022), I do not distinguish between rule bending and rule breaking in my operationalization of rule compliance behavior.

Additionally, work on transparency demonstrates that providing citizens with information about the rationale of governmental decision-making processes influences citizens' support for resulting decisions (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer 2014; Guardino and Mettler 2020; Ingrams, Kaufmann, and Jacobs 2020; Porumbescu and Grimmelikhuijsen 2018). This, too, supports the conclusion that processes matter to citizens, as even information about how those processes were conducted shapes their perceptions of the broader government.

As such, the processes their government follows—as well as the decisions that result from those processes—are important to citizens, even when they are not directly involved in those processes and decisions. When they believe that the rules apply to everyone and that the government treats citizens fairly, citizens are more likely to see government positively. But the literature suggests the possibility of competing values here: consistent rule compliance and enforcement may not be the most equitable way to serve clients. Treating all clients equally—like cases—and conflating the means of procedural compliance with the ends of service quality and outcomes has been long acknowledged as a possible shortcoming of bureaucratic structure (Merton 1939), and the tension between what the rules allow and what their clients need is certainly one that bureaucrats feel (e.g., Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2022, pp. 9-24), with street-level bureaucrats sometimes breaking rules to "go above and beyond" for their clients and, other times, strictly enforcing the rules to prevent clients they perceive as undeserving from accessing government resources (Stensöta 2010, 2019; Zacka 2017). It is reasonable to assume that citizens are aware of the tension between what rules allow and what they feel they deserve, too, likely having encountered rules as obstacles in their previous interactions with government.

So, while the literature demonstrates that citizens value consistent rule enforcement and procedural fairness, it also suggests they know that, sometimes, rules get in the way (see: Hattke, Hensel, and Kalucza 2020), and that some citizens prefer pursuing equality (which may include a

preference for universal rule application) while others prefer approaches that maximize equity (e.g., Hochschild 1981; Reeskens and van Oorschot 2013; Van Hootegem, Abts, and Meuleman 2020), which may include an openness to rule bending/breaking when what is allowed by the rules conflicts with what a client needs. In this paper, I explore this tension by assessing citizens' agreement with PSRB—in this case, a bureaucrat's decision to break the rules *for the explicit purpose of better serving a client*.

> **Research Question #1:** Do citizens ever agree more strongly with a street-level bureaucrat's decision to break the rules *for the explicit purpose of better serving a client* (PSRB) than a bureaucrat's decision to follow rules, even if compliance limits the bureaucrat's ability to meet clients' needs?[4]

But the Outcomes—or What—Government Achieves Matters to Citizens, too…

While how and why the government operates is important to citizens, the outcomes government achieves—or *what* government does—also matter a great deal. In fact, much of the rationale underlying New Public Management reforms was that the increased flexibility achieved by slashing red tape would improve governmental performance for citizens (Osborne and Gaebler 1992; see also Van Ryzin 2011), with Gore going so far as to state that, "*Taxpayers aren't interested in what rules bureaucracy follows. But they do care deeply about how well government serves them."* (1993, p. 80). While this does not mean that citizens agree with rule breaking, it implies that citizens are aware of rules' potential as obstacles, and that they might prefer that the government focus more on outcomes than procedural compliance. It is possible that the ends sometimes justify the means for citizens—i.e., that citizens might be more likely to agree with rule breaking when it results in better outcomes for clients.

[4] I do not specify a hypothesis for this research question.

Separate work also provides strong evidence that outcomes matter to citizens. The performance literature reveals that information about public sector performance can lead to changes in citizens' behavior (James 2011; James and John 2007) and shape their perceptions of and satisfaction with public service quality (Barrows, Henderson, Peterson, and West 2016; Holbein 2016; James and Moseley 2014). These findings mirror those from the economic voting literature (Fiorina 1978; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2013; Stokes 2016), which suggest that voters hold politicians accountable for policy outcomes at the ballot box. Also noteworthy is that perceptions of inefficient/ineffective service provision are often cited to explain citizens' typically negative view of bureaucracy (Goodsell 2003; Rainey and Bozeman 2000; Van de Walle 2004), and that citizens' perceptions of rules may be affected by how favorably they view an outcome (Kaufmann and Feeney 2014). Taken together, evidence suggests that outcomes matter to citizens generally, affecting their perceptions of both the government and the rules it follows. Here, I contribute by exploring whether the ends ever justify the means for citizens, or whether they more strongly agree with a street-level bureaucrats' PSRB decision when the client receives a positive outcome.

- ***Hypothesis #1:*** Citizens will express significantly more agreement with a street-level bureaucrats' decision to break agency rules for the explicit purpose of better serving a client when the client receives a positive outcome (relative to when the client receives a negative outcome).

… As Well as For Whom the Outcomes Were Achieved.

Citizens may also consider for whom the bureaucrat's decision to comply (or not comply) was made. While they may dislike rules that impose burdens on *them,* citizens' perceptions of deservingness shape evaluations of burdens imposed on *others*. In fact, knowledge of burdens targeted towards groups perceived as undeserving can increase citizen support for the policies and programs associated with the burdens (Bell 2020; Keiser and Miller 2020; Nicholson-Crotty, Miller,

and Keiser 2021; see also Schneider and Ingram 1993). As such, citizens' perceptions of rules—including burdensome ones—may depend on who the rules affect. Thus, citizens may express more agreement with a bureaucrat's decision to follow the rules when rule compliance results in guarding public resources from groups seen as undeserving (Campbell 2020; Herd and Moynihan 2018), something we know bureaucrats do (Zacka 2017). Similarly, citizens may express less agreement with a bureaucrat's PSRB decision when that decision is made to help a client that citizens perceive as undeserving.

- ***Hypothesis 2A:*** Citizens will express significantly more agreement with a street-level bureaucrat's PSRB decision when the bureaucrat is breaking rules for the explicit purpose of better serving a *deserving* client (relative to when the bureaucrat breaks the rules for the explicit purpose of better serving an *undeserving* client).
- ***Hypothesis 2B:*** Citizens will express significantly more agreement with a street-level bureaucrat's decision to follow rules that limit the bureaucrat's ability to meet a client's needs when citizens perceive the client as *undeserving* (relative to when the client is perceived as *deserving*).

Likewise, the effect of client outcomes on citizens' support for bureaucrats may also be moderated by the client's perceived deservingness. The relationship between policy support and the perceived deservingness of the policy's target populations is well documented (Gilens 1995; Israel-Trummel and Streeter 2022; Petersen 2012; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1993). This paper contributes by asking whether citizens' evaluations of bureaucratic behavior—like those of policies and programs—are affected by perceptions about the deservingness of the clients they serve. In other words, it may matter that citizens get the outcomes they "deserve."

- ***Hypothesis 3a:*** On average, citizens will express significantly higher agreement with a bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior when deserving clients receive positive outcomes (relative to when undeserving clients receive positive outcomes).
- ***Hypothesis 3b:*** On average, citizens will express significantly lower agreement with a bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior when deserving clients receive negative outcomes (relative to when undeserving clients receive negative outcomes).

Also relevant is that citizens' burden tolerance in human service interactions has also been shown to vary based on the races of the bureaucrat and client (Johnson and Kroll 2021). Similarly, research has shown that citizens' perceptions of procedural fairness (Johnson, Wilson, Maguire, and Lowrey-Kinberg 2017; Kang 2021; Radburn, Stott, Bradford, and Robinson 2018) and bureaucratic rule compliance (Fleming and Bodkin 2022) vary based on the racial identities of those involved. This is unsurprising since citizens rely on their social group identities to make policy judgements, tending to support policies that benefit in-group members and/or burden outgroups (Brewer 2007; Chong, Citrin, and Conley 2001; Converse 1964; Elder and O'Brian 2022; Mason and Wronski 2018; Nelson and Kinder 1996; Tajfel 1981). Citizens may be more likely to agree with a bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior—regardless of whether the bureaucrat decides to follow rules that limit the bureaucrat's ability to meet a client's needs **or** to break rules for the explicit purpose of better serving a client—when the resulting decision either helps an in-group client (i.e., a client who shares at least one social identity with the citizen) or hurts an out-group client (i.e., a client who does not share at least one social identity with the client). In fact, scholars have called for an examination of how social identities affect citizens' judgements of bureaucrats' rule compliance behaviors (Fleming and Bodkin 2022).

- ***Hypothesis 4a:*** On average, citizens will express more agreement with a street-level bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior when the bureaucrat breaks the rules for the

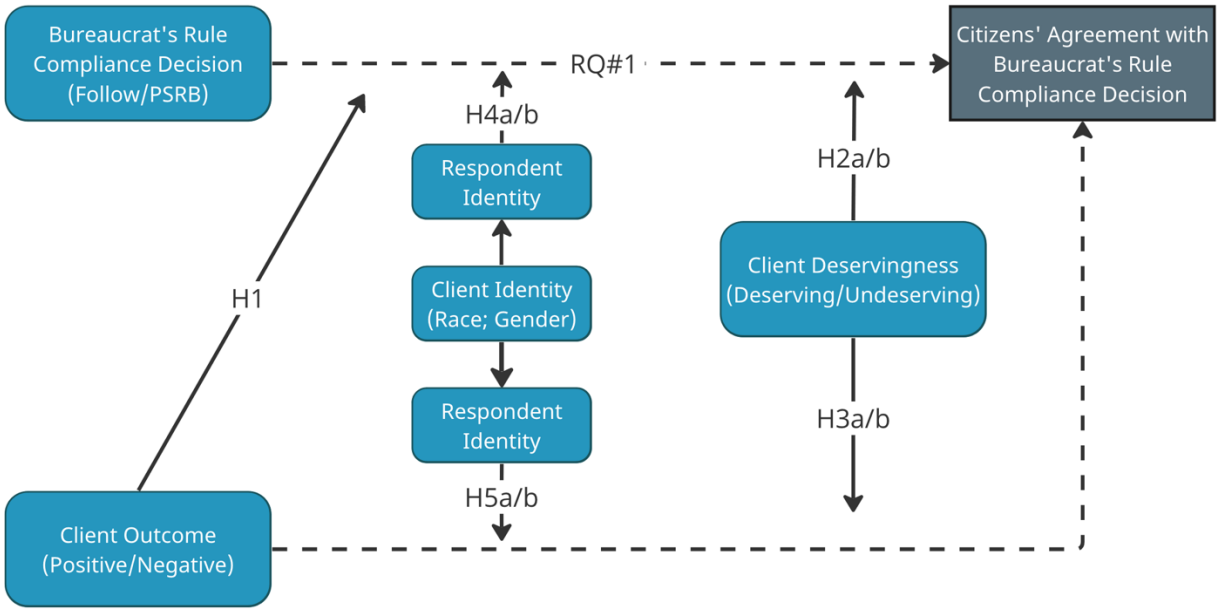
explicit purpose of better serving an *in-group client*—i.e., a client with which the citizen shares at least one identity (relative to when the bureaucrat breaks the rules to help an out-group client, or a client that does not share at least one identity with the citizen).

- ***Hypothesis 4b:*** Citizens will more strongly with a street-level bureaucrat's choice to follow rules that limit the bureaucrat's ability to meet a client's needs when the bureaucrat is serving an out-group client (i.e., a client who does not share at least one social identity with the citizen).

Finally, the effects of the client's outcome on citizens' likelihood of agreement with the bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior may depend on whether the citizen shares an identity (or does not share an identity) with the client.

- ***Hypothesis 5a:*** On average, positive client outcomes will lead to citizens expressing significantly more agreement with a bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior when the client shares at least one social identity with the citizen (relative to when the client does not share an identity with the citizen).
- ***Hypothesis 5b:*** On average, negative client outcomes will lead to citizens expressing significantly less agreement with the bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior when the client shares an identity with the citizen (relative to when the client does not share at least one identity with the citizen).

Figure 3-1: Theoretical Framework



Methods

To understand factors that shape citizens' agreement with bureaucrats' rule compliance behavior, I rely on a factorial survey experiment (Auspurg and Hinz 2015). The vignette is based on story 1.1 ("A Happy Ending") from Maynard-Moody and Musheno's *Cops, Teachers, Counselors* (2022) and centers around an interaction between a hypothetical employment counselor (a street-level bureaucrat) and client.[5]

Respondents

Of the 3,994 respondents who started the survey, 3,485 completed the instrument; the 87.3% completion rate is slightly above the average for similar web surveys (Liu and Wronski 2018).[6] Descriptive statistics for the sample are available in the appendix as Table A1. Respondents were recruited and compensated via Lucid's Theorem panel, which Lucid constructs around quotas based on U.S. Census data.[7] Researchers have found results from Lucid's Theorem panel to be quite generalizable (Coppock and McClellan 2019).

Vignette and Treatment Variables

The vignette is a story about an unemployed client who comes to Jake Becker (the bureaucrat, an employment counselor) for help finding a job. Though jobs are scarce, Jake finds a job for the client but runs into a problem: the job is about an hour away and the client neither owns a vehicle nor lives in an area with public transportation. While Jake is allowed to provide funds for approved expenses, providing funds for vehicles is explicitly prohibited. As such, Jake must decide whether to pro-socially break agency rules and assist the client by helping them buy a vehicle or

[5] The bureaucrat's identities are not central to this study and are held constant. I chose the first name Jake because it was identified as a white name by over 90% respondents in Gaddis' (2017) study. In the same study, Gaddis examined last names and found that adding a white last name boosted the rate at which respondents identified "Jake" to over 95%, hence the last name Becker (see also Tzioumis 2018).

[6] I set a goal of at least 2,448 complete responses based on the ability to detect an effect size of 0.1, α error probability of 0.05, and β error probability of 0.95 for 32 groups and 5 covariates. The 3,485 I received allows a minimum effect size of 0.08 to be detected.

[7] For more information on Lucid's data quality, see: https://lucidtheorem.com/faq#data-quality.

comply with rules and refuse the client's request. The vignette ends by describing the client's outcome. Table 3.1 details the 4x2x2x2 treatment combinations; Figure 3-2 shows an example vignette.

Table 3.1: Vignette Variables and Possible Values

Variable	Possible Values
Bureaucrat's Rule Decision	**Followed rules** (did not misuse funds or help buy vehicle); **PSRB/broke rules** (misused funds to help client buy vehicle)
Client Identity	**Black Woman** (Tanisha); **Black Man** (Keyshawn); **White Woman** (Katelyn); **White Man** (Brett)
Client Deservingness	**More deserving** (college grad, high performer, lost job when prior employer went bankrupt, motivated and never late); **Less deserving** (earned G.E.D., lost previous job due to poor performance, did not seem motivated and often late)
Client Outcome	**Positive** (car allowed client to keep job, recently received promotion); **Negative** (was not able to keep job, returned to the agency for more help)

Note: *treatment levels are bolded; operationalizations are summarized in parentheses*

Figure 3-2: Example Vignette

"Recently, one of Jake's clients, a 42-year-old **[**woman/man**]** named **[**Tanisha/Katelyn/Brett/Keyshawn**]**, came into his office looking for a new job. Katelyn **[**was a college graduate and received excellent performance reviews at her previous job but was laid off when the organization went bankrupt/previously earned her G.E.D. but had lost her last job due to poor performance**]**. Katelyn also **[**seemed very motivated and was never late for meetings with Jake/did not seem very motivated and was often late for meetings with Jake**]**.

At the time, jobs were very hard to come by in the area. Eventually, just as Katelyn was about to run out of savings, Jake found Katelyn a job with excellent pay and benefits. However, the job was about an hour's commute by car, which was a problem because Katelyn did not have a vehicle. Public transportation was also unavailable in the area.
Katelyn asked Jake to help her buy a vehicle. Jake wasn't sure what to do, as the Employment and Career Development Office's rules ***do not*** allow employment counselors to use funds to purchase vehicles for clients.

After thinking about it, **[Jake decided there was nothing he could do: rules are rules. Jake told Katelyn he would not be able to help her purchase a vehicle/Jake decided the job was too good to pass up. Jake requested training funds and a professional clothing allowance for Katelyn but told her to use the money to buy a vehicle instead which, according to the rules, was a misuse of agency funds].**

In the end, Katelyn accepted the job Jake found for her **[**and remains happily employed with the company. In fact, Katelyn recently received a promotion/but only managed to keep it for a few weeks. Katelyn recently came back to the Employment and Career Development Office for additional help**]**."

The dependent variable here is respondents' indicated level of agreement with the bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior—i.e., the bureaucrat's response to agency rules. This is measured by asking respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the following prompt: "Jake made the right decision in choosing to [follow/break] the Employment and Career Development Office's rules in this case." Responses are ordered on a five-point scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree".

I operationalize the bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior (i.e., the bureaucrat's response to agency rules) by varying bureaucrat's compliance with agency rules. However, rather than varying compliance across a simple follow/break dichotomy, I operationalize compliance (i.e., the decision to follow agency rules) and noncompliance as breaking *a rule with an unexplained purpose in order to directly benefit a client*. This is done for two reasons. First, my aim is to evaluate citizens' agreement with bureaucrats' PSRB decisions, not citizens' agreement with rule breaking that is either arbitrary or motivated by self-interest. Second, the variation in compliance is inspired by NPM-style arguments that citizens want a less constrained bureaucracy *because* excessive rules lead to poor service provision. In my vignettes, this rules/service dyad is mirrored by compliance restricting the bureaucrat's ability to meet the client's specific needs and noncompliance increasing the ability to meet the client's needs. Finally, to increase salience of the bureaucrat's response to agency rules, respondents are reminded of whether the bureaucrat followed or broke the rules in the post-treatment question used for the dependent variable via piped text.

The client's outcome is operationalized as follows. Respondents assigned positive client outcomes are told that the client remains happily employed in their new position and even received a promotion, while respondents assigned negative client outcomes are told that the client accepted the job Jake (the bureaucrat) found for them but could only keep it for a few weeks and returned to the agency for additional help.

The client's race, gender, and deservingness are also independent variables that are manipulated in the vignettes. Four total variations in the client's race and gender are possible and are signaled to the respondent through the client's name (Black woman = Tanisha; Black man = Keyshawn; white woman = Katelyn; white man = Brett). I operationalize clients' deservingness by varying signals of the client's earned deservingness and resource deservingness (see: Jilke and Tummers 2018) across treatments, an approach previously utilized in the literature (Bell 2020, 2021).

Earned deservingness is operationalized by more deserving clients being described as punctual and motivated, while less deserving clients are described as frequently late and less motivated. Resource deservingness is operationalized by deserving clients being described as college graduates who were high performers at their prior jobs—intended to convey a higher likelihood of success at their new job— while undeserving clients are described as G.E.D. holders who were fired from their previous job after poor performance. Finally, because of the relationship between age and perceived deservingness (Heuer and Zimmermann 2020), all clients are described as 42-years-old. The age 42 was chosen to send neutral age cues and closely approximates respondents' average age (~46).[8]

Analysis and Results

Descriptive Statistics and t-tests

I begin by examining the distributions of respondents' agreement with the bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior (i.e., response to agency rules) over each level of the five treatment variables included in my vignettes. These distributions are available below as Figures 3-3 – 3-7; the dashed lines in each figure represent the mean.

[8] I also included a post-treatment manipulation check to assess the effectiveness of treatments. Approximately 70% of respondents passed the manipulation check. In accordance with recommendations, the manipulation check is used only as a verification that most respondents received the treatment; it is not used to interpret findings (Gruijters 2022) or to screen out respondents (Aronow, Baron, and Pinson 2019; Montgomery, Nyhan, and Torres 2018; Varaine 2022).

Figure 3-3: Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement with the Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Behavior by the Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Decision

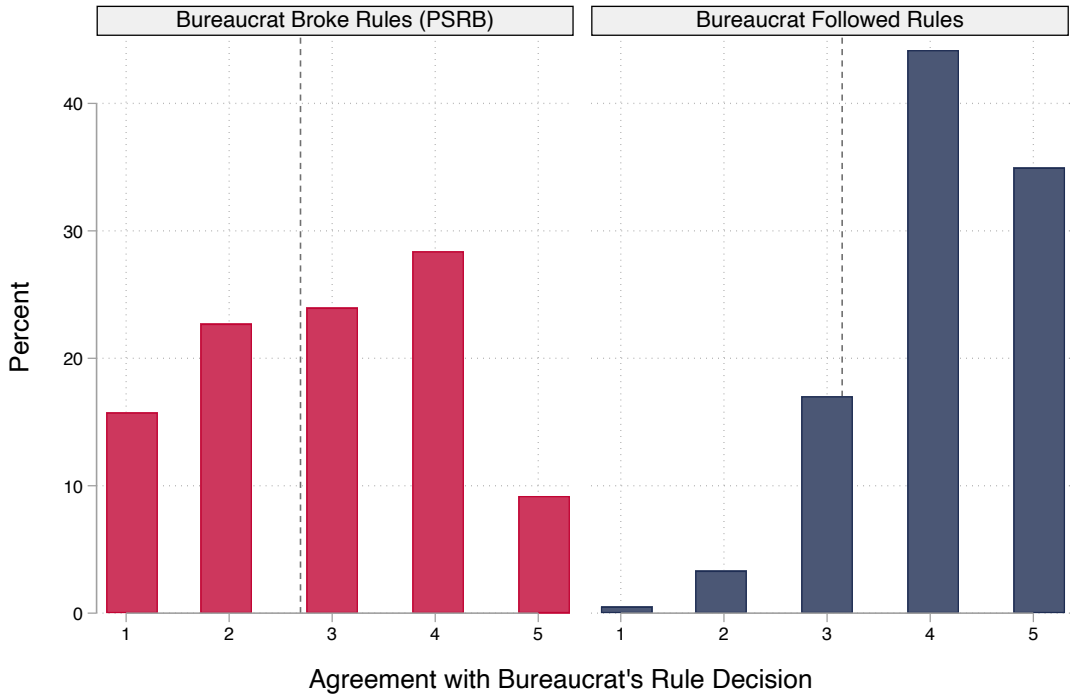


Figure 3-4: Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement with the Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Behavior by the Client's Race

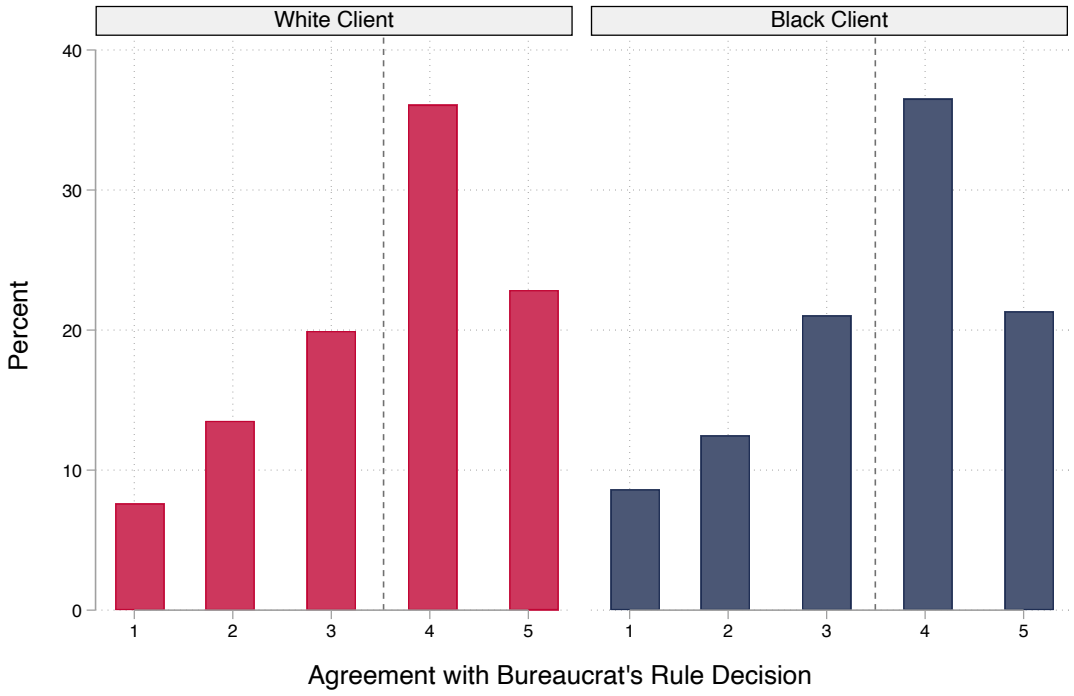


Figure 3-5: Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement with the Bureaucrat's Rule Decision by the Client's Gender

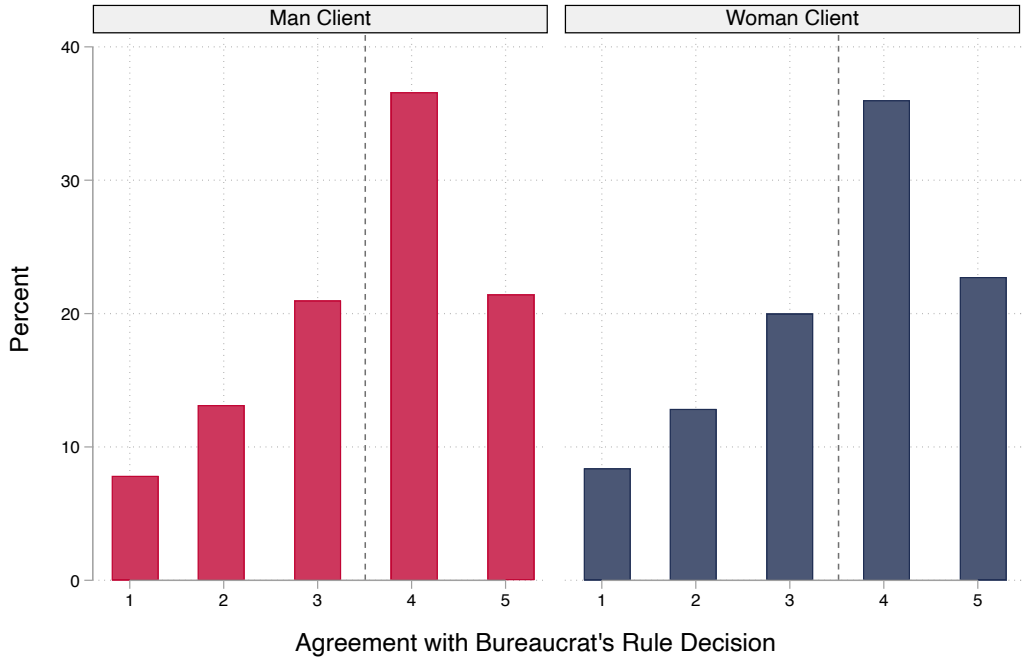


Figure 3-6: Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement with the Bureaucrat's Rule Decision by the Client's Deservingness

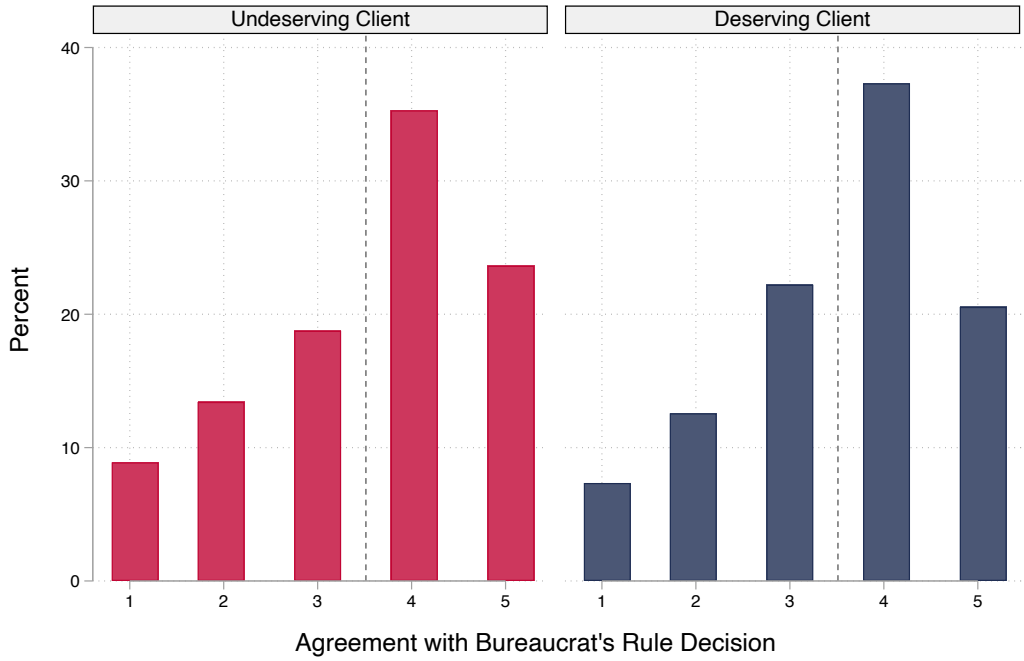
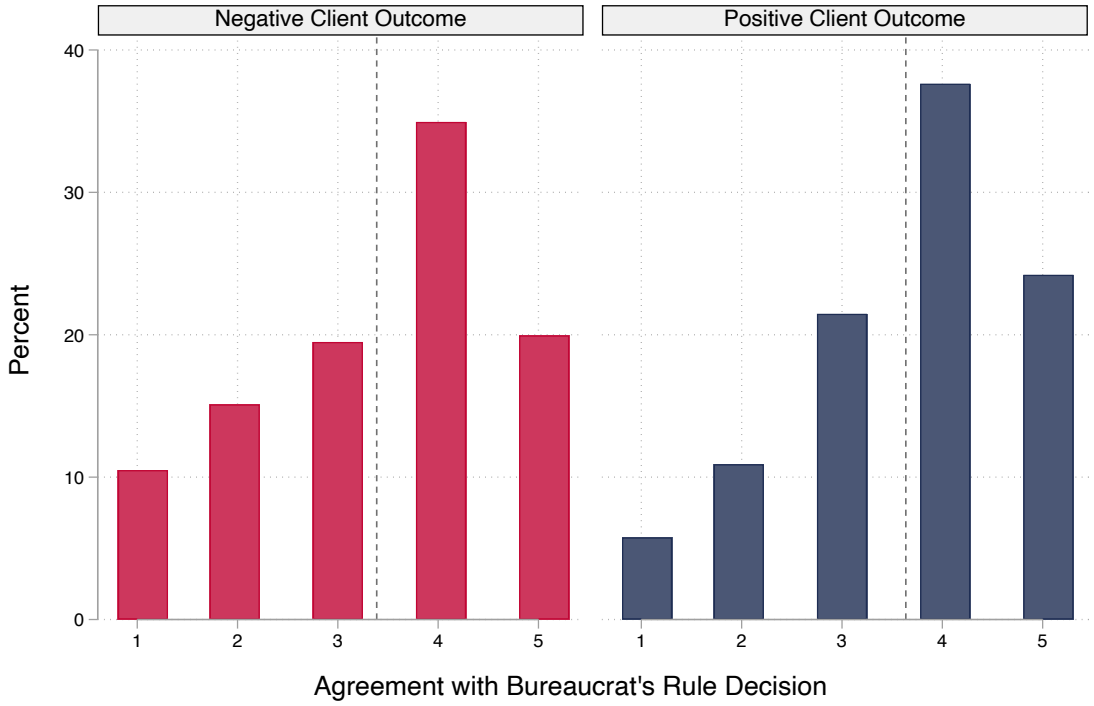


Figure 3-7: Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement with the Bureaucrat's Rule Decision by Client Outcome



On average, respondents expressed significantly more agreement with the bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior when the bureaucrat chose to follow the rules (4.10/5.00) than when the bureaucrat chose to break the rules for prosocial reasons—i.e., to help the client (2.93/5.00; $p < 0.01$).[9] Citizens' average level of agreement when the bureaucrat pro-socially broke the rules was closest to a 3.00/5.00, equivalent to a response of "Neither Agree nor Disagree," and the lowest average level of agreement across all treatment combinations was a 2.49/5.00 (see Appendix Table 3.2), almost exactly halfway between "Disagree" and "Neither Agree nor Disagree."

Examining respondents' mean level of agreement with the bureaucrat's rule decision across all 32 treatment combinations also allows me to evaluate my first research question. As seen Appendix Table 3.2, results show that the average respondent never expressed more agreement with

[9] T-tests of respondents' average agreement across each treatment variable are available in the appendix (Tables A3-A7).

a bureaucrat's prosocial rule-breaking decision than a bureaucrat's decision to follow agency rules. In fact, the *lowest* average agreement in treatments where the bureaucrat *followed* agency rules was a 3.83/5.00 while the *highest* average agreement across *PSRB* treatments was a 3.22/5.00.

Additionally, while the difference was more modest, respondents expressed significantly more agreement with the bureaucrat's rule decision when the client received a positive outcome (3.64/5.00) than when the client received a negative one (3.39/5.00; $p < 0.01$). Neither the client's race, gender, nor deservingness significantly affected respondents' mean level of agreement.

OLS Regression Results

Next, I estimate a series of OLS regression models, beginning with Model 1 which serves as a baseline (below):

Model 1: *Agreement with Bureaucrat's Rule Decision ~ Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance + Client Race + Client Gender + Client Deservingness + Client Outcome + Error*

Results from estimating this model are provided in Figure 3-8 (below), which shows the predicted effect of a 0 to 1 change in each treatment variable on respondents' average level of agreement with the bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior (full results are also provided below in Table 3.2).[10]

[10] As a robustness check, I ran all models using ordered logistic regression given that my dependent variable is ordinal (and again using a generalized ordered logistic model because the first model violated the proportional odds assumption). Results were functionally identical. In Model 1, for example, receiving a treatment in which the bureaucrat followed agency rules decreases the predicted probability of a respondent indicating a 1, 2, or 3 level of agreement (by 12%, 16.9%, and 15.1%, respectively) and increases the predicted probability of a respondent indicating a 4 or 5 level of agreement (by 15.1% and 28.8%). Receiving a treatment in which the client received a positive outcome led to increases in the predicted probability of indicating a 4 or 5 and decreases in the predicted probability of indicating a 1, 2, or 3 but all changes were comparatively minor, averaging 3.6%. Because results are consistent, I proceed by reporting estimates from OLS regression for ease of interpretation.

Figure 3-8: Marginal Effects of Treatment Variables on Citizens' Average Agreement with the Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Decision

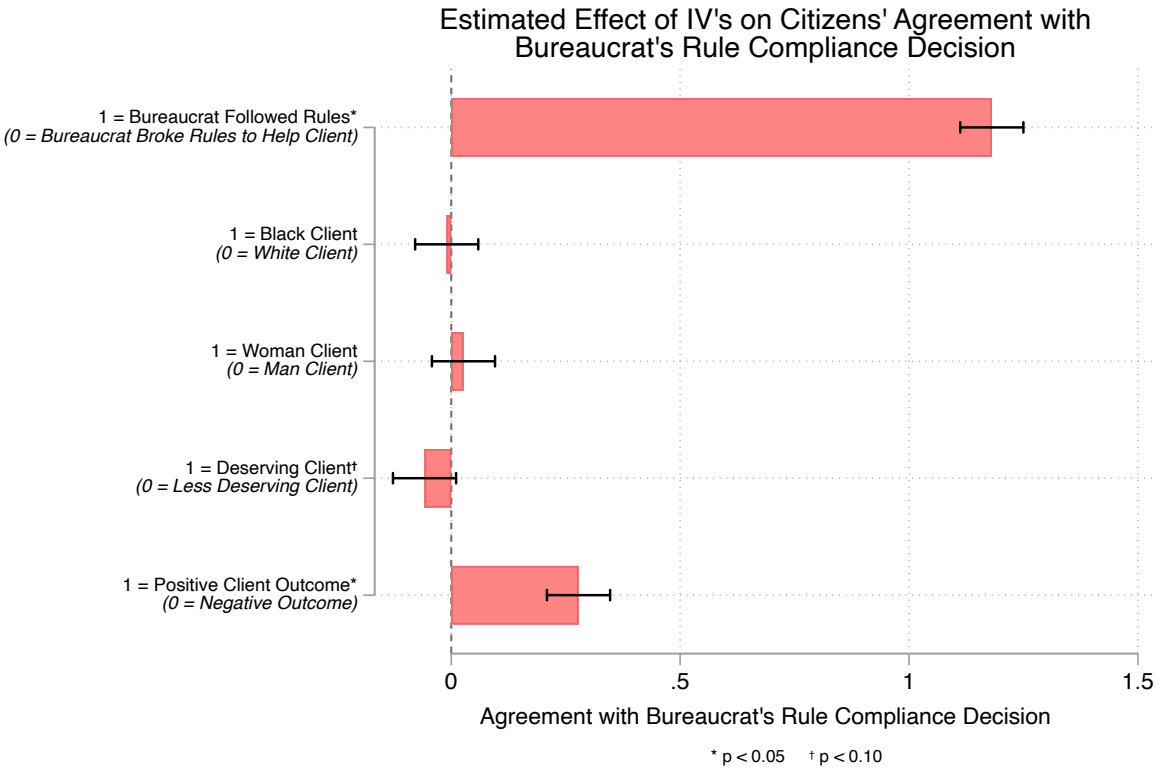


Table 3.2: OLS Regression Results

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
Follow rules	1.18	**	1.36	**	1.29	**	1.18	**	1.12	**	1.18	**
(ref = break)	(0.04)		(0.05)		(0.05)		(0.04)		(0.06)		(0.04)	
Black client	-0.01		-0.01		-0.01		-0.01					
(ref = white)	(0.04)		(0.04)		(0.04)		(0.04)					
Woman client	0.03		0.03		0.03		0.03					
(ref = man)	(0.04)		(0.04)		(0.04)		(0.04)					
Deserving client	-0.06	†	-0.06	†	0.05		-0.04		-0.06		-0.06	
(ref = undeserving)	(0.04)		(0.04)		(0.06)		(0.05)		(0.04)		(0.04)	
Positive outcome	0.28	**	0.46	**	0.28	**	0.30	**	0.28	**	0.16	**
(ref = negative)	(0.04)		(0.06)		(0.04)		(0.04)		(0.04)		(0.06)	
Identity match									0.03		-0.02	
(ref = <1 shared ID)									(0.06)		(0.06)	
Follow rules * Positive outcome			-0.35	**								
			(0.07)									
Follow rules * Deserving client					-0.21	**						
					(0.07)							
Positive outcome * Deserving client							-0.04					
							(0.07)					
Follow rules * Identity match									0.08			
									(0.08)			
Positive outcome * Identity match											0.17	*
											(0.08)	
Intercept	2.80	**	2.71	**	2.75	**	2.79	**	2.79	**	2.82	**
	(0.05)		(0.05)		(0.05)		(0.05)		(0.06)		(0.06)	
Observations	3,485		3,485		3,485		3,485		3,485		3,485	

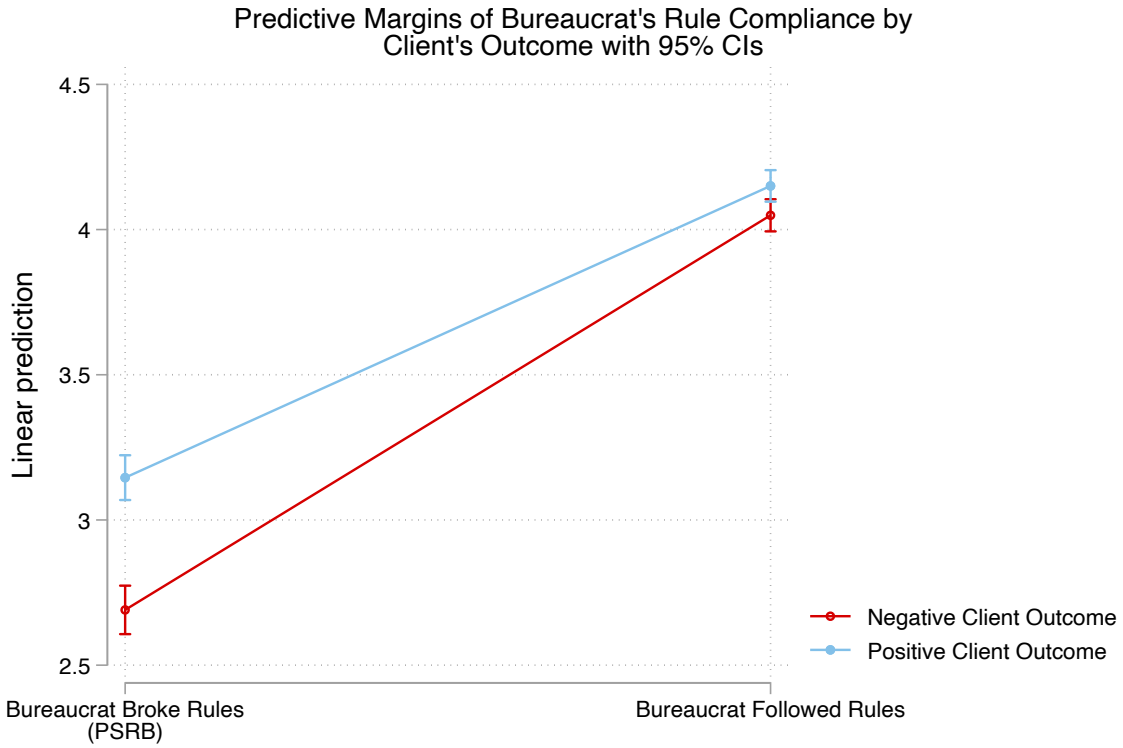
** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; † p <0.10

Results from Model 1 show that the bureaucrat's response to agency rules—i.e., whether the bureaucrat followed the rules or pro-socially broke them—is the strongest predictor of respondents' agreement with the bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior. Relative to treatments in which the

bureaucrat pro-socially broke the rules, following the rules resulted in a 23.6% increase in respondents' average level of agreement with the bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior (+1.18/5.00; $p < 0.01$). The client's outcome also significantly affected respondents' average level of agreement, with a positive outcome leading to a 5.56% increase in agreement compared to treatments in which the client received a negative outcome (+0.28/5.00; $p < 0.01$). Client deservingness had a significant effect at the 0.10 level ($p = 0.097$) as respondents expressed less agreement with bureaucrat's rule decision when the bureaucrat served a deserving client; however, the 1.2% (-0.06/5.00) decrease is not very substantively interesting. Neither the client's race ($p = 0.78$) nor gender ($p = 0.45$) significantly affected respondents' average level of agreement.

Having established baseline results, I now turn to my first hypothesis, which posits that citizens will more strongly agree with a street-level bureaucrats' decision to break agency rules for the explicit purpose of better serving a client when that decision results in a positive outcome for the client. I estimate another OLS regression model (Model 2) that adds an interaction term between the bureaucrat's compliance decision and the client's outcome to Model 1.

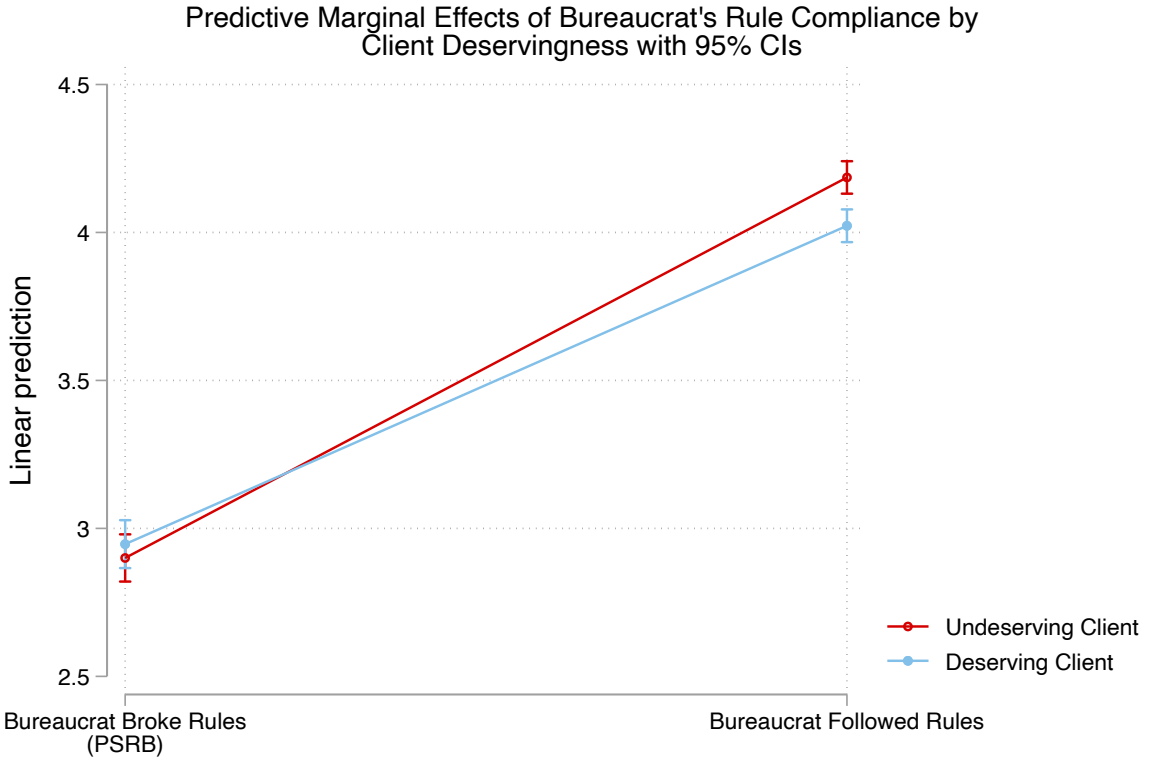
Figure 3-9: Marginal Effects of Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance by Client Outcome on Agreement with the Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Decision



As seen in Figure 3-9 (above; see also Table 3.2), the client's outcome induced significant changes in the average level of citizens' agreement with the bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior, but *only* for PSRB decisions. While breaking the rules led to a decrease in citizens' average level of agreement (relative to following them), a positive client outcome significantly reduced the size of this decrease (-1.36 vs. -1.00; $p < 0.01$). Thus, H1 is supported: on average, citizens expressed more agreement with the bureaucrat's PSRB decision when the bureaucrat's client received a positive outcome (relative to when the client received a negative outcome).

I next evaluate H2a and H2b. To test these hypotheses, I estimate Model 3, which includes an interaction term between the bureaucrat's rule compliance and the client's deservingness to Model 1.

Figure 3-10: Marginal Effects of the Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance on Respondents' Agreement with the Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Behavior by Client Deservingness

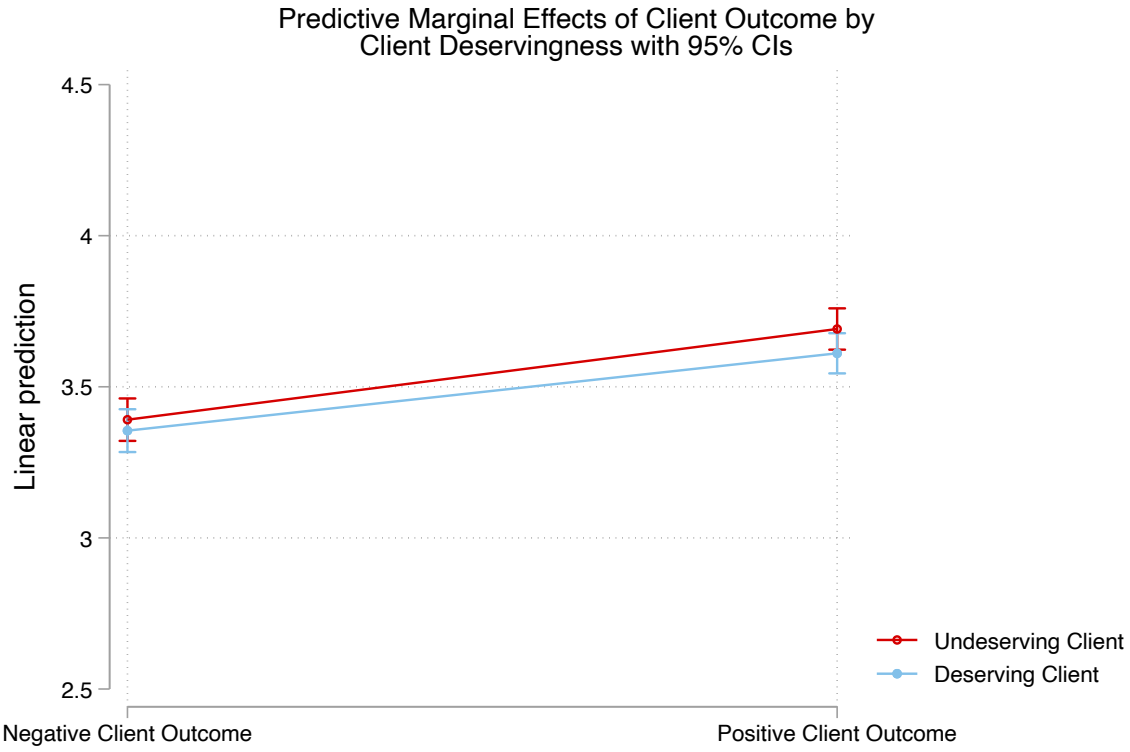


Results from Model 3 are seen in Figure 3-10 (above; see also Table 3.2). H2a is not supported: citizens did not express significantly more support for the bureaucrat's PSRB decision when the bureaucrat was serving a deserving client (relative to when they were serving an undeserving client). H2b, on the other hand, is weakly supported as citizens expressed significantly more support (+0.16; $p < 0.01$) for the bureaucrat's decision to follow agency rules when the bureaucrat was serving an undeserving client (relative to when serving a deserving client). That said, the 0.16 difference is substantively fairly small.

I now evaluate H3a and H3b, which expect that citizens will be more likely to agree with bureaucrats' decisions when those decisions result in clients getting the outcomes they "deserve." To

test these, I estimate Model 4, which includes an interaction term between client outcome and deservingness (results seen in Figure 3-11).

Figure 3-11: Marginal Effects of Client Outcome by Client Deservingness



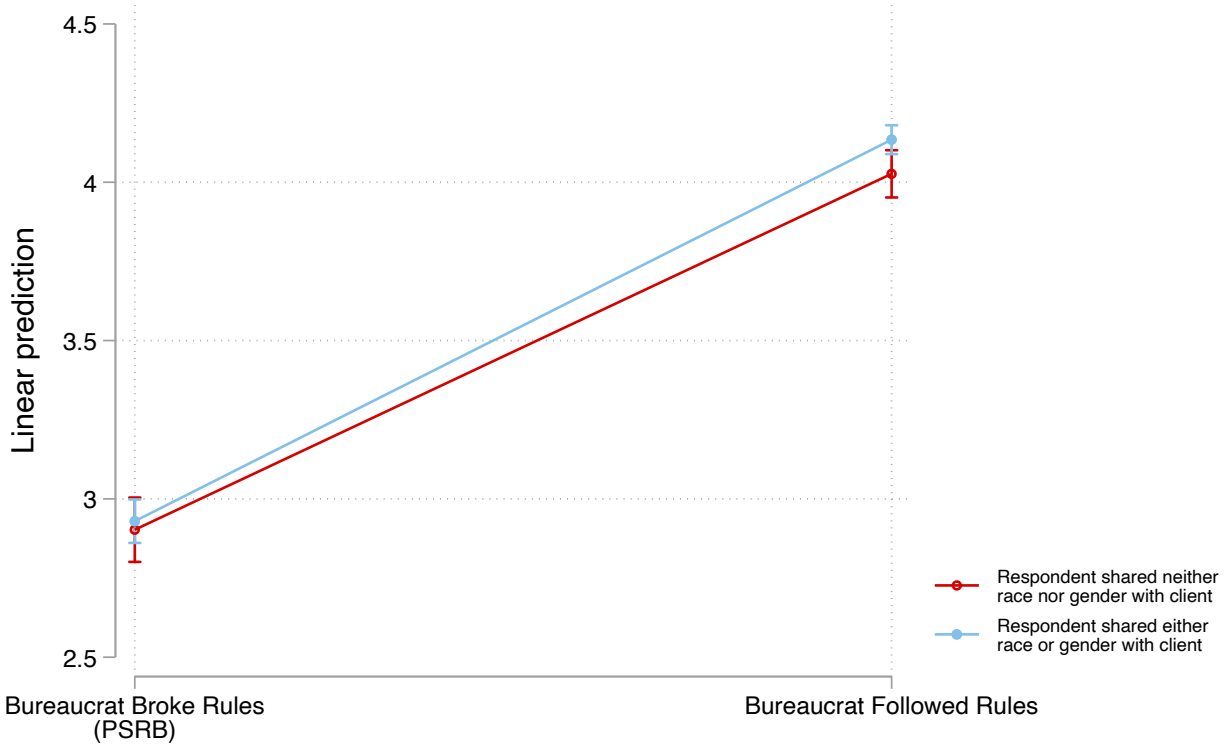
Findings do not support H3a—in fact, results show a significant difference ($p = 0.099$) in the opposite direction, as citizens expressed about 1.6% more agreement with the bureaucrat's rule compliance decision when undeserving clients received positive outcome (relative to when deserving clients received positive outcomes). H3b is also not supported by the data, as citizens did not express significantly more agreement with the bureaucrat when undeserving clients received negative outcomes (relative to when deserving clients received negative outcomes; $p = 0.47$). Overall, it is important to note that the largest difference in agreement (i.e., between *deserving* clients that received *negative* outcomes and *undeserving* clients that received *positive* outcomes) was only 6.7% ($p < 0.01$)—a difference that, while significant, is modest.

Hypotheses 4a posits that citizens will express significantly more agreement with a bureaucrat's PSRB decision when the bureaucrat is serving a client with which the citizen shares at least one social identity (relative to when the bureaucrat decides to break the rules for a client with whom the citizen does not share at least one identity); H4b posits that citizens will express significantly more agreement with a bureaucrat's decision to follow rules that limit the bureaucrat's ability to meet the client's needs when the bureaucrat is serving a client with whom the client does not share at least one social identity (relative to when serving clients that share at least one social identity with the citizen). To evaluate these hypotheses, I estimate Model 5 (below):

> ***Model 5:*** *Agreement with Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Decision ~ Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance + Client Gender + Client Deservingness + Client Outcome + Citizen/Client Identity Match + Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance * Citizen/Client Identity Match + Error*

Citizen/client identity match is dichotomously coded: if a respondent was a member of the same racial or gender group as the client they received in their treatment, they were coded as a 1; if respondents shared *neither* a racial nor gender identity with the client, they were coded as a 0.

Figure 3-12: Marginal Effects of Bureaucrat's Compliance by Client/Citizen Identity Match on Agreement with Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Behavior

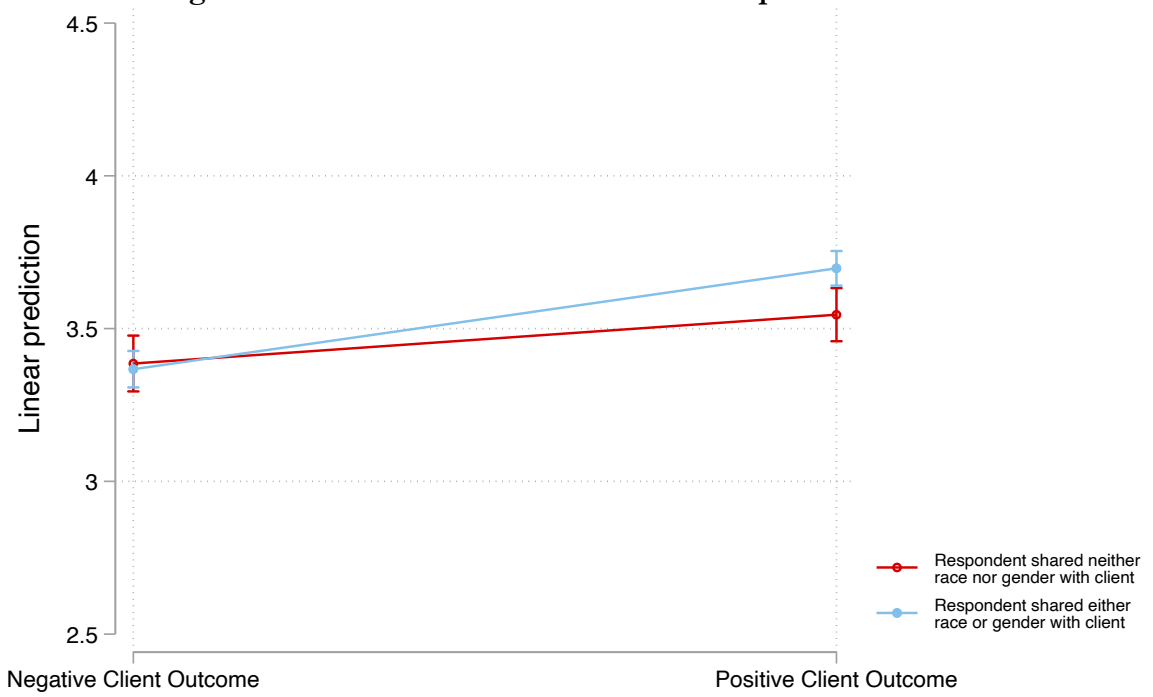


Results from estimating Model 5 are in Figure 3-12 (see also Table 3.2). Evidence indicates that neither H4a nor H4b are supported. Sharing at least one identity with the client did not significantly affect citizens' agreement with the bureaucrat's PSRB decision ($p = 0.67$). Contrary to expectations, respondents expressed significantly more agreement with the bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior when they followed the rules for an in-group client (4.13/5.00) than when they followed the rules for an out-group client (4.03/5.00; $p = 0.02$); that said, the roughly 2% difference is not very substantively significant. Findings suggest that citizens value bureaucratic compliance for both in-group and out-group clients.

To this point, results have not indicated that client outcomes matter a great deal to citizens. However, this may be because citizens care as much about *for whom* outcomes are achieved as they do the outcomes themselves. H5a (H5b) posits that positive (negative) client outcomes will only

increase respondents' agreement when respondents share (do not share) at least one social identity with the client. I evaluate H5a/b by estimating Model 6, which replaces Model 5's interaction term between the bureaucrat's compliance and the client/citizen identity match with one between the client's outcome and the client/citizen identity match.

Figure 3-13: Marginal Effects of Client Outcome by Client/Citizen Identity Match on Agreement with the Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Decision



As seen in Figure 3-13 (above; see also Table 3.2), H5a is very weakly supported: respondents expressed more agreement with the bureaucrat's rule compliance decision when the clients that received positive outcomes shared at least one identity with the respondent (3.70/5.00) than when the clients that received positive outcomes did not share an identity with the respondent (3.55/5.00; $p < 0.01$), though the difference is substantively quite small. H5b, however, is not supported, as negative client outcomes did not increase respondents' agreement when they did not share an identity with the client ($p = 0.74$).

Table 3.3: Summary of Hypotheses and Results

	Hypothesis	Support
RQ1	Will citizens ever agree more strongly with a bureaucrat's prosocial rule-breaking decision than a bureaucrat's decision to follow rules?	Not supported
H1	Citizens will express significantly more agreement with a bureaucrat's prosocial rule-breaking decision when the client receives a positive outcome (relative to when the client receives a negative outcome).	Supported
H2a	Citizens will express significantly more agreement with a street-level bureaucrat's PSRB decision when the bureaucrat is breaking rules for the to better serve a **deserving** client (relative to when the bureaucrat breaks the rules to better serve an undeserving client).	Not supported
H2b	Citizens will express significantly more agreement with a street-level bureaucrat's decision to follow rules that limit the bureaucrat's ability to meet a client's needs when citizens perceive the client as **undeserving** (relative to when the client is perceived as deserving).	Weakly supported
H3a	On average, citizens will express significantly more agreement with a bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior when deserving clients receive positive outcomes (relative to when undeserving clients receive positive outcomes).	Not supported – small but significant result in opposite direction
H3b	On average, citizens will express significantly less agreement with a bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior when deserving clients receive negative outcomes (relative to when undeserving clients receive negative outcomes).	Not supported
H4a	On average, citizens will express more agreement with a street-level bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior when the bureaucrat breaks the rules to better serve an **in-group** client—i.e., a client with which the citizen shares at least one identity (relative to when the bureaucrat breaks the rules to help an out-group client—i.e., someone that does not share at least one identity with the citizen).	Not supported
H4b	Citizens will agree more with a street-level bureaucrat's choice to follow rules that limit the bureaucrat's ability to meet a client's needs when the bureaucrat is serving an **out-group** client (i.e., a client who does not share at least one social identity with the citizen).	Not supported – small but significant result in opposite direction
H5a	Positive client outcomes will lead to citizens expressing significantly more agreement with a bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior when the client shares at least one identity with the citizen (relative to when the client does not share an identity with the citizen).	Weakly supported
H5b	Negative client outcomes will lead to citizens expressing significantly less agreement with the bureaucrat's rule compliance behavior when the client shares an identity with the citizen (relative to when the client does not share at least one identity with the citizen).	Not supported

Discussion

Results indicate that only a positive client outcome increases citizens' agreement with a bureaucrat's PSRB decision, as citizens expressed significantly more agreement with a bureaucrat's PSRB decision when their client received a positive outcome (relative to when the bureaucrat's client received a negative outcome). Neither the client's race, gender, nor deservingness impacted citizens' agreement with the bureaucrat's rule decision to a noteworthy degree. That said, citizens prefer compliance as, across models, citizens expressed between 20% - 27.2% more agreement with bureaucrats' decisions to follow agency rules than with bureaucrats' PSRB decisions, even though following the rules limited the bureaucrat's ability to meet the client's needs in my vignettes.

This study has a few limitations worth mentioning. Generalizability is always a concern with survey experiments. Though research has shown they can generate accurate estimates without representative samples (Coppock 2019; Coppock and McClellan 2019; Mullinix, Leeper, Druckman, and Freese 2015; Weinberg, Freese, and McElhattan 2014), I chose a representative sample in an attempt to mitigate sample-dependent concerns regarding generalizability.

Additionally, the vignettes were constructed around a specific human service interaction between bureaucrats and clients. However, citizens' preferences and decision calculi are likely contextual; as such, future research should examine the comparability of my findings to other types (e.g., in-house vs. contract service delivery; employment vs. other social service program areas) and levels (e.g., federal, local, or tribal) of government programs. This would strengthen our ability to draw generalizable conclusions about how citizens weigh processes and outcomes for other types of bureaucrat-client interactions (e.g., between a teacher and student or police officer and citizen). Along similar lines, future work is needed to validate the generalizability of these results to other countries, especially given that attitudes toward social service programs are influenced by each country's history (see Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011).

Finally, I chose to hold the bureaucrat's race and gender constant across treatments to isolate the effect of compliance and keep the number of treatments manageable. Manipulating the bureaucrat's identities may have resulted in interesting variation, especially considering previous work on biases in citizens' perceptions of bureaucrats (e.g., de Boer 2020). More studies that investigate the role of bureaucrats' identities (e.g., Fleming and Bodkin's 2022) and possible interactions between the identities of the bureaucrat, client, and respondent are needed.

Conclusion

Findings show that citizens agree more strongly with bureaucrats' responses to agency rules when bureaucrats choose to comply with them rather than break them—despite the fact that, in this study, compliance made it more difficult for bureaucrats to meet clients' needs and that rule breaking was done for prosocial reasons (i.e., to better serve the client). While the average citizen did not express strong disagreement with bureaucrats' prosocial rule-breaking decisions, they always expressed more agreement with rule-following decisions than prosocial rule-breaking decisions, and findings were largely robust to changes in the client's race, gender, deservingness, and outcome. Though evidence suggests that the ends (i.e., the client's outcome) partially justified the means (i.e., the bureaucrat's choice to break agency rules) for some citizens, the average citizen seemed to prefer rule compliance to rule breaking, even rule breaking for prosocial reasons.

One implication from this study is the need to design rules in a way to both increase rule abidance (e.g., DeHart-Davis 2009, 2017) and to allow for flexible, tailored service provision within the rules (DeHart-Davis 2007; see also Merton 1939). After all, most bureaucrats are not rule breakers by default—it is the gap between what the rules allow and bureaucrats' perceptions of what clients deserve that often drive them to bend or break rules (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2022; Potipiroon 2022). Moving forward, we must strive to design rules with an eye toward tailored service

provision so that bureaucrats have the flexibility needed to meet specific needs whilst also respecting citizens' preferences for rule compliance.

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Appendix

Appendix Table 3.1: Descriptive Statistics of Sample

	N	Mean
Race		
White	3,485	0.67
Black	3,485	0.19
American Indian	3,485	0.03
Asian	3,485	0.05
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3,485	0.01
Hispanic or Latina/o/x	3,485	0.10
Gender		
Man	3,485	0.48
Woman	3,485	0.51
Nonbinary	3,485	0.01
Other gender	3,485	0.00
Political Identity		
Strong Democrat	3,485	0.24
Lean Democrat	3,485	0.19
Independent	3,485	0.24
Lean Republican	3,485	0.14
Strong Republican	3,485	0.15
Education		
High school/GED	3,485	0.26
Some college, no degree	3,485	0.23
Associates or technical school	3,485	0.13
Bachelor's degree	3,485	0.24
Graduate degree	3,485	0.09
Income		
Less than $25k	3,485	0.22
$25k - $49k	3,485	0.26
$50k - $74k	3,485	0.19
$75k - $99k	3,485	0.12
$100k - $150k	3,485	0.11
$150k or more	3,485	0.07

Appendix Table 3.2: Mean Agreement with Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Behavior Across All Treatment Combinations

Bureaucrat's Rule Decision	Client Identity	Client Deservingness	Client Outcome	Mean	[95% CI]	
Follow Rules	White woman	Deserving	Positive	4.136	3.992	4.281
Follow Rules	White man	Deserving	Positive	4.085	3.931	4.238
Follow Rules	Black woman	Deserving	Positive	4.058	3.900	4.216
Follow Rules	Black man	Deserving	Positive	4.083	3.939	4.227
Follow Rules	White woman	Undeserving	Positive	4.234	4.076	4.393
Follow Rules	White man	Undeserving	Positive	4.202	4.059	4.345
Follow Rules	Black woman	Undeserving	Positive	4.214	4.066	4.363
Follow Rules	Black man	Undeserving	Positive	4.209	4.029	4.389
Follow Rules	White woman	Deserving	Negative	4.027	3.855	4.200
Follow Rules	White man	Deserving	Negative	4.015	3.877	4.154
Follow Rules	Black woman	Deserving	Negative	3.932	3.760	4.104
Follow Rules	Black man	Deserving	Negative	3.827	3.660	3.995
Follow Rules	White woman	Undeserving	Negative	4.167	4.007	4.327
Follow Rules	White man	Undeserving	Negative	4.115	3.963	4.268
Follow Rules	Black woman	Undeserving	Negative	4.205	4.069	4.341
Follow Rules	Black man	Undeserving	Negative	4.093	3.938	4.249
Broke Rules	White woman	Deserving	Positive	3.122	2.894	3.349
Broke Rules	White man	Deserving	Positive	3.100	2.891	3.309
Broke Rules	Black woman	Deserving	Positive	3.189	2.964	3.413
Broke Rules	Black man	Deserving	Positive	3.127	2.911	3.344
Broke Rules	White woman	Undeserving	Positive	3.053	2.831	3.275
Broke Rules	White man	Undeserving	Positive	3.178	2.955	3.401
Broke Rules	Black woman	Undeserving	Positive	3.181	2.979	3.384
Broke Rules	Black man	Undeserving	Positive	3.221	2.996	3.447
Broke Rules	White woman	Deserving	Negative	2.845	2.609	3.080
Broke Rules	White man	Deserving	Negative	2.723	2.476	2.970
Broke Rules	Black woman	Deserving	Negative	2.719	2.478	2.959
Broke Rules	Black man	Deserving	Negative	2.717	2.480	2.954
Broke Rules	White woman	Undeserving	Negative	2.491	2.260	2.722
Broke Rules	White man	Undeserving	Negative	2.748	2.518	2.977
Broke Rules	Black woman	Undeserving	Negative	2.785	2.556	3.014
Broke Rules	Black man	Undeserving	Negative	2.522	2.288	2.756

Appendix Table 3.3: Results from t-test – Mean Agreement with Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Behavior by the Bureaucrat's Decision to Prosocially Break or Follow Rules

Group	n	Mean	St Err	[95% Conf. Interval]		p-value
Bureaucrat Broke Rules (PSRB)	1,740	2.93	0.03	2.87	2.98	
Bureaucrat Followed Rules	1,745	4.10	0.02	4.06	4.14	
Difference		**-1.17**	**.036**	**-1.24**	**-1.10**	**0.0000**

Appendix Table 3.4: t-test – Mean Agreement with Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Behavior by Client Outcome

Group	n	Mean	St Err	[95% Conf. Interval]		p-value
Negative Client Outcome	1,734	3.39	0.03	3.33	3.45	
Positive Client Outcome	1,751	3.64	0.03	3.58	3.69	
Difference		**-0.25**	**0.04**	**-0.33**	**-0.17**	**0.0000**

Appendix Table 3.5: t-test – Mean Agreement with Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Behavior by Client Race

Group	n	Mean	St Err	[95% Conf. Interval]		p-value
White Client	1,746	3.53	0.03	3.47	3.59	
Black Client	1,739	3.49	0.03	3.44	3.55	
Difference		**0.04**	**0.04**	**-0.04**	**0.12**	**0.378**

Appendix Table 3.6: t-test – Mean Agreement with Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Behavior by Client Gender

Group	n	Mean	St Err	[95% Conf. Interval]		p-value
Man Client	1,735	3.51	0.03	3.45	3.56	
Woman Client	1,750	3.52	0.03	3.46	3.58	
Difference		**-0.01**	**0.04**	**-0.09**	**0.07**	**0.7743**

Appendix Table 3.7: t-test – Mean Agreement with Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance Behavior by Client Deservingness

Group	n	Mean	St Err	[95% Conf. Interval]		p-value
Undeserving Client	1,743	3.51	0.03	3.46	3.57	
Deserving Client	1,742	3.51	0.03	3.46	3.57	
Difference		**0.002**	**0.04**	**-0.08**	**0.08**	**0.9607**

Chapter 4: Whose Fault? How Citizens Assign Blame When Clients Experience Negative Outcomes

Abstract

How citizens respond when clients experience negative outcomes largely depends on whom they blame for those outcomes. If the bureaucracy is not blamed when its clients experience negative outcomes, citizens are unlikely to attempt to hold it accountable for those outcomes. I extend previous research on blame attribution by examining how citizens attribute blame for negative client outcomes across four categories (the bureaucrat, client, agency's rules, and "other factors"). Using data from a survey experiment, I leverage variation in the client's social identity and deservingness to understand how each influences respondents' blame allocations. I find that clients are primarily blamed for their negative outcomes, averaging more than twice as much blame as the next category. While the client's identities were largely inconsequential, clients framed as deserving received significantly less blame than those framed as undeserving. Supporting hypotheses from social psychology, when bureaucrats followed agency rules, they received less blame and the agency's rules received more.

Whether and how citizens respond to negative client outcomes largely depends on how they assign blame for those outcomes. If citizens do not blame government for a given failure, they are unlikely to attempt to hold the government—whether politicians, agencies, or bureaucrats—accountable for the failure (James et al. 2016). While scholars have examined how citizens attribute blame to politicians and the bureaucracy for service provision failures, more work is needed to understand whether/how much citizens blame clients, or the social service recipients who experience negative outcomes. These are important questions, as research in other disciplines suggests that citizens may blame clients for negative outcomes, even if clients have little control over the outcome. If citizens blame clients rather than bureaucrats or agencies for service failures, they are less likely to hold the bureaucrats and politicians who are responsible for providing the services accountable, potentially leaving government unaccountable for its errors.

In this article, I examine how citizens attribute blame for negative street-level service outcomes to four possible recipients: a bureaucrat, a client, an agency, and "other factors". I use data from a vignette-based survey experiment (n = 1,734) based on a hypothetical interaction between a street-level bureaucrat and client, leveraging variation in the client's deservingness and social identity to test hypotheses about how citizens' blame attributions are affected by each. Borrowing from social psychological theories, I also vary the bureaucrat's compliance with restrictive agency rules to better understand how perceptions of control influence citizens' blame attributions.

Results reveal that clients are overwhelmingly blamed for the negative outcomes they experience, with respondents assigning over 2.3-times as much blame to the client than the bureaucrat, agency, or "other factors", respectively ($p < 0.001$). Consistent with expectations, client deservingness strongly influenced respondents' blame allocations: compared to those assigned a deserving client, respondents who received an undeserving client assigned an average of 54% more blame to the client, 16% less blame to the bureaucrat, 28% less blame to the agency, and 39% less

blame to "other factors". Contrary to hypotheses, respondents did not assign less blame to clients with whom they shared a social identity; however, the client's gender was not inconsequential, as respondents assigned an average of 11% less blame when they served women clients. Finally, hypotheses regarding the importance of perceived control over the situation were indirectly supported, as respondents assigned 55% more blame to the agency when receiving treatments in which the bureaucrat followed restrictive agency rules but assigned 38% more blame to the bureaucrat in treatments where the bureaucrat went around said rules. As I will argue, these findings have significant accountability implications.

Theory

Citizens' ability to hold actors and institutions accountable largely hinges on their ability to correctly identify the actor or institution responsible for a given outcome.[1] Citizens' misattributions of blame can result in holding actors responsible for factors out of their control (Marvel and Girth 2016). Previous research across disciplines has explored how factors such as federalism and governance structures (Leland, Mohr, and Piatak 2021; Marvel and Girth 2016), outsourcing/third-party service provision (James et al. 2016; Leland, Mohr, and Piatak 2021; Piatak, Mohr, and Leland 2017; Ramirez 2021), biases and/or motivated reasoning (James and Van Ryzin 2017; Marvel 2015; 2016), partisanship (Tilley and Hobolt 2011; Lerman and Trachtman 2020; Lyons and Jaeger 2014), and even information about others citizens' blame attributions (Sievert et al. 2020) influence whether and to whom citizens allocate blame when they believe the government is performing poorly.

A different line of inquiry also shows that citizens' opinions of policies and programs largely correspond with their perceptions of the people the policies/programs affect, with citizens being more likely to support policies/programs that either: **1)** benefit target populations seen as powerful or deserving/burden those seen as weak or undeserving (Bell 2020, 2021; Keiser and Miller 2020; Nicholson-Crotty, Miller, and Keiser 2021; Schneider & Ingram 1993) or; **2)** benefit fellow members

of their social identity group(s)/burden those with whom they do not share a social identity (Converse 1964; Elder and O'Brian 2022; Nelson and Kinder 1996; see also Brewer 2007; Mason and Wronski 2018; Tajfel 1981).

To date, these two streams of literature have mostly remained separate. As such, more research is needed to understand whether citizens' perceptions of social service recipients—the bureaucracy's clients—influence how (and to whom) they assign blame when clients experience negative service outcomes. If citizens blame clients rather than bureaucrats or agencies for poor outcomes, they are less likely to hold the bureaucrats and politicians who are responsible for providing the services accountable, potentially leaving government unaccountable for its errors—and if citizens use deservingness or social identity group membership as heuristics for blame allocation, some clients may be more likely to be blamed than others.

Why Citizens Might Blame Clients Rather Than the Bureaucracy for Negative Outcomes

The social psychology literature describes numerous sources of bias in attribution. One such source is fundamental attribution error, or the tendency of individuals to explain *other's* behavior as the result of *internal* (e.g., personal characteristics) rather than *external* (e.g., broader circumstances) factors (Heider 1958; Fiske and Taylor 2013). In terms of a social service recipient, this could look like attributing a person's reliance on a food assistance program to their laziness rather than a nation-wide economic recession. A closely related (though more self-serving) phenomenon is the actor-observer effect, or individuals' tendency to explain *their own* behavior as a function of *external* rather than *internal* factors (Jones and Nisbett 1972). This could look like attributing one's own reliance on a food assistance program to a difficult situation (e.g., "Nobody is hiring right now.") instead of themselves (e.g., "I was fired from my last two jobs."). As such, when clients experience negative outcomes, citizens may blame clients *by default*, attributing said outcomes to something

about the client—an internal factor—rather to the bureaucrat, agency rules, or other external factors.

Another reason to expect that citizens may not only blame clients but *prefer* to blame clients comes via the just-world hypothesis. The just-world hypothesis posits that individuals' biased attribution of blame is motivated by a desire to minimize uncertainty and maintain a sense of control over their environment (Lerner 1980; Lerner and Miller 1978), commonly stated as the belief that "people get what they deserve and deserve what they get." While believing that the world is fundamentally just is comforting to individuals, believing otherwise can feel very threatening, as it implies that something bad may happen to them that they do not deserve and cannot prevent. This may explain why individuals blame others for the negative outcomes they receive, as blaming others allows individuals to continue believing that the world is just.

Taken together, it seems possible—and perhaps likely—that some citizens would blame social service recipients for their misfortunes. Whether stemming from biases in blame attribution or to maintain their belief in a just world, citizens may be more comfortable blaming the bureaucracy's *clients* than blaming the bureaucracy itself or broader circumstances. As such, I expect that citizens will allocate more blame to clients who receive negative outcomes than to the bureaucrat or agency providing the service.

> ***H1:*** *Citizens will allocate more blame to clients who receive negative outcomes than to the bureaucrat, the agency's rules, or "other factors."*

Why Citizens Might Blame the Bureaucracy Rather Than Clients for Negative Outcomes

There are also reasons to suspect that citizens might blame the bureaucracy—in the case of this article, the serving agency's rules and/or bureaucrat providing the service, respectively—for negative service outcomes. In fact, another hypothesis from social psychology, the defense attribution hypothesis, provides one such reason: if citizens perceive similarities between themselves

and the client **or** believe it is likely that they will encounter a similar situation in the future, they may be more apt the blame the bureaucrat, agency, or other factors to protect themselves from being blamed in the future (Burger, 1981; Shaver, 1970). The defense attribution hypothesis has been supported by research on victim blaming, with studies showing that the likelihood of blaming victims of sexual assault or rape is inversely correlated with individuals' perceived similarly with the victim (Grubb and Harrower 2008; Grubb and Turner 2012). As such, citizens who share a social identity (e.g., race or gender) with the client or can imagine using a similar social service in the future (e.g., low-income or unemployed citizens) may try to avoid blaming the client for a negative outcome to defend themselves from future blame.

The public administration literature provides a second reason to suspect that citizens will blame the bureaucracy (i.e., the bureaucrat or agency's rules): anti-public sector bias. Scholars have long noted that citizens tend to hold a disparaging view of the public sector (Goodsell 2003). Marvel's (2015; 2016) work provided some of the first experimental evidence of anti-public sector bias's existence, showing it can even affect citizens' *unconscious* evaluations of performance. Taken together, it stands to reason that citizens may assign more blame to the bureaucracy than clients when clients receive negative outcomes.

> ***H2:*** *Citizens will allocate more blame to the serving bureaucrat and/or the serving agency's rules than to clients when clients receive negative outcomes.*

How Deservingness, Identity, and Control May Influence Citizens' Blame Assignment

While more work is needed to specifically understand whether/how citizens assign blame to clients who experience negative service outcomes, research suggests that citizens may blame clients for their *general* misfortunes. The social construction of target populations framework explains that stereotypes about a target population influence how that population is treated by government, with populations constructed as deserving being more likely to receive policy benefits and those

constructed as less deserving being more likely to receive burdens (Bell 2020; 2021; Schneider and Ingram 1993). The idea here is that the public will be more supportive of policies that treat target populations "appropriately", with appropriateness being a function of the target populations' social constructions.

So, why do citizens support policies that burden groups seen as undeserving? One reason is that deservingness is largely defined around perceptions of responsibility and control—those whose misfortunes are seen as uncontrollable are pitied and worthy of governmental help; those viewed as responsible for their own plight are not (Gilens 1999; van Oorschot 2000; Petersen 2012; Schneider and Ingram 1993; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1993; see also Alicke 2000; Alicke et al. 2015; Weiner 1985). Put differently, some citizens don't support policies that help people in difficult situations because they *blame* those people for "putting themselves" into the situations. As such, when clients experience negative service outcomes, I expect citizens to allocate more blame to undeserving clients than deserving ones—in other words, that clients who were blamed before (and, thus, seen as undeserving) will be blamed again.

H3: *Undeserving clients will receive more blame for the negative outcomes they receive than deserving clients.*

As discussed, the public is more likely to support policies that allocate benefits to deserving populations *and those that allocate burdens to undeserving populations* see also Nelson and Kinder 1996; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1993). Similar evidence has been found for programs, with citizens expressing more support for programs that place administrative burdens on undeserving clients (Keiser and Miller 2020; Nicholson-Crotty, Miller, and Keiser 2021; Petersen et al. 2010), perhaps because citizens view administrative burdens as guarding public resources from undeserving clients. As such, I expect that citizens will allocate less blame for clients' negative outcomes to the bureaucracy—whether individual bureaucrats and/or agency rules—when clients are seen as

undeserving: citizens may believe the bureaucracy is doing its job when undeserving clients receive the outcomes they "deserve."

> ***H4:*** *The bureaucrat and the rules of the agency responsible for providing a service will receive less blame for negative service outcomes when clients are viewed as undeserving (relative to when clients are viewed as deserving).*

Whether citizens blame clients for negative outcomes may depend on whether they are members of the same social group as clients. According to social identity theory, people automatically sort themselves and others into groups based on social identities (e.g., race, gender, age, etc.); membership in these categories largely dictates social behavior, and individuals tend to favor people who are members of the same groups as them (i.e., in-group members) to those who are not (i.e., out-group members; Brewer 2007; Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1986). It is well established that citizens frequently evaluate policies based on how they affect social groups, tending to favor policies that help in-group members—and sometimes even those that burden out-group members (Conover 1984; Druckman, Klar, Krupnikov, Levendusky, et al. 2021; Elder and O'Brian 2022; Nelson and Kinder 1996). It stands to reason that citizens might also use social group membership as a heuristic to decide how and to whom they will assign blame for negative service outcomes, blaming in-group members less and out-group members more because of favoritism. This seems even more likely when considering the aforementioned defense attribution hypothesis, as citizens may attribute less blame to people like them—such as in-group members—in order to protect themselves from being blamed if they find themselves in a similar situation in the future (Burger, 1981; Shaver, 1970). Taken together, I expect citizens will be less likely to blame in-group clients for negative service outcomes, both because citizens favor clients with whom they share a social identity and because they want to protect themselves from future blame; due to out-group animus, I also expect that citizens will allocate more blame to out-group clients.

> ***H5:*** *Citizens will allocate less blame to in-group clients and more blame to out-group clients.*

Finally, a central component of blame attribution is controllability. Heider's (1958) work on attribution theory is foundational here, as he was among the first to delineate between internal and external explanations of behavior (in his terms, attributions of behavior as the result of personal vs. environmental forces). The idea is that individuals explain actions/behaviors—of themselves and others—as the result of some combination of internal (e.g., personality, motivation, effort) or external (e.g., difficulty, luck, other people) factors. From here, two assessments are made to determine causality: the weight of internal vs. external factors (i.e., determining whether an actor could have caused something) and the actor's causal influence (i.e., the extent to which an actor actually did cause something; Heider 1958). If an individual believes an actor can/could have produced an outcome *and* that the actor caused the outcome, the individual is assigning what Heider (1958) called personal causality—i.e., explaining behavior as the result of the actor. However, if an individual either believes an actor cannot/could not have produced an outcome *or* that the outcome was not caused by the actor, the individual is assigning impersonal causality—i.e., explaining behavior as the result of the environment.[2] The key point for the present study is that Heider's (1958) work suggests that humans attribute responsibility for a given outcome by assessing both the actor's potential control and exerted control over a situation.

Since Heider's work, controllability has continued to be a critical dimension of works that followed. Shaver (1985) proposed a broader five-item theory of blame attribution that includes causality, or the extent to which an observer believes an actor caused the outcome in question. Similarly, Alicke's (2000) culpable control model of blame attribution purports that individuals consider an actor's personal control over the outcome—or the actor's capacity to cause and intent to cause the outcome—when deciding how much to blame the actor (Alicke et al. 2015).

> ***H6:*** *Citizens' blame allocations depend on the extent to which they perceive an actor—whether the client, bureaucrat, or agency's rules—as having control over the outcome.*

Methods

Respondents

To assess how citizens allocate blame for service provision failures, I use a factorial survey experiment (Auspurg and Hinz 2015). Respondents (n = 1,734) were recruited via Lucid's Theorem panel. Descriptive statistics for the sample are available in the supplemental material. Though a convenience rather than a random sample, Lucid balances participants in each survey to ensure maximum representativeness and employs numerous measures to increase data quality.[1] Scholars have found that results obtained from samples of Lucid's Theorem panel approximate those obtained from nationally representative samples of Americans (Coppock and McClellan 2019).

I conducted a series of balance tests using 29 different demographic dummy variables to assess whether there were significant differences in respondents across my 16 treatment groups. While there were no significant differences for 27/29 variables, two were not balanced (see supplementary material for full results). Both variables were income variables and, while there is some debate over whether to include variables upon which treatment groups are not balanced as controls *solely because* of the imbalance (see: Mutz, Pemantle, and Pham 2019), I already planned to include respondents' income as a control for reasons discussed below. As such, the balance tests led me to conclude that the sample was quite well balanced across my treatment groups.

Vignette

The vignette is based on a real-world account of a street-level bureaucrat serving a client provided in Story 1.1 "A Happy Ending" of Maynard-Moody and Musheno's *Cops, Teachers, Counselors* (2022). The vignette (full text available in supplemental material) centers around an interaction between a hypothetical client and an employment counselor (a street-level bureaucrat) named Jake Becker who works for a state government's employment and career development office.[3,4] The bureaucrat is tasked with helping the client find a job at a time when jobs are hard to

come by in the area. Eventually, the bureaucrat finds a job with great pay and benefits for the client, but there is a problem: the job is an hour's drive away and the client has neither a car nor access to public transportation. In the end, the client accepts the job but is only able to keep it for a few weeks and comes back to the agency for additional help.

Treatment Variables

I use a 4x2x2 factorial survey experiment, meaning that there are a total of 16 treatment groups with each group representing a distinct combination of treatment variables to which respondents could be randomly assigned. Tables 4.1 and 4.2, below, summarize the treatment variables and combinations. I included a post-treatment manipulation check to assess the effectiveness of my treatments—i.e., whether respondents read and remembered the treatment they received. Approximately 70.4% of respondents passed the manipulation check.[5]

The first treatment variable is the client's demographic profile, operationalized here as the client's race and gender. Variation in the client's race and gender is signaled by using one of four different names for the client in the vignette (Black woman = Tanisha; Black man = Keyshawn; White woman = Katelyn; White man = Brett). Names were selected based on previous research in which over 90% of respondents associated each name with its corresponding race (Gaddis 2017).[6]

Next, variation in the bureaucrat's rule compliance decision is signaled by explaining that the bureaucrat either chose to prosocially break rules (i.e., break the rules for the explicit purpose of helping the client) or to follow agency rules. In treatments featuring the bureaucrat's prosocial rule-breaking decision, it is explained that the bureaucrat requests training funds and a professional clothing allowance for the client but tells the client to use the money to help purchase a vehicle. In treatments in which the bureaucrat complies with agency rules, it is explained that the bureaucrat chose to follow agency rules and, as a result, did not help the client purchase a vehicle. The agency's rules are framed as restrictive in that they prevent the bureaucrat from helping the client. This is

designed to signal shifts in how much control or influence the bureaucrat had over the client's outcome, with prosocial rule-breaking treatments explaining the bureaucrat went around agency rules to help the client (more bureaucratic control) while rule-following treatments explain that the bureaucrat deliberates before deciding "…there was nothing he could do: rules are rules" (more agency control/less bureaucratic control).

Next, consistent with the literature (Bell 2020, 2021), I signal variation in the client's deservingness by randomly varying signals of the client's earned deservingness and resource deservingness (see: Jilke and Tummers 2018) across treatments. Earned deservingness is operationalized by more deserving clients being described as punctual and motivated, while less deserving clients are described as frequently late and less motivated. Resource deservingness is operationalized by more deserving clients being described as college graduates who were high performers at their prior jobs—intended to convey a higher likelihood of success at their new job—while less deserving clients are said to be G.E.D. holders who were fired from their previous job due to poor performance.

Table 4.1: Treatment Variables and Possible Values

Variable	Possible Values
Client Background	**Black Woman** (Tanisha); **Black Man** (Keyshawn); **White Woman** (Katelyn); **White Man** (Brett)
Client's Framed Deservingness	**More deserving** (college grad, high performer, lost job when prior employer went bankrupt, motivated and never late); **Less deserving** (earned G.E.D., lost previous job due to poor performance, did not seem motivated and often late)
Bureaucrat's Rule Decision	**Followed rules** (did not misuse funds or help buy vehicle, agency has more control over outcome); **broke rules** (misused funds to help client buy vehicle, bureaucrat has more control over outcome)

Note: *Bolded words are treatments; summaries are in parentheses.*

Table 4.2: Treatment Combinations

Treatment Group	Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance	Client Race	Client Gender	Client Deservingness
1	Follow	White	Woman	Deserving
2	Follow	White	Man	Deserving
3	Follow	Black	Woman	Deserving
4	Follow	Black	Man	Deserving
5	Follow	White	Woman	Undeserving
6	Follow	White	Man	Undeserving
7	Follow	Black	Woman	Undeserving
8	Follow	Black	Man	Undeserving
9	Break	White	Woman	Deserving
10	Break	White	Man	Deserving
11	Break	Black	Woman	Deserving
12	Break	Black	Man	Deserving
13	Break	White	Woman	Undeserving
14	Break	White	Man	Undeserving
15	Break	Black	Woman	Undeserving
16	Break	Black	Man	Undeserving

Additional Independent Variables

To assess the effect of social group membership on respondents' blame allocation, I include a variable for respondents' race (one dummy for White respondents where 0 = non-White, 1 = White and one for Black respondents where 0 = non-Black, 1 = Black), and respondents' gender (0 = man, 1 = woman). I then use information about respondents' social group membership along with information about the treatment group to which they were randomly assigned to construct two additional independent variables: one indicating whether respondents shared a race with the client (0 = no race match, 1 = race match) and one indicating whether they shared a gender with the client (0 = no gender match, 1 = gender match).

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable here is respondents' blame allocation for the client's negative outcome—i.e., the fact that the client was only able to keep the job for a few weeks and returned to

the agency for help. This is measured by asking respondents to allocate 10 "blame points" to the bureaucrat, client, agency rules, or "other factors" based on how much blame each deserves for the client's negative outcome (for full wording, see supplemental material). Provided that the sum of their assigned points was 10, respondents were free to assign blame points at their discretion, which included the ability to assign all 10 blame points to a single category or 0 points to a category/ies if desired.[7] The "other factors" category is included to give respondents a place to assign blame to a category other than the bureaucrat, client, or agency if they did not blame either of the first three categories for the client's outcome but is also an interesting category in its own right given the expectations laid out in H1 and H2.

Control Variables

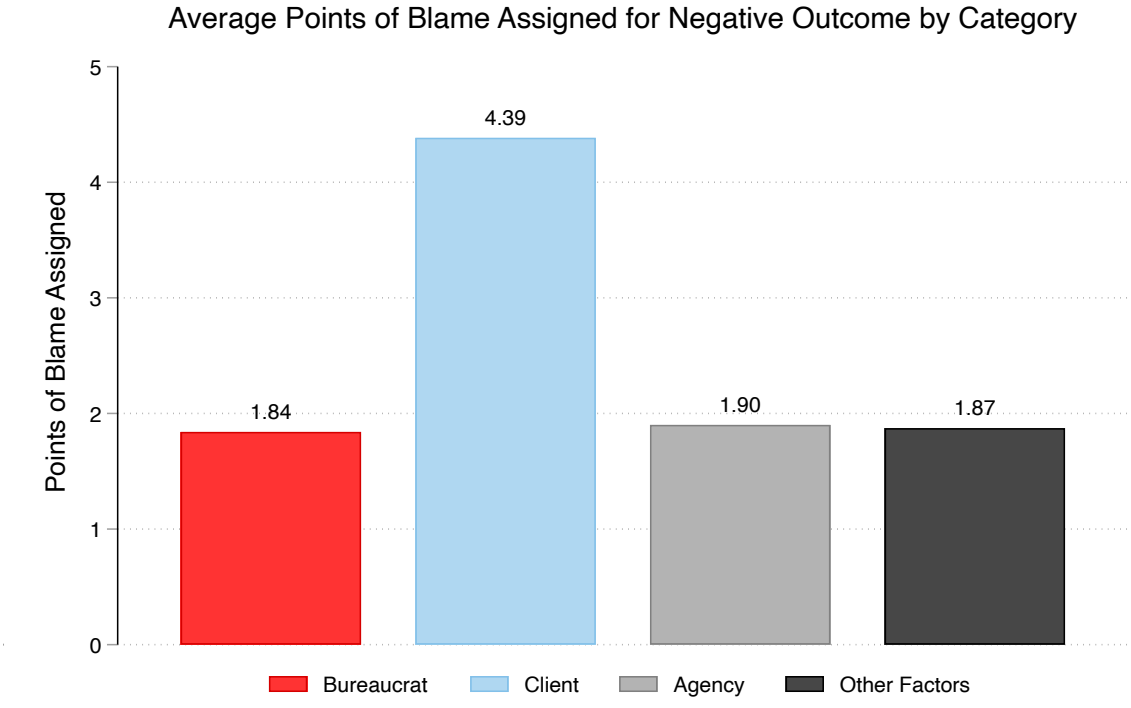
I include a series of control variables to account for respondent characteristics; the inclusion of each is motivated by prior scholarship and theory. I provide information on each variable's measurement in the supplementary material. First, I include respondents' political party identification given that partisanship has been found to influence blame attributions in prior scholarship (Tilley and Hobolt 2011). I also include a measure of respondents' trust in the bureaucracy to account for their preconceptions about the public sector (Marvel 2015; 2016). Since the degree to which respondents believe that the world is fundamentally just influences their blame allocations, I include an indexed measure of respondents' belief in a just world captured via a battery of survey questions as suggested by Lucas, Zhdanova, and Alexander (2011). Next, I condition on respondents' income, using income as a proxy for both their perceived socioeconomic similarity with the respondent and their perceived likelihood of encountering a situation similar to the clients because of the aforementioned defense attribution hypothesis (e.g., Shaver 1970). Finally, the previously described variables for respondents' race and gender are included as controls to account

for any baseline effects of either that should be distinguished from the effect of sharing an identity with the client.

Results

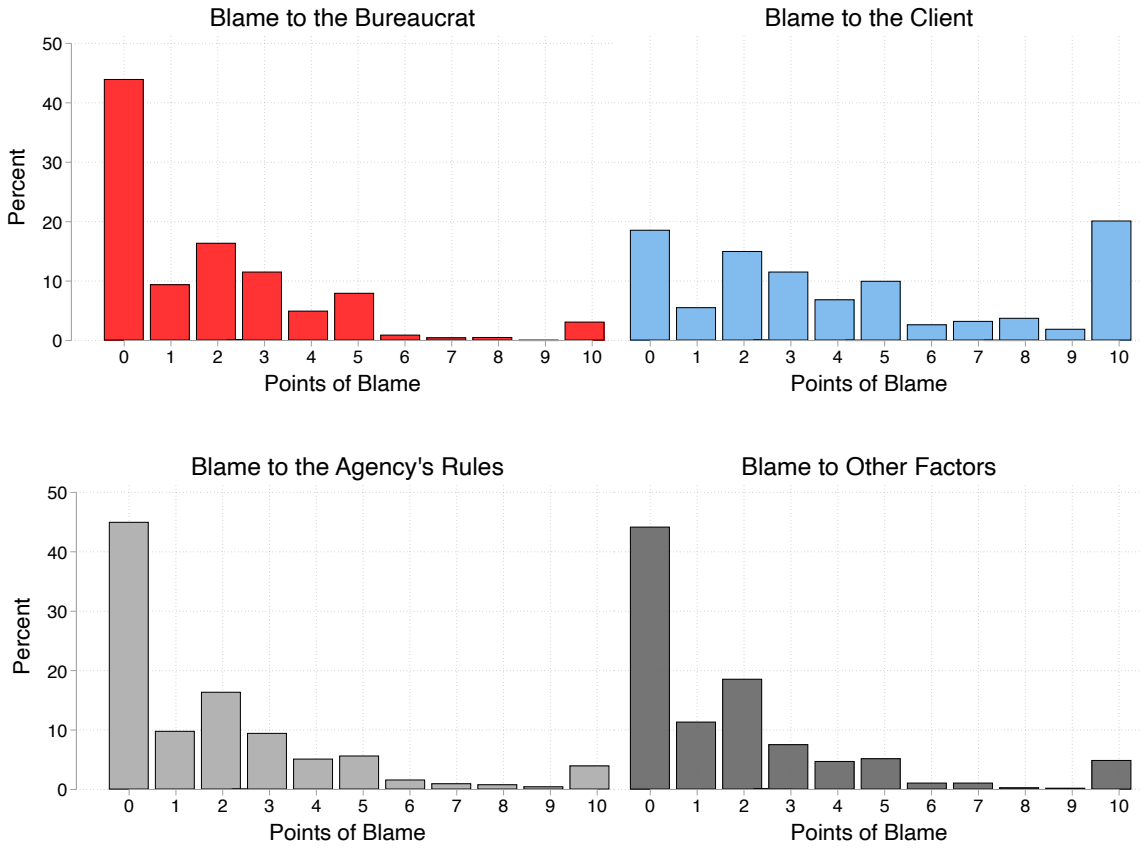
I take advantage of the randomization in my survey and evaluate H1 and H2 using simple difference-of-means tests. The goal here is to examine the average amount of blame respondents allocate to the bureaucrat, client, agency's rules, and other factors. If H1 is correct, respondents will allocate more blame to clients than to the bureaucrat or agency; if H2 is correct, the opposite will be true. As seen in Figure 4-1 (below), the results support H1 and show that, on average, respondents allocate significantly more blame to the client than any other category. In fact, respondents allocated more than 2.3x as much blame to clients (mean = 4.39) as the next closest category, agency rules (mean = 1.90; $p < 0.001$). As such, H2 is not supported.

Figure 4-1: Avg. Points of Blame for Negative Client Outcome Assigned to Each Category



However, the mean blame assignment by category is not the only items of interest here: the distributions of respondents' blame assignment across categories are also worth noting. Figure 4-1 showed that, on average, clients receive the most blame; Figure 4-2 (below), adds another layer to the story by showing that clients are also the most likely category to receive *all 10 points* of blame.

Figure 4-2: Distribution of Blame Assigned to Each Category



To evaluate my remaining hypotheses, I estimate a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models to predict the effects of the treatment variables (i.e., the client's outcome, deservingness, race, and gender along with the bureaucrat's rule compliance) on the dependent variable (i.e., respondents' blame allocation). I model the effects of the treatment variables on the amount of blame allocated to each category of the dependent variable (i.e., to the bureaucrat, client,

agency, and "other factors") separately. Additionally, for each category, I estimate both a "base" model containing only my treatment variables and a "full" model in which I condition on the control variables discussed in the previous section. Results from both models for each category of the dependent variable are available in Table 4.3 (below).[8] In the remaining discussion, I will refer to results from the full model.

Table 4.3 Results from Estimating Series of OLS Regressions

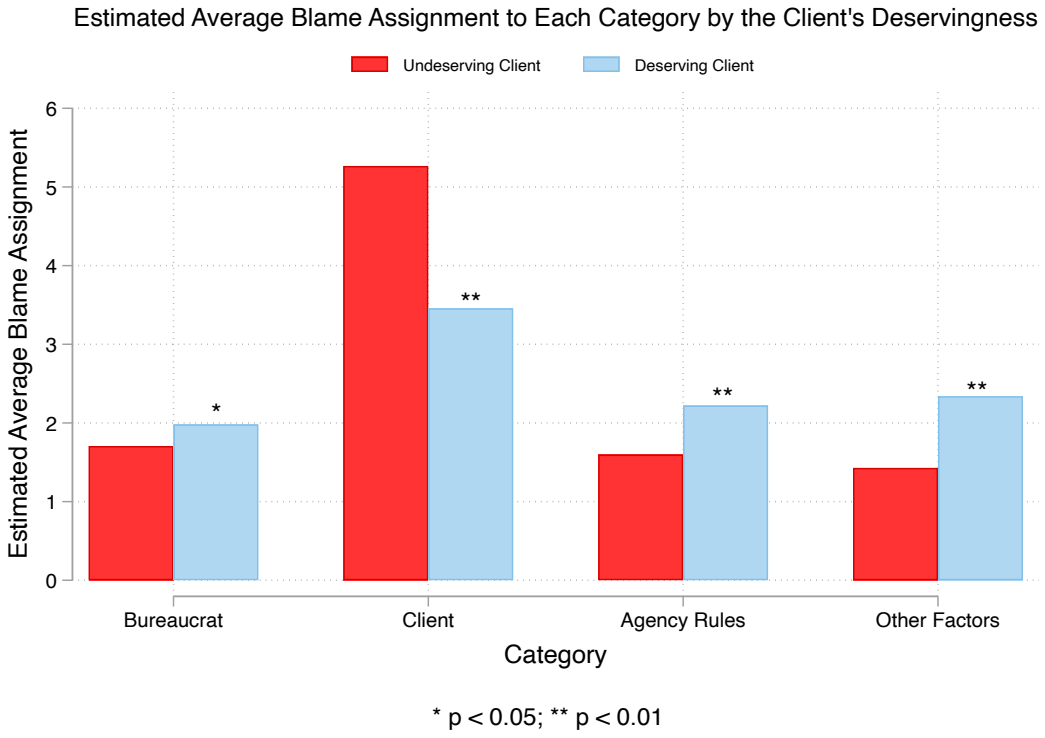
	Blame to…							
	Bureaucrat		Client		Agency Rules		Other Factors	
	Base	*Full*	*Base*	*Full*	*Base*	*Full*	*Base*	*Full*
Follow rules	-.61**	-.60**	-.91**	-.91**	.78**	.81**	.74**	.70**
	(.11)	(.11)	(.17)	(.17)	(.12)	(.12)	(.12)	(.12)
Black client	-.27*	-.22	.001	-.01	.17	.10	.10	.14
	(.11)	(.14)	(.17)	(.19)	(.12)	(.13)	(.12)	(.14)
Woman client	-.21	-.20†	.19	.16	-.06	-.04	.01	.09
	(.11)	(.11)	(0.17)	(.17)	(.13)	(.12)	(.13)	(.12)
Deserving client	.27*	.32**	-1.81**	-1.85**	.62**	.63**	.91**	.90**
	(.11)	(.11)	(.17)	(.17)	(.12)	(.12)	(.12)	(.12)
Party ID		.001		.11†		-.10*		-.01
		(.04)		(.06)		(.05)		(.05)
Trust in Bur.		.16**		-.46**		.19**		.11†
		(.06)		(.08)		(.06)		(.06)
BJW index		.19*		.15		-.20†		-.14
		(.09)		(.13)		(.10)		(.09)
Resp. income		-.07†		.06		.02		.01
		(.04)		(.06)		(.04)		(.04)
Black resp.		.22		.33		-.26		-.29
		(.21)		(.30)		(.21)		(.21)
White resp.		-.49**		.74**		-.06		-.19
		(.17)		(.25)		(.15)		(.18)
Race match		.09		.01		-.18		.08
		(.15)		(.21)		(.15)		(.15)
Woman resp		-.23*		.31†		-.21†		.13
		(.11)		(.17)		(.12)		(.12)
Gender match		-.05		-.15		.07		.13
		(.11)		(.17)		(.12)		(.12)
Intercept	2.26**	1.98**	5.64**	5.13**	1.24**	1.71**	1.04**	1.17**
	(.13)	(.29)	(.19)	(.45)	(.12)	(.33)	(.13)	(.33)
n	1,734	1,666	1,734	1,666	1,734	1,666	1,734	1,666

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; † $p < 0.10$

Note: DVs are amounts of blame allocated to each category (columns). Robust standard errors in parentheses. "Base" model includes only effects from treatment variables; "full" model adds in controls.

Estimates from the series of models indicate some support for H3 and H4, respectively. Figure 4-3 (below; see also Table 4.3) provides predicted marginal means of blame assignment to the bureaucrat, client, agency, and "other factors" by the client's deservingness. H3 receives the strongest support, as deserving clients received an average of 1.85 fewer points of blame than undeserving clients (3.44 vs. 5.29; $p < 0.001$). H4 receives more modest support as, while significant, the 0.32pt increase (1.70 vs. 2.02; $p = 0.004$) in blame received by bureaucrats serving deserving clients is relatively small; that said, the 0.63pt increase (1.59 vs. 2.22; $p < 0.001$) in blame allocated to the agency rules is more substantively impressive.

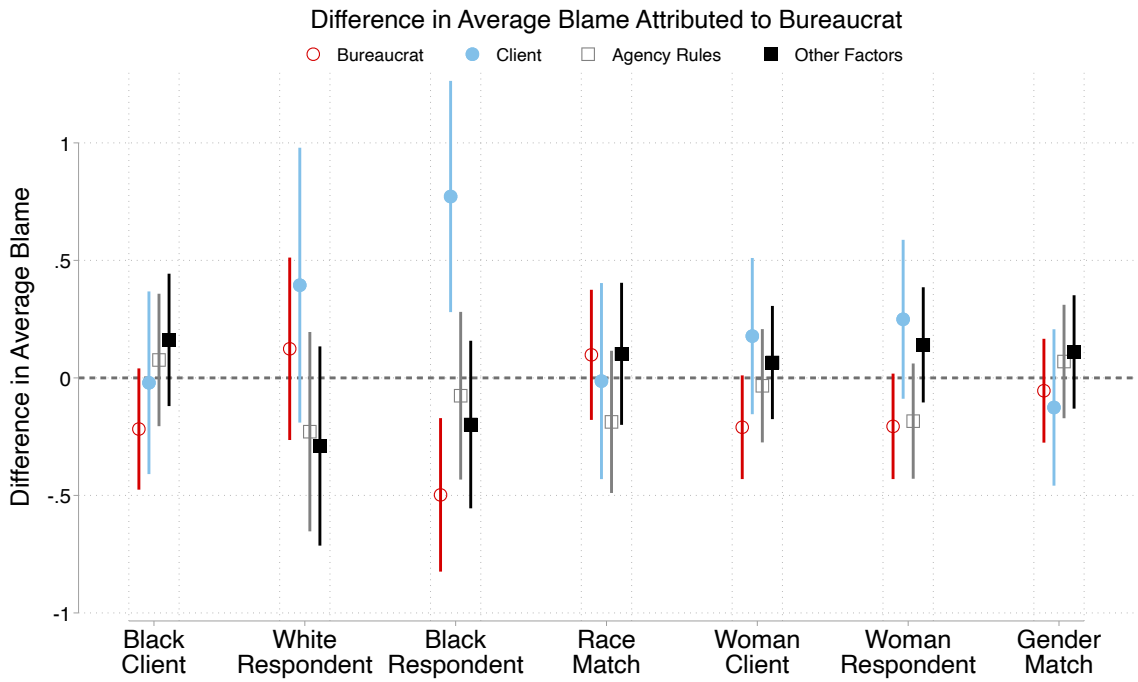
Figure 4-3: Estimated Average Blame Assignment to Each Category by Client Deservingness



Before moving to H5 and looking at the role of client/respondent identity congruence, it is worth examining whether the client's race and/or gender affects respondents' blame allocation across categories. As seen in Table 4.3 (above), there are some differences worth noting based on the client's race and gender, respectively. On average, bureaucrats receive 0.22 (1.96 vs. 1.74; $p = 0.118$) fewer points of blame when serving Black clients compared to when serving white clients. Bureaucrats also receive an average of 0.20 (1.95 vs. 1.75; $p = 0.077$) fewer points of blame when serving women clients compared to when serving men clients. Separately, there are also a few significant differences noting based on the *respondent's* race and gender, as White respondents assigned an average of 0.49 fewer points of blame to the bureaucrat (1.69 vs. 2.18; $p = 0.004$) and 0.73 more points of blame to the client (4.63 vs. 3.90; $p = 0.003$) than non-White respondents. Finally, women respondents assigned an average of 0.23 fewer points of blame to the bureaucrat (1.74 vs. 1.97; $p = 0.041$) and 0.31 more points of blame to the client (4.54 vs. 4.23; $p = 0.069$) than men respondents.

With baseline effects of the client's and respondents' race and gender established, I now move to an examination of H5, which posits that citizens will allocate less blame to in-group clients. As a reminder, the race match and gender match variables are coded dichotomously: if the respondent shares the same racial or gender identity as the client they received in their assigned treatment, they are coded as a 1; if they do not, they are coded as a 0.[9] Figure 4-4 provides the estimated average difference in blame assignment by both the racial/gender match variables and the baseline racial/gender variables. As indicated there (see also Table 4.3), the results do not support H5: neither the race match nor the gender match variable significantly affected blame assignment to any of the four categories.

Figure 4-4: Estimated Mean Difference in Blame Assignment to Each Category by Race and Gender Variables



Finally, we end by evaluating H6, which posits that the amount of blame citizens assign to each category varies according to how much control citizens believe each has over the outcome. Recall that I use the bureaucrat's rule compliance decision as a proxy for control: if the bureaucrat takes matters into his own hands and breaks the rules to better serve the client, it is expected that respondents will perceive the bureaucrat as having more control over the client's outcome and, thus, assign more blame to the bureaucrat; if the bureaucrat decides to comply and refuses to break the rules to better serve the client, it is expected that respondents will perceive the bureaucrat as having less control and the agency having more control over the client's outcome and, thus, assign more blame to the agency. The results cannot provide more than indirect support for this hypothesis, as rule compliance is only a proxy for control; however, with this caveat established, H6 is supported—and the effect of rule compliance on blame across the four categories is quite strong (see Figure 4-5

below and Table 4.3 above). Consistent with H6's expectations, on average, bureaucrats received 0.60 fewer points of blame when following agency rules than when breaking them (1.56 vs. 2.16; $p < 0.001$). Along similar lines, when the bureaucrat follows agency rules, respondents assigned an average of 0.81 more points of blame to the agency rules (1.48 vs 2.29; $p < 0.001$). While less relevant to H6, it is also interesting that rule-following resulted in respondents assigning an average of 0.91 fewer points of blame to the client (3.94 vs. 4.86; $p < 0.001$) and an average of 0.70 more points of blame to "other factors" (1.50 vs. 2.21; $p < 0.001$).

Figure 4-5: Estimated Mean Blame Assignment to Each Category by the Bureaucrat's Rule Compliance

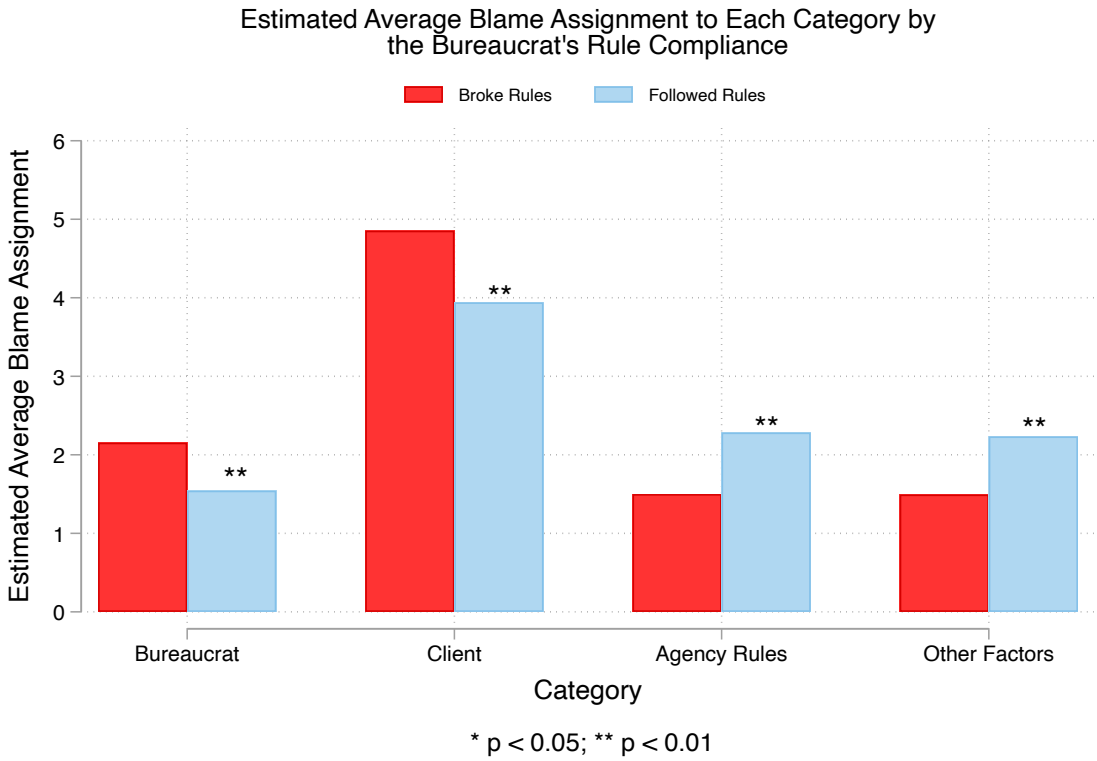


Table 4.4: Summary of Hypotheses and Results

	Hypothesis	Support
H1	Respondents will allocate more blame to clients who receive negative outcomes than to the bureaucrat or agency providing the service.	Strongly supported
H2	Respondents will allocate more blame to the bureaucrat providing the service and/or the agency's rules than to clients when clients receive negative outcomes.	Not supported
H3	Undeserving clients will receive more blame for the negative outcomes they receive than deserving clients.	Strongly supported
H4	The bureaucrat and agency rules will receive less blame when clients are viewed as undeserving (relative to when clients are viewed as deserving).	Weakly supported
H5	Respondents will allocate less blame to in-group clients and more blame to out-group clients.	Not supported
H6	Respondents' blame allocations depend on the extent to which they perceive an actor as having control over the outcome.	Strongly supported, albeit indirectly

Discussion

Taken together, the findings lend support to H1 (and not the competing H2), as respondents allocated over twice as much blame to clients than the next closest category; clients were also the most likely to receive all 10 points of blame and the least likely to receive 0 points. H3 is also supported, as respondents allocated an average 1.81 more points of blame to undeserving clients than deserving ones, roughly a 54% increase. However, even deserving clients were a more popular target of blame than any other category. This may explain why the results lend only weak support to H4, with the bureaucrat receiving an average of 0.32 additional points of blame and the agency rules receiving an average of 0.63 more points of blame when serving deserving clients than when serving undeserving ones. H5 was not supported, as neither sharing a race nor gender with the client affected respondents' blame allocations. Finally, H6 was at least indirectly supported, with bureaucratic rule-following leading to an average reduction of 0.60 points of blame to the bureaucrat

and an average increase of 0.81 points of blame to agency rules, indicating that perceptions of control—or influence over the client's outcome—affected respondents' blame allocations.

One contribution of this article is that it demonstrates the need to change how public administration scholars tend to research blame. Most of the time, clients are not considered as possible targets of blame in scholarship, indicating that we may often be studying how respondents allocate blame between tertiary rather than primary targets. Findings from other disciplines including social psychology clearly show that blame attribution can be biased, with even victims of violent crimes often being blamed for their misfortunes (e.g., Grubb and Turner 2012). These findings informed my research design, including the choice to incorporate clients as possible targets of blame, and my results clearly indicate that future blame research should also incorporate clients when contextually appropriate to the study.

Another contribution of this article is that it suggests that findings from the social construction and policy design literature (e.g., Schneider and Ingram 1993) hold at the street-level—or, more concretely, that perceptions of deservingness largely shape how citizens interpret street-level service encounters much like they do for broader policies and programs. While I cannot say that respondents supported the bureaucrat and/or agency rules more when undeserving clients received negative outcomes, I can show that both receive less blame for the negative outcomes experienced by undeserving clients than deserving ones.

These findings have significant implications for accountability in a democratic system. Social accountability (including, for instance, giving citizens more of a role in evaluating the government's performance) is an important goal that is worth pursuing. However, we should be careful to avoid institutionalizing inequities of service provision. If citizens blame clients—and especially those they see as undeserving—rather than bureaucrats or agencies for the negative outcomes clients receive, we must be careful to avoid mistaking the lack of blame to the bureaucracy

as an indicator of its effective performance. Additionally, models of accountability that rely too heavily on citizen feedback effectively push the responsibility of ensuring effective, equitable services onto citizens. There is a risk that the citizens who receive negative service outcomes either do not have the capacity to utilize citizen-driven accountability mechanisms because of existing inequalities or are members of a group with a negative social construction that lacks the power/strength (Schneider and Ingram 1993) to hold the powerful to account. If the negatively affected clients are unable to push for change themselves *and* being blamed by citizens for the negative outcomes they're receiving, there is no accountability "backup" coming for disadvantaged clients who may be trapped in cycles of poor service outcomes and need (see Rubenstein's (2007) "surrogate accountability").

Future work should also examine the role citizens' worldviews play in shaping their blame allocations (e.g., just-world beliefs). If citizens are motivated to defend the status quo to protect their worldviews, there is again a risk that the citizens who are not directly involved in service provision ignore—or even justify—the negative outcomes that clients receive.

Limitations

My research design comes with tradeoffs. I use a nationally representative sample of Americans to maximize the generalizability of my findings in the United States; however, additional research will be needed to examine how findings hold in other countries. Along similar lines, the survey experiment itself is quite narrow. I utilize the vignettes on an interaction between an employment counselor and unemployed client in part because of the extensive reference material provided by Maynard-Moody and Musheno's (2022) *Cops, Teachers, Counselors*. Their book allowed me to craft a scenario that closely resembles authentic, real-world interactions between a street-level bureaucrat and client. However, because of the countless types of street-level bureaucrats (and

because of the many different ways in which the government provides direct service to citizens), caution is needed before applying the results here to other service areas (e.g., education, food assistance, healthcare) or arrangements (e.g., third-party service provision). Citizens may, for instance, assign blame differently when considering an interaction between a public-school teacher and student or when the frontline employee works for a nonprofit organization providing services on contract.

Additionally, as has already been discussed, my operationalization of culpable control allows for only an indirect test of H6. A more direct test of the effects of control on respondents' blame assignment for negative service outcomes would have been possible with a few tweaks to my design; however, my main priority was to ensure the vignettes mirrored Maynard-Moody and Musheno's (2022) accounts as closely as possible, which resulted in tradeoffs. Future research should focus on specifically exploring culpability in more detail. If control is as important to blame as theorized by social psychologists (e.g., Alicke 2000), it is critical to understand whether micro-level attribution processes hold at the meso- and macro-levels involving agency rules, agencies, and governments as actors, and how citizens' attributions of blame are complicated when actors' actions are hidden by federalism/layers of government or links in the chain of the policy process (see: Leland, Mohr, and Piatak 2021; Mettler 2011).

Conclusion

This article explores whom citizens blame when human service interactions between the bureaucracy and a client result in negative outcomes for clients. I use data collected from a novel survey experiment (n = 1,734) based around an interaction between a street-level bureaucrat and client to understand how citizens attribute blame for negative client outcomes across four possible categories—a bureaucrat, a client, an agency's rules, and "other factors"—and vary the bureaucrat's

rule compliance (follow/break), the client's identity (Black woman/Black man/white woman/white man), and the client's deservingness (more/less) to understand the impact of each.

Findings show that clients themselves are primarily blamed for the negative outcomes they receive, with respondents allocating over twice as much blame to clients, on average, than either the bureaucrat, agency, or "other factors". This was especially true when clients were framed as undeserving, as undeserving clients, on average, received over half of the total points (5.29/10). The social identity of the client did not significantly affect the amount of blame assigned to clients by respondents, though respondents assigned less blame to the bureaucrat when the bureaucrat was serving women clients. Interestingly, in line with hypotheses, the bureaucrat's rule compliance—used as an indirect way to evaluate the effect of perceived control over the client's outcome—resulted in significant changes in the amount of blame assigned to each category; in treatments where the bureaucrat followed the rules, the bureaucrat and client received less average blame while the agency and "other factors" received more.

Notes

1. I use the word "citizen" in the democratic sense, referring to any person who interacts with, participates in, or is subject to a United States government. Additionally, for the purposes of this dissertation, my definition of "citizen" is broader than a strictly legal one and refers to persons living in the United States regardless of their formal citizenship status. My use of this broader definition is meant to more closely mirror bureaucrats' reality and is based on the fact that bureaucrats (especially street-level bureaucrats) often serve clients regardless of their formal citizenship status. When I refer to "clients," I am specifically referencing a person who, while also a citizen, is actively being served by a government (bureaucrat, agency, etc.). In this dissertation, this is often the hypothetical client featured in my vignettes. Finally, though they, too, are citizens, I refer to the participants in my survey as "respondents."

2. For more on Lucid's data quality, see: https://lucidtheorem.com/faq#data-quality.
3. To emphasize the publicness (broadly defined) of both the bureaucrat and the agency, respondents were given information about the employment counselor's job description and the government agency directly before the vignette (see supplementary material for full prompt).
4. I chose the first name Jake because it was identified as a white name by over 90% respondents in Gaddis' 2017 study. In the same study, Gaddis examined last names and found that adding a white last name boosted the rate at which respondents identified "Jake" to over 95%, hence the last name Becker (see also Tzioumis 2018).
5. In accordance with recommendations, the manipulation check is used only as a verification that most respondents "received" the treatment by reading it; it is not used to interpret findings (Gruijters 2022) or to screen out respondents (Varaine 2022).
6. Tzioumis (2018) examined the frequency with which first names corresponded to different racial groups. Results were as follows: Tanisha (81% Black), Brett (98% white), Katelyn (90% white). Keyshawn was not featured in the list. Notable results for alternative spellings include Bret (98% white), Kaitlyn (95% white), Kaitlin (97% white).
7. My dependent variable is compositional, meaning it contains positive values that communicate information about respondents' relative allocation of blame across categories rather than their absolute allocation of blame to each individually (Bacon-Shone, 2011; Greenacre, 2021). I ran the data using a fractional multinomial regression model as suggested by Buis (2020) and Mullahy (2015) which accounts for intercategorical dependence. Results were functionally identical to those obtained using OLS models (see supplementary material for full results and more discussion). As such, for ease of interpretation, I report OLS estimates.

8. The "full" model excludes 68 respondents that did not complete a question for one of the various control variables. One respondent who preferred not to divulge their race is included in the 68.
9. 14 respondents identified as both Black and White, meaning they were coded as a "1" for the race match variable regardless of which client they received in their treatment. As a robustness check, I ran separate models that excluded these 14 respondents from the sample. Results were essentially identical.

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Appendix

Descriptive Statistics for Sample

Appendix Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics for Sample and U.S. Population Estimates

	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	U.S. Pop. Est.	
Gender							
Man	1,734	.49	.50	0	1	.49	†
Woman	1,734	.51	.50	0	1	.51	†
Race							
White	1,733	.67	.48	0	1	.58	†
Black	1,733	.19	.38	0	1	.12	†
Native American	1,733	.03	.13	0	1	.01	†
Asian	1,733	.05	.20	0	1	.06	†
Hawaiian/Pacific Isl.	1,733	.01	.06	0	1	.00	†
Hispanic/Latina/o/x	1,733	.11	.27	0	1	.19	†
Other race	1,733	.01	.07	0	1	.01	†
Multiracial	1,733	.05	.22	0	1	.04	†
Age							
18-24	1,734	.14	.35	0	6	.09	†
25-44	1,734	.38	.48	0	6	.27	†
45-54	1,734	.15	.35	0	6	.12	†
55-64	1,734	.15	.36	0	6	.13	†
65-74	1,734	.12	.33	0	6	.10	†
75-84	1,734	.05	.23	0	6	.05	†
85+	1,734	.01	.07	0	6	.02	†
Party ID							
Strong Dem.	1,672	.26	.44	0	4	.17	‡
Lean Dem.	1,672	.19	.39	0	4	.24	‡
Independent	1,672	.24	.43	0	4	.27	‡
Lean Rep.	1,672	.15	.36	0	4	.19	‡
Strong Rep.	1,672	.16	.37	0	4	.12	‡
Education							
Some HS	1,724	.04	.20	0	5	.10	†
HS/GED	1,724	.25	.44	0	5	.26	†
Some college	1,724	.19	.43	0	5	.19	†
Assoc. or Tech.	1,724	.10	.34	0	5	.09	†
Bachelor's	1,724	.26	.43	0	5	.22	†
Graduate degree	1,724	.16	.29	0	5	.14	†

† *Source: 2022 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS)*

‡ *Source: 2022 General Social Survey (GSS) -- Davern, Michael; Bautista, Rene; Freese, Jeremy; Herd, Pamela; and Morgan, Stephen L.; General Social Survey 1972-2022. [Machine-readable data file]. Principal Investigator, Michael Davern; Co-Principal Investigators, Rene Bautista, Jeremy Freese, Pamela Herd, and Stephen L. Morgan. Sponsored by National Science Foundation. NORC ed. Chicago: NORC, 2023: NORC at the University of Chicago [producer and distributor]. Data accessed from the GSS Data Explorer website at gssdataexplorer.norc.org.*

Survey Questions and Measurement for Control Variables

Party ID: Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a ...?

- Strong Democrat (1)
- Lean Democrat (2)
- Independent (3)
- Lean Republican (4)
- Strong Republican (5)
- Not sure (-99)

Trust in Bureaucracy: In general, how often can you trust the bureaucracy in the United States to do what is right?

- Never (1)
- Sometimes (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Most of the time (4)
- Always (5)

Respondent Income: What was your total household income before taxes during the past 12 months?

- Less than $25,000 (1)
- $25,000-$49,999 (2)
- $50,000-$74,999 (3)
- $75,000-$99,999 (4)
- $100,000-$149,999 (5)
- $150,000 or more (6)
- Prefer not to say (-99)

Respondent race: What is your race? (Please check all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- Asian (4)
- Black or African American (2)
- Hispanic and/or Latino (6)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
- White (1)
- Other (Please specify) (7)

Respondent gender: Would you describe yourself as...

- a man (1)
- a woman (2)
- non-binary (3)
- Something else (Please describe) (4)

Belief in Just World (BJW) Index – Questions

BJW_1: I feel that other people generally earn the rewards and punishments they get in this world.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_2: Other people usually receive the outcomes they deserve.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_3: Other people generally deserve the things that they are given.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_4: I feel that people are generally fair when evaluating others.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_5: Regardless of the outcomes they receive, other people are generally subjected to fair procedures.

- Strongly disagree (6)
- Somewhat disagree (7)
- Neither agree nor disagree (8)
- Somewhat agree (9)
- Strongly agree (10)

BJW_6: Other people are generally subjected to processes that are fair.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_7: I feel that I generally earn the rewards and punishments I get in this world.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_8: I usually receive the outcomes I deserve.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_9: I generally deserve the things that I am given.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_10: I feel that people are generally fair in their evaluations of me.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_11: Regardless of the specific outcomes I receive, I am generally subjected to fair procedures.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

Full Text of Vignette

Pre-vignette Prompt:

Jake Becker is an **employment counselor** at the **state government's Employment and Career Development Office**. Jake is responsible for helping clients find or change jobs. In a typical day, Jake might teach a client how to find jobs online, help a client create or improve their resume, or help clients access funds for approved purchases such as professional clothing.

Vignette:

"Recently, one of Jake's clients, a 42-year-old [woman/man] named [Tanisha/Katelyn/Brett/Keyshawn], came into his office looking for a new job. Katelyn **[was a college graduate and received excellent performance reviews at her previous job but was laid off when the organization went bankrupt/previously earned her G.E.D. but had lost her last job due to poor performance]**. Katelyn also **[seemed very motivated and was never late for meetings with Jake/did not seem very motivated and was often late for meetings with Jake].**

At the time, jobs were very hard to come by in the area. Eventually, just as Katelyn was about to run out of savings, Jake found Katelyn a job with excellent pay and benefits. However, the job was about an hour's commute by car, which was a problem because Katelyn did not have a vehicle. Public transportation was also unavailable in the area.
Katelyn asked Jake to help her buy a vehicle. Jake wasn't sure what to do, as the Employment and Career Development Office's rules *do not* allow employment counselors to use funds to purchase vehicles for clients.

After thinking about it, [Jake decided there was nothing he could do: rules are rules. Jake told Katelyn he would not be able to help her purchase a vehicle/Jake decided the job was too good to pass up. Jake requested training funds and a professional clothing allowance for Katelyn but told her to use the money to buy a vehicle instead which, according to the rules, was a misuse of agency funds].

In the end, Katelyn accepted the job Jake found for her but only managed to keep it for a few weeks. Katelyn recently came back to the Employment and Career Development Office for additional help."

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- **Note about vignette:** bolded treatments vary together as a single deservingness treatment such that college graduates are always described as motivated and on time; similarly, G.E.D. earners are always described as not very motivated and often late.

Fractional Multinomial Logit Model

The survey question upon which my dependent variable is drawn required that the sum of respondents' allocation of blame across each category (i.e., the bureaucrat, client, agency, and "other factors") sum to 10. As such, the variable is compositional, meaning it contains positive values that communicate information about respondents' relative allocation of blame across categories rather than their absolute allocation of blame to each individually (Bacon-Shone 2011; Greenacre 2021; for an overview of the treatment of compositional variables in political science, see: Philips, Rutherford, and Whitten 2016). OLS is not recommended for compositional dependent variables, in part because of inherent spurious correlation between categories within the composition that result from the constant-sum constraint—a change in one category of a compositional dependent variable necessarily requires a change in another category (for example, two points of blame assigned to the bureaucrat mean there are two fewer points available to assign to the other three categories, making it difficult to ascertain how much (if any) of an observed change to Category A of a compositional DV was induced by an independent variable *affecting Category A* rather than a side effect of an independent variable inducing a change in Category B, C, or D that only appeared to induce a change in Category A because of the closed nature of the DV).

The best approach to using regression to analyze compositional dependent variables is still being debated, in part because many approaches (including approaches suggested by King, Tomz, and Wittenberg (2000) and Tomz, Tucker, and Wittenberg (2002)) involve a variety of log-ratio transformations that, by nature, exclude 0's from the dataset (Martín-Fernández et al., 2011; Tsagris et al., 2023). In my case, excluding 0's would be problematic, as awarding 0 points of blame to a category is meaningful and a response I wanted to keep. As such, to avoid excluding 0's from my dataset, and as a robustness check, I also ran the data using a fractional multinomial regression model as suggested by Buis (2020), Murtiera and Ramalho (2016), and Mullahy (2015). This model

simultaneously estimates the means of each category of the dependent variable and accounts for the intercategorical dependence in part by bounding the estimates for each category between 0 and 1 ($0 \leq x \leq 1$) and forcing the sum of all categorical estimates to equal 0 since changes in one category necessarily affect the others (for a more detailed overview, see: Becker 2017; Murtiera and Ramalho 2016—full references to follow at end of appendix).

Average marginal effects obtained from estimating a fractional multinomial logit model are available below in Appendix Table 4.2. The estimated average marginal effects (AMEs) are the estimates of interest from a fractional multinomial logit model, as raw coefficients from each category of the dependent variable cannot be easily interpreted in isolation (see Becker 2017, pp. 16-18). AMEs are also the most useful tools for comparing results with the OLS models, though AMEs will need to be multiplied by 10 for direct comparison due to the rescaling of the dependent variable for this model.

Appendix Table 4.2: Average Marginal Effects on Blame by Category from Estimation of Fractional Multinomial Logit Model

	Blame to Bureaucrat								Blame to Client							
	Pred. AME	Std. err.	p	[95% conf.	interval]	Pred. at min	Pred. at max	AME* 10	Pred. AME	Std. err.	p	[95% conf.	interval]	Pred. at min	Pred. at max	AME* 10
1.follow_rules	-.056	.011	<.001	-.079	-.034	.211	.155	-.565	-.093	.017	<.001	-.126	-.060	.491	.398	-.927
1.black_client	-.022	.013	.086	-.046	.003	.192	.171	-.216	-.003	.020	.884	-.041	.036	.444	.441	-.029
1.woman_client	-.022	.011	.052	-.044	.000	.193	.171	-.218	.018	.017	.280	-.015	.051	.434	.452	.183
1.deserving_client	.033	.011	.003	.011	.055	.166	.199	.330	-.182	.017	<.001	-.215	-.149	.531	.349	-1.821
pid	.000	.004	.973	-.008	.008	.182	.181	-.001	.010	.006	.112	-.002	.023	.425	.465	.102
trust_bureaucracy	.016	.006	.008	.004	.027	.155	.217	.155	-.048	.008	<.001	-.064	-.031	.522	.333	-.476
bjw_index	.016	.009	.088	-.002	.034	.143	.206	.160	.017	.014	.214	-.010	.044	.397	.467	.171
resp_income	-.005	.004	.184	-.012	.002	.191	.167	-.050	.003	.006	.650	-.009	.014	.438	.451	.026
1.black_resp	.007	.019	.706	-.030	.044	.180	.187	.071	.043	.030	.158	-.017	.102	.435	.478	.427
1.white_resp	-.052	.017	.002	-.085	-.019	.216	.164	-.520	.079	.024	.001	.031	.127	.390	.469	.791
1.race_match	.012	.014	.382	-.015	.039	.177	.189	.122	-.003	.021	.896	-.045	.039	.444	.441	-.028
1.woman_resp	-.021	.011	.065	-.044	.001	.193	.171	-.211	.025	.017	.137	-.008	.059	.430	.455	.255
1.gender_match	-.007	.011	.548	-.028	.015	.185	.179	-.067	-.012	.017	.459	-.046	.021	.449	.437	-.125
	Blame to Agency Rules								**Blame to Other Factors**							
	Pred. AME	Std. err.	p	[95% conf.	interval]	Pred. at min	Pred. at max	AME* 10	Pred. AME	Std. err.	p	[95% conf.	interval]	Pred. at min	Pred. at max	AME* 10
1.follow_rules	.082	.012	<.001	.058	.106	.148	.230	.820	.067	.012	<.001	.043	.091	.151	.218	.671
1.black_client	.008	.014	.573	-.019	.035	.186	.194	.078	.017	.014	.232	-.011	.044	.177	.194	.167
1.woman_client	-.003	.012	.819	-.027	.021	.192	.189	-.028	.006	.012	.605	-.018	.030	.182	.188	.063
1.deserving_client	.061	.012	<.001	.037	.085	.160	.221	.610	.088	.012	<.001	.064	.112	.142	.230	.880
pid	-.010	.005	.044	-.019	.000	.207	.169	-.098	.000	.005	.954	-.009	.009	.186	.184	-.003
trust_bur	.020	.006	.001	.008	.032	.158	.238	.201	.012	.006	.033	.001	.023	.165	.212	.120
bjw_index	-.020	.010	.053	-.041	.000	.244	.161	-.202	-.013	.009	.167	-.031	.005	.216	.166	-.129
resp_inc	.002	.004	.642	-.006	.010	.187	.196	.019	.000	.004	.908	-.008	.008	.184	.187	.005
1.black_resp	-.022	.020	.271	-.060	.017	.194	.172	-.217	-.028	.019	.142	-.066	.009	.191	.162	-.281
1.white_resp	-.007	.017	.679	-.041	.027	.195	.188	-.072	-.020	.018	.261	-.055	.015	.199	.179	-.199
1.race_match	-.020	.015	.187	-.049	.010	.198	.179	-.197	.010	.015	.499	-.020	.040	.181	.191	.103
1.woman_resp	-.019	.012	.135	-.043	.006	.199	.181	-.185	.014	.013	.257	-.010	.039	.178	.192	.142
1.gender_match	.008	.012	.527	-.016	.032	.186	.194	.078	.011	.012	.351	-.013	.035	.179	.191	.114

Dependent Variable Survey Question

"Who deserves the most blame for [the client's name] being unable to keep [gender pronoun] job and returning to the Employment and Career Development Office for additional help?"

Please allocate 10 points based on how much blame each of the options below deserves. Your points must add up to 10.

Jake's decisions : _____ (1)
[Client name]'s actions : _____ (2)
The Employment and Career Development Office's rules : _____ (3)
Other factors : _____ (4)

Results from Balance Tests

Appendix Table 4.3: Results from Balance Tests (Part I)

Treatment	White resp.	Black resp.	Hispanic resp.	Asian resp.	Man resp.	Woman resp.	Strong Dem.	Lean Dem.	Ind.	Lean Rep.	Strong Rep.
1	0.75	0.15	0.10	0.03	0.45	0.54	0.25	0.16	0.30	0.13	0.11
2	0.71	0.12	0.12	0.05	0.52	0.46	0.28	0.16	0.23	0.19	0.12
3	0.67	0.14	0.15	0.05	0.51	0.47	0.24	0.17	0.25	0.11	0.22
4	0.70	0.17	0.08	0.06	0.50	0.49	0.24	0.19	0.21	0.18	0.13
5	0.64	0.23	0.15	0.03	0.35	0.62	0.29	0.21	0.20	0.13	0.15
6	0.66	0.19	0.12	0.06	0.56	0.43	0.25	0.18	0.28	0.13	0.14
7	0.67	0.21	0.09	0.06	0.47	0.52	0.21	0.23	0.17	0.15	0.17
8	0.62	0.21	0.12	0.02	0.44	0.56	0.24	0.16	0.30	0.18	0.11
9	0.66	0.19	0.12	0.05	0.47	0.53	0.22	0.14	0.23	0.13	0.23
10	0.63	0.21	0.09	0.04	0.45	0.55	0.23	0.20	0.21	0.18	0.14
11	0.70	0.23	0.07	0.04	0.51	0.47	0.30	0.19	0.21	0.15	0.11
12	0.64	0.23	0.05	0.06	0.48	0.52	0.27	0.20	0.21	0.15	0.12
13	0.69	0.16	0.08	0.08	0.52	0.47	0.18	0.25	0.22	0.13	0.20
14	0.65	0.18	0.14	0.05	0.50	0.49	0.24	0.13	0.28	0.14	0.17
15	0.61	0.19	0.13	0.06	0.56	0.42	0.25	0.26	0.17	0.11	0.16
16	0.66	0.19	0.10	0.06	0.51	0.49	0.28	0.15	0.22	0.16	0.17
p-value (ANOVA)	0.839	0.634	0.569	0.877	0.309	0.303	0.931	0.384	0.397	0.858	0.266

Appendix Table 4.3: Results from Balance Tests (Continued)

Treatment	<$25k	$25-$49k	**$50-74k**	**$75-99k**	$100-149k	$150k+	Some HS	HS/GED	Some college	Assoc. or tech degree	Bachelors degree	Graduate degree
1	0.19	0.22	**0.19**	**0.19**	0.11	0.05	0.04	0.24	0.25	0.10	0.29	0.08
2	0.23	0.21	**0.18**	**0.13**	0.08	0.12	0.06	0.18	0.23	0.17	0.27	0.09
3	0.17	0.30	**0.26**	**0.12**	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.19	0.28	0.14	0.27	0.06
4	0.18	0.23	**0.28**	**0.12**	0.12	0.04	0.02	0.25	0.26	0.11	0.24	0.12
5	0.17	0.26	**0.26**	**0.11**	0.10	0.10	0.05	0.21	0.24	0.11	0.30	0.09
6	0.17	0.31	**0.18**	**0.13**	0.13	0.06	0.03	0.23	0.25	0.13	0.26	0.09
7	0.15	0.39	**0.15**	**0.07**	0.15	0.04	0.01	0.23	0.28	0.11	0.20	0.14
8	0.24	0.28	**0.22**	**0.06**	0.11	0.05	0.05	0.28	0.24	0.14	0.22	0.06
9	0.27	0.26	**0.17**	**0.09**	0.12	0.08	0.07	0.29	0.21	0.11	0.25	0.06
10	0.24	0.23	**0.14**	**0.15**	0.11	0.09	0.05	0.20	0.24	0.16	0.22	0.10
11	0.21	0.30	**0.18**	**0.16**	0.07	0.04	0.01	0.28	0.28	0.11	0.16	0.14
12	0.28	0.28	**0.18**	**0.05**	0.12	0.03	0.04	0.35	0.20	0.13	0.20	0.04
13	0.20	0.31	**0.15**	**0.12**	0.12	0.08	0.03	0.34	0.17	0.17	0.21	0.08
14	0.27	0.30	**0.14**	**0.09**	0.13	0.05	0.05	0.25	0.21	0.14	0.23	0.11
15	0.21	0.22	**0.23**	**0.17**	0.10	0.05	0.07	0.28	0.29	0.07	0.17	0.10
16	0.17	0.30	**0.14**	**0.10**	0.10	0.11	0.03	0.23	0.19	0.17	0.23	0.12
p-value (ANOVA)	0.348	0.197	**0.089**	**0.062**	0.925	0.152	0.526	0.138	0.733	0.656	0.500	0.428

Appendix Table 4.3: Results from Balance Tests (Continued)

Treatment	age18_25	age26_34	age35_44	age45_54	age55_64	age65_plus
1	0.13	0.12	0.20	0.13	0.21	0.22
2	0.13	0.17	0.12	0.18	0.15	0.25
3	0.17	0.12	0.24	0.17	0.11	0.19
4	0.18	0.15	0.24	0.11	0.17	0.15
5	0.13	0.18	0.22	0.14	0.17	0.17
6	0.19	0.21	0.18	0.11	0.14	0.16
7	0.19	0.12	0.16	0.12	0.20	0.21
8	0.13	0.18	0.20	0.17	0.22	0.10
9	0.14	0.23	0.20	0.14	0.12	0.17
10	0.14	0.21	0.20	0.09	0.18	0.18
11	0.15	0.17	0.20	0.15	0.18	0.17
12	0.18	0.18	0.22	0.11	0.13	0.17
13	0.11	0.16	0.22	0.23	0.10	0.18
14	0.10	0.20	0.23	0.23	0.09	0.14
15	0.14	0.21	0.23	0.13	0.14	0.14
16	0.13	0.20	0.23	0.14	0.15	0.16
p-value (ANOVA)	0.788	0.462	0.788	0.113	0.224	0.458

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Chapter 5: How Worldview, Identity, and Deservingness Perceptions Shape Support for Rule Compliance Behavior

Abstract

This chapter explores factors that shape perceptions of bureaucrats' rule compliance behavior. Drawing on insights from public administration, political science, and social psychology, I specify several hypotheses regarding the effects of just-world beliefs, social group identities, client outcomes, and perceptions of client deservingness on support for a street-level bureaucrat's decision to either follow or break agency rules. Drawing on data from an original survey experiment (n = 3,485), findings reveal that just-world beliefs had, by far, the strongest influence on respondents' support for the bureaucrat's rule decision, associated with large increases in support regardless of the bureaucrat's compliance. Hypotheses regarding the effect of identity congruence between the respondent and hypothetical client were not supported; hypotheses regarding the client's outcome and deservingness received only weak support. Results from a subgroup analysis of bureaucrat respondents (n = 399) were generally consistent with those obtained from the full sample, even when controlling for bureaucrats' baseline rule-following tendencies. Taken together, findings indicate that just-world beliefs may be an important lens through which bureaucratic behavior is interpreted, and one that deserves further consideration in the literature.

Introduction

Street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) are tasked with interpreting policies and bridging the gap between citizens and their governments. In this way, the power of the government is briefly channeled by a single bureaucrat—they become *the* person who will decide which benefits and costs citizens will receive from their government (Bell & Smith, 2021; Lipsky, 1980; Schram et al., 2009). Organizational rules help public organizations rebalance the scales, shifting much of that power away from individual bureaucrats to the organization itself by both constraining undesirable behaviors and enabling those that move the organization toward its desired goals (DeHart-Davis, 2017; Weber, 1947). However, SLBs display various extents of compliance and non-compliance (Bozeman, 2022), often changing the way they serve clients by strategically adhering (or not adhering) to rules (Borry & Henderson, 2020; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022). Over time, these individual rule decisions harden into default tendencies that structure the way SLBs relate to rules and their clients (Oberfield, 2014; Zacka, 2017). As such, it is critically important to understand the factors that shape SLBs' perceptions of rule compliance behaviors, including the effects of their worldviews, social identities, and perceptions of an SLB's clients on their support for rule-breaking behaviors.

In this chapter, I examine factors that shape support for street-level bureaucrats' rule compliance decisions, specifically SLBs' decisions to follow or prosocially break organizational rules. I use data collected via an original survey experiment, analyzing the full sample (n = 3,485) and a subsample of bureaucrat respondents (n = 399) to evaluate hypotheses regarding the influence of respondents' just-world beliefs, social identity congruence between respondents and a hypothetical client, client deservingness, and client outcomes on their support for a SLB's rule compliance decision. Findings reveal that respondents' just-world beliefs have the strongest influence on their support for the

SLB's rule compliance decision, significantly increasing support regardless of whether the SLB followed or prosocially broke agency rules in line with hypothesized expectations. Hypotheses regarding the effect of identity congruence between the respondent and client on support for the SLB's decision are not supported—in fact, results, when significant, are in the opposite direction. Results provide weak support for hypotheses on client deservingness but slightly stronger support for those on client outcomes. Overall, findings show that SLBs who more strongly believe that the world is just are more likely to support decisions to both follow and prosocially break organizational rules, even when controlling for their baseline rule-following tendencies. As such, I argue that it is time public administration scholars heed Wilkins and Wenger's (2015) call to further examine the role that SLBs' worldviews play in shaping their behaviors, including how they relate to organizational rules and their clients.

Background

Street-level Bureaucrats, Rules, and Strategy

Street-level bureaucrats are afforded a great deal of power by the discretion inherent to their positions (Lipsky 1980), and research has shown that they use their discretion in a variety of ways. Sometimes, SLBs use their discretion to better serve—or "move toward" (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022)—their clients, such as in the case of SLBs who actively represent minoritized clients by, among other things, working to improve those clients' outcomes (Keiser et al., 2002; Sowa & Selden, 2003). Other times, however, SLBs do the opposite and "move away" from clients (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2022), using their discretion in harmful, biased ways (Baumgartner et al., 2017; Bell & Jilke, 2024; Olsen et al., 2022). Clearly, SLBs have access to a wide range of actions within their discretionary range. However, SLBs also possess the ability to act outside the bounds of their allotted discretion.

Bozeman (2022) describes three primary ways in which SLBs can respond to organizational rules: by fully complying, partially complying, or not complying. While these responses may seem clear cut, taking them at face value elides a great deal of complexity in SLBs' compliance behaviors, including the strategy behind them. In fact, SLBs use rules strategically much like they do their discretion: to move toward or away from clients. For example, SLBs may over comply with rules, rigidly enforcing them to prevent certain clients from accessing public resources; yet, for the "right" clients, they may bend—or even break—rules in order to better meet their clients' needs (DeHart-Davis, 2017; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022; Zacka, 2017). Recent work has explored the latter type of rule breaking, known prosocial rule breaking (PSRB), defined as *"…any instance where an employee intentionally violates a formal organizational policy, regulation, or prohibition with the primary intention of promoting the welfare of the organization or one of its stakeholders.*" (Morrison, 2006, p. 6). While some scholarship has explored the role of bureaucrats' personalities (Borry & Henderson, 2020), their gender identities and identity congruence between bureaucrats and their managers (Piatak et al., 2020; see also Portillo & DeHart-Davis, 2009), and public service motivation (Weißmüller et al., 2022) in influencing bureaucrats' PSRB tendencies, more work is needed to understand how bureaucrats' perceptions of *clients* shapes their support for PSRB decisions. Because bureaucrats use rules strategically, though, this study examines how information about the client a SLB is serving shapes support for both PSRB and rule-following decisions.

Rule Compliance for Whom? The Possible Roles of Social Identity and Deservingness

Scholars have called for more research on how social identities shape perceptions of bureaucrats' rule compliance behavior (Fleming & Bodkin, 2022), and there are reasons to expect that clients' social identities may influence support for both PSRB and rule-following decisions. According to

social identity theory (SIT), individuals naturally categorize themselves and others into groups based on perceived similarities and differences (Tajfel, 1981b; T5/2/24 3:51:00 PMajfel & Turner, 1986). In the categorization process, the perceived similarities and differences that are used to distinguish one category from another are emphasized as individuals work to determine the groups into which they and others fit, and individuals soon begin to define themselves—their identities—based on the similarities that form the basis of their group membership (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Tajfel, 1981a). Because the groups to which individuals belong (i.e., ingroups) make up such a large part of who individuals are, individuals are motivated to protect ingroups and promote them over other groups (i.e., outgroups) by showing both favoritism towards ingroup members and discrimination against outgroup members, as protecting ingroups also means protecting themselves (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As such, SIT leads me to the following hypotheses:

H1: *On average, respondents will express more (less) support for street-level bureaucrats' prosocial rule-breaking decisions when those decisions are made to help an ingroup (outgroup) client, or client with which respondents share (do not share) a social identity.*

H2: *On average, respondents will express more support for street-level bureaucrats' rule-following decisions when those decisions are made while serving an outgroup client.*

There are also reasons to expect that respondents' perceptions of a given client's deservingness will influence their support for both SLBs' rule-following and PSRB decisions. This may be especially true for bureaucrat respondents, as a litany of evidence indicates that client deservingness is often the criteria SLBs use in determining whether they will use their discretion and/or the rules to move towards or away from their clients (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022; Zacka, 2017; see also Bell et al., 2020; Falk Mikkelsen et al., 2022; Jilke & Tummers, 2018; Stensöta, 2019; Wenger

& Wilkins, 2009). While not specifically focused on SLB-client interactions, there is also a tremendous amount of research showing that perceptions of target populations' deservingness largely shapes how citizens view policies and programs, with citizens being more likely to support policies/programs that benefit populations seen as deserving *or* burden those seen as undeserving (Bell, 2021; Gilens, 1999; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; van Oorschot, 2000, 2006; see also Baekgaard et al., 2021; Keiser & Miller, 2020; J. Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2021; Soss & Schram, 2007). This leads me to the following hypotheses:

H3: *On average, respondents will express more (less) support for street-level bureaucrats' prosocial rule-breaking decisions when those decisions are made to help a deserving (undeserving) client.*

H4: *On average, respondents will express more support for street-level bureaucrats' rule-following decisions when those decisions are made while serving an undeserving client.*

Outcomes: Ends that Justify Means?

It is also possible that respondents' support for SLBs' rule decisions will hinge much more on their assessment of the client's outcome—what happens to the client—than the SLBs' actual compliance. For starters, citizens tend to loathe rules they perceive as red tape (Hattke et al., 2020; Kaufmann & Tummers, 2017; Tummers et al., 2016), and New Public Management reforms often explicitly tied the public sector's inefficiencies to an excess of burdensome, ineffective rules (Gore, 1993; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Coupled with the consistency with which outcomes are shown to matter to citizens (e.g., Holbein, 2016; James, 2011; James & Moseley, 2014; Ryzin & Immerwahr, 2004), it seems possible that citizens may excuse noncompliance if it results in better outcomes.

While more work is needed to understand the relationship between outcomes and citizens' perceptions of SLBs' rule decisions, some research already shows that context shapes how citizens view rules and rule compliance. For example, positive outcomes improve citizens' perceptions of rules (Ahn & Campbell, 2022; Kaufmann & Feeney, 2014), suggesting that, for some citizens, outcomes may serve as ends that justify procedural means. Along similar lines, citizens also demonstrate nuance in their perceptions of bureaucrats' rule-breaking decisions, recommending more lenient punishments for bureaucrats who break the rules for prosocial reasons than those who do so for self-interested reasons (Fleming & Bodkin, 2022). Taken together, I expect that client outcomes will matter to citizens—specifically, that positive outcomes will increase citizens' support for rule-following and PSRB decisions. Additionally, because rules legitimize decisions (DeHart-Davis, 2017; DeHart-Davis et al., 2013), rule-following decisions should be in less need of justification than PSRB decisions; thus, I expect the increase in support that comes from positive client outcomes to be larger for PSRB decisions than rule-following ones.

H5a: *On average, respondents will express more support for SLBs' rule decisions when clients receive positive outcomes (relative to when they receive negative ones).*

H5b: *On average, the effect of a positive client outcome on respondents' support will be significantly greater for PSRB decisions than rule-following decisions.*

Hindsight in a Just World: The Possible Role of Just-World Beliefs

Finally, respondents' worldviews—particularly their belief in a just world—may play an important role in shaping their support for SLBs' rule compliance decisions. A rich literature in social psychology exists around individuals' just-world beliefs (or belief in a just world; terms used interchangeably). Lerner is credited with introducing the just-world hypothesis, which essentially

argues that, because of a need to reduce uncertainty and feel that they have more control over their environment, individuals are motivated to believe that the world is fundamentally just—in other words, that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Lerner, 1965, 1980; Lerner & Matthews, 1967; Lerner & Miller, 1978). According to the hypothesis, believing in a just world makes it much easier for individuals to pursue long-term goals because a just world allots outcomes based on deservingness; on the other hand, believing that the world is *not* just requires confronting an uncomfortable reality, one wherein an individual's hard work may not pay off and in which bad things may happen to good people (Lerner & Miller, 1978).

Because just-world beliefs make life more comfortable, individuals are not only motivated to hold them but to defend them, which affects how they make sense of the world, especially their attribution processes. For example, those with high just-world beliefs are more likely to blame victims for their misfortunes (Lerner & Miller, 1978; Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2021; Smith & Stathi, 2022; Strömwall et al., 2012) and view negative outcomes and inequality as just (Furnham & Gunter, 1984; García-Sánchez et al., 2022; Harper et al., 1990). Scholars have also found that just-world beliefs are negatively correlated with support for redistributive policies (García-Sánchez et al., 2020; Wilkins & Wenger, 2014). Further, Appelbaum et al. (2006) examined perceptions of whether a low-income subject deserved government aid, using a survey experiment to vary the amount of effort the subject had expended toward bettering their situation. The authors found that the subject's effort was *negatively* correlated with deservingness perceptions among respondents with high just-world beliefs but was positively correlated among those with low just-world beliefs. According to the just-world hypothesis, the explanation for all of these findings is simple: high-belief individuals blame *people* for their misfortunes rather than broader systems or circumstances to preserve their belief in the world as a fundamentally just place. Relevant to the current study, the just-world hypothesis leads me to

expect that respondents with high just-world beliefs will see the SLBs' rule decision and the client's outcome as the most just option. In other words, regardless of whether the SLB follows or prosocially breaks the rules, high-belief respondents will be motivated to believe that the SLBs' rule decision was just—the rule decision the client deserved. Similarly, high-belief respondents will be motivated to believe that the client experienced the outcome they deserved, regardless of the client's past and whether the outcome was positive. Taken together, this leads me to expect that respondents' just-world beliefs will be positively correlated with their support for *both* rule-following and PSRB decisions, regardless of information about the client and/or the outcome they experience. In a just world, hindsight truly is 20/20.

H6: *Respondents' just-world beliefs will be positively correlated with their support for both rule-following and PSRB decisions.*

Research Design

To evaluate my hypotheses, I use data collected from an original survey experiment. Respondents (n = 3,485) were recruited via Lucid's Theorem panel. Descriptive statistics for the sample are available in the appendix. Lucid claims to balance each survey's sample such that it is roughly analogous to a random, nationally-representative sample of Americans, and studies have provided evidence that supports this claim (Coppock & McClellan, 2019; see also Peyton et al., 2022).[1] While Rutherford et al. (2021) found that bureaucrats' responses to experimental treatments closely approximated those of students and MTurk respondents, which suggests that results obtained from my full sample may generalize to bureaucrats, I also analyze a subsample of bureaucrat respondents (i.e., public sector

employees; n = 399) to aid in drawing conclusions regarding bureaucrats' support for SLBs' rule decisions.

Vignette

While survey experiments featuring hypothetical scenarios can generate valid results (Brutger et al., 2023), I chose to base my vignette on the real SLB-client interaction presented in Story 1.1 of Maynard-Moody and Musheno's (2022) *Cops, Teachers, Counselors*. I selected Story 1.1 because of my interest in gauging support for PSRB, as the story provides an actual account of a SLB doing just that.

In the vignette (full text available in appendix), an employment counselor (i.e., SLB) named Jake Becker is tasked with helping a client find employment.[2] Though it is explained that jobs are scarce at the time, the SLB is eventually able to find a position for the client in a neighboring town; however, the town is an hour's drive for the client, there are no public transportation options available in the area, and the client does not own a vehicle. The SLB has access to funding that can be used to help clients with certain approved expenses such as professional clothing. The client asks the SLB for help purchasing a vehicle but using funds to help clients purchase a vehicle is against agency rules. The SLB then must decide whether to follow agency rules, thereby refusing to help the client, or prosocially break agency rules by helping the client. The vignette ends by discussing the client's outcome, explained in more detail below.

Treatment Variables

The vignette is embedded with a 2x4x2x2 factorial survey experiment. As such, there were a total of 32 treatment groups to which respondents could be randomly assigned. Table 5.1 (below) and

Appendix Table 5.1 (appendix) summarize treatment values and the groups formed by their combinations.

Table 5.1: Treatment Variables and Possible Values

Variable	Possible Values
Bureaucrat's Rule Decision	**Followed rules** (did not misuse funds or help buy vehicle); **PSRB/broke rules** (misused funds to help client buy vehicle)
Client Identity	**Black Woman** (Tanisha); **Black Man** (Keyshawn); **White Woman** (Katelyn); **White Man** (Brett)
Client Deservingness Framing	**More deserving** (college grad, high performer, lost job when prior employer went bankrupt, motivated and never late); **Less deserving** (earned G.E.D., lost previous job due to poor performance, did not seem motivated and often late)
Client Outcome	**Positive** (car allowed client to keep job, recently received promotion); **Negative** (was not able to keep job, returned to the agency for more help)

Notes: treatment levels are bolded; operationalizations are summarized in parentheses

The first treatment variable, the SLB's rule decision, has two possible values: the SLB either follows the rules and does not give the client funds to help with the purchase of a vehicle or prosocially breaks the rules by doing the opposite. The second treatment variable, the client's identity, has four possible values: Black woman, Black man, White woman, White man. These are signaled by varying the client's name in the vignettes; each name was associated with its corresponding race by over 90% of respondents in a study by Gaddis (2017). The client's identity will be used to evaluate H1 and H2. Used to test H3, the third treatment variable, the client's deservingness, has two values which I randomly signal by varying descriptions of the client's earned and resource deservingness (Jilke & Tummers, 2018). Finally, the fourth treatment variable, the client's outcome, has two values: positive outcomes are signaled by the client keeping their job and succeeding while negative values are

signaled by the client being unable to keep their job and returning to the agency for additional assistance. The client's outcome will be used to evaluate H5a and H5b.

Other Independent Variables

To test the effect of the SLB serving an in-group client (i.e., a client with which the respondent shares an identity), respondents' race and gender are used in conjunction with the demographic information of the client they were assigned. I created two dummy variables to indicate when respondents share an identity with the client. If men (women) respondents received a client that was a man (woman), the value of the gender match dummy is a 1; similarly, if Black (White) respondents received a Black (White) client, the value of the race match dummy is a 1. It is also worth noting that respondents may define themselves more by the intersections of their racial and gender identities than by either in isolation—for example, a respondent may primarily identify as a *Black woman* rather than as Black *or* a woman (see Bearfield, 2009; Fay et al., 2021; Headley, 2022). To account for possible effects of respondents sharing both a racial and gender identity with the client, I also created a third dummy variable to indicate when respondents shared both a racial and gender identity with their assigned client. For instance, if a Black woman respondent received a Black woman client, the value of the "both match" variable is a 1.

To assess H6 and the effect of respondents' just-world beliefs on their support for the SLB's rule decision, I capture respondents' just-world beliefs using Lucas, Zhdanova, and Alexander's (2011) measure of 12 survey questions. I then index responses to these 12 questions to create a continuous scale ranging from 0 to 4, with 0 representing the hypothetical minimum value (i.e., respondents who selected the lowest level of just-world beliefs for all 12 survey questions) and 4 representing the

maximum (i.e., respondents who selected the highest level of just-world beliefs for all 12 survey questions).

Control Variables

I include a few standard control variables as well as one specific to this study. I account for baseline effects of respondents' race and gender in an effort to isolate the previously discussed effects of identity congruence with clients. I also include a measure of respondents' income (0 = < $25,000; 5 = $150,000 or more) to account for socioeconomic identification with the client (see Vinopal, 2020) and political party identification (0 = strong Democrat; 4 = strong Republican) to account for any general prior opinions of social service programs. Given the study's focus on rule compliance, I also include Oberfield's (2010) measure of respondents' default rule-following tendencies, which is an index of respondents' indicated agreement with five survey questions (e.g., "I am someone who follows the rules even if I don't agree with them; see appendix for full list of items). The index ranges from 0 to 4, with 4 indicating the highest rule-following tendency. This will allow me to account for any baseline aversion to (or propensity towards) following/breaking rules from respondents.

Dependent Variable

My dependent variable is respondents' level of support for the SLB's rule decision. This is measured via responses to the following question: "If you were [the SLB's] supervisor, would you support or oppose his decision to {follow/break} the rules in this case?".[3] Either "follow" or "break" was piped into the question based on the treatment group to which respondents were assigned in an effort to remind respondents of the SLB's rule decision. Responses ranged from 1 (strongly oppose) to 5 (strongly support).

Methodology

I included two pre-treatment attention checks and a post-treatment (and post-randomization) manipulation check in my survey. Only respondents who passed the attention checks were randomly assigned a treatment group. As such, 3,485 of the 3,984 recruited respondents are included in my sample. As a manipulation check, respondents were asked why the client was unemployed, with the correct answer varying based on the deservingness of the client in the treatment they were assigned. Approximately 70.1% of respondents passed the manipulation check.

I also conducted a series of balance tests to test for significant differences in the demographic composition of respondents across my 32 treatment groups. Among 29 demographic variables, significant differences were detected for only two: the proportion of respondents whose highest level of education was a high school diploma or G.E.D. and the proportion of respondents who were aged 65 years and up (full results in supplementary material). Thus, I concluded that groups were well balanced and included neither education nor age as controls.

To evaluate my hypotheses, I estimate a series of OLS regressions.[4] First, I separate respondents into two groups based on the rule decision of the SLB in their received treatment, as I am interested in understanding how respondents' support for both PSRB and rule-following decisions is influenced by my covariates. I then estimate two models for both the PSRB and rule-following groups: one including only the treatment variables manipulated in my vignette and one including all covariates, bringing the total to four models. Finally, I re-estimate all models, this time including

only bureaucrat respondents (i.e., respondents who indicated that they were public sector employees).

Results

Results from estimating each of my models are available in Figures 5-1 and 5-2, below (for full results, see Appendix Tables 5.2 and 5.3). Figure 5-1 provides the predicted effect of variables relevant to my hypotheses on support of respondents in rule-following treatments; Figure 5-2 does the same, this time looking at respondents who were assigned PSRB treatments and the effect of relevant variables on their support for the SLB's decision.

Figure 5-1: Effects of Key Variables on Marginal Mean Support for Bureaucrat's Rule-following Decision

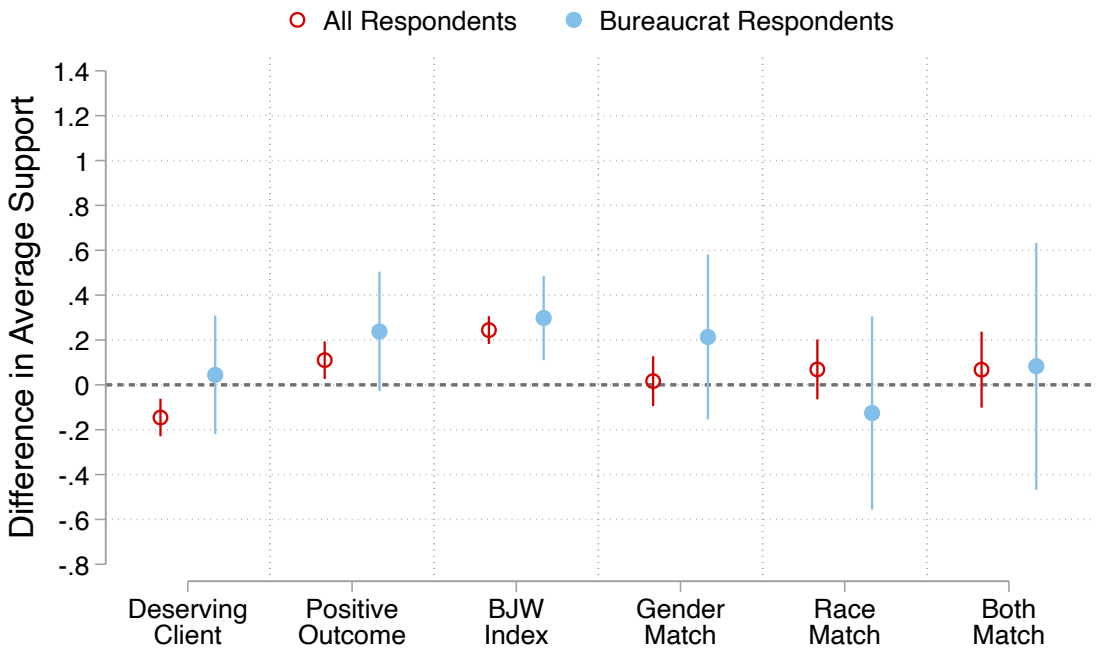
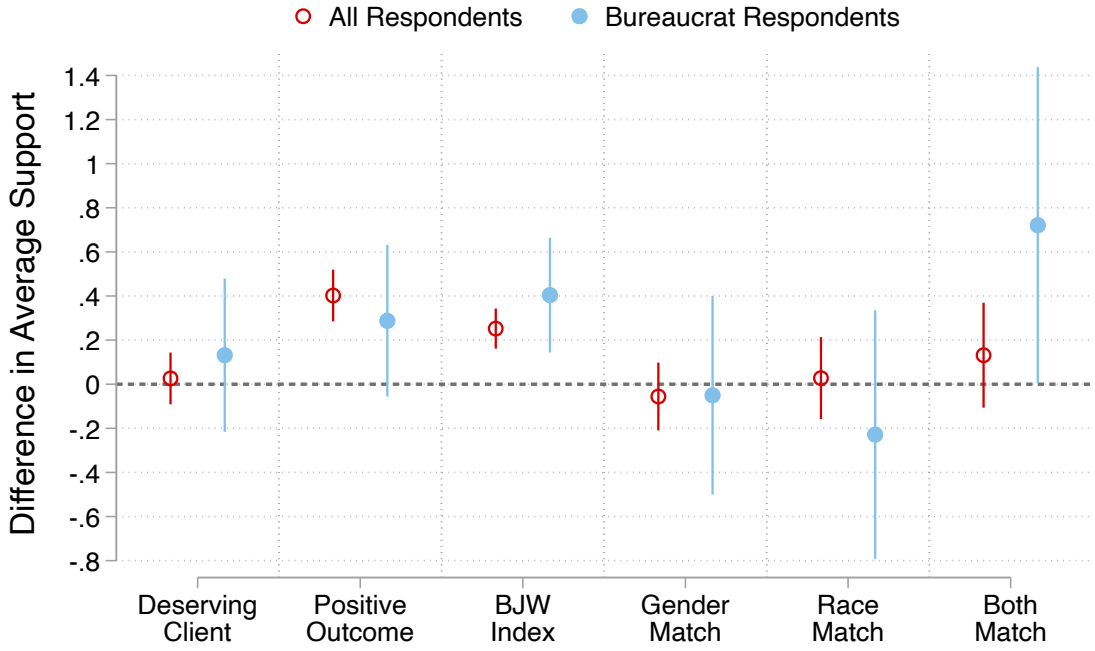


Figure 5-2: Effects of Key Variables on Marginal Mean Support for the Bureaucrat's PSRB Decision



H1 posited that respondents would express more support for SLBs' PSRB decisions when the decisions were made to help a client with which respondents shared a social identity (i.e., in group client). The results largely do not support this hypothesis, though there are still interesting findings here. Neither sharing a race, gender, nor both with the client significantly affected respondents' support for the SLB's PSRB decision; however, when restricting analysis to bureaucrat respondents only, sharing both a race and gender with the client was associated with a 0.72pt increase in support for the SLB's PSRB decision ($p = 0.049$) on average. H2, meanwhile, posited that respondents would express more support for the SLB's rule-following decision when made for an outgroup client. This hypothesis is also not supported, as no significant differences resulted from respondents sharing a race and/or gender with the client.

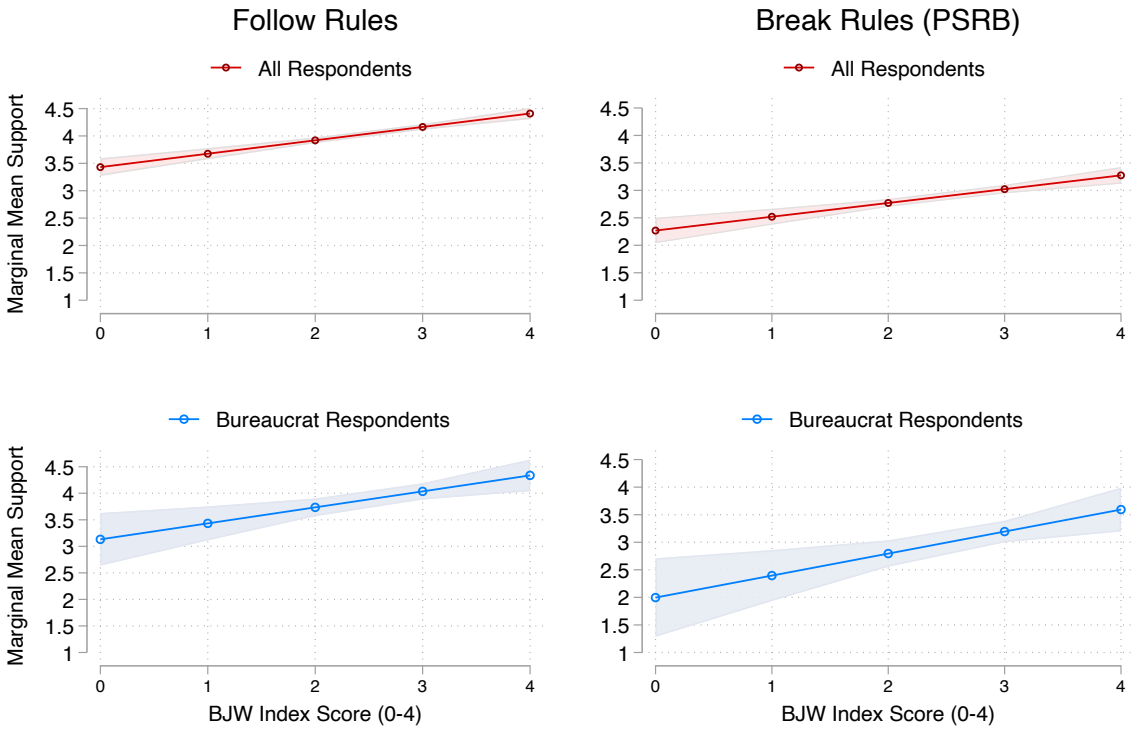
H3 and H4 were each concerned with the client's deservingness, positing that respondents would express more support for the SLB's PSRB decision when the client was deserving and more support for the SLB's rule-following decision when the client was undeserving, respectively. These hypotheses are also generally unsupported by results. Relative to those assigned undeserving clients, respondents who were assigned deserving clients expressed significantly less support (-0.15; $p = 0.001$) for rule-following decisions; however, the decrease does not seem substantively noteworthy, equivalent to a 3% reduction in support on a five-point scale. The client's deservingness did not significantly affect support for the SLB's rule-following decision when restricting analysis to bureaucrat respondents; support for the SLB's PSRB decision was unaffected in both samples.

Next, H5a posited that respondents would express more support for both the SLB's rule-following and PSRB decisions when the SLB's client received a positive outcome; if H5b is supported, this increase in support will be larger for PSRB decisions than rule-following decisions since rule-following decisions should be partially legitimized by the rules themselves. H5a is supported, as, relative to treatments in which the client experienced a negative outcome, a positive outcome resulted in an average increase in support for rule-following decisions among both the entire sample (0.11; $p = 0.010$) and bureaucrat respondents only (0.24; $p = 0.079$) as well as an average increase in support for PSRB decisions among both samples (0.40; $p < 0.001$ | 0.29; $p = 0.101$).[5] The results also provide support for H5b, as a quick chi-squared test indicates that the difference between the average effect of a positive client outcome in PSRB treatments (0.40) and the average effect of a positive client outcome in rule-following treatments (0.11) is greater than 0 ($\chi^2 = 15.89$; $p < 0.001$).

Finally, according to H6, respondents' just-world belief index scores—which range from 0 to 4—will be positively correlated with their support for both rule-following and PSRB decisions. Results

provide the strongest support yet for H6, as a one-unit increase in respondents' just-world belief index scores is associated with an average increase in support for rule-following decisions among all respondents (0.24; $p < 0.001$) and bureaucrat respondents (0.30; $p = 0.002$). A one-unit increase is also associated with an average increase in support for PSRB decisions among all respondents (0.25; $p < 0.001$) and bureaucrat respondents (0.40; $p = 0.003$). Looking at the full range of just-world belief index scores, among all respondents, a four-unit increase (i.e., moving from the minimum to maximum just-world belief index score) is associated with a 0.98pt increase in support for both rule-following and PSRB decisions; among bureaucrat respondents, the same shift is associated with a 1.19pt and a 1.62pt increase in support for rule-following and PSRB decisions, respectively (see Figure 5-3, below).

Figure 5-3: Estimated Marginal Effects of Just-World Belief Index Score from 0 to 4 on Respondents' Support for the SLB's Rule Decision



Discussion

Overall, findings suggest that respondents' just-world beliefs play the largest role in shaping their support for SLBs' rule decisions. The effect of just-world beliefs on support was consistent for the full sample and when restricting analysis to a subgroup of only bureaucrat respondents, with just-world beliefs being strongly and positively associated with support for both rule-following and PSRB decisions, even when conditioning on respondents' baseline rule-following tendencies. Though the client's deservingness and client outcome occasionally generated statistically significant differences in respondents' support consistent with hypothesized expectations, effect sizes were substantively quite small. Interestingly, the client's race and gender identities largely did not affect respondents' support, regardless of whether clients shared a race and/or gender identity with respondents—the lone exception here was among bureaucrat respondents who shared *both* a race and gender with the client, which led to a relatively large increase in their support for the SLB's PSRB decision; bureaucrat respondents' support for the SLB's rule-following decision was unaffected by identity congruence with the client.

Consistent with Wilkins and Wenger's (2015) argument, these findings also suggest that just-world beliefs may largely shape bureaucrats' behavior, including what bureaucrats *do not* do. Just-world beliefs were associated with strong increases in support for both rule-following and PSRB decisions, which is not surprising given that individuals with high just-world beliefs tend to undersell the role that individual actions and agency play in influencing outcomes (Lerner and Miller, 1978). To those with high just-world beliefs, disparate outcomes are simply evidence of the world giving people what they deserve (Wilkins and Wenger, 2014). That just-world beliefs increased support for the SLB's decision *regardless* of what it was (or whom they were serving) suggests that the same is true for decisions: that those with high-just world beliefs are more likely to support a wide-range of decisions

in hindsight, as decisions are ultimately just. This raises concern that public managers with high-just world beliefs may be less likely to critically examine client outcomes—including the decisions that led to the outcomes—and more likely to ignore the role that their employees may play in perpetuating inequality.

This study also contributes by merging literatures on bureaucratic discretion and PSRB with social psychology literatures on identity and deservingness, investigating how bureaucrats may change their response to organizational rules based on the client they're serving. Much of the research on bureaucratic behavior has primarily focused on what bureaucrats do within the range of their allotted discretion, including on how these behaviors depend on how they perceive their clients. This study goes a step further by extending this research to bureaucratic behavior *outside* the bounds of their discretion.

Along these lines, the findings also provide implications for the representative bureaucracy literature. Identity congruence only significantly affected support for PSRB decisions (but not rule-following decisions) among bureaucrats who shared *both* a race and gender with clients suggests that PSRB may a possible mechanism behind the improved outcomes generated through active representation—that bureaucrats are more likely to support PSRB decisions (and to perhaps make PSRB decisions themselves) for clients with whom they share a race and gender. However, the fact that sharing *only* a race or gender with the client did not affect bureaucrat respondents' support for PSRB decisions may indicate that there is a correlation between how much a bureaucrat is willing to do for a client (including whether they are willing to act outside of the rules) and how strongly they identify with a client. In other words, the choice to actively represent, at least to the extent that it includes breaking rules to help a client, may not be as binary as it is sometimes presented. Finally,

the fact that no degree of identity congruence with the client influenced support among the full sample of respondents is also interesting and worth exploring in future work.

Limitations

While, as discussed, I have taken steps to boost the generalizability of my findings to bureaucrats themselves, future work is needed to confirm this generalizability and evaluate the extent to which findings hold for a larger sample of bureaucrats. Additionally, future work will also be needed to examine how these findings hold in other street-level contexts (e.g., police encounters, public school classrooms, etc.). SLBs are occasionally lumped together into a single class in research. While recognizing the important similarities faced by SLBs across professions is important, we must be careful to avoid overlooking the importance of variation in organizational culture across those professions, as organizational culture can certainly change how SLBs respond to clients, sometimes even in ways that are contrary to expectations of public administration literatures (Wilkins & Williams, 2008, 2009). As such, future research should examine whether support for PSRB and/or rule-following decisions varies across street-level professions.

In this study, I chose to present respondents with information about the client's outcome to understand whether the positivity of said outcome affected their support for PSRB decisions in particular—in other words, to understand whether the ends (outcome) ever justified the means (rule-breaking) for respondents. Doing so prevented me from ending the vignette at the decision point and then asking *respondents* whether they would follow or prosocially break the rules in that situation. As such, findings do not speak as directly to the effect of my independent variables on bureaucrats' PSRB/rule-following tendencies as would have been possible with a different research design. Future work that more directly assess this rather than bureaucrats' *support* for rule-

following/PSRB would be especially interesting when combined with the findings of this study, especially given that the client's outcome had a smaller effect among bureaucrat respondents than the entire sample.

Conclusion

Taken together, the findings of this chapter suggest that bureaucrats' worldviews—and particularly the extent to which they believe the world is just—play an important role in shaping how they perceive other bureaucrats' rule compliance decisions. While bureaucrat respondents who shared *both* a race and gender identity with the client were more likely to support PSRB decisions (i.e., decisions to break the rules for the explicit purpose of better helping that client), those who shared *only* a race or gender with the client were not, findings which were inconsistent with hypothesized expectations.

Notes

1. For more information on Lucid's data quality, see: https://lucidtheorem.com/faq#data-quality.
2. The name "Jake Becker" was selected because it was identified as a white name by over 95% of respondents in Gaddis' (2017) study. I chose to give the SLB a name because the SLB's identities are not variables of interest in this study. Explicitly making the SLB a white man allows me to better "control" for any effects of the SLB's identity on respondents' answers, as the SLB's identities are constant individually inferred (or not inferred) by respondents.
3. Rutherford et al.'s (2021) found that samples of bureaucrats, students, and participants in online survey panels exhibited very similar evaluations of a public organization's performance. I asked respondents whether they would support the SLB's rule decision *if they were his supervisor* in an

effort to put respondents in more of an evaluative mindset, much like they were in Rutherford et al.'s study. This should make the findings obtained from my full sample of respondents more generalizable to bureaucrats; however, I also analyze a subset of bureaucrat respondents to further increase the applicability of my findings to bureaucrats.

4. Given that my dependent variable is ordinal, I also ran all models using ordered logit. Results were consistent in their direction, magnitude, and significance. As such, I report OLS estimates for ease of interpretation.
5. While results here are not always significant at the 0.05 level, they are close enough to warrant discussion given the smaller sample sizes of the bureaucrat respondent subgroups, especially given that the estimates are only one piece of my analysis and are consistent with results from the full sample.
6. This is especially problematic when considering that the question on which my dependent variable is based asked respondents whether they would support the SLB's decision *if they were the SLB's supervisor*, not to mention that that those with high just-world beliefs are more likely to justify the status quo (Hafer & Choma, 2009; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007)

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Appendix

Summary of Experimental Treatments

Appendix Table 5.1: Summary of Treatment Values and Combinations

Bureaucrat's Rule Decision	Client Identity	Client Deservingness	Client Outcome
Follow Rules	White woman (Katelyn)	Deserving	Positive
Follow Rules	White man (Brett)	Deserving	Positive
Follow Rules	Black woman (Tanisha)	Deserving	Positive
Follow Rules	Black man (Keyshawn)	Deserving	Positive
Follow Rules	White woman (Katelyn)	Undeserving	Positive
Follow Rules	White man (Brett)	Undeserving	Positive
Follow Rules	Black woman (Tanisha)	Undeserving	Positive
Follow Rules	Black man (Keyshawn)	Undeserving	Positive
Follow Rules	White woman (Katelyn)	Deserving	Negative
Follow Rules	White man (Brett)	Deserving	Negative
Follow Rules	Black woman (Tanisha)	Deserving	Negative
Follow Rules	Black man (Keyshawn)	Deserving	Negative
Follow Rules	White woman (Katelyn)	Undeserving	Negative
Follow Rules	White man (Brett)	Undeserving	Negative
Follow Rules	Black woman (Tanisha)	Undeserving	Negative
Follow Rules	Black man (Keyshawn)	Undeserving	Negative
PSRB	White woman (Katelyn)	Deserving	Positive
PSRB	White man (Brett)	Deserving	Positive
PSRB	Black woman (Tanisha)	Deserving	Positive
PSRB	Black man (Keyshawn)	Deserving	Positive
PSRB	White woman (Katelyn)	Undeserving	Positive
PSRB	White man (Brett)	Undeserving	Positive
PSRB	Black woman (Tanisha)	Undeserving	Positive
PSRB	Black man (Keyshawn)	Undeserving	Positive
PSRB	White woman (Katelyn)	Deserving	Negative
PSRB	White man (Brett)	Deserving	Negative
PSRB	Black woman (Tanisha)	Deserving	Negative
PSRB	Black man (Keyshawn)	Deserving	Negative
PSRB	White woman (Katelyn)	Undeserving	Negative
PSRB	White man (Brett)	Undeserving	Negative
PSRB	Black woman (Tanisha)	Undeserving	Negative
PSRB	Black man (Keyshawn)	Undeserving	Negative

Results from OLS Regression (Full Sample)

Appendix Table 5.2: Results from OLS Regression (Full Sample of Respondents)

	Rule-following Decision				PSRB Decision			
	Base		Full		Base		Full	
Black client	0.02		0.05		0.002		0.04	
(ref. = white client)	(0.04)		(0.05)		(0.06)		(0.07)	
Woman client	0.01		0.03		0.02		0.00	
(ref. = man client)	(0.04)		(0.04)		(0.06)		(0.06)	
Deserving client	-0.15	*	-0.15	**	0.01		0.03	
(ref. = undeserving)	(0.04)		(0.04)		(0.06)		(0.06)	
Positive outcome	0.10	*	0.11	*	0.38	***	0.40	***
(ref. = negative)	(0.04)		(0.04)		(0.06)		(0.06)	
Just-world belief index			0.24	***			0.25	***
(min. = 0; max = 4)			(0.03)				(0.05)	
Resp./Client gender match			0.02				-0.06	
(ref. = no gender match)			(0.06)				(0.08)	
Resp./Client race match			0.07				0.03	
(ref. = no race match)			(0.07)				(0.09)	
Rule-following score			0.16	***			-0.34	***
(min. = 0; max = 4)			(0.03)				(0.04)	
Party ID			0.02				-0.07	**
(Str. Dem to str. Rep.)			(0.02)				(0.02)	
Income			0.02				0.01	
(0 = <$25k; 6 = $150k+)			(0.01)				(0.02)	
Woman respondent			0.07				-0.02	
(ref. = man respondent)			(0.04)				(0.06)	
Black respondent			0.02				0.03	
(ref. = non-Black resp.)			(0.08)				(0.10)	
White respondent			0.15	*			-0.10	
(ref. = non-White resp.)			(0.06)				(0.09)	
Gender & race match			0.07				0.13	
(ref. = no race and/or gender match)			(0.09)				(0.12)	
Constant	4.04	***	2.78	***	2.67	***	2.95	***
	(0.05)		(0.12)		(0.07)		(0.17)	
Observations	1,745		1,618		1,740		1,605	

*Notes: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001. Robust Standard Errors appear in the parentheses below the coefficients.*

Subgroup Analysis: Results from OLS Regressions (Bureaucrat Respondents Only)

Table A3: Results from OLS Regressions (Bureaucrat Respondents Only)

	Rule-following Decision				PSRB Decision			
	Base		Full		Base		Full	
Black client	-0.05		-0.03		-0.22		-0.28	
(ref. = white client)	(0.13)		(0.15)		(0.18)		(0.20)	
Woman client	0.16		0.21		0.06		0.06	
(ref. = man client)	(0.13)		(0.14)		(0.18)		(0.18)	
Deserving client	-0.01		0.04		0.15		0.13	
(ref. = undeserving)	(0.13)		(0.13)		(0.18)		(0.18)	
Positive outcome	0.19		0.24		0.23		0.29	
(ref. = negative)	(0.13)		(0.13)		(0.17)		(0.17)	
Just-world belief index			0.30	**			0.40	**
(min. = 0; max = 4)			(0.10)				(0.13)	
Resp./Client gender match			0.21				-0.05	
(ref. = no gender match)			(0.19)				(0.23)	
Resp./Client race match			-0.13				-0.23	
(ref. = no race match)			(0.22)				(0.29)	
Rule-following score			0.04				-0.10	
(min. = 0; max = 4)			(0.10)				(0.13)	
Party ID			0.00				-0.11	
(Str. Dem to str. Rep.)			(0.05)				(0.07)	
Income			0.02				0.14	*
(0 = <$25k; 6 = $150k+)			(0.05)				(0.06)	
Woman respondent			0.25				0.47	**
(ref. = man respondent)			(0.14)				(0.18)	
Black respondent			-0.20				0.003	
(ref. = non-Black resp.)			(0.24)				(0.30)	
White respondent			0.08				0.01	
(ref. = non-White resp.)			(0.22)				(0.25)	
Gender & race match			0.08				0.72	*
(ref. = no race and/or gender match)			(0.28)				(0.36)	
Constant	3.75	***	2.59	***	2.92	***	1.72	**
	(0.15)		(0.42)		(0.19)		(0.49)	
Observations	209		198		212		201	

*Notes: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001. Robust Standard Errors in the parentheses below coefficient.*

Appendix Table 5.4: Balance of Treatment Groups

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	χ2	p
Race/Eth.																																		
White	.64	.65	.62	.76	.65	.68	.69	.60	.75	.71	.67	.70	.64	.66	.67	.62	.72	.67	.71	.73	.73	.59	.69	.65	.66	.63	.70	.64	.69	.65	.61	.52	27.52	.65
Black	.20	.22	.25	.17	.18	.23	.21	.22	.15	.12	.14	.17	.23	.19	.21	.21	.16	.19	.19	.15	.12	.24	.17	.25	.19	.21	.23	.23	.16	.18	.19	.29	27.79	.63
Hisp./Lat.	.10	.10	.08	.07	.13	.11	.08	.07	.10	.12	.15	.08	.15	.12	.09	.12	.13	.09	.09	.09	.11	.11	.13	.12	.12	.09	.07	.05	.08	.14	.13	.13	21.01	.91
Asian	.07	.05	.07	.04	.07	.04	.06	.11	.03	.05	.05	.06	.03	.06	.06	.02	.02	.06	.04	.04	.02	.05	.05	.05	.05	.04	.04	.06	.08	.05	.06	.05	25.29	.75
Gender																																		
Man	.51	.41	.55	.49	.50	.46	.54	.48	.45	.52	.51	.50	.35	.56	.47	.44	.50	.48	.49	.46	.38	.49	.48	.45	.47	.45	.51	.48	.52	.50	.56	.49	29.37	.55
Woman	.48	.58	.44	.49	.48	.52	.46	.51	.54	.46	.47	.49	.62	.43	.52	.56	.49	.50	.51	.54	.62	.49	.51	.54	.53	.55	.47	.52	.47	.49	.42	.48	30.00	.52
Party ID																																		
Strong Dem.	.19	.24	.28	.24	.24	.27	.27	.21	.25	.28	.24	.24	.29	.25	.21	.24	.20	.19	.22	.17	.23	.22	.29	.26	.22	.23	.30	.27	.18	.24	.25	.29	20.91	.91
Lean Dem.	.20	.22	.16	.20	.13	.17	.21	.19	.16	.16	.17	.19	.21	.18	.23	.16	.23	.24	.24	.14	.18	.22	.19	.16	.14	.20	.19	.20	.25	.13	.26	.14	28.50	.60
Indep.	.25	.27	.31	.21	.26	.25	.13	.24	.30	.23	.25	.21	.20	.28	.17	.30	.24	.26	.27	.31	.23	.30	.20	.19	.23	.21	.21	.21	.22	.28	.17	.25	34.99	.28
Lean Rep.	.15	.09	.14	.12	.21	.13	.18	.16	.13	.19	.11	.18	.13	.13	.15	.18	.13	.09	.14	.17	.16	.12	.12	.19	.13	.18	.15	.15	.13	.14	.11	.10	23.73	.82
Strong Rep.	.13	.14	.10	.21	.14	.14	.17	.11	.11	.12	.22	.13	.15	.14	.17	.11	.17	.16	.11	.16	.19	.12	.15	.17	.23	.14	.11	.12	.20	.17	.16	.13	29.86	.52
Income																																		
<$25k	.32	.25	.22	.27	.22	.24	.19	.25	.19	.23	.17	.18	.17	.17	.15	.24	.22	.25	.20	.23	.19	.21	.23	.22	.27	.24	.21	.28	.20	.27	.21	.26	27.90	.63
$25-$49k	.22	.28	.23	.27	.21	.21	.21	.30	.22	.21	.30	.23	.26	.31	.39	.28	.26	.20	.25	.26	.25	.33	.30	.22	.26	.23	.30	.28	.31	.30	.22	.24	34.44	.31
$50-74k	.16	.20	.15	.19	.21	.20	.21	.13	.19	.18	.26	.28	.26	.18	.15	.22	.19	.23	.21	.20	.19	.17	.17	.18	.17	.14	.18	.18	.15	.14	.23	.17	29.66	.54
$75-99k	.12	.10	.14	.08	.16	.07	.17	.11	.19	.13	.12	.12	.11	.13	.07	.06	.12	.14	.13	.13	.12	.16	.09	.12	.09	.15	.16	.05	.12	.09	.17	.11	36.22	.24
$100-149k	.08	.08	.10	.14	.10	.17	.11	.12	.11	.08	.06	.12	.10	.13	.15	.11	.13	.08	.12	.09	.12	.07	.12	.14	.12	.11	.07	.12	.12	.13	.10	.08	20.05	.93
$150k +	.05	.06	.13	.02	.10	.07	.08	.08	.05	.12	.05	.04	.10	.06	.04	.05	.05	.05	.08	.05	.04	.06	.06	.10	.08	.09	.04	.03	.08	.05	.05	.06	39.44	.14
Education																																		
Some HS	.01	.03	.07	.03	.04	.04	.00	.02	.04	.06	.05	.02	.05	.03	.01	.05	.04	.05	.03	.02	.04	.04	.03	.03	.07	.05	.01	.04	.03	.05	.07	.05	27.95	.62
HS/GED	.35	.36	.18	.28	.23	.29	.19	.25	.24	.18	.19	.25	.21	.23	.23	.28	.30	.26	.18	.36	.22	.23	.25	.32	.29	.20	.28	.35	.34	.25	.28	.35	**53.05**	**.01**
Some Col.	.25	.16	.22	.22	.19	.24	.33	.19	.25	.23	.28	.26	.24	.25	.28	.24	.22	.25	.26	.19	.23	.22	.20	.20	.21	.24	.28	.20	.17	.21	.29	.20	26.03	.72
Assoc./Tech	.12	.10	.14	.13	.12	.11	.11	.11	.10	.17	.14	.11	.11	.13	.11	.14	.16	.12	.12	.09	.18	.19	.16	.13	.11	.16	.11	.13	.17	.14	.07	.12	23.16	.84
Bachelors	.18	.25	.23	.25	.34	.22	.26	.30	.29	.27	.27	.24	.30	.26	.20	.22	.17	.25	.28	.23	.25	.24	.26	.22	.25	.22	.16	.20	.21	.23	.17	.17	29.74	.53
Grad. Deg.	.07	.10	.15	.08	.06	.10	.11	.11	.08	.09	.06	.12	.09	.09	.14	.06	.10	.06	.11	.11	.09	.09	.09	.09	.06	.10	.14	.04	.08	.11	.10	.08	24.44	.79
Age																																		
18-25	.09	.12	.16	.13	.11	.18	.12	.16	.13	.13	.17	.18	.13	.19	.19	.13	.10	.14	.13	.11	.09	.16	.16	.15	.14	.14	.15	.18	.11	.10	.14	.22	22.80	.86
26-34	.22	.15	.20	.18	.20	.20	.24	.22	.12	.17	.12	.15	.18	.21	.12	.18	.11	.22	.17	.15	.20	.17	.16	.17	.23	.21	.17	.18	.16	.20	.21	.24	26.69	.69
35-44	.27	.23	.26	.19	.22	.25	.20	.19	.20	.12	.24	.24	.22	.18	.16	.20	.14	.14	.25	.24	.19	.19	.19	.22	.20	.20	.20	.22	.22	.23	.23	.23	26.53	.70
45-54	.14	.15	.08	.13	.13	.13	.15	.12	.13	.18	.17	.11	.14	.11	.12	.17	.14	.16	.12	.13	.14	.17	.17	.16	.14	.09	.15	.11	.23	.23	.13	.11	30.24	.50
55-64	.15	.15	.16	.16	.16	.14	.15	.16	.21	.15	.11	.17	.17	.14	.20	.22	.17	.17	.13	.15	.18	.11	.18	.13	.12	.18	.18	.13	.10	.09	.14	.09	23.30	.84
65+	.14	.20	.15	.22	.19	.10	.13	.14	.22	.25	.19	.15	.17	.16	.21	.10	.33	.17	.20	.22	.20	.21	.15	.17	.17	.18	.17	.17	.18	.14	.14	.11	**47.13**	**.03**

Full Text of Vignette

Pre-vignette Prompt:

Jake Becker is an **employment counselor** at the **state government's Employment and Career Development Office**. Jake is responsible for helping clients find or change jobs. In a typical day, Jake might teach a client how to find jobs online, help a client create or improve their resume, or help clients access funds for approved purchases such as professional clothing.

Vignette:

"Recently, one of Jake's clients, a 42-year-old [woman/man] named [Tanisha/Katelyn/Brett/Keyshawn], came into his office looking for a new job. Katelyn **[was a college graduate and received excellent performance reviews at her previous job but was laid off when the organization went bankrupt/previously earned her G.E.D. but had lost her last job due to poor performance]**. Katelyn also **[seemed very motivated and was never late for meetings with Jake/did not seem very motivated and was often late for meetings with Jake].**

At the time, jobs were very hard to come by in the area. Eventually, just as Katelyn was about to run out of savings, Jake found Katelyn a job with excellent pay and benefits. However, the job was about an hour's commute by car, which was a problem because Katelyn did not have a vehicle. Public transportation was also unavailable in the area.
Katelyn asked Jake to help her buy a vehicle. Jake wasn't sure what to do, as the Employment and Career Development Office's rules *do not* allow employment counselors to use funds to purchase vehicles for clients.

After thinking about it, [Jake decided there was nothing he could do: rules are rules. Jake told Katelyn he would not be able to help her purchase a vehicle/Jake decided the job was too good to pass up. Jake requested training funds and a professional clothing allowance for Katelyn but told her to use the money to buy a vehicle instead which, according to the rules, was a misuse of agency funds].

In the end, Katelyn accepted the job Jake found for her but only managed to keep it for a few weeks. Katelyn recently came back to the Employment and Career Development Office for additional help."

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- **Note about vignette:** bolded treatments vary together as a single deservingness treatment such that college graduates are always described as motivated and on time; similarly, G.E.D. earners are always described as not very motivated and often late.

Rule Orientation Index Questions

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements below.

(Strongly disagree to Strongly Agree)

- I am someone who follows the rules even if I don't agree with them
- Sometimes it's okay to bend the rules to help out a person who deserves it. (reverse coded)
- It is important that things are done "by the book" no matter what.
- If I think a rule is pointless, I will find a way around it. (reverse coded)
- I find it important to always follow the rules.

Belief in Just World (BJW) Index – Questions

BJW 1: I feel that other people generally earn the rewards and punishments they get in this world.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW 2: Other people usually receive the outcomes they deserve.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_3: Other people generally deserve the things that they are given.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_4: I feel that people are generally fair when evaluating others.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_5: Regardless of the outcomes they receive, other people are generally subjected to fair procedures.

- Strongly disagree (6)
- Somewhat disagree (7)
- Neither agree nor disagree (8)
- Somewhat agree (9)
- Strongly agree (10)

BJW_6: Other people are generally subjected to processes that are fair.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_7: I feel that I generally earn the rewards and punishments I get in this world.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_8: I usually receive the outcomes I deserve.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_9: I generally deserve the things that I am given.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_10: I feel that people are generally fair in their evaluations of me.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

BJW_11: Regardless of the specific outcomes I receive, I am generally subjected to fair procedures.

- Strongly disagree (0)
- Somewhat disagree (1)
- Neither agree nor disagree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Strongly agree (4)

Survey Questions and Measurement for Control Variables

Party ID: Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a ...?

- Strong Democrat (1)
- Lean Democrat (2)
- Independent (3)
- Lean Republican (4)
- Strong Republican (5)
- Not sure (-99)

Respondent Income: What was your total household income before taxes during the past 12 months?

- Less than $25,000 (1)
- $25,000-$49,999 (2)
- $50,000-$74,999 (3)
- $75,000-$99,999 (4)
- $100,000-$149,999 (5)
- $150,000 or more (6)
- Prefer not to say (-99)

Respondent race: What is your race? (Please check all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- Asian (4)
- Black or African American (2)
- Hispanic and/or Latino (6)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
- White (1)
- Other (Please specify) (7)

Respondent gender: Would you describe yourself as...

- a man (1)
- a woman (2)
- non-binary (3)
- Something else (Please describe) (4)

Descriptive Statistics for Sample

Appendix Table 5.5: Descriptive Statistics for Sample

Variable	Mean
White	0.66
Black	0.20
Hispanic/Latina/o/x	0.10
Asian	0.05
Man	0.48
Woman	0.51
Strong Dem.	0.24
Lean Dem.	0.19
Independent	0.24
Lean Rep.	0.14
Strong Rep.	0.15
<$25k	0.22
$25-$49k	0.26
$50-$74k	0.19
$75-$99k	0.12
$100-$149k	0.11
$150k +	0.06
Some HS, No deg.	0.04
HS/GED	0.26
Some College	0.23
Assoc./Tech.	0.13
Bachelors	0.24
Graduate Deg	0.09
18-25	0.14
26-34	0.18
35-44	0.21
45-54	0.14
55-64	0.15
65+	0.18
n	3,485

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Summary (…and a Few Contributions)

I began my dissertation research with the goal of better understanding the factors that influence how citizens view street-level bureaucratic decision making. Much of this work was inspired by my interest in bureaucratic discretion—especially as it relates to rule compliance—and the ways in which it is shaped by bureaucrats' perceptions of their clients. However, the real contribution of this research is that it largely shifts the focus from bureaucrats to citizens, exploring how their perceptions of bureaucratic behavior vary based on the client a bureaucrat is serving at the time. For all we know about how deservingness perceptions affect the ways that street-level bureaucrats treat clients (Assouline & Gilad, 2022; Jilke & Tummers, 2018; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022) and citizens evaluate policies (Bell, 2021; Gross & Wronski, 2021; Schneider & Ingram, 1993), research has not often focused on linking these two streams of literature and investigating the effects of client deservingness on citizens' assessments of street-level bureaucratic behavior.

From the outset, I expected that citizens' perceptions of street-level service interactions would generally correlate with their perceptions of clients: citizens would feel more positively about what street-level bureaucrats did when those actions either helped a client perceived as deserving or prevented a client perceived as undeserving from accessing government resources. In other words, at this point, my premise was essentially that the social construction and policy design framework proposed by Schneider and Ingram (1993) would hold at the street level, applying to individual client service interactions much as it does to social programs (Keiser & Miller, 2020; Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2021).

I then expanded this premise to incorporate findings from social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and similar identity-related work from political science and public administration

that has long shown what we've long seen: race and gender shape how individuals are perceived and treated, too (Baumgartner et al., 2017; Fording et al., 2011; Keiser et al., 2004; Portillo et al., 2020; Schram et al., 2009; Wenger & Wilkins, 2009). I expected that race and gender would matter at the street level, too, with citizens expressing more support for street-level bureaucrats' decisions when those decisions either helped in-group members or burdened out-group members, both because of the intergroup competition posited by social identity theorists (for an overview, see: Hogg & Abrams, 1998) and general prejudice toward minoritized populations.

I suspected that some of the discrimination I posited would be the result of conscious biases, either through the intentional efforts of the powerful to reinforce social hierarchies that advantage them or through groups jockeying for a position within that hierarchy (again see Hogg and Abrams, 1998; see also Ellemers & Haslam, 2012).[1] However, I expected that much of this discrimination would result from unconscious biases introduced into boundedly-rational citizens' decision-making processes via their reliance on heuristics—in other words, that the tools citizens use to make decisions simpler (and to make those decisions more efficiently) would reflect personally-held and societal biases, thereby biasing the eventual decision (Gilovich et al., 2002; see also Oberfield, 2020; refer to Chapter 2 for a more detailed overview). By suggesting this unconscious pathway, I raise the possibility that biases are not confined to a few "bad apples" but more widely held among citizens.

Drawing again from work on bounded rationality and individuals' desire to reduce uncertainty whenever possible, I also posited that a more general bias against *all* clients might be present. Because of some citizens' desire to defend their belief in the world as a fundamentally just place wherein people get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Lerner, 1980; Lerner & Miller, 1978), I expected that citizens would be quicker to both blame or otherwise disparage individual clients and to credit or legitimize actions of the government, as admitting that the

government made any sort of error would threaten their notion of the world's ultimate fairness. This, too, raised the possibility of a broader predisposed negativity toward clients than might otherwise be expected.

My findings provide both some room for optimism and cause for concern. On the one hand, at almost every turn, the client's identity—including their identity congruence with respondents—did not significantly influence respondents' answers, with the only exception being that bureaucrat respondents were more likely to support prosocial rule-breaking decisions when made to help clients with which they shared *both* a racial and gender identity. Additionally, despite a great deal of evidence in the public administration literature demonstrating that perceptions of clients' deservingness shape how bureaucrats use their discretion, the findings from Chapter 6 showed that bureaucrat respondents, unlike citizens, were no more or less likely to support rule breaking to help the client, suggesting that client deservingness may only shape bureaucratic behavior inside the bounds of their allotted discretion. Both findings indicate the possibility of more equitable decisional processes than I expected when I began this dissertation. The findings related to identity have particularly interesting implications, suggesting that Wilkins and Wenger (2015) may have been right to argue that we too often conflate identities and values in the public administration literature.

However, the findings also contain a few troubling implications. For instance, in Chapter 5, I found that undeserving clients received much more blame than deserving ones for the negative outcomes they experienced, and that *even deserving* clients received more blame than any other category. Put differently, even clients who did everything right and experienced a negative outcome were more likely to be blamed for that outcome than the serving bureaucrat or agency. Given everything we know about how negatively citizens tend to view the bureaucracy (to say nothing of the broader government), this is worrying for the reasons I argued to conclude that chapter. The

cause for worrying is only increased when these are combined with findings from Chapter 6, though, which showed that respondents with high just-world beliefs were much more likely to support *whatever* the bureaucrat decided, whether it was to follow or prosocially break agency rules and no matter what happened to the client.

The theme that seems to be emerging from this dissertation is that respondents more readily find flaws with clients than the government. Much like the just-world hypothesis and neighboring system justification theory suggests, my results continually show that respondents are slow to disparage the government—doing so would be uncomfortable and raise the possibility of bad things happening to good people, or at least those who do not deserve them. Indeed, it was just-world beliefs in Chapter 5, not the client's deservingness, that dictated agreement with *any* decision regardless of the outcome the client ultimately received. Perhaps the most troubling thing, though, is that just-world beliefs did not significantly affect blame allocation to the client in Chapter 4, meaning that there must be another motivation for blaming clients more than the government—one that is not identity, partisanship, or any of the other covariates I included in my models.

Ultimately, though, this is only the start of a research agenda in this area, and one that should continue moving forward to better understand why—and perhaps whether—citizens prefer to point the finger at other citizens rather than government. Perhaps the most important contribution my dissertation makes toward this agenda is my emphasis on *clients* as a possible target of citizens' blame for negative service outcomes. As discussed in Chapter 4, clients are not typically considered as targets in public administration. My findings clearly demonstrate that they should be, but there is still much to be known about *why* they are such a popular target in my study.

Future work should examine the extent to which the inclusion of citizens in program planning and design—in addition to the broader social accountability initiatives mentioned in Chapter 3—facilitate a different kind of bias institutionalization than is usually studied in public

administration, a sort of street-level version of the social construction and policy design framework that examines how citizens' perceptions of clients shape the feedback and input they provide. While deservingness did not always shape citizens' perceptions in expected ways, the effect of citizens' just-world beliefs raise the possibility of a stealthier kind of discrimination that is rooted in a bias toward an unequal status quo. While broadening citizen participation and inclusion opportunities may seem democratic on its face, much of its normative appeal rests on the extent to which this increased participation is representative—i.e., the extent to which the participation increases input for *all* citizens rather than further amplifying the voices of the powerful. As such, more research is needed to understand whether these initiatives have the intended effect.

A Broader Contribution: Rule Compliance as Discretion

The broadest (and possibly overlooked) contribution of my dissertation, though, may come through my consideration of rule compliance behavior through a behavioral lens—and, more importantly, by considering rule compliance behavior as a branch of bureaucratic discretion. The public administration literature tends to look at discretion as conferred by an organization, a set of boundaries—usually imposed by rules—within which the organization allows a bureaucrat to follow their own judgement toward certain prescribed goals. I would argue that this conceptualization is too narrow, and that discretion is not a product of rules but of protection or liability. If a bureaucrat chooses to take an action within the rules and something goes wrong, the organization will often protect them. If, however, they choose to do something outside of the rules, they are taking a risk—opening themselves up to discipline or perhaps even losing their job—because the organization did not give them permission to take said action. But the organization is not (and often cannot) definitively prevent a street-level bureaucrat from doing something that is against the rules, and, at any given juncture, street-level bureaucrats have to decide whether to follow, bend, or break rules. As such, when they come upon each of these junctures, they face a choice: they must use their

judgement to determine their response, a response that may or may not fall within organizationally prescribed boundaries.

I fully expect that some may more readily conceptualize the rule-breaking behavior I am describing here as agency or autonomy than discretion. However, while I am certainly in favor of precise specification of concepts and broader constructs, my argument here can also be stated more practically in a way that avoids arguments about the nature of discretion. Whether we label rule bending/breaking as discretion, autonomy, or something else, my argument is that we must adopt a wider view of the decision set facing street-level bureaucrats, as it *always* includes opportunities for introducing bias into decision-making processes and the option to bend/break agency rules within the resulting choice set. These wider decision and choice sets are precisely what enables pathbreaking works like Maynard-Moody and Musheno's (2022) *Cops, Teachers, Counselors* and O'Leary's (2006) *Ethics of Dissent*, as the authors fully recognize that bureaucrats are constantly deciding between options available inside and outside of organizationally prescribed bounds, strategically adjusting their response to organizational rules in their pursuit of maximally appropriate behavior (see also Oberfield, 2020; Zacka, 2017). The next step is to examine rule bending/breaking as a function of a bureaucrat's individual clients, investigating the ways in which bureaucrat rule compliance decisions are subject to the same influences (and biases!) as the classic, more narrowly defined discretion we often study. In short, we should stop drawing such a sharp distinction between discretionary decisions and rule-bending/breaking decisions—they are both *decisions*, after all, and decisions that can both affect clients.

These two literatures are currently far too siloed. There is a tremendous amount of research on organizational rule compliance, impressive in both the time and breadth it covers (for two excellent overviews relevant to the public sector, see: DeHart-Davis, 2017; O'Leary, 2006). However, much of the work on rule compliance focuses on the relationship between the

organization and the employee (in my case, a bureaucrat), too often neglecting to examine the role of rules and rule compliance in shaping what happens one step down the "ladder" in the relationship between the bureaucrat and client. Put differently, numerous literatures in public administration—representative bureaucracy, administrative burden, deservingness, and even the broader street-level bureaucracy literature—*routinely* ask, "discretion for whom?", consistently exploring the ways that discretion affects clients. My argument is that we must do the same for organizational rules and start asking, "rule compliance for whom?" This dissertation moves the field toward this question.

In some sense, the contribution here is simply restating Mary Parker Follett's notion of relating as circular and applying it to rule compliance just as we (perhaps implicitly) do to discretion—in other words, recognizing the reciprocal nature of bureaucrat-client interactions as "I-plus-you interacting with you-plus-me" (Follett, 1996). Here, I am essentially only adding a layer to this relationship: in addition to the reciprocity between organizations (whether through rules or otherwise) and bureaucrats, there is reciprocity between bureaucrats and clients. Simply put, I am arguing that bureaucrats do not respond to rules in a vacuum, they respond to "rules-plus-them-plus-clients."

Again, this is the exact type of thinking the field regularly replies to discretion in numerous literatures. For example, representative bureaucracy has long recognized the importance of discretion to bureaucrats' active representation of clients (Keiser et al., 2002; Meier & Bohte, 2001), understanding that bureaucrats use their discretion differently for different clients—and, in this case, in positive ways that benefit clients. I would argue that bureaucrats also relate and respond to organizational rules differently for different clients, something we already have some evidence for (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2022; Zacka, 2017). If we adopt a broader view of bureaucratic decision and choice sets, though, as I am arguing here, we unlock another possible causal pathway behind the positive client outcomes generated through representation: differential rule compliance.

This, in some sense, captures the bulk of my entire argument here: that we must begin to acknowledge the full range of choices available to bureaucrats, including the ways in which bureaucratic rule compliance, like discretion, varies by client and drives disparities in client outcomes—that we must start asking, "rule compliance for whom?"

Notes:

1. While I do not use them in my theoretical framework—mostly because social identity theory is more parsimonious and maps on to my research design more cleanly—it should be noted that this line of thinking was also heavily inspired by conflict theories from sociology (Marx, 1867; Weber, 1922, 1947).

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