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**MASTER THESIS: Qualitative research on the mechanisms of how administrative burdens in citizen-state interactions influence one's political efficacy.**

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# MASTER THESIS

Qualitative research on the mechanisms of how administrative burdens in citizen-state interactions influence one's political efficacy.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*“We didn’t mean it that way”* is the title of the renowned book by Jesse Frederik (2021), reconstructing what has led to the infamous political childcare benefits scandal in the Netherlands. After the *Bulgarian fraud*<sup>1</sup>, the administrative burden to apply for this childcare benefit was disproportionally enhanced to prevent further fraudulent practices (Moynihan & Herd, 2010; Wiering, 2021; Frederik, 2021), which led parents in need of the benefits getting into severe financial hardship (Frederik, 2021). Could this have been prevented if the parents advocated for their rights? Maybe the scandal could have been avoided if citizens in need of this policy voiced their concerns about the potential threat of disproportionally enhancing administrative burdens.

An important factor in determining whether people engage in political activities, such as voting, discussions, campaigning, and other involvements with the way in which their country is governed, is political efficacy (Harrison, 2017). Political efficacy is the perception one has of their political abilities, and of how responsive the state is towards them (Shore, 2020). Groups with high political efficacy, participate more and get their policy preferences fulfilled more than the less active groups (Campbell, 2011; Mahlangu & Schulz-Herzenberg, 2022). The way social policies are formulated influences one’s political efficacy, as policies are the primary way by which citizens experience the state, they empower some groups and discourage others (Moynihan & Herd, 2010, p. 654; Campbell, 2011). Welfare recipients are the least politically efficacious, because of the obligatory and demeaning process to prove eligibility for assistance, which creates a stigmatizing effect (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015) and lowers one’s political efficacy, and therefore one’s political, and democratic participation (Campbell, 2011; Shore 2020).

In 2015, the national government of the Netherlands introduced the new Social Support Act (CPB, 2013), which has considerably decentralized its social policies in the domains of youth care, long-term care, and income support, where the municipality becomes the main supplier

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<sup>1</sup> In 2013, Dutch media sensationally brought how Bulgarian criminals abused the Dutch allowances system, leading the government to amend and adopt a disproportionally strict social policy for receiving child benefits (Wiering, 2021; Frederik, 2021).

of social services to better tailor the services to individual needs (Vermeulen, 2015). Citizens in need of social assistance often interact with the street-level bureaucrat that implements social policies made by the national government, and most developed welfare states have some form of conditioning, means-tested, activating policies that encourage active citizenship (Newman & Tonkers, 2011). More administrative tools are placed to gatekeep benefits and to distinguish the people that are entitled to it or not, which impose higher levels of burdens on the ones proving eligibility (Christensen, et al., 2020; Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015). And it has increasingly become an obligation to do something in return to receive social benefits when someone is eligible for receiving it (Kampen & Tonkens, 2019). However, these means-tested policies and interactions that come with them have a stigmatizing element, because citizens believe that documentation requirements signal mistrust for example (Christensen, et al., 2020), that trickles down to one's perception of their own position in society and their political efficacy, which can lead to viewing the government as unresponsive and unreliable and the citizen not being politically and democratically engaged (Shore, 2020; Watson, 2015). Means-tested social policies might negatively affect political efficacy (Shore, 2020), whereas universal social policy programs can have positive effects on political efficacy (Campbell, 2011).

The theory states that, from the view of policy design, people receiving a form of income support will generally have negative perceptions of themselves and their place in society (Shore, 2020; Kampen & Tonkens, 2019; Kampen, Elshout, & Tonkens, 2013; Sebrechts & Kampen, 2022). People applying for such social policies often experience a great deal of effort or difficulty (Halling & Bækgaard, 2022). It takes great human capital to access the benefits that states offer, but at the same time, the burdens imposed by the state make it even more difficult to do so for the group with the least human capital, but who therefore need the benefits most (Christensen, et al., 2020). This has even more equity implications, as very often, the people in need of social assistance experience the imposed burdens the worst (Moynihan & Herd, 2010). The administrative burdens that are experienced that come with these types of policies are one of the reasons why people might feel stigmatized and therefore are less likely to be politically active (Burden, et al., 2012; Campbell, 2011; Christensen, et al., 2020; Halling & Bækgaard, 2022; Herd & Moynihan, 2018; Marx & Nguyen, 2016; Mettler & Soss, 2004). But not much is yet known about how, in the Netherlands, the administrative

burdens that people experience from such means-tested policies influence their political efficacy.

Given the vast research that exists on citizen-state interactions is focused on the state side, and less is known about citizen perceptions in these interactions, it is interesting to find out how they experience their interactions with the state, and how these interactions influence their political efficacy. Interactions between citizens and the state come in many forms, like voting, paying taxes, and citizens being customers, participants, or clients (Jakobsen, James, Moynihan, & Nabatchi, 2019). People that receive a form of financial support, such as social assistance, invalidity- (WIA) or unemployment benefits (WW) in the Netherlands could be considered as a group that are often interacting with the state, and as the social welfare policy has a means-tested design, implying greater administrative burdens experienced by receivers of the benefits, therefore leading to a lower political efficacy, it is interesting to find out how administrative burdens in the context of interactions with the state influence one's political efficacy in the Netherlands.

### 1.1 Research Question

The level of political efficacy in society is an important indicator of a healthy democracy (Shore, 2020). Many factors influence one's level of political efficacy. One of those factors are experiences that citizens have with public services (Herd & Moynihan, 2018; Shore & Tosun, 2019; Shore, 2020). Most research that is done on this topic mainly comes from the United States, which establishes that people who need social assistance generally have stigmatizing experiences, which is a factor that lowers one's political efficacy. These stigmatizing experiences are caused by the obligatory elements that means-tested policies bring along with them (Soss, 1999; Watson, 2015; Shore 2020). On the other hand, research conducted in Germany showed that positive encounters with the state positively influenced the participant's political efficacy (Shore & Tosun, 2019). However, not much is known yet about how Dutch citizens experience administrative burdens in their interactions with the state, and what the effect is of these burdens on their political efficacy. Therefore, this paper aims to inductively examine: How do administrative burdens in citizen-state interactions influence the political efficacy of people receiving social assistance in the Netherlands?

## 1.2 Societal Relevance

Conducting this research has practical relevance, as the way street-level bureaucrats communicate and interact with receivers of already theoretically established stigmatizing social policies (Shore, 2020; Stuber & Schlesinger, 2006; Watson, 2015) could possibly have an influence on the way citizens later behave. As the policies are deemed to have a negative effect on political efficacy, which in turn has a negative effect on political participation (Mahlangu & Schulz-Herzenberg, 2022). Administrative burdens also amplify unjust experiences and marginalization as they have equity implications for disadvantaged groups (Moynihan & Herd, 2010). Shore's study review summarizes how societies with a high level of policy efficacy, generally enjoy more citizen support for the political system, rather than societies with declining policy efficacy, which indicates that the citizens perceive the government as lacking in legitimacy (Shore, 2020). A lack of political efficacy is a good indicator for the absence of civic engagement (Loveless, 2013). When political efficacy is high, people tend to increase their political participation, and when political efficacy is low, political participation decreases (Mahlangu & Schulz-Herzenberg, 2022). King and Waldron (1988) even state that if social rights are accounted for, this then also ensures political rights. Therefore, it is relevant to investigate how administrative burdens in citizen-state interactions influence one's political efficacy, to see where future changes in the interactions can be made in order to increase the political efficacy of the groups that experience administrative burdens in means-tested policies.

In recent years, there have been several government failures in the Netherlands, like the childcare benefits scandal, the nitrogen crisis, and the housing crisis, to name a few that have influenced citizens' perceptions of the government, and their trust in it (de Blok & Brummel, 2022) (NOS, 2022). For example, duped parents from the Dutch childcare benefits scandal were suddenly marked fraudulent and had to pay back thousands of euros they didn't have (nji, n.d.; Frederik, 2021). A new policy was introduced after the Bulgarian fraud, which aimed to strictly oversee applications for childcare benefits, undermining the humanness and reality of the other parents in the years that followed (Frederik, 2021). The administrative burdens were purposefully exaggerated (Christensen et al., 2020) in order to decrease the likelihood of further fraud (Frederik, 2021). Parents applying for childcare benefits are often minority groups with traditional factor elements that make for a lower political efficacy, like being part

of an ethnic minority, single parents, having lower income, and having enjoyed lower education (Shore, 2020). They have not been as politically involved and did not voice their concerns when the policy change was happening in the Netherlands after the Bulgarian fraud. Maybe the bigger crises that happened afterward could have been avoided, if this group had been more politically active, like the pensioners in Campbell's study (2011). This research aims to investigate what the mechanisms are that lead to lower political efficacy, and maybe this can be prevented or worked on in further interactions between the citizen and the state.

### 1.3 Academic Relevance

Next to the practical relevance, this study also adds to academia, as most existing research in citizen-state interactions mostly focuses on the perceptions from the perspective of the street-level bureaucrat, and not from the citizen perspective (Shore, 2020; Jakobsen, et al., 2019). A lot is known about the street-level bureaucrat, how they use available resources to implement social policies, and their perceptions of different rules and regulations. There are several mechanisms that a bureaucrat uses in order to deal with restricted resources, like gaming (prioritizing tasks), stereotyping to categorize clients (Lipsky, 1980), implementing different role conceptions, and they have to deal with having to choose between what they could do and what they really wanted to do (Zacka, 2017). However, less is known about citizen perceptions when interacting with the state, what the outcomes of these interactions are for the citizens' perceptions, and what this means for the bureaucracy and the state (Jakobsen, et al., 2019). Citizens' experiences with the state shape their attitudes and beliefs vis-à-vis the state (Soss, 1999).

"The interactions between the state are the moments that may inform citizens about their position in society and whether the state is responsive to their needs and preferences" (Lipsky, 1980, as cited in Shore, 2020). Having attention to how social policies, such as the Social Support Act are administered, can provide insight into how the recipients of social assistance are more or less politically engaged (Shore, 2020). More empirical evidence is needed to examine how the relationship between administrative burdens and outcomes, in this case, political efficacy, are linked to learning whether burdensome encounters with the state have other consequences on the live and democratic behavior of the citizens and to investigate the differences in people's experiences of the burdens (Christensen, et al., 2020).



Even though the abovementioned factors would traditionally lead to lower political efficacy, it is not always the case that the administrative burden is experienced the same by everyone. Individual differences could explain why there are disparities in feelings of political efficacy (Herd & Moynihan, 2018).

Also, most research that has been done on this topic has been conducted in the United States, which generally implies that means-tested policies have a stigmatizing element that trickles down to one's perception of their position in society, which can lead to viewing the government as unresponsive and unreliable, and not participating in democracy (Shore, 2020; Watson, 2015).

#### 1.4 Thesis Outline

The following sections of the paper consist of a theoretical framework, where the concepts of administrative burdens, citizen-state interactions, and political efficacy are discussed. This section is followed by a methodology chapter, outlining how the main research question is answered. This is done by conducting a series of semi-structural interviews to inductively acquire knowledge about how administrative burdens influence the political efficacy of receivers of social assistance, WIA, or WW in the Netherlands. The paper then analyses the results of the interviews, which are presented in the results section, accompanied by code trees in the appendices. This paper then concludes by answering the main research question, followed by a discussion of limitations and further research proposals.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents a theoretical framework by conceptualizing the main concepts of the research question. The section starts off with an elaboration of citizen-state interactions, followed by a definition of administrative burdens. The chapter then continues with a deeper insight into political efficacy and its different forms. This section ends with a general proposition regarding the expectations of the results of this study.

### 2.1 Citizen-State Interactions

The concept of citizen-state interactions is very broad, with no universally accepted definition or grand theory explaining it (Jakobsen, James, Moynihan, & Nabatchi, 2019). According to the Cambridge Dictionary, an interaction is in its most abstract form, communication, or reaction between two or more people (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), or in this case, entities such as the citizen and the state. It can be approached from the citizen viewpoint, as well as the viewpoint of the street-level bureaucrats, or the state. For the sake of this research, the paper focuses on citizens, as the aim is to find out what the *citizen perception* is, not that of the state. Citizen-state interactions are an essential aspect of democracy, as they “offer a venue to study the functioning of the state” (Jakobsen, et al., 2019, p. e9). Lipsky suggests that people’s interaction with the state can shape beliefs and attitudes toward the government (Lipsky, 1980). And they allow individuals and groups to have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives and communities, as well as allowing governments to collect and measure public opinion and feedback.

As mentioned before, interactions between the state and citizens come in many forms, which might include voting, paying taxes, and the citizens being clients, customers, or participants (Jakobsen, James, Moynihan, & Nabatchi, 2019). This research focuses on the interactions where the citizens are clients of the state, as they are applying for a service and only receive the service after careful consideration. The paper focuses on the citizens interacting with the state through the application process for social assistance, WIA, or WW in the Netherlands, which can come in the form of document application and personal contact with the bureaucrats that enforce social policies (Bartels, 2013).

According to Nabatchi and Leighninger, these forms of interactions can generally be put into three types of communication: one-way, two-way, and deliberative communication (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). One-way communication has one flow of information shared from the sender to the receiver, without any input from the receiver. Two-way communication allows for feedback and some negotiation from the receiver as well, however, with little opportunity for in-depth consideration of perspectives (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). Deliberative communication is an important form of multi-way communication that is oriented toward problem-solving, where it requires participants to listen attentively and carefully consider the contributions of others (Gastil, 2008, as cited in Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). It is expected that recipients of one of the three beforementioned types of income support in the Netherlands experience deliberative communication, due to the highly obligatory nature of the means-tested policies from the Social Support Act (2015). This way, there is more opportunity to learn about the citizens' stance in society through interactions with the state (Campbell, 2011).

## 2.2 Administrative Burden

Theory on political efficacy mentions that stigmatizing experiences, caused by the obligatory and conditional character of means-tested social policies influence one's self-perception of their position in society and make for generally a lower political efficacy (Shore, 2020). The conditionalities can be experienced as an administrative burden. This concept is often used to understand the meaning of citizen-state interactions, and how citizens are influenced by, and respond to interactions with the state (Halling & Bækgaard, 2022), as it is established that citizens do in fact experience burden in their interactions with the government (Soss, 1999).

This term is defined as an individual's experience of policy implementation involving a great deal of effort, trouble, or difficulty (Burden et al., 2012, p. 742). Others also add that the level of difficulty is subjective to each individual (Christensen, et al., 2020). They continue by explaining that the individual can be a public official, or a member of the public (Moynihan & Herd, 2010). This paper focuses on the latter. Academics generally agree that administrative burden is the learning, compliance, and psychological cost that people might experience when interacting with the state (Burden et al., 2012; Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015; Christensen et al., 2020). Each of the costs may vary between policies and individual

experiences (Christensen, et al., 2020), but it is generally accepted that they fall harder on disadvantaged groups (Halling & Bækgaard, 2022). Some burdens are placed unintentionally, and others are more deliberately constructed to serve legitimate public values (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015).

The question of the use of administrative burdens is a normative one. Even though some administrative burdens are intentionally designed into programs to eliminate waste, abuse, and fraud, it should not be overdone to the point where take-up is reduced for the legitimately entitled citizens (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015). “The imposed burdens should not be costlier than their stated legitimate purpose” (Moynihan & Herd, 2010, p. 666). This still sometimes does happen. For example, limiting fraud with public programs like what happened after the Bulgarian fraud in the Netherlands (Frederik, 2021). Such burdens are often excessively experienced by disadvantaged groups, as it can be especially challenging for the ones who lack the resources to navigate complex administrative processes, eventually restricting access to political and social rights (Moynihan & Herd, 2010).

The contexts in which administrative burdens can be studied are not limited solely to basic bureaucratic encounters such as renewing ones driving license, but “any context in which the state regulates private behavior or structures how individuals seek public services where burdens are imposed in the process” (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015, p. 44). This means that also in the case of this paper, it is appropriate to investigate the influence of administrative burdens in citizen-state interactions on the political efficacy of the citizen receiving a form of income support, which is also a public service where burdens are imposed in the process.

Below, the learning, compliance, and psychological costs of administrative burden are further elaborated.

#### 2.2.1 Learning Costs

These costs arise when people need to find information about the existence of programs, public goods, or individual rights, as well as what the eligibility criteria are (Christensen, et al., 2020). One must learn about rights, rules, and the demands that come when interacting with

the state (Halling & Bækgaard, 2022). One will not use public services if it is not known what one's rights are, or which programs are available. For example, a study on college applications showed that high-achieving low-income students are less likely to apply for financial aid benefits, application-fee waivers, or institutions that would cost them less, as opposed to their better-advised high-income peers due to a lack of knowledge about the programs (Hoxby & Avery, 2012, as cited in Moynihan, Herd & Harvey, 2015, p. 45).

Research conducted in the United States shows that most of the time, citizens are unaware of the existence of a program, whether they are eligible, what is required to apply, and what the benefits exactly bring (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015). In the case of this paper, citizens need to know that they are eligible to apply for income support, where to find this information, what to apply for exactly, and how to do so. There are many forms of social assistance in the Netherlands, and one must know which one applies to them particularly. More about the policy and its many varieties in the Netherlands are presented in section 2.4 of the paper.

#### 2.2.2 Compliance Costs

Compliance costs “are the burdens of following administrative rules and requirements” (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015, p. 46). It means that the person needs to meet specified standards or comply with specific rules while interacting with the state (Halling & Bækgaard, 2022), like having to show up for meetings, or proving that he is applying for jobs on a regular basis. These costs occur from “the time, effort, and financial costs of meeting administrative demands” (Christensen, et al., 2020, p. 126). For example, completing forms, undertaking face-to-face interviews, or providing documentation. Research shows that if compliance cost is high, application rates tend to decrease and if there are efforts to decrease compliance cost, applications increase (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015).

#### 2.2.3 Psychological Costs

Psychological costs are the mental discomfort that interacting with the government might bring. For example, “interactions associated with uncertainty may lead to experiences of stress, loss of autonomy, and even stigma” (Halling & Bækgaard, 2022, p. 4). Moynihan, Herd & Harvey (2015) and Christensen et al. (2020) even argue that stigma is an inevitable indicator

of the concept, resulting from participating in unpopular programs, disempowerment experiences, feelings of mistrust, and loss of autonomy.

Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey (2015) continue by summing up where these feelings could come from. From the stigma of participating in unpopular programs (Moffitt, 1983, as cited in Moynihan, Herd & Harvey, 2015, p. 49), to recipients being characterized as ‘undeserving’, as opposed to a feeling of it being a right when applying for universal programs (Moynihan, Herd & Harvey, 2015; Shore, 2020; Sebrechts & Kampen, 2022). For example, job-training programs may be viewed by recipients as not providing the means to move out of poverty, but feel no other choice but to participate, because they have to (Dias & Maynard-Moody, 2007). Also, it is established that the imposed processes and directives come across as the recipient lacking the capacity to determine how to live their lives (Moynihan, Herd & Harvey, 2015), which results in frustration, powerlessness, and degradation (Lipsky, 1980; Soss, 1999; Dias & Maynard-Moody, 2007). This is important to note, as it could influence how one perceives their interactions with a UWV expert or when filing forms, and how this then influences their political efficacy.

The concept of administrative burden closely relates to the concept of red tape. Bozeman first defined red tape as “rules, regulations, and procedures that remain in force and entail a compliance burden, but do not advance the legitimate purposes the rules were intended to serve” (Bozeman, 2000, p. 12). Other definitions by multiple dictionaries add a perceptual component, stating that the procedure is perceived as excessive, complex, and redundant (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.; Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). This makes the term to always have a negative connotation. Moynihan et al. also point out that administrative costs specifically cover the individual experiences in their interaction with the state to be the main extension rather than rules (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015).

Some articles argue that red tape is an attribute of administrative burden, by it being the same as compliance burden (Moynihan & Herd, 2010; Christensen et al., 2020). This means that the administrative burden is a bigger concept, referring to the broader costs associated with complying with administrative requirements. However, Burden et al. add that red tape focuses on administrative system rules and procedures, not particular policies (Burden, et al.,

2012). A difference between the two terms that is not mentioned in the literature, is that red tape is generally defined as being perceived as an *unnecessary* burden, while this attribute is missing from the concept of administrative burden.

As the paper focuses on a particular policy field in the Netherlands, it is, therefore, useful to build on the concept of administrative burden to capture all of how the general costs influence the citizen's political efficacy in citizen-state interactions. Disregarding the potential of red tape that the interactions with the state citizens might experience when applying for social assistance.

### 2.3 Political Efficacy

Political efficacy is the independent variable this paper focuses on. The importance to investigate what happens to one's political efficacy is detrimental to democracy (Harrison, 2017), as it is a significant factor in determining whether people engage in political activities (Mettler & Soss, 2004; Campbell, 2011; Mahlangu & Schulz-Herzenberg, 2022). Societies with politically efficacious citizens are a sign of general support for the political system (Sullivan & Riedel, 2001). Which increases political support and indicates a healthy democratic system (Shore, 2020). However, a decline in political efficacy can be concerning, as this shows the opposite, namely that those who have low political efficacy perceive the government or system to lack legitimacy (Scotto & Xena, 2015). The meaning of political efficacy is explained further below, followed by an explanation of the connection with administrative burdens in citizen-state interactions, in order to investigate *how* these burdens, have a negative effect on political efficacy.

Campbell first labeled the term as "the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact on the political process, that is, that it is worthwhile to perform one's civic duties" (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954, p. 187). Political efficacy is the subjective belief, or feeling one has about their own ability to participate in politics, and whether it is worthwhile to take part in it (Shore, 2020). Thus, the term really entails what the perception is of one's ability to participate in political activities and to what extent they believe their input has an effect. These two parts of the concept are split up into two dimensions, internal- and external political efficacy, which are elaborated more below.

### 2.3.1 Internal Political Efficacy

This term taps into the people's perception of themselves and refers to “an individual’s self-perceptions that they are capable of understanding politics and competent enough to participate in political actions such as voting” (Miller, Miller, & Schneider, 1980, p. 253). It is the subjective feeling that one understands political facts and processes and that he can have a meaningful impact (Reichert, 2016). In short, it is the people’s perception of themselves (Shore, 2020).

It is established that political knowledge “promotes political participation” (Galston, 2001, p. 224). Education is also seen as the biggest predictor that enhances internal political efficacy (Shore, 2020). It improves cognitive skills that foster political awareness and understanding, which in turn are directly linked to higher levels of internal political efficacy (Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996). And a high internal efficacy means an increase in political involvement and one’s intention to participate in political activities. And low internal political efficacy shows a decreased political activism (Jabobs, Mettler, & Zhu, 2021).

### 2.3.2 External Political Efficacy

This term refers to people’s perceptions of their states or governments (Westholm & Niemi, 1986) and whether they feel that institutions and politicians are responsive to their needs and interest (Shore, 2020). A lower external political efficacy shows “the belief that the public cannot influence political outcomes, because government leaders and institutions are unresponsive to their needs” (Miller et al., 1980, as cited in Craig & Maggiotto, 1982, p. 86). In short, meaning the people’s perceptions of the state and their government.

External efficacy is a facilitating, but not a sufficient condition for the existence of internal efficacy (Craig & Maggiotto, 1982). And the same goes the other way around, if one has very high internal efficacy, but low external efficacy, then this could lead to behaviors such as political protests or violence (Craig & Maggiotto, 1982). For example, education is generally perceived as the biggest socioeconomic factor contributing to one's internal political efficacy (Shore, 2020), and a decline in external efficacy may help explain why people get increasingly active in aggressive citizen participation, which needs an already high level of internal political efficacy (Craig & Maggiotto, 1982). However, this should not be seen as a rule of thumb,



because other research shows that a high level of cynical perception of the government does not always lead to an increased potential for aggressive or extremist behavior (Pollock III, 1983). Even though the definition of political efficacy consists of the two dimensions, the interrelationship between those two are beyond the scope of this research. Rather, the relationship is investigated between administrative burdens and the two forms of political efficacy as a whole.

To sum up, citizens' perceptions of themselves, their political abilities, and their perception of how responsive the state is towards them, all influence how politically involved and active they are. The author of this paper believes that the terms are undeniably intertwined, as one's external political efficacy influences whether one can have a meaningful impact in the first place, and vice versa. However, they should be treated as two distinct orientations, as there are different mechanisms at place influencing one or the other category (Craig & Maggiotto, 1982). The mechanisms and influences of the two are divided into three categories and explained below.

#### 2.4 Link Between Administrative Burdens and Political Efficacy.

There are many, by earlier research established, (traditional) influences on one's political efficacy, like education, income, network, background, and (stigmatizing) experiences with public services (Shore, 2020). These traditional influences can be grouped into three categories, starting from socioeconomic characteristics (Marx & Nguyen, 2016), to policy design (Shore, 2020; Soss, 1999), and policy administration (Shore, 2020; Moynihan and Soss, 2014). For the sake of the scope of this research, the paper focuses further on the elaboration of policy design and administration below.

##### 2.4.1 Policy Design

Shore (2020) explores the differences between two types of social policies; means-tested and universal social programs. Means-tested policies require proof that recipients are eligible to receive the social benefit they are applying for. This can come in many shapes and forms, like defining a maximum income requirement (Shore, 2020), or performing obligatory tasks (Dwyer, 2000) like volunteering (Kampen, Elshout, & Tonkens, 2013) or following language courses. While universal social programs are less intrusive and universally applicable to a

larger group of recipients (Shore, 2020). Recipients of universal social programs tend to feel more politically empowered and are more politically involved (Campbell, 2011). And on the other hand, other research implies that means-tested social policies have a negative effect on one's self-perception and position in society due to the stigmatizing element that these policies bring along (Shore, 2020; Watson, 2015; Moynihan, Herd, Harvey, 2015; Stuber & Schlesinger, 2006; Soss, 1999).

#### 2.4.2 Policy Administration/ Interaction

As stated before, not much research has been done on how the interactions between the administrators of policies and their recipients might influence the political efficacy of the recipient. Other research done by Shore in 2019 looks at how young people's experiences with public employment services in Germany can shape levels of external political efficacy. They conclude that positive encounters increase the likelihood of being politically efficacious (Shore & Tosun, 2019). They found that the positive encounters were perceived like this, as the young people felt like they were treated fairly and with respect (Shore & Tosun, 2019). This indicates that interactions with the state could indeed have an influence on one's political efficacy, regardless of the 'traditional' socioeconomic characters or policy design influences on political efficacy.

As research shows that administrative burdens have a negative effect on political efficacy, which is very evident in social, means-tested policies that have significant, obligatory component that stigmatizes the recipients of social assistance, and that the burdens are disproportionally experienced by this group. Research conducted by Soss in 1999 shows that citizens who need social assistance often report that "they feel they have very few opportunities to make consequential choices about their own life" (Shore, 2020, p. 4). The process of applying for, and the conditional aspects of the application, impacted recipients' well-being due to the stigmatizing and degrading experience, which affects their political efficacy (Soss, 1999). Nonetheless, not a lot is known about *how* these administrative burdens in citizen-state interactions affect the political efficacy of this group, which is what this paper is going to further focus on investigating. In line with this existing research, I expect administrative burdens to negatively affect recipients' political efficacy and will explore *how* this could happen.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The following chapter elaborates on the methodological approach of this study. The first sections of this chapter further expand on the research context of the social assistance policies in the Netherlands, followed by a research design elaborating on the methods of data collection, sampling, operationalization, and analysis. The chapter concludes with a reflection on validity and reliability.

#### 3.1 Research Context

Most developed welfare states have some form of conditioning, means-tested, activating policies that encourage active citizenship (Newman & Tonkers, 2011). It has increasingly become an obligation to do something in return to receive social benefits when someone is eligible for receiving it (Kampen & Tonkens, 2019). The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment is responsible for fostering work and income security for everyone living in the Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). People that receive social assistance often interact with the state via application forms and face-to-face interactions with social workers, due to the conditional character of the social assistance benefits, which increased after the implementation of the 2015 Participation Act (Sebrechts & Kampen, 2022). This benefit policy is a form of means-tested social policy in the Netherlands, as the receiver needs to adhere to a list of obligations to obtain the assistance (Rijksoverheid, n.d.).

Opponents to these increased conditionalities find that the obligation to do something in return feels like a harassing and humiliating experience, which stigmatizes people to an inferior status (Kampen & Tonkens, 2019). Recipients of social assistance often explain that they feel at the mercy of bureaucratic authority, with few opportunities to make consistent decisions about their lives (Soss, 1999). The Dutch income support branch of the Social Support Act (2015) is an example of a means-tested social policy that supposedly has the ‘traditional’ stigmatizing element that accounts for a lower political efficacy. This case is elaborated further in the methodology chapter of the paper.

In 2015, the national government in the Netherlands introduced the new Social Support Act (CPB, 2013), which has considerably decentralized its social policies in the domains of youth care, long-term care, and income support, where the municipality becomes the main supplier

of social services to better tailor the services to individual needs (Vermeulen, 2015). This paper focuses on the social policies of income support, of which the decentralization in 2015 was extended from social assistance and welfare to work programs for people with full ability to work, to people who are less than fully able to work and who have no employment history. Eligibility criteria for income support have been tightened for this group. This reform does not apply to people who are fully disabled, for which the central government remains responsible (Vermeulen, 2015). People who are declared fully disabled by a doctor and labor expert at the UWV (Rijksoverheid, n.d.) get the Income provision for the Fully Disabled (IVA) (Nibud, n.d.). For other people, a doctor evaluates how much percent a person is capable of working, and a labor expert decides what types of work people who are less than fully disabled can conduct, despite their disability (Rijksoverheid, n.d.).

Applying for and receiving social assistance, unemployment benefits (WW) or invalidity benefits (WIA), come with a high degree of conditions and obligations before one can receive, and keep receiving, the benefits. The Netherlands limits the number of beneficiaries and to promote labor market participation the Dutch government took several policy measures to increase conditionality: eligibility criteria are rigidified, compliance with job application requirements is more closely monitored, policy definition of suitable work reformulated, penalties for lack of language skills, obstructive behavior, etc. (Sebrechts & Kampen, 2022). These are all examples of what could be perceived as burdensome elements by the people applying for such benefits. Ever since the implementation of the Social Support Act in 2015, the freedom and responsibilities of municipalities expanded, along with an increase in conditionalities and a decrease in freedom for recipients of social assistance (Sebrechts & Kampen, 2022) and other benefits, like the WW and WIA. A complete list of the conditionalities applied to this policy can be found in Appendix A (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). Therefore, this context allows us to research the relationship between administrative burdens in citizen-state interactions and the political efficacy of the citizens receiving such benefits, as the conditional and obligatory elements of these policies presumably bring a sense of administrative burdens to the recipients. And because these burdens are not necessarily experienced only once, or in a short period of time, due to the recurring element in obligations in order to *keep* receiving the benefits and the recurring interactions with the state, the experiences of the burdens can be reflected on one's political efficacy.

### 3.2 Research Design

Research that focuses on citizen experiences of administrative rules could usefully explain variation in that experience, both within and across programs. Simply documenting the language and concepts that citizens apply to this experience would be valuable and suitable for qualitative research (e.g., Soss, 1999). A more inductive approach is taken to investigate and explain the everyday reality of receivers of social assistance in the Netherlands (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), by taking a systemic approach in conducting the research and analysis of the gathered data (Boeije, 2010). To gain a deeper understanding of how the administrative burdens in the interactions that clients of social support in the Netherlands have with the state influence their political efficacy, this study's design is of a qualitative nature (Neuman, 2014). The goal of this research is not to recognize generalizable patterns but to investigate the mechanisms by digging deeper into the experiences of the social assistance recipients. Doing qualitative research allows to inductively gather information on the phenomenon without implying any pre-conditioned answers that would have been the case with for example, sending out a survey (Bryman, 2016; Boeije, 2010). A survey only allows for an X amount of questions and leaves no room for other information when it is not an option to choose from, while the mechanisms within the relation between administrative burden and political efficacy are better exposed through individual stories and experiences from the people that interact with the state. Qualitative research allows for deeper insights into the mechanisms at place that administrative burdens have on one's political efficacy. "The interviewer digs nuggets of data or meanings out of a subject's pure experiences, unpolluted by any leading questions" (Kvale, 1996, p. 3). This quote also hints at the data collection method, which is explained below.

### 3.3 Data Collection

This research will be executed by conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with receivers of social benefits in the Netherlands to generate highly detailed answers and increase internal validity (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). It is appropriate to use this method to gather knowledge on the experiences of a particular group of people, as the participants are given an opportunity to extensively share their stories and experiences in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena (Boeije, 2010; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Therefore, in a semi-structured interview, there is room for one's stories of their experiences,

whilst also keeping a form of structure by selecting the main themes that need to be discussed prior to the interview (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). The main topics and interview questions have been established prior to the interview by generating an interview guide (Boeije, 2010), to ensure that information is systematically gathered regarding the main concepts of the research, but also leaves open space for questions that might arise during the interview itself. This is necessary when looking for a true understanding of what is happening in the context of this study (Boeije, 2010).

It is most important to be able to make the interviewee feel as comfortable as possible in order to receive the most extensive and qualitative answers from the participants (Harvey, 2011). To generate trust and build rapport with the participants, the priority will be to use the face-to-face technique, where the researchers and the interviewee are both at the same location at the same time (Opdenakker, 2006; Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). Another advantage of doing face-to-face interviews is that the participant's body language and other non-verbal signs can be observed (Opdenakker, 2006), which might be leveraged for further questions or overall observations. Other interviews have been held on Microsoft Teams. This decision was usually made for practical reasons, as some respondents were located far away, which made conducting the interviews through Teams a time- and travel-saving option. Doing the interviews from home also allowed for a safe space for the interviewee. One interviewee specifically requested to do the interview online, as face-to-face contact would be too much of a sensory overload due to his health conditions. However, the Teams interviews also showed both the interviewer and the participant on screen, allowing for building trust, and facial expressions and body language to be visible throughout the interviews. A downside to an online interview is that some words or phrases are harder to transcribe when listening back to the recording.

### 3.4 Sampling

The respondents are selected based on them receiving or having received a form of financial assistance in the Netherlands. This criterium means that the respondents likely experienced a range of administrative burdens when applying for their type of financial assistance and experienced some form of interaction with the state, and thus from their experience can elaborate on how the burdens have influenced their political efficacy. The sampling method

used is a mix of convenience sampling, and that of snowball sampling (Neuman, 2014). The gathering and selecting of participants commenced by contacting people in the researcher's own network who receive a form of financial assistance in the Netherlands. A challenge with contacting people from the researcher's own network is that the researcher could have a biased interpretation of the data, due to more knowledge of the contextual surroundings of these participants, like background, personality, and historical experiences. This is mitigated as much as possible, by staying close to the research topic while interviewing the participants and analyzing their data as neutrally as possible. An advantage, however, is that there is an already established sense of trust and openness between the interviewer and participants. From there on, the last cases were selected based on a referral from previous interview participants (Neuman, 2014). From the nine selected participants, three receive social assistance, four receive an invalidity benefit (WIA), and the last two have received unemployment benefits. Each of these types of benefits comes with a range of administrative obligations and conditionalities that can be experienced as burdensome, which makes them eligible for the research purpose of this paper. Three out of nine participants have a different mother language, than Dutch. This is expected to increase administrative burdens even further, which makes these participants even more eligible to interview about their experiences. To increase the transparency of this research, a list is provided in Appendix C, detailing which participant received which type of assistance, how the interview is conducted, the duration of the interview, and their mother tongue.

Participants have been localized and contacted, appointments have been made, the interviews were held, and after that, the interviews are transcribed and analyzed. The method of analysis is elaborated in [section 3.6](#). Some participants asked to receive the questions beforehand, which was honored by sending out the main questions about the main topics. The follow-up questions were left out, mainly due to the changing nature of these questions regarding the answers that are given during the interview. Prior to the interview, the participants were informed of the goal of the research, the method of data collection and analysis, and were promised anonymity by using pseudonyms in this paper. The pseudonyms are translated to participant numbers. Participants gave written and/or oral informed consent for conducting the interviews and using their answers as data for analysis. The shortest

interview took a little over 30 minutes, while the longest interview was almost 100 minutes long. Overall, the mean duration of the interviews is 65 minutes long.

### 3.5 Operationalization

Due to the qualitative nature of the research question, the operationalization of the main concepts is done by conducting interviews in order to attempt to connect the theory with empirical findings (Neuman, 2014). The key concepts of the research question are administrative burdens, citizen-state interactions, and political efficacy. In this paper, the term citizen-state interactions is used as the context in which administrative burdens and political efficacy are analyzed. This means that no attempt has been made to measure or understand the participants' view on citizen-state interactions *per se*, but rather investigates their experiences of administrative burdens *within* citizen-state interactions, and how this affects their political efficacy. Therefore, only the concepts of administrative burdens and political efficacy are operationalized to infer what the underlying mechanisms are, within the context of citizen-state interactions by asking interviewees questions about their experiences and opinions regarding these two main topics.

#### 3.5.1 Administrative Burdens

As stated in the theoretical framework chapter, administrative burdens come in three forms: learning cost, compliance cost, and psychological cost (Burden et al., 2012; Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015; Christensen et al., 2020). there is no validated measure of learning, compliance, and psychological costs developed in the administrative burden research (Halling & Bækgaard, 2022; Bækgaard & Tankink, 2022). Therefore, an attempt has been made to examine the themes by asking questions regarding the attributes of the concepts. First, the three attributes of the concept have been laid out, followed by a short description of the meaning of these attributes. These operationalizations are presented in the table below.

| Administrative Burden | Operationalization  |
|-----------------------|---|
| Learning Cost         | Finding out about the existence and eligibility criteria of a program.  |
| Compliance Cost       | Meeting specific administrative demands or complying with particular rules. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Time</li><li>- Effort</li><li>- Financial</li></ul> |



|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Psychological Cost | Mental (dis)comfort from interacting with the government.<br>Overall experiences and opinions of the burdens. |
|--------------------|---|

Following this operationalization, more specific questions have been established, without exactly wording the meaning of the attributes, to ask the participants how they experienced each of the attributes of the administrative burdens that they encountered in their interactions with the state, without preconditioning their responses. Participants were asked to reminisce on how they learned about their corresponding program, what their experiences were in finding out what was needed from them, and how the language with their interactions affected them. A similar approach was taken with questions that belong to the compliance cost theme (see Appendix B). These choices have been made to give the participants time to remember what their experiences were and simultaneously develop a more constructed opinion on the questions that are aimed to answer what their psychological costs are. These questions are asked in the present tense, as their past experiences that have been remembered through the first questions about learning and compliance costs, have built up to reaching their emotional state and opinion on how they feel now, after reflecting on what they have experienced before. These questions included asking about what their feeling are, whether they agree with the rules and obligations that come with their corresponding social assistance, and whether they feel these demands are fair in their eyes (see Appendix B). It was interesting to note that sometimes these questions did not even need to be asked, as these experiences of their feelings and opinions often logically flowed through in their stories when answering the questions on the previous two themes.

### 3.5.2 *Political Efficacy*

Just like with the operationalization of administrative burdens, political efficacy is operationalized by shortly describing the meaning of each of the attributes of the term, and from there on developing questions that aim to find out how participants evaluate themselves on how politically efficient they are. The operationalizations are in the table below.

| Political Efficacy | Operationalization                        |
|--------------------|---|
| Internal           | The capability of understanding politics. |

|          |  |
|----------|--|
|          | Feeling competent enough to participate in political actions.<br><br>Believing that you can have a meaningful impact.      |
| External | Perception of the government.<br><br>Feeling that institutions and politicians are responsive to your needs and interests. |

When researching political efficacy, studies have pointed out that it is important to ask questions about political efficacy in a comparative manner towards other citizens, which ask whether politicians, the government or institutions are responsive to “people like me” (Balch, 1974; Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). As it is important to emphasize that the questions asked are about the participants specifically, and not other people outside the sampling scope. Therefore, this has been taken into account when developing the questions for the themes of internal and external political efficacy. Making an emphasis on trying to let them answer the questions from the perspective as recipients of their form of financial assistance. Furthermore, some of the questions asked are inspired by the recommended indicators of external efficacy proposed by Miller et al. (1980), such as asking whether participants believe if public officials care much about what people like them think (please note the comparative manner towards other citizens in which the question is asked), or whether political parties are responsive to their needs, or if they only care for their votes during election periods? Also, questions regarding the evaluation of their internal efficacy have been asked, such as “Do you trust that you can understand political facts and processes?” Or, “Do you believe that you have a meaningful say so about what the government does?” Which are inspired by Craig’s and Magiotto’s (1982) index to measure internal political efficacy. Furthermore, as the definition of political efficacy calls for a personal, individual evaluation of their own perceptions and subjective beliefs on the topic, the following questions were therefore formulated in such a way that the participants felt safe to voice their intricate opinions and not to be afraid that they would be ‘tested’ on their ‘knowledge’ on politics. Which was sometimes a concern that was voiced prior to the interview. Other questions were asked to reflect on whether and how the interactions with the state influenced their internal and external political efficacy, and asking for particular

examples of events that might have occurred that might have triggered their viewpoint on their political efficacy. Please see Appendix B for an overview of the main questions that have been prepared in the interview guide.

### 3.5.3 *Conducting the Interviews*

After the operationalization of the main concepts, a research guide has been established combining all the abovementioned elements in order to gather data on the topic. As stated before, the gathering of the data is done so in a systematic way in order to infer as much as possible from the receivers of their type of social assistance (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). All interviews started with an icebreaker and an introduction to comfort the interviewees (Johnson, 2001), followed by a couple of easy transition questions where the respondents and the interviewer get to know each other a little bit better. The questions regarding the main topics have been asked after these introductory questions. A list of main topics that needed to be discussed flowed logically after the operationalization of the main concepts of this study, which led to the creation of the main questions that correspond to their topics (Boeije, 2010). All the questions were grouped together in blocks and laid out in an interview guide which can be found in Appendix B. These questions were then followed by follow-up questions (Boeije, 2010), which were subject to change with each interview, depending on the answers of the participants. These are then followed by *how* and *when* questions. Despite the structured nature of an interview guide, the interviewer always let the interview flow naturally with the stories of the participants, which meant that sometimes the interviews jumped from topic to topic in a different order than what the interview guide set out to do, which allowed for a natural flowing dialogue between the interviewer and interviewees.

The interviews consisted of two main parts. First, questions were asked regarding the three attributes of administrative burdens, where the participants were asked to remember, reflect, and evaluate their experiences with the learning, compliance, and psychological costs. Secondly, questions were asked about their perception of their internal and external political efficacy. Sometimes these questions needed short explanations, or the participants needed guidance in answering these questions. This was done by illustrating examples of scenarios and asking how the respondents would act in such a scenario. This was done to make the questions on political efficacy more comprehensible and relatable, leading to the respondents

giving a more thought-through answer on their political efficacy, whereas most of the time they would usually first simply answer that they have no political efficacy at all. This changed after the short real-life examples were presented to them, enabling the participants to think about what they would have done in such a scenario.

The interviews always concluded with closing remarks, consisting of a short summary of the main points that were discussed (Johnson, 2001), and asking whether the participants felt that something important still needed to be discussed or whether they had any questions (Boeije, 2010). The topic list of the interview always remained the same, but after each interview, the specific questions asked were evaluated and when necessary, changed when it was clear that some questions were uncomfortable, difficult, or repetitive. New questions were added or reformulated were appropriate. After the interviews have been conducted, the recorded audio is transcribed in order to prepare for the next stage of the data collection, the analysis.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

In order to interpret what has been shared during the interviews, it is important to analyze the data collected. This is done so by systematically organizing, integrating, and examining the data at hand to search for patterns (Neuman, 2014). This paper uses a thematic analysis method to identify patterns and make sense of the stories and subjective personal experiences told by the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 1993; Neuman, 2014).

The thematic analysis method is the main method used to manage, analyze, and interpret the raw data. This is done by conducting the following steps. Transcribing data, coding interesting features in a systematic fashion, collating codes into potential themes (open coding) reviewing the themes (axial coding), defining and naming themes (selective coding), and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, the gathered data is transcribed to prepare for the coding process and to immerse in the data to start searching for patterns and meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data is transcribed by using a combination of two transcribing programs, Amber script, and online Microsoft Office 365, followed by manually checking for mistakes or adding on to missing parts that were difficult to hear or inaudible for the programs.

Secondly, the data is coded, which is done by separating the data into meaningful parts and distinguishing themes or categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process is a mixture of a theoretical thematic analysis, where answers were searched for the specific research question at hand. But to answer the *how* question, also the raw data is organized and themed through three rounds, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2007). Open coding is the first read of the collected data, where the text is divided into important fragments in order to research, compare and conceptualize the data (Strauss & Corbin, 2007), and the first codes and initial themes were assigned to those fragments (Boeije, 2010; Neuman, 2014). In this stage, some general reoccurring themes were found and coded. After this was done, the coded data is then organized in a more theoretical thematic (Braun & Clarke, 2006) manner, by organizing the data that correspond with the main concepts laid out in the operationalization paragraph.

This step is followed by axial coding, which is when the organized set of initial codes is focused on (Neuman, 2014), rather than the full raw data. Here it is important to make connections between the categories made in the open coding stage (Strauss & Corbin, 2007), and to determine which elements are more important than others (Boeije, 2010). These codes stand further away from the raw data and are therefore more abstract frameworks (Boeije, 2010). Here, new subcategories and divisions have been created to grasp the vast data set.

Selective coding is the last step in the coding process, and the main goal is to specifically “look for connections between the categories in order to make sense of what is happening in the field” (Boeije, 2010, p. 115). All of the data and previous codes are scanned through, looking selectively for cases that illustrate or narrate more on the previously established themes. After the analysis of one interview, comparisons with other interviews and their established codes have been made in order to find overarching themes within and across the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes established after the axial coding stage served as a guide in the search process through the raw data again, in order to elaborate on them (Neuman, 2014). The last step of the analysis is presented in the results chapter of the research.

### 3.7 Reflection on Validity and Reliability

The benefit of a qualitative research method, like conducting semi-structured interviews, is that it ensures a high internal validity, due to the detailed answers collected from the participant (Krefting, 1991). Their stories and experiences told come closest to the actual reality that is being researched and adds to the truth value of the findings (Neuman, 2014; Krefting, 1991). However, as stated before, there is no validated measure of learning, compliance and psychological costs developed in the administrative burden discourse (Halling & Bækgaard, 2022). This means that the personal perceptions and biases of the researcher are undeniably connected to the translation of the collected data to the results of the paper (Johnson, 2001). This might influence the interpretation of the collected data. However, this has been taken into consideration when formulating open questions for the interview, steering away from preconditioned answers as much as possible. And to ensure neutrality, or confirmability of the data (Krefting, 1991), as much of the gathered data is coded and presented in code trees in [Appendix D](#).

In order to ensure as much reliability as possible within this research, nearly all interviews were held in the same setting and followed nearly the same interview guide for each interview to ensure all major themes were discussed. However, as all follow-up questions were dependent on the respondent's answers, and due to a plethora of external factors and the naturalistic setting of the interviews (Krefting, 1991), the very nature of the different experiences and individual perceptions of their situations, and the near impossibility of repeating the exact same interviews and gathering the exact same answers from different responses, reliability is undeniably quite low in a qualitative work conducting semi-structured interviews. The applicability of the findings is very low, as it is very difficult to apply to other contexts, settings, or other groups (Krefting, 1991).

## 4. RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings from the collected data, which are elaborated on with examples from the interviews. The chapter is divided into three paragraphs, corresponding to the two main concepts of the research question, which were also the main themes that the interviews focused on, and the relationship between the two concepts. The first part of this chapter illustrates what administrative burdens the participants experienced and to what extent. The second part does the same but on the participant's evaluation of their political efficacy. Appendices D.1 and D.2 provide the coding trees that are the result of the coding process and are then used to organize the data and present it in this chapter. The last part of this chapter then connects the experiences and main themes that have been found in the analysis with the citizen-state interactions, which is the final piece of the puzzle to answer the main research question. These findings are reflected against the proposition and discussed in the concluding chapter of the paper, where the main research question will be answered.

### 4.1 Experiences of Administrative Burdens

The first section illustrates what and how administrative burdens were experienced by the participants of this research. The results from the interviews are presented in sections laid out in the operationalization, which are the learning-, compliance- and psychological costs.

#### 4.1.1 *Learning costs*

Learning costs come about when people need to find information about the existence of a program, as well as what the eligibility criteria are (Christensen, et al., 2020). All participants were asked how they learned about the existence of their corresponding income support programs and how they knew what was needed from them to prove their eligibility, or how they comply with the rules and obligations. The answer to the question of what their learning costs are can therefore be split into two themes: learning about the program and learning about the conditions and obligations.

Learning about the program was generally a fairly easy task for the participants. Everyone almost unanimously shared that they have known about the existence of some kind of program in the Netherlands, or that a relative or someone close in their surroundings reminded them of such programs as a first step. Participant #3 said for example: “Yeah,

*everybody just knows about it from life.*” Or participant #8 said: *“Because all of the Netherlands know about it, it is just generally known.”* The general notion was then that they simply needed to find out further and more specifically what applies to them and what their rights are. This part usually consists of searching for it online and/ or calling someone from the municipality or UWV to further their process of application. *“In 2020 I contacted the UWV, the organization that accounts for all the benefit payments, and I asked them, what (type of income support) fits my situation? And they told me that I needed to apply for the sickness benefit, and when that terminates after two years, I need to apply for the WIA. So, this is how I got to know about the existence of the WIA and that it actually is a sequential process.”* – Participant #3. Or one participant (#4) said: *“My dad reminded me, and I just went googling.”* Which is the most occurring way of how people learned about the program. Overall, the participants that were interviewed viewed the learning process about the program to be fairly easy. Participants either knew themselves about the program, or someone in their network, such as a work manager, a relative or a friend told them about the existence of some kind of income support program in the Netherlands.

Learning about the conditions and obligations had more different notions among the participants. Once they knew about the existence of the program, the next steps are either going on the internet to do research on what is needed from them. *“I then went Googling to find out what the program exactly entails, and do I actually really have the right for it? When I checked all the boxes, I went looking for the website where I needed to be to apply.”* #5 Even when some things were not entirely clear yet, there was no fear of simply calling someone who knows more or filing the cases and hearing back when a mistake had been made. Like participants #3 and #4 say: *“I simply called them and asked what was exactly expected from me”*. And *“They asked for a lot of things that I couldn’t get a hold of and so much information that I thought: I have no clue what they actually want from me. But I applied and once something was missing from my file, someone would contact me to add on to it.”*

However, even though the participants recalled burdensome events, overall, when looking back, the participants did not express these experiences to be very burdensome in general. Only because it was specifically asked about it, people started to reflect on it, but generally, learning occurred quite naturally due to existing knowledge or their environment, which is



then followed by some more research on what is needed. The interactions with the state here have been easy and accessible. Spoken and written language was understood, and if extra help was needed, it was provided. So, the participants expressed the learning experiences not to be very burdensome, even if things were difficult to understand, participants expressed it was easy to learn further in other ways, by googling, calling a bureaucrat, or simply just handing in the applications and awaiting a response.

#### 4.1.2 Compliance Costs

Following the learning costs come compliance costs, which “are the burdens of following administrative rules and requirements” (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015, p. 46). As stated in the theoretical framework, these costs usually arise from the time, effort, and financial costs one has to put in in order to meet the administrative demands (Christensen, et al., 2020). The rules and obligations vary depending on each case. Because of the difference for each type of income support and also each case within the same type of income support is differently treated by the state and experienced by each person, it is redundant to sum up what exactly each participant had to do to comply, but it is interesting to note how time, effort, and financial costs were experienced. For example, for all participants, it starts with filling in application forms. This is standard practice everywhere. However, the application forms differ per type of income support, and the time, effort, and financial costs are experienced differently by each person. Therefore, the following findings are presented according to the three attributes of the concept.

##### 4.1.2.1 Time

The amount of time it takes to comply to the rules and obligations of the income support and how this is experienced differs per case. The data shows that there are two main themes regarding how time is experienced by the participants. Time spent to comply can be divided in it being a *one-time effort* and a *standard reoccurrence* (see Appendix D.1).

All the participants had to fill in forms in order to apply for their type of income support. For most of them, this is a one-time effort. Once their income support is granted, usually other forms of compliance need to be adhered to. However, the same amount of time spent on one thing can be experienced entirely differently by different people. Participants #4 and #9 had

to file forms for which they both said it was a matter of hours to gather the information to file the necessary documents, but they both feel differently about how they experienced this. For example, participant #4 explains why he thought it was a hassle to file the forms, even though it only needed to be done once. *“We had to hand in many things, many forms, and gather much information, for which I first didn’t know how to even get that information myself. So many hours went into sorting that out, and it really felt like an unnecessary hassle.”* Whereas participant #9 has an almost opposite outlook on seemingly the same amount of time that was spent. *“It took some hours to file all documentation, so it was really not a big hassle.”*

After the applications are accepted, other obligations needed to be adhered to every x amount of time. This is standard reoccurring compliance that participants illustrated during the interviews. These might vary from another medical checkup somewhere in the future, to weekly tasks, to daily hours of volunteering work that needs to be done to return to society. *“I have to do many courses to keep getting my social support, and 20 hours a week of volunteering work.”* #7 Or participant #3 said *“There will be a time when they’ll ask for another medical examination, but I don’t know when that will be.”*

The following part establishes how *effort* is experienced by the participants. Where the interpretations of the *one-time* efforts can differ between the receivers of income support, overall, the feelings of the standard *reoccurring* compliances were mostly perceived positively. This is explained more in the following part on efforts, as the efforts experienced might explain why the one-time effort and standard reoccurrences are perceived differently.

#### 4.1.2.2 Effort

This sub-theme of compliance costs is divided into three main categories, which are *easy*, *medium*, and *hard*. As said before, each individual experience is evaluated differently by each participant, and can therefore perceive the same amount of time for a task differently from another person. These are elaborated more on below.

People showing signs of the feeling that not much effort has been taken to comply to the rules and regulations would say that it is an easy effort to comply. The main thing that was

universal is that they needed to fill in various forms. For some people this was an easy process, like participant #1 and #2, who do not even speak the Dutch language, have said that a little external help, such as a friend who can translate, or simply using Google translate, make the process a lot easier and the forms were filed quite quickly. *"We could send in a file from the cardiologist to the UWV and it was during Covid when I had the interview with the employee from the UWV who simply said that I have worked all my life already and that I have done enough for our society when I look at your papers. So, you need to enjoy your old days and you are 100% rejected to work and you do not have to apply for other jobs."* #9

For others, the language on those application forms was already a hurdle to overcome. *"I remember that all this bureaucratic language was quite intimidating, and one has to be highly educated to understand what is actually expected from you."* -#6. This creates a sense of medium efforts that need to be taken to comply to the rules and obligations. There is an understanding of the processes and therefore do not feel that the hassle was too big to comply. The same participant #6 also stated: *"Going to various locations, like Utrecht and Leiden, for medical examinations by a doctor from the WAO<sup>2</sup>. Of course, it takes some time and effort, but I am happy that there is a serious gateway. I don't feel that these types of income support are to be handed out on a platter for just anyone, as some people might abuse this support system and I find it hard to support those people."*

The last sub-division is the experience to comply being a hard process. Where in the other two dimensions some people expressed that much time needs to be spent to comply and that some effort is needed, there is still a factor of understanding where the rules come from and understanding that it is for the greater good in the future for themselves. The ones who find complying to be hard have more difficulty in adhering to the demands that their means-tested policy has. Especially after comparing themselves to other cases. Participant #7 for example says: *"I have to do much work, follow many courses, and 20 hours of volunteering each week, while others with less issues only work 8 hours a week. And next to that I have to take my spouse to all his doctor appointments and volunteering work that he has to do for his social*

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<sup>2</sup> Older version of the WW (invalidity support). The principles are the same, but the name and other details within the invalidity benefits law have changed.

*benefit. Where do I find the energy and time? I am drained, it is a lot of effort to keep up with the obligations and it is strange how other people who seem more fit, have to do less."*

#### 4.1.2.3 Finances

The last sub-category of compliance costs that one might experience is the financial costs one has to make (Christensen, et al., 2020). These are the costs one has to make to comply or prove compliance with their type of income support program. Based on the findings, this subcategory is divided into: *no- to low financial costs* and *high costs*.

Most of the participants had low to no financial costs when applying and further complying with the obligations. Usually, all communications with the state are done digitally through the computer, through the telephone, or at the local municipality house. *"The municipality is around the corner from my house, so I could walk or bike there, so no costs for me."* -#5. Even when participants need to physically go to other cities for medical checkups, the travel expenses were always covered. *"I had to go to different cities, but every time you drive over 15km, they pay you back your traveling expenses in full."* -#1

Participant #3 experienced very high financial costs in order to prove eligibility for the invalidity benefit. *"In the first instance I didn't get the invalidity benefit. They just said that my condition is too unquantifiable, but the doctor didn't even read my file properly. So, because I was first rejected, I had to gather much more paperwork and do extra medical examinations with third parties, just to invalidate their first decision. I even had to have a lawyer by my side, so they would listen to my case. This cost me a lot of money, not only to hire a lawyer to apply for something I know I have the right to, but also for the extra costs of moving to an Airbnb [in the Veluwe] when it's fireworks season in the Randstad."* [The participant was very sure of his situation and his right to receive WIA, but he had to hire a lawyer to prove he has the right for the disability support, as the bureaucrat did not recognize his disability at first, and instead of moving to the quiet countryside in Spain, which has been his plan for a couple of years, he has to stay in the Netherlands in the Randstad where it is very crowded and noisy, which physically hurts him]. This experience later translates into the participant's political efficacy in a negative manner, which is explained in the paragraph on political efficacy.

Overall, the time, effort, and financial costs that come into play are generally divisible in categories of generally bringing low to high compliance costs. As it differs a lot how someone experiences each of the three subcategories of compliance costs, the experiences have been organized in the *low-high* and *easy, medium, and hard* scale. The amount of time it takes to comply to the rules and obligations of the income support and how this is experienced differs per case. One person might say that it took several hours, which is very long and almost discouraged this person to even try to apply (#4), whereas the other person can say it only takes up one or a couple of days to fill out forms (#1, #2, #5, #9).

#### 4.1.3 Psychological Costs

Each individual has their own experiences which are then translated into the overall psychological costs. All of the experiences in learning and compliance costs interchange with each other and form the basis for what the psychological costs are at the end of the administrative burdens that each participant experiences in the interactions with the state. The psychological costs are the costs that flow from the learning and compliance costs that they have experienced during the interactions that they had with the state (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015; Moynihan & Herd, 2010). These are the mental discomfort that interacting with the state might bring (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015). As previously said, imposed processes and directives can result in feelings of frustration, powerlessness, and degradation (Lipsky, 1980; Soss, 1999; Dias & Maynard-Moody, 2007), which can spill over to their political efficacy (Shore, 2020). The results determining how the participants felt about the rules and obligations regarding their income support, and how they evaluate it to impact their political efficacy, are presented in this paragraph.

The first thing that is important to note, is that the interactions with the state did not always bring about mental *discomfort*, as conceptualized in the theoretical framework. The interactions with the state have also been seen to have brought comfort to some participants. Appreciation and comfort from the interactions with the state were found in the following ways: *human help, digitalization, comparison to other people and/ or countries, peace of mind, and overall acceptance*. The human touch when interacting with the state, instead of following a digitalized process is appreciated that a real human being, a bureaucrat, takes a look at the case at hand and helps out when necessary. However, where human interactions

were much appreciated by some, others really found comfort in the initial digitalization of administration that comes along. Participant #1 illustrates this by explaining how she is afraid of speaking to a bureaucrat in the Dutch language and having to do everything digitally really made the experience more pleasant. *"It was not difficult at all. They sent out all the paperwork online, my friend helped translate and file the forms and we could send it back to them."* #1. *"I really liked that it was enough to hand in forms digitally, and no other questions were asked."* #2.

Other factors that illustrate how participants of this study experience mental comfort from the administration process and interactions with the state, are how they feel peace of mind and an overall acceptance of the rules and regulations. Whatever any negative experiences with the administration process might be, these are outweighed by the peace of mind that follows from receiving any type of income support. And there is also an overall acceptance to the rules and obligations that come with the territory of the income support policies. Participant #5 states: *"It is logical that they ask for so much of your personal information. You're asking for money from the government, so the least you can do is help them gather the information they need about you in order to get it."* #5.

Also, the comparison with other cases is often a reason for being content and accepting of the administrative burdens that are part of the income support policies. These are the last sub-categories found to be contributing to experiences of comfort after the administrative process are comparisons of one's own situation with other people or other countries. A comparison to other people who are unsuccessful in receiving a type of income support contributes to one's appreciation of their current *"luxurious position"* (#6) of receiving support. These participants see how other people in their surroundings might have a more difficult time with the administrative process, and because the participants of this research are already part of the program, they feel a sense of gratitude that it worked for them. This realization also goes hand in hand with the acceptance of the rules and regulations that come with the policy, as they are also well aware that some people who technically do not have a right for support, might still take advantage of the policies. *"Some people might take advantage of the system, and that doesn't sit right with me. So even though they were very tough with me at first, I do agree with the necessity of the rules and obligations."* #6. A similar

notion can be seen that participants express gratitude when they evaluate their situation in the Netherlands, compared to other countries. It brings a sense of comfort to realize how well-organized the administrative system the Netherlands has, and an appreciation for its laws and policies. *"I have nothing to complain, and I am willing to do anything they ask from me. If I was back in Lithuania, things would be different, but I'm here and I'm happy the state helps me out like this."* #2.

Participants often expressed how their case is being treated, compared to others, or how the bureaucrats that they encounter respond to their situation and make their decisions based on their situations. There is a clear notion of gratitude that once their case is accepted to receive income support, they realize how different life would be without support. But there is also the realization and sense of unfairness once their case is rejected, or if it takes a much longer process than what they believe is supposed to take in order to be found compliant with the regulations of their corresponding income support. For example, participant #3 said: *"In the first instance I didn't get the invalidity benefit. They just said that my condition is too unquantifiable, and the doctor didn't even read my file properly. So, because I was first rejected, I had to gather much more paperwork and do extra medical examinations with third parties, just to invalidate their first decision. I even had to have a lawyer by my side, so they would listen to my case. Thinking about it still makes me furious."* This example shows how mental discomfort from the administrative burdens manifested in the participants.

Mental discomforts are also experienced that administrative burdens bring about. Even though many participants almost unanimously expressed feelings of gratitude and overall understanding for the administrative burdens that are brought on to them, many initial reactions have also brought some discomfort. Almost all participants experienced some general emotions of feeling stressed, angry, annoyed at, or mistrusting of the administrative processes and some interactions with the state. However, as stated above, usually these initial emotions faded away for most participants once the realization hit that they are in a good position to be able to receive a type of income support. But this is not entirely the case for participants #3 and #7, who express feeling let down and misunderstood. *"It was a tough process, and it did bother me, especially as I already am in a difficult situation, and this didn't*

*make it easier. It caused me so much stress, it also affected my heart. It still makes me very angry when I think about it.” #3.*

Another reoccurring theme with other participants that brought on discomfort, was the feeling that an expert opinion is worth much more than that of a citizen and feelings of uncertainty of what is about to come. Participants expressed how it influenced them that the word of an expert weighs heavier than that of the applicant themselves. One applicant’s story was downplayed by a medical examiner who did not read the files thoroughly enough (#3), other participants felt intimidated by the language spoken by bureaucrats or written on the letters they received (#6) or felt a sense of uncertainty from the ambiguous language used when filing for their income support (#4, #7). An example from participant #4 illustrates this in the following quote: *“You think that you’ve done everything right, but usually with most government texts, you could read 10 times and think that you know it, but you are never completely sure. I know that government rules can sometimes be so complex that, even though it is stated pretty clearly on the website page, but it’s a tricky business and there is lots of room for loopholes which you only get confronted with at the moment a bureaucrat is really analyzing your case. You never know what rules come at play that you might have missed.”*

To sum up, everyone experiences various degrees of administrative burdens (Christensen et al., 2020), and the data shows that this is indeed the case. The experiences of the administrative burdens influences one’s political efficacy. Meaning that stigmatizing experiences in means-tested policies generally make for lower political efficacy, and positive experiences would increase efficacy (Shore, 2020; Watson, 2015). After mapping out the administrative burdens experienced by people receiving a form of income support in the Netherlands, the paper attempts to explain the sources of variation in people’s experiences and how the administrative burdens in their encounters with the state affect the citizens’ political efficacy. The following section discusses how people perceive their political efficacy to be, which is followed by a short paragraph connecting the two concepts together.

#### 4.2 Self-Evaluation of Political Efficacy

Usually, the participants evaluate their political efficacy to be very low from the start. Therefore, different aspects of internal and external political efficacy have been unpacked



and asked about during the interview, which led the participants to evaluate their political efficacy differently, and also connect their experiences of administrative burdens to their political efficacy. The questions asked were aimed at finding out what they believed to what extent their ability is to participate in political activities and whether they believe government organizations are responsive to their beliefs and needs. Please see Appendix D.2 for the code tree on political efficacy and elaborations on the results in the following sections below.

#### 4.2.1 *Internal Political Efficacy*

Internal political efficacy is the “individual’s self-perception to being capable of understanding politics and competent enough to participate in political actions such as voting” (Miller, Miller, & Schneider, 1980, p. 253). Generally speaking, a high internal political efficacy means an increase in participation in political activities, and vice versa when there is a low internal efficacy (Jabobs, Mettler, & Zhu, 2021). Participants in this research expressed their internal political efficacy in the following ways: They expressed a level of interest in politics and topics that they feel drawn to. The data shows a distinction of subcategories between *passive*, *active*, and *no interest* in political topics and activities.

Most participants exhibited notions of passive interest in political processes and policy topics. This subcategory is divided into three themes: *understanding processes*, *following topics of interests*, and *forming ideas*. Some participants expressed how they feel comfortable in saying that they *understand political processes*, and more participants expressed that they *follow topics they are interested in* by watching the news, reading the newspaper, listening to political podcasts, or reading about it on other online platforms. However, the data shows a significant emphasis on the passive absorption of information, rather than actively looking it up voluntarily. More participants have expressed the same notion along the line of what participant #9 said: “*When something comes on the news, I would watch it, or read about it in the newspaper, but I don’t look political topics up voluntarily.*” The last theme in the passive interest subcategory is *forming ideas*. This means when someone is involved in their type of income support, they have ideas about what could be changed within that policy or administrative process but do not feel the need to act on it.

The second subcategory is *active interest*, in which participants expressed how they are actively engaging in political activities such as discussions and voting or actively engaging in policy-changing efforts. There is however a notion that this usually applies to their knowledge on political processes and mechanisms. Participants like to look for news about topics that are of interest to them, or they like to talk about it with friends and family. However, this is where the 'active' in active interest has its limits with most participants. The part in taking political action to actively engage in policy-changing activities, such as joining protests, or writing letters is universally quite low, to non-existent. People are happy where they are and are content and understanding of their rights and obligations regarding receiving their type of social assistance. Participants often said they would not go out of their way to protest or write letters, or anything else that requires the bare minimum to voice their opinion. *"I vote, and I engage in conversations about politics in general and topics that interest me, but other than that I just don't engage politically, that just isn't me."* -#4. Or people actively think about things that could be changed for the better in their opinion, but that is where actively engaging in political activities finds its borders. *"From my experiences, I do believe that administrative processes could be better, and I do believe that I could sum up a few fixes here and there, but I won't actively do so."* -#6.

The opposite subcategory is *no interests*, which is where participants conveyed no interest at all to be politically involved or policy topics of interest. This comes either from genuinely not having an opinion on political matters, to believing they have nothing to say and therefore not wanting to engage at all. Another reason mentioned is that there is no interest in Dutch politics specifically because there is no understanding of the Dutch political system and political parties. This is due to a language barrier and not wanting to disturb their happy life by concerning themselves with matters they do not understand or do not believe they can influence anyway. *"I don't understand what they're talking about, I can't read Dutch, I don't know Dutch politics, which party says what and which party does what, and I can't change anything anyway so why would I put my time and energy into Dutch politics? To me, the most important thing is that I get my social assistance and I'm happy. I'm an immigrant and nobody needs anything from me. I'm such a small cog in this mechanism, who needs my opinion?"* -#2. *"I don't know any of the candidates...no one knows the people and their parties, there's so*

*many of them, and even if you do know about their programs, they won't follow through with it anyway. So, I'm not interested."* -#7.

To sum up, the data shows a distinction in how the internal efficacy is evaluated with each participant. Most participants express to have a form of interest, whether it be passive or active, meaning that they do have a sense of internal efficacy. The opposite was the case for three out of nine participants, who showed no interest at all. However, the internal efficacy generally reached not much further than passive internal efficacy to minimal active internal efficacy. Political processes are understood, topics of interest are followed, opinions are developed, discussions are held and usually, voting is done, but when asked about other activities that participants might engage in was generally too much effort, also for the ones who evaluate themselves to be highly politically efficacious. The belief that someone can impact society on any level is generally shared to be quite low, so all but one participant stray away from any political action, other than participating in discussions in their own network and voting. This is also often connected to how people evaluate their external efficacy to be, which is elaborated on in the following passage.

#### *4.2.2 External Political Efficacy*

This paragraph lays out what people's perception is of their government (Westholm & Niemi, 1986) and whether they feel that institutions and politicians are responsive to their needs and interests (Shore, 2020). Three subthemes emerged when asked about the citizen's perception of the government, which are: *mistrusting the government*, *room to voice an opinion* and *competence*. These are presented below.

Participants were asked about their perception of their government and the first thing that is striking, is that there is no data from this research that shows that this group has trust in the government as a whole. On the contrary, interviewees were vocal about their mistrust of the government. Even without asking specific questions, the participants would almost automatically talk about their distrust in the government. However, when asked if their experiences with the administrative burdens in the interactions with the state had anything to do with this, almost everyone said that the administrative burdens had nothing to do with it. *"I have to say that I'm done with politics because they [politicians] make unbelievably many*

*mistakes where others would have been fired. I don't believe I have a lot of trust left.... But no, my experiences with the administrative processes and interactions with the bureaucrats have nothing to do with my political views.”* -#6. Only participants #3 and #7 have expressed influences of administrative burden on their political efficacy, which are expanded on in the next section of this chapter.

Further, participants do feel that they can voice their opinions and are happy that there is room for that in the Dutch democracy. However, they also feel politicians and bureaucrats are not necessarily responsive to your beliefs and opinions. *“There is no room for your participation and opinion, there really isn't. They'll let you believe that you have a say so, but in the end, they'll still do whatever they want without actually considering your opinion.”* #9. This shows how some participants feel that the government and its institutions are not responsive to the citizens' needs and interests. However, the other half of the participants disagree and believe politicians and bureaucrats in fact do have intentions and care about people like them. Some examples of participants 1 and 5 illustrate that they believe the government is responsive to their interests and needs: *“Yes I can see how politicians care about disabled people and that they change things in a better direction.”* #1. And *“I really believe that the bureaucrats working at UWV have empathy and care, otherwise you won't have that work.”* #5. Even though the same participants expressed mistrust in the government as a whole. But there is a clear difference between viewing the government as a big entity, and the individual people working there.

Everything together shows that perceptions of one's external efficacy are quite divided in this interview group. Everyone does agree, however on not being able to trust the government right now, but this lack of trust comes from factors outside the scope of this paper. It is important to note that this paper is written shortly after the Covid-19 pandemic, during an ongoing war in Ukraine, and several crises in the Netherlands<sup>3</sup>. Participants expressed these examples and the mishaps by the government during this time of crisis. Other than that, even though distrust in government as a whole is prominent, there is a sense of trust in half of the

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<sup>3</sup> Housing crises, nitrogen crises, childcare benefit scandal, and more. These examples were proposed by the participants themselves during the interviews.

participants that the people behind the policies are responsive to their interests and needs. The other half believes that there is no responsiveness, and that politicians and bureaucrats only do what they do for prestige, personal gain, and money.

The following section of this chapter connects the interviewees' experiences of administrative burdens in their interactions with the state to their political efficacy, in order to attempt an answer to the main research question.

#### 4.3 Connecting experiences of administrative burdens to political efficacy

As the participants had the time and chance to reflect on their administrative burdens in their interactions with the state and their own evaluations of political efficacy, it was easier to connect the two concepts together and ask questions about how their experiences influence their political efficacy. This is briefly elaborated in this section, but more thoroughly discussed in the conclusion chapter to answer the main research question.

As said before, the majority of participants expressed not being influenced by the administrative burdens on their political efficacy at all. They see it as completely separate things and feel that nothing in the administrative process or interactions with the state have (had) anything to do with how they look at politics and how they evaluate their internal and external political efficacy to be. Only one thing that was a recurring theme within this group, is that when they were asked if there were certain things within the administrative process or interactions with the state that they would change, some of the participants would come up with examples of what they would like to see differently within the process. From changing to a more easy and friendly language (#6, #1, #2), to digitalizing the process (#2, #5, #9), to un-digitalize the process and keeping a more human connection (#4). But when asked whether they would actively pursue such changes, the enthusiasm dropped. *"Maybe if it is presented on a platter and I have to sign a petition, then I would participate."* -#9. Or a neglectable short emotional increase of what was already thought of politics, which is illustrated by #5: *"Maybe the experiences did indeed do something. Maybe it just made me more annoyed, because I already disagree with a lot of things, and how badly things are organized in the country, but I don't believe it changed my political preference or anything like*

*that. I only really engage with politics and topics of interest around the time new elections are coming up."*

Only participants #3 and #7 have expressed a real connection between administrative burden and political efficacy. #3 had to put in a disproportionate amount of effort in order to comply to receive his invalidity benefit which he knows has the right to. This resulted in a loss of energy to care much about his political interests. His experiences created a sense of tiredness, and discouragement to spend his scarce energy on things that he feels politicians and bureaucrats do not listen to anyway, just as they did when he applied for his invalidity support, where only the word of an expert really counted to establish understanding, rather than his own word. *"It is only recognized by the organizations that I have an illness, due to the fact that I carry the word of an expert with me. This makes my position stronger, but it hurts it has to be this way."* #3. He also continues to say: *"I'd rather not engage in policy topics regarding the WIA and diseases. I just want to live a normal life, but I also hope that problems like this in my case can be solved. And because I'm involved in this policy field, then of course it automatically interests you and you form your own opinions on it. Maybe even out of necessity, because imagine they would change something and this group of people can apply for compensation and it would be on the news, then you should be the first one to know of course."* So even though there is no desire to be involved in political topics related to the WIA and health, this participant still is, as he feels it is necessary to stay updated and to know when things might change for him for the better and to be on top of it. Whereas without past experiences with administrative burdens, this interest in staying updated for this policy field would not exist. Also, after participant's #3 experiences with administrative burdens, he is more actively shedding light on and advocating for policy changes by writing letters to bureaucrats in his municipality. Without these experiences, he would have had a more passive attitude toward topics of interest in politics. *"I feel that I am very involved, especially when I feel that things need to be different, I try to make my voice heard at least on a bureaucratic level. I can't go any other way, I have to appeal, and I have to take action because I can't go any other way."* #3

Participant #7 has expressed discontent and distrust with the entire Dutch government and social assistance system. She feels that she is not heard, she feels that other people are

treated differently, and she finds many decisions that are being made regarding her participation in society in return for social assistance to be strange. *“I had this idea in Ukraine about the Netherlands that everything is so much better here, that people really listen to you and care for you. But after 20 years in this country, I can’t say the same anymore. I see so many strange things happening, stupid political decisions that are being made, strange and unthoughtful participation activities that are imposed on me and my husband so we can receive social assistance... After all these experiences I’ve lost my trust in the government and in the system, and now I won’t even try to keep track of politics, and I don’t trust the government with my votes.”* When this participant used to live in Ukraine, her ideas about politics in the Netherlands were the total opposite of what they are now, specifically after her experiences of administrative burdens that come along with the social assistance policy. She expresses concerns about the way decisions are made without any consideration of her and her husband’s particular circumstances. All these experiences made her opinion on Dutch politics to completely turn around, compared to 20 years ago. The unresponsiveness by politicians and bureaucrats to her interests and specific needs has influenced her political efficacy to be a very passive citizen, as she does not feel heard and understood, and because she believes strange decisions are being made all the time. Therefore, she decided not to engage in politics and political activities anymore, due to the increase of distrust after her continuous experiences with administrative burdens.

## 5. CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

This chapter answers the main research question. How do administrative burdens in citizen-state interactions influence the political efficacy of people receiving income support in the Netherlands? After concluding remarks in the first sections of this chapter, points of discussion, limitations, and further research are proposed in the second section.

### *5.1 Conclusion*

As stated in the theoretical framework, research on political efficacy generally agrees with the notion that the administrative burdens in citizen-state interactions that come with means-tested policies generally influence one's political efficacy to be lower (Shore, 2020; Soss, 1999, Halling & Bækgaard, 2022). Christensen et al. (2020) add that the level of burdens experienced is subjective to each individual, but it is generally accepted that the burdens fall harder on disadvantaged groups (Halling & Bækgaard, 2022), like people receiving a kind of income support such as social assistance, unemployment- or invalidity benefits. However, most of this research is done in other countries (Shore & Tosun, 2019; Campbell, 2011), but not in the Netherlands. The study also adds to academia, as most research in citizen-state interactions mostly focuses on the perceptions and experiences of the bureaucrat, and not the citizen (Shore, 2020; Jakobsen, et al., 2019). Acquiring knowledge on citizen's perceptions from interacting with the state are useful to relate to what it means for bureaucracy and how public administration can be optimized (Jakobsen, et al., 2019). It is the interactions between the state and citizens that may inform citizens about their stance in society and whether they feel the state is responsive to their needs and preferences (Lipsky, 1980). Therefore, this research focused on how people living in the Netherlands who fall under three examples of means-tested policies (WW, WIA/IVA & social assistance) respond to the administrative burdens in their interactions with the state in their political efficacy.

The paper proposed that the administrative burdens in the encounters with the state would negatively impact how citizens evaluate their political efficacy. To research this proposition, the research consisted of conducting semi-structured interviews, which were then analyzed to inductively infer how administrative burdens influence one's political efficacy. The results from the analysis show that the sample group has different experiences with administrative burdens, but also respond differently to similar burdens. From some people liking a digitalized



administrative process to other people preferring a more human connection and personalized approach. However, for the most part, the experiences of administrative burdens in the interactions with the state did not seem to uphold the proposition, meaning that the vast majority explicitly stated not to feel any connection between the administrative burdens experienced and their political efficacy. The two concepts are viewed to be completely separate, and not influential enough to affect one's internal and external political efficacy. Only a slight, temporary increase in already existing emotions and opinions on political topics and political efficacy was something people noticed after experiencing the administrative burdens. But overall, the participants adamantly contested the idea that their experiences with administrative burdens have had anything to do with how they perceive their political efficacy to be.

However, for a small fraction of the group, their experiences did influence their political efficacy. They did indeed express to have experienced ambiguity, unfairness, and overall stigma surrounding their case with the administrative burdens in their interactions. These burdens are so intrusive, that they expressed it shaping their political efficacy. But for those two participants, the results are again the opposite. Participant #3 sees an increase in political efficacy, and participant #7 a decrease.

When applying for the invalidity benefit for participant #3, the elongated administration process caused by disbelief or misunderstanding from the bureaucrat toward this participant's case, was a tiring, angering, and discouraging process. So much so that an initial averseness for this policy topic and health-related matters emerged. Or for participant #7, who also stated feeling not being heard or understood, and having the feeling that decisions made are not thought through and seem very strange to her. It is discouraging when a case does not fit the mold of the policy, and there is no real client tailoring to find solutions for difficult cases. This led to the belief that there is no incentive to be responsive to people like them. Similar notions were expressed by other participants as well, stating that they do not believe that politicians really care about their opinions and interests, but it was never connected to a change in their political efficacy. Pollock (1983) also argued that a cynical perception of the government not always necessarily leads to potential extremist behavior, like protesting for example.

To conclude, the majority of interviewees express no connection between the administrative burdens and their political efficacy, because they say that nothing and no one can influence their opinion. However, the participants who did express a feeling of the administrative burdens having affected their political efficacy, it did so in three different ways. Firstly, even though an aversion for the policy topic emerged after the experiences, there is still the feeling of needing to stay updated, should things change for the better. Secondly, because the administrative burdens experiences were so intense, a sense of duty to advocate for change or attention on the particular topic emerges, whereas these would be non-existent if experiences were different. And lastly, a complete change in political efficacy occurred after experiencing administrative burdens in citizen-state interactions. These feelings came about after stigmatizing experiences, such as a disproportionately elongated administrative process, feelings of not being heard, only being taken seriously with the word of an expert and having the feeling that unthoughtful decisions without personal needs taken into consideration are being made.

### *5.2 Discussion of Limitations and Further Research*

This section discusses possible explanations for the limited results found on *how* administrative burdens influence an income support recipient's political efficacy in the Netherlands. Followed by suggestions for further research.

The vast majority of participants expressed no connection between administrative burdens and their political efficacy at all, some reasons why this might be the case in this research are the following. These participants also expressed a general content with how the administrative process went and their current situation. Even though some experiences were burdensome, and some experiences more intense than other experiences, the administrative rules, and obligations, and therefore the burdens that come along with it were easily understood, or probably even forgotten when asked about their experiences and evaluating their political views and activism. This group expresses a sense of gratitude to being able to receive a form of income support, regardless of the necessary steps needed to comply with rules. Some even agree with the means-tested nature of this policy, as they believe that the gatekeeping function is necessary to prevent fraudulent practices. Methodologically it would be recommended to follow people receiving a form of income support in real-time when they

are still close to the experience of imposed administrative rules and obligations. But at the same time, such a method would be of less value for this particular research. Maybe longitudinal research would be more fitting to investigate the relationship between administrative burdens and political efficacy and how it changes over time.

Next to the feelings of gratitude when receiving a type of income support in the Netherlands, which maybe therefore outweigh their previous and/ or continuous experiences of administrative burdens, this group also expressed an understanding for the existence of the burdens that come with the territory of the means-tested policy that they are falling under, as well as simply adamantly stating that they do not feel that there is a connection between their experiences with administrative burdens and political efficacy. It would be interesting to do more research on why people believe this and keep in mind the cultural contexts of the respondents.

To add on that, existing literature on political efficacy emphasizes other factors, other than administrative burdens, influencing one's political efficacy, such as education, minority ethnic or religious background, income, and network (Shore, 2020), with education being the most important indicator of one's political efficacy. Even though it was not in the scope of this paper to ask about the participant's educational background, #4 for example, did express his educational background and specifically clarify that due to his educational background, he feels like he has a relatively good and in-depth understanding of politics and decision-making. So even though he finds himself experiencing some burdens when applying for income support, this did not affect his political efficacy.

But this can be contested, as participant 3 who says the disproportional administrative burdens, he experienced very much influenced his political efficacy, also enjoyed higher education. The difference with the literature, however, is that his experiences did not lower his political efficacy (Shore, 2020; Campbell, 2011; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Mahlangu & Schulz-Herzenberg, 2022) but rather increased, even though he would rather not be involved in this policy field anymore. As Lipsky (1980) said, the interactions did affect how they view the government and where they stand in society, but for one participant it decreased her political efficacy, and for the other one it increased his political efficacy.

A last recommendation for future research is to specify the sample group even more. From interviewing people on the broader spectrum of receiving a form of income support through the means-tested Social Support Act in the Netherlands (2015), to choosing one specific type of income support. It being either social assistance, invalidity benefit, or unemployment benefit receivers. Especially, as previously recommended, more longitudinal research would be more fitting to investigate the relationship between how administrative burdens and political efficacy in the Netherlands, it would be interesting to do research on a group that has to do the most continuous work in proving eligibility and complying to the rules and regulations of a means-tested policy.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Conditionalities in the Social Assistance Policy in the Netherlands.

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Recipients' rights</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial support.</li> <li>- Municipal support to finding a workplace.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Recipients' obligations</b> | <p><b>Work obligations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accepting job offers and keeping them.</li> <li>- Sign in with an employment agency.</li> <li>- You must actively search for a job in the municipality, prior to moving.</li> <li>- You must be prepared to travel a maximum of 3 hours per day if this is required to find a job.</li> <li>- You must be prepared to relocate if it is not possible to find a job within a 3-hour travel distance.</li> <li>- You have to do everything in your abilities to acquire and keep the required knowledge and skills.</li> <li>- You must cooperate with the support the municipality imposes on you that is aimed at work integration.</li> <li>- You must ensure that your clothing, personal grooming, or behavior does not interfere with acquiring work.</li> </ul> <p>Single parents with children up to 5 years of age are exempted from these obligations. Single parents with children up to 12 years of age are only obligated to accept work opportunities when childcare is available.</p> <p>People who are fully disabled and declared incapable of work are exempted from the obligations.</p> <p><b>Reintegration Duty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You must cooperate in your reintegration.</li> <li>- You must adhere to the agreements to find paid work as soon as possible.</li> </ul> |

**Volunteer Work**

You must do unpaid work in accordance with your abilities when the municipality asks for it. The unpaid work must be of societal value.

**Cooperation Duty**

You have to cooperate when the Municipality is asking for it. The Municipality may ask your cooperation with for example a house visit, or an investigation determining whether you are still eligible to receiving social assistance.

**Identification Duty**

You must be able to prove your identity with a valid proof of identity when the Municipality is asking for it.

**Information Duty**

You are obligated to inform your municipality of all matters that are deemed important for your social assistance. Should something change in your circumstance, than it is your duty to inform this immediately. Examples are:

- You are going to work and receive an income.
- You receive a heritage, a prize in a lottery, or a gift.
- You wish to study.
- You wish to do volunteering work.
- You are moving.
- Your living situation is changing (moving in together, divorce, children moving in or out.
- You wish to go on a holiday.

Should you fail to comply in informing the municipality and do you receive too much social assistance unlawfully? Then you have to pay this back immediately, and you could face a fine.

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <p><b>Correct Behavior in the Municipality</b></p> <p>You have to behave accordingly. You are not allowed to misbehave to a civil servant from the Municipality.</p> <p><b>Language Learning</b></p> <p>As a social assistance recipient, you have to adhere to the language requirement. This means you have to have a sufficient command of the Dutch language. This is necessary in obtaining, accepting, and keeping a job. You need to make an effort in developing your language command, should this be insufficient</p> <p><b>Holidays</b></p> <p>You are allowed to go on a holiday for a maximum of 28 days per calendar year. This includes weekends and public holidays. You have to inform your civil servant of your holiday plans, even if you are staying in the Netherlands. The Municipality assesses whether you can go travel and for how long while retaining your social assistance.</p> |
|--|--|

This information is extracted from the official government website of the Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, n.d.) and the governmental law bank (Overheid Wettenbank).

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

| Key Concepts                  | Remarks  | Questions  |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Introduction</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explain research focus</li> <li>- Explain data collection and analysis</li> <li>- Interviewee questions</li> <li>- Record interview</li> <li>- Informed consent (yes/no)</li> </ul> | What is your name, age and where do you come from?   |
|                               |  | Since when do you receive social assistance?   |
|                               |  | What is the reason you're receiving social assistance?   |
|                               |  |  |
| <b>Administrative Burdens</b> | Learning costs   | What kind of social assistance do you receive?   |
|                               |  | How did you get to know about this program?  |
|                               |  | Did you receive any help/ assistance?  |
|                               |  | When did you realize that you could apply for this program?  |
|                               |  | How difficult was it to figure out what is needed to apply? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Could you give any specific example of something that went well/ difficult/ anything else when learning about the program?</li> </ul>   |
|                               | Compliance costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time</li> <li>- Effort</li> <li>- Financial</li> </ul>   | Is the language easy to understand? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If yes, what makes it easy?</li> <li>- If no, what makes it complex?</li> <li>- How do you deal with the complexity?</li> </ul>   |
|                               |  | To what extent was it time-consuming for you to adhere to the prescribed requirements?   |
|                               |  | How much time on average do you spend on your eligibility? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How does it make you feel? Did It take too long or was it quite quickly?</li> </ul>  |
|                               |  | How much effort does it take to follow the administrative rules and regulations? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To what extent was it difficult/ easy? Can you give an example?</li> <li>- Eg. Logging in every time, conversations with a social worker, weekly language courses, etc.</li> </ul> |
|                               |  |  |

|                           |                     |  |
|---------------------------|---------------------|--|
|                           |                     | How frequently do you need to prove your eligibility?<br>- How does it make you feel that you need to do it this often?  |
|                           |                     | What type of work do you need to do to be included to the program?<br>- Think about: volunteer work, language courses, accepting job offers, information duty, etc.  |
|                           |                     | Did you have to pay any fees to apply for this program?<br>Please elaborate.   |
|                           | Psychological costs | How do you feel about the whole administration process to get social assistance?   |
|                           |                     | Do you have the feeling that the whole administration process impacted your wellbeing?   |
|                           |                     | Do you agree with the rules and regulations regarding the application and continuation of the program?<br>- Please elaborate.<br>- What would you suggest as a change?<br>- Have you ever considered on contributing/ working on changing anything in the procedure? |
|                           |                     | Is it fair to expect social assistance receivers to adhere to the obligations that the program imposes?<br><br>What does the fact that you need to apply for social assistance do to you? How do you feel about it?  |
| <b>Political Efficacy</b> | Internal            | Do you feel encouraged to be politically active?<br><br>How do you stay politically involved?  |

|  |          |  |
|--|----------|--|
|  |          | <p>How do you see your own role in political activities, such as voting, discussions, protesting etc?</p> <p>Do you believe you can make a meaningful impact?</p> <p>Can you give examples where certain interactions with the state would fuel/ discourage your political activity?</p> <p>Does the language used by the state make you think about your political efficacy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eg. Do you get inspired/ are you learning from it/ does it make you want to talk about politics or about/ does it frustrate you?</li> </ul> <p>Could you give an example where certain interactions made you feel more/less politically efficacious? And how/ why was that?</p> |
|  | External | <p>Do you think that the government and/ or politicians care about your needs and beliefs?</p> <p>Do you believe that the government or its institutions are responsive to people like you? Please elaborate.</p> <p>Do you believe that, through the communications with the state, you are being heard?</p> <p>Do you have trust in the government? Please elaborate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did something in the administrative process influence your trust in government in any way?</li> </ul> <p>Do the administrative burdens influence your political interests?</p> <p>What moment triggered your change in your political view?</p>                                       |

|                 |   |   |
|-----------------|---|---|
|                 |   | Do you have the feeling that the experiences that you shared with me are of any influence on your political efficacy? |
| Closing remarks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Other questions?</li> <li>- Thank you for your participation.</li> </ul> | Do you have anything else to add/ that you would like to illustrate on your previous answers?                         |

\*Six interviews were held in Dutch, whilst the remaining three interviews were done in Russian, as the level of Dutch of those participants was not sufficient to do the interview in. A translation of the questions on both of these languages is available upon request.

### Appendix C: Participant Interviews

| Nr. | Mother tongue         | Financial support type | Interview       | Duration |
|-----|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| 1.  | Lithuanian            | WIA                    | Face-to-face    | 0:32:29  |
| 2.  | Lithuanian            | Bijstand               | Face-to-face    | 1:19:32  |
| 3.  | Dutch                 | WIA                    | Microsoft Teams | 1:27:21  |
| 4.  | Dutch                 | WW                     | Microsoft Teams | 0:49:51  |
| 5.  | Dutch                 | WW                     | Face-to-face    | 0:54:44  |
| 6.  | Dutch                 | WAO/ IVA               | Face-to-face    | 1:24:07  |
| 7.  | Ukrainian/<br>Russian | Bijstand               | Face-to-face    | 01:07:35 |
| 8.  | Dutch                 | Bijstand               | Face-to-face    | 0:29:00  |
| 9.  | Dutch                 | WIA                    | Microsoft Teams | 0:47:19  |

The names of the participants are hidden for the preservation of their anonymity, which is what they agreed to when consenting to doing the interviews. In the paper the participants are referred to their corresponding number in this table.



## Appendix D.1: Code Trees Administrative Burdens

| Category      | Subcategory                                   | Divided in        | Explanation   | Example   |
|---------------|---|-------------------|---|---|
| Learning Cost | Learning about the program                    | General knowledge | The first step that people do is learn about the existence of the program.  | "It's not hard, there is this law in the Netherlands. If at your work your contract ends, you always go to the UWV. Everyone just already knows this." -#2  |
|               |   | Network           | This happens either through one's general knowledge and they simply knew about the existence of a program, or someone from the network reminds them of it. Such as a manager, a relative, or a friend.  | "My dad reminded me of the program, and then I just went Googling" -#4<br>"My contract was not prolonged and with that my girlfriend's mom came to me saying that I probably should apply to the WW program." #5<br>"My manager at work told me about the program once I fell ill" #9<br>"My Russian friend told me all about it." #1 |
|               | Learning about the conditions and obligations | Internet          | The second step that people do is learning about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Whether they have the right to this program?</li> <li>- What is needed to apply?</li> <li>- What is needed to keep receiving the income support once applied?</li> </ul> | "I then went Googling to find out what the program exactly entails, and do I actually really have the right for it? When I checked all the boxes, I went looking for the website where I needed to be to apply." #5   |
|               |   | Trying it out     |   | "They asked for a lot of things that I couldn't get a hold of and so much information that I thought: I have no clue what they actually want from me. But I applied and once something was missing from my file, someone would contact me to add on to it." #4  |
|               |   | Calling           |   | "I simply called them and asked what was exactly expected from me." #3<br>"If there is a moment that you're not sure about what is needed, you can easily give them a call, and everything is explained to you and then it's just fine." #5   |
|               |   | Referral          |   | "The occupational physician applied my case and from there on out it went automatically. I then received an invitation letter for a medical examination with a UWV doctor." #6  |

| Category        | Subcategory | Divided in            | Explanation   | Examples  |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------------------|---|---|
| Compliance Cost | Time        | One-time effort       | To apply, application forms only needed to be filed once.   | <p>"We had to hand in many things, many forms, for which I first didn't know how to even get that information myself, so many hours went into sorting that out, and it really felt like an unnecessary hassle." #4</p> <p>"It took a couple of hours to file all documentation, so it was really not a big hassle."9</p> <p>"Fortunately, I am completely done now, and I don't have to put in any more time to receive my invalidity benefit. I know that I am very lucky, as I hear many stories where the case is different. " #6 &amp; #1</p> <p>"Everything together, it took a year to apply for my invalidity benefit." #3</p> |
|                 |             | Standard reoccurrence | After the application is accepted, other obligations needed to be adhered to every x amount of time.  | <p>"Two times a week applying for a job, but they only needed to be at your level of education, which was very nice." #4</p> <p>"Have to do many courses to keep getting it, and 20 hours a week of volunteering work." #7</p> <p>"I had to work for 3 hours a day, but no more than 3 hours, 3 hours was the maximum." #8</p> <p>"I have to check some boxes online in order to receive my social support. I have to do this every month." #2</p> <p>"There will be a time when they'll ask for another medical examination, but I don't know when that will be." #3</p>   |
|                 | Effort      | Easy                  | The feeling that not much effort has been taken to comply to the rules and regulations. There is a sense of feeling lucky for the low effort being taken. | <p>"Filling in various forms, it was a hassle at first, but you know it's worth it, so you simply just take the time one evening, go to an interview with a bureaucrat, and you're basically done."#5</p> <p>"Actually, I had to continue looking and applying for jobs and do a language course to improve my Dutch, but they really looked at me and said, why would you apply for jobs and suffer anyway? Plus, there is no Dutch language, and the pension is very close, no one will hire you anyway. Well, they sent out a letter and said I don't have to suffer anymore, that I don't need to apply for jobs." #2</p>         |

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|  |          |                          |  | We could send in a file from the cardiologist to the UWV and it was during Covid when I had the interview with the employee from the UWV who simply said that I have worked all my life already and that I have done enough for our society when I look at your papers. So, you need to enjoy your old days and you are 100% rejected to work and you do not have to apply for other jobs.” #9  |
|  |          | Medium                   | The feeling that medium effort has been taken to comply to the rules and obligations. There is an understanding for the processes and therefore do not feel that it was a big hassle to apply. | “Going to various locations, like Utrecht and Leiden, for medical examinations by a doctor from the WAO <sup>4</sup> . Of course, it takes some time and effort, but I am happy that there is a serious gateway. I don’t feel that these types of income support are to be handed out on a platter for just anyone, as some people might abuse this support system and I find it hard to support those people.” #6  |
|  |          | Hard                     | It was/is a tough and hard process to comply with the rules and obligations of the financial support.  | “In the first instance I didn’t get the invalidity benefit. They just said that my condition is too unquantifiable, but the doctor didn’t even read my file properly. So, because I was first rejected, I had to gather much more paperwork and do extra medical examinations with third parties, just to invalidate their first decision. I even had to have a lawyer by my side, so they would listen to my case. This cost me a lot of money, not only to apply for something I know I have the right to, but also for the extra costs of moving to an Airbnb when it’s fireworks season in the Randstad.” #3 [instead of moving to the quiet countryside in Spain]. |
|  | Finances | No – low financial Costs | The financial costs one has to make to comply or proof compliance with their type of income support program.   | “I had to go to different cities, but every time you drive over 15km, they pay you back your traveling expenses in full.” #1<br><br>“The municipality is around the corner from my house, so I could walk or bike there, so no costs for me.” #4 & #5   |
|  |          | High costs               |  | “The long process cost me extra money and time, where I could have moved a long time ago if my word was believed from the start. That’s why I don’t like to think about it.” #3   |

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<sup>4</sup> Older version of the UWV. The principles are the same, but the name and other details within the invalidity benefits law have changed.

| Category           | Subcategory    | Divided in                    | Explanation  | Examples  |
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| Psychological Cost | Mental comfort | Human help                    | Instead of following a digitalized process, it is appreciated that a real human being (bureaucrat) takes a look at your case and helps you out when there are questions. It gives a personal touch to the situation. | <p>"The application process is a job that takes unnecessarily long with unnecessary obstacles for the applicant. This might scare people off in thinking that it's not worth the hassle. This annoyed me very much. But once I got in contact with a real person, as soon as there was personal contact, it was so much better. This woman really exhibited understanding and care, which was really pleasant." #4</p> <p>"It gave me a good feeling that I was heard and helped so quickly. The cardiologist also send out a file which sped up the process for me. I also had a pleasant conversation with the bureaucrat working there. It all just went so quickly, so I just needed to adapt to the new situation, that's all." #9</p> |
|                    |                | Digitalization                | Others appreciate the digitalization of administration.  | <p>"It was not difficult at all. They sent out all the paperwork online, my friend helped translating and filing the forms and we could send it back to them." #1</p> <p>"I really liked that it was enough to hand in forms, and no other questions asked." #2</p>   |
|                    |                | Comparison to other people    | A comparison to other people who are unsuccessful in receiving income support increases the appreciation of one's current luxurious position of receiving support in the first case.                                 | <p>"Some people might take advantage of the system, and that doesn't sit right with me. So even though they were very tough with me at first, I do agree that this is necessary." #6</p> <p>"I'm in a luxurious position. I know I'm lucky to receive my invalidity benefit, I see in my surroundings how other people struggle with their applications and it can be horrible." #6 + #9</p>  |
|                    |                | Comparison to other countries | A comparison to other countries brings comfort, appreciating how well-organized it is here in the Netherlands.   | <p>"We have nothing to complain about in the Netherlands. There are plenty of other countries where for example the finances are much worse ... Yes, I think that it is really nicely organized here." #9</p> <p>"I have nothing to complain, and I am willing to do anything they ask from me. If I was back in Latvia, things would be different, but I'm here and I'm happy the state helps me out like this." #2</p>  |
|                    |                | Peace of mind                 | The overall experiences are outweighed by the peace of mind that follows from receiving any type of income support.  | <p>"The application process was a pain and really made me grumpy, but once the human touch was there it all became better and I felt the questions asked were always from a place of trust, rather than distrust. And overall, the whole experience gave me a positive feeling, because receiving an unemployment benefit gives me peace and time to look for a really fitting job." #4</p>   |

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|  |                   |  |   | "It gives me peace of mind to know that I have more time to search for a new job." #5   |
|  |                   | Overall acceptance                         | There is an overall acceptance of the rules   | <p>"It was okay for me, I think these are logical rules." #8</p> <p>"If there are these rules, then I agree with them. How else can I think about it? If there are these rules, then there must be a reason for them." #2</p> <p>"It is logical that they ask for so much of your personal information. You're asking for money from the government, so the least you can do is help them gather the information they need about you in order to get it." #5</p>  |
|  | Mental discomfort | Expert opinion<br>(Ander woord misschien?) | The word of an expert weighs heavier than that of the applicants themselves.  | <p>"My story was downplayed and not believed. And someone who is in a much stronger position than you are downplays your story, doesn't read my files correctly, and because his word is stronger than mine, he can decide on my future. That feels very unfair." #3</p> <p>"I remember that all this bureaucratic language was quite intimidating, and one has to be highly educated to understand what is actually expected from you" -#6</p> <p>"It is strange when you realize that the decision of a bureaucrat can dictate the course of the future of your life when you think about it." #5</p>   |
|  |                   | Precariousness/<br>uncertainty             | <p>The feeling of being in the dark about what personal data can be accessed by the institutions.</p> <p>Unknowingness due to ambiguous and vague language.</p> | <p>"They oversee your financial earnings, but it was never really clear to me what data exactly they could access about you, which gives an unpleasant feeling due to the lack of transparency." #4</p> <p>"You think that you've done everything right, but usually with most government texts, you could read 10 times and think that you know it, but you are never completely sure. I know that government rules can sometimes be so complex that, even though it is stated pretty clearly on the website page, but it's a tricky business and lots of room for loopholes which you only get confronted with at the moment a bureaucrat is really analyzing your case. You never know what rules come at play that you might have missed. " #4</p> <p>"Sometimes I needed to do two different things on the same day at the same time, that was a little strange." #7</p> |

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|  |  | General emotions | Feelings of stress, difficulty, anger, mistrust, annoyance. | <p>"It was a tough process, and it did bother me, especially as I already am in a difficult situation, and this didn't make it easier. It caused me so much stress, it also affected my heart. It also makes me very angry when I think about it." #3</p> <p>"The first medical examiner was horrible. He was so degrading that I even stood outside and cried after that meeting. It was really a traumatic experience. And the letter I received to get examined wasn't the friendliest one, it really felt like you were discouraged to get examined as you won't be rejected to work anyway. But the second examiner was very understanding and had a good look at my file to see that I had the right for a 100% of the invalidity benefit." #6</p> <p>"I had different physical pains and problems, and then I had to be here and there, and courses and it gave me much stress which made the situation worse, but no one would diagnose me with anything and got even sicker." #8</p> |
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## Appendix D.2: Code Tree Political Efficacy

| Category                    | Subcategory      | Divided in                    | Explanation   | Examples   |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Internal Political Efficacy | Passive interest | Understanding processes       | Having trust in one's capability to understand political processes.                 | "I know it can be frustrating sometimes when parties promise a lot, but can't seem to make it happen... But this is how politics function, and I understand the processes and mechanisms behind it." # 4   |
|                             |                  | Following topics of interest. | Following politics and policy topics of interest online, television, and newspaper. | <p>"When something comes on the news, I would watch it, or read about it in the Newspaper, but I don't look it up voluntarily." #3, #9</p> <p>"I listen to a lot of political podcasts or follow politics in general." #4</p> <p>"I'd rather not engage in policy topics regarding the WIA and diseases. I just want to live a normal life, but I also hope that problems like this in my case can be solved. And because I'm involved in this policy field, then of course it automatically interests you and you form your own opinions on it. Maybe even out of necessity, because imagine they would change something and this group of people can apply for compensation and it would be on the news, then you should be the first one to know of course." #3</p> |

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|  |                 | Forming ideas        | When someone is involved in their support policy, they have ideas about what could be changed, but do not feel the need to act on it. | "I see things happening in my surroundings and from my own experiences I believe I could think of a few very practical solutions to problems." #6  |
|  | Active interest | Political Engagement | Actively engage in politics such as discussions, voting, protests   | <p>"When I hear a politician talking about a policy change, and it appeals to me, then I would be quicker to vote for that person than vote to someone who doesn't pay attention to my problem." #3</p> <p>"I always have my rhetoric on point and I'm ready for a political discussion." #3</p> <p>"Other than just on a conversational level, I don't engage politically, that just isn't in me." #4</p> <p>"I believe that you have to vote, otherwise you lose your entitlement on an opinion." #6</p> <p>"We often talk about politics at home." #5</p> |
|  |                 | Policy changes       | Actively engaging in policy-changing efforts.   | <p>"I feel that I am very involved, especially when I feel that things need to be different, I try to make my voice heard at least on a bureaucratic level. I can't go any other way, I have to appeal and I have to take action because I can't go any other way." #3</p> <p>"From my experiences I do believe that administrative processes could be better, and I do believe that I could sum up a few fixes here and there, but I won't actively do so." #6</p>  |
|  | No interest     | No interest          | There is no interest at all to be involved in politics or policy topics of interest.  | <p>"I have nothing to say or add to politics." #8</p> <p>"I have zero interest in politics. I know it's not right; my wife is the complete opposite of me, but I have no interest, I have no opinion and I don't want to hear other people's opinions and I never vote." #9</p>  |

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|                                    |                             | No understanding of Dutch politics | There is no understanding of the Dutch political system and parties due to a lack of understanding the language and not wanting to search for problems or change when they feel happy where they are. | <p>"I don't understand what they're talking about, I can't read Dutch, I don't know Dutch politics, which party says what and which party does what, and I can't change anything anyway so why would I put my time and energy into Dutch politics? To me, the most important thing is that I get my social assistance and I'm happy. I'm an immigrant and nobody needs anything from me. I am such a small cog in this mechanism, who needs my opinion?" #2</p> <p>"I don't understand anything about Dutch politics. I don't care about it at all, because, well, my Dutch is very bad, so I just stay out of the way." #1</p> |
|                                    | Estimating own capabilities | Impacting society                  | When someone estimates their own capabilities in forming and voicing their own opinions in a meaningful manner or believing your opinion has an impact. (On any level of society).                    | <p>"I know what is happening, I have the knowledge and I believe that people seriously consider my situation and what I have to say. However, I don't have the time and energy to for example establish a big platform to voice my political interests and concerns." #3</p> <p>"I never really follow politics other than when the elections are around the corner, because outside of elections I don't believe you can make an impact in any way." #5</p>  |
| <b>External Political Efficacy</b> | Perception of Government    | Trust in Government                |   | n.d.  |
|                                    |                             | Mistrust in Government             |   | <p>"I have to say that I'm done with politics because they [politicians] make unbelievably many mistakes where others would have been fired. I don't believe I have a lot of trust left." #6</p> <p>"I don't trust anyone in politics, everyone is lying, and everyone aims for power." #2</p>  |
|                                    |                             | Room to voice an opinion           | The participant's view whether they can voice their opinion and whether it is considered.   | <p>"We can still voice our opinions, as long as it stays within certain limits, but we are still a free country and are able to make our own choices. I mean, you only have to look at Russia to see how it goes there." #6</p> <p>"There is no room for your participation and opinion, there really isn't. They'll let you believe that you have a say so, but in the end they'll still do whatever they want without considering your opinion." #9</p>   |
|                                    |                             | Competence                         | The feeling whether the government is competent enough.   | "Digitalization seems to be a priority in our government, but it doesn't seem to work and now they have these kinds of clumsy systems." #4  |



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|  |                |   |   | <p>"Letting an experienced human being do the work, like the nice lady who helped me, apparently works much better." #4</p> <p>"There is an administrative incompetence, rather than a workers shortage." #3</p>   |
|  | Responsiveness | Politicians and/ or Bureaucrats care        | Politicians or bureaucrats have good intentions and are therefore in their position, or they really do care about the people that they work with. | <p>"I honestly believe that people on any political level, from Rutte to whomever, really do intrinsically have good intentions. I don't think that most politicians go into that line of work to make financial gains, because then they would have to find another job. Politics doesn't pay that well." #4</p> <p>"A couple of times I've received an answer on my letters that I wrote, stating they understand my concerns and that they agree with my arguments. I got recognition and it feels like they take me seriously when I address my concerns." #3</p> <p>"I really believe that the bureaucrats working at UWV have empathy and care, otherwise you won't have that work." #5</p> <p>"Yes, I can see how politicians care about disabled people and that they change things in a better direction." #1</p> |
|  |                | Politicians and/ or Bureaucrats do not care | Politicians or bureaucrats have no other intentions than power and personal gain.   | <p>"The UWV principally does nothing to help you with your objection." #3</p> <p>"No, they do what they want and don't take your opinion into consideration. It really has no point to vote or be active, because nobody cares, and nobody listens to your vote." #6</p> <p>"All the bureaucrats only sit there to earn more money, they don't care or think about anything." #2</p>   |

### Appendix D.3: Connecting Administrative Burdens to Political Efficacy

| Category             | Subcategory  | Divided in         | Explanation   | Examples   |
|----------------------|--|--------------------|---|--|
| <b>No Connection</b> | No connection at all.  |                    | No connection between the administrative burdens in the interactions with the state are felt on one's political efficacy. These are two entirely different things that are unrelated to each other.   | <p>"No one and nothing can influence my thoughts and my opinion, so also not this experience." #9</p> <p>"No, the experiences have no connection to how I view politics." #4</p> <p>"Not in any way has someone or something influenced my political view and activities in any way. There hasn't been any stimulus to that, not even the administrative burdens." #2</p>  |
|                      | Minimal/ to neglectable connection                                 | Increased emotions | The experiences with administrative burdens have shortly had an effect on one's emotional connection to politics and their efficacy, but there is no overall influence on their views.  | "Maybe the experiences did indeed do something. Maybe it just made me more annoyed, because I already disagree with a lot of things, and how badly things are organized in the country, but I don't believe it changed my political preference or anything like that. I only really engage with politics and topics of interest around the time new elections are coming up." #5   |
| <b>Connection</b>    | Staying updated  |                    | Due to the experiences with administrative burdens, participants feel it is necessary to stay politically updated should policy changes be proposed regarding the topic of interest. Whereas without the experiences of administrative burden, the interest in staying updated for this policy field would not exist. | "Maybe even out of necessity, because imagine they would change something and this group of people can apply for compensation and it would be on the news, then you should be the first one to know of course." #3   |
|                      | Advocating change  |                    | Actively advocating for policy changes or attention to problems due to experiences of administrative burdens.   | "I feel that I am very involved, especially when I feel that things need to be different, I try to make my voice heard at least on a bureaucratic level. I can't go any other way, I have to appeal and I have to take action because I can't go any other way." #3  |
|                      | Complete change of view toward the government and its institutions |                    | The experience with administrative burdens have completely changed one's viewpoints towards the government and its institutions. One's political efficacy is definitely affected by the experiences of administrative burdens.  | <i>"I had this idea in Ukraine about the Netherlands that everything is so much better here, that people really listen to you and care for you. But after 20 years in this country, I can't say the same anymore. I see so many strange things happening, stupid political decisions that are being made, strange and unthoughtful participation activities that are imposed on me and my husband so we can receive social assistance... After all these experiences I've lost my trust in the government and in the system, and now I won't even try to keep track of politics, and I don't trust the government with my votes." #7</i> |

