

Published in Early View as: Migchelbrink, Koen & Van de Walle, Steven (2020). “Increasing the cost of participation: red tape and public officials’ attitudes toward public participation”  
*International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 00(00): 1-19.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852320942311>

## **Increasing the Cost of Participation. Red Tape and Public Officials’ Attitudes toward Public Participation<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>The study has received funding from the European Commission (H2020) under grant number 726755, project CITADEL.

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## **Abstract**

Red tape is seen as a destructive organizational force that reduces public officials' motivations and curtails organizational performance. By increasing the time, costs, and efforts required for informing the public and coordinating participation, red tape has also been said to reduce public officials' positive attitudes toward public participation. However, research on the effects of red tape on public officials' attitudes toward public participation remains inconclusive. This study examines how the lack of functionality of rules and the compliance burden of rules affect public officials' attitudes toward public participation. Using cross-sectional survey data of  $n = 862$  municipal public officials and a structural equations modelling approach, this study finds that public officials' perceptions of the lack of functionality of rules are positively associated with attitudes toward public participation and that perceptions of the compliance burden of rules are negatively associated with attitudes toward public participation. These results indicate that examining the effects of red tape on public officials' attitudes toward public participation requires a multidimensional measurement approach.

### **Points for practitioners**

- Red tape affects public officials' attitudes toward public participation.
- The compliance burden of rules is negatively associated with public officials' attitudes toward public participation.
- The perceived lack of functionality of rules is positively associated with public officials' attitudes toward public participation.
- The effects of red tape are multifaceted and should be examined from a multidimensional point of view.

## Introduction

Public officials' willingness to engage with the public is an important attitudinal determinant of successful public participation (Eckerd & Heidelberg, 2019; Liao & Schachter, 2018).

Overall, officials appear to have a positive outlook on public participation (Liao & Schachter, 2018; Migchelbrink & Van de Walle, 2020). However, burdensome rules, regulations, and procedures that do not serve their intended purpose (e.g., red tape) can reduce officials' willingness to engage. Ineffective organizational structures and procedures, unnecessary procedural delays, and excessive reporting requirements increases the time, resources, and effort public officials need to invest in informing the public, coordinating participation, and in mitigating possible conflicts (Liao & Schachter, 2018). As a result, officials who are entangled in red tape are likely to view public participation as a source of inefficiency and delay.

Prior research examining the effects of organizational characteristics on public officials' attitudes toward public participation focused on the role of organizational resources (Liao & Zhang, 2012; Neshkova & Guo, 2018), size (Johnson, 2011; Yang & Callahan, 2007), and hierarchy (Yang & Pandey, 2011). Other studies examined the effects of organizational autonomy (Neshkova, 2014; Van Damme & Brans, 2012), personnel mobility (Koontz, 1999), procedural orientation (Yang, 2005), and formalization (Alkadry, 2003; de Vries, 2000). A number of studies also examined the effects of organizational red tape on officials' attitudes toward public participation (Campbell & Im, 2016; Liao & Schachter, 2018; Yang & Pandey, 2011) and their willingness to co-create with citizens (Van Eijk, Steen, & Torenvlied, 2019).

However, studies examining the effects of red tape on officials' attitudes toward public participation are scant and present diverging results. Most of these studies show that

red tape reduces officials' willingness to engage with the public (Liao & Schachter, 2018; Yang & Callahan, 2007). Other studies are less clear about the detrimental effects of red tape on officials' participatory attitudes (Campbell & Im, 2016), while a third group of studies finds diverging effects depending on the form of red tape (Van Eijk et al., 2019) or the type of attitudes toward public participation (Liao & Schachter, 2018). Additionally, most of these studies focus on the compliance burden of red tape without explicitly taking the lack of functionality of rules into account as well.

In this study, we examine the effect of red tape on public officials' attitudes toward public participation. Specifically, this study adds to the public participation and red tape literature by disentangling the effects of the compliance burden of rules and the lack of functionality of rules on public officials' attitudes toward public participation. We use the novel job-centered red tape scale (Van Loon, Leisink, Knies, & Brewer, 2016), which was especially developed to separate the effects of these two dimensions of red tape. We formulate the following research question to guide our examination:

*What are the associations between public officials' job-centered red tape perceptions and their attitudes toward public participation?*

We tested the effects of the compliance burden of rules and the lack of functionality of rules on public officials' attitudes toward public participation by means of a structural equations model (SEM) with three latent constructs. Data were gathered using a cross-sectional survey among  $n = 862$  Belgian municipal public officials. Our results indicate that the lack of functionality of rules and the compliance burden of rules affect officials' attitudes toward public participation in different ways. Whereas the compliance burden of rules is

negatively associated with officials' attitudes toward public participation, the lack of functionality of rules displays a positive association.

In the next section, we discuss the relevant red tape studies in more detail. We move on to examine previous research on the effects of red tape on public officials' attitudes and behaviors in general, and attitudes toward public participation in particular. In the third section, we introduce our data and method. Both the dependent variable (attitudes about public participation) and the independent variables (the compliance burden of rules and the lack of functionality of rules) are conceptualized as multi-item latent constructs. In the fourth, we present our empirical findings from the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the job-centered red tape instrument and the SEM of the association between the compliance burden of rules and the lack of functionality of rules on public officials' attitudes toward public participation. In the last sections of this paper, we discuss the results and present our conclusions.

## **Theory**

### ***Red tape***

Red tape is commonly defined as “rules, regulations and procedures that entail a compliance burden without advancing the legitimate purposes they were intended to serve” (Bozeman, 2000, p. 12). As such, red tape is defined by two functional dimensions: the compliance burden of rules and the lack of functionality of rules. For rules to qualify as red tape, they have to entail both. “The fact that we do not like particular rules does not qualify them as red tape” (Bozeman and Feeney, 2011, p. 49; also: Feeney, 2012). However, current red tape

measures typically emphasize the compliance burden of rules and often overlook the lack of functionality of rules (Feeney, 2012; Van Loon et al., 2016).

Most studies that examine the effect of red tape on public officials' attitudes (e.g., Campbell & Im, 2016; Liao & Schachter, 2018; Van Eijk et al., 2019; Yang & Pandey, 2011) use a version of Rainey, Pandey and Bozeman's (1995) general red tape instrument to measure respondents' level of perceived red tape. Such an instrument asks respondents "If red tape is defined as 'burdensome administrative rules and procedures that have negative effects on the organization's effectiveness', how would you assess the level of red tape in your organization?" (Rainey et al., 1995, p. 574). Such a question omits the specific effect of the lack of functionality of rules. Our study builds on these articles by providing a multidimensional perspective on red tape that includes both the compliance burden and lack of functionality of rules.

Building on the pioneering work by Bozeman (1993, 2000), Van Loon, Leisink, Knies and Brewer (2016) developed the job-centered red tape measure to distinguish between the effects of the compliance burden and lack of functionality of rules. The authors define job-centered red tape as "rules that employees perceive as burdensome and not helpful in achieving the rules' functional objective in their respective job" (Van Loon et al., 2016, p. 663). Compared to other single-item constructs, this multi-item measure explicitly includes both the compliance burden *and* lack of functionality dimensions specified by Bozeman (1993, 2000). In addition, whereas most red tape measures survey respondents' perceptions of red tape in their organization, job-centered red tape focusses on respondents' own job environment instead. According to Van Loon *et al.* (2016), narrowing the scope of red tape to the rules that officials have direct experience with, instead of those perceived to exist in the organization as a whole, increases measurement validity.



Furthermore, previous research offers some suggestions that the effects of the compliance burden and the lack of functionality of rules on public officials' attitudes toward public participation could diverge. Brewer and Walker (2010) found that different types of red tape (internal and external) influence the performances of English local governments differently. In addition, Van Loon (2017) found that the compliance burden of rules and the lack of functionality of rules affect the performance of Dutch healthcare organizations differently as well. Independently, both factors appear to negatively affect organizational performance; however, when the lack of functionality of rules is controlled for, the effect of the compliance burden of rules lost statistical significance. These studies indicate that red tape and its effects are not unidimensional and that a multifaceted examination of red tape is warranted.

### ***The effects of red tape on public officials' attitudes and behavior***

Red tape is predominantly studied as an "organizational pathology" (Bozeman & Feeney, 2011; Feeney, 2012). Red tape is found to increase officials' workplace alienation (DeHart-Davis & Pandey, 2005; Pandey & Kingsley, 2000; Pandey & Welch, 2005; Stazyk, Pandey, & Wright, 2011), encompassing feelings of powerless, normless, self-estrangement, and meaninglessness (DeHart-Davis & Pandey, 2005). Alienation increases withdrawal behaviors like absenteeism, turnover, and reduced effort. According to DeHart-Davis and Pandey (2005), encounters with pointless yet burdensome rules trigger feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness, reducing officials' organizational commitment, job involvement, and job satisfaction.

Others argue that red tape relates to a disdain for rules and procedures that can spill-over into a disdain for the organization as a whole and reduces officials' affective

organizational commitment (Stazyk et al., 2011). Red tape is a determinant of organizational turnover as well (Quratulain & Khan, 2013). According to a study by Giaque et al. (2012), red tape is the single most important predictor of Swiss municipal public officials' intention to resign (resigned satisfaction). Others relate red tape to public employees' insecurity, mistrust, and pessimism (Rainey et al., 1995).

Furthermore, red tape is associated with reduced public service motivation (PSM) (Giaque et al., 2012; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007; Scott & Pandey, 2005). Moynihan and Pandey (2007) find that red tape is negatively associated with U.S. public managers' PSM and attraction to policy making, but not to their public interest or sense of civic duty. Alternatively, Scott and Pandey (2005) argue that higher levels of PSM enhance the likelihood that officials' look beyond red tape and see rules as legitimate in their intent and purpose. Interestingly, previous research established a positive association between officials' PSM and their support for public participation (Campbell & Im, 2016; Coursey, Yang, & Pandey, 2012; Huang & Feeney, 2013).

Prior studies provide contradictory evidence on the effects of red tape on public officials' attitudes toward public participation. According to Yang and Pandey (2011), red tape prevents officials from disseminating relevant information to citizens, increases public officials' risk aversion, and constrains their discretion in involving citizens. They find a negative association between bureaucratic red tape and managers' perceptions of good participatory outcomes. Public officials' who experience red tape are less likely to report positive experiences with public participation.

Alternatively, Li and Feeney (2014) and Campbell and Im (2016) do not find a significant effect of red tape on officials' attitudes and behavior toward public participation. Campbell and Im (2016) observe no significant effect between officials' assessment of red

tape and their assessment of public involvement as an effective vehicle for policy development (e.g., participation efficacy). Similarly, Li and Feeney (2014) observe that red tape does not effect city managers' procurement of communication technologies needed for public participation. In support of Li and Feeney (2014) and Campbell and Im (2016), Van Eijk, Steen, and Torenvlied (2019), find that perceived generalized red tape does not affect public professionals' willingness to coproduce. However, they do establish that red tape associated with coproduction is associated with lower willingness to coproduce.

Liao and Schachter (2018) observe that the effects of red tape diverge depending on the specific attitudes toward public participation. They find that while the perceived level of burdensome rules and procedures in an organization increases officials' perceptions of the cost of participation, it does not affect their perceptions of its benefits. Their research indicates that even though red tape might increase the perceived costs of participation, it does not necessarily reduce the perceived usefulness of participation in the eyes of public officials.

### ***Increasing the costs of decision-making***

According to Eckert & Heidelberg (2019), public officials support public participation to the extent that it is useful and constructive for their goal attainment. Officials use their discretion over who participates, how participation is carried out, and how participation affects administrative decision-making to shape participatory practices in order to minimize procedural costs and maximize their personal and organizational instrumental benefits (Eckerd & Heidelberg, 2019; Moynihan, 2003). The perceived compliance burden and lack of functionality of rules shape the administrative context in which officials perceive participation to be beneficial and whether they are willing to use citizens' inputs in administrative decision-making.

Following the existing literature, we argue that the compliance burden of rules and the lack of functionality of rules reduce public officials' positive attitudes toward public participation because they increase the procedural costs of decision-making (Liao & Schachter, 2018) and constrain their discretion to engage the public (Yang & Pandey, 2011). In terms of ineffective organizational structures and excessive reporting requirements, red tape increases the time and effort officials need to invest in organizing and coordinating participation. In fact, Liao and Schachter (2018) observe that perceived red tape is directly related to managers' perceptions of increased costs of citizen involvement.

Moynihan (2003) distinguishes between four types of costs associated with public participation: administrative costs (opportunity costs, time, resources), self-interested costs (officials' loss of control administrative power and autonomy), decision process costs (excessive delays, inability to reach consensus), and decision outcome costs (suboptimal, less timely, less-rational outcomes). These costs can have a direct effect on how public officials use their discretion in the design of the participatory process. One way in which officials can use their discretion to reduce procedural costs is "to reduce the representativeness and fullness of participation" (Moynihan, 2003, p. 174; see also: Liao & Schachter, 2018).

In order to examine the effects of red tape on public officials' attitudes toward public participation, and to test whether the compliance burden of rules and the lack of functionality of rules have the same effects on public officials' attitudes toward public participation, we formulate the following two hypotheses:

*H<sub>1</sub>: The higher the perceived compliance burden of rules, the more negative public officials' are about public participation.*

*H<sub>2</sub>: The higher the perceived lack of functionality of rules, the more negative public officials' are about public participation.*

## **Data and method**

### ***Dependent variable***

Attitudes toward public participation were measured as a single latent construct using five indicators borrowed from previous research (Yang & Callahan, 2007; Yang & Pandey, 2011). Indicators include measures on the benefits of public participation in terms of bringing in new ideas and different decision-making outcomes (x1 & x2) and measures on the perceived costs of public participation in terms of slower decision-making processes (x3), increased efforts (x4), and increased difficulty in reaching consensus and closure (x5). Respondents provided their answers on a seven-point scale ranging from *totally disagree* (1) to *totally agree* (7). To prevent habituation and carryover effects, we randomized the question order. We recoded the indicators in a positive direction so that higher scores indicated more positive attitudes.

### ***Independent variables***

Public officials' perceptions of the compliance burden of rules and the lack of functionality of rules were measured using the job-centered red tape scale by Van Loon et.al., (2016). The lack of functionality of rules was measured by asking respondents whether the rules with which they had to comply in their core activities: *have a clear function for my job activities* (x6); *contribute to the goal of my job activities* (x7), and *help me do my job well* (x8). The

compliance burden of rules was measured by asking respondents whether the rules with which they had to comply in their core activities: *cause much pressure at work* (x9), *take a lot of time to comply with* (x10), and *cause much delay* (x11). Responses were provided on a seven-point scale ranging from *totally disagree* (1) to *totally agree* (7). We randomized the question order and recoded the responses in positive direction so that higher scores indicated higher perceived red tape.

In addition, we included four variables controlling for respondents' demographic and job-based characteristics: e.g., age, gender, administrative grade, duration of employment, and ten indicator controlling for respondents' department of employment. Respondents' provide us with information on their age (in years) and gender (0 = male, 1 = female). Data on respondents' administrative grade (0 = B, 1 = A), duration of employment (in years), and department of employment were obtained from the municipal's administrative registers.

Measuring dependent and independent variables in the same survey creates the risk of common source bias (CSB) (George & Pandey, 2017; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). We took a number of measures to reduce possible CSB effects. Following the recommendations by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2012), we presented our dependent and independent variables in two separate batteries, separated by an unrelated response-interruption questionnaire, in order to increase temporal and proximal distance (see also George & Pandey, 2017). Furthermore, we randomized the order in which questions were presented and used reversed-worded items to prevent habituation and response sets. That said, by their very nature, the attitudinal questions in our study are 0.1perceptual. It is for this reason that the use of cross-sectional surveys in which dependent and independent variables are measured are considered suitable for studies where individuals' attitudes,

perceptions, judgements and feelings are examined (George & Pandey, 2017; Podsakoff et al., 2012).

### ***Data collection***

Data were collected among public officials' employed at the municipality of Antwerp – Belgium's largest city – in February 2018. The population of interest consisted of public officials' tasked with drafting and implementing policies at a municipal level. We developed our sampling frame based on administrative grades, with all official's with grade B (at least a Bachelor's degree) or grade A (at least a Master's degree) as eligible respondents. Representatives from the municipality of Antwerp provided a list with the contact details for all eligible respondents. Because of the size of the sampling frame (N = 2,128) we conducted a total sampling strategy (a census) and invited all eligible persons to participate. We received n = 881 completed surveys, a response rate of 41.4%. Due to missing data, the effective sample contained n = 862 respondents. Respondents' mean age was 42 years, 58.1% were women, and the majority (57.8%) of respondents attained administrative grade A.

The survey was administered using Qualtrics (Qualtrics, 2005). Each subject in the sampling frame received an invitation email, informing them about the purpose and objective of the study, and containing an unique link to the survey instrument. To increase the participation rate, non-responders received up to two emails reminding them to participate, up to three weeks after the initial invitation was sent. Access to the survey was restricted to subjects who provided their informed consent to participate. The institutional ethics committee of our institution approved the content and design of the survey. Table 1 provides descriptive information on the variables and indicators included in the analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std.Dev</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>n</b>
<b>x1</b> – PP brings in new ideas	5.309	1.029	1	7	881
<b>x2</b> – PP produces different decision outcomes	4.779	2.170	1	7	881
<b>x3</b> – PP slows the decision process	3.545	1.029	1	7	881
<b>x4</b> – PP takes more effort than it is worth	4.919	1.254	1	7	881
<b>x5</b> – PP increase difficulty reaching consensus	4.184	1.391	1	7	881
<b>x6</b> – Rules have a clear function in my job	2.756	1.156	1	7	881
<b>x7</b> – Rules contribute to goal of my job	2.930	1.226	1	7	880
<b>x8</b> – Rules help me do my job well	3.327	1.332	1	7	881
<b>x9</b> – Rules cause much pressure	4.560	1.410	1	7	881
<b>x10</b> – Rules take a lot of time to comply with	4.354	1.507	1	7	881
<b>x11</b> – Rules cause much delay	4.634	1.479	1	7	880
<b>X12</b> – Age	42.06	9.58	20	67	874
<b>X13</b> – Gender	.58	.49	0	1	872
<b>X14</b> – Administrative grade	.58	.49	0	1	872
<b>X15</b> – Duration of employment	10.94	8.45	0	46	881
<b>X16</b> – Personnel management department	.10	.31	0	1	867
<b>X17</b> – Urban development department	.13	.34	0	1	867
<b>X18</b> – Administrative affairs department	.06	.23	0	1	867
<b>X19</b> – Finances department	.05	.21	0	1	867
<b>X20</b> – Independent services department	.04	.21	0	1	867
<b>X21</b> – Urban maintenance department	.11	.31	0	1	867
<b>X22</b> – Social services department	.08	.28	0	1	867
<b>X23</b> – Culture, Sports, Youth, and education department	.23	.42	0	1	867
<b>X24</b> – Social Safety department	.07	.26	0	1	867
<b>X25</b> – Business and City Marketing	.12	.32	0	1	867

PP = Public Participation

### *Method of analysis*

We modelled the effects of the lack of functionality and compliance burden of rules on public officials' attitudes toward public participation using an SEM approach (Brown, 2015; Kline, 2016; Rosseel, 2018). An SEM analysis allows us to model the relations between latent constructs without aggregating the constructs' indicators into compound variables. In our model, the lack of functionality of rules and the compliance burden of rules were exogenous, and public officials' public participation attitudes was endogenous.



As a result of the ordinal-worded answer categories, the assumption of normality was violated and we used the weighted least square mean and variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimator for parameter estimation (Brown, 2015; Rosseel, 2018).<sup>1</sup> The WLSMV estimator does not assume normality and provides the best option for modelling ordered data (Brown, 2015). The analyses were conducted using the Lavaan package (Rosseel 2018; Rosseel et al. 2018 [version 0.3-6]) in the statistical environment R (version 3.4.4) (R Core Team, 2017).

We assessed model fit using absolute and comparative fit indices (Brown, 2015; Kline, 2016). Absolute fit indices assess how well the model's predicted variance-covariance matrix is statistically similar to the sample variance-covariance matrix. We use two absolute fit indices: the standardized root mean square residual (SRMS) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Overall, SRMS-values and RMSEA-values below 0,1 indicate good model fit (Brown, 2015). The comparative fit indices indicate the fit between a modelled solution and a baseline – or “null” – model in which all covariances among the indicators are fixed to 0. We used the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI). Generally, the cut-off values for good model fit are CFI > .90 and TLI > .90 (Brown, 2015).

## **Results**

### ***Job-centered red tape perceptions***

Before we assessed the effects of the lack of functionality and compliance burden of rules on public officials' attitudes toward public participation, we evaluated the fit of the job-centered

red tape scale (Van Loon et al., 2016) to our data. Figure 1 presents the standardized parameter estimates.

The goodness-of-fit indices suggested that the original two-factor solution by Van Loon et al. (2016) fitted our data well: SRMR = .043, RMSEA = .093, and CFI = .940, TLI = .887. All freely estimated standardized parameters were statistically significant at  $p < .001$ . The factor loadings showed that the latent constructs were strongly related to their indicators (range of  $R^2$ 's = .72 to .92), and the estimates indicate good internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alphas lack of functionality of rules = .874 and the compliance burden of rules = .854) and convergent validity (average value extracted (AVE) the lack of functionality of rules = .703 and the compliance burden of rules = .669) (Cronbach, 1951; Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Jorgensen, Pornprasertmanit, Schoemann, & Rosseel, 2019).

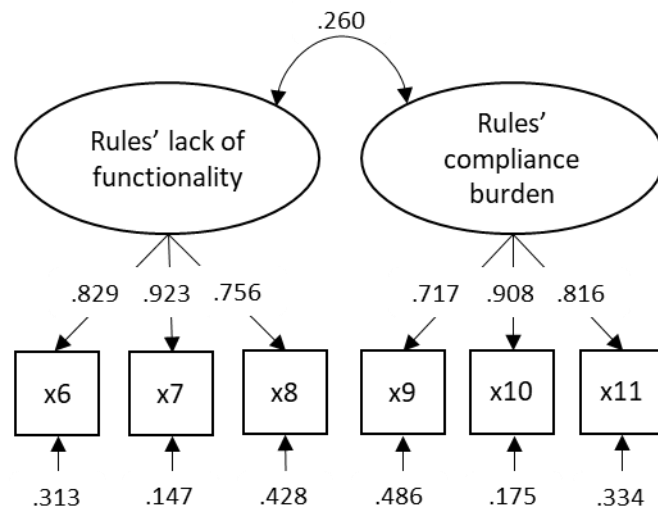


Figure 1. Measurement model job-centered red tape perceptions (standardized estimates)

### *Compliance burden and lack of functionality*

The associations between the lack of functionality of rules and the compliance burden of rules with public officials' attitudes toward public participation are presented in Figure 2. The model converged normally after 30 iterations, with 69 free parameters and 171 degrees of freedom. The WLSMV estimator was associated with a scaling correction factor = 1.146 and a shift parameter = 83.952. According to the robust model fit indices, the model provided a good fit to the data. The absolute fit indices were well below 0.1 (SRMR = .053 and RMSEA = .045) with relative fit indices of CFI = .829 and TLI = .945. All freely estimated standardized parameters were statistically significant at  $p < .001$ . The fitted covariance matrix is included in Appendix 1.

The measurement part of the model provides information on the fit between the indicator variables and the latent constructs. Unstandardized and standardized coefficient estimates are presented in Table 2. Officials' perceptions about the lack of functionality of rules were most strongly associated with the extent to which rules were perceived not to contribute to the job activities, followed by the relative clarity about the extent to which those rules contribute to their jobs and the extent to which the rules helped respondents do their job well. Officials' perceptions of the compliance burden of rules were associated most with the perceptions of the time it took respondents to comply with the rules, followed by the extent to which following those rules caused delay and the extent to which those rules caused pressure at work. Finally, officials' attitudes toward public participation were influenced most by whether participation was deemed worth the effort, followed by attitudes on the ease with which closure and consensus could be achieved, whether participation slowed the decision-

making process, whether it brought in new ideas, and finally whether the administration would have reached the same decision without participation.

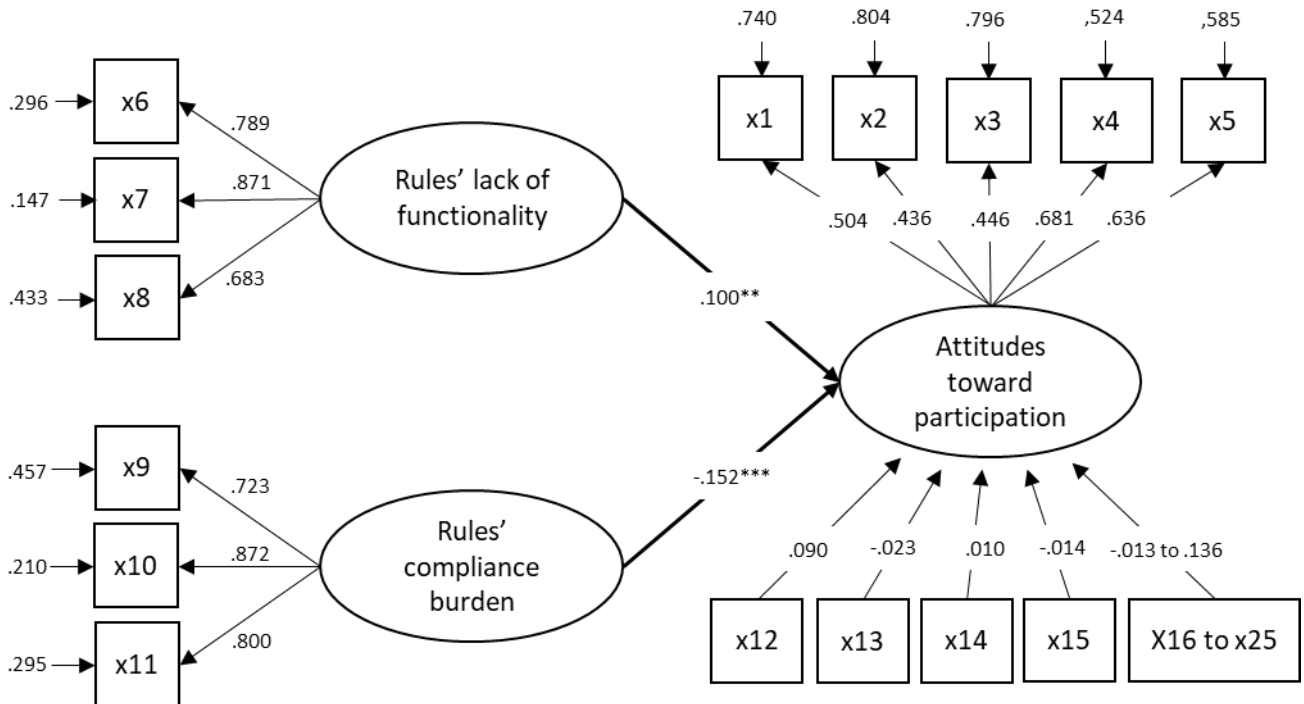


Figure 2. Structural equations model for the effects of the lack of functionality of rules and the compliance burden of rules on attitudes toward public participation (standardized estimates).

Table 2. Standardized and Unstandardized Coefficients for the measurement model

Indicator	Latent construct	Unstandardized		Standardized		P-value
		B	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.	
x1	Attitudes toward participation	1.129	.093	.504	.028	<.001
x2		.978	.086	.436	.029	<.001
x3		1.000	-	.504	.028	<.001
x4		1.526	.111	.681	.026	<.001
x5		1.425	.093	.636	.024	<.001
x6	Lack of functionality of rules	1.000	-	.789	.033	<.001
x7		1.171	.055	.871	.034	<.001
x8		.994	.055	.683	.035	<.001
x9	Compliance burden of Rules	1.000	-	.723	.039	<.001
x10		1.288	.073	.872	.043	<.001
x11		1.164	.085	.800	.043	<.001

The associations between public officials' attitudes toward public participation and the lack of functionality of rules and the compliance burden of rules were derived from the structural part of the model (see Figure 2) and are summarized in Table 3. Both the lack of functionality of rules and the compliance burden of rules are statistically significantly related to public officials' attitudes toward public participation. Supporting hypothesis 1, officials' perceptions of the compliance burden of rules are negatively associated with public officials' attitudes toward public participation. However, contrary to our expectation, the lack of functionality of rules is positively associated with public officials' attitudes toward public participation. We fail to support hypothesis 2. These findings are robust against respondents' age, gender, administrative grade, duration of employment, and department of employment. Although age, gender, administrative grade, and duration of employment have no statistically significant association with public officials' attitudes towards public participation, we do observe some variation regarding public officials' department of employment. Officials' employed at the Personnel management, Social safety, and Culture, sports, and education departments appear significantly more positive about public participation than public officials' employed at the Business and city marketing department (reference category). Together, these variables account for  $R^2 = .06$  of the variance in public officials' public participation attitudes (e.g.: 6 %).

Table 3. Results structural equations of attitudes toward public participation

Indicators	Estimate	Std.Err	Z-value	P-value
The lack of functionality of rules	.100	.037	2.707	.007
The compliance burden of rules	-.152	.040	-3.772	<.001
Age	.090	.051	1.767	.077
Gender	-.023	.042	-.556	.578
Administrative grade	-.010	.042	-.231	.817
Duration of employment	-.014	.054	-.258	.796
Personnel management department	.118	.054	2.167	.030
Urban development department	.036	.059	.617	.537
Administrative affairs department	.014	.054	.269	.788
Finances department	-.015	.055	-.267	.790
Independent services department	.027	.050	.534	.593
Urban maintenance department	-.030	.057	-.521	.603
Social services department	.051	.053	.971	.331
Culture, sports, youth, and education department	.136	.065	2.088	.037
Social Safety department	.105	.052	2.045	.041
Business and City Marketing*	-	-	-	-

\* Reference category for department of employment

## Discussion

The objective of this study was to provide insight into the relation between red tape and public officials' attitudes toward public participation by disentangling the effects of the lack of functionality of rules and the compliance burden of rules. We found that perceptions of the compliance burden of rules were negatively associated with attitudes toward public participation and that perceptions of the lack of effectiveness of rules were positively associated with officials' attitudes toward public participation. With these results, this study contributes both to the literature on the determinants of public officials' attitudes toward public participation and to our understanding of the effects of red tape on public officials' attitudes and behaviors.

Contrary to our expectation, the lack of functionality of rules was positively associated with officials' attitudes toward public participation, indicating that officials who

perceive rules to lack functionality are more positive about public participation in administrative decision-making. Officials who perceive rules to be ineffective might use their discretion to shape participation as they like in order to attain their and their organization's objectives. They could perceive the inclusion of citizens in organizational decision-making as an instrument to help overcome organizational inertia and ineffectiveness. Such a hypothesis finds support in research establishing a positive relation between red tape and organizational innovation, especially in information and communication technology (ICT) (Moon & Bretschneider, 2002; Pandey & Bretschneider, 1997). Future research could examine the conditions under which red tape could positively affect public officials' attitudes toward public participation in more detail.

Other findings are in line with the results of previous studies. Our results support Yang and Pandey's (2011) finding that managers' evaluations of positive participation outcomes are negatively associated with red tape, defined as burdensome administrative rules and procedures that have negative effects on the organization's performance. Similarly, our results provide partial support for Liao and Schachter (2018), who found that the perceived level of burdensome rules and procedures is associated with the perceived costs of citizen participation, though not related to perceived citizen contributions.

The findings of this study should be interpreted in light of some limitations. First, red tape research is a broad field of research. In this study, we have examined how job-centered red tape perceptions affect officials' attitudes toward public participation independently of the public participation process itself. Future research could examine how public participation induced red tape affects public officials' willingness to participate with the public and how different aspects of red tape affect different forms of participation.

Second, the results in the structural part of the model are dependent on the specification of the measurement part of the model. It is possible that other studies could develop measurement models that fit as well as ours does. A possible avenue for future research would be to use an experimental design and to manipulate the lack of functionality of rules and the compliance burden of rules in order to determine their effects on public officials' attitudes toward public participation. An inspiring example is provided in the Tummers et al. (2016) experiment into the effects of red tape on citizens' satisfaction with government.

Third, our analysis is based on cross-sectional data from a large municipality in Belgium. Although there is no evidence to assume that public officials from the municipality of Antwerp react differently to red tape than public officials from other municipalities, our results are not necessarily valid for other jurisdictions as well. Focusing on a single jurisdiction allowed us to take a closer look at the effects of organizational level characteristics such as departmental differences on public officials' attitudes toward public participation. At the same time, this approach did not allow us to examine how different organizational characteristics affect public officials' attitudes toward public participation. Future research could strengthen the external validity of our findings by implementing this study in other jurisdictions as well.

## **Conclusion**

The effects of red tape on public officials' attitudes toward public participation are modest and diverge. On the one hand, this study found a positive association between public officials' perceptions of the lack of functionality of rules and their attitudes toward public



participation. On the other hand, we found that public officials' perceptions of the compliance burden of rules and their attitudes toward public participation are negatively associated. Officials' who are trapped by burdensome rules are less likely to have positive attitudes toward public participation.

Our findings support a nuanced view on the effects of red tape on public officials' attitudes and behaviors. Previous studies have focused on the compliance burden of rules and paid less attention to the lack of effectiveness of rules. Our finding that both dimensions affect officials' attitudes differently provides an interesting and timely addition to the literature. Red tape, though commonly defined as an organizational pathology, can both hamper and stimulate officials' appetite to participate with the public. A multifaceted understanding of red tape helps to understand why.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>We tested for normally distributed data using the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality. All eleven indicators had w-values significant at the  $<.001$ . level, indicating a violation of normality for all eleven of them.

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## Appendix 1

<b>Fitted covariance matrix</b>											
	x1	x2	x3	x4	x5	x6	x7	x8	x9	x10	x11
x1	1.000										
x2	.226	1.000									
x3	.231	.200	1.000								
x4	.352	.305	.312	1.000							
x5	.329	.285	.291	.444	1.000						
x6	.027	.023	.024	.036	.034	.918					
x7	.030	.026	.026	.040	.037	.687	.906				
x8	.023	.020	.021	.031	.029	.539	.595	.900			
x9	-.047	-.041	-.042	-.064	-.060	.123	.136	.107	.979		
x10	-.057	-.05	-.051	-.077	-.072	.149	.164	.128	.630	.970	
x11	-.052	-.045	-.046	-.071	-.066	.136	.151	.118	.578	.697	.935

<b>Fitted means</b>											
	x1	x2	x3	x4	x5	x6	x7	x8	x9	x10	x11
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0