

Low-Trust Bureaucracy: An Exploration of Administrative Exclusion in a Developing Bureaucracy

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Paper presented at the Administrative Burdens Workshop

June 26-27, 2017

ESADE Business School, Barcelona (Spain)

ABSTRACT

Latin American bureaucracies are notorious for their inefficiency and opacity, yet there is very little empirical research done on what exactly determines the 'bureaucratic experience' for citizens and what the individual and social costs of dysfunction are. This explorative paper uses six small cases of Mexican citizens' encounters with public bureaucracies to develop the notion of 'low-trust bureaucracy', in which access to public services is unreliable and levels of control towards both citizens and bureaucrats are excessive. Furthermore, the paper adds new insights to the existing body of literature on administrative burdens and administrative exclusion. It suggests dysfunction is not merely a consequence of poorly designed bureaucratic procedures, but also of more structural causes, such as historical legacies of corporatism and authoritarianism that plague administrative culture, bureaucratic coping mechanisms for structural shortages in staff and funding, and administrative burdens as a means to prevent corruption and fraudulent use of public services. The paper ends with a discussion of strategies that citizens exhibit in dealing with low-trust bureaucracies, and with an agenda for further research.

Keywords: low trust bureaucracy, public services, administrative burdens, administrative exclusion, Mexico.

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1. Introduction

Latin American bureaucracies are notorious for their inefficiency and opacity, yet there is very little empirical research done on what exactly determines the 'bureaucratic experience' for citizens. This paper aims to provide a starting point to understand what makes these bureaucracies so different from their counterparts in so called developed countries. Of course, European and North American countries are not void of bureaucratic dysfunction. Besides the recurrent theme of red tape, they tend to suffer – ironically – from the unintended consequences of advancements in use of technology, density of regulations, and new managerial philosophies (XXXX). Latin American bureaucracies, by contrast, generally suffer from 'authoritarian legacies' that treat bureaucracies as political instruments rather than means for universal public services (XXXX). The state apparatus was more often than not a means to control social and political forces rather than serve the public good. Democratisation processes have so far been unable to wipe out this burden of the past.

The concept of administrative burdens is a useful starting point to understand the way 'developing bureaucracies' affect citizens' access to public services. It refers to the learning, psychological, and compliance costs that limit the ability of citizens to access the services they are formally entitled to (Moynihan et al., 2015). Thereby, it deliberately seeks to move away from the more traditional notion of red tape (e.g. Bozeman, XXXX), which is often associated with inter- or intra-organisational regulations and procedures. Administrative burdens, by contrast, focus on citizens, how they experience bureaucracy, and how access to public services is organised (De Jong & Rizvi, 2008). By adopting this perspective, it is possible to develop an understanding of what makes the bureaucratic experience in a developing bureaucracy so different from a more developed one. Taken on face value, there seems to be little that sets them apart. Laws, regulations, and institutions are usually all in place. Below the surface, however, the bureaucratic underlife reveals a different story in which getting access is an often complicated and frustrating affair.

This paper is an exploration into the specifics of administrative burdens in a developing bureaucracy. Since very little empirical research on this topic exists, the aim here is to posit a motivated hypothesis as a starting point for further studies. This hypothesis is constructed from two parts. The first part, which will be developed in the following paragraph, is formed by a theoretical exploration of the concepts administrative burdens and administrative exclusion. The second part consists of six short case studies from the Mexican

context that provide small windows on the mechanisms that make interactions with bureaucracies in this country often unpredictable and unreliable. In the two closing paragraphs of this paper, I develop the concept of 'low-trust bureaucracy' to grasp the nature of bureaucratic dysfunction in Mexico, and, by extension, in similar countries. This, in turn, leads to a fuller understanding of the concept of administrative burdens and the types of 'costs' citizens may encounter.

2. Three elements for the study of administrative burdens

Condemnations of bureaucratic pathologies is basically as old as the study of bureaucracy itself. Early critiques, including Max Weber's, focused mostly on the effects of bureaucratic structure on the behaviour of bureaucrats and the performance of organisations (XXXX). More recently, attention has shifted to the more down-to-earth analysis of administrative burdens and red tape. Bozeman's (XXXX) contributions to understand the origin and nature of red tape focused mainly on inter- and intra-organisational regulations, procedures, and bureaucratic behaviour that were unnecessary for the execution of an organisation's task. The study of 'administrative burdens' looks more specifically at unjustified compliance burdens for citizens that restrict access to public services or benefits (e.g. Moynihan & Herd, 2010). Moreover, it breaks away from the narrow focus on rules ('formalisation gone bad') as the source of bureaucratic dysfunction.

The impact of administrative burdens on the ability of citizens to enjoy the public services they are formally entitled to can, for instance, be measured in terms of the learning costs (such as the investment in takes to find out about a government programme), psychological costs (including intrusive application processes and social stigma), and compliance costs (rules and requirements) that citizens face (Moynihan et al., 2015). By focusing on the social impact of bureaucracy, we move away from mere economic analyses of compliance costs to the question of access to social and political rights (De Jong & Rizvi, 2008). As De Jong (XXXX) points out, the consequences of bureaucratic dysfunction can be both material and immaterial and affect both individual and collective levels. Besides time and money spent dealing with unnecessary paperwork or time-consuming procedures, administrative burdens can also produce social injustice and reduce citizen trust in government (cf. Wichowsky & Moynihan, 2008; Tummers et al., 2016).

As Brodtkin and Majmundar (2010) have shown, formal processing rules, informal practices, and claiming costs at the street-level of public bureaucracies can lead to 'administrative exclusion': formal eligibility which does not lead to access of services (for instance, because people feel discouraged to apply in the first place) or leads to drop-out during a bureaucratic procedure. Moreover, administrative burdens do not affect all citizens equally. Especially disadvantaged groups with lower levels of financial, social, and human capital tend to be disproportionately hit (Moynihan et al., 2014). Financial costs for a government service, travelling times, unfamiliarity with government programmes or procedures, having a bank account and official identification, or the ability to take hours off of work are just a few examples that can account for varying levels of exclusion among population groups.

The study of administrative burdens seeks to analyse the social impact of bureaucratic dysfunction. It thereby employs the perspective of the citizen or user of public services as starting point. Problems such as administrative exclusion often remain hidden from sight when focus lies on organisational structure or managerial roles. This is especially true for the functioning of public bureaucracies in countries like Mexico, where the formal rules and regulations are – generally speaking – not what sets it apart from more developed bureaucracies. Instead, the operational level is where a large part of citizens' 'bureaucratic experience' is determined – as we will later see in the case studies. Another aspect of bureaucratic dysfunction that usually only be unearthed through a citizens' perspective is the way the simultaneous but uncoordinated activities of multiple government organisations affect citizens (XXXX).

A second element crucial to studying administrative burdens is defining what exactly qualifies as a bureaucratic dysfunction. As important as the citizen perspective is, it is not sufficient to pass judgement on whether or not a burden is unjustified. Kaufmann claimed that "one man's red tape is another's treasured procedural safeguard" (1977: XX). This might not bring us any closer to defining bureaucratic dysfunction, but it does point out the values that bureaucracies seek to realise, such as impartiality, impersonality, and formality. Not every citizen's discomfort is a sign of dysfunction. Bozeman (2000) sought to distinguish between legitimate bureaucratic functions and bureaucratic pathologies, such as red tape, by focusing on rules that entail a compliance burden but "do not advance the legitimate purposes the rules were intended to serve" (XXXX). The downside of this definition is that it does not allow

for questioning the legitimacy of rules and regulations themselves. Moynihan and Herd (2010: XX) walk a different path by emphasising the 'unjustified' nature of compliance burdens. However, an external criterion is needed to determine what qualifies as 'unjustified'.

Moore's (1995) notion of 'public value' is a good candidate for such a criterion. Its intention was to curb public bureaucracy's tendency to merely follow political mandates by inviting managers to look outwards to what their organisation contributes to society. Moore failed to offer a working definition, but we can follow Bozeman's (2007: 17) suggestion here: "Public values are those providing normative consensus about (1) the rights, benefits, and prerogatives to which citizens should (and should not) be entitled; (2) the obligations of citizens to society, the state and one another; and (3) the principles on which governments and policies should be based". This segmented definition includes convictions about the common good, but also intra-organisational aspects such as reliability and efficiency, the behaviour of civil servants (accountability, integrity, etc.), and the treatment of citizens (responsiveness, equality, legality, etc.) (Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007).

A third and final theoretical building block for studying administrative burdens shifts attention to the origins of bureaucratic dysfunction. The citizen perspective serves the identification of dysfunction and the notion of public value its assessment, but what is missing is a framework to understand the various forms in which dysfunction occurs. De Jong (2016) identifies four different origins and causes of bureaucratic dysfunction:

- Red tape/administrative burdens: unnecessary paperwork, delays, complex procedures and compliance criteria that have their origin at the operational level of bureaucracies (cf. Bozeman, XXXX).
- Culture: unresponsive or legalistic behaviour by street-level bureaucrats (cf. Alford, XXXX) following from administrative behaviour (such as bounded rationality, goal displacement or satisficing behaviour) (cf. Allison, XXXX; Simon, XXXX; Merton, XXXX), strategic behaviour (such as rationing of services, turf wars or career motivations) (cf. Lipsky, 1980; Downs, XXXX), a desire for control (cf. Bardach & Kagan, XXXX), professional standards and norms (cf. Noordegraaf, XXXX), or lack of training and expertise.
- Structure: problems that originate in organisational design and managerial behaviour, including the lack of intra- or inter-organisational coordination (Christensen & Lægread, XXXX; Wegrich & Štimach, XXXX), the existence of conflicting rules and catch-

22 situations (De Jong, XXXX), and overemphasis on internal control mechanisms and performance criteria (XXXX).

- Statecraft: problems originating in the legal, political, and technological preconditions that determine an organisation's basic resources and objectives, such as information infrastructure (XXXX), political priorities, and policy paradigms (XXXX).

This framework is a useful tool to understand the organisational side of bureaucratic dysfunction. Administrative exclusion can originate from street-level behaviour or operational procedures, but also from more structural problems resulting from organisational design, coordination issues, and the translation of political ambitions into bureaucratic practices. Furthermore, as De Jong (2016, XX) acknowledges, it is often the case the bureaucratic dysfunction involves issues on more than one level of origin and that they are highly interrelated. For instance, in one of the case studies to be discussed in the following government's ambition to make citizens behave more 'responsible' led to making welfare transfers conditional on strict compliance criteria. Elsewhere, the use of information and communication technology has proven to potentially increase unresponsiveness and reduce street-level discretion to deal with individual cases (XXXX).

3. Unpredictable, unreliable, and underfunded: six mini-case studies on Mexican public service provision

The three elements for the literature on bureaucratic dysfunction outlined in the previous paragraph serve as a framework for conducting empirical research on administrative burdens. Looking from a citizen perspective, using public value as yardstick, and distinguishing various origins of dysfunction are key to better understanding the nature of this phenomenon in 'developing bureaucracies'. This is especially true for understanding the social significance of bureaucracies in developing countries. Following Foucault's (1976; 2003) suggestion, we should "study power where it is exercised over individuals rather than legitimated at the centre" (Jessop, 2007: 36; cf. Neal, 2004). Studying laws and institutions will give only a partial view of how bureaucracies work. The mechanisms of bureaucratic structures, the behaviour of street-level bureaucrats, the social conditions in which bureaucracies operate, and the capacities and resources assigned for public service delivery

shape, transform, and distort the bureaucratic experience for citizens. It is to this study we turn next.

Besides a few exceptions (XXXX), most of what we know about administrative burdens and bureaucratic dysfunction comes from studies conducted in the US and Western Europe (XXXX). Far less is known about the way bureaucracies work in developing countries. Conversely, what we know of the trajectories of democratisation in developing countries often focuses on political transformations and general administrative reforms (XXXX), and not on street-level public service provision. This gap in our knowledge is problematic for developing countries, since they are left with the challenge of policy transfer (XXXX), or the application of foreign successful practices into fundamentally different political and social context. However, the lack of understanding of how bureaucracies work in developing countries may also limit the development of a more comprehensive theoretical framework. As the following analysis of bureaucratic dysfunction in Mexico shows, the mechanisms of administrative exclusion and the types of administrative burdens are more varied than current literature on this topic suggests.

Since there is very little previous groundwork on administrative burdens in developing countries, this paper is explorative and seeks to formulate a hypothesis to serve as a basis for further research. The hypothesis is based on 6 small case studies of bureaucratic dysfunction from the citizen or user perspective in Mexico. Six of these cases prepared by students of the doctoral and masters programme in public administration of the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) – one of Mexico's most respected research institutes. The other two cases (on the rationing of public services and on red tape as a barrier against corruption) were prepared by myself. The students, who all participated in one of my courses, were asked to select a case of bureaucratic dysfunction from their own personal experience or from their own research projects. This means that the selection of cases is not necessarily a representative sample, but it does provide enough substance and variety to formulate a hypothesis on the specific nature of bureaucratic dysfunction in Mexico – which, in extension, serves as an example for similar countries.

The students prepared their cases under my supervision and according to the first three steps of the research method developed by De Jong (2016). **PM**

Case 1: A labyrinth and a coyote

Narrative

Jesús is in the final year of his bachelor in communication studies in the city of Guadalajara. He runs a small company that helps businesses with making audio-visual material for websites and social media. During one of his classes, a professor told him there were public funds available to help young entrepreneurs expand or improve their business. Jesús consults the website of the institute responsible for granting funds. He creates an account and consults the information on the available funds. Despite the amount of information, there seems to be no way to actually start an application procedure. Disappointed he decides to let it go. Only months later, after talking to some people with experience in applying for funds, he tries again. Again unable to find what he is looking for, he sends an email to the institute's helpdesk – only to be replied by what seems to be an automatically generated message.

Another six months later, Jesús decides to have another go. He soon realises he needs a fiscal identification number, for which he has to apply at the Ministry of Finance – a procedure that he cannot do online and will take him a full day. Furthermore, Jesús has to present a detailed business plan to apply for funding – something he has zero experience with. When he tells a friend of his girlfriend of his experiences several months later, he tells Jesús that “he knows a friend of a friend that can help finding your way through the bureaucratic labyrinth. It's easy”, the friend says, “these sort of people arrange the funding for you and in return you pay them 50% as their fee”. Jesús feels frustrated. “How come I have to pay somebody 50% of what I receive? Why do I need a ‘coyote’ for something that should be easy?”

Analysis

- Costs: time, money, economic participation, economic productivity
- Values at stake: access to services, well designed procedures, responsiveness
- Nature of dysfunction: opacity and bad process design, not client friendly, legalism (in interviews with INADEM employees: simulation – it's not about the service, but about internal order), dysfunctional technology (information labyrinth)
- Response: disappointment, use of coyotes

Case 2: Red tape against corruption

Narrative

Michael Jones recently moved to Mexico City to work for the Mexican office of the bank he works for as a financial consultant. To speed up his integration in Mexican society, he decides to follow a Spanish course in one of the country's most respected public universities. Two weeks before the start of the course he heads down to the language institute of the university for an entry level test and formal enrolment. In the short period Michael has been living in Mexico, he already found out foreign credit cards are not accepted everywhere, so he plays it safe and brings cash to pay for the course. To his surprise, however, the friendly lady who also reviewed his entry level test told him that he could not pay with her directly.

After filling in the application format, she presses a small note in his hands with the bank and payment details of the university. "With this you go to a bank, preferably 'our' bank Banamex, and pay the fee for the course. You have to ask for a receipt of payment, which you then hand over at the central cashier of the university. There they will give you a confirmation of payment, which you can bring to me so I can finalise your enrolment". Michael is stunned by what he perceives as an enormous inefficiency. Considering the horrible traffic in this city, this will take me the rest of the day, he thinks to himself. "Is there no other way of doing this?", he asks. "I'm afraid not. The university does not allow any cash transfers for enrolment to make sure the financial administration is correct".

Analysis

- Costs: time, money
- Values at stake: inefficiency; protection against corruption (but burden is for the user)
- Nature of dysfunction: verification and formalisation
- Response: frustration and acceptance (there is no way around it)

Case 3: Rationing services to deter clients

Narrative

The Mexican state provides its civil servants with access to various social services. Day-care for the children of female state employees is one of those services. It has always struck Patricia Barrales, who works as a secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as odd that

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children of her male colleagues weren't admitted. As if the assumption is that they all have wives who will happily stay at home. A colleague of Patricia told her once that this is an old rule kept in place because there is no way the state would be able to provide day-care for all the children of male employees as well. She was reminded of this explanation when her son's day-care asked her to have several lab tests done for his next year's re-inscription. In the past, Patricia went to private laboratories for this sort of tests. Sure, it costs you some money, but at least it's quick, open on weekends, and they send you the results through e-mail. This time around, she decides to save her pesos and go to the public system.

First step in the procedure is an appointment – annoyingly only possible during office hours – with a doctor at the local public medical centre. With the notification she receives from the doctor, she can make an appointment – in person – at the local laboratory. There, she is given only one lab jar instead of the four she needs. “We only provide one, the rest you have to buy yourself at a pharmacy”. “Another chore on the list”, grumbles Patricia. Fortunately, she was able to make the appointment to hand in the required substances and bring her son for a saliva smear test at 7AM in a few weeks' time. That morning, however, she finds herself in a queue of about a hundred people outside the laboratory, who, apparently, all had their 'appointment' at the same time. Almost an hour later, she and her son are back outside with a notification that they can pick up the results – in person, of course – at the local medical centre in one week. “Next time, I will just pay again for a private lab”, she says to herself. At the same time, she is well aware that the vast majority of the people around her could never afford that luxury.

Analysis

- Costs: time, money, female economic participation, exclusion (disincentive to use public system)
- Values at stake: inefficiency; protection against corruption (but burden is for the user)
- Nature of dysfunction: rationing of services; survival mechanism of underfunded services
- Response: exit to parallel systems by those who can afford it; acceptance by those who can't

Case 4: Protecting particular interests through bureaucratic scrutiny, secrecy, and inaction

Narrative

On August 30th, 2015, a group of 150 domestic workers from across Mexico held their first General Assembly to form the national union for domestic workers². There are an estimated 2.4 million domestic workers in Mexico, most of them (around 96%) working without a formal contract. A union would allow domestic workers to bargain collectively over wages, benefits, and working conditions. In order to function in the Mexican legal system and formally represent workers, a union requires formal recognition from the government – a procedure known as ‘toma de nota’ (literally; ‘take note’). Despite its unassuming name, the procedure proved to be extremely burdensome for new labour union. If only because the preparations for the General Assembly took the workers about a year and would not have been possible without specialised legal expertise, which was in this case sponsored by a German NGO.

The legal requirement for the ‘toma de nota’ is to have 20 workers make a request to the local labour authorities – in this case in Mexico City – which are constituted by representatives of the employers, workers, and local government. The workers must present proof of employment and their address, along with the minutes of the union’s founding General Assembly. The paperwork is sometimes accepted without much ado. In other cases, verification of employment and identity is heavily scrutinised, sometimes leading to inspectors visiting worksites, sending back assembly minutes for failure to comply with a format, and – in the worst cases – even sending the list of employees to their employer, which can lead to the employees being fired. Especially for workplaces with a high turnover and no formal contracts, such as domestic workers or tip-only workers, long procedures complicate proving employment. In the case of the domestic workers union, months after the formal application no action had been taken by the local labour authorities. It was only after the mayor of Mexico City, for whom domestic workers were a target demographic for his social policy programme, publicly complained that the bureaucratic wheels were set in motion. The ‘toma de nota’ was officially granted on March 8, 2016.

Analysis

- Costs: time, exclusion, social rights
- Values at stake: equality, legality

² Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Hogar (SINACTRAHO).

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- Nature of dysfunction: protecting particular interests: discretion used to protect vested interests of what at first sight appear to be objective bureaucratic procedures.
- Response: frustration that public support (media outreach and mayor's office) was crucial to overcome inaction

Case 5: Signatures, delays, and broken procedures

Narrative

As many other institutes, the research centre of one of Mexico's national universities, has recently established an office of technology transfer. Its main objective is to identify and exploit research with potential commercial value. The office functions as an intermediary between researchers and businesses and helps researchers with patent registration and business plans. In this capacity, it helped doctor Arroyo, a specialist in genetics and molecular biology, obtain two patents, with several more under revision at the time of writing. However, several years later no pharmaceutical companies have shown interest in her work. This changes when her institute establishes a new agency especially dedicated to technology transfer, which conducts a market research for doctor Arroyo and actively promotes her research among companies. Moreover, the agency secured her a budget of 2 million pesos from the national council for science and technology for commercialisation activities. With that money, she can hire researchers to do further lab tests and experiments.

What doctor Arroyo hadn't expected was that the internal bureaucracy of her university would prove very costly and almost fatal for her attempts at commercialisation. For hiring researchers, she needs a signature from her management, after that from the technology transfer agency, and after that from the general management of the university. When this is finally completed, the administrative department still has to transfer the resources to doctor Arroyo. Only then can she pay her researchers. In order to quickly follow-up on the interest of commercial parties, she already hired several researchers. They were told in advance that their first pay check might arrive a bit later. What doctor Arroyo had not expected was that the whole internal procedure would take months. After six months, she sees no other option than to start paying the researchers out of her own pocket. To get this reimbursed will, ironically, force her to go through another procedure.

Analysis

- Costs: time, money, innovation, use of public funds
- Values at stake: efficiency, fairness
- Nature of dysfunction: formalisation and hierarchy (signatures), delays (broken procedures and lead times do not correspond with necessities of reality), fragmentation/specialisation/islands of responsibility (follow-up van een trámite crucial; burdens are pushed towards user; difficult for user to pressure system and other actors also do not make themselves responsible for it)
- Response: patience and improvisation (paying out of her own pocket); takes up a lot of effort and energy – doctor Arroyo not sure if this is worth it (discouragement).

Case 6: Unreasonable enforcement

Narrative

Tiberio has a dream. To one day open his own restaurant and do something more than work on his family's cow farm. He has very little education and lives in humble circumstances, just like the vast majority of the people in his village in the state of Mexico. Through a government-organised fair, he first heard of a fund for small businesses. It may be a long shot, he thinks, but why shouldn't I give it a try? He heads down to the fund's main offices in the city of Toluca, where a helpful civil servant fills in the necessary forms to apply for a 100.000 pesos funding to open a restaurant. Five weeks later, he goes back to hand over several documents to take the next step in his application. Although it was quite a bit of paperwork, the same civil servant was again very helpful. A few weeks later, Tiberio received the decision his application was approved. Two days later, he had 100.000 pesos on his bank account. Tiberio waists little time, and a few months later his restaurant is up and running.

Two years later, the unthinkable happens: the fund demands a full return of the funding Tiberio received. Right after Tiberio handed over the invoices of the refrigerator and dishwasher he bought (as part of the fund's compliance criteria), he was informed that the product guarantee papers have to be included as well – which he did not have, or at least could not find anymore. "Honestly, I had no idea they wanted to see the guarantee", Tiberio recalls. A few months later, they came to check if Tiberio had spent his funds properly. They found a fully functioning restaurant with five tables, a cook, and two waiters. However,

Tiberio was again informed that the guarantee papers the kitchen equipment was missing. When Tiberio proved unable to provide the requested papers, the fund officially demanded all the money back – leaving Tiberio in disbelief: “They saw my restaurant. They saw it functioning. And now they want all the money back because of an administrative detail. I am afraid they will take everything away from me, because there is no way I can pay 100.000 back”.

Analysis

- Costs: money (also for a lawyer to handle the appeal), economic growth, entrepreneurship, waste of public resources (many of the law suits ended legally with convictions but practically with lost funds, because everybody had already spent the money).
- Values at stake: fairness, access to social services, social mobility
- Nature of dysfunction: rigidity and formalism (in structure and behaviour); translation of policy paradigm (‘responsibilisation’) into strict bureaucratic criteria of conditionality. A year later, the case was dropped when the new government changed the policy and ordered all the cases (more than 13.000, about 37% of all beneficiaries) accumulated during the previous ten years to be dropped.
- Response: incomprehension, frustration and fear; Tiberio: last time I will apply for a fund

4. Low-trust bureaucracy

As said before, the six cases described above do not give a full representative overview of the ‘bureaucratic experience’ in Mexico. They do, however, provide enough substance to formulate a hypothesis for further research. In all cases, we see that bureaucratic procedures are highly unpredictable and unreliable for their users. What may seem like a properly designed procedure, like a functioning website, like a successful application, or like a clearly formulated law ends up being frustrated for a variety of causes, including dysfunctional technology, rigid enforcement of rules, lack of coordination between agencies, poorly designed procedures, unresponsive and indifferent civil servants, or more deliberate administrative burdens to prevent unlawful use of services or overburdening of underfunded

government organisations. Therefore, I propose to understand Mexican public bureaucracies – and, by extension, bureaucracies in similar countries, as a ‘low-trust bureaucracies’, which are characterised by an unreliable access to public services and high levels of control towards both users and bureaucrats (cf. Nef, 2003 on the ‘culture of distrust’ in Latin American public administration). More specific, a low-trust bureaucracy has two faces:

- Citizens cannot trust the bureaucracy to provide with what they are entitled to: there is a high probability of encountering a barrier during the course of a bureaucratic procedure, which can be the result of poorly designed procedures, of high levels of formality and rigidity, or of more deliberate strategies to deter potential clients.
- The bureaucracy does not trust citizens nor its employees: there are high administrative burdens to maintain internal order and to check for illegitimate access or fraud by citizens and bureaucrats. For instance, payment procedures for a service might involve compulsory bank deposits to prevent individual employees from handling money.

The case studies also indicate that bureaucratic dysfunction does not necessarily follow from malevolence – even though corruption is undeniable a problem in Mexico’s public sector, and adds another layer of complexity (XXXX). Instead, the cases suggest that the causes of low trust are combinations of the following three elements:

- Control: the access to public services is subjected to strict forms of control. In part, administrative burdens can be deliberately put in place to make corruption more difficult – such as prohibiting the direct payment for services to civil servants or introducing ‘double’ verification to prevent non-eligible people acquiring services through befriended or bribed civil servants. However, excessive control can also be an expression of classic rule-bound and rigid bureaucratic behaviour, which places internal order over service orientation.
- Corporatism: the Mexican civil service was originally not designed for efficiency or universal access to public services. As is typical for many Latin American countries, authoritarian legacies continue to affect the functioning of the state, both at political and street-level (Méndez, 1997; Arellano Gault, 1999; Cesarini & Hite, 2004). Jorge Nef (2003) identifies five common expressions of these legacies:
 - o Particularism: a tendency towards personal loyalties and personal favours instead of the bureaucratic adage to work ‘sine ira et studio’.

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- Formalism: hierarchical and rigid behaviour as expressions of power and prestige.
- Discretion: operational autonomy for functionaries to determine who will get a favourable treatment.
- Corporatism: the bureaucracy as a means to 'capture' and control social groups/civil society, and vice versa, access to state benefits through group membership (such as unions or economic elites) rather than individual rights.
- Centralism: decisions and responsibilities flow from the top downwards, implying, among other things, a culture of instruction and obedience.

Besides this, another important characteristic of Mexican public administration is the combination of a spoils system – which means the top-level officials of public organisations rotate quickly and have a personal loyalty to their political master – and a large influence of unions on street-level, that control hiring and firing and produce high levels of inertia and inefficiency.

- Coping: public bureaucracies, their managers, and their staff have to develop coping mechanisms for being structurally understaffed and underfunded. Administrative burdens are deliberately raised to manage overdemand. This can include asking financial or practical contributions from users (anything from buying your own lab jars to providing food for relatives in a hospital), introducing waiting lists and queues to manage demand, and sticking to formal procedures and working instructions to prevent time-consuming interaction with citizens. These bureaucratic coping mechanisms tends to push more affluent citizens to private services in, for instance, health care and education because of higher levels of quality and efficiency. The less affluent, however, do not have this option and are left to deal with public services.

5. Conclusion and discussion

The concept of low-trust bureaucracy adds a new element to our understanding of administrative burdens and administrative exclusion. Besides familiar phenomena, such as high compliance costs and opaque procedures (XXXX), unreliability and unpredictability in service provision emerge as important causes of exclusion and citizen frustration. These do not necessarily follow from malevolence or from poor process design, but can also be the

tangible artefacts of an administrative context in which control and hierarchy rather than service-orientation is emphasised, in which unresponsiveness and indifference can thrive, and in which coping with lack of funding produces a daily quest for survival. The costs for both individual citizens and for society in general are high. In a material sense, low-trust bureaucracy costs citizens large amounts of time, which is often also time not spent on economic productivity. However, the immaterial costs might be even higher. If citizens cannot rely on public bureaucracies to provide them with what they are entitled to without large administrative burdens, social and political rights, social mobility, and trust in government and the state will suffer.

In part, this is reflected in the way citizens respond to their interactions with low-trust bureaucracy. As the aforementioned cases have shown, frustration with bureaucratic dysfunction leaves citizens frustrated and discouraged to deal with the state in the future. With a nod to Hirschman's (1970) famous distinction between exit, voice, and loyalty as potential reactions to declining organisational performance, three different citizen responses to unpredictable and unreliable public services can be distinguished:

- Avoidance: because of the expected administrative burdens or lack of trust that benefits and services can actually be obtained, citizens might choose not to interact with public bureaucracies. People eligible for funds or grants are reluctant to apply. Crime are not reported because of the high administrative burdens involved and lack of trust that something will be done with a report. And fear of being subjected to arbitrary enforcement stops people from formalising their small business. A different form of avoidance or 'exit' occurs among the more affluent citizens: they avoid public services and opt for costly, but better and more reliable, private alternatives in health care and education.
- Resourcefulness: when the formal procedures are unreliable or impractical, people may seek informal and inventive ways to obtain a preferential treatment or merely obtain what they are entitled to. Several strategies can be mentioned here. A first is the use of 'coyotes': people who – for financial compensation – facilitate access to services because of their knowledge of complex procedures, personal contacts with civil servants, or use of bribery. Second, there are more obvious ways of fraud and bribery of (and by) street-level bureaucrats to speed up procedures, gain illegal access to services, or skip formal procedures. A third option is to use collective leverage: unions and other civil organisations are often more successful in pressuring local

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authorities and politicians than individual citizens are. And related to that is to use of personal networks or friends – in Mexico known as ‘palancas’ (literally: ‘levers’) – to ask them for favours (XXXX).

- Acceptance: if avoidance and informal resources are not available or realistic, there is little left to do than accept procedures and burdens as they are. Patience is a crucial ‘skill’ when dealing with public bureaucracies. Spending large amounts of time going through paperwork, visiting offices multiple times, and standing in line constitute the daily experience of citizen-state interaction for many Mexicans. However, this is often the only way to get access to services, no matter how frustrating it may be.

There is still very little research done on administrative burdens in developing countries and the specific nature of their public bureaucracies. Most studies in Latin American public administration, for instance, focus on the historical trajectories that determine its administrative and political cultures (XXXX). This paper is a first attempt to analyse how this affects public service delivery and administrative burdens for citizens. The explorative nature of this paper implies the need for further research to confirm, reject, or further refine the concept of ‘low-trust bureaucracy’. Does the concept hold up in more in-depth (both qualitative and quantitative) empirical studies? How much variety is there in levels of trust and trustworthy service delivery, and what explains this variety? How does corruption fit into this more general concept of low trust? What are ways forward to improve reliability in public service delivery in Mexico and elsewhere? Answering these and other questions can fill a considerable gap in our understanding of administrative burdens and how bureaucratic dysfunction affects citizens’ social and political rights.

Literature

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