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Informative title

A Systematic Literature Review of Citizen Participation in Street-Level Bureaucracies

Title

From Passive Recipients to Active Participants: A Systematic Literature Review of Citizen Participation in Street-Level Bureaucracies

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Abstract

How do citizens participate in interactions with street-level bureaucrats? We systematically reviewed 50 studies and identified a repertoire of citizens' attitudes and behaviors, ranging from compliance to opposition, with exit as a last resort. We related them to civil servants' practices using Tummers et al.'s (2015) typology. Citizens' attitudes and behaviors include: compliance with formal rules, informal practices, and officers; attempts at persuasion, such as negotiation, begging, complaints and blaming; forms of opposition, including resistance, manipulation, lie and aggressiveness; and exit, manifested as either avoiding encounters or disengaging psychologically from interactions. Compliant and persuasive citizens tend to prompt officers to move towards them. Those who exit can push officers to move away. Opposition tends to lead civil servants to either move away or towards, depending on how it is expressed. These results deconstruct the image of citizens as passive recipients and reposition them as active participants in frontline public services.

Keywords

Compliance; Persuasion; Opposition; Public encounters; Systematic review.

Introduction

Over the course of a person's life, renewing an identity card, changing civil status or applying for social housing involves multiple interactions with public administration and, by extension, with the frontline officials¹ who embody them. This article seeks to better understand the role of citizens in these encounters by examining the individual forms of participation they employ when interacting with street-level bureaucrats.

Street-level bureaucracy (SLB) theory has long been central to the study of frontline interactions with public services (Lipsky, 1980/2010). However, it has essentially focused on the actions and constraints of frontline officials—social workers, police officers, tax agents—rather than the citizens they serve. SLB research has shed light on their discretionary power (Hupe et al., 2015), the tensions they navigate—such as processing high caseloads with limited resources—and the coping mechanisms they develop to manage these pressures (e.g., Sabbe et al., 2021; Tummers et al., 2015; Vedung, 2015). In doing so, this body of work has often portrayed public service interactions as essentially unidirectional, with power concentrated in the hands of bureaucrats and citizens occupying the background (see Dubois, 2010; Hupe et al., 2015; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003/2022).

That said, scholars have shifted attention towards the citizen's experience at the street-level. The literature on administrative burdens has shown how navigating the state can be a taxing experience (e.g., Moynihan et al., 2015), while also introducing key resources, such as human capital, that citizens draw on in these interactions (e.g., Christensen et al., 2020). In parallel, policy feedback research has underscored how frontline experiences shape citizens' attitudes, perceptions, and capacities (e.g., Moynihan & Soss, 2014). More recently, building on Bartels' (2013) revival of Goodsell's (1981) work, scholars have begun to reconceptualize interactions

¹ In this article, we use the terms (street-level) bureaucrats, (frontline) officers, (frontline) workers, (frontline) officials and civil servants interchangeably.

at the frontline of public services, or public encounters², as collaborative processes, where both citizens and frontline officials shape decisions and outcomes (e.g., Hand & Catlaw, 2019). This resonates with the expanding literature on the coproduction and cocreation of public services (see Gofen, Rønning, Sønderskov, 2024). Such perspectives underscore that power is bidirectional in these interactions. Citizens are not passive recipients but active participants capable of influencing service delivery (Hand & Catlaw, 2019).

Yet, despite these advances, we still lack a systematic understanding of how citizens behave during public encounters and how frontline officials, in turn, respond. Existing studies that explore citizens' repertoire of actions tend to be fragmented and context-specific (e.g., Hupe, 2022; Nielsen & Nielsen, 2024; but see Boswell & Smedley, 2023 for an exception). For instance, what participation entails differs when dealing with a tax officer, a prison guard, or a social worker. There is a pressing need for more comprehensive insights that integrate findings across disciplines and sectors. Moreover, to our knowledge, no study has yet systematically examined how citizens' behaviors and attitudes influence the discretionary practices of frontline officials. To address this gap, we conducted a systematic review of the scientific literature in public administration, sociology, and political science, using the "Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses" (PRISMA) (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

This article makes a twofold contribution. Theoretically, it offers a first comprehensive, cross-sectoral, and interdisciplinary mapping of the repertoire of citizens' actions in public encounters. We position these along a continuum—from compliance to persuasion to opposition—, recognize exit as an alternative (Hirschman, 1970), and offer insights into how frontline officials respond. This not only sheds light on relational dynamics in public services

² In the remainder of this article, we prefer the concept of "public encounters" to refer to interactions at the frontline of public services.

but also lays the groundwork for future empirical research that would explore the interplay between citizens' behaviors and bureaucratic discretion. Practically, understanding how citizens shape—and are affected by—street-level discretion is critical. Public encounters constitute the most tangible interface between individuals and the state, and the responsiveness of public officials to citizens' claims and behaviors plays a critical role in shaping perceptions of trust, fairness, and legitimacy. These perceptions, in turn, influence civic and political participation—cornerstones of democratic governance (Moynihan & Soss, 2014). Moreover, our findings provide valuable insights for public managers and frontline professionals. These insights may inform the design of procedures and trainings that encourage forms of citizen engagement conducive to effective service delivery.

The article proceeds as follows: we begin by laying out the theoretical foundations of our systematic review, followed by a presentation of its scope and methodology. We then outline the main findings and discuss their theoretical contributions, before proposing an agenda for future research. Finally, we conclude by reflecting on the theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of our analysis.

Citizens in Public Encounters

Scholarly attention to how citizens engage in public encounters has grown steadily in recent years. SLB studies have long acknowledged the influence of citizens' characteristics and self-presentation on frontline agents' discretionary practices (e.g., Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003/2022). Based on signals related to citizens' attributes—e.g., gender, age, socioeconomic status—and behaviors—e.g., manipulation, lies, cooperation—street-level bureaucrats determine citizens' worthiness and trustworthiness and make decisions accordingly (Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2018). This suggests that citizens can adapt their self-presentation to influence frontline agents' discretionary practices (Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2020). Across various contexts, research has documented how citizens exploit procedural loopholes, evade sanctions,

or maneuver towards more favorable decisions (e.g., Epp et al., 2014; Raaphorst & Loyens, 2020).

In parallel, administrative burdens research has highlighted the barriers that prevent citizens from actively engaging with public services. The learning, psychological and compliance costs associated with public encounters can disempower citizens, leaving some powerless (Nisar, 2018). These burdens can also create frustration—fueling protest among those with high self-efficacy (Gilad & Assouline, 2024)—or lead to complete disengagement and non-take-up of entitlements (Moynihan et al., 2015). Crucially, administrative burdens tend to fall hardest on the most vulnerable, who often lack the resources to overcome them. Human capital, including cognitive abilities, financial means, age, and health, can help mitigate these burdens and enhance citizens’ ability to navigate public encounters successfully. In short, resourceful citizens are better positioned to engage actively in public encounters and secure favorable outcomes (Christensen et al., 2020).

Despite these barriers, recent research has emphasized that citizens retain agency at the frontline of public services, though the way this agency is categorized varies. For example, Peeters and Campos (2021) identify coping strategies used by Mexican social welfare recipients to cope with administrative burdens and secure favorable outcomes: adjustment strategies (anticipating and adapting behaviors), social and human capital strategies (drawing on personal networks and communication skills), and gaming strategies (using deception or manipulation to achieve goals). Meanwhile, drawing on a quantitative study of interactions with tax authorities and homecare services, Nielsen et al. (2021) offer a typology of citizens’ profiles based on three dimensions: the level of activity, the degree of preparation, and the degree of opposition. “Accommodators” are passive and compliant; “cooperators” prepare and seek information but avoid confrontation; “resisters” essentially promote alternatives and question the legitimacy of authorities; “fighters” are highly prepared and confrontational with

civil servants; and “activists” combine various strategies—including manipulation, questioning the legitimacy of authorities, and information gathering—to influence outcomes. While valuable, most studies adopt an individualistic perspective focused solely on citizens.

However, to fully grasp the scope of citizens’ agency and power, recent research argues for considering how frontline workers respond to citizens’ behaviors. In other words, attention must shift to the “in-between”: “the relational, situated performances” through which encounters are co-constructed and their outcomes negotiated (Bartels, 2013, p. 478). Although some studies have adopted this relational perspective, they remain marginal (e.g., Hand & Catlaw, 2019). For example, in their study of public encounters between homeless individuals and shelter officers in Denmark, Mik-Meyer and Silverman (2019) identify three types of “clients”: the “resolute client”, who highlights personal problems while showing a willingness to take responsibility for resolving them; the “acquiescent client”, who shifts from anger to acquiescence; and the “passive client”, who remains disengaged yet expresses a desire for a normal life. Importantly, the authors show that shelter officers respond differently to each type of client: they are generally responsive to resolute and passive clients, while being unresponsive with acquiescent ones.

Despite these valuable insights, existing attempts at mapping citizens’ repertoire of actions in public encounters remain fragmented and context-specific. Systematic reviews can help integrate these fragmented findings. In doing so, they reveal broader patterns and contribute to a deeper understanding of the existing body of research. For instance, Boswell and Smedley (2023) conduct a meta-ethnography of welfare studies, demonstrating how citizens exercise agency under administrative burdens. A common denominator across existing studies is an underlying analytical axis that captures citizens’ behaviors and attitudes along a continuum from compliance to opposition. To move towards a more integrated understanding, we propose categorizing citizens’ behaviors and attitudes along this continuum, while also recognizing exit

as a distinct form of (non)engagement (Hirschman, 1970). To account for frontline workers' reactions to citizens' behaviors and attitudes, we rely on Tummers et al. (2015), who provide an analytical grid for how frontline agents cope with work objectives and constraints, based on the impact on citizens. Bureaucrats "move against" citizens when they rigidly apply rules at their expense, as when a placement officer refuses a late job application (Wright, 2003). They "move towards" citizens when they bend or break rules for individuals they deem worthy of help, as when a counselor buys tools for a would-be plumber (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003/2022). Finally, they "move away" when they avoid "meaningful interactions", such as rationing resources to limit their workload or refusing to deal with all demands (Tummers et al., 2015, p. 1103). This typology allows us to explore how citizens' attitudes and behaviors influence how they are treated by frontline agents.

Scope and Methods of the Review

For our systematic literature review, we rely on the PRISMA approach (Page et al., 2021; Rethlefsen et al., 2021). This approach was developed in the medical sciences but has already been used in political science (e.g., Ouimet et al., 2024) and in public administration research (e.g., Colaux et al., 2023; Voorberg et al., 2015). The protocol provided by the approach minimizes biases and ensures transparency, rigor, and replicability in the search and selection of the literature. In the next subsections, we provide more details about the search, selection, and analysis of the reviewed articles, an overview of which is also presented (see Figure 1).

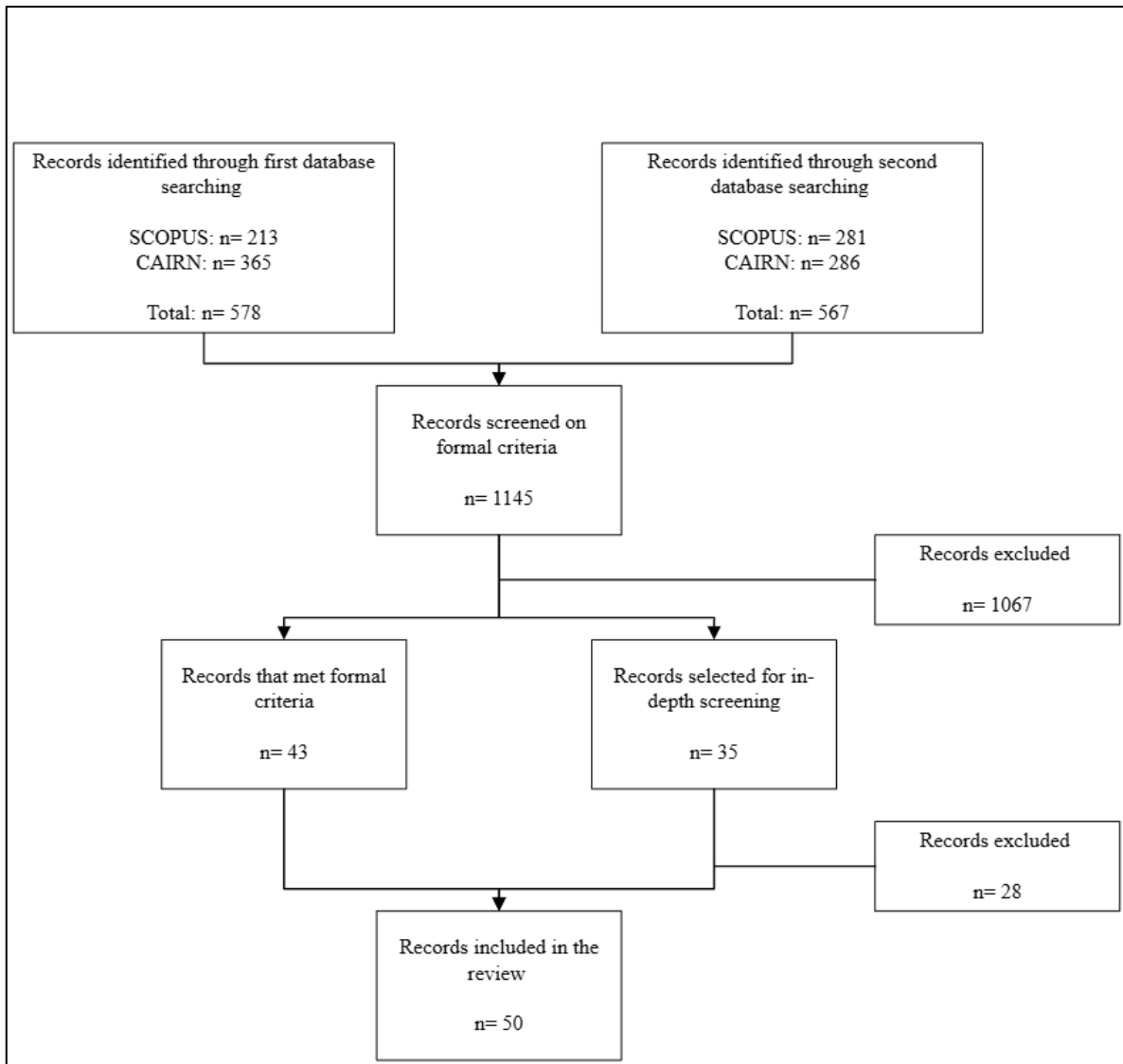


Figure 1: Flow diagram of the search strategy

Scope of the Review

We searched for scientific literature up to April 2025 in two well-established databases in the two languages we understand: Scopus (in English) and CAIRN (in French). We decided to use peer-reviewed articles instead of conference papers and book chapters with the hope of improving the quality of the reviewed studies. Two distinct searches were combined. First, as SLB research is a key approach to the study of public encounters, the results that included at least one of the following words in their title, abstract, or keywords³—“street-level

³ The articles from CAIRN were selected based on their title and abstract as the keywords may not be searched.

bureaucracy” or “frontline” or “discretion” or “coping” (on CAIRN: “street-level bureaucracy” or “guichet” or “proximité” or “première ligne” or discrétion* or “mécanisme* d'adaptation”)—with at least one of the following—“bureaucrat*” or “agent*” or “officer*” or “worker*” or “servant*” or “official*” or “employee*” (on CAIRN: “bureaucrate*” or “agent*” or “fonctionnaire*”)—were retained. The first set of words refers to SLB theory, while the second set refers to public officials. On Scopus, the number of articles that were identified with this search was very high (8101). To facilitate selection, we focused only on the articles that were from one of the 100 best-ranked journals in public administration, sociology and political science and contained one of the following words: “citizen*” or “user*” or “client*”. This first search led to 213 results on Scopus and 365 on CAIRN (i.e., 578 in total).

Second, following the same lines of reasoning, we looked for studies that did not necessarily rely on SLB theory to examine public encounters. The results that included at least one of the following words—“encounter*” or “interaction*” (on CAIRN: “interaction*” or “relation*” or “rapport*” or “rencontre*” or “dispositif*”)—with one of the following ones—“bureaucr*” or “agent*” or “official*” or “servant*” or “officer*” or “worker*” or “employee*” (on CAIRN: “bureaucrate*” or “agent*” or “fonctionnaire*”)—were retained. On Scopus, the following condition was added: “client*” or “citizen*” or “user”, and we limited our search to the same 100 best-ranked journals. To compensate for the French equivalent of “public encounters”, articles in French also had to contain one of the following words: “administration*” or “service* public*” or “guichet”. This second search led to 281 results on Scopus and 286 on CAIRN (i.e., 567 results in total). Although we based all of the sets of keywords on preliminary readings, we are aware that potentially excluding items that could have proven relevant is the price to pay for the rigor, transparency, and replicability of the search.

Selection and Analysis of the Articles

The first two authors separately screened the titles and abstracts of the 1145 searched articles. To be eligible, studies had to focus on public encounters at the frontline of public services and provide insights into citizens' attitudes and behaviors during these interactions—with a focus on the repertoire of actions that could shape the course and outcomes of the interactions—as well as, ideally, information on how frontline officers respond to specific citizens' behaviors and attitudes. For example, Raaphorst and Loyens (2020) was included as it offers insights into public encounters involving the Belgian labor inspection and the Dutch tax administration. The study provides valuable information on both citizens' behaviors and attitudes, as well as frontline officers' responses. For instance, citizens may negotiate with civil servants to reach favorable outcomes, such as avoiding the reporting of violations.

Based on these criteria, 43 articles were consensually selected for the review. The full text of 35 other articles was screened in depth: seven of these 35 articles were consensually selected and included in the review. Thus, 50 articles were reviewed. Intercoder reliability could not be assessed using Cohen's Kappa due to the high number of exclusion decisions (1095 out of 1145 articles), which may have led to the Cohen's Kappa paradox (see Belur et al., 2021). Instead, we measured reliability by calculating the percentage of agreement on article inclusion or exclusion, which was 93%, indicating a high level of consistency in the preliminary decisions. For the few articles on which the coders disagreed, a discussion was held to reach a consensus on the final inclusion or exclusion decisions. The difference between 1145 and 50 may seem remarkable, but the authors had many good reasons for excluding searched articles from the review. For example, although they had keywords related to citizens, many searched articles focused on frontline agents only. Similarly, other articles focused on users' characteristics without any insight into their behaviors or attitudes in interactions.

The 50 reviewed articles were analyzed through a grid that included various categories. Beyond the type of article (empirical or theoretical), the research field or the name of the journal, we

looked at the chronological and geographical setting of the research as well as the public service(s) investigated. To ensure consistency in the analysis, the first ten articles were independently reviewed by the first two authors. A discussion was then held to resolve any inconsistencies before proceeding with the analysis of the remaining articles, which were divided between the first two authors for individual review. Our analytical approach was a combination of deduction and induction. On the one hand, to account for citizens' attitudes and behaviors, we relied on a continuum ranging from compliance to persuasion and opposition, developed from existing studies (e.g., Nielsen et al., 2021; Peeters & Campos, 2021) (see Figure 2). To categorize agents' discretionary practices, we drew on Tummers et al.'s (2015) typology—moving towards, moving away, and moving against. On the other hand, subcategories of citizens' behaviors and attitudes were inductively developed along the compliance–opposition continuum (see Table 1).

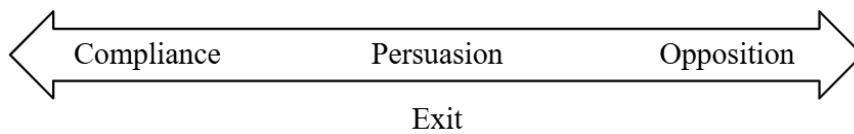


Figure 2: A continuum of citizens' behaviors and attitudes in public encounters

<i>Compliance</i>	Compliance with policies, rules, and norms Compliance with civil servants' expectations and suggestions Compliance with informal practices
<i>Persuasion</i>	Supplication Negotiation Blame Complaints
<i>Opposition</i>	Resistance Manipulation Lie Aggressiveness
<i>Exit</i>	Physical withdrawal Mental disengagement

Table 1: Subcategories of citizens' behaviors and attitudes

Notably, the categorization was never forced: when there was not enough information to apply the typologies to citizens' and frontline agents' attitudes and behaviors or to relate them, they were not. Last but not least, it should also be noted that the units of analysis in the results are

not the reviewed articles as such but the instances of public encounters empirically reported or theoretically addressed in each of them. However, we do not make any statistical claim to infer any conclusion from the quantification of these instances. The results of the review are detailed in the Appendix.

Overview of the Reviewed Articles

The reviewed articles come from 29 different journals. *Social Policy & Administration* (10%), *Public Administration* (8%) and *Administration & Society* (8%) are the most represented in our review, with five and four articles each. While 30 of the reviewed articles were written in English (60%), 20 (40%) were written in French. Ten (20%) articles are from journals that are only classified in sociology, four (8%) only in public administration, one (2%) only in economy and management (Aoufi, 2011) and one (2%) only in political science (Bureau, Rist, Lima & Trombert, 2013). The other 34 (68%) articles come from journals that are simultaneously classified in public administration and/or sociology as well as in other disciplines such as political science, economy and management, or law.

Our literature review contains 44 empirical articles (88%) and six theoretical articles (12%). Among the empirical papers, 31 (70%) use qualitative data, 10 (23%) use quantitative data, and three (7%) use mixed methods (DiFranceisco & Gitelman, 1983; Djuve & Kavli, 2015; Hattke et al., 2020).

Empirically, welfare services (27 or 61% of the empirical articles), security or justice (six or 14% of the empirical articles) and postal services (five or 11% of the empirical articles) are the most represented. Fourteen (32%) empirical articles focus on several sectors simultaneously. Geographically, French cases dominate (15 or 34% of the articles). European countries are addressed in 28 (64%) articles: beyond France, the most represented are Scandinavian countries with seven (16%) articles and Germany with three (7%) articles. On the American continent,

four (9%) studies focus on the US, while one (2%) study has been conducted in Argentina (Schijman, 2013) and one (2%) in Mexico (Nieto-Morales, Peeters & Lotta, 2024). African countries are the focus of five articles (11%). Asian cases are discussed in six (14%) articles: four (9%) focus on Israel and two (5%) on China (Pei, 2025; Zhang & Wang, 2024). Regarding Oceania, there is one (2%) article that examines an Australian case (Blaxland, 2013). Finally, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) is the focus of one article (2%) (DiFranceisco & Gitelman, 1983). Chronologically, most of the reviewed research was conducted between 2010 and 2025 (42 or 84% of the articles), which suggests growing attention to the role of citizens in public encounters (see Figure 2).

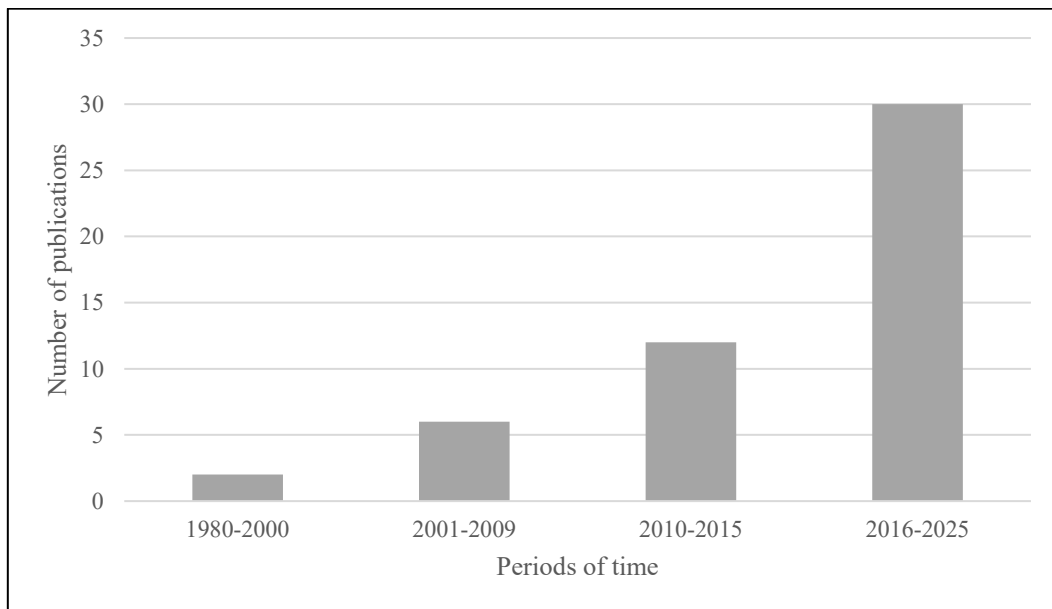


Figure 3: Number of articles selected over time

Citizens in Public Encounters: A Broad Repertoire of Actions

In this section, we explore citizens’ attitudes and behaviors in the reviewed articles along a continuum ranging from compliance to persuasion, and to opposition. We also identify instances of exit, where citizens move beyond this continuum. When it is explicitly reported in the articles, we relate citizens’ behaviors and attitudes with officers’ responses—moving

towards, against, or away from citizens. The results are summarized in Table 2, which presents instances where such relations could be isolated based on the content of the reviewed articles.

		<i>Frontline agents' behaviors and attitudes</i>			TOTAL
		<i>Moving towards</i>	<i>Moving away</i>	<i>Moving against</i>	
<i>Citizens' behaviors and attitudes</i>	<i>Compliance</i>	36 (69%)	12 (23%)	4 (8%)	52 (100%)
	<i>Persuasion</i>	25 (52%)	10 (21%)	13 (27%)	48 (100%)
	<i>Opposition</i>	34 (31%)	45 (42%)	29 (27%)	108 (100%)
	<i>Exit</i>	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	0 (0%)	3 (100%)

Table 2: Instances of public encounters in which citizens' behaviors can be related to frontline agents' responses

Compliance

Instances of compliance were identified in 36 out of 50 articles. In their interactions with frontline agents, citizens can be compliant, first, with policies, rules, and norms; second, with agents' expectations; and, third, with informal practices.

Citizens may comply with any constraint, direction or suggestion that directly results from formal policies and rules, as seen in 24 articles. For example, citizens may follow frontline workers' suggestions that emerge from the normal course of policy implementation (e.g., Cuvelier & Mumbund, 2013; Pei, 2025; Zhang & Wang, 2024). As an illustration, Australian applicants of parenting allowances that depend on activation conditions can accept frontline agents' suggestions of training, thereby demonstrating compliance (Blaxland, 2013). In the same vein, citizens may provide expected documents (e.g., Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b; Döring & Gilke, 2023). In French Guiana, some claimants consider this behavior as a guarantee of their legitimacy to obtain favorable outcomes with regard to the social housing administration (Léobal, 2016). It may be conclusive as frontline workers may move towards: Léobal (2016)'s study illustrates the case of a woman who managed to get the agent to speak

in her language—Creole (*ndjuka*), French being the language of the administration—by presenting a folder containing all the required documents.

Alignment with agents' expectations is another form of compliance (e.g., Döring, 2021; Hajjat, 2010). For example, citizens may show respect by being polite (Le Strat, 2001) or punctual (Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b). It may prompt civil servants to move towards them. For example, when French users of social services outstandingly comply with frontline agents' expectations, their demands for help in filling in the paperwork tend to be accepted (Le Strat, 2001). In the same vein, citizens may try to demonstrate that they are informed public service users, which might encourage civil servants to move towards them (Döring, 2021; Döring & Jilke, 2023). As an illustration, based on the latent class analysis of a self-report survey on citizens' behaviors towards tax and home care referral authorities, Nielsen et al. (2021) highlight that citizens seek information—e.g., on a website or among friends and family—to fulfil administrative expectations on the front line. Finally, citizens may show recognition to frontline agents through expressions of gratitude during public encounters (Carswell, Chambers & De Neve, 2019; Le Strat, 2001) or beyond (de Boer, 2021). Showing motivation and keeping their commitments are also expectations that citizens may fulfill in these interactions (e.g., Wilińska & Bülow, 2020). For example, women who wear a hijab are expected by French naturalization agents to show motivation regarding integration. Avoiding the tight black hijab may be seen as a positive sign by officials (Hajjat, 2010). Similarly, Hansen (2023), in his study of the Israeli educational system, shows that students who make considerable efforts tend to elicit more support from teachers—who move towards them.

Citizens can rely on frontline workers as emphasized in 15 articles (e.g., Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b; Hand & Catlaw, 2019; Salin, 2020; Shwartz-Ziv & Feldman, 2025). They may rely on agents to overcome the complexity of administrative procedures and trust them to deal with their case (e.g., Djuve & Kavli, 2015; Siblot, 2002; 2010). They may ask for help and assistance

(e.g., Léobal, 2016; Salin, 2020; Siblot, 2005b), confess and share details of their private life (e.g., Hand & Catlaw, 2019; Le Strat, 2001; Shwartz-Ziv & Feldman, 2025; Weller, 1990), engage in chatting (Gaspar, 2019), and try to befriend frontline workers (Nielsen et al., 2021). Finally, compliance with informal practices that do not directly result from formal policies and rules is illustrated in six articles, all of which indicate that such practices lead civil servants to move towards citizens. In Senegal, the USSR, Mexico and India, studies report citizens being compelled by frontline agents to pay to obtain favorable outcomes (e.g., Cissokho, 2017; Carswell et al., 2019; DiFranceisco & Gitelman, 1983; Nieto-Morales et al., 2024). For example, based on an ethnography of Senegalese administrations, Blundo (2001) documented that some fraudsters bribe taxation agents to look the other way. Similarly, in their article on access to public services in India, Carswell et al. (2019) report that women—e.g., a mother asking for a duplicate of her daughter’s birth certificate—can address discrimination and administrative barriers by paying frontline workers to accelerate procedures.

Compliance often prompts unsurprising reactions. Frontline officers were inclined to move towards citizens in 69% of the compliance instances. That said, it is not always the case: civil servants move away from citizens in 23% or against them in 8% of the instances. For instance, in French postal, social, and municipal services, citizens may ask agents to fill in documents on their behalf due to their lack of linguistic and writing skills. In this situation, some agents help them and explain the procedure, even though this is not part of their standard duties (i.e., moving towards). Some other agents put social distance between them and citizens by showing reluctance to help them or by using technical terminology that is difficult to understand (i.e., moving away). They may even refuse to help and despise them (i.e., moving against) (Siblot, 2002, 2010).

Persuasion

Citizens do not merely comply. Reviewed articles show that they actively participate in public encounters to assert their preferences and interests (34 articles: e.g., Aubert, 2014; Caswell, 2020; Cissokho, 2017). It may manifest in submissive forms, such as supplication, or follow a bargaining logic, as in negotiation. It may also mean expressing dissatisfaction without necessarily opposing the established rules and norms.

Citizens may supplicate or beg frontline agents (seven articles: e.g., Bruhn & Ekström, 2017; DiFranceisco & Gitelman, 1983; Gaspar, 2019). Supplication seems mostly beneficial to citizens (67% of the instances). In French Guiana, some women argue that they must beg agents of the social housing administration through overpoliteness: “(...) you have to beg (...) please, thank you”. In this case, it led the civil servant to accept to fill in a form in place of the citizen—he moved towards (Léobal, 2016, p. 184, translated.). Similarly, Swedish beneficiaries of higher education financial aid sometimes beg officials to help them avoid the enforcement order of the administration responsible for debt collection. In some cases, the demand is accepted by frontline workers who move towards citizens: “I’ll make an exception here” (Bruhn & Ekström, 2017, p. 208). However, begging may also lead frontline agents to move away from citizens (33% of the instances). For instance, in Belgian social services, beneficiaries can supplicate agents to give more attention and time to the treatment of their case: while some workers provide more help (i.e., moving towards), others refuse (i.e., moving away) (Gaspar, 2019).

Citizens may engage in negotiations (25 articles) with frontline workers (e.g., Aubert, 2014; Bréant, 2018; Jakobsen, James, Moynihan & Nabatchi, 2019; Raaphorst & Loyens, 2020). They dialog with agents (Bartels, 2013), express preferences (e.g., Djuve & Kavli, 2015), share concerns and doubts (e.g., Döring, 2021; Gofen et al., 2019) about administrative requirements, suggest alternative solutions (e.g., Nielsen et al., 2021; Weller, 1990), and try to persuade

agents to make desired decisions (e.g., Döring, 2021; Schijman, 2013). Moreover, they may claim benefits (e.g., Bakoula, 2018; Bartels, 2013; Siblot, 2005a) and try to assert their rights (Cissokho, 2017; Siblot, 2005b). In doing so, they participate in decision-making. Negotiating may involve referring to laws and moral considerations (e.g., Bureau et al., 2013; Nielsen et al., 2021; Schijman, 2013). Social housing beneficiaries in Buenos Aires, for example, may resort to juridical arguments to reconsider expulsion orders (Schijman, 2013). As far as morality is concerned, Danish taxpayers can plead for compassion and offer to forgo tax relief in the future if officials turn a blind eye in the moment (Nielsen et al., 2021). Negotiating with agents may also involve making concessions to persuade them. For example, in front of French naturalization agents, Muslim women sometimes unveil or wear a veil that reflects the French flag's colors to facilitate their applications for citizenship (Hajjat, 2010).

Negotiation often leads agents to move towards citizens (60%), which may result from a common desire to reach agreements that are mutually profitable (e.g., Blaxland, 2013; Blundo, 2001; Cuvelier & Mumbund, 2013; Raaphorst & Loyens, 2020). In their study on public health in Israel, Sweden and England, Gofen et al. (2019) report that when parents express concerns regarding childhood vaccination, they may manage to convince nurses to agree to delay the vaccine shots, thereby bending the standard protocol. Citizens' compelling arguments may also convince workers to move towards them. For example, interactions with Belgian labor inspectors and Dutch tax officers are "poker game[s]" (Raaphorst & Loyens, 2020, p. 41) in which compromises are developed and negotiation skills are crucial for citizens to convince street-level bureaucrats—e.g., not to impose a sanction when fraud is detected (Raaphorst & Loyens, 2020). In a few cases, however, negotiating citizens may push agents to move away from them (13%) or against them (27%). When French applicants for social aid try to convince frontline agents to grant them allocations by emphasizing their financial difficulties, the latter may justify their refusal—they move away—by appealing to their lack of leeway (Le Strat,

2001). Australian mothers trying to negotiate about the conditions for financial support by emphasizing their health problems can generate mistrust among frontline workers who stick to the rules or even refuse medical certificates as sufficient proof (i.e., they move against: Blaxland, 2013).

Citizens may be more protestive and complain about encounters and decisions (ten articles: e.g., Aoufi, 2011; Djuve & Kavli, 2015; Döring et al., 2025). Citizens who interact with public administrations commonly express disagreement, disappointment, and dissatisfaction (e.g., Aubert, 2014; Le Strat, 2001; Weller, 1990; Wilińska & Bülow, 2020). For example, French social allowance beneficiaries sometimes complain to social workers about their allocations because they decrease gradually over time (Le Strat, 2001). Additionally, citizens may blame frontline workers and administrations (two articles: Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b; Siblot, 2005b). For example, in their study on Israeli public services, Davidovitz and Cohen (2022b) describe how some parents may criticize the educative system for their children's difficulties. In the same vein, Siblot (2005b) emphasizes that citizens who apply for parental allowances may blame agents when they impose burdensome waiting times and document requirements and still end up refusing the application based on information they had for a long time.

The reviewed articles present similar proportions of moving towards (27%), away (36,5%) and against (36,5%) when it comes to the response frontline agents give to citizens' complaints. For example, Swedish beneficiaries of study grants complaining about repayment can get frontline workers to accept deferment (i.e., moving towards) or to quickly end the discussion (i.e., moving away: Bruhn & Ekström, 2017). Similarly, participants in the Norwegian Introductory Program for immigrants who disagree about the proposed professional training may get agents to accept their requests even if they think these trainings are not adequate (i.e., moving towards) or they may get them to make decisions without taking their wishes into account (i.e., moving against: Djuve & Kavli, 2015).

Opposition

Citizens may adopt oppositional behaviors and attitudes that challenge the very rules and norms upon which public services are built (33 articles: e.g., Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022a; Littlechild, 2008). The reviewed articles reveal that such opposition can range from resistance to civil servants' expectations and administrative rules (27 articles) to manipulation (13 articles), lie (eight articles) and aggressiveness (14 articles).

Citizens can resist frontline agents' prescriptions and expectations to enforce their preferences (e.g., Caswell, 2020; de Boer, 2021; Prior & Barnes, 2011; Wilińska & Búlow, 2020). Most of the instances reported in the reviewed articles involve resistance to administrative rules, norms, or expectations in general. As mentioned above, some parents sometimes resist child immunization policies (Gofen et al., 2019). Some Israeli citizens resist social workers' expectations by recording their encounters: this causes stress for the officials, who fear that it will be used against them (Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b). More specifically, resistance sometimes involves challenging the legitimacy and authority of frontline agents, as well as provoking these actors (e.g., Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b; Hajjat, 2010). Raaphorst and Loyens (2020) describe how a citizen, who suspected a lack of evidence to justify a control, laughed at a labor inspector. Swedish citizens involved in work rehabilitation sometimes challenge the institutional agenda of the meetings by trying to reorientate the discussion from violations of work conditions to quarrels with the employers whom they consider to be the source of the problem (Wilińska & Búlow, 2020). Citizens may also challenge agents' authority by asking them to explain their decisions further; for example, Danish taxpayers use this approach with regard to tax officials' calculations (Nielsen et al., 2021). Finally, as Bell, Christensen, and Hansen (2022) point out, in Oklahoma, resistance may also involve contacting the media or policymakers to contest the withdrawal of financial aid for higher education.

Resistance may lead to different responses: agents may move towards (28%) or against (44%) citizens. Moving towards is illustrated by Prior and Barnes (2011) in their literature review, with parents successfully resisting the imposition of predetermined schools by the British administration for their children with specific needs. Conversely, in French Guiana, some agents of the social housing administration sometimes refuse demands to female citizens who resist their ultimatums to obtain sexual favors (i.e., they move against these women: Léobal, 2016). Agent profiles—e.g., their professional experience—can account for the diversity of responses towards resistance. For instance, when candidates for French naturalization resist frontline workers' injunctions to unveil due to religious beliefs, experienced female agents tend to move towards them by respecting their choices, whereas their less experienced colleagues tend to strictly enforce the practice (i.e., they move against: Hajjat, 2010). Resisting citizens may also prompt agents to move away (28%). This happens, for example, when Danish agents responsible for the implementation of employment policies provide less support to citizens who resist their job advice in favor of options they prefer (Caswell, 2020).

Citizens also manipulate frontline workers or lie to them (e.g., Carswell et al., 2019; DiFranceisco & Gitelman, 1983; Döring, 2021), which can involve cheating (e.g., Bakoula, 2018; Blundo, 2001; Caizzi, 2010; Siblot, 2002; 2010), making false declarations (e.g., Bureau et al., 2013), and adjusting the truth and their demands (e.g., Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b; Léobal, 2016) to game the system. In Denmark, some citizens “exaggerate the need for assistance” (Nielsen et al., 2021, p. 389) to receive more benefits from home care services. Strategic confessions can also be made to obtain concessions: in Belgian labor inspection, some employers admit infractions to labor inspectors and then offer them to regularize the unregistered employees to avoid fines (Raaphorst & Loyens, 2020). Lies and manipulation prompt agents to move towards citizens more than could be expected (i.e., moving towards: 45% of the instances). Citizens also rely on emotional manipulation, such as crying—tough it

may also reflect genuine distress—to induce pity (e.g., Bureau et al., 2013; Carswell et al., 2019; Siblot, 2002, 2010). Crying, for example, proves effective in demonstrating one’s worthiness and increasing chances of obtaining benefits (Carswell et al., 2019). French officials who interact with applicants for financial youth aid who strategically burst into tears during interactions tend to accept their demands (Bureau et al., 2013). In a similar vein, citizens may take advantage of seduction—e.g., women adapting their clothes to seduce agents responsible for granting social housing in French Guiana (Léobal, 2016). In similar proportions (50% of the reported instances), however, lying and manipulating may also encourage agents to move away from citizens. Applicants for French youth financial aid who manipulatively meet with several officials to obtain more benefits can encourage them to make procedures more cumbersome (e.g., longer waiting times and multiple meetings: Bureau et al., 2013). Israeli parents who are perceived as manipulative because they, for example, report problems to the administration, generate mistrust and prompt teachers to be overcautious with them and their children (Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b).

Finally, aggressiveness towards frontline workers is reported in 14 articles (e.g., Bureau et al., 2013; Federman, 2022; Littlechild, 2008; Rhee et al., 2024). Aggressiveness may lead agents to move away from citizens (44% of the instances) or against them (27% of the instances). Aggressiveness is most often verbal: threats, intimidation and screams from citizens are practices that frontline officials often encounter in some public services (e.g., Carswell et al., 2019; Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b; Weller, 1990). For example, some applicants for social housing resort to insults when confronted to frontline workers in French Guiana (Léobal, 2016). That said, aggressiveness may also be physical. A literature review and an empirical study of Israeli teachers and social workers reveal multiples instances, not only of intimidations and threats of harming them or their families but also of biting, pushing, and poisoning attempts (Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022a; 2022b). In that context, citizens who try to intimidate social

workers also raise their cautiousness and suspicion (i.e., moving away: Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b). In France, when citizens insult and threaten social security agents, the latter sometimes call the police (i.e., moving against: Bakoula, 2018). Surprisingly, frontline officers can also move towards aggressive citizens (29% of the instances: e.g., Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022a) when they fear retaliation: in UK child protection, for example, some officers do not report threats from parents who are under investigation (Littlechild, 2008).

Exit

Eventually, citizens may resort to behaviors and attitudes that fall outside the compliance-opposition continuum as they imply refusing to engage in public encounters. In other words, following Hirschman (1970) and others (e.g., Peeters et al., 2020), they may exit these interactions. Exit was identified in only eight of the reviewed articles.

In rare instances (one article: Bureau et al., 2013), citizens may avoid encounters altogether. In such cases, exit aligns with Hirschman's (1970) definition as citizens withdraw completely from public encounters as a result of dissatisfaction with the public service. For example, in a French youth aid program, administrative constraints drive some young people to exit the service. After their initial meeting with a frontline worker, they never return with the required documents to complete their file, often due to the slow process and the significant effort involved, with no guarantee of success (Bureau et al., 2013).

In most cases, however, citizens do not strictly break the administrative interaction (Hirschman, 1970); rather, they tend to disengage from the relationship (Lehman-Wilzig, 1991). In other words, they give up on their attempts to enforce their preferences and interests (e.g., Bureau et al., 2013; Djuve & Kavli, 2015; Weller, 1990). In contrast with compliant citizens, those who disengage do not expect frontline agents to support, take over, or substitute for them, nor do they attempt to influence agents' decisions. They remain physically present but mentally

disengaged, which is at odds with typical agents' expectations (e.g., Le Strat, 2001; Siblot, 2002; 2005b; Weller, 1990). For example, confronted with dissatisfactory situations, French pension beneficiaries may stop trying to ensure that their requests are met (Weller, 1990).

Exit attitudes and behaviors from citizens could be related to frontline agents' responses in three instances. While they prompted frontline officers to move away from citizens in two cases (Bureau et al., 2013; Djuve & Kavli, 2015), they led them to move towards in one other (Djuve & Kavli, 2015). In Norway, immigrants sometimes express no preference regarding their "individualized qualification plan": in this situation, some agents postpone the submission of the plan and help them to specify their opinions (i.e., they move towards them); others decide alone on the content of the plan (i.e., they move away from them: Djuve & Kavli, 2015). According to Djuve and Kavli (2015), whether an agent will help mostly depends on his or her profile: "care-oriented" or "rule-oriented" (p. 240). In the same vein, when French applicants for disabled aid refuse to express preferences regarding the specific benefits for which they apply, the agents may let a decision-making committee make the decision (i.e., they move away: Bureau et al., 2013).

Discussion

How do citizens participate in interactions with street-level bureaucrats? Drawing on a review of 50 studies across diverse sectors, disciplines, and geographical contexts, we identified a repertoire of citizens' actions in public encounters. These range along a continuum from compliance to persuasion and opposition, with exit as an ultimate recourse. We also shed light on the "in-between" (see Bartels, 2013) as reported in the reviewed articles, giving insights into relational and power dynamics in public encounters.

Our contribution goes beyond a synthesis. Through the continuum of citizens' behaviors and attitudes identified, we provide a standardized framework for grasping citizens' practices in

public encounters. This effort to bridge existing typologies and categorizations (e.g., Boswell & Smedley, 2023; Peeters & Campos, 2021; Nielsen et al., 2021) based on various studies establishes a common ground for future research. The continuum can be mobilized across empirical studies to analyze citizens' behaviors and attitudes consistently, regardless of geographical or sectoral contexts.

The continuum delineates three overarching categories—compliance, persuasion, and opposition—and recognizes exit as a distinct mode of (non)engagement. These categories encapsulate a wide variety of practices. Compliance ranges from straightforward rule-following (e.g., Blaxland, 2013; Léobal, 2016) to meeting informal expectations like expressing gratitude or deference (e.g., Carswell et al., 2019; Le Strat, 2001). Persuasion includes strategies that aim to influence outcomes, from bargaining (e.g., Raaphorst & Loyens, 2020; Gofen et al., 2019) to complaints or blaming frontline staff (e.g., Aoufi, 2011; Djuve & Kavli, 2015; Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022b). Opposition may manifest as open resistance to requirements (e.g., Hajjat, 2010; Prior & Barnes, 2011), but it can also involve more strategic actions, including the use of manipulation to serve personal interests (e.g., Carswell et al., 2019; Léobal, 2016). Finally, following Hirschman (1970), exit may involve avoiding public services entirely (Bureau et al., 2013) or psychological withdrawal while remaining formally engaged (Djuve & Kavli, 2015; Weller, 1990).

Our findings highlight how these behaviors are shaped by both personal and organizational factors. In line with the administrative burdens literature, we find that citizens with more resources are more likely to engage in persuasion (e.g., Döring, 2021; Raaphorst & Loyens, 2020), while those with fewer resources tend to comply. Indeed, lack of skills or knowledge often leads citizens to rely on frontline workers for assistance (e.g., Léobal, 2016; Siblot, 2002; 2010). Extending policy feedback research (see Moynihan & Soss, 2014), oppositional behaviors often reflect challenges to the legitimacy or authority of the state (e.g., Davidovitz

& Cohen, 2022b; Prior & Barnes, 2011). Though instances are relatively rare, exit becomes a strategic choice when burdens outweigh expected benefits (Bureau et al., 2013). In contrast, instances of compliance are common, especially among disadvantaged citizens who depend heavily on public services and cannot afford disengagement (Dubois, 2010).

These behaviors and attitudes are far from anecdotal; they play a significant role at the frontline. Consistent with SLB theory, our review confirms that frontline agents rely on citizens' "signals" (Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2018) to inform their decisions. Citizens' characteristics and attributes undoubtedly matter. Twenty of the reviewed articles suggest that frontline officials tend to move towards citizens perceived as competent and knowledgeable (e.g., having linguistic skills: Hajjat, 2010; see also Léobal, 2016) as well as those with high social capital (e.g., Bréant, 2018; Carswell et al., 2019; Siblot, 2005a; 2005b). Sociodemographic characteristics also convey important signals for frontline agents (17 articles). Citizens' personal environment and situation (11 articles: e.g., their familial environment), socioeconomic status (five articles), gender (three articles), and ethnicity (two articles) may prove decisive in frontline decisions (e.g., Carswell et al., 2019).

Most crucially, citizens' attitudes and behaviors shape frontline responses. In line with existing research (e.g., Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003/2022; Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2018), compliance, namely cooperation, honesty, benevolence, and openness, tends to prompt street-level bureaucrats to move towards citizens in various ways (e.g., Shwartz-Ziv & Feldman, 2025). Conversely, those who exit tend to push frontline agents to move away (e.g., Djuve & Kavli, 2015). Persuasive strategies like negotiation (e.g., Gofen et al., 2019) or supplication (e.g., Carswell et al., 2019) also frequently result in favorable treatment. In contrast, frontline workers move away from citizens in most instances of aggressiveness (e.g., Döring et al., 2025). Finally, complaints, resistance, lies, and manipulation prompt context-dependent reactions, underscoring the importance of understanding relational dynamics.

Ultimately, in line with Bartels (2013) and other recent studies (e.g., Döring et al., 2025; Mik-Meyer & Silverman, 2019), our literature review highlights the pressing need for a new research agenda centered on the relational nature of public encounters. Individualistic perspectives focused on civil servants, as in SLB theory (e.g., Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003/2022), or on citizens, as in administrative burdens research (e.g., Moynihan et al., 2015), have provided valuable insights into public encounters. However, our review suggests the time is ripe to bridge this divide by adopting an approach that considers both sides of the encounter simultaneously. A relational approach (see Bartels & Turnbull, 2020) is therefore essential for unpacking how relational and power dynamics shape public service delivery.

From this perspective, we outline three key avenues for future research. First, drawing on our continuum of citizens' behaviors and attitudes, future research should focus on relational dynamics to better understand why and how citizens adopt specific practices across various sectors. Ethnographic longitudinal studies could follow individuals across multiple encounters with different public services to understand the personal, organizational and relational circumstances that drive specific behaviors and attitudes. Second, while our literature review provides indications into frontline workers' responses to specific citizens' behaviors and attitudes—drawing on insights into the “in-between” reported in existing studies—we need more systematic research into these dynamics, exploring the causal mechanisms at play. Given the nature of the studies reviewed, we adopted a linear perspective, which involved understanding relational dynamics as a sequence in which citizens act and officers respond. Yet, as Bartels (2013) emphasizes, the reality is far more complex. Relational dynamics follow a circular logic, where actors continuously respond to each other's practices. For instance, while citizens' compliance may encourage frontline workers to move towards them (e.g., Siblot, 2002; 2010), the reverse can also be true—citizens' compliance may arise in response to civil servants' attitudes which may, for instance, be perceived as warmth (e.g., Pei, 2025).

Moreover, this circular logic may extend across encounters when they are multi-episodic (see Döring et al., 2025). Future research should therefore adopt this circular perspective to examine relational and power dynamics in sporadic and multi-episodic encounters. Third, research should examine how broader institutional and cultural contexts shape citizens' behaviors and attitudes in public encounters. Our review suggests that some behaviors, such as bribery (e.g., Cissokho, 2017; Carswell et al., 2019), are more prevalent in certain geographical contexts. Comparative analyses of relational and power dynamics across different environments will deepen our understanding of how structural factors influence relational dynamics and citizen-state interactions globally.

Conclusion

While SLB theory (Lipsky, 1980/2010; Hupe et al., 2015) has traditionally focused on frontline workers, recent research has increasingly explored the citizen's role in public encounters. Administrative burdens literature has examined the costs of accessing and navigating public services (e.g., Moynihan et al., 2015), while policy feedback studies have highlighted how these experiences shape civic engagement (e.g., Moynihan & Soss, 2014). More recent work on the "in-between" (Bartels, 2013) has emphasized the relational and power dynamics shaping public encounters (e.g., Hand & Catlaw, 2019; Döring et al., 2025).

In this context, our systematic literature review of 50 social sciences studies maps how citizens engage in public encounters. Theoretically, we show that citizens not only comply but also negotiate, resist, or manipulate to influence outcomes—eliciting varied responses from frontline workers. We offer a continuum ranging from compliance to persuasion and opposition, as well as exit, that provides a common ground to study citizens' participation in public encounters, bridging disparate strands of literature. In line with Bartels (2013) and others (Döring et al., 2025; Hand & Catlaw, 2019), our review highlights the limited attention to the relational and power dynamics in studying public encounters. Existing research often centers

on individual actors, overlooking how public encounters are relational and co-constructed. We call for future studies to examine relational dynamics in public encounters and how these shape public service delivery on the ground.

Methodologically, we selected articles that do provide insights into citizens' attitudes and behaviors in public encounters, which introduces a bias favoring participation over reciprocity. All behaviors were considered equally, regardless of their frequency or significance. We also did not account for contextual differences—geographic, temporal, sectoral, or institutional—that may shape citizens' and bureaucrats' behaviors. As such, our findings should be seen as exploratory (Stebbins, 2001) and warrant future empirical validation.

Practically, this review suggests two key implications. First, given the dynamic nature of public encounters, administrations should avoid rigid, profile-based approaches—especially digital systems that treat citizens as static types. Second, since citizens can actively shape policy implementation, educational programs should foster awareness of this role by equipping students with relevant knowledge (e.g., about public services) and skills (e.g., deliberation) to engage effectively (Fisher, 2020; Manosevitch, 2019) with street-level bureaucrats.

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Appendix. Results of the review

	General information					Data		Citizens' attributes		Citizens' behaviors and attitudes	Discretionary practices of frontline agents (Tummers et al., 2015)
	Author(s) and date	Title of the article	Source	Field of the journal	Type of article	Source	Collection period	Direct influence on the agents or the encounters	Influence on behaviors and attitudes		
1	Aoufi, A. (2011)	Organisation des bureaux de poste et gestion de la file d'attente : analyse des interactions guichetier-client	<i>La Revue des Sciences de Gestion</i> , 251, 157-164.	Economy and management	Empirical (qualitative)	Postal services (France)	/	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Persuasion	Moving towards
2	Aubert, P-M. (2014)	Projets de développement et changements dans l'action publique	<i>Revue Tiers Monde</i> , 220, 221-237.	Political science; economy and management	Empirical (qualitative)	Forest administration (Morocco)	2006-2009	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Persuasion	Moving towards
3	Bakoula, B. (2018)	Les valeurs de la Sécurité sociale vues par les salariés : attentes et adaptation	<i>Informations Sociales</i> , 196-197(1), 83-92.	Sociology; political science	Empirical (qualitative)	Social security (France)	2013	/	/	Persuasion; opposition	Moving towards; moving against
4	Bartels, P. R. K. (2013)	Public Encounters: The History and Future of Face-to-Face Contact Between Public Professionals and Citizens	<i>Public Administration</i> , 91(2), 469-483.	Sociology; political science; public administration	Theoretical	UK*	/	/	/	Compliance; persuasion	/
5	Bell, E., Christensen, J., & Hansen, J. K. (2022)	Resistance or Capitulation? How Discrete Emotions Shape Citizens' Interactions With the Administrative State	<i>American Review of Public Administration</i> , 52(8), 535-557.	Sociology; political science; public administration; marketing	Empirical (quantitative)	Financial aid for higher education (USA)	/	/	Sociodemographic characteristics; behavioral, attitudinal and emotional attributes	Persuasion; opposition	/
6	Blaxland, M. (2013)	Street-level Interpellation: How Government Addresses Mothers Claiming Income Support	<i>Journal of Social Policy</i> , 42(4), 783-797.	Public administration; management, monitoring,	Empirical (qualitative)	Unemployment (Australia)	/	/	/	Compliance; persuasion	Moving towards; moving against

				policy and law							
7	Blundo, G. (2001)	Négociier l'État au quotidien : agents d'affaires, courtiers et rabatteurs dans les interstices de l'administration sénégalaise	<i>Autrepart</i> , 20, 75-90.	Sociology	Empirical (qualitative)	Public transports; customs; justice; health; taxation; public procurement (Senegal)	/	/	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Compliance; persuasion; opposition	Moving towards
8	Bréant, H. (2018)	Étudiants africains : des émigrés comme les autres. Sélectivité sociale du visa et (im)mobilités spatiales des étudiants internationaux comoriens et togolais	<i>Politix</i> , 123, 195-218.	Sociology; political science	Empirical (qualitative)	Migration (France, Togo, Comores)	2010-2016	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Persuasion	Moving towards
9	Bruhn, A., & Ekström, M. (2017)	Towards a Multi-level Approach on Frontline Interactions in the Public Sector: Institutional Transformations and the Dynamics of Real-time Interactions	<i>Social Policy & Administration</i> , 51(1), 195-215.	Sociology; political science; public administration; development	Empirical (qualitative)	Financial aid for higher education (Sweden)	2011-2012	/	/	Compliance; persuasion	Moving towards; moving away
10	Bureau, M-C., Lima, L., Rist, B., & Trombert, C. (2013)	La traduction de la demande d'aide sociale : les cas du handicap et de l'insertion des jeunes	<i>Revue Française d'Administration Publique</i> , 145(1), 175-188.	Political science	Empirical (qualitative)	Youth aid and aid for the disabled (France)	2009-2010	Sociodemographic characteristics; behavioral, attitudinal and emotional attributes	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Persuasion; opposition; exit	Moving towards; moving away
11	Caizzi, A. (2010)	Présence et représentation des usagers aux guichets des caisses d'Allocations familiales	<i>Informations Sociales</i> , 158, 112-120.	Sociology; political science	Theoretical	Family allowance offices (France)	/	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics; behavioral, attitudinal and emotional attributes	/	Opposition	Moving towards

12	Carswell, G., Chambers, T., & De Neve, G. (2019)	Waiting for the State: Gender, Citizenship and Everyday Encounters with Bureaucracy in India	<i>Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space</i> , 37(4), 597-616.	Public administration; management, monitoring, policy and law; geography, planning and development; environmental science	Empirical (qualitative)	Public services (India)	2014-2016	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Compliance; persuasion; opposition; exit	Moving towards
13	Caswell, D. (2020)	Talking Policy into Being – How Street-Level Bureaucrats and Unemployed Talk About Labor Market Participation	<i>European Policy Analysis</i> , 6(1), 23-37.	Public administration	Empirical (qualitative)	Unemployment (Denmark)	2016	/	/	Compliance; persuasion; opposition	Moving towards; moving away
14	Cissokho, S. (2017)	Petits échanges entre amis. Remarques sur l’ambivalence des rapports routiniers entre fonctionnaires et usagers au Sénégal	<i>Revue Française de Science Politique</i> , 67, 631-651.	Sociology; political science	Empirical (qualitative)	Public transport (Senegal)	2011-2014	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics; behavioral, attitudinal and emotional attributes	/	Compliance; persuasion; opposition	Moving towards; moving away
15	Cuvelier, J., & Mumbund, M. M. (2013)	Réforme douanière néolibérale, fragilité étatique et pluralisme normatif. Le cas du guichet unique à Kasumbalesa	<i>Politique Africaine</i> , 129, 93-112.	Social sciences	Empirical (qualitative)	Customs (DRC)	2011-2012	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Compliance	Moving towards
16	Davidovitz, M., & Cohen, N. (2022a)	Frontline Social Service as a Battlefield: Insights from Street-Level Bureaucrats’ Interactions with Violent Clients	<i>Social Policy & Administration</i> , 56(1), 73-86.	Sociology; political science; public administration; development	Empirical (qualitative)	Social services education (Israel)	2019-2020	Behavioral, attitudinal, and emotional attributes	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Opposition	Moving towards; moving away; moving against

17	Davidovitz, M., & Cohen, N. (2022b)	Which Clients Inspire or Reduce the Trust of Street-Level Bureaucrats?	<i>Administratio n & Society</i> , 54(8), 1516-1541.	Sociology; political science; public administratio n; marketing	Empirical (qualitative)	Social services & education (Israel)	2019-2020	Behavioral, attitudinal and emotional attributes	Behavioral, attitudinal and emotional attributes	Compliance; persuasion; opposition	Moving towards; moving away; moving against
18	de Boer, N. (2021)	The (Un)intended Effects of Street-Level Bureaucrats' Enforcement Style: Do Citizens Shame or Obey Bureaucrats?	<i>Public Policy and Administratio n</i> , 36(4), 452-475.	Sociology; political science; public administratio n	Empirical (quantitative)	Public transport and city watch (The Netherlands)	2018	/	/	Compliance; opposition	/
19	DiFranceisco, W., & Gitelman, Z. (1983)	Soviet Political Culture and "Covert Participation" in Policy Implementation	<i>American Political science review</i> , 78(3), 603-621.	Sociology; political science; international relations	Empirical (quantitative & qualitative)	Housing; employment; pensions; admission to higher education; police; armed forces (USSR)	1980-1981	Sociodemographi c characteristics	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Compliance; persuasion; opposition	Moving towards; moving against
20	Djuve, B. A., & Kavli, C. H. (2015)	Facilitating User Involvement in Activation Programmes: When Carers and Clerks Meet Pawns and Queens	<i>Journal of Social Policy</i> , 44(2), 235-254.	Social sciences; public administratio n; managment, monitoring, policy and law	Empirical (quantitative & qualitative)	Integration & immigration (Norway)	2007 & 2011	/	Behavioral, attitudinal and emotional attributes	Compliance; persuasion; exit	Moving towards; moving away; moving against
21	Döring, M (2021)	How-to Bureaucracy: A Concept of Citizens' Administrative Literacy	<i>Administratio n & Society</i> , 53(8), 1155-1177.	Sociology; political science; public administratio n; marketing	Theoretical	Denmark*	/	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Compliance; persuasion; opposition	/
22	Döring, M., & Jilke, S. (2023)	Cream-skimming at the frontline: The role of administrative literacy	<i>Public Administratio n</i> , 101(4), 1569-1586.	Sociology; political science; public administratio n	Empirical (quantitative)	Social services & unemployme nt (Germany)	/	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Compliance; persuasion; opposition	Moving towards; moving away

23	Döring, M., Draths Schmidt, N., & Nielsen, P. P. S. (2025)	It takes (at least) two to tango: Investigating interactional dynamics between clients and caseworkers in public encounters	<i>Public Administration Review</i> , 85(2), 419-435.	Sociology; political science; public administration; marketing	Empirical (qualitative)	Social services (Germany)	/	Sociodemographic characteristics; competencies, knowledge and capital	Sociodemographic characteristics; competencies, knowledge and capital	Compliance; persuasion; opposition	Moving towards; moving away; moving against
24	Federman, S. P. (2022)	Cop Wisdom and the Democratic Consequences of Citizen-State Interactions	<i>Administration & Society</i> , 54(5), 857-877.	Sociology; political science; public administration; marketing	Empirical (quantitative)	Police (USA)	2015	Sociodemographic characteristics	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Persuasion; opposition	/
25	Gaspar, J-F (2019)	Salles d'attente : (faire) patienter dans l'univers du travail social	<i>Espaces et sociétés</i> , 176-177, 103-115.	Sociology	Empirical (qualitative)	Social services (Belgium)	/	Sociodemographic characteristics	/	Compliance; persuasion	Moving towards; moving away
26	Gofen, A., Blomqvist, P., Needham, C. E., Warren, K., & Winblad, U. (2019)	Negotiated Compliance at The Street Level: Personalizing Immunization in England, Israel and Sweden	<i>Public Administration</i> , 97(1), 195-209.	Sociology; political science; public administration	Empirical (qualitative)	Public Health (Israel, Sweden & England)	2012-2016	/	/	Persuasion; opposition	Moving towards
27	Hajjat, A. (2010)	Port du hijab et « défaut d'assimilation ». Étude d'un cas problématique pour l'acquisition de la nationalité française	<i>Sociologie</i> , 1, 439-455.	Sociology	Empirical (qualitative)	Naturalization administration (France)	/	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics; behavioral, attitudinal and emotional attributes	/	Compliance; persuasion; opposition	Moving towards; moving against
28	Hand, C. L., & Catlaw, J., T. (2019)	Accomplishing the Public Encounter: A Case for Ethnomethodology in Public Administration Research	<i>Perspectives on Public Management and Governance</i> , 2(2), 125-137.	Public Administration	Empirical (qualitative)	Food administration (USA)	2013	/	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Compliance; opposition	/
29	Hansen, P. (2025).	How client characteristics cause extra-role behaviours in public service: uncovering invisible frontline work	<i>Public Management Review</i> , 27(4), 981-1001.	Public Administration	Empirical (quantitative)	Education (Denmark)	2020	Behavioral, attitudinal and emotional attributes	/	Compliance	Moving towards

30	Hattke, F., Hensel, D., Kalucza, J. (2020)	Emotional Responses to Bureaucratic Red Tape	<i>Public Administration Review</i> , 80(1), 53-63.	Sociology; political science; public administration; marketing	Empirical (quantitative & qualitative)	University administration (Germany)	2018	/	Behavioral, attitudinal and emotional attributes	Opposition	/
31	Jakobsen, M., James, O., Moynihan, D., & Nabatchi, T. (2019)	JPART Virtual Issue on Citizen-State Interactions in Public Administration Research	<i>Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory</i> , 29(4), e8-e15.	Sociology; political science; public administration; marketing	Theoretical	Denmark*	/	/	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Compliance; persuasion	/
32	Le Strat, C. (2001)	Un échange de services paradoxal	<i>Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales</i> , 136-137, 49-61.	Sociology	Empirical (qualitative)	Social services (France)	/	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Compliance; persuasion; opposition; exit	Moving towards; moving away
33	Léobal, C. (2016)	Des marches pour un logement. Demandeuses bushinenguées et administrations bakaa (Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, Guyane)	<i>Politix</i> , 116(4), 163-192.	Sociology; political science	Empirical (qualitative)	Social housing (French Guiana)	2013-2014	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Compliance; persuasion; opposition	Moving towards; moving away; moving against
34	Littlechild, B. (2008)	Child Protection Social Work: Risks of Fears and Fears of Risks – Impossible Tasks from Impossible Goals?	<i>Social Policy & Administration</i> , 42(6), 662-675.	Sociology; political science; public administration; development	Theoretical	Child protection (UK)	/	/	Behavioral, attitudinal and emotional attributes	Opposition	Moving towards; moving away
35	Nielsen, L. V., Nielsen, O. H., & Bisgaard, M. (2021)	Citizen Reactions to Bureaucratic Encounters: Different Ways of Coping with Public Authorities	<i>Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory</i> , 31(2), 381-398.	Sociology; political science; public administration; marketing	Empirical (quantitative)	Tax and home care authorities (Denmark)	2016	/	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics; image of administrations, agents and public encounters	Compliance; persuasion; opposition; exit	/

36	Nieto-Morales, F., Peeters, R., & Lotta, G. (2024)	Burdens, bribes, and bureaucrats : The political economy of petty corruption and administrative burdens	<i>Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory</i> , 34(4), 481-497.	Sociology; political science; public administration; marketing	Empirical (quantitative)	Public services (Mexico)	2021	/	Image of administrations, agents and public encounters	Compliance	/
37	Pei, Z. (2025).	Is Warmth More Persuasive? The Effects of Street-Level Bureaucrats' Warmth and Competence on Citizens' Compliance During Pandemic Emergencies	<i>Regulation & Governance</i> , 1-12.	Sociology; political science; public administration; law	Empirical (quantitative)	Municipal services (China)	2022	/	Image of administrations, agents and public encounters	Compliance	/
38	Prior, D., & Barnes, M. (2011)	Subverting Social Policy on the Front Line: Agencies of Resistance in the Delivery of Services	<i>Social Policy & Administration</i> , 45(3), 264-279.	Sociology; political science; public administration; development	Theoretical	UK*	/	/	Competencies, knowledge and capital; image of administrations, agents and public encounters	Opposition	Moving towards; moving against
39	Raaphorst, N., & Loyens, K. (2020)	From Poker Games to Kitchen Tables: How Social Dynamics Affect Frontline Decision Making	<i>Administration & Society</i> , 52(1), 31-56.	Sociology; political science; public administration; marketing	Empirical (qualitative)	Labor inspectorate and tax authorities (Belgium and the Netherlands)	/	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Persuasion; opposition	Moving towards; moving against
40	Rhee, Y-C., Menifield, E. C., & Song, M. (2024)	Symbolic representation in policing: How officer characteristics shape police-suspect interactions	<i>Public Management Review</i> , 1-22.	Public Administration	Empirical (quantitative)	Police (USA)	2014-2017	/	Sociodemographic characteristics; image of administrations, agents and public encounters	Compliance; opposition	/
41	Salin, F. (2020)	Inégalités sociales et judiciaires aux prud'hommes : le cas des référés	<i>Droit et Société</i> , 106(3), 567-585.	Sociology	Empirical (qualitative)	Labour justice (France)	2017	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Compliance	/

42	Schijman, E. (2013)	Usages, pactes et « passes du droit ». L'accès au logement social à Buenos Aires	<i>Déviance et société</i> , 37(1), 51-65.	Sociology	Empirical (qualitative)	Social housing (Argentina)	2010-2011	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics; behavioral, attitudinal and emotional attributes	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Compliance; persuasion; opposition	Moving towards; moving against
43	Shwartz-Ziv, T., & Feldman (2025)	Between Institutional Loneliness and Visibility: Low-Income Families Navigating Housing Insecurity in Social Welfare Programs	<i>Social Policy & Administration</i> , 1-10.	Sociology; political science; public administration; development	Empirical (qualitative)	Social housing (Israel)	2021-2022	Sociodemographic characteristics	Sociodemographic characteristics; image of administrations, agents and public encounters	Compliance; persuasion	Moving towards; moving away; moving against
44	Siblot, Y. (2002)	Stigmatisation et intégration sociale au guichet d'une institution familière le bureau de poste d'un quartier populaire	<i>Sociétés Contemporaines</i> , 3, 79-99.	Sociology	Empirical (qualitative)	Postal services (France)	1999-2002	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Compliance; opposition; exit	Moving away; moving against
45	Siblot, Y. (2005a)	« Adapter » les services publics aux habitants des « quartiers difficiles » : Diagnostics misérabilistes et réformes libérales	<i>Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales</i> , 4, 70-87.	Sociology	Empirical (qualitative)	Postal, social and municipal services (France)	1999-2002	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Compliance; persuasion	Moving towards; moving away
46	Siblot, Y. (2005b)	Les rapports quotidiens des classes populaires aux administrations. Analyse d'un sens pratique du service public	<i>Sociétés Contemporaines</i> , 2, 85-103.	Sociology	Empirical (qualitative)	Postal, social and municipal services (France)	1999-2002	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Compliance; persuasion; opposition; exit	Moving towards; moving away; moving against
47	Siblot, Y. (2010)	Contraintes et ambivalences du travail d'accueil du public	<i>Informations Sociales</i> , 2, 102-110.	Sociology; political science	Empirical (qualitative)	Postal, social and municipal services (France)	1999-2002	Competencies, knowledge and capital; sociodemographic characteristics	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Compliance; opposition	Moving towards; moving away
48	Weller, J-M. (1990)	Sociologie d'une transaction : une caisse	<i>Sociétés Contemporaines</i>	Sociology	Empirical (qualitative)	Pension fund (France)	/	/	Competencies, knowledge and capital	Compliance; persuasion; opposition; exit	Moving towards; moving away; moving against

		de retraite et ses usagers	nes, 3(1), 81-94.								
49	Wilińska, M., & Búlow, P. H. (2020)	Emotion Ability – Practices of Affective Citizenship in The Work Rehabilitation Process	<i>Critical Policy Studies</i> , 14(1), 38-66.	Sociology; political science; public administration	Empirical (qualitative)	Welfare services (Sweden)	2013	Sociodemographic characteristics	/	Compliance; persuasion; opposition	Moving towards; moving away; moving against
50	Zhang, Y., & Wang, H. (2024)	Symbolic Bureaucratic Representation and Client Cooperation: Experimental Insights From Four Daily Public Service Scenarios in China	<i>Public Administration</i> , 1-28.	Sociology; political science; public administration	Empirical (quantitative)	Public services (China)	2023	/	Image of administrations, agents and public encounters	Compliance	/

*For the theoretical articles, we looked at the institutional affiliation of the first author.

Note: Given the focus of our literature review, we included information about frontline agents' discretionary practices when we could relate them to specific behaviors and attitudes from citizens. The manuscript presents the relevant relationships we identified.