ROMANIAN STREET LEVEL BUREAUCRACY: A DESCRIPTIVE FOUNDATION

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Abstract

Despite our relatively broad and robust understanding of street level bureaucracy in a Western context, this area of inquiry remains somewhat understudied in an Eastern European context. This is particularly problematic for Romania, where poor educational stock, weak accountability mechanism, and rather frail media make front line bureaucrats' behavior disproportionately critical to public service provision. This article partially fills this void and brings a much needed overview of street-level bureaucracy in Romania. Relying on recent survey data collected from 407 front line workers, the study covers four key public administration services (taxation, consumer, environmental, and labor protection) and street-level bureaucracy, describes demographics, values, work environment, and attitudes towards rules and citizens. It shows that Romanian front line workers are relatively willing to bend and break the rules if their organizational goals demand so, and that they enjoy important levels of discretion and work autonomy. These bureaucrats also depict high levels of organizational commitment, low levels of uncertainty tolerance, and high power distance. The article concludes with comments and implications for future research in policy implementation at the front lines.

Keywords: street-level bureaucracy, Romania, discretion, rule abidance, conformity, public sector motivation, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, goal ambiguity, organizational commitment.

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1. Introduction

Romanian civil servants function in a complex and changing environment. In the 29 years since the end of the communist regime, Romania has become a European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member state, has a functioning market economy, and is experiencing one of the highest rates of economic growth in the EU (World Bank, 2017). These positive economic and political developments are matched by enduring difficulties; Romania has one of the highest levels of corruption in Europe (Transparency International, 2015), among the lowest levels of trust in democratic institutions (Standard Eurobarometer, 2016) and a low level of government effectiveness (World Bank, 2017).

Romania's bureaucracy is still heavily politicized (Profiroiu, 2011) and it remains one of the least reformed parts of the society. In the aggregate, Romanians tend to have a high level of power distance (Hofstede, 2005; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Littrell and Lapadus, 2005), implying a lower willingness to voice against abuses, low educational stock (UNESCO, 2015), and high level of functional illiteracy (PISA, 2012). Traditional guardians against bureaucratic abuses, like media and civil society, are not sufficiently mature (Freedom House, 2015). These difficulties add to major deficiencies in administrative transparency as well as frequent regulatory changes, which do not allow public debate and adaptation to change.

With these factors in mind, civil servants' interaction with and perspectives on rules and policy implementation become fundamental for understanding public sector performance and democratic accountability. However, with very few exceptions, we know little about those Romanian public servants who potentially have the most significant impact on policy implementation: street-level bureaucrats (SLBs). Dorondel (2016) showed that SLBs distributing food as part of an EU aid program exercise a significant amount of discretion even in the face of significant regulatory burdens. Similarly, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016) highlighted the potential risks of legislative ambiguity in the construction industry in Romania, where public servants implementing policy enjoy substantial discretionary powers through lack of appropriate regulations and guidance.

Questions often discussed in Anglo-American literature remain unanswered, including those of civil servants' willingness to bend the rules (DeHart-Davis, 2009; Portillo, 2011; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2012), their job-related discretion (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003; Henderson and Pandey, 2013; Alpes and Spire, 2014), goal ambiguity (Evans and Harris, 2004), and nature of their working environment. To our knowledge, no coherent effort to understand Romanian street level bureaucrats exists.

This article provides a foundation for the understanding of SLBs in Romania in four main deconcentrated areas: taxation, consumer, environmental, and labor protection. We chose these domains because of their high level of discretion and potential for the use of coercive power, both raising challenges for policy implementation. The next section will discuss key concepts that have come to define literature on

street-level bureaucracy. Next, we will outline our data and methods, followed by a descriptive discussion of Romanian SLBs and considerations for future empirical research. This paper offers a unique view on Romanian street-level bureaucrats that can inform both practitioners and public administration scholars on the challenges of bureaucracy in the midst of ongoing reform.

2. Street level bureaucracy: key concepts

Street-level bureaucracy has been an important part of the academic conversation in public administration for more than three and a half decades (c.f., Lipsky, 1980). Emerging from this conversation is a focus on concepts of bureaucratic discretion, autonomy, perspectives on rules and rule abidance, the impact of political principals and, more recently, discussion of public service motivation and pro-social motivation. In this section we will highlight a sample of studies of street-level bureaucracy, with most emerging from a Western context.

Bureaucratic discretion has long been a focal point of public administration research (Finer, 1941; Friedrich, 1940), and has been especially central to considerations of decision-making latitude and the abilities of bureaucrats at the front lines of policy implementation (Lipsky, 1980). These bureaucrats are often charged with enacting complex policies in difficult environments with little oversight (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003; Riccucci, 2005; Prottas, 1978). Despite the attention these positions receive, it is impossible to write rules that provide sufficient depth to address all situations (Lipsky, 1980), thus allowing for some amount of administrative discretion at all levels of government service. Furthermore, actual perception of rules also play a role. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003, p. 155) observed that cops, teachers, and counselors 'first make normative judgments about offenders, kids, and clients and then apply, bend, or ignore rules and procedures to support the moral reasoning'. Similarly, while discussing rule abidance in the context of issues of race and ethnicity in the United States (US), Portillo (2011) shows that SLBs of color abide more by the rules because of fear of escalation. This reinforces DeHart-Davis's argument (2009) that bureaucratic compliance, along with technical design, is central for rule effectiveness.

While discretion and rule abidance are core concepts of SLB theory, their determinants are equally important. Braxton (1993 *apud* DeHart-Davis 2009, p. 904) saw goal ambiguity as a major cause for lower rule abidance, arguing that unclear goals disengage bureaucrats and may nudge them to deviate from rules and norms. Brockmann (2015, p. 1) takes this further, stating that complex and ambiguous working environments require SLBs to exercise discretion and thereby bend rules to perform their daily task. Goal ambiguity may also allow bureaucrats to pacify potentially conflicting goals (Matland, 1995) and rules abundance may, paradoxically, favor more discretion (Evans and Harris, 2004). In contrast, work burdens may force SLBs to switch the focus from client-service and prioritize among clients (Baviskar *apud* Tummers *et al.*, 2015), which reinforces Evans and Harris's idea that discretion is not inherently good or bad.

Following an interactionist approach (Shaver, 2010, p. 369), recent efforts also tackle psychological elements in understanding front line bureaucrats. Conformity, pro-social behavior, and public service motivation (PSM) are of particular interest, as direct and unambiguous oversight is almost impossible and intrinsic motives may play a key role in good governance and rule abidance (Tyler and Blader, 2000). While the latter two are both outwardly-focused, pro-social behavior appears to be conceptually different from PSM (Esteve *et al.*, 2016). Maynard Moody and Musheno (2003) show that PSM can increase client focus, while Shim, Park and Eom (2015) argue that it may lower turnover intentions and perception of red tape (also Scott and Pandey, 2005). At the same time, because PSM is inherently subjective, it may perpetuate SLB biases (Lipsky, 1980; Prendergast, 2007). In a study on border police, Guyer (2013) shows that SLB may be willing to engage in pro-social behavior even when their careers may be at risk. Brockmann (2015) suggests similar behavior, whilst Moynihan, Pandey and Wright (2012) show that pro-social behavior may make public managers more willing to use performance measurement tools. Furthermore, SLBs willingness to conform to authority and status quo may raise additional challenges, as it can perpetuate corruption (Ashforth and Anand, 2003; Lee-Chai and Bargh, 2001) and discrimination (Petersen and Dietz, 2000; Feagin and Eckberg, 1980), and favor the development of a professional culture that is resistant to change (Prenzler, 1997).

In turn, organizational culture often emerges as important for understanding SLB (Kelly, 1994; Sandfort, 2000; Riccucci, 2005). Studies have shown that judgment based on individually held moral beliefs, values, and cultural schemes influence bureaucrat's discretionary practices (Lipsky, 1980; Kingfisher, 1998; Hasenfeld, 2000; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003; Dubois, 2013). While conformity and other individual level variables can explain SLB behavior, group norms and values also play a role in how public service employees relate to rules and clients (Green, 2005). For former authoritarian administrations, power distance, as well as uncertainty avoidance, may be of particular interest, as hierarchical and undisputed execution of orders characterized state bureaucracies.

The behavior of front line bureaucrats in post-communist countries has been a focus of a limited amount of past research. Studying Russia and Poland, Berenson (2010) used reflections on state-citizen interactions that came in the form of tests of social welfare and employment offices, seeking to tease out the impact of broader structural and societal variables. Findings of this study indicated that, rather than seeing an expected difference between these countries, front line workers were generally able to satisfy the needs of clients (Berenson, 2010). Despite this finding of no difference, examining street-level bureaucracies with attention to other contexts remains important. Political considerations of SLBs have been influential in past studies, finding that cues from managers about political aspects of jobs can have an impact (May and Winter, 2007), as can considerations of perceived broader national interests on the part of front line workers (Alpes and Spire, 2014). The national context in which

street-level behavior occurs may be influential. As Rice (2012, p. 1040) notes, attention to both culture and institutions serves to '… conceptually [embed] individual caseworker actions in a wider web of economic, political, cultural, and social structures'. Though well developed in other regions of the world, our understanding of SLBs in Romania is limited. The next section describes our data collection efforts with SLBs in several distinct national- and county-level agencies in Romania.

3. Data and methods

The purpose of this study is to create a descriptive foundation for our understanding of street-level workers in national- and county-level public services in Romania. As our interests were in the perspectives and characteristics of individual public servants, we used a cross-sectional survey to gather data, posing questions on individual-level perspectives, traits, and behaviors.

The initial survey was drafted in English by all three authors and then translated into Romanian by the first and third authors. Affiliated researchers who are fluent in both English and Romanian then back-translated the survey from Romanian into English to ensure equivalence of meaning. Questions that emerged about the meaning or content of specific survey questions from the translation and back-translation process were discussed by all three authors until those questions were resolved. The survey was then pilot-tested with a number of Romanian public servants, and any practical questions regarding wording or clarity of meaning were addressed.

The final survey was distributed in both paper form and via an online survey platform. Paper surveys were mailed to 672 public servants in 168 organizations that included county-level offices for Territorial Labor Inspectorates (Inspectoratul Teritorial de Munca); County Commissions for Consumer Protection (Comisariatul Județean pentru Protecția Consumatorului); the National Environmental Protection Agency offices in all counties in Romania (Agenția Națională pentru Protecția Mediului), and the County Administrations for Public Finance (Administratia Judeteana a Finantelor Publice).

Links for the web-based surveys were sent in a series of emails (pre-notification, survey link, and two reminders) over a two-week period to the same four types of organizations. Official email addresses for these organizations were culled from official websites and were assembled into a database. We asked in the email introduction to each organization that the single point of contact to forward the survey link to subordinates that work in front line positions. The absence of a formalized list of employees for these four types of organizations does not allow for the calculation of a response rate. In total, we collected 407 responses from both the paper- and web-based surveys.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic characteristics

Though our sampling methods do not allow for the creation of a representative sample of Romanian SLBs, it is important to understand the general characteristics of these public servants (see Table 1) as a precursor to the examination of other concepts. Of all of our survey respondents, nearly three quarters were women. The median age for respondents was 47, and less than a fifth of those completing the survey indicated that they are below 40 years of age. Romanian SLBs are highly educated, with approximately two-thirds holding at least a master's degree. Almost half have an annual income of more than 30,000 RON (over 6,600 Euro). Just over 67% are union members, and a small proportion, approximately 2%, previously served in the military.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of Romanian street-level bureaucrats

	N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Min.	Max
Leadership	402	0.25	0.00	0		0	1
Years on this job	388	10.03	10.00	10	5.99	0	26
Organizational tenure	394	15.78	16.00	16	6.31	0	35
Women	398	0.74	0.00	0		0	2
Age	378	46.92	47.00	47	7.57	19	65
Last graduated school	402	6.41	7.00	7	0.96	3	8
Income	386	3.75	4,00	5	1.29	1	5
Union membership (Yes)	395	0.67	1.00	1		0	1
Former member of the military (Yes)	386	0.02	0.00	0		0	1

Most respondents have a long history in their current organization, joining the institution on average 16 years prior to their survey response; less than 20% joined 10 or fewer years prior to responding. Similarly, most respondents have held the same job for several years, with 75% occupying the same position for at least five years. Most respondents hold non-executive positions. Thus, the average Romanian SLB responding to this survey is a middle aged female with high experience in the public sector (over 10 years) but little experience in other sectors, enjoying high job stability in a non-executive position with an income that is slightly above the national average. The general context of work for these SLBs is also important, and provides a basis for understanding more targeted facets of front line work.

4.2. Work-related attitudes

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for several work-related attitudinal scales, including satisfaction, autonomy, and commitment, and includes a comparative analysis of executive versus non-executive positions using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests. Romanian SLBs are broadly satisfied with their current job (hereafter, variable names appear in parentheses in italicized text, in this case, Satisfaction),

particularly those in managerial positions. Civil servants show high levels of organizational commitment (Commitment 1), with a high sense of collegial duty (Commitment 2) and organizational indebtedness (Commitment 3). These feelings are moderately stronger for executives, with ANOVA tests indicating that the differences are statistically significant for three of the four variables that measure organizational commitment. Approximately 53% of respondents believe that civil servants like them face considerable administrative burden (Administrative Burden), and executives strongly share this belief.

While the score is indeed high, they are not as high as expected based on previous rankings of administrative burden (World Bank, 2017), as well as anecdotal evidence that fueled recent efforts to cut red tape. The explanation may reside in the fact that, while civil servants have to pursue multiple and complex objectives, they are rarely contradictory (see Table 3).

Furthermore, while respondents agree that some rules are technically challenging (Rule Complexity 1) – particularly at executive level – only 49% of the respondents believe that this affects their daily work (Rule Complexity 2). Thus, Romanian civil servants face diverse objectives (Goal Ambiguity 1) and have to implement technically complex procedures, but there is less ambiguity: objectives are rarely contradictory (Goal Ambiguity 2) and technicalities general do not stand in the civil servants' way as they engage in the service provision.

Rules may objectively be contradictory and technically complex, but how administrators relate to them depends on other elements as well. Our data show that SLBs enjoy high level of work autonomy (Autonomy index), particularly at executive level.

4.3. Culture and administration

We used the 'Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness' (GLOBE) model (House *et al.*, 2004; Țiclău and Hințea, 2016) to measure both power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Power distance remains rather high in Romanian local administrations, with only a third of respondents (32.9%) declaring that voicing is expected from the employee; executives scoring slightly higher (38.2%) (Table 4a). Furthermore, less than a third (29.9%) feel that, at present, influence is based on merit (abilities and skills) and not on position. Moving to values (the ideal situation), there is an overall increase of around 20% of those who wish less power distance: the number of SLBs wishing more voicing opportunity almost doubles to 54.4% over both categories of respondents (executives and non-executives). This trend continues with respect to source of influence, with meritocracy seen as more desirable by 5% of SLBs, 14% more executives than non-executives seeing this as ideal.

Table 2: Work-related attitudes for Romanian street-level bureaucrats

		All Respondents						Non-Executive			Executive			ANOVA
		N	Mean	Mode	SD	Min	Max	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD	
Satisfaction	In general, I am satisfied with my current position.	401	4.90	5	0.98	1	6	4.82	294	1.02	5.14	102	0.80	**
Autonomy 1	I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.	396	4.52	5	1.08	1	6	4.45	293	1.10	4.74	99	1.02	*
Autonomy 2	I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.	394	4.43	5	1.24	1	6	4.38	290	1.29	4.67	99	1.03	*
Autonomy 3	I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.	398	4.27	5	1.27	1	6	4.21	295	1.31	4.48	98	1.13	*
	Autonomy index	387	4.40		1.09	1	6	4.33	289	1.12	4.62	98	0.97	
Commitment 1	This organization deserves my loyalty.	406	5.98	7	1.27	1	7	5.95	299	1.26	6.03	102	1.35	
Commitment 2	I would not leave my organization right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it.	405	4.82	6	1.70	1	7	4.63	298	1.69	5.37	102	1.61	***
Commitment 3	I owe a great deal to my organization.	406	4.98	6	1.64	1	7	4.81	299	1.65	5.45	102	1.53	**
Commitment 4	It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to.	405	4.64	4	1.89	1	7	4.50	298	1.86	5,09	102	1.88	**
	Commitment index	400	5.10		1.20	1	7	4.97	298	1.18	5.48	102	1.18	***

Note: *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05

Table 3: Goal ambiguity, rule complexity, and administrative burden in Romanian public services

	Objectives are:	All						Non-Executive			Executive			ANOVA
		N	Mean	Mode	SD	Min	Max	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD	
Goal Ambiguity 1	Extremely numerous	399	4.49	5	1.19	1	6	4.43	295	1.18	4.68	99	1.21	
Goal Ambiguity 2	Contradictory in some aspects	400	3.33	2	1.38	1	6	3.25	295	1.38	3.52	100	1.42	
Goal Ambiguity 3	Extremely complex overall	402	4.47	5	1.21	1	6	4.39	296	1.24	4.70	101	113	*
	Goal Ambiguity index	**391**	**4.09**		**0.99**	**1**	**6**	**4.02**	**292**	**0.99**	**4.29**	**99**	**0.95**	*
Administrative Burden	There is a significant amount of administrative burden on officials like me.	402	3.48	4	1.09	1	5	3.40	298	1.12	3.72	99	1.03	*
Rule Complexity 1	How technically complex are the rules that you use for your job?	388	3.77	4	.88	1	5	3.68	290	0.92	4.05	94	0.68	***
Rule Complexity 2	Daily rule application is made difficult because of technical complexity.	388	3.21	3	1.02	1	5	3.15	290	1.00	3.38	93	1.07	
	Rule Complexity average	**382**	**3.48**		**0.79**	**1**	**5**	**3.41**	**290**	**0.80**	**3.70**	**92**	**0.70**	**

Note: *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05

Table 4a: Power distance scores for Romanian street-level bureaucrats

	All Respondents			Non-Executives		Executives	
	Agree (%)	*Disagree (%)*	*Mean*	*Agree (%)*	*Disagree (%)*	*Agree (%)*	*Disagree (%)*
Current Practices							
In this organization, subordinates are expected to*:*							
1) Obey their boss without question	32.9	44.2	4.33	30.7	48.5	38.2	34.3
7) Question their boss when in disagreement							
In this organization, a person's influence is based primarily on:							
1) One's ability and contribution to the organization	29.9	48.9	4.41	27.2	50.7	39.2	43.1
7) The authority of one's position							
Ideal situation							
In this organization, subordinates should:							
1) Obey their boss without question	54.4	25.7	3.30	54.6	24.5	53.6	17.8
7) Question their boss when in disagreement							
In this organization, a person's influence should be based primarily on:							
1) One's ability and contribution to the organization	55.0	25.2	3.20	51.6	28.4	64.4	15.9
7) The authority of one's position							

Note: Scale = 1–7; low score = lower power distance; high score = high power distance

Compared with the GLOBE results, scores are relatively similar with sensibly higher power distance levels for current practices (compared to both GLOBE average and CEE average), and there is a more emphasized need for less power distance in an ideal situation (see Table 4b).

Table 4b: Comparison of power distance scores for Romanian street-level bureaucrats and GLOBE Study

		Romanian SLBs	GLOBE (Overall Score)	GLOBE Central Eastern Europe (CEE) Score
Power Distance (mean score)	**Current Practices**	4.37	4.01	4.22
	Ideal Values	3.25	3.56	3.74

This is in line with previous research, as overall power distance scores at society level tend to influence organizational values (Shane, Venkataraman and MacMillan, 1995; Hayes and Prakasam, 1989; Tata and Prasad, 1992). Respondents who report

higher levels of power distance at societal level tend to also report higher practices of power distance in their organization (House *et al.*, 2004, p. 542), with Romania registering quite high scores on this item in a recent survey (90 out of 100 on power distance, c.f., Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010).

In terms of uncertainty avoidance, approximately half of respondents agree that, at organizational level, there is a preference for order and continuity, even at the expense of innovation and experimentation (see Table 4c). Interestingly, there was no difference between non-executive positions and executive positions. Regarding job requirements and expectations, approximately 69% agreed that job requirements and instructions are clearly spelled out so they know what they are expected to do, and a lower proportion (16.9%) disagreed. These proportions shifted a bit for executives, where a lower proportion (63.8%) agreed and a more substantial proportion (19.6%) disagreed.

Agreement with uncertainty avoidance increases to 84% overall when respondents are asked about what they would prefer ('ideal values'), although there is a reverse effect regarding order and consistency, with a drop to only 35% preferring this at the expense of innovation or possibility to experiment. We see a desire for less orderliness, which would offer more possibility of innovation, experimentation (or higher discretion) in general, but should not translate to individual job requirements, instructions, expectations, with more coherence and clarity.

Table 4c: Uncertainty avoidance among Romanian street-level bureaucrats

	All Respondents			Non-Executives		Executives	
	Agree (%)	*Disagree (%)*	*Mean*	*Agree (%)*	*Disagree (%)*	*Agree (%)*	*Disagree (%)*
Current Practices							
In this organization, orderliness and consistency are stressed, even at the expense of experimentation and innovation.	49.6	21.9	4.46	49.0	19.3	50.9	29.4
In this organization, job requirements and instructions are spelled out in detail so employees know what they are expected to do.	69.1	16.9	5.04	71.0	15.9	63.8	19.6
Ideal Values							
In this organization, orderliness and consistency should be stressed, even at the expense of experimentation and innovation.	35.2	41.2	3.82	36.1	39.8	32.3	45.1
In this organization, job requirements and instructions should be spelled out in detail so employees know what they are expected to do.	84.0	6.7	5.76	84.7	5.6	82.3	9.9

Note: Scale = 1–7; low score = high uncertainty; high score = low uncertainty

One potential explanation for this apparent paradox could be the effects of legislative instability coupled with a strong legalistic culture (OECD, 2016) which puts SLBs in an uncomfortable position where they have to work with changing regulations, a situation in which more autonomy and discretion may be their coping mechanism.

4.4. Rule abidance and discretion

Romanian civil servants tend to abide the rules, even when they dislike them (Rule Abidance 1). This is less because of the fear of being caught (Rule Abidance 2), as because of a genuine belief that rules exist with a purpose (Rule Abidance 7). While less than half agree that they would find a way around a pointless rule (Rule Abidance 6), they are more willing to bend the rule if it improves the organizational performance (75%, Rule Abidance 4) than when it simply makes their work easier (47%, Rule Abidance 8), suggesting that rule abidance is weaker when it comes to organizational goals than when it comes to individual work. Importantly, they only marginally believe that their work would be more effective with fewer rules and procedures, with 45% disagreeing with this statement. In essence this suggests that rules are rarely a problem per se, and thus may not need bending or breaking. The answers to the questions on discretionary authority support this argument (see below).

Interestingly, in almost all cases there is a difference between executive and non-executive respondents. Executives agree more often that employees are better off if the organization provides a comprehensive set of rules to follow (Rule Abidance 3); they tend to agree less often that the only thing wrong with breaking the rules is being caught, and they are more willing to bend the rules if this improves the organizational effectiveness. They are less willing though to find a way around a rule they find inefficient, and are less willing to break a rule for their own work effectiveness. Last, they adhere more strongly to the idea that rules are there for a purpose. There is an obvious preference for guidance on the management's side, and a stronger emphasis on organizational interests, than on personal beliefs and priorities. The differences, though statistically significant, are modest.

Aligned with rule abidance is discretionary authority; respondents rarely felt that procedures constrain their work (Discretion 3), even though these are rather strict (Discretion 4). Surprisingly, respondents agreed that they have freedom in deciding how to implement these procedures (Discretion 1), and that they can answer the citizen's needs (Discretion 2), even though this is not always fully possible (Discretion 5). Less than a quarter feel that when applying norms and procedures they cannot make their own judgments about them (Discretion 6).

Last, Romanian SLBs score high on PSM and pro-social behavior (see Table 7). They overwhelmingly agree that meaningful public service is very important (PSM1), with 2/3 agreeing that they are willing to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society (PSM5). Interestingly, executives tend to score higher on PSM than non-executives. We noticed similar results also for pro-social behavior; while SLB show a high level of pro-social behavior, executives tend to do this more extensively.

Table 5: Rule abidance among Romanian street-level bureaucrats

	All						Non-Executive			Executive			ANOVA
	N	Mean	Mode	SD	Min	Max	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD	
Rule Abidance 1 Even if I dislike a rule, I usually obey it.	406	3.19	3	0.596	1	4	3.19	299	0.60	3.20	102	0.55	
Rule Abidance 2 Often, the only thing wrong with breaking rules is getting caught.	398	1.61	1	0.735	1	4	1.65	292	0.75	1.47	101	0.66	*
Rule Abidance 3 Employees are better off when the organization provides a complete set of rules to be followed.	403	3.14	3	0.712	1	4	3.06	296	0.73	3.37	102	0.63	***
Rule Abidance 4 I will bend a rule if it helps me to improve my organization.	401	2.82	3	0.722	1	4	2.78	295	0.71	2.95	101	0.74	*
Rule Abidance 5 I could be more effective in my job if there were fewer policies and procedures.	404	2.58	3	0.846	1	4	2.65	297	0.82	2.37	102	0.88	**
Rule Abidance 6 If I think a rule is pointless, I will find a way around it.	405	2.30	2	0.814	1	4	2.37	298	0.82	2.10	102	0.76	**
Rule Abidance 7 I figure that rules are there for a purpose.	403	3.33	3	0.589	1	4	3.29	299	0.61	3.44	99	0.52	*
Rule Abidance 8 I will bend a rule if it makes my job easier.	405	2.37	3	0.836	1	4	2.42	298	0.85	2.23	102	0.77	*
Rule Abidance Index	**383**	**2.86**		**0.38**	**1.75**	**4**	**2.83**	**286**	**0.37**	**2.98**	**97**	**0.37**	*******

Note: *** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05

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Table 6: Discretion / policy alienation among Romanian street-level bureaucrats

	All						Non-Executive			Executive		
	N	Mean	Mode	SD	Min	Max	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD
Discretion 1	I have freedom to decide how to use rules and policies.	403	3.45	4	1.051	1	5	3.42	298	1.09	3.56	100	0.92
Discretion 2	While working with rules and policies, I can be in keeping with the client's needs.	405	4.10	4	0.713	1	5	4.12	299	0.71	4.04	101	0.72
Discretion 3	Working with rules and policies feels like a harness in which I cannot easily move.	403	2.81	3	0.991	1	5	2.79	297	0.97	2.87	101	1.06
Discretion 4	When I work with the rules and policies, I have to adhere to tight procedures.	405	4.03	4	0.897	1	5	3.99	299	0.94	4.14	101	0.75
Discretion 5	While working with the rules and policies, I cannot sufficiently tailor them to the needs of my clients.	401	3.20	4	1.099	1	5	3.15	296	1.12	3.37	100	1.05
Discretion 6	While working with the rules and policies, I can make my own judgments.	405	3.31	4	1.112	1	5	3.33	300	1.12	3.27	100	1.06
Discretion index		**388**	**3.13**		**0.55**	**1.33**	**5**	**3.14**	**289**	**0.54**	**3.08**	**99**	**0.56**

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; ANOVA results column not provided here as means were not statistically significantly different across executive and non-executive groups

Table 7: Public service and pro-social motivation among Romanian street-level bureaucrats

		All						Non-Executive			Executive			ANOVA
		N	Mean	Mode	SD	Min	Max	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD	
PSM 1	Meaningful public service is very important to me.	404	5.46	6	0.84	1	6	5.43	297	0.87	5.61	102	0.60	
PSM 2	I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another.	399	5.02	5	0.98	1	6	4.95	294	1.02	5.20	101	0.86	*
PSM 3	Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements.	401	4.28	5	1.26	1	6	4.22	295	1.30	4.49	101	1.13	
PSM 4	I am not afraid to go to bat for the rights of others even if it means I will be ridiculed.	399	4.10	5	1.33	1	6	3.98	293	1.37	4.41	101	1.18	**
PSM 5	I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.	397	3.82	4	1.33	1	6	3.75	292	1.36	4.04	100	1.21	0.59
	PSM Index	**395**	**4.53**	**5.2**	**0.88**	**1**	**6**	**4.46**	**291**	**0.92**	**4.74**	**100**	**0.74**	****
	Why are you motivated to do your work?	N	Mean	Mode	SD	Min	Max	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD	
Pro-social 1	Because I care about benefitting others through my work.	406	4.71	6	1.81	1	7	4.67	299	1.81	4.86	102	1.82	
Pro-social 2	Because I want to have a positive impact on others.	406	5.81	6	1.11	1	7	5.74	299	1.15	6.04	102	0.94	*
Pro-social 3	Because it is important to me to do good for others through my work.	406	6.11	6	0.92	1	7	6.12	299	0.94	6.12	102	0.81	
Pro-social 4	Because I enjoy the work itself.	403	6.16	7	0.97	1	7	6.08	297	1.00	6.42	101	0.74	**
	Aggregated Pro-social	**403**	**5.70**	**6**	**0.87**	**1**	**7**	**5.65**	**297**	**0.89**	**5.86**	**101**	**0.76**	*****

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

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4.5. Correlations

Table 8 presents correlations for all indices and demographic variables discussed here. We found a number of statistically significant correlations among the variables that are important for understanding SLBs in Romania. A number of these correlations are related to general demographic variables, including a moderate and positive correlations between holding an executive position and income (0.399), years in the current position and years in the organization (0.382), and respondent's age and years in the organization (0.370), all of which make intuitive sense.

Among work-related variables, job satisfaction and general work autonomy (0.463), and job satisfaction and organizational commitment (0.393) are the most noticeable correlations. These also make intuitive sense in that individuals with more autonomy are likely satisfied, and that SLBs that are more satisfied with their services are more likely to be committed to their organization. A number of positive and moderate correlations were evident among variables related to discretion, rules, and goals, including discretion and work-related autonomy (0.399), administrative burden and goal ambiguity (0.331), rule complexity and goal ambiguity (0.422), and rule complexity and administrative burden (0.394). The correlation between autonomy and discretion, conceptually similar, makes sense in that general work autonomy and rule-related discretionary abilities are likely to occur in a specific work context. Likewise, as rules become more complex, the perceived burden created by those rules may increase and may create additional ambiguity of goals. Related to this, we found negative, moderate, and statistically significant correlations between discretion and administrative burden (-0.337), and discretion and rule complexity (-0.314). Both make sense given that reduced weight of administrative procedures or complexity of rules may result in an increase in the amount of discretion that a SLB might wield. Finally, we found moderate correlations between individuals' perceptions of uncertainty avoidance in their organization, and their idealized version of uncertainty avoidance (0.400), and between PSM and pro-social motivation (0.426). Both also make sense in this population given the conceptual linkages between these variables.

5. Discussion and limitations

Our data reveal several important facts about Romanian street-level bureaucrats. First, they enjoy significant levels of discretion, particularly when it comes to keeping with the client's needs, even though their work objectives are numerous and sometimes complex. This also puts into perspective the issue of administrative burden: as long as a significant part of street-level bureaucrats (40%) are willing to bend the rules for work reasons, over-regulation is not necessarily a challenge to the administrator's work; issuing more rules will not necessarily improve service delivery. Second, discretion and organizationally-motivated rule bending may contribute to a high sense of purpose and mission. This presents both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, a genuine concern for the public interest may act as self-regulatory mechanism,

Table 8: Correlations for all study indices

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
1. Leadership	1.00																						
2. Years in Pos.	-0.173***	1.00																					
3. Org. Tenure	0.196***	0.382***	1.00																				
4. Gender	0.153***	-0.148**	-.057	1.00																			
5. Age	0.184***	0.203***	0.370***	0.016	1.00																		
6. Education	0.251***	-0.061	0.109	0.05	-0.086	1.00																	
7. Income	0.399***	-0.051	0.283***	0.161**	0.178***	0.291***	1.00																
8. Union Member	-0.037	0.01	0.152**	0.047	-0.006	0.039	0.151**	1.00															
9. Former Military	0.039	-0.064	-0.128	0.172***	0.04	-0.024	0.057	-0.016	1.00														
10. Satisfaction	0.141**	-0.103*	0.089	0.047	0.092	0.06	0.206***	0.032	-0.007	1.00													
11. Autonomy	0.119*	-0.037	0.141*	0.04	0.145**	0.101*	0.121*	-0.051	-0.006	0.463***	1.00												
12. Commitment	0.186***	0.001	0.161**	0.088	0.107	0.018	0.266***	0.03	0.054	0.393***	0.238***	1.00											
13. Goal Ambig.	0.117	0.076	0.052	0.121*	0.110*	-0.028	0.044	0.05	-0.005	-0.076	-0.101*	0.048	1.00										
14. Admin. Burden	0.124*	0.046	0.064	0.121*	0.057	0.145**	0.023	0.026	0.002	-0.218***	-0.141**	-0.056	0.331***	1.00									
15. Rule Complex.	0.158**	0.025	0.051	0.082	0.126*	0.07	0.109	0.068	0.059	-0.039	-0.063	0.119*	0.422***	0.394***	1.00								
16. Rule Abid.	0.178***	-0.029	0.017	-0.04	-0.071	-0.002	0.226***	0.033	-0.017	0.160**	0.094	0.117	-0.113*	-0.231***	-0.188***	1.00							
17. Discretion	-0.05	-0.017	0.033	-0.095	-0.05	0.006	-0.001	-0.063	0.015	0.200***	0.399***	0.108*	-0.193***	-0.337***	-0.314***	0.077	1.00						
18. PD Current	-0.134**	0.094	-0.002	0.003	0.053	-0.011	-0.054	0.062	0.007	-0.179***	-0.272***	-0.233***	0.161**	0.155**	-0.004	-0.083	-0.267***	1.00					
19. PD Ideal	-0.145**	0.064	0.041	-0.007	-0.013	-0.084	0.025	0.035	0.003	0.091	0.019	0.133**	-0.075	-0.158**	-0.145**	0.108*	0.029	0.124*	1.00				
20. UA Current	-0.066	-0.063	0.087	0.041	0.009	-0.043	0.095	0.081	0.03	0.243***	0.06	0.267***	0.093	-0.016	0.09	0.057	0.013	0.042	0.157**	1.00			
21. UA Ideal	-0.021	0.06	0.117*	0.05	0.055	-0.033	0.116*	0.06	-0.014	0.092	0.105*	0.202***	0.191***	0.047	0.100*	0.021	0.013	0.087	0.162***	0.400***	1.00		
22. Pro-social	0.106*	-0.054	0.09	-0.069	-0.029	0.058	0.023	-0.022	-0.042	0.245***	0.186***	0.259***	0.189***	0.004	0.055	0.081	0.116*	-0.094	-0.088	0.188***	0.151**	1.00	
23. PSM	0.137*	-0.067	0.134**	0.126*	0.112*	0.044	0.145**	0.033	-0.05	0.277***	0.280***	0.327***	0.081	0.005	0.096	0.168**	0.097	-0.151**	0.065	0.244***	0.152***	0.426***	1.00

but may also raise questions about fairness and opportunity. Faced with discretion and a willingness to bend the rules, an important share of SLBs may execute their own – or organizational – normative interpretation of what is just and should be done. Since the surveyed agencies have important coercive powers, this can critically affect their clients. This also raises questions about accountability, and puts a premium on the SLB values and beliefs. Our study has not taken this into consideration, and to our knowledge no systematic efforts to map civil service values in Romania exist, but our preliminary results show the potentially critical role they play in the daily work of public administrators.

Third, Romanian SLBs are very much acclimated to organizational life. They have a long history in the organization and on the job, and they depict a fairly high level of organizational commitment and satisfaction. While the correlation was not statistically significant, our preliminary analysis shows that respondents with a higher organizational tenure tend to report higher willingness to break the rules in order to reach organizational objectives. Reform programs should take this into consideration, particularly if unitary rule implementation is a government goal.

Fourth, there is an obvious difference between executive and non-executive SLBs on most dimensions, with sometimes paradoxical results. Executives prefer more merit-based than position-based organizational influence. Predictably, they enjoy a higher level of work satisfaction, they are more committed, and enjoy more work autonomy. They are also more willing to bend the rules to reach organizational goals, suggesting that SLB policies should consider leadership roles when designing interventions or trainings for professional development (Stănică, 2012).

Finally, SLBs in Romania work in a high power distance environment with significant levels of ambiguity and uncertainty, which may lead to a mixed approach in adopting coping mechanisms. While we see a preference for less power distance across the board (more opportunities to voice concerns but also a preference for meritocracy), with respect to uncertainty avoidance, the preference is for more clarity in job requirements and expectation, and more discretion in applying policy. A number of limitations of this study are evident.

Our goal in this paper is to paint a descriptive picture of street-level bureaucracy in Romania. Though our use of cross-sectional data does not allow us to make causal inferences, our descriptive purpose here is well suited to the collection of data at a single point in time. Future research on SLBs that emerges from this study should employ methods and data collection techniques that are more robust and study appropriate, including longitudinal data that may allow for conclusions about causality.

Additionally, our data collection methods resulted in a non-representative sample. This is primarily due to the lack of a single unified sampling frame of front line workers in the fragmented national and sub-national organizations in which we collected the data. Given the exploratory nature of this research we feel these limitations are acceptable.

6. Conclusion

This descriptive analysis is not intended to fully explain the roles or functions of SLBs in Romania, nor is it intended to be an exhaustive analysis of the characteristics of street-level work. It does, however, bring a unique 'birds-eye view' of the phenomenon in four key areas of central government responsibility. It highlights a client-centric component of public service with potential vulnerability to organizational and individual biases. It suggests that any government reform effort should consider the human side of the policy implementation. Future research should explore these concepts more fully, which will inform potential avenues of future research and government reform that will contribute constructively to improving public service delivery.

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