

Distributive Justice and Reference Points

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DFG Research Group FOR 2104 - Need-Based Justice and Distribution Procedures





A Tale of Two Working Papers

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Weiss et al. 2017

When the Poorest Are Neglected A Vignette Experiment on Need-Based Distributive Justice

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Abstract: We examine the sole of used nationable in non-comparative justice or along about read-measured with quark. An assumative approaches, we do now of distinctions, parks strained, and sufficient strainism. Using a superior superiorment, we show that a next constant mercane the prevalence of pixels experiment, we show that a next constant increases the prevalence of pixels are also also that is not a refer to the pixels of the pixels of the straining and the straining of the pixels of the straining and the straining of the pixels of the straining and the straining of the s

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Bauer et al. 2023



Study

- vignette study
- two treatments (between-subjects)
- two tasks (within-subject)
- n = 116
- WiSo experimental laboratory at the University of Hamburg, 2016
- role of need satisfaction in non-comparative justice ratings about endowments
- justice evaluation function (JEF) as a quantitative measurement of justice evaluations



Vignette (1/2)

Please imagine the following:

In the region of Bergtal, a new village is going to be established. It is the task of the Public Housing Association of Bergtal to build housing. All households in this region want to live in the largest living space possible. The residents of the region have collectively decided on a minimum amount of living space, under which living a decent life in this community is not possible. Between the households in the region, there are no noteworthy differences and the minimum amounts are the same for each household: Each household should have 1000 regional—i.e., common to the region—area units of living space in order to be able to live a decent life. To have a living space with the equivalent area means for a household to live in close quarters, but it will be just enough to lead a decent life.



Vignette (2/2)

There are enough means to be able to build up to 2000 regional area units of living space for each household. The Regional Parliament decides how much living space will actually be built for the residents of the new village. The decision has otherwise no noteworthy consequences. For the construction of living space, no additional area would be consumed. The new village will be built in the area of an old village that was abandoned after a fire destroyed the houses.

In its decision, the Regional Parliament wants to take into account how impartial people—like you—judge the justice of different scenarios. Your task is, therefore, to indicate for each scenario how just you hold the distribution of living space to be.



Global Rating Task (1/2)

The following scenarios differ in how much living space shall be built for each household according to the decision of the Regional Parliament.

Please indicate for each following distribution how just you regard it to be. 100 percent means that you judge the distribution to be completely just. Percentages close to 100 percent mean that you judge the distribution to be almost completely just. Percentages far from 100 percent mean that you judge the distribution to be significantly less just.

Please familiarize yourself now with each of the given distributions before answering the questions.



Global Rating Task (2/2)





Relative Rating Task (1/2)

On the coming pages, we will present to you each time two differing scenarios. We will ask you furthermore to indicate on a scale from 1 (equally just or unjust) to 11 (much more just) how just you regard each scenario compared to the other one to be.



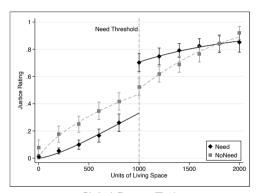
Relative Rating Task (2/2)







Results (1/3)



Global Rating Task



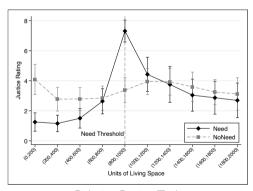
Results (2/3)

| | Need | | NoNeed | |
|------------------------------|------|-----------|--------|-----------|
| Hump-Shaped | 8 | (15.38%) | 2 | (3.51%) |
| Binary | 4 | (7.69%) | 5 | (8.77%) |
| Flat at/above Need Threshold | 7 | (13.46%) | 1 | (1.75%) |
| Zero below Need Threshold | 15 | (28.85%) | 5 | (8.77%) |
| Increasing | 17 | (32.69%) | 36 | (63.16%) |
| Other | 1 | (1.92%) | 8 | (14.04%) |
| | 52 | (100.00%) | 57 | (100.00%) |

Global Rating Task



Results (3/3)



Relative Rating Task



Some Shortcomings

- small and homogeneous sample
- no non-normative reference point as control treatment
- no separate presentation of scenarios





Vignette (1/2)

Please imagine the following:

The Müller family has a certain need for living space. That means they require an apartment with a specific number of square meters in order to live in decency. If they receive exactly this number of square meters, their need for living space is exactly met. If they receive less, their need is underfulfilled. If they receive more, their need is overfulfilled. The Müller family requires 100 square meters. On the next page, we will show you various scenarios in which the actual size of the apartment they receive differs.



Vignette (2/2)

Please evaluate how well the number of square meters fulfil the Müller family's need in each case [how just the number of square meters is in regard to the Müller family's need in each case]. You can do this by providing a number, 0 indicate that their need is exactly fulfilled Ithat they receive a just amount]. Negative values indicate that their need is underfulfilled [that they receive less than would be just]. Positive values indicate that their need is overfulfilled [that they receive more than would be just.]. The more strongly the need is under- or overfulfilled [the allocation deviates from what is fair], the higher the value should be. Please base your judgments on your own personal assessment. There are no right or wrong answers.



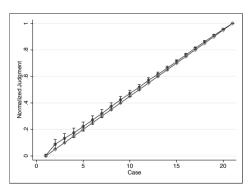
Task



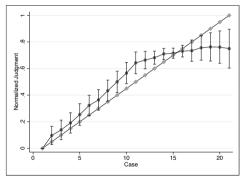
Relative Rating Task



Results



Non-Normative Formulation (n = 74)



Normative Formulation (n = 24)



3 Some Ideas



3 Some Ideas

Takeaway Points

- presence of a need-based reference point alters the sense of what is fair (Weiss et al. 2017, Bauer et al. 2023)
- not merely the existence of a reference point matters—but its normative framing (pilot study)



3 Some Ideas

Potential Directions for Future Research

- How do reference points affect evaluations of distributive justice? (descriptive)
 - various (isolated) (non)normative reference points
 - multiple (competing) (non)normative reference points
- What is the cognitive nature of such evaluations? (explanatory)
 - (in)consistencies of evaluations
 - intuitive evaluations versus evaluations with reflective interventions
 - evaluations under time pressure, cognitive load, or distraction (dual process)
 - cross-population or cross-cultural influences



References

Bauer, Alexander Max, Adele Diederich, Stefan Traub, and Arne Robert Weiss (2023): "Thinking About Need. A Vignette Experiment on Need-Based Distributive Justice," SSRN Working Paper 4503209. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4503209

Weiss, Arne Robert, Alexander Max Bauer, and Stefan Traub (2017): "Needs as Reference Points. When Marginal Gains to the Poor do not Matter," FOR 2104 Working Paper 2017-13.

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