

Difference in attitudes about inequality by academic discipline

Concept note

Joe Brew*^{†‡} Peter Lanjouw^{‡§}

Study summary

We will measure attitudes about inequality among professors of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam through a brief survey. We will analyze results with an aim of detecting differences in attitude by academic discipline, experience, and place of origin.

Rationale

People’s attitudes regarding inequality contribute to the formation of policies which affect inequality (at least in democratic societies). These attitudes, in turn, are partially formed in university classrooms. Understanding the general landscape of attitudes about inequality among university professors - as well as the extent to which academic discipline, experience and place of origin affect those attitudes - can inform policy discourse, shed light on the intellectual tension between disciplines, and help to better understand the role university studies may have in affecting attitudes.

Methods

In December 2017, we will email all currently active Vrije Universiteit (VU) professors with an invitation to participate in a short survey. We will collect two kinds of information: (i) data pertaining to the participant (age, gender, year of PhD, academic discipline), and (ii) data pertaining to the participants’ attitude regarding inequality. The latter will be assessed via 5 brief yes/no questions which attempt to assess the participants’ tolerance for redistributive policy as a function of inefficiency using the paradigm of Okun’s “leaky bucket” (Lambert 1988) (Pirtilla and Uusitalo 2010).

Knowledge dissemination and transparency

The raw data will be made publicly available so that other researchers can query it. Participants will be informed that results are not anonymous. All analysis code and procedures will be made publicly available so as to facilitate reproducibility and ensure transparency.

*Barcelona Institute for Global Health: c/ Rosselló, 132, 5è 2a. 08036, Barcelona, Spain

[†]University of Amsterdam: REC E, Roetersstraat 11, Amsterdam, Netherlands

[‡]Barcelona Institute for Global Health: c/ Rosselló, 132, 5è 2a. 08036, Barcelona, Spain

[§]VU University Amsterdam: De Boelelaan 1105, 1081 HV Amsterdam, Netherlands

Timeline

- November 23 - November 30, 2017: Refinement of this concept note; writing of survey questions.
- December 1 - December 5, 2017: Invitation to participate in survey sent to all professors.
- December 10, 2017: Survey closes.
- December 11 - December 31st, 2017: Data analysis.
- January 1 - January 30, 2018: Article writing.
- January 31, 2017: Article submitted for publication.

Roles

- **Brew** will handle technical aspects, write code for survey recruitment, manage and clean data, and write first draft of paper.
- **Lanjouw** will handle subject matter aspects, provide input for survey questions, supervise analysis, and review and contribute to paper.
- Authorship order will be determined by the tossing of a 1979 Dutch Guilder.

Example survey

Section 1: Participant details

- What is your name?
- What is your gender?
- What year were you born?
- What is the highest degree you were awarded?
- What year were you awarded your highest degree?

Section 2: Views on inequality

We will ask a few questions regarding inequality, wealth redistribution, and policy inefficiency. These are theoretical, and there is no “wrong” answer.

Imagine the bottom 20% of Dutch families, with incomes averaging 15,000 EUR per year. Now imagine the top 20%, with incomes averaging 150,000 EUR per year. The government proposes a tax of 15,000 EUR per year (ie, 10% of the richest families’ incomes) to be taken from the top 20% of families and redistributed among the bottom 20% of families.

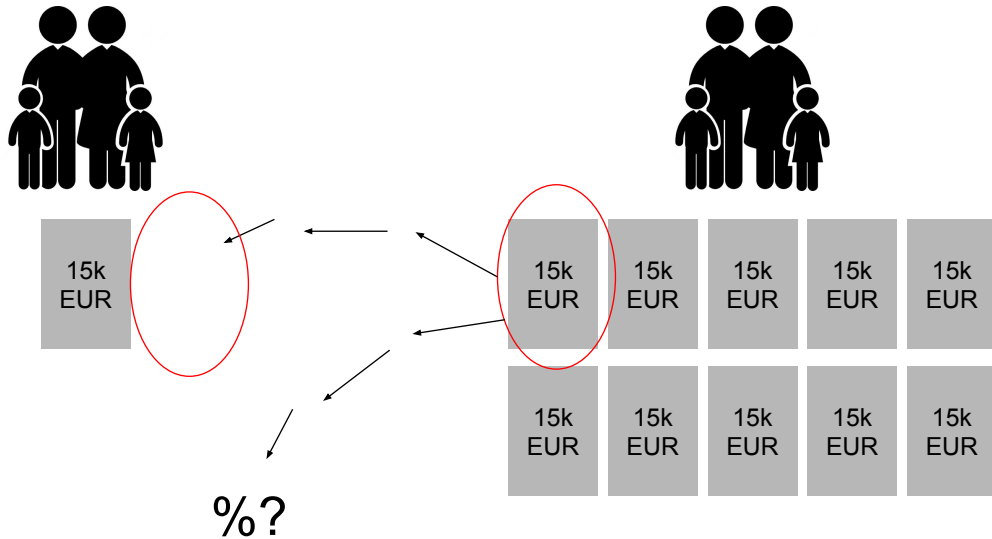
What is the highest “leakage rate” (ie percentage of the original 15,000 EUR which does not arrive to the poorest families) which you would consider acceptable before cancelling the program?

Possible answers:

- 0%: I would be against this tax even if 100% of the money taken from the richest families went to the poorest families.
- 25%: I would be for this tax unless more than 25% of the money taken from the richest families disappeared before reaching the poorest families.
- 75%: I would be for this tax unless more than 75% of the money taken from the richest families disappeared before reaching the poorest families.
- 100%: I would be for this tax even if all of the money taken from the richest families disappeared before reaching the poorest families.

Bottom 20% of families

Top 20% of families



joebrew@gmail.com

References

- Lambert, Peter J. 1988. "Okun's Bucket: A Leak and Two Splashes?" *Journal of Economic Studies* 15 (1). Emerald: 71–78. doi:10.1108/eb002666.
- Pirtilla, J, and R Uusitalo. 2010. "A Leaky Bucket in the Real World: Estimating Inequality Aversion Using Survey Data." *Economica* 77 (305). Wiley-Blackwell: 60–76. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0335.2008.00729.x.