

Decision Processes Colloquia

Monday, April 13, 2026

Where: JMHH G50

When: 12:00 – 1:20 pm

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New Perspectives on the Political Psychology of Money

ABSTRACT:

The priorities of a functioning capitalistic democracy depend on how citizens understand money—in particular, how it is distributed, how it is accumulated, and how it should be spent. In my talk I'll review recent work that speaks to each of these issues. In the first part of my talk I'll discuss results of a forthcoming paper (Bogard, West & Fox, in press, *Nature Communications*) in which we show that the ways in which income and wealth distributions are typically depicted convey misleading impressions of wealth and income inequality. This is due to our natural tendency to focus on extreme fractiles (i.e., the richest and the poorest groups) without making adjustments for relative group size. I'll suggest better ways to depict such data that minimizes these biases. In the second part of my talk I'll briefly review results of a recently published paper (Krijnen, Ülkümen, Bogard, and Fox, 2022, *JPSP*) and some newer data in which we show that lay theories concerning how financial well-being changes over time (i.e., why people get richer or poorer) influence people's political preferences and their responses to different kinds of messages about redistributive policies. Finally, I'll spend the core of my talk presenting new work (Weber & Fox, working paper) in which we examine how people evaluate government policy spending decisions. Rational choice principles require consideration of cost-effectiveness and opportunity costs of spending on the focal policy. However, because consumers have difficulty grasping the enormous dollar amounts of government programs and have little awareness of alternative policy spending options, they tend to exhibit pronounced scope insensitivity and alternative neglect. We show that people instead rely on a two-stage application of the affect heuristic in which support for spending policies is influenced by a primary affective response to the focal spending area and a secondary affective response to the contrast with alternative programs or spending amounts that happen to be salient. It is my hope that a better

understanding of the political psychology of money can help enhance the public discourse and narrow partisan divides concerning government policies.

