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Getting People to Tolerate Bad Outcomes:

John R. Hibbing
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, jhibbing1@unl.edu

Getting People to Tolerate Bad Outcomes: An Experimental Study

Kevin B. Smith
Christopher W. Larimer
Levente Littvay
John R. Hibbing

Department of Political Science
University of Nebraska
Lincoln, NE 68588
ksmith1 @ unl.edu

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Abstract

Recent research from experimental economics and social psychology finds that people's perceptions of outcomes as well as of those dispensing outcomes is affected by factors other than the outcome itself. Unfortunately, the political relevance of this finding is rarely addressed. In this paper, we present the results of original experiments in which subjects are required to react to identical outcomes rendered by decision-makers with ostensibly different traits. Specifically, we manipulate (the subject's belief regarding) whether a decision-maker wanted to be a decision-maker, did not want to be a decision-maker, or earned the right to be a decision-maker. In addition, we manipulate whether or not decision-makers have a personal financial interest in the outcome. The results suggest that, quite apart from the outcome itself, both the manner by which the decision-maker came to be the decision-maker and especially whether or not the decision-maker has a vested interest in the outcome affected people's satisfaction with the outcome they received and their perceptions of the fairness of the decision-maker. People's satisfaction with authoritative allocations of resources is not driven solely by the amount of resources they receive; rather, it is also influenced by the traits and considerations of the allocators, a finding entirely consistent with the burgeoning research on the importance of people's concern with their role in the social unit.

During the past 30 years or so, dissatisfaction with government and especially governmental decision makers has been quite high in the United States as well as most other countries. While dissatisfaction is certainly not universal, as is indicated by the increase in support in the U.S. after the disasters of 9-11-2001, the norm in modern developed societies seems to be disillusionment with government. In this paper, we examine the conditions that might lead people to be more satisfied with authoritative decisions and the officials who make them. To do so, we employ laboratory experiments in which people are presented with an outcome rendered by a decision maker and then asked to react.

An obvious variable to expect to influence people's satisfaction with a governmental decision is the extent to which people get what they want; in other words, the outcome. We take as a given that outcome influences people's satisfaction, but we also take it as not particularly interesting or helpful. Government is by definition an allocator of ***scarce*** resources. Consequently, the citizens to whom resources are and are not allocated will frequently be disappointed with their lot. Simply giving people more undoubtedly would improve their happiness but giving people more is rarely possible. Pies are not always growing and getting less than they think they deserve from government is a fact of life for most people. Thus, the real question of interest becomes whether steps can be taken to make people less dissatisfied with disappointing outcomes.

Fortunately, recent research in experimental economics and social psychology, frequently deriving hypotheses from biological and evolutionary theory, suggests that factors other than outcome alter people's satisfaction with authoritative decisions. After briefly reviewing this theory and some of the empirical research connected to it, we set up, conduct, and report the

results of our own original research on the conditions that make people less negative about those decisions and the makers of decisions. Our findings indicate that, while it may not be possible to make people completely satisfied with an unfavorable decision, it is possible to make them much less dissatisfied, often to the point that they are quite accepting of the decision. People are not just after short-term tangible gains; rather, they have a range of much more sophisticated interests and the source of these intangible interests is ancient and enduring.

Evolutionary Biology as a Guide to Human Preferences

Increasingly, evolutionary biology is serving as a wellspring of hypotheses in the social sciences. The allure is obvious since evolution provides a theory of human preferences while existing analytical constructs in political science, such as rational choice and behavioralism, do not even pretend to offer such a theory. To be sure, in their own way, both have been quite useful. Behavioralism plots proximate environmental influences on behavior while rational choice identifies the optimal strategy for achieving an outcome given an assumed preference, but neither offers any guidance regarding the ultimate source of preferences. Evolutionary biology may not in the end turn out to be the actual basis for preferences, we cannot say for sure, but it does provide a theory of preferences. And as rational choice scholars frequently and accurately point out, "a theory...can only be supplanted by a superior theory" (Chong, 1996: 47). Until the arrival of this superior theory, we turn to evolutionary biology for guidance and encourage others at least to consider doing the same.

The central theoretical insight is simple: evolutionary pressures lead people, like other organisms, to behave in a fashion that promotes long-term survival. Because of selection

pressures, those not behaving in this fashion will be decreasingly represented in future generations, so those people living today are generally in possession of behavioral tendencies that have stood the test of time–a long time. In fact, some of these behavioral tendencies may be better suited to the environment of hunter-gatherers in which humans existed for hundreds of thousands of years than to the modern mass, post-industrial societies that have been our home for just a few generations.

What are these factors that could reasonably be thought to have promoted survival over the millennia? This is not the place for a detailed presentation of the expectations flowing from evolutionary psychology, but among the most basic survival behaviors, and the one of most relevance to our research here, is the ability to be a respected part of a viable social unit. Humans are heavily reliant upon their social skills. Groups and the exchanges that occur within real groups, enhance both acquisition of provisions and protection against predators, including out-group conspecific predators. People who are not accepted members of a properly-functioning group will see their survival and reproductive odds diminish markedly (for further explication, see Tooby and Cosmides, 1992; Pinker, 2002). Continued human existence is in large part attributable to our social nature.[1]

In fact, human beings have developed a remarkable set of social capacities. Most can identify subtle moods of other people merely by seeing photographs of their eyes (see Baron-

[1]Just as it is in equally large part now threatened by that social nature. Being social is not being "good" as it can entail mindless conformity, unthinking obedience to authority figures, taking pleasure in the misfortune of others, and violent hostility toward out-group members.

Cohen, 2003), most can predict how others will behave in game-playing situations after visiting with them for just a few minutes (Frank, 1988; Frank, Gilovich, and Regan, 1993), and most people's memories work significantly better when social as opposed to non-social factors are at play (Chiappe, Brown, and Rodriquez, 2002). Moving closer to the political realm, an argument can be made that evolution has left us with a decidedly and understandably ambivalent attitude toward leadership. Clearly, certain important tasks, including the killing of large game and engaging in battles with neighboring groups/clans, are facilitated by group unity and coordination of the sort that requires leadership. At the same time, one of the most common traits in the entire human anthropological record is an aversion to "big man behavior" when the group is not in obvious need of it (see, for example, Diamond, 1997; Boehm, 1999). Nothing is more poisonous to the vitality of a group than an influential individual bent on furthering personal ends at the expense of others.

Accordingly, though humans in general are highly sensitive to being taken advantage of, they are even more sensitive to being taken advantage of by an important member of the group, such as a decision maker (see Hibbing and Alford, 2004). From the rank-and-file member's point of view, the consequences of a decision maker who plays others for suckers are dire. Such behavior indicates either that the member has lost a place of respect in the group or that the decision maker has turned to the dark side and habitually acts in a self-interested fashion. If it is the latter, the rank-and-file group member can take some comfort in the fact that the unfavorable treatment was not meted out because of anything specific about the member, but this is likely to be cold comfort because the group itself is in danger. Humans' social nature leads them to be wary cooperators, eager to contribute their fair share to the group but only when they believe

others are doing the same. An act of unpunished non-cooperation by any member of a group of conditional cooperators has the potential to spread like wildfire (see Boyd and Richerson, 1992; Gintis, 2000; Nowak, Page, and Sigmund, 2000; Fehr and Fishbacher, 2003), but when the act comes from a decision maker such contagion effects are even more probable.

Fear of non-cooperation and especially of being the victim of a non-cooperator is no doubt connected to the well-documented ability of humans to detect "cheaters." People are much better at solving a problem if it involves violation of a social contract than a problem that is of equal intellectual difficulty but does not involve such a violation (Cosmides, 1989; Cosmides and Tooby, 1992). And no doubt it is also connected to the willingness of most humans, when they have identified a cheater, to engage in altruistic punishment by using their own resources to inflict punishment (Boyd and Richerson, 1992; Henrich and Boyd, 2001; Fehr and Gachter, 2002). Cheater detection and altruistic punishment are important elements of humans' social repertoire, but in terms of political implications, aversion to self-appointed leaders, or "anti-big-manism," as it is sometimes called, is of even more interest. In fact, anti-big manism may be seen as an attempt to avoid being played for a sucker, since people in a position of power are more likely to be able to take advantage of others.

For eons, human beings fastidiously put down attempts by other members to set themselves apart. Successful hunters were expected to share game with the entire village (Hawkes, 2001). And self-important and self-serving behaviors were immediately met with ridicule and reduced esteem (Boehm, 1999). Behavioral variation across hunter-gatherer societies is extraordinary but "social accounting" systems for keeping track of those doing their share and those too big for their britches are perhaps as close as any traits come to being

universal. The ability to identify a would-be big man and the willingness to visit immediate social sanctions upon that individual is long-standing and has not atrophied with the advent of the less egalitarian governmental systems characterizing modern mass societies. In fact, since "big people" (decision makers) are now officially designated and given special authority, the ability to identify those with their own and not the group's interest at heart and the willingness to rein in self-serving decision makers are all the more crucial. Part of the disillusionment with government, we believe, is traceable to humans' deep-seated suspicion of those who ***want*** to make decisions for others. At an intellectual level many of us recognize the need for leadership; at a more emotional level, most of us are turned off by individuals who want to be leaders and/or who are in a position to act in a self-interested fashion.

Politics becomes an odd game as a result. The candidates' respective stances on crucial issues of the day, though certainly part of the picture, are frequently less influential than the candidates' stories about why they are seeking office and how selfless they are. We hear claims that they were called to service, perhaps against their will, and that they have only the best interests of others and of the country at heart. They criticize opponents because of their issue positions but perhaps even more commonly because they "will do anything to get elected," including flip-flopping on issues and mindlessly obeying the results of political polling. Policy stances become less the focal point than the motivation of the individuals seeking office. Successfully impugning the motives of a political opponent often translates into victory and the issues themselves occasionally become secondary. A desire for power can disqualify people for public office unless a convincing case can be made that they are seeking power for the betterment of others. Reluctant office-holders, from Cincinnatus to Colin Powell, are highly desirable,

however even if their policy positions were unchanged, their seductive appeal would evaporate if word leaked out that they really did want power.

But determining an individual's inner motivation is difficult. To do so, people frequently take cues from the process by which decisions were made or the process by which individuals became decision makers in the first place. This makes sense. If a main goal is, as we claim, to determine not the policy positions of would-be leaders but their motivations, political observers would be well advised to pay careful attention to traits of the decision makers as well as the constraints institutions place on the ability of decision makers to manifest those traits. Constitutions try to design procedures that will limit self-serving behavior. Certainly this was Madison's main goal and he was quite right to pursue it. He wanted to create procedures by which selfish behavior would be checked by other decision makers and, if that failed, by the voters.

In this context, the concern for procedural justice, so ably articulated by social psychologists such as Tom Tyler (Tyler, 1990; see also, Thibaut and Walker, 1975; Lind and Tyler, 1988), fits perfectly with evolutionary theory. Tyler and others have demonstrated that, with outcomes controlled, people are quite sensitive to general features of the process by which decisions are made. In some decision making contexts, such as those surrounding judicial decisions, the reactions of those people who felt that all sides were listened to, that the decision was objective, and that the motives of decision makers could be trusted, were more positive than the reactions of those who did not (Tyler, 2001). Why would people feel better about decisions emanating from certain processes than they would about that very same decision emanating from other processes? Because these features of the process say something about the motivations of

the decision makers and about the role of rank-and-file group members. If the decision is being made "on the merits," then by definition the decision maker cannot be manipulating the process for selfish ends.[2]

In this light, the evolutionary account provides a theoretical basis for the empirical findings long present in the procedural justice literature. It suggests that people do not simply prefer certain procedures because they do but rather they prefer them because certain procedures help to protect the group and an individual's place in that group. As such, the theory may help to identify the specific aspects of the process that are likely to be at the center of people's preferences. Indeed, if our reading of the theory is correct, people's core desire is to prevent the wrong kind of decision maker from being in a position to act in a self-interested fashion. The procedures for making decisions cannot really be separated from the traits of those making the decisions. Plato thought non-self-interested behavior would be engaged in by decision makers if we could recruit and train the right kind of people. Madison thought that institutions were needed to prohibit decision makers from behaving in the self-interested behavior that is the inclination of all people. The desired type of behavior was remarkably similar but the manner by which that behavior was thought most likely to be produced was quite different.

People's end goal is not a certain set of procedures just as it is not a certain set of outcomes; people's end goal is to be a respected part of a viable social group, a group in which leaders are behaving cooperatively and not selfishly. If this line of thinking is correct, positive

[2]For a useful investigation of the interaction of outcomes and processes, see Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996.

reactions to authoritative decision makers should be engendered not just by certain procedures with outcome held constant but also by decision makers possessing certain traits with process and outcome held constant.

In the remainder of this paper, we wish to concentrate more directly on the traits of the decision maker as opposed to more amorphous features of the process since we believe people's empirically established preferences for procedural justice are better seen as preferences for getting the right kind of decision maker to have the right kind of motivation. Previous research on public reactions to authoritative decisions has provided a better sense of the effects of general procedures than of the type of decision maker involved in the decisions. Institutions and procedures may be able to de-personalize politics to a certain extent, but individual variation remains. In the empirical part of our paper, we analyze whether or not people's tendencies to be pleased, satisfied, and accepting of the same outcome rendered by the same procedure is influenced by variations in three important human traits: ambition, entitlement, and self-interest.

The Role of Decision Maker Desire and Entitlement

If we are right, procedures are only part of the story and people are actually seeking certain characteristics in decision makers. Thus, in the initial battery of experiments we designed and describe below, the procedures by which decisions were made were held constant. Indeed, these procedures were simplicity itself. The experimental subject was led to believe that another person (in actuality, an experimental fiction) had the authority to divide a small pot of money ($20) between him/herself and the subject. We next informed the subject that the allocator had decided to keep $17 and to pass along just $3 to the subject and then ascertained the reaction of

the subject to this decision that tangibly affected the money the subject would receive at the end of the experiment. By not using a real allocator, we were able to standardize the outcome. All that we varied in this experiment was the manner by which the subject believed the allocator came to hold the position of allocator (or decision maker).

There were three possibilities. Subjects in the first cell were told the individual with whom they had been paired was made the allocator because he or she wanted that position more than the subject. Subjects in the second cell were told that the individual with whom they had been paired was made the allocator even though he or she wanted that position ***less*** than the other person involved (the experimental subject). And finally subjects in the third cell were told that the individual with whom they had been paired was made the allocator because he or she had earned that position.

The manner in which we made these presentations believable follows. Subjects were first told that they had been randomly matched with an anonymous second subject who was contemporaneously at a computer terminal in another room and with whom they would play only one game. In a pre-test completed by all subjects we asked how badly each wanted to be the allocator on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being an extreme desire to make the allocation decision. We also asked them how much total time in minutes they would spend traveling to and from the experimental site. Those subjects randomly assigned to Cell 1 were told that the player with whom they had been matched gave a higher number than was given by the subject on the "want to be decision maker" spectrum.[3] Those subjects randomly assigned to Cell 2 were told that the

[3]In the five cases in which the subject answered 10 (the highest score possible), the subject was informed that the other player also answered 10 and had been randomly selected to be the allocator.

player with whom they had been matched gave a lower number than was given by the subject.[4] And those subjects randomly assigned to Cell 3 were told that the individual with whom they had been matched had invested more travel time in coming to the experiment.[5]

As mentioned above, after these preliminaries, each subject was then informed of the allocator's decision to pass along only $3 of the $20 and asked, via several items in a post-test, to provide reactions. The most relevant of these items for our purposes pertained to satisfaction with the outcome ($3) and perceptions of the fairness of the allocator. More specifically, subjects were asked how fair or unfair they though the allocator was, using a 7-point scale with 6 equating to "very unfair" and 0 to "very fair," and they were asked to estimate their satisfaction with the money they received, again on a 7-point scale with 6 equating to "very unsatisfied" and 0 to "very satisfied." As it turns out, levels of satisfaction and perception of fairness were highly correlated (r =.75) so we combined these two measures into a simple additive "scale of negativity" ranging from 0 to 12 with higher values being greater negativity.

If our interpretation of evolutionary theory is correct, the greatest negativity should be in evidence when subjects believe the decision maker with whom they had been matched craved power since these are the individuals about which other group members worry. This is "big man" behavior. Subjects should be somewhat less negative when they believe their counterpart

[4]No subjects reported the lowest possible level of desire to be the allocator, so we could always say the other player had less desire.

[5]No subjects reported the highest possible driving time, so we could always say that the other player spent more time traveling.

abjured power since such an individual is less likely to raise ancient concerns. Expectations based on a more rational or outcome-based view of human behavior would not anticipate reactions to a $3 allocation in a single-play game to be any different whether they were rendered by an ambitious decision maker or not. Finally, subjects should be the least negative when their counterpart did something to earn the right to be the decision maker. Being entitled to a position of authority is much more tolerable than doing nothing for it or, worse yet, than openly seeking that position. In fact, previous research provides evidence of such an entitlement effect, though virtually all of this evidence pertains to the divider and not the receiver. In other words, we know that when people believe they have earned the right to be the allocator they keep a greater share of the money (see Hoffman and Spitzer, 1985; Hoffman, McCabe, Shachat, and Smith, 1994) but the evidence that receivers are more deferential to decision makers entitled to that role is less clear. And the evidence on the role of ambition, holding the outcome of the decision constant, is even less compelling (though see Hibbing and Alford, 2004). Scholars have focused too much on outcome and process and not enough on decision maker traits.

Figure 1 presents our initial results. They indicate that the pattern is exactly the one we expected. Subjects are more negative toward a $3 allocation when it is made by a decision maker who craved power. They are somewhat less negative when the decision maker was not desirous of power (relative to the subject). And they were less negative still when they believed the decision maker had been given that slot because of the amount of time invested in attending the experimental activities. The differences are not substantively huge, but they are plainly evident and they do traditionally accepted significance levels even with the small N characteristic of

experimental research.[6] Subjects faced with an allocator eager for power on average registered 9.37 on the negativity scale with 12 being maximum negativity and 6 being neutrality, neither negative nor positive. Those subjects whose allocator had not wanted to be the allocator were less negative at 8.60 and those subjects whose allocator had unwittingly earned the position by traveling for a longer time period were the least negative at 7.93–even though all subjects received the same allocation. Clearly these variations in the traits displayed by allocators in receiving their position are not powerful enough to make people happy about a truly disappointing outcome, but movement is noticeably present. In some respects, it is remarkable that subjects receiving just $3 can be made to score less than 8 on the scale (with 6 being neutral) simply because the decision was made by a meritorious decision maker.

[Figure 1 about here]

We also gave subjects in these three cells the opportunity to accept or reject the offer proposed by the allocator with the stipulation that if they rejected the proposal neither the subject nor the allocator would receive anything. This arrangement is commonly known as the ultimatum game (see Guth and Tietz, 1990; Thaler, 1992, for good reviews). The ultimatum game is now the most widely employed experimental scenario in the social sciences and the results from it are consistent. Allocators are reasonably generous in their offers and receivers are surprisingly willing to reject those allocations that are ungenerous (see Nowak, Page, and Sigmund, 2000, for a summary). Our theory, as might be expected, is that subjects faced with an allocator who craved power will be much more likely to reject the $3 proposal (even though rejecting it costs them $3) than will subjects dealing with an allocator who did not want that

[6]One-tailed tests are used throughout since we have clear directional expectations for the results.

position or, especially, an allocator who earned that position by traveling a relatively long time.

[Figure 2 about here]

As can be seen from Figure 2, many of our subjects were willing to engage in altruistic punishment. More subjects accepted than rejected the $3 proposal but a significant minority (just under 40 percent overall) rejected the lowball offer.[7] But the feature of interest to us is the pattern across experimental cells. Here we find that the results, once again, comport nicely with our expectations. Rejection rates of the $3 approached 50 percent when the allocator was believed to be an individual who had a craving for power, dropped to 40 percent when the allocator had not wanted that privileged position, and dropped still farther, to just 30 percent, when the allocator earned the right to fill that position. The manner by which individuals come to power apparently affects not only subjects' level of negativity regarding the outcome and the decision maker but also their tendency to accept the decisions that are made.[8]

Self-Interested and Non-Self-Interested Decision Makers

The method by which a decision maker became the decision maker is obviously a factor

[7]Our results indicate a higher overall acceptance rate than is common in the literature. No doubt the major reason for this is that in order to facilitate recruiting of a non-student population we offered a guaranteed inducement of $10 with the chance of earning up to $20 more. This guaranteed money undoubtedly drove up the acceptance rated across the board. This is of less concern to us since our interest is in the patterns across cells rather than the overall level.

[8]Though these differences are significant only at the more permissive .10 level.

in explaining subjects' reaction but, consistent with evolutionary theory, we expect that decision makers' opportunity to use their position for personal gain will be another factor. Specifically, it seems likely that subjects will be more negative toward decisions when decision makers benefit personally from that decision. Indirect but real-world support for this speculation can be found in the persistent pattern of courts being viewed by the public more favorably than legislatures. In the United States, for example, people are much more likely to believe that members of Congress benefit personally from the decisions they make than they are to believe that judges benefit from the decisions they make. Members of Congress are busy ingratiating themselves to special interests and can reap large dividends, the public believes, by voting yea rather than nay. Judges, on the other hand, are not believed to be materially affected by whether they rule in favor of Smith or in favor of Jones. It is certainly possible that this is one of the reasons public support for the Court is always higher than public support for Congress (see Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995; 2002), and this pattern is consistent with our hypothesis that, other things being equal, self-interested decision makers will lead to more negativity than non-self-interested decision makers.

In order to test this hypothesis, we took the following steps. Rather than introduce another small cell in which subjects were led to believe the allocator did not have any self-interest in the decision, we informed all subjects, after they had provided their initial reactions to the self-interested allocator (see above), that there had been a mistake and that their allocator had actually been dividing the $20 between the subject and another individual. They were further told that the allocator was being played a flat fee for making this decision. In other words, subjects were led to believe that the allocator was actually a neutral third-party, receiving a salary to make decisions much as is the case with judges. With this new information in mind, subjects

were again asked to rate levels of satisfaction and fairness on the same 7-point scales, even though the size of the allocation to the subject ($3) had not changed.

[Figure 3 about here]

Our expectation is that levels of negativity will be reduced when allocators are not believed to be personally gaining from the decision (remember that in Figures 1 and 2 the allocator was able to keep whatever share of the $20 that was not given to the subject). As can be seen from Figure 3, these expectations are borne out. The mean level of discontent for all subjects when the allocator was self-interested was 8.63 but this figure dropped to just 7.80 when subjects were led to believe that they had in fact received the $3 from an allocator who had nothing to gain from giving the subject that sum. These findings on the importance of the variations in allocators' motivations are perfectly consistent with Tyler's work on the importance of a decision's institutional context and also findings from experimental economics on people's fear of being played for a sucker. Many times, people are upset with a small allocation not simply because they wanted more of whatever is being allocated but because of what that small allocation says about them and about those making the decision. Being played for a sucker does not automatically happen whenever people receive a small allocation. Rather, it happens when someone uses their position to benefit themselves at others' expense. The results in Figure 3 support the belief that people would be as happy with a small allocation offered by a non-self-interested decision maker as they would with a larger allocation offered by a self-interested decision maker. Reactions to decisions are much richer than preprogrammed response to the specific outcome provided. Evolutionary theory may not be right, but it does offer an explanation for humans' preferences on this score–and traditionally employed analytical

constructs in the discipline do not.

Combining Mode of Becoming the Decision Maker and the Nature of the Decision

Since each subject responded twice, once to an allocator they thought to be self-interested and once to an allocator they thought to be neutral, and since each subject was also in one of the three cells pertaining to an allocator who craved power, abjured power, or earned power, we can look at the manner in which method of acquiring the position of allocator and motivation in making the allocation decision interact. We are left with six possibilities: a self-interested allocator who craved power; a self-interested allocator who abjured power; a self-interested allocator who earned power; a non-self-interested allocator who craved power; a non-self-interested allocator who abjured power; and a non-self-interested allocator who earned power. It is possible for us to identify the level of negativity engendered by each type of allocator.

Expectations concerning the degree to which each of these six situations will lead respondents to react negatively are not crystal clear. In order to state expectations with confidence, we would need to know whether the method of acquiring power (Figures 1 and 2) trumps the allocator's motivation to use power (Figure 3). Evolutionary theory expects that both method of acquiring power and motivation to use power will matter but it does not offer clear guidance regarding which will matter more. Thus, we present this portion of the study as an exploration designed to see if motivation or selection method is more potent. These results are presented in the table below:

Decision Maker Who Was...	Negativity Scale
Self-Interested and Craved Power	9.36
Non-Self-Interested and Craved Power	8.76
Self-Interested and Abjured Power	8.58
Self-Interested and Earned Power	7.92
Non-Self-Interested and Abjured Power	7.32
Non-Self-Interested and Earned Power	7.32

The pattern is generally the one that theory and previous results lead us to expect, with perhaps one interesting exception. As expected, the highest negativity score is produced when the allocator is desirous of power and is in a position to use that power to better him/herself, just as the lowest negativity score is produced when the allocator earned the right to be the allocator and is not in a position to use that power for his/her own ends. Whether ambition or motive is more important is not evident in the results. The two lowest groups in negativity are indeed groups in which the allocator had been non-self-interested, but the second highest group in negativity is the group facing a non-self-interested but power-hungry allocator. Thus, further research will be necessary to partition the relative importance to subjects of these two decision maker traits. It may even be that there is an interaction effect at work. But the overall difference from the most to least negative groups is substantial, covering more than two full points on this 12-point scale, even though the outcome was always the same.[9]

[9]The difference between the high and low group is significant at the .02 level (paired sample t-test).

Conclusion

Why do people care about things that are irrelevant to outcome? Why do they care about outcomes even when the outcome does not mean anything to them? We believe the key is that people care about the health of their group and their own status in it, and indications of these factors are present quite apart from the tangible outcome received. Evolutionary pressures have encouraged human beings to care about such things because organisms that do not care about groups or their own status are likely to find themselves at a disadvantage. In the political realm, the widespread aversion to people who desire power and to people who use power to benefit themselves at our expense is quite likely genetically based–and adaptive–since individuals who do not notice or mind when a fellow group member is power hungry and/or self-serving are unlikely to do well in the evolutionary contest.

We recognize that this line of thought will strike many political scientists as curious or worse. Most of us have been trained to believe that preferences are entirely the product of environmental forces and that they are therefore completely unrelated to genetic forces but exciting research at the intersection of the life and social sciences is revealing the extent to which even complex social behaviors are connected to genetic factors (see especially Caspi et al., 2002; 2003). Future research will provide even more evidence that social preferences and behaviors are not merely environmentally driven but are rather the product of a fascinating interaction of genes and the environment. Certainly, other explanations for phenomena of the sort present in our findings are possible but we have yet to see these explanations satisfactorily articulated. Often the claim is simply that "that is the way people are" but this claim is meaningless and atheoretical. As social scientists our job is to understand why people are the way they are.

Evolutionary theory at least provides a reason and this is what sets it apart from existing analytical constructs. We invite others to offer their own theories about the origins and nature of human preferences especially as these preferences pertain to leaders and the decisions they make.

Just as evolutionary theory is viewed with suspicion by many political scientists, so are laboratory experiments but experiments allow us to investigate behavioral primitives in a way that is impossible with more context-dependent methodologies. They are not intended to reflect the real world in all its complexity. Unlike the decision makers in our experiments, decision makers in the real world of government have to make multiple decisions, operate in the context of institutions with rich histories, and sometimes have the chance to explain the rationale for their decisions, run for reelection, or both. All these factors may very well affect the way people react to decisions and we sincerely hope that future researchers will add each of these layers of complexity, preferably one at a time so that it will be possible to learn the precise cause of any changes in results. But without a simple baseline, identification of the specific contextual factors that are and are not powerful becomes problematic.

Regardless of the extent to which readers are persuaded by the usefulness of evolutionary theory and laboratory experiments, we believe the results presented here indicate that people's reactions to decisions are based in part on something deeper than either the tangible outcomes they happen to receive or their general perceptions of the procedures that were employed. We happily accept that outcome and process are important but we believe that reactions to authoritative decisions, in a larger sense, are best seen as the products of people's interpretations of what is being communicated about the group and their own place in the group. To make these interpretations, people draw upon the outcome itself, the procedures by which decisions were

made, and also the traits they perceive decision makers to possess. We believe decision maker traits have been under-emphasized in previous research. For example, more than political scientists realize, people's goal in a political campaign is not to determine each candidate's position on a broad range of issues but to determine the nature of the candidates, their motivations, concerns, and ambitions. Only by getting a read on the outcome, procedures, ***and*** decision maker traits can people be in a position to make the informed judgments that have well-served human beings for hundreds of thousand of years; judgments that have allowed people to preserve a relatively healthy social life even as decision makers are now granted authority that, without proper public attentiveness and sensitivity, could be used to the detriment of the group and the individual.

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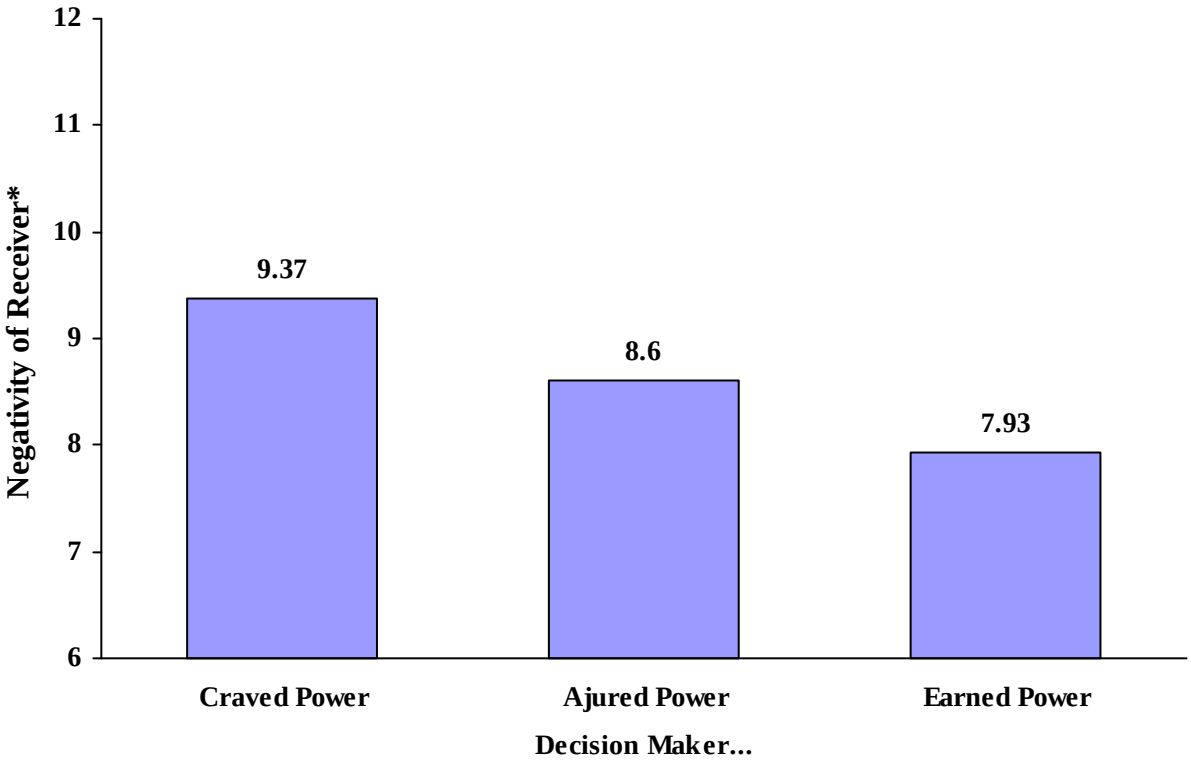
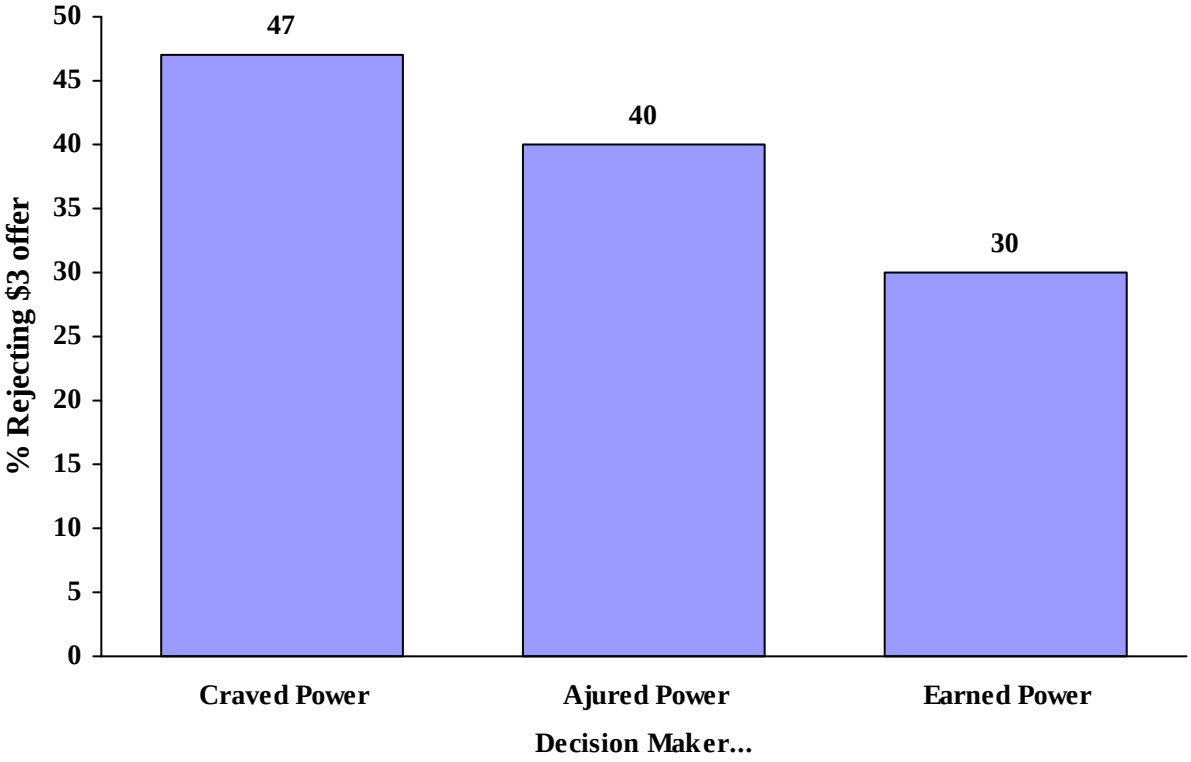
Figure 1: Effects of Decison Maker Selection Method on Negativity toward the Decision and Decision Maker



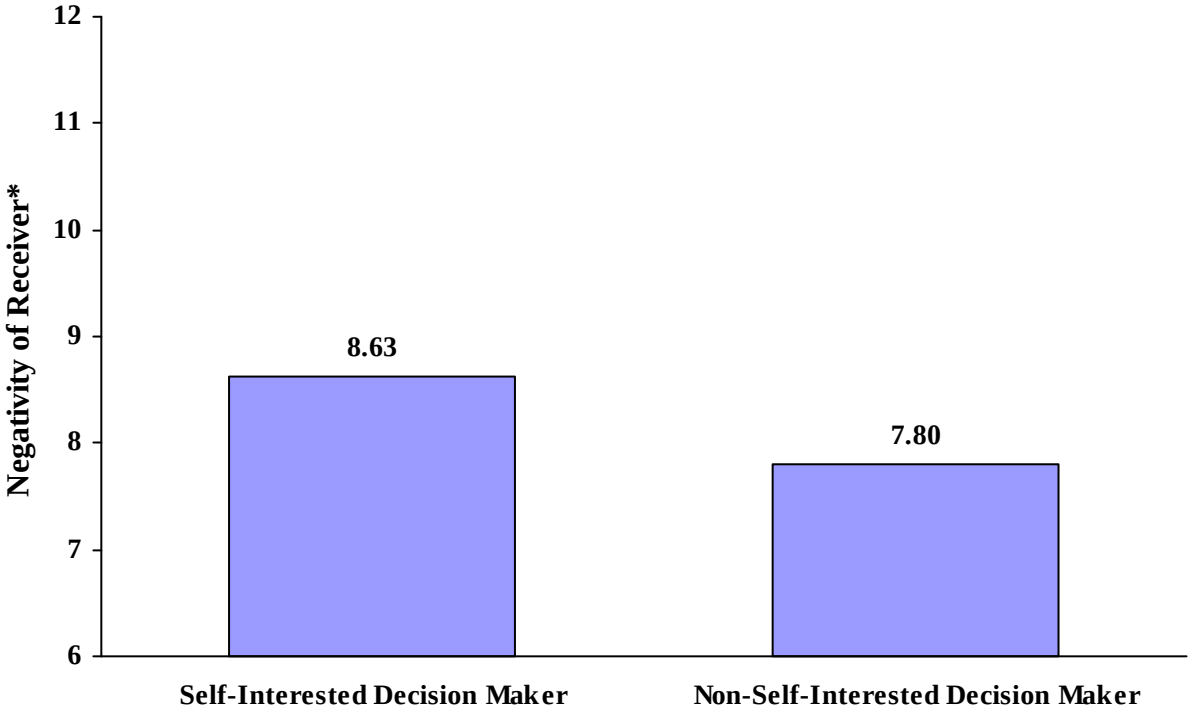
N = 90
$p < .05$
*Negativity of Receiver ranges from 0 to 12 where 0 equals a subject perceiving the decision maker as completely fair and being completely satisfied with the $3 allocation and 12 equals a subject completely unsatisfied and seeing the decision maker as completely unfair

Figure 2: Effects of Decision Maker Selection Method on Rejection Rates



N = 90
$p < .10$

Figure 3: Effects of Decision Maker Self-Interest on Negativity toward the Decision and Decision Maker



N = 90
$p < .05$ (paired sample)
*See Figure 1