

Magdalena Wasilewska

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EDUCATION

University of Amsterdam PhD in Economics, Department of Microeconomics	Amsterdam, the Netherlands September 2023 – present
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- Supervisors: Prof. dr. Joël van der Weele and dr. Thomas Douenne
- Research stay at FAIR, NHH (hosted by Prof. Bertil Tungodden), February – April 2026

KU Leuven MSc in Sociology (Social Data Science)	Leuven, Belgium 2022 – 2023
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University of Amsterdam MSc in Economics (Behavioural Economics and Game Theory)	Amsterdam, the Netherlands 2021 – 2022
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Warsaw School of Economics BSc in Quantitative Methods in Economics and Information Systems	Warsaw, Poland 2017 – 2020
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RESEARCH INTERESTS

Behavioral Economics, Experimental Economics, Public Economics, Political Economy

REFERENCES

Prof. Joël van der Weele
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dr. Thomas Douenne
University of Amsterdam
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Prof. Bertil Tungodden
Norwegian School of Economics
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Prof. Eric Bartelsman
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JOB MARKET PAPER

Fairness at a Price: Support for Complex Benefit Systems

Claiming welfare benefits involves substantial transaction costs. Simplifying benefit systems is on the policy agenda in many countries, but progress has been slow. I study whether public support can explain this, using a spectator experiment and a survey experiment in the Netherlands. Most spectators accept substantial effort costs on claimants for a modest improvement in targeting accuracy, but their support is sensitive to the size of these costs and falls when it fails to reach everyone it is meant for. In the survey experiment, information about the costs of complexity shifts respondents' beliefs but does not, on average, raise support for simplification. This average hides heterogeneity: respondents who have not received benefits become more supportive of a simpler system, whereas recipients do not, even though they update their beliefs at least as much and do not have more accurate priors at baseline. Across both experiments, support for simplification is thus sensitive to its costs among those who have nothing to lose from it. Building widespread support among the rest may therefore require resolving uncertainty about considerations people find salient when evaluating the reforms, such as how reform would affect their own entitlements.

WORKING PAPERS

Do People Distinguish Income from Wealth Inequality? Evidence from the Netherlands

with Thomas Douenne, Oda Sund and Joël van der Weele · *R&R at The Economic Journal*

In most countries, wealth inequality is much higher than income inequality, spurring debates about wealth taxation. We study people's perceptions of income and wealth inequality using a survey-experiment linked to administrative records for the Dutch population. We document a strong overlap in perceptions about the two distributions: people largely underestimate the difference between the respective levels of inequality and use information about income (inequality, own rank) to predict wealth and vice versa, even when information about both is provided. Informing people about inequality or their own rank has direct effects on their beliefs, but little effect on their policy preferences.

WORK IN PROGRESS

Inequality Narratives and Redistribution

with Thomas Douenne, Oda Sund and Joël van der Weele

How do people explain economic inequality, and how do these personal narratives shape responses to narratives provided by others? We field two linked surveys on representative samples of the Dutch population, conducted two years apart and linked to administrative tax data, and document three findings. First, open-ended “top-of-mind” explanations show that most respondents attribute inequality to structural factors (the labor market, family background, education, and the tax system) rather than effort or luck, and that these narratives vary with wealth, political identity, and fairness views. Second, linking the surveys, narratives independently predict redistributive preferences two years later, as well as which narratives respondents expose themselves to when given a choice. Third, experimentally provided narratives shift emotions and beliefs about the meritocracy of education, but not redistributive attitudes; updating is constrained by prior beliefs, and counter-attitudinal expert narratives can even backfire. Inequality narratives are thus durable elements of worldviews, robust to short-run interventions.

Salience and Meritocracy

TEACHING AND SUPERVISION

Economics (in a Global Business World)	2023 – present
Teaching Assistant, BSc Business Administration, University of Amsterdam	
Master and Bachelor Thesis Supervision	2023 – present
20 BSc theses (Economics and Business Economics; PPPE), 1 MSc thesis (Economics)	

GRANTS

<i>Fairness at a Price: Support for Complex Benefit Systems</i>	
Amsterdam Center for Behavioral Change (ACBC)	€10 000
A Sustainable Future (ASF) Initiative	€9 200
Amsterdam Centre for European Studies (ACES)	€2 500
<i>Inequality Narratives and Redistribution</i> (with T. Douenne, O. Sund and J. van der Weele)	
LISS panel grant (Principal Investigator)	approx. €10 000
Amsterdam Center for Behavioral Change (ACBC)	approx. €7 000
<i>Do People Distinguish Income from Wealth Inequality?</i> (with T. Douenne, O. Sund and J. van der Weele)	
Amsterdam Centre for European Studies (ACES)	approx. €5 000

PRESENTATIONS

2026: 18th Nordic Conference in Behavioral and Experimental Economics, Helsinki; World Inequality Conference, Paris; B&EM Meeting on Fairness in the Economy, Bristol; Bergen-Berlin Behavioural Workshop, Bergen; Pizza & Presentation Seminar, FAIR NHH, Bergen

2025: Workshop on Psychological and Economic Perspectives on Inequality, Amsterdam; Workshop in Behavioral Public Economics and Political Economy, Vienna; Narratives, Memory and Beliefs Summer School and Workshop, Riederau; Text as Data in Behavioral Economics, Potsdam; CBESS-CeDEx-CREED Meeting (CCC), Amsterdam; MPI-CREED Meeting, Bonn

2024: Interdisciplinary Brownbag Seminar of Behavioral Sciences, Maastricht; Max Planck Summer School on the Political Economy of Conflict and Redistribution, Berlin; 23rd Journées Louis-André Gérard-Varet (LAGV), Marseille; 7th Maastricht Behavioral Economic Policy Symposium (M-BEPS), Maastricht; CBESS-CeDEx-CREED Meeting (CCC), Norwich

SERVICE

- Organiser of the CREED lunch seminar
- Co-organiser of the CBESS-CeDEx-CREED Meeting

SKILLS

Languages	Polish (native), English (fluent), French (beginner), Dutch (beginner)
Software	Stata, R, Python, L ^A T _E X