

ELICITING INEQUALITY AVERSION IN THE UNITED STATES: RESULTS FROM A BENEFIT TRADE-OFF EXPERIMENT

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INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVE

- Inequality aversion parameters (IAPs) such as the Atkinson parameter represent the degree of concern for reducing a specified inequality.
- Applied to equity analyses, (e.g., distributional cost-effectiveness analysis) IAPs can increase the relative value of health gains in populations with lower health through equity weighting.
- IAPs have been elicited from populations in the United Kingdom (UK) and other countries but have not yet been reported for the United States (US).
- The study objective was to elicit an Atkinson IAP for the US in a Census-balanced sample of the general population.

Figure 1: Contextual Framing for Participant Self-Report and Survey Questions

BETTER OFF
Higher average income
Higher education
More proficient native English speakers
More have jobs
Have better housing and transportation
Less likely to experience racial discrimination

WORSE OFF
Lower average income
Lower education
Less proficient native English speakers
Fewer have jobs
Have worse housing and transportation
More likely to experience racial discrimination

In the United States, the Better Off group lives **more quality-adjusted life years**. This means that they generally **live longer** and in **better health**.

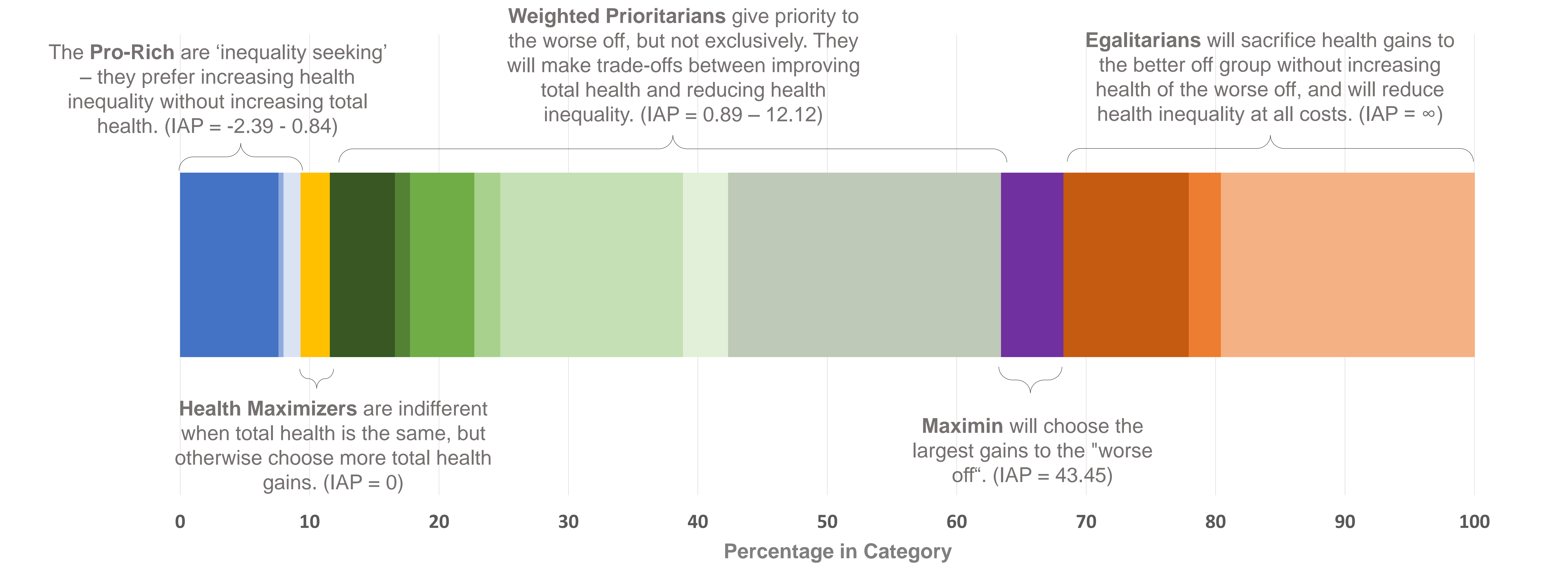
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METHODS

- We adapted a benefit trade-off (BTO) instrument used in a UK study.¹
- English-speaking adults were recruited June-December 2023 from a Qualtrics panel of the US population. Screening criteria required study participants to read and interpret a basic bar graph.
- The survey was administered online and included: 1) demographics and health attitudes questions, 2) instructional videos, 3) BTO exercise.
- Participants were quizzed on their ability to correctly interpret the BTO graphs, which were a criterion to proceed to the BTO.
- The BTO asked respondents to trade off quality-adjusted life expectancy from the "better off" to "worse off" quintiles of the US population, in terms of length and quality of life, described by factors influencing geographic social vulnerability and social determinants of health (Figure 1).
- Using established methods, logical response patterns for the BTO were classified into 15 ranks with corresponding Atkinson IAPs and a median IAP equity weight was calculated. IAPs ranged from -2.39 to ∞.
- Lower IAP values indicate less aversion to inequalities while higher values indicate greater aversion.
- We classified responses using the method of Cookson et al.² describing five primary 'types' of responses elicited from the BTO (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Cumulative Proportion of Respondents in each category (n=1167).



RESULTS

- Among 1864 complete responses, an inequality aversion parameter was calculated for 1167 respondents.
- The sample demographics approximated US census data in regard to gender, race/ethnicity and income. Our participants tended to be older and with at least high school education, as compared to the US census.
- The median Atkinson IAP among the sample was **12.12**; the corresponding equity weight was 6.7.
- According to the ranked trade-off responses, 88% of our sample were willing to trade-off total health to reduce health inequality.

CONCLUSIONS

The elicited Atkinson IAP for the **US (12.12)** is comparable to that of the UK (10.95). Our results indicate that the vast majority of our sample prioritized health gains to the worse off, weighting them **6-7 times as highly** as gains to the better off.

REFERENCES

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