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Group Discussion Clarifies the Difference between Maximin and Equality Principles in Social Distribution for Others

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Abstract

The allocation of scarce resources is a ubiquitous process in human societies, yet it is challenging to aggregate peoples diverse distributive viewpoints into group consensus. We investigate whether such heterogeneity in preferences may be reduced when people participate in group discussion in a distribution task. In two interactive experiments, we found that after group discussion, participants became less inequity-averse and preferred the maximin allocation. Analyses of participants conversations and information-search behaviors showed that such shifts toward the maximin allocation were facilitated by a strong concern for the worst-off recipient during group discussion. These results suggest that a maximin concern exhibited in discussion helped participants to understand the difference between the inequity-aversion principle and the maximin principle, which are often confounded in individual judgments. These results provide empirical insight into how social interaction can help to aggregate peoples diverse distributive preference into a social consensus.