



Instructor's Guide to Dictator Games

Laboratory implementation, theoretical foundations,
experimental evidence, and variants

Behavioral and Experimental Economics Research Lab
Department of Economics



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<https://beer-lab.org/>

How to use this guide

This guide supports the preparation, implementation, and classroom discussion of the family of dictator games available through the Behavioral and Experimental Economics Research Lab (BEER Lab) at the Department of Economics of Tecnológico de Monterrey. It is intended for instructors with different levels of familiarity with experimental and behavioral economics.

The document offers three reading paths. The **quick guide** is enough to launch a session. The operational chapters explain each screen used by instructors and students. The conceptual chapters present the theories, predictions, and empirical findings needed to lead the post-game discussion.

Access instructions and common screens are explained once. Each variant then focuses only on what changes relative to the basic game: configuration, group size, decisions, predictions, relevant outcomes, and academic literature.

Author

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For the instructor

This guide follows the English-language interface. Spanish configurations use the same logic. Never project individual codes or connect outcomes to names, student identification numbers, or seats in the room.

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Quick implementation guide

1.1 Access through the updated laboratory website

Start at <https://beer-lab.org/en/>. Select **CLASSROOM** in the top navigation menu; it opens <https://teaching.beer-lab.org/en/>. In the **Classroom experiments** catalog, use the search box to locate the activity by name. You can also filter by **Topic** or **JEL code**. Clear any filters left from an earlier search before looking for another game.

Each family's card distinguishes **Español** and **English** access links. The **Show extended version** checkbox selects that edition before following a link. Catalog language and session language are separate choices: verify both. Students use the room specified by the instructor; the instructor prepares and monitors the session through this family's own administrative pages.



Figure 1.1: Current institutional website. Select CLASSROOM in the top navigation menu to open the teaching experiments. Captured on October 7, 2026.



Figure 1.2: Current catalog: search by title, topic, or JEL code. Then locate this family's card and select language and edition. Captured on October 7, 2026.

Checking resources, comprehension, and participant requirements

Before opening the room, check the selected configuration and the number of students present. The session-creation form states the group size and minimum required by that configuration. An individual activity accepts any positive participant count; an interactive activity must satisfy its stated requirement: complete groups when size is fixed, or a minimum participant count when size is flexible. Requirements may change across treatments, for example when adding a third party or changing an institution's size. If you edit a grouping parameter, check the requirement for the edited configuration, rather than relying only on the demo's suggested count.

In the instructions, ensure that students can identify what each role receives, what they can decide, and how the outcome is calculated. An initial account, a distributable budget, and final earnings need not be the same amount. Refer to the resources panel and the example for the selected treatment. Do not carry the basic edition's endowment into a treatment that changes accounts or introduces additional positions.

ECU stands for *Experimental Currency Units*: the activity's unit of account. An outcome of 100 ECU does not automatically equal 100 pesos or 100 dollars. Conversion depends on the session configuration. Before announcing a payment, confirm with the laboratory whether money is paid, the conversion rate, and which decisions count for payment. In hypothetical modules, describe amounts as outcomes in the stated situation.

When a comprehension check is included, an incorrect response receives an explanation beside that question, identifying the submitted answer and the correct answer. Other answers remain in the form. Ask the student to return to the example, locate the relevant rule, and redo the calculation before correcting the response. Avoid revealing answers to the entire class for an individual error, and do not interpret a comprehension mistake as an economic choice in the game.

Demo

[ES] Dictador extendido — versión básica, una ronda
[ES] Dictador extendido — versión básica, 10 rondas, pareja fija
[ES] Dictador extendido — versión básica, 10 rondas, parejas aleatorias
[ES] Dictador extendido — tomar en lugar de dar
[ES] Dictador extendido — dotación ganada
[ES] Dictador extendido — castigo altruista de terceros
[ES] Dictador extendido — información social, 10 rondas
[ES] Dictador extendido — identidad del receptor
[ES] Dictador extendido — cada ECU genera 2 ECU para B
[ES] Dictador extendido — costo de dar reducido a la mitad
[ES] Dictador extendido — dos receptores
[ES] Dictador extendido — decisiones observables
[EN] Extended Dictator — baseline, one round
[EN] Extended Dictator — baseline, 10 rounds, fixed partner
[EN] Extended Dictator — baseline, 10 rounds, random partners

Figure 1.3: Demo contains only the configurations of this game family, in both languages and editions. Continuation 1/2.

[EN] Extended Dictator — taking instead of giving
[EN] Extended Dictator — earned endowment
[EN] Extended Dictator — third-party altruistic punishment
[EN] Extended Dictator — social information, 10 rounds
[EN] Extended Dictator — recipient identity
[EN] Extended Dictator — every ECU generates 2 ECUs for B
[EN] Extended Dictator — cost of giving reduced by half
[EN] Extended Dictator — two recipients
[EN] Extended Dictator — observable decisions
[ES] Juego del dictador — una ronda
[ES] Juego del dictador — 10 rondas, pareja fija
[ES] Juego del dictador — 10 rondas, parejas aleatorias
[EN] Dictator Game — one round
[EN] Dictator Game — 10 rounds, fixed partner
[EN] Dictator Game — 10 rounds, random partners

Figure 1.4: Demo contains only the configurations of this game family, in both languages and editions. Continuation 2/2.

Rooms

Current rooms:

[ES] Juego del dictador
[EN] Dictator Game
[ES] Juego del dictador extendido
[EN] Extended Dictator Game

Figure 1.5: Rooms contains the four rooms for this family: basic and extended editions in Spanish and English.

Room: [EN] Dictator Game

Create a new session

English room. Only the three English configurations for this game are shown below.

Session Config

[EN] Dictator Game — one round

Number of participants

Complete groups of 2 participants. Use a multiple of 2; minimum 2.

Create

[Configure session](#) 

App sequence

dictator_game (10 rounds)

Juego del dictador bilingüe / Bilingual Dictator Game.

Figure 1.6: Session-creation form for the basic English room. Check the selected configuration and participant requirement before creating the session.

Downloading a session with several rounds

For the instructor

Open **Data** within the relevant session and use that session's CSV or CSV-for-Excel download link. The general export has one row per participant and columns for the different rounds. Ten rounds do not necessarily mean ten rows per person. When the family provides its own long-format export, observations may instead be organized by participant and round or another unit defined by the design.

Save the original file together with the configuration name, session code, and active-round count. Check that columns for the last active round are present and that the data belong to the selected session. Empty cells can represent inactive rounds, a pending decision, or a field that does not apply to a role; do not automatically recode them as zeros. To compare learning, preserve round and group identifiers alongside participant identifiers. Share only anonymous aggregates in class, and record session incidents before constructing derived tables.

1.2 Basic facts

Purpose	Study distributive decisions when one person unilaterally controls an endowment and the other person cannot respond.
Unit of account	Experimental Currency Units (ECU). The default endowment is 100 ECU.
Basic edition	Groups of two: participant A decides and participant B receives.
Suggested duration	30–40 minutes for one round; 45–60 minutes for ten rounds.

Participants	An even number for two-person variants; a multiple of three for third-party punishment and two-recipient treatments.
Student link	dictator.beer-lab.org/room/dictator .
Instructor access	dictator.beer-lab.org/demo .
Results	Anonymous aggregate report with indicators, histograms, and round-by-round trends.
Experimental unit	Interactions in groups of 2, 3 participants, depending on treatment.
Extended edition	baseline, one round; taking instead of giving; earned endowment; third-party altruistic punishment; social information, 10 rounds; recipient identity; every ECU generates 2 ECUs for B; cost of giving reduced by half; two recipients; observable decisions.
Decision	A decides how much of the endowment to transfer to B; B receives the transfer.
Outcome	In the basic game, A keeps the endowment minus the transfer and B receives the transfer.
Topics	altruism; social preferences; fairness; repeated games; behavioral economics.
JEL	C91; C92; D64; D91.

1.3 Minimum sequence

1. Before class, confirm attendance and select a variant compatible with the number of participants.
2. Visit beer-lab.org and select **View games**.
3. At teaching.beer-lab.org, locate the **Dictator Game**.
4. Open the instructor portal, sign in, and select **Rooms**.
5. Open **[EN] Dictator Game** or **[EN] Extended Dictator Game**, depending on the treatment.
6. Choose the configuration and create the session with the appropriate number of participants.
7. Keep **Monitor** and **Report** open in separate tabs.
8. Ask students to open the room link or scan its QR code.
9. Wait until all participants have completed their decisions before revealing results.
10. Project only the aggregate report and use the questions in this guide to conduct feedback.

Checkpoint

Before admitting participants, verify that the room displays the correct configuration, the expected number of participants, and the intended matching procedure.

1.4 Checklist

- ☐ Computers connected to the internet with a browser open.
- ☐ Projector ready and report tab free of individual data.
- ☐ Administrative credentials available.
- ☐ Number of participants compatible with group size.
- ☐ Variant and number of rounds confirmed.
- ☐ Student link or QR code ready.
- ☐ **Monitor** and **Report** tabs open.
- ☐ Introductory script and discussion questions available.

Accessing the platform

2.1 From the laboratory website

Begin at beer-lab.org. In the **Faculty and students** section, select **View games**. This path opens the catalog of classroom experiments.

At teaching.beer-lab.org, locate the **Juego del dictador · Dictator Game** card. The **English** link opens the participant room.

2.2 Two distinct routes

	Participants	Instructor
Address	Dictator room	Game panel
Function	Join the assigned game	Create, monitor, and analyze the session
Credentials	No administrative account required	Username and password required
Content	Instructions and own decisions	Rooms, Monitor, Report, and Data

Attention

Do not share the administrative link or project the password. Students need only the room link.

2.3 Student route

When students open dictator.beer-lab.org/room/dictator, they see the room welcome page. They must select **Start**. If no session is active, the platform may keep them waiting until the instructor creates one.

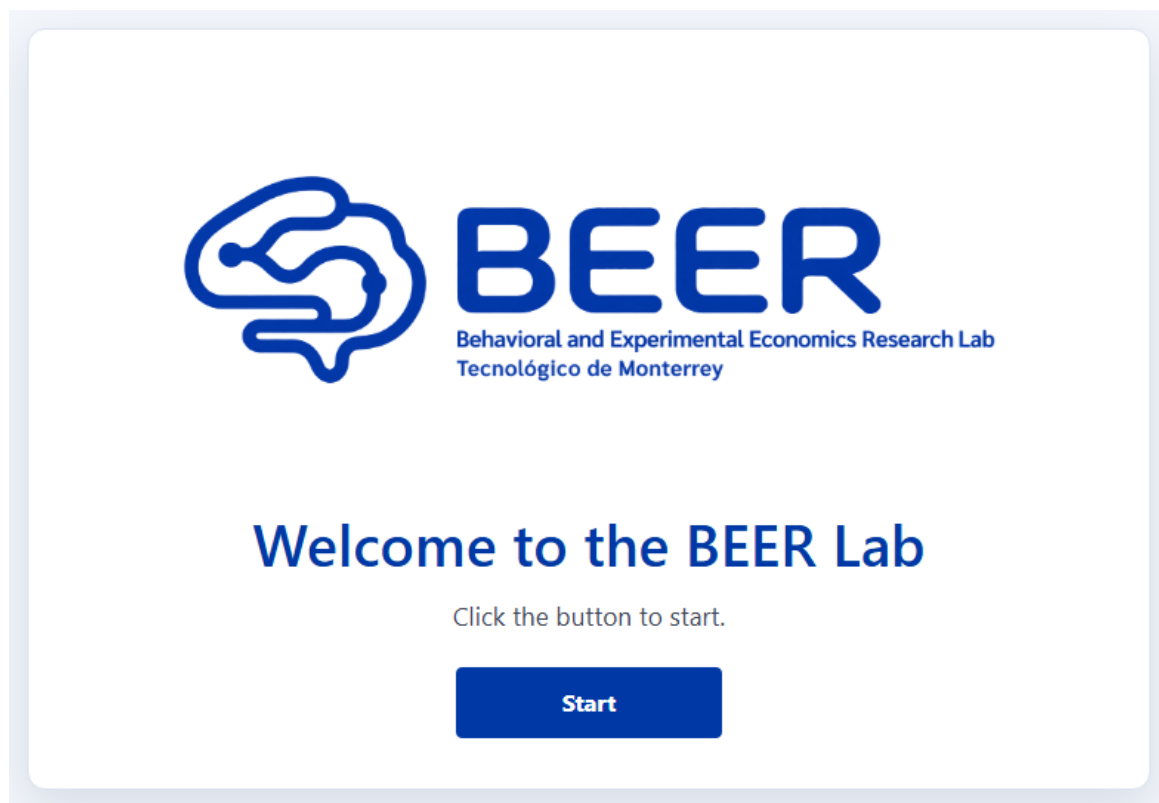


Figure 2.1: Public entry screen for the English dictator-game room.

2.4 Instructor route

The address dictator.beer-lab.org/demo opens the oTree sign-in page. The laboratory coordinator provides the credentials; they should never appear in public teaching materials.

Figure 2.2: Sign-in page for the oTree administrative panel.

After signing in, the top menu provides access to **Demo**, **Sessions**, **Rooms**, **Data**, and **Server Check**. Use **Rooms** for a classroom session connected to the stable student address.

At the address for this game, **Demo** lists only the 30 dictator game configurations, and **Rooms** shows only its four rooms (basic and extended in Spanish and English). If another game appears, do not start the session; contact the laboratory coordinator.

Select **[EN] Dictator Game** for the three basic versions. Use **[EN] Extended Dictator Game** for the additional treatments. Inside the room, select the configuration and number of participants.

For the instructor

The **Demo** page is useful for trying configurations with the default number of participants. To activate the stable room link during class, create the session from **Rooms**.

2.5 Links and monitoring

Once a session is created, oTree displays participant links and administrative tabs. The production session uses the stable room; individual links are useful for testing and controlled recovery.

The screenshot shows the oTree web interface. At the top is a navigation bar with links: Demo, Sessions, Rooms, Data, and Server Check. Below this is a header for the current session: "[EN] Dictator Game — one round: session 'a6e2yc9a' (demo)". A row of icons provides access to various functions: New, Links, Monitor, Data, Payments, Report, and Description. A note states: "Below are temporary links for testing and demonstration. To launch a real study, either create persistent links by setting up a [room](#), or create a session through the [sessions page](#). Choose one of the following options to play the session:". Under "Combined views", there are two buttons: "Split-screen view Launch" and "Grid view Launch". A section titled "Session-wide testing link" instructs the user to "Open the below link in up to 4 browser tabs." and provides the URL: <http://127.0.0.1:8001/join/tasejoko>. Another section titled "Single-use links" instructs the user to "Open each link in its own browser tab." and lists four participant links labeled P1 through P4.

P1	http://127.0.0.1:8001/InitializeParticipant/wisvkr7r
P2	http://127.0.0.1:8001/InitializeParticipant/4fe78wd0
P3	http://127.0.0.1:8001/InitializeParticipant/e4ajlr6
P4	http://127.0.0.1:8001/InitializeParticipant/2jhtng0

Figure 2.3: Participant links for a test session.

In **Monitor**, the instructor follows the progress of each anonymous code. This view helps identify students who remain on an earlier screen or lose their connection.

The screenshot shows the oTree web interface in the Monitor view. The navigation bar is the same as in Figure 2.3. The session header is "[ES] Juego del dictador — una ronda: session 'n48mlld'". Below the navigation icons, a table displays the progress of participants. The table has columns: ID, Code, Label, Progress, App, Round, PageName, Waiting, WaitsFor, and Since. Below the table, it shows "0 started, 0 in progress (total: 2)".

ID	Code	Label	Progress	App	Round	PageName	Waiting	WaitsFor	Since
0 started, 0 in progress (total: 2)									

Figure 2.4: Progress monitor for a dictator-game session.

Common elements of the dictator game

3.1 Rules

In the basic game, oTree forms anonymous pairs and randomly assigns roles A and B. In each round:

- A receives an endowment of 100 ECU;
- A chooses how many ECU to transfer to B;
- B makes no decision and cannot reject the transfer;
- A's payoff equals the endowment minus the transfer;
- B's payoff equals the transfer; and
- pair members cannot communicate.

If the endowment is e and the transfer is t , payoffs are

$$x_A = e - t, \quad x_B = t, \quad 0 \leq t \leq e.$$

Theoretical foundation

The prediction $t = 0$ does not follow from rationality alone. It also requires the assumption that A values only A's own monetary payoff. A person can choose consistently while valuing another person's payoff, equality, efficiency, or compliance with a norm.

3.2 Common screens

3.2.1 Welcome page and laboratory rules

The first internal screen presents the purpose of the laboratory, rules of conduct, and a required confirmation. Allow every student to read the text without turning it into guidance about how much to transfer.

3.2.2 Instructions

The instructions describe the mechanism using **participant A** and **participant B**. They avoid evaluative labels such as “selfish,” “generous,” or “donation,” which could suggest an expected choice.



Welcome to the BEER Lab

The **Behavioral and Experimental Economics Research Lab** of the Department of Economics at Tecnológico de Monterrey is a space designed for learning about economic decision-making through controlled activities.

During this session, you will make decisions individually. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. What matters is that you read the instructions carefully and respond according to your own judgment. The class results will be presented in aggregate form and used for discussion and learning.

Laboratory rules

For the activity to run properly:

- Remain silent throughout the session.
- Do not talk or communicate with other participants.
- Do not look at other participants' screens or decisions.
- Put away your phone and do not use materials unrelated to the activity.
- Read each screen carefully before continuing.
- Do not close, refresh, or leave the experiment page.

Figure 3.1: BEER Lab welcome page and laboratory rules accepted by each participant.

The resources box states the session's actual endowment in the body of the instructions, in addition to the header. In the basic game, A starts each round with 100 ECU and B with 0 ECU; both role cards repeat these balances. If the instructor changes the endowment, the screen displays that amount and the examples adjust accordingly. In the taking treatment, B holds the initial endowment; in third-party punishment, C's account is separate from the fund allocated by A.

ECU stands for *Experimental Currency Units*: it is an accounting unit, not a national currency. The instructor should explain whether the session involves real payments and, if so, which decisions are paid and the conversion rate. The usual teaching configuration of this game does not convert ECU into real money.



Dictator Game

BEER Lab · Tecnológico de Monterrey

Baseline

One round · 100 ECU

Resources and unit of account

Endowment allocated by A this round: 100 ECU. A starts with 100 ECU and B with 0 ECU.

ECU stands for Experimental Currency Units. It is the unit of account for this activity.

This session does not convert ECU into real money.

In this game, A decides how to divide an endowment between A and B.

Participant A

Initial endowment: 100 ECU.

Decides how many ECUs to allocate.

Participant B

Initial endowment: 0 ECU.

Receives the amount determined by A and cannot reject it.

Matching: One random pair.

ECUs have no monetary value in this version.

[Continue](#)

Powered by [oTree](#)

Figure 3.2: Current instructions for the basic edition: initial resources, decision rules, and experimental units.

3.2.3 Comprehension

Before continuing, students calculate A's and B's outcomes in an example and verify the number of rounds and the matching procedure. When an answer is incorrect, feedback appears beside that question: it identifies the submitted answer, the correct answer, and the rule or calculation behind the outcome. Previously submitted fields are retained; the student corrects only what is necessary and continues again.

Example of comprehension feedback

With an endowment of 100 ECU and a transfer of 30 ECU to B, A keeps $100 - 30 = 70$ ECU and B receives 30 ECU. If the student enters 0 for A and 30 for B, the system explains A's outcome and retains B's answer and the round and matching selections. This check teaches the rules; it does not suggest how much A should transfer during play.



Review the marked questions. Each shows your answer and an explanation; your other answers are retained.

Check the rules

Answer correctly before continuing.

Baseline
100 ECU

Resources and unit of account

Endowment allocated by A this round: 100 ECU. A starts with 100 ECU and B with 0 ECU.

ECU stands for Experimental Currency Units. It is the unit of account for this activity.

This session does not convert ECU into real money.

A allocates 30 ECUs to B.

How many ECUs does A have at the end of the example?

71.0

Figure 3.3: Current comprehension check with an incorrect answer, its specific explanation, and retained responses. Continuation 1/2.

3.2.4 Role assignment

The system privately announces each participant's role. Roles remain fixed across all ten rounds in the repeated versions.

3.2.5 Decision and waiting

A enters an amount with no preselected value. The interface calculates how much A keeps and how much B receives. Meanwhile, B sees a waiting screen that does not reveal the decision or A's exact response time.

3.2.6 Round result and completion

After confirmation, both participants observe the round allocation. At the end, each participant receives a summary of their own outcomes.

Your answer: 71. The correct answer is 70. A keeps the endowment minus transfer costs: $100 - 30 = 70$ ECU.

How many ECUs does B have at the end of the example?

30.0

How many rounds are there in this session?

☒ 1 round

☐ 10 rounds

How are pairs or groups formed?

☒ The interaction occurs once.

☐ The same pair or group continues.

☐ The pair or group changes each round.

Continue

Powered by [oTree](#)

Figure 3.4: Current comprehension check with an incorrect answer, its specific explanation, and retained responses. Continuation 2/2.

Your role in this session

Your role will remain the same throughout all rounds.

One round

100 ECUs

You will participate as

A

In each round, you will decide how many ECUs to transfer to B.

Start the game

Con tecnología de [oTree](#)

Figure 3.5: Role-assignment screens. Role A: makes the decision.

Your role in this session

Your role will remain the same throughout all rounds.

One round

100 ECUs

You will participate as

B

In each round, you will receive the amount that A decides to transfer.

Start the game

Con tecnología de [oTree](#)

Figure 3.6: Role B: receives the transfer.

How many ECUs do you want to transfer?

Participant A · Round 1 of 1

One round

One random partner

Enter a whole number between 0 and 100. No amount is selected initially.

How many ECUs do you want to transfer to B?

A keeps

—

ECUs

B receives

—

ECUs

Confirm decision

Con tecnología de [oTree](#)

Figure 3.7: Simultaneous screens during the decision. Participant A's decision.

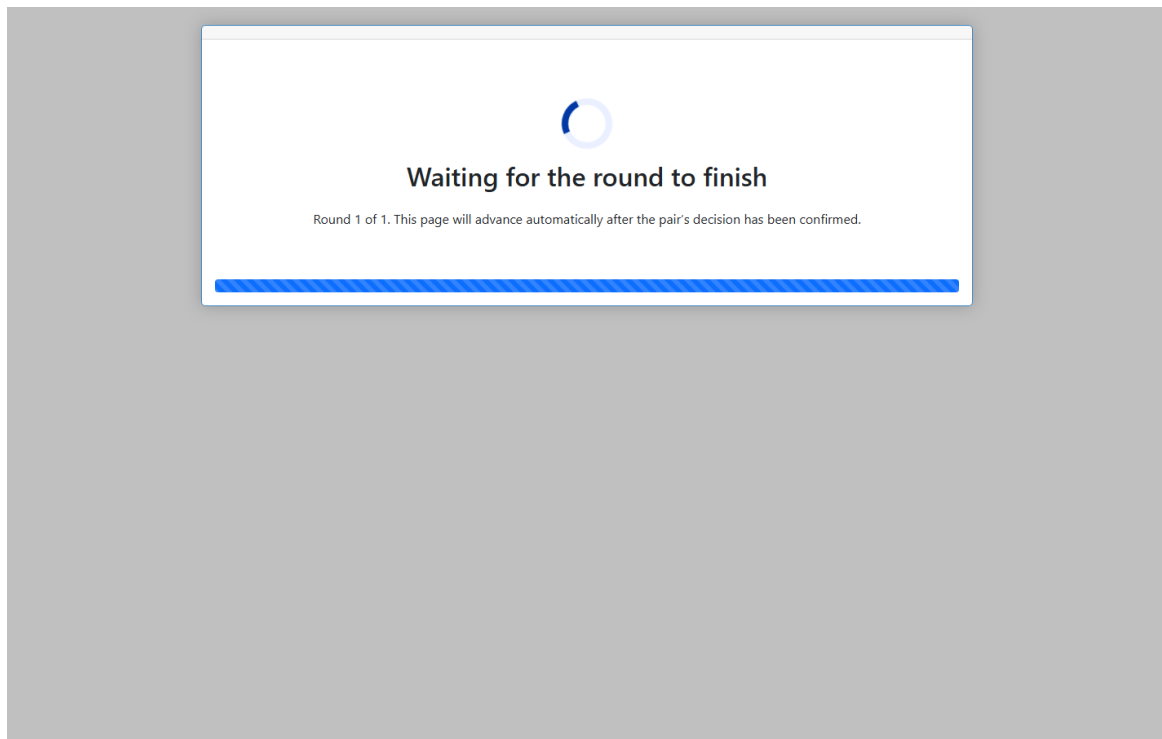


Figure 3.8: Participant B's waiting screen.

Round 1 result

Participant A

One round
One random partner

A keeps

60

ECUs

B receives

40

ECUs

Your outcome in this round

60 ECUs

This was the final round.

Continue

Con tecnología de [oTree](#)

Figure 3.9: Individual round outcomes. Outcome observed by A.

Round 1 result

Participant B

One round
One random partner

A keeps

60

ECUs

B receives

40

ECUs

Your outcome in this round

40 ECUs

This was the final round.

Continue

Con tecnología de [oTree](#)

Figure 3.10: Outcome observed by B.

Summary of your participation

The activity is complete.

One round
Participant A

Total outcome

60 ECUs

Wait for the instructor's directions before the class discussion.

Session complete

You do not need to take any further action.

Remain on this page while the instructor presents the class's aggregate results.

Con tecnología de [oTree](#)

Figure 3.11: Individual summary at the end of the session.

3.3 Instructor panel

While decisions are pending, the report displays session status and keeps allocations hidden. Once all pairs finish, the instructor can reveal aggregate outcomes.

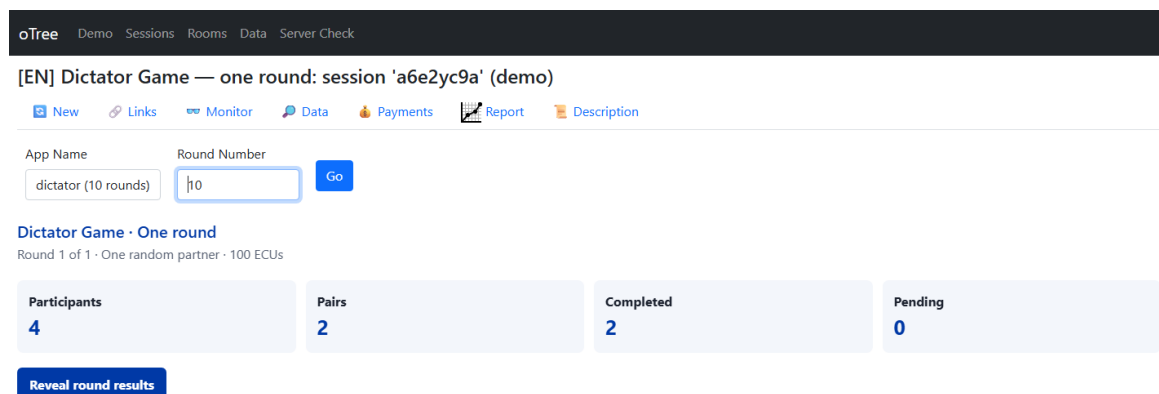


Figure 3.12: Instructor report before and after revealing results. Results remain hidden.

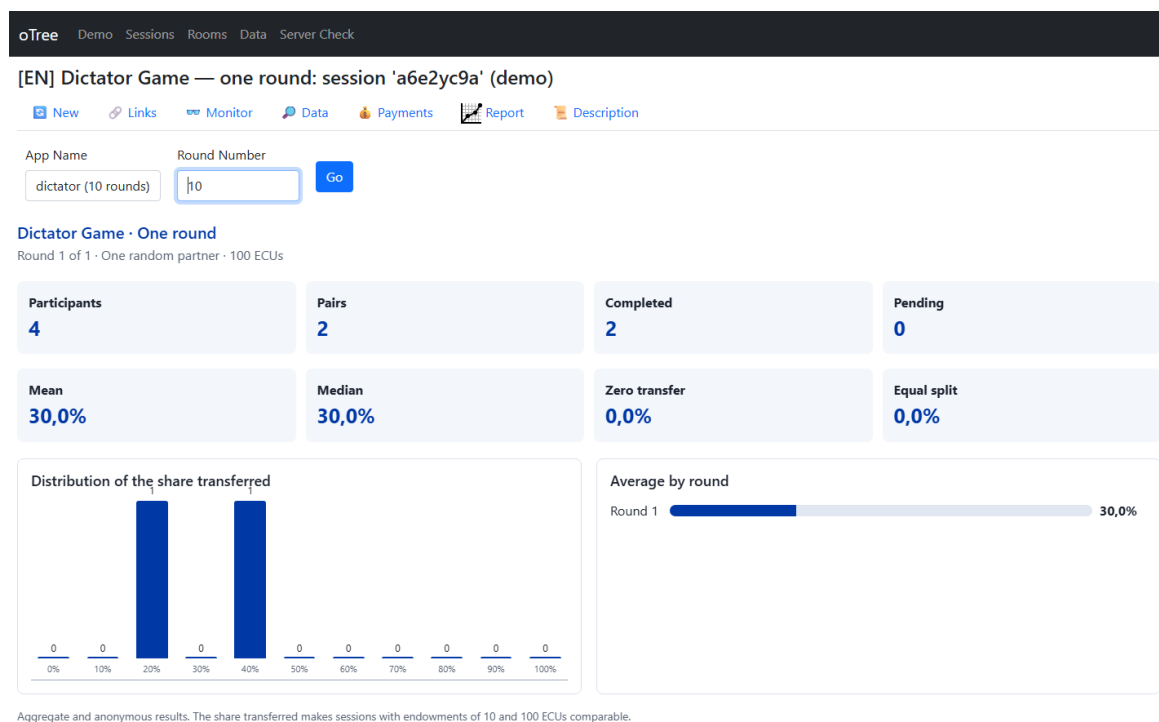


Figure 3.13: Aggregate results revealed.

The basic panel reports participants, complete pairs, and pending pairs. After results are revealed, it displays the mean, median, proportion of zero transfers, proportion of equal splits, histogram, and mean by round.

Theoretical foundations and evidence

4.1 Material self-interest

The benchmark model assumes

$$U_A(x_A, x_B) = x_A.$$

Because $x_A = e - t$, every positive transfer reduces A's payoff. The optimal choice is $t^* = 0$. This prediction is unchanged in a one-shot interaction and in a finite ten-round game as long as B remains passive and A faces no future consequences.

This result provides a clear benchmark, but it is not a definition of rationality. Consistently maximizing a utility function that includes another person's welfare is also rational behavior.

4.2 Altruism and warm-glow giving

A simple representation of altruism is

$$U_A = x_A + \alpha x_B, \quad \alpha \geq 0.$$

In the basic game, one unit transferred costs A one unit and gives B one unit. If $\alpha < 1$, this linear model predicts zero; if $\alpha > 1$, it predicts transferring everything. Concave utility or heterogeneity in α allows interior choices.

The idea of *warm glow* adds utility from the act of giving, rather than only from B's outcome ([Andreoni, 1990](#)). The distinction is especially useful when the productivity of a transfer changes: a person motivated by consequences may respond to B's benefit, whereas a person motivated mainly by the act of giving may respond differently.

4.3 Inequality aversion

For two people, the model in [Fehr and Schmidt \(1999\)](#) can be written as

$$U_A = x_A - \alpha_A \max\{x_B - x_A, 0\} - \beta_A \max\{x_A - x_B, 0\},$$

where α_A measures aversion to disadvantageous inequality and β_A measures aversion to advantageous inequality. In the basic game, while $t \leq e/2$,

$$U_A = e(1 - \beta_A) + t(2\beta_A - 1).$$

Thus, a simple version of the model predicts zero when $\beta_A < 1/2$ and an equal split when $\beta_A > 1/2$. It does not normally predict transfers above one half. The ERC model of [Bolton and Ockenfels \(2000\)](#) likewise combines own payoff and relative position.

4.4 Efficiency, maximin, and social welfare

People may value total surplus or the outcome of the person who is worst off. These motives can be distinguished with variants in which A's cost and B's benefit differ. If

$$x_A = e - ct, \quad x_B = mt,$$

total surplus is $e + (m - c)t$. When $m > c$, transferring increases efficiency. A decision maker concerned only with own payoff still chooses zero if $c > 0$; a utilitarian may transfer more; and a person concerned with equality may stop near the equal-payoff point. The designs of [Andreoni and Miller \(2002\)](#), [Engelmann and Strobel \(2004\)](#), and [Fisman et al. \(2007\)](#) show why varying the price of giving and the budget set is informative.

4.5 Social norms and context

Social norms describe conduct that a group regards as appropriate. The same monetary consequence may acquire different meanings when framed as giving, taking, keeping one's own resources, or dividing jointly produced resources. [Krupka and Weber \(2013\)](#) show that ratings of social appropriateness help explain differences across dictator-game variants that payoff-only models cannot capture.

It is useful to distinguish:

- **empirical expectations:** what a person believes others will do;
- **normative expectations:** what a person believes others regard as appropriate; and
- **social preferences:** the value a person directly assigns to different outcomes.

4.6 Entitlements, merit, and property

In the standard game, the endowment appears as a resource supplied by the experiment. When A or B earns it through effort, a sense of entitlement arises. Experiments by [Hoffman et al. \(1994\)](#), [Cherry et al. \(2002\)](#), [Oxoby and Spraggon \(2008\)](#), and [Cappelen et al. \(2007\)](#) show that the origin of resources changes allocations and helps distinguish strict egalitarianism, responsibility-sensitive equality, and libertarian principles.

4.7 Social image, anonymity, and social distance

Observability can introduce social-image utility: a person values being perceived as fair. [Andreoni and Bernheim \(2009\)](#) develop and test this explanation for the concentration of choices at the 50–50 split. Reducing social distance can also increase transfers when the recipient is no longer an abstract stranger ([Bohnet and Frey, 1999](#); [Charness and Gneezy, 2008](#)).

Social image should not be confused with altruism. A choice can change when it is observed even though payoffs remain constant. Likewise, minimal information about the recipient may change affective reactions or identification without altering monetary incentives.

4.8 Third-party punishment and norm enforcement

In the three-person treatment, C can pay to reduce A's payoff after observing the transfer. Material self-interest predicts that C will not punish because C receives no monetary benefit. Positive punishment, especially when it rises as transfers fall, is consistent with costly norm enforcement and strong reciprocity. [Fehr and Fischbacher \(2004\)](#) document this pattern in distributive and cooperation games.

4.9 What the basic evidence shows

Early experiments compared ultimatum and dictator games to separate fear of rejection from distributive concern ([Forsythe et al., 1994](#)). Dictator transfers are often positive, but their distribution is heterogeneous: there are concentrations at zero and at the equal split, together with intermediate choices. The meta-study by [Engel \(2011\)](#) shows that design, anonymity, action sets, recipient type, and other protocol features systematically affect results.

Attention

A positive transfer does not identify altruism by itself. It may reflect inequality aversion, norms, social image, experimental demand, or a combination of motives. Comparing variants helps discriminate among explanations, but a classroom session provides descriptive evidence rather than a definitive test.

Implementing the basic game

5.1 Configurations

Configuration	Matching	Participants
dictator_1_round	One random pair, one round	Even number
dictator_10_fixed_partner	Same pair for ten rounds	Even number
dictator_10_random_partners	New partner each round; avoids repeats when possible	Even number; ideally 20

5.2 Before the session

1. Define the learning objective. Use one round for an introduction and a ten-round version to study dynamics.
2. Confirm an even number of participants. Prepare a backup access link in case someone is absent.
3. Create the session from **Rooms** and verify the configuration.
4. Open **Monitor** and **Report**.
5. Keep the report hidden until everyone finishes.
6. Project the room address or its QR code.

5.3 Introductory script

What participants will see

“You will take part in an activity about economic decision making. Read every screen carefully. Do not speak with other participants or look at their monitors. If you encounter a technical problem, raise your hand. Your decisions will be analyzed in aggregate form and will not be presented with names. Begin only when instructed.”

Do not announce the zero-transfer prediction or use moral language before decisions are recorded. Reserve that information for the feedback discussion.

5.4 During the game

1. Use **Monitor** to confirm that everyone has advanced beyond the welcome page.
2. Wait for all participants to complete the comprehension questions.
3. Verify that half of the class is assigned to A and half to B.
4. Do not comment on the time taken by individual decision makers.
5. In repeated versions, observe round progress without revealing averages.
6. Once every pair finishes, open **Report** and select **Reveal results**.

5.5 Feedback for the basic game

Feedback script

1. Ask: "If A valued only A's own ECU, what would A choose?"
2. Derive $t^* = 0$ using $x_A = 100 - t$.
3. Show the histogram and ask for a description before offering interpretations.
4. Identify zero, 50, and intermediate choices.
5. Compare mean, median, and mode. Explain why they are not equivalent.
6. Introduce altruism, inequality aversion, norms, and preference heterogeneity.
7. Ask what design change would better distinguish among these explanations.

5.6 Repeated versions

Roles are fixed in both ten-round versions. B still cannot reward or punish, so the usual strategic reciprocity of a repeated prisoner's dilemma is absent. Changes can reflect experience, task learning, consistency, adaptation, familiarity, accumulated income, or moral licensing.

Comparing fixed and random partners allows the class to ask whether continuity changes behavior even when the counterpart is anonymous and passive. If the number of possible partners is smaller than the number of rounds, the matching algorithm must repeat some partners and the panel displays a warning.

Feedback script

Compare the first and last rounds, but also show the entire trajectory. Ask whether changes occur gradually, whether they are concentrated among particular behavioral types, and whether the mean and the distribution tell the same story. Repeated observations from one person are not independent.

Dictator-game variants

6.1 Map of variants

Variant	Change	Teaching question
One round	One decision	Do transfers occur without the threat of rejection?
Ten rounds, fixed partner	Repetition with the same counterpart	How do choices evolve with experience and continuity?
Ten rounds, random partners	A new counterpart	Does the time pattern depend on a persistent relationship?
Taking instead of giving	A may appropriate B's resources	Do the frame and action set matter?
Earned endowment	The endowment is obtained through a task	How do merit and property criteria change allocations?
Third-party punishment	C can punish A at a cost	Will people pay to enforce norms?
Social information	The previous distribution is displayed	Do expectations about others change behavior?
Recipient identity	A receives information about B	Does social distance matter?
Efficient giving	Each transferred ECU produces 2 for B	Do participants value total surplus?
Lower cost of giving	Giving 1 to B costs A 0.5	How does giving respond to its price?
Two recipients	A allocates resources among B and C	How do equality, maximin, and efficiency interact?
Observable decisions	The choice is shown by anonymous pair	Does social image matter?

6.2 Taking instead of giving

Configuration: `dictator_extended_take`. Groups of two; one round.

This treatment reverses the decision frame. B starts with the entire endowment and A with zero; A decides how much to take from B. The entered amount is what A takes and keeps, not what A gives to B. B's role screen states the initial endowment and explains that B keeps what A does not take. Not giving and actively taking can carry different normative meanings even when the total budget is unchanged.

For the instructor

With an endowment of 100 ECU, taking 30 leaves A with 30 and B with 70. The preview must display those same outcomes before confirmation. Taking zero leaves the entire endowment with B; taking 100 leaves B with nothing. For a general endowment E and amount taken x , payoffs are $\pi_A = x$ and $\pi_B = E - x$. In the giving game, entering 30 produces the opposite allocation: A keeps 70 and B receives 30. Always check what the entered amount means before comparing distributions.

How many ECUs do you want to take?

Taking instead of giving

One random pair

Participant A · Round 1 of 1

Enter whole numbers. No decision is selected initially.

ECUs that A takes from B

A finishes with

30

ECU

B finishes with

70

ECU

Confirm decision

ECU stands for Experimental Currency Units. It is the unit of account for this activity.

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Figure 6.1: Decision in the taking treatment: A takes 30 from B's initial 100 ECU; the preview displays A = 30 and B = 70.

Theoretical foundation

Self-interest predicts the action that maximizes A's payoff, including maximum taking. A stable outcome-based theory compares final allocations. Theories of norms, property rights, and framing predict that describing and expanding the action set can change choices even when some final allocations coincide.

List (2007) and Bardsley (2008) find that generosity declines sharply when taking is included in the action set. These results caution that positive transfers in the standard game may partly depend on how the experiment defines the appropriate action and reference point.

Feedback script

Compare the distribution with the baseline, distinguishing taking zero from taking a positive amount. This treatment permits taking between zero and B's endowment; it does not offer giving from A's own resources. To compare monetary outcomes, giving y in the basic game is equivalent to taking $E - y$ in this treatment. A high mean amount taken means that A keeps more, not that B receives more. Distinguish this frame change from designs in the literature that expand a single decision to permit both giving and taking.

Essential readings: List (2007); Bardsley (2008). **Further reading:** Krupka and Weber (2013); Engel (2011).

6.3 Earned endowment

Configuration: dictator_extended_earned_endowment. Groups of two; one round.

Before allocating resources, A earns the endowment through a task. This modification introduces entitlement and property. Clearly explain who completed the task and avoid presenting a normative interpretation before the decision.

Theoretical foundation

Self-interest continues to predict a zero transfer. Strict egalitarianism retains the equal split. Libertarian or responsibility-sensitive criteria allow the person who produced the resources to keep a larger share. If B had earned the endowment, the same criteria could justify larger transfers to B.

Evidence shows that perceived entitlements matter. Earning the role or the endowment can increase allocations favorable to the decision maker (Hoffman et al., 1994; Cherry et al., 2002). Allocations can shift substantially when the person who produced the resources changes (Oxoby and Spraggon, 2008). Production designs also reveal a plurality of fairness ideals (Cappelen et al., 2007).

Feedback script

Compare the windfall endowment with the earned endowment. Ask what distribution each theory regards as fair and whether effort changes moral ownership. Distinguish effort, productivity, and luck.

6.4 Third-party altruistic punishment

Configuration: dictator_extended_third_party_punishment. Groups of three; one round.

A allocates 100 ECU between A and B. C receives 50 ECU and, after observing the transfer, can purchase punishment points. Each ECU spent by C reduces A's outcome by 3 ECU. The maximum prevents negative outcomes.

Theoretical foundation

A C who cares only about own payoff chooses zero punishment. Norm enforcement and strong reciprocity allow positive punishment that increases with the perceived severity of the violation. Anticipated punishment may increase A's transfer when the expected sanction exceeds the benefit of keeping resources.

Fehr and Fischbacher (2004) show that many third parties punish distributive violations even though they were not harmed and punishment is costly. The treatment separates A's willingness to share from C's willingness to enforce a norm.

For the instructor

The number of participants must be a multiple of three. The report separately displays transfers, punishment expenditure, the proportion of third parties who punish, and the relationship between transfers and punishment.

Feedback script

Show transfers first and punishment second. Ask what appears to constitute a violation and whether C punishes to help B, reduce inequality, express disapproval, or deter A.

6.5 Social information

Configuration: `dictator_extended_social_information`. Groups of two; ten rounds with a fixed partner.

Beginning in the second round, participants see an anonymous histogram of decisions from the preceding round. The information identifies no one and does not prescribe a transfer.

Theoretical foundation

If preferences depend only on payoffs, payoff-irrelevant information about others does not change the decision. Social-influence and norm theories predict movement toward observed behavior. A distribution may change empirical expectations even when normative expectations remain constant.

Cason and Mui (1998) show that observing a relevant choice can limit movement toward more selfish allocations. Bicchieri and Xiao (2009) emphasize empirical expectations, while Krupka and Weber (2013) connect perceived norms to variation across dictator games.

Feedback script

Compare the first round, which is completed without information, with later rounds. Look for convergence, polarization, or persistence. Ask whether students interpreted the histogram as a description, a recommendation, or both.

6.6 Recipient identity

Configuration: `dictator_extended_recipient_identity`. Groups of two; one round.

A receives a minimal description of B, for example that B is another Tecnológico de Monterrey student. The information reduces abstraction without revealing names or permitting individual identification.

Theoretical foundation

Payoffs do not change, so self-interest and preferences based only on outcomes predict the same choice. Models of identity, social distance, and empathy allow a larger transfer when B is perceived as a concrete person or a member of a close group.

Identification and reduced social distance often increase dictator-game allocations (Bohnet and Frey, 1999; Charness and Gneezy, 2008). The effect does not necessarily imply general altruism: it

may be specific to the group or information presented.

Feedback script

Ask what information was relevant and whether a shared identity changes the perceived obligation. Discuss the difference between universal generosity and favoritism toward close groups.

6.7 Efficient giving

Configuration: dictator_extended_efficient_giving. Groups of two; one round.

Each ECU sacrificed by A produces 2 ECU for B. Payoffs are

$$x_A = 100 - t, \quad x_B = 2t.$$

A transfer increases total surplus. Equality occurs when $100 - t = 2t$, or near $t = 33.3$.

Theoretical foundation

Self-interest predicts zero. A utilitarian preference favors high transfers because every unit sacrificed creates two. Inequality aversion can favor the transfer that equalizes payoffs. Maximin may focus on increasing the lower payoff up to equality.

Variations in the price and productivity of giving reveal heterogeneity among selfish, egalitarian, and surplus-oriented preferences ([Andreoni and Miller, 2002](#); [Engelmann and Strobel, 2004](#); [Fisman et al., 2007](#)).

Feedback script

Mark three reference points on the graph: zero transfer, approximate equality, and maximum efficiency. Ask which best describes the decisions and why equality and efficiency no longer coincide.

6.8 Lower cost of giving

Configuration: dictator_extended_low_cost_giving. Groups of two; one round.

Giving B 1 ECU costs A 0.5 ECU:

$$x_A = 100 - 0.5t, \quad x_B = t.$$

The price of increasing B's payoff is lower than in the baseline.

Theoretical foundation

Self-interest still predicts zero because every transfer has a positive cost. Consequentialist altruism generally predicts more giving when helping becomes cheaper. Equality and efficiency identify different points, allowing the theories to be compared.

Demand experiments on generosity show that many choices respond to price, with considerable heterogeneity ([Andreoni and Miller, 2002](#); [Fisman et al., 2007](#)).

Feedback script

Compare amounts and proportions with the baseline. Ask whether giving more when it is cheaper implies greater concern for B or simply a normal response to prices.

6.9 Two recipients

Configuration: dictator_extended_two_recipients. Groups of three; one round.

A allocates an endowment among A, B, and C. The treatment studies both how much A gives and how the amount given is divided between two passive recipients. A must explicitly enter an amount for B and another for C, including zero when appropriate. The preview displays all three payoffs and enables confirmation only when both amounts are valid and their sum does not exceed the endowment. With 100 ECU, allocating 20 to B and 30 to C leaves 50 for A.

How do you want to allocate the ECUs?

Two recipients

One random group of three

Participant A · Round 1 of 1

Enter whole numbers. No decision is selected initially.

ECUs allocated by A to B

ECUs allocated by A to C

A finishes with

50

ECU

B finishes with

20

ECU

C finishes with

30

ECU

Confirm decision

ECU stands for Experimental Currency Units. It is the unit of account for this activity.

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Figure 6.2: Decision with two recipients: 20 ECU for B and 30 for C leave 50 for A. Both amounts enter the same budget constraint.

Theoretical foundation

Self-interest predicts keeping everything. Egalitarianism favors similar payoffs for all three people. Maximin seeks to improve the outcome of the worst-off person. A preference for total welfare requires knowing whether transfers have equal productivity. The ERC model changes because A's relative position is evaluated within a group.

Games with several recipients show that giving a positive amount and treating recipients equally are distinct decisions (Bolton et al., 1998). Three-person budget sets identify preferences over

allocations among others ([Fisman et al., 2007](#)).

For the instructor

The number of participants must be a multiple of three. The report should display both the total transferred and the separate allocation between B and C.

Feedback script

Analyze two margins: how much A keeps and how symmetrically A treats B and C. Ask whether equality between recipients matters even when A retains an advantage.

6.10 Observable decisions

Configuration: `dictator_extended_public_decisions`. Groups of two; one round.

After all decisions are complete, the class sees a table organized by anonymous pairs. No names or codes that could identify a student are displayed.

Theoretical foundation

Payoff-only preferences predict the same choice as under privacy. Social-image utility and public norm compliance can increase transfers or generate a concentration at the equal split.

Evidence on anonymity shows that observability can reduce decisions that exclusively favor the decision maker ([Hoffman et al., 1994](#)). [Andreoni and Bernheim \(2009\)](#) connect audience effects to the 50–50 norm. Even subtle cues of observation can affect generosity, although magnitude and robustness depend on context ([Haley and Fessler, 2005](#)).

Feedback script

Compare the distribution with a private session. Ask whether results reflect concern for B, fear of social judgment, or both. Do not ask anyone to explain an individual decision publicly.

Interpretation and classroom feedback

7.1 How to read the histogram

The histogram contains more information than the mean. The instructor should identify:

- the mass at zero, which is consistent with self-interest but can also reflect other motives;
- the mass at 50 percent, associated with the equal split;
- intermediate choices;
- transfers above one half; and
- dispersion and possible behavioral clusters.

The median describes the central observation, whereas the mean can be shifted by extreme choices. The mode identifies the most frequent interval. No single statistic replaces the full distribution.

7.2 Prediction matrix

Variant	Self-interest	Inequality	Efficiency	Norms and context	Image and identity
Basic	Zero	Zero or equality	Depends on weight	Appropriate transfer	Limited under privacy
Taking	Maximum taking	Final outcome matters	Final outcome matters	Strong frame effect	Possible moral cost of taking
Earned endowment	Zero	Equality if strict	No mechanical change	Property rights	Merit changes perception
Third-party punishment	Zero punishment	Punish to reduce inequality	Can destroy surplus	Norm enforcement	Observable disapproval
Social information	No change	No direct change	No direct change	Convergence to observed choices	Conformity

Variant	Self-interest	Inequality	Efficiency	Norms and context	Image and identity
Identity	No change	No change if only outcomes matter	No change	Group-specific norm	Lower social distance
Efficient giving	Zero	Equality point	High transfer	Depends on norm	Ambiguous effect
Lower cost	Zero	New equality point	High transfer	Depends on reference	Ambiguous effect
Two recipients	Zero	Equality among three	Depends on technology	Sharing rule	Recipient identity
Observable	No change	No change if preferences are stable	No mechanical change	More public compliance	Greater image weight

7.3 Recommended feedback sequence

1. **Description.** Ask the class to describe the graph before explaining causes.
2. **Theoretical benchmark.** Derive the self-interest prediction.
3. **Comparison.** Identify agreements and deviations.
4. **Alternative explanations.** Present two or more compatible theories.
5. **Treatment.** Ask what changed relative to the baseline.
6. **Published evidence.** Compare the class results qualitatively with the relevant studies.
7. **Limitations.** Discuss sample size, order, composition, and the absence of random assignment across classes.
8. **Application.** Connect the treatment to donations, redistribution, organizations, norms, or institutional design.

7.4 General questions

- What assumptions beyond rationality generate the zero-transfer prediction?
- Which decisions are consistent with inequality aversion?
- How could altruism be distinguished from social image?
- Why can the mean conceal different behavioral patterns?
- Which variant best identifies preferences for efficiency?
- Does a change in framing reveal different preferences or change the applicable norm?
- What comparison is required to support a causal conclusion?

Data, limitations, and troubleshooting

8.1 Responsible interpretation

A classroom session is primarily a teaching demonstration. Its outcomes can be compared with theoretical predictions and published patterns, but they should not be presented as a precise estimate for a population.

- Repeated-round choices come from the same people and are not independent.
- Comparing two courses may confound the treatment with differences between groups.
- The order of treatments may produce learning, anchoring, or experimental-demand effects.
- The classroom context may reduce perceived anonymity.
- Choices should not be used to label permanent traits of individual students.

8.2 Data and privacy

The platform stores anonymous codes, configuration, round, pair, role, endowment, transfer, transfer proportion, payoffs, comprehension attempts, and progress status. This version does not request names, email addresses, student identification numbers, or demographic information.

Downloading session data

1. Open the session you want to analyze and select the **Data** tab. Check its code and configuration before downloading.
2. Under **Download this session's data**, select **CSV** or **Excel CSV**. These buttons include only the open session and all recorded rounds, including the ten-round configuration.
3. For the dictator's round-level format, use the game's custom export and filter by session code if the download includes several sessions from this family.

The standard file is wide: it contains one row per participant, with rounds in columns. A four-person, ten-round session therefore contains four participant rows, rather than forty. In the custom round-level file, the same session contains forty records: one per person and round. Both formats include A and B; filtering for role A lets you analyze transfers without counting them twice. Unrecorded answers remain blank, while other fields may contain initial values. A blank field does not mean a zero transfer.

Save exports with a filename that identifies the date, course, and treatment without including personal data, for example:

2026-09-19_behavioral-economics_dictator-one-round.csv

8.3 Common problems

Situation	Recommended action
"Please wait"	Check Monitor to see whether the counterpart is missing or the group has not reached the same page. Do not refresh repeatedly.
Participant does not exist	The link belongs to a reset database or an old session. Return to the room and generate a current access link.
Incompatible count	Create complete groups: multiples of 2 in the basic game and of 3 when there is a third participant. The form displays the treatment's actual requirement.
Incomplete three-person treatment	The number of participants must be a multiple of three. Adjust it before creating the session.
"No more pages left"	Verify that the configuration includes the summary screen and that the participant reached the end. In current versions, the summary should appear before completion.
Results hidden	Wait until every pair finishes. The button becomes available once the round is complete.
Student disconnected	Check Monitor, retain the anonymous code, and reopen the corresponding link if the session remains active.
Empty graph	Confirm that results were revealed and that the selected round contains complete decisions.

8.4 Closing a session

1. Confirm that every participant reached the summary.
2. Export data if they will be used later.
3. Retain only anonymous results.
4. Record the treatment, number of participants, and any incident.
5. Close or archive the session according to laboratory procedures.
6. Do not reuse individual links from a previous session.

Available configurations

oTree name	Description
dictator_1_round	Basic game, one round.
dictator_10_fixed_partner	Ten rounds, same partner.
dictator_10_random_partners	Ten rounds, random partners.
dictator_extended_1_round	Baseline within the extended application.
dictator_extended_10_fixed_partner	Extended baseline, ten rounds, fixed partner.
dictator_extended_10_random_partners	Extended baseline, random partners.
dictator_extended_take	Taking instead of giving.
dictator_extended_earned_endowment	Endowment earned through a task.
dictator_extended_third_party_punishment	Costly punishment by a third party.
dictator_extended_social_information	Histogram of prior decisions.
dictator_extended_recipient_identity	Information about B's social identity.
dictator_extended_efficient_giving	Each ECU sacrificed produces 2 for B.
dictator_extended_low_cost_giving	Each ECU assigned costs A 0.5.
dictator_extended_two_recipients	One decision maker and two recipients.
dictator_extended_public_decisions	Outcomes observable by anonymous pair.

A.1 Glossary

ECU Experimental Currency Unit; the unit of account used in the experiment.

Configuration A set of parameters defining the treatment, number of rounds, matching, and endowments.

Room A stable room that connects participants to an active session.

Session A particular instance of a game run with one group of participants.

Monitor Administrative view of participant and group progress.

Report Aggregate-results panel prepared for the instructor.

Fixed matching The same pair remains together throughout all rounds.

Random matching The system reassigns counterparts between rounds.

Social preferences Preferences that incorporate others' payoffs, inequality, efficiency, intentions, or norms.

Social norm A shared rule of conduct about what is appropriate in a situation.

Social distance The degree of closeness, identification, or information between participants.

Social image The value a person assigns to how others interpret their behavior.

Bibliography by topic

Topic	Recommended readings
Basic game and synthesis	Forsythe et al. (1994); Hoffman et al. (1994); Engel (2011); Camerer (2003).
Inequality and social preferences	Fehr and Schmidt (1999); Bolton and Ockenfels (2000); Charness and Rabin (2002).
Price, efficiency, and demand	Andreoni and Miller (2002); Engelmann and Strobel (2004); Fisman, Kariv, and Markovits (2007).
Taking frame	List (2007); Bardsley (2008); Krupka and Weber (2013).
Merit and property	Hoffman et al. (1994); Cherry et al. (2002); Cappelen et al. (2007); Oxoby and Spraggon (2008).
Third-party punishment	Fehr and Fischbacher (2004).
Information and norms	Cason and Mui (1998); Bicchieri and Xiao (2009); Krupka and Weber (2013).
Identity and social distance	Bohnet and Frey (1999); Charness and Gneezy (2008).
Multiple recipients	Bolton, Katok, and Zwick (1998); Fisman, Kariv, and Markovits (2007).
Anonymity and image	Hoffman et al. (1994); Haley and Fessler (2005); Andreoni and Bernheim (2009).
Repetition	Engel (2011); Sass, Timme, and Weimann (2017).

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