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INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in Behavioural Public Policy: IBPPC 2022

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Introduction to IBPPC 2022

Behavioural Public Policy (BPP) is an established sub-discipline of public policy. BPP uses insights from behavioural science, broadly defined, to shape and inform public policy. Intersectionality in social sciences research is central to the research agenda of BPP. To this extent, BPP invites diversity in its approach to understand human behaviours and make policy recommendations, from scholars across established disciplines, notably economics, philosophy, psychology, political science and many more. This interdisciplinary take, in turn, allows BPP to be novel in its methodology and cross-cutting in its applications, in policy fields spanning across environment and climate change, development and social policy, finance, health, misinformation, privacy, law and regulation, and technology and Artificial Intelligence, to name a few.

BPP formally developed as a structured field of active research in the last decade. To advance research in BPP, multiple initiatives have been taken. One such initiative is the annual International Behavioural Public Policy Conference (IBPPC). This editorial summarises what happened at IBPPC 2022 and introduces eleven papers that were presented at the conference which compose this conference special issue. IBPPC 2022 was organised in London between 7 and 10 September 2022, and was hosted by the Department of Social Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science, in partnership with King's College London, Frontier Economics, the LSE Hayek Programme, LSE Suntory and Toyota International Centres for Economics and Related Disciplines (STICERD), the University of Notre Dame's Research Programme on Law and Market behaviour, Expilab Research, and the UK Behavioural Insights Team.

This conference was opened with a panel led by Nava Ashraf (LSE), Tim Besley (LSE) and Gus O'Donnell (Frontier Economics) and chaired by Minouche Shafik

(LSE President and Vice-Chancellor, 2017–2023). It included two keynote lectures, by John List (University of Chicago) on 'The Voltage Effect in Public Policymaking', and Douglas Bernheim (Stanford University) on 'The Challenges of behavioural Welfare Economics'. Furthermore, the conference held nine panel discussion sessions organised by academics, policy makers and practitioners working on key topics in behavioural science and public policy.

IBPPC 2022 was attended by more than 200 delegates internationally. Given the high quality of submissions and presentations in IBPCC 2022, BPP issued a call for a special issue, to share ideas presented in the conference with the broader academic community of BPP. The special issue was edited by a team of guest editors who authored this editorial introduction. The special issue was open for submission to all attendees (including panel session organisers). Based on an initial pre-submission enquiry and interest screening, a total of 26 abstracts were further invited to be submitted as full papers. These papers were considered for publication in the special issue following a double-blinded peer-review process, per the standard reviewing protocols of *BPP* journal. Following peer-review, a total of eleven papers were accepted for publication. These papers cover a range of topics, including theoretical and conceptual ideas in BPP and applications of BPP in the areas of environment, health and financial decision-making. We summarise these papers briefly in the next section and conclude with a note on the future editions of the IBPPC.

About this special issue

This special issue comprises eleven papers, presented at IBPPC 2022. These papers illustrate key developments and recent themes emerging in BPP, organised into four strands of research: applications of BPP in domains of health (Arboleda *et al.*, 2024; Kourtidis, Fasolo and Galizzi, 2024; Lunn et al., 2024), environment (Grelle *et al.*, 2024; Laffan, 2024; Lohmann *et al.*, 2024; Shreedhar *et al.*, 2024) and financial decision-making (de Jonge et al., 2024), and new concepts and theory (Banerjee *et al.*, 2024; Dold and Rizzo, 2024; Michaelsen, 2024);

The first three articles of this special issue relate to a notable theme that emerged during IBPPC 2022 – the application of BPP during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic underscored the significance of behavioural science and public policy for exploring effective strategies in public health (Ruggeri *et al.*, 2024). Before vaccines were widely available, behaviour change interventions were among the only approaches to curb infection rates. Arboleda *et al.* (2024) illustrate this by applying the East, Attractive, Social, Timely (EAST) framework as a strategy to promote adherence to nutritional supplementation for health care workers to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 infection. But also, after vaccines became widely available, BPP research was important to understand the complex multidimensional behaviour associated with COVID-19. In this context, Kourtidis, Fasolo and Galizzi (2024) discuss and analyse behavioural spillover effects of encouraging vaccination against COVID-19. As every behaviour is inevitably embedded in a sequence of other behaviours, it is important for BPP researchers and policy makers to consider subsequent behaviours to ensure there are no unintended negative spillover effects from interventions, as exemplified by authors of this paper. Next, Lunn *et al.* (2024) delve into complex

behaviour chains through an 18-month, fortnightly 'day reconstruction' survey, examining self-reported behaviours and public perceptions regarding COVID-19. The development of their Social Activity Measure (SAM), which captures the amount, location and type of social activity, is promising for future research on detailed understanding of the locations and reasons behind transmission risks and offers valuable insights for future applications.

The significance of context in shaping behaviour is evident, as highlighted by previous papers on COVID-19; however, a more extensive crisis, the climate crisis, is ahead of us. Behavioural research has a pivotal role in comprehending and altering behaviours linked to CO_2 emissions, climate change, and other environmental threats (Sunstein, 2020). This is exemplified by the next four articles of this special issue. First, Laffan (2024) analyses data from nutrition surveys in Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands to identify situational factors influencing meat consumption. These factors include meal type, day of the week, and location of food consumption. The results reveal that these factors are indeed associated with meat and red meat consumption, with variations across countries and, in some cases, gender. The findings underscore the importance of understanding situational factors for designing targeted interventions to influence meat consumption, while also acknowledging cultural and individual differences. Furthermore, it was evident during IBPPC 2022 that commercial choice architects often misuse behavioural insights for their private gain. Such dark use of behavioural insights or nudging has been referred to as 'sludging' in the literature (see Shahab and Lades, 2021). In this context, Shreedhar *et al*. (2024) introduce the idea of 'brown sludge', exploring how poor design, legacy issues, and intentional actions obstruct green initiatives. The discussion categorises barriers at individual, social and institutional levels, highlighting the applicability and limitations of brown sludge as an explanatory tool. The authors contrast brown sludge with brown infrastructure, revealing conceptual boundaries and discussing the implications for policy solutions.

The success of nudges in promoting pro-environmental behaviour hinges on its legitimacy and public acceptance. Here framing can play an important role. Contrary to expectations, Grelle *et al*. (2024) show using multiple online experiments that individuals are more accepting of nudges when they are personally framed (e.g., *you* are defaulted into a vegetarian meal) rather than societally framed (e.g., *people* are defaulted into a vegetarian meal). This contrasts with the hypothesis that addressing the general public would garner greater acceptance due to highlighting collective costs. The framing effect is stronger for nudges involving high-effort behaviour. This suggests that perceived nudge effectiveness mediates the positive relationship between personal framing and acceptance, offering novel insights into the factors influencing nudging acceptance and their implications for policy making. In a similar spirit, Lohmann *et al*. (2024) investigate the impact of climate change messaging on inducing emotions and encouraging pro-environmental actions through an online experiment. The authors explore the effectiveness of explicit positive ('warm glow') and negative ('cold prickle') emotional appeals, along with traditional social norm communication. Surprisingly, a simple call to action for mitigating climate change is found to be as effective as emotional appeals and social norm messages. The results suggest challenges in designing messaging interventions that successfully leverage

emotional incentives for pro-environmental actions. Messages highlighting personal emotional benefits or adverse effects fall short in motivating such efforts, emphasising the need for caution when integrating emotional appeals into policy interventions.

Another prominent application of BPP is in areas of financial decision-making, which is exemplified by the article by de Jonge *et al.* (2024). In this article, the authors explore the acceptability of seven financial behavioural interventions among Dutch citizens. Financial policy makers increasingly use behavioural insights, but public sentiment on nudging financial behaviour remains unclear. de Jonge *et al.* (2024) assess the impact of the agent implementing the intervention (policy maker vs financial company) and perceived effectiveness on acceptability. They show lower acceptability in financial decision-making interventions compared to health interventions. The individual has no discernible effect on acceptability, while perceived effectiveness strongly correlates with acceptability, especially when influencing one's decisions.

The next three articles of this special issue relate to new directions for BPP. First up is a conceptual note on 'Hayekian Psychological Economics: A Preliminary Look' by Dold and Rizzo (2024). The authors argue for a departure from the traditional 'heuristics and biases' perspective. They advocate in favour of individual diversity and heterogeneity in decision-making. Moreover, it emphasises that static, isolated models of behaviour underestimate people's capacity to adaptively learn from and with others. In line with this, practitioners often encounter challenges when implementing behavioural nudges as quick fixes due to a lack of or non-persistent treatment effects, spillovers and other unintended consequences. To address these challenges, Banerjee *et al.* (2024), in their theory piece titled, 'It's time we put agency into BPP', suggest that it is important for the field to recognise citizens as autonomous agents in their decision-making process. The authors introduce a behavioural agency framework. They further argue that agency-enhancing interventions can alleviate ethical and efficacy limitations resulting in longer-lasting and more meaningful behaviour change. The authors review and outline three agency-improving behavioural toolkits, namely boosts (Hertwig and Grüne-Yanoff, 2017), debiasing (Fischoff, 1982) and nudge + (Banerjee and John, 2024) and provide a multidimensional framework comparing these toolkits. The last article of this special issue relates to transparency in public policies, which is often discussed as a means to improve agency and citizen support is vital for BPP in government initiatives. However, not all citizens approve of nudge-type interventions. To address this, there is a need for BPP to move away from the perception that citizens are manipulated without their awareness into behaviours conflicting with their preferences. Emphasising transparency, as explored by Michaelsen (2024), by building transparency in nudging, becomes pivotal in building trust. The author finds that the present literature provides consistent support for nudges even when choosers are given the opportunity to detect and understand the influence the nudge might have on their choices.

Given the policy-oriented focus of IBPPC 2022, it was apparent that there has been a notable shift among some practitioners and policy makers away from conventional one-size-fits-all behavioural policies to personalised interventions and behavioural toolkits that enhance human autonomy and agency. This was attributed to recent findings in the literature suggesting that behavioural tools, when scaled up, experience

a 'voltage drop' (or reduced effectiveness; see List 2022) and that behavioural nudges varied in their effectiveness, with modest to low effects, following corrections for publication bias and truncated effects (Bakdash and Marusich, 2022; Maier *et al.*, 2022; Mertens *et al.*, 2022). Evidence also suggests that findings in the laboratory often do not translate into effective real-world applications. When dealing with real-world applications of behavioural science findings, policy makers are faced with various complexities which an oversimplified approach fails to address. Moving forward, BPP holds a lot of promise, especially in domains such as health, finance and sustainability. However, for it to reach its potential researchers must overcome the challenges associated with oversimplified models and theories of decision-making. This involves more nuanced consideration of contextual factors, heterogeneity, using qualitative data and methods, and an understanding that individual behaviours are interconnected rather than isolated (also see Hallsworth, 2023). Moreover, recognising citizens' desire for agency and transparency in decision-making will be crucial to make behavioral public policy more legitimate.

Future IBPPCs

Following the first conference at the London School of Economics and Political Science, the second edition of IBPPC was hosted by the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. IBPPC 2023 featured sessions exploring the intersections of BPP with journalism, global public health, and management, along with practical implementation in governments. Panels showcased the evolving applications of BPP and fostered interdisciplinary dialogue. Keynote speakers, Erik Angner (Stockholm University) and Sunita Sah (Cornell University) provided perspectives on behavioural insights, enriching the discourse on ethical and epistemological dimensions and applications in public policy. The varied themes underscored the broad applications of behavioural science across different domains and challenges.

At the time of writing, efforts are currently underway to organise the third edition of the IBPPC. IBPPC 2024 is scheduled for 23–25 June 2024 in Cambridge, UK, and will feature Elke Weber and Cass Sunstein as keynote speakers. IBPPC 2025 is planned to be hosted by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Considering the tremendous growth of BPP scholarship in the last years and the need to broaden BPP's geographical scope beyond the United States and Europe, the IBPPA will expand the remit of the conference with more satellite events. These initiatives reflect the IBPPA's commitment to inclusivity and global collaboration within the BPP community.

IBPPC goes beyond traditional research presentations, aiming to be a dynamic hub for the exchange of ideas, meaningful connections, and transformative insights in BPP. Positioned at the forefront of addressing global challenges, it serves as a platform for researchers exploring forward-thinking solutions within the evolving landscape of behavioural studies. Emphasising inclusivity and global collaboration in the BPP community, the conference serves as a nexus for researchers addressing complex challenges, fostering a collaborative environment, and showcasing progress. Its broader mission is to advance BPP, inspiring impactful, ethically sound interventions for contemporary issues, while remaining at the forefront of shaping the future of

behavioural science in public policy. We believe this special issue is a testament to our commitment to growing BPP research and scholarship.

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