

# Experiencing Nudges: Autonomy, Intrusion and Choice Satisfaction as Judged by People Themselves

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## OVERVIEW

- Nudging is commonly blamed for infringing upon people's choice autonomy
- We provide empirical data on the choice experiences of people that have been nudged
- Specifically, we explore experiences of autonomy, situational intrusion, and choice satisfaction.

## BACKGROUND

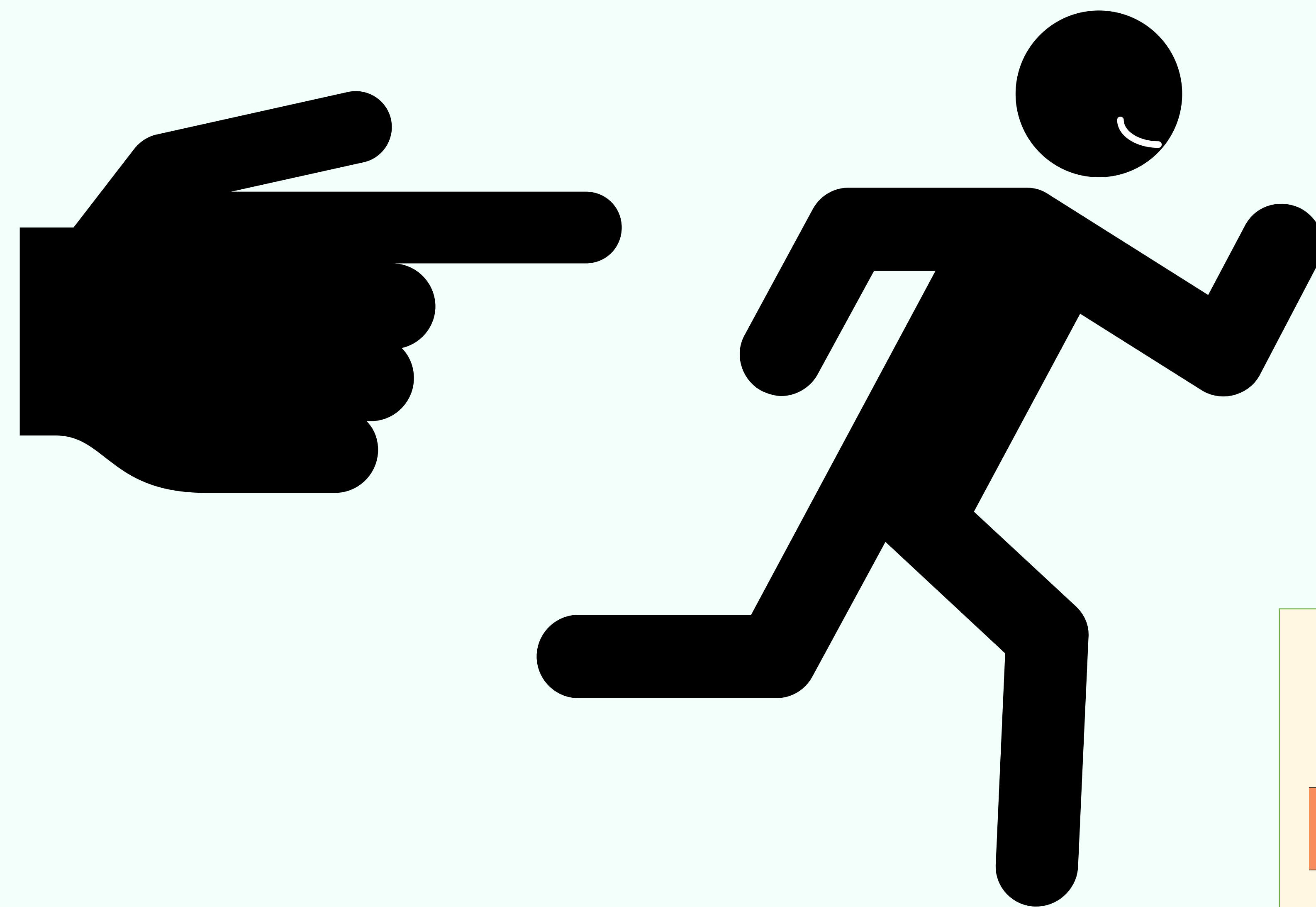
- Best case scenario, nudging can be a both effective and freedom-preserving alternative for policy. While we know that nudging can have significant societal effects (especially judged from a cost/benefit-perspective, Benartzi et al., 2017), empirical work on what nudging does to people's experiences of autonomy (and largely, to other experiences of the choice as well) is missing.
- Recent survey data (e.g. Hagman et al., 2015) show that people reading examples of common nudges judge them highly acceptable, albeit at the same time moderately intrusive. While such survey data is informative, it lacks a first-hand perspective from individuals actually being subjected to a nudge.

## METHOD

Across 2 experiments, MTurk participants made choices between options that were either environmentally friendly (i.e. green) or not (i.e. non-green) in an imaginary apartment acquisition scenario (adopted from Steffel et al., 2016). Specifically, Ps chose between fitting green amenities (for a higher monthly rent) or non-green amenities (for a lower monthly rent).

**Experiment 1** ( $N = 284$ ) used 3 experimental conditions: **Opt-out** (all amenities green by default), **Opt-in** (all amenities non-green by default), and **Active Choice** (no default, Ps had to actively choose green or non-green for each item). **Experiment 2** ( $N = 616$ ) used the same 3 conditions as Exp 1, but extended the experimental design with a Nudge Disclosure manipulation: half of the Ps in each condition were before choosing presented a text box disclosing the possible nudge effect.

Ps viewed a list of 10 amenities and their cost, and could click a box (one of two boxes for AC) next to each in order to shift choice. After choosing amenities, critical DVs pertaining to **Experienced Autonomy**, **Experienced Intrusion** and **Choice Satisfaction** were measured.



## RESULTS

- Participants in Opt-out condition made significantly more green choices without being "worse off" in relevant choices experiences
- Ps in Opt-out condition were actually significantly *better off* with regards to autonomy and choice satisfaction (Exp2)
- Disclosing possible nudge influence to Ps did not show a significant effect on any DV (Exp2)

## CONCLUSIONS

- We find that nudging can produce several positive outcomes without making important other ones worse
- Consequently, some of the charges aimed at using nudging for policy may be overstated – at least as judged by people themselves.

### Default-effect on choice

0 – 10 Green amenities

	OPT-OUT	ACTIVE CHOICE	OPT-IN	ANOVA
EXP 1	6.77	4.29	3.48	$p < .001^*$
EXP 2	7.48	4.72	4.12	$p < .001^{**}$

\*O-O > AC & O-I; AC > O-I. \*\* O-O > AC & O-I; AC > O-I.

### Experienced Autonomy

6 items,  $\alpha = .88$ . Scale 1-9

	OPT-OUT	ACTIVE CHOICE	OPT-IN	ANOVA
EXP 1	7.85	7.82	7.65	<i>n.s.</i>
EXP 2	7.84	7.70	7.46	$p = .024^*$

\*OPT-OUT > OPT-IN

### Disclosure Manipulation

Experiment 2

	CHOICE	EA	EI	CS
Absent	5.40	7.64	2.28	7.79
Present	5.25	7.67	2.38	7.64
t-test	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>

### Experienced Intrusion

4 items,  $\alpha = .92$ . Scale 1-9

	OPT-OUT	ACTIVE CHOICE	OPT-IN	ANOVA
EXP 1	2.34	2.52	1.99	<i>n.s.</i>
EXP 2	2.41	2.27	2.33	<i>n.s.</i>

### Choice Satisfaction

1 item, Scale 1-9

	OPT-OUT	ACTIVE CHOICE	OPT-IN	ANOVA
EXP 1	8.11	7.81	7.79	<i>n.s.</i>
EXP 2	7.93	7.72	7.54	$p = .020^*$

\*OPT-OUT > OPT-IN

## REFERENCES

- Benartzi, S., Beshears, J., Milkman, K., Sunstein, C., Thaler, R., Shankar, M., Tucker-Ray, W., Congdon, W.J., & Galing, S. (2017). Should governments invest more in nudging? *Psychological Science*, 28(8), 1041-1055.
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