

# EGAP Ethics Activity

## Objective

- Presently EGAP has no statement of principles to help guide researchers on ethical dilemmas.
- Nevertheless, in nearly every session at an EGAP meeting, we talk about “ethical concerns.” And yet, it is not always clear
- Yet are there topics, partners, or methods that are considered off limits?
- What are defensible principles we should refer to when in doubt (or challenged)?
- Does the membership have a position on this? Should we have one?
- The objective of the ethics session during EGAP 25 is to have members work through a set of ethical dilemmas and discuss their responses and get to a set of principles.
- We'll make notes of the discussion and, if the insights are somehow by consensus, as a next step, develop a statement to put to the membership.

## Instructions

- Two sessions, each session has four groups, each group discusses a dilemma for 45 mins.
- Each group appoints a note taker and presenter.
- Each group is assigned one of the four vignettes below.
  - Please discuss and work through the worksheet (at end of document).
  - For your vignette, please read version A, fill out the worksheet for version A, and then read version B, fill out the worksheet for version B, and so on.
  - Don't try to think in terms of “what would the IRB allow.” We want to know your recommendations. Assume that IRB clearance is not an issue in any of these.
  - To make this more concrete, suppose the proposed study is one that is submitted for EGAP funding. Should this study be funded by EGAP?
- After the break there is a 45 mins large group session. Each group presents their thoughts followed by a general discussion (Chair: Cyrus)

# Vignette I “Anti-immigrant parties”

Version A: Researchers are interested to know what motivates support and voting for anti-immigrant parties in a Northern European country. They design an experiment that they administer through an online platform (e.g., MTurk) in which they expose participants to pairs of candidates who issue appeals that vary in their emphasis on how immigrants threaten safety, demographic stability, and welfare programs, and they also vary the emotional intensity of the appeals. Outcomes include measures of respondents’ preferences over the pair of candidates as well as their attitudes toward immigration. Participants are not given any forewarning or debriefing regarding the content of the experiment. Rather, they are told that they are being asked to complete a task that asks “their opinions on issues of current interest,” and then the task ends with no explanation as to its purpose.

Version B: Same as above, but participants are debriefed at the end, and told that the task was designed by researchers who are interested to learn about reasons for support of anti-immigrant parties, that this is solely for an academic enquiry into this phenomenon, and that if participants are troubled by any of the content, the researchers would appreciate hearing from them, with contact information provided.

Version C: The researchers make a connection with an anti-immigrant party in a Northern European country that allows the researchers to experiment with the content of their television and radio appeals in a large number of media markets. They use this opportunity to test variations of media ads that vary in the same manner as the ones that were studied using the online platform. The experimental variations are issued in waves over the set of media markets. Wave-specific outcomes are measured using an opinion poll panel that was assembled in a way that makes no reference to the experiment. In addition, outcomes measuring accumulated effects are assessed with administrative data on turnout and vote shares. The results are to be shared with the party.

Version D: Same as Version C, except that the researchers get the party to accept that the content of the ads cannot contain any falsehoods or provocations to violence, and the ads will explicitly state that the best way to address immigration issues is through legal and non-violent pursuit of policy initiatives.

## Vignette II “Irregular migration”

Version A: Researchers would like to know to what extent information about the characteristics and risks of migration routes can shape individuals’ decisions to irregularly migrate from low-income to high-income countries. They design a field experiment where they enroll randomly sampled subjects in several origin communities, with the treatment consisting of factual and truthful information about the journey, such as death and injury rates, financial costs, likelihood of arrival at the destination, etc. Outcomes are measured a month and half a year post-treatment and include actual migration attempts, migration intent, any preparatory steps taken, and social and economic indicators of well-being.

Version B: Same as Version A, but the researchers conduct a pre-intervention survey to measure the state of migration-related knowledge in origin communities and subsequently include only those pieces of information in the treatments that suggest irregular migration is riskier than the average community member believes. For example, actual death rates are only included if they exceed the average community member’s belief about death rates.

Version C: Instead of factual information about irregular migration, the treatment consists of a recorded emotional appeal from a returnee who greatly suffered during his or her migration attempt.

Version D: Same as Version A, but the researchers combine the treatment with information about how to (legally) migrate internally to an economically advantageous location.

## Vignette III “Ethnicity and voting”

Version A: Researchers working in an ethnically polarized society seek to understand what informational messages can undermine ethnic motivated reasoning, or the biased take-up of political information based on ethnicity. Messages will be disseminated via community-level pre-election workshops organized and funded by the research team prior to legislative elections. Members of the control group receive information about the date of the election, how to register to vote, biographical information about the slate of candidates (which will implicitly reveal ethnicity), and basic information about past

performance of their parties (all compiled by the research team). Members of treatment groups receive one or more additional messages designed to undermine motivated reasoning. The unit of randomization is the polling station catchment area, and outcomes will be measured using administrative election data. Given a within-constituency research design, a large treatment effect has the potential to alter the outcome of an election (raising concerns about the justice principle for candidates and parties involved). Polling station level outcomes are not only visible to researchers, but also the parties and candidates which could alter treatment of the community by politicians going forward (raising concerns of the do no harm principle for the communities involved). The researchers have blanket administrative permission to work in the country and must receive assent by a local leader to occupy public space in each community.

Version B: Same as Version A, but a local NGO takes responsibility for the implementation of the workshops, including the compilation of information, and a foreign donor is already funding them (with or without the research component).

Version C: Same as Version A, but a representative sample of the community is asked to consent to the information treatment prior to its provision. Communities are informed about the types of information that will be made available in the treatments. The treatment would not be provided if consent were not given by at least two-thirds of the community.

Version D: Election related ethnic violence has occurred in prior elections in this country. This raises the stakes of the intervention: both for potential benefits if ethnicity is made less salient, as well as for potential risks, if the information intervention generates unanticipated perverse effects.

## Vignette IV “Housing discrimination”

Version A: A research team collaborates with the New York Human Rights Commission to assess the level of housing discrimination in NY and possible responses to it. The commission engages confederates who pose as prospective tenants and make over 3000 apartment visits. The visits involve deception, there is no consent (raising concerns with respect for persons principle), and the subjects (the landlords) could be put at risk of prosecution (raising concerns with do no harm interpretation of the beneficence principle) and landlords would likely not value the outcome of the research (raising concerns with the justice principle). Although the commission and not the researchers employ and direct the confederates. The large scale of audits is a result of

the research partnership. Researchers find that there are much higher levels of discrimination than previously thought. However, the evidence for the effectiveness of interventions is murky.

Version B: Same as above but the researchers hire and direct the confederates and that way (a) take more responsibility for directly affecting the subjects (b) reduce the risk of prosecution of subjects.

Version C: Same but researchers set things up so that they only work with subjects who have consented to be exposed to random audits (though not told which particular cases are audits, of course). The consenting pool likely selects for non discriminators.

Version D: Same but this time the agency is ICE who want to audit businesses to make sure that they would not hire undocumented migrants.

## Worksheet

Version	Gut reaction	Considered reaction	Prohibitory Principles Violated	Permissive principles satisfied	Other Remarks
#	0 = No! 10 = Yes!	0 = Prohibit 10 = Permit	# or Explanation	# or Explanation	
A					
B					

C					
D					