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Elements in Applied Social Psychology

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BEHAVIORAL INSIGHTS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Contextualizing Our Science

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Behavioral Insights for Public Policy

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Abstract: There has been an increasing effort to integrate behavioral insights into public policy. These insights are often reliant on social psychological research and theory. However, in this relatively young field, policy interventions and behavioral insights are often built on laboratory-based psychological research, with effects that can prove to be unstable in the “real world.” In this Element, the authors provide a brief history of how behavioral insights have been applied to complex policy problems. They describe ways in which behavioral insights have been successful and where they have fallen short. In addition, they examine unintended negative consequences of nudges and provide a more nuanced examination of their impacts on behavior change.

Finally, the Element concludes with a set of recommendations for generating more effective practical applications of psychology to the field of public policy.

Keywords: behavioral insights, equity, nudging, psychological tax, public policy

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