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# Absolute versus relative inequality and social preferences

A comparative study between  
Mozambique and Viet Nam

Ines A. Ferreira<sup>1</sup>, Rachel M. Gisselquist<sup>2</sup>, and Finn Tarp<sup>3</sup>

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**Abstract:** Knowledge of the factors driving people's views on redistribution in the Global South remains limited. While these societies occupy top positions in inequality rankings, redistribution levels tend to be lower. We combine survey and experimental data from Mozambique and Viet Nam to test whether redistributive preferences vary depending on the source of inequality, focusing on two channels: fairness views and communication. First, we confirm that inequality resulting from differences in merit is more accepted than inequality due to luck or factors outside of individual control. We also observe heterogeneity in fairness views. Second, we extend the analysis to consider whether allowing for communication between a receiver, who can suggest a distribution, and a dictator, who makes the final decision, affects redistribution preferences. We find that the relevance of the source of inequality remains. However, whether the expectation of the receiver is met by the dictator varies across samples and depends on the source of inequality. Overall, our results provide important insights into the universality of fairness views and point to the need for more analysis across contexts with different institutional and economic backgrounds.

**Key words:** perceptions of inequality, framing, altruism, Mozambique, Viet Nam

**JEL classification:** D31, D63, D64, D83, D90

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# 1 Introduction

An important finding within the large, and expanding, literature on the determinants of preferences for redistribution<sup>1</sup> is that individual perceptions of inequality are key determining factors (Gimpelson and Treisman 2018; Karadja et al. 2017; Kuziemko et al. 2015; Stantcheva 2024). By perceptions we mean how high the level of inequality is considered to be; how individuals assess its evolution or compare its level between different settings; or how fair they think it is. Thus, unpacking how these perceptions and understandings of inequality are formed is crucial to getting a better grasp of social preferences, including altruism. In this paper, we focus on one way in which perceptions and understandings of inequality may affect altruistic behaviour, namely through differences in whether inequality is understood or framed in relative or absolute terms.

The debate on inequality is often based on relative measurement, in particular, when describing trends over time. Relative measures imply that if the incomes of all individuals increase in the same proportion, inequality remains unchanged. However, there is indicative evidence that there is variation in how people think about inequality, namely that a non-negligible part of the population thinks about it in absolute terms instead (Ravallion 2014, 2018). In contrast with relative measures, absolute measures will remain at the same level if everyone's income is increased by a fixed amount. This distinction has important implications for inequality comparisons between contexts and over time. For instance, while someone may perceive inequality to be stable (in relative terms), others may think of it as increasing (in absolute terms), with both being 'correct' in respect of their own inequality measures. A striking empirical example is offered in the analysis of global income inequality, which reveals a steep decline from the 1990s to the 2020s using a relative measure (the Gini) but consistent increase using an absolute measure (Niño-Zarazúa et al. 2017). Thus, disparate perceptions may have important implications for empirical assessments and for the positions taken in key policy debates (see Ravallion 2004, 2014).

We believe this differentiation is crucial in discussions about inequality and redistribution, especially in line with Sustainable Development Goal 10 of reducing inequality within and among countries. This is so given that there is a potential mismatch between how the academic and policy discourses frame inequality and address it and how civil society perceives and reacts to it, including through their demands for redistribution. Still, we are lacking a good grasp of the extent of this disconnection and of how people think about inequality.

To help address this gap and bring clarity to the debate on inequality, we elicited individuals' tendency to think in relative and absolute terms in two non-WEIRD (Western, Educated, Indus-

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<sup>1</sup> See Mengel and Weidenholzer (2022) for a review.

trialized, Rich, and Democratic) contexts, Mozambique and Viet Nam. Additionally, we examined whether this understanding correlates with altruistic behaviour, captured through standard dictator games. As a causal check of this relationship, we implemented an economic experiment to test whether an information treatment that frames a fictional scenario about inequality in a specific context in absolute versus relative terms affects altruism.

We found that, while in our Viet Nam sample close to 60 per cent of the respondents think in relative terms and only circa 25 per cent think in absolute terms, the opposite is true in Mozambique. In this country, more than half of the participants think in absolute terms, compared to a share of only 14 per cent who think in relative terms. Still, even if there is heterogeneity in how people think about inequality in Mozambique and Viet Nam, these differences do not seem to affect either altruism or the preference for equality. Surprisingly, our results do not confirm our hypothesis that the framing of inequality matters for altruistic behaviour. We do not find a statistically significant difference between the altruistic behaviour of those who heard the information about inequality in absolute terms versus those who heard the information in relative terms. Our conclusions remain the same when we vary the amount at stake in the dictator game.

We make several contributions to the literature. First, we provide new evidence on the heterogeneity of understandings of inequality, namely on thinking in relative versus absolute terms. The literature on this distinction remains scarce. Amiel and Cowell (1992, 1999) provided the first insights, collecting data from students from colleges and universities in Germany, England, Israel, and the United States of America. They reported that only 37 per cent of the answers supported the assumption underlying relative measures, short of the expected majority. Still, the assumption implied by absolute measures received support by a mere 17 per cent. In an analogous line of work, Ballano and Ruiz-Castillo (1993) and Harrison and Seidle (1994) found similar results using samples of Spanish and German respondents. About a decade ago, Ravallion (2014, 2018) brought the implications of these different understandings back into light. The answers from his students at Georgetown University repeatedly suggested that roughly half (and sometimes more) of the students thought about inequality in absolute terms. We provide an updated account of these enquiries relying on samples of nationals in Mozambique and Viet Nam, rather than university students in WEIRD settings, to understand whether previous findings hold more generally.

Second, we contribute to the literature on how information about inequality affects preferences (e.g., Kuziemko et al. 2015). Previous experimental work has studied various information treatments on, for instance, the level of inequality (Trump 2018), its effects (Lobeck and Støstad 2023) and its inevitability (Pellicer et al. 2019), social mobility (Alesina et al. 2018), and the position of the individual in the income distribution (Cruces et al. 2013; Hoy and Mager 2021). Overall, these studies found that, while providing information about inequality to individuals af-

fects their perceptions and concerns about inequality, it has a small effect on their redistributive preferences (Ciani et al. 2021). Moreover, there is yet no conclusive evidence of what might explain this small effect. We extend this analysis by focusing on the effect of an information treatment on altruistic behaviour.

Third, we add to the literature on the effects of framing on perceptions of inequality and support for redistribution (see Easterbrook 2021 for an overview).<sup>2</sup> Bruckmüller et al. (2017) added to previous studies by comparing the differences in perceptions when framing inequality as the advantaged group having more or framing it as the disadvantaged group having less. Drawing on a very small sample from Germany, they found that the latter framing led individuals to perceive inequality as less legitimate. Similarly, across five studies in the United States, Dietze and Craig (2021) found that the way in which inequality is communicated does indeed matter, and framing inequality as lower-class disadvantages leads to increased support for policies to reduce it.<sup>3</sup> Ziano et al. (2022) confirmed the relevance of considering absolute and relative indicators. The results of their experiments in the United States and France showed that an absolute indicator of salaries had a greater effect on perceived inequality than the widely used relative indicator.

Closer to our setting, Oppel (2023) suggested that presenting inequality in absolute (large-stake and small-stake units) and relative expressions (percentages and multiples) affected the fairness evaluations of individuals in South Africa. The analysis in this paper contributes to these studies by testing the relevance of one of the axioms underlying commonly used indicators, scale invariance, for the individual perceptions of inequality. By employing a simple information scenario together with a visual illustration,<sup>4</sup> we are able to move away from samples of high-skilled students and collect data from samples of the general population in two low-income settings.

Fourth, this study tests the effect of an additional factor—the framing of inequality—on altruistic behaviour. Other determinants studied in the literature include, on one hand, the characteristics of the recipient of the donation, such as social class, social distance, political ideology, or sense of fairness and, on the other hand, certain factors related to the donor's personal char-

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<sup>2</sup> See also the references on hypothetical preferences and individual choices between absolute and relative outcomes in Clark and D'Ambrosio (2015).

<sup>3</sup> On a recent study, Epper et al. (2024) found evidence in Denmark that different types of inequality aversion have different effects on preferences for redistribution. They consider aversion to two different types of inequality: (i) advantageous (comparison relative to those worse off) and disadvantageous (comparison relative to those better off). While advantageous inequality increases both support for public redistribution (support for policies that reduce inequality) and private redistribution (donation to charity), disadvantageous inequality aversion increases the first but decreases support for private redistribution.

<sup>4</sup> See the advantages in this type of presentation of the information and a general overview of information provision experiments in Haaland et al. (2023).

acteristics, namely moral emotions or the source of the endowment (see Brañas-Garza et al. 2020 and the references therein). On an early and seminal account, C. C. Eckel and Grossman (1996) suggested that donations in a dictator game are positively affected by the degree to which the donor perceived the receiver to be deserving, using an experiment where the receiver was either an anonymous pair in the next room or a local charity.

We consider an additional element that may affect altruism, namely the size of the stakes. To do that, we elicit participants' behaviour in two settings, varying the size of the amount at stake between low and high. While most studies find that the results of the dictator game are robust to varying the amount at stake (C. Eckel and Gintis 2010), there are also some indications that higher stakes reduce the amount donated, even if not by much (Engel 2011; Larney et al. 2019).

Finally, by comparing samples from Mozambique and Viet Nam, we contribute to expanding the, so far, narrow knowledge on understandings and perceptions of inequality in the Global South, drawing from populations in both urban and rural areas. We believe that the comparative analysis in this paper constitutes an opportunity to examine the predominance of one of the axioms underlying commonly used inequality measures, namely the relative Gini, and to explore further heterogeneity between these settings.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we set the stage with a description of the two empirical settings. In Section 3 we give more detail about the design of the experiment, while in Section 4 we describe the methods and data. People's understandings and the correlations between understandings and altruism are described in Section 5, while Section 6 presents the results of the information treatment. Finally, Section 7 concludes.

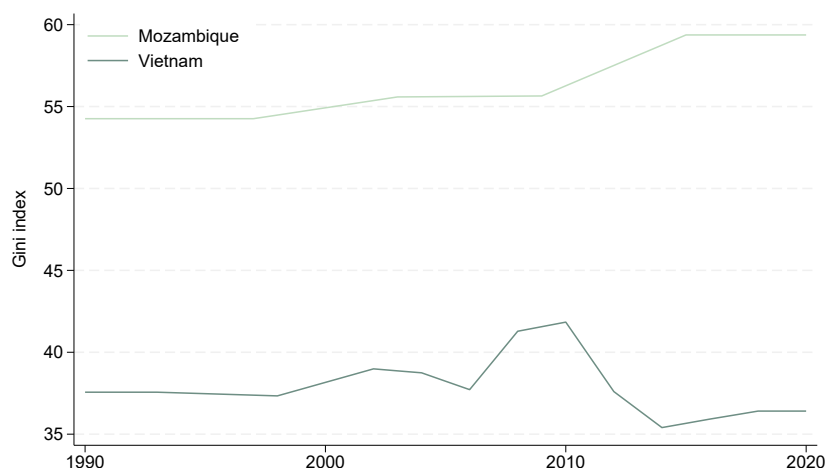
## 2 Empirical settings

Comparing inequality trends in Mozambique and Viet Nam suggests different pushes for redistribution. Figure 1 shows that in both countries, relative inequality levels were fairly constant until the early 2000s, with a higher level in Mozambique (around 0.55 according to the Gini index) compared to Viet Nam (around 0.38). However, in the last decade or so, Viet Nam managed to reduce inequality levels whereas there was an upward trend in Mozambique.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Recent updates have suggested a decline in inequality between 2019–20 and 2022, but the current situation of post-election unrest and political instability could easily reverse this trend.

**Figure 1: Trends in inequality (1990–2020)**



Source: authors' construction based on UNU-WIDER (2023).

While these two countries share some similarities in terms of economic histories, their growth trajectories have been very different. Mozambique has gone through many drastic political and economic shifts and transformations, which led to a complicated institutional environment. Mozambique's independence from the colonial power in 1975 (later than many other African countries) was followed by a long period of war and destruction until 1992. Despite recurring violent conflicts with the opposition party, Renamo, Frelimo has been the political leader for over 45 years. While after independence, Frelimo implemented a strict Marxist-Leninist regime, in the late 1980s Mozambique saw a dramatic shift in economic policy stance with the implementation of market-based reforms, in line with an orthodox structural adjustment programme imposed by donor institutions. Still, Mozambique has struggled to pursue a clear policy strategy to achieve poverty reduction and inclusive development. Inequality has been on an upward trend since the period after independence, as a result of economic growth disproportionately benefiting the richer groups of the population (Gradín and Tarp 2019; Gradín 2020).

Viet Nam also experienced a prolonged period of war and pursued a national strategy inspired by socialist central planning, which gradually opened up to more market-based approaches (Arndt et al. 2012). Still, in contrast with the development trajectory of Mozambique, Viet Nam's story is one of success. Characterized by a mixed socialist market economy, since the beginning of the economic reform ('Doi Moi') in 1986, Viet Nam has achieved an impressive improvement from being amongst the poorest countries to becoming a lower-middle income country. The 'growth with equity' strategy implemented by the government has been broadly successful (Nguyen and Pham 2018), and inequality levels have remained stable over time (T. H. Dang et al. 2022). Still, some concerns have arisen over increases in inequality in rural areas in recent years (Benjamin et al. 2017), and group inequalities remain an important challenge (T. T. H. Dang 2019). The most recent data suggest that while relative inequality has remained stable in the last decade, absolute inequality has increased (Nguyen and Tarp 2024).



Rather than collecting data in the capital, Maputo, our study departs from a large part of the literature on Mozambique and zooms in on the northern part of the country, namely on the province of Nampula. Nampula is the most populous province in the country with a population of more than five million. The Gini coefficient for this province was 0.48 in 2019–20 (Barletta et al. 2024). Given Viet Nam's history before reunification (Tarp 2017, 2018), we collected data in two provinces, Hà Nam province, located in the northern part of the country, and Trà Vinh province in the southern part. Hà Nam is a province in the Red River Delta with a population of just below one million people, which accounts for close to one per cent of the country's population. Both its average monthly income per capita and its level of relative inequality are similar to the national figures. Located in the Mekong Delta, Trà Vinh is a bigger province with a population of close to 1.5 million people. The average monthly income per capita is lower than the national average, while the level of relative inequality is similar.<sup>6</sup>

### 3 Study design

Our samples include data for a total of 905 participants in Mozambique and 1,681 participants in Viet Nam, collected in 2022–23.<sup>7</sup> We ran sessions in eight districts in Nampula Province in Mozambique, across 19 'postos administrativos' (administrative units within the districts)—nine urban and 10 rural. In Viet Nam, we first collected data in the northern province of Hà Nam, where we ran sessions in Bình Lục district (in 10 rural communes) and Phu Ly city (in 10 urban communes). We then collected data in the southern province of Trà Vinh, where we ran sessions in Cang Long district (in 10 rural communes) and Trà Vinh city (in 10 urban communes).

We ran two sessions within each administrative unit ('posto' in Mozambique and commune in Viet Nam), which happened either on consecutive days (in Mozambique) or in the morning and afternoon of the same day (in Viet Nam, with two exceptions). We describe the content of each session in what follows.

#### 3.1 Protocol of the sessions

Each session had the duration of approximately half a day in Mozambique and about 2.5 hours in Viet Nam. The Vietnamese language was used in Viet Nam, whereas in Mozambique, the sessions were held in both Portuguese and the local language in Nampula province, Makua.

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<sup>6</sup> In this paper, we do not focus on the differences between the two provinces in Viet Nam separately, though we refer briefly to them in a robustness check in a later section.

<sup>7</sup> We received ethical approval for this study by the Joint Ethical Review Board (ERB) of UNU (United Nations University) in March 2022 followed by an approved amendment in May 2023. The study was also registered on the AEA RCT Registry, with RCT ID AEARCTR-0010212.

Each session followed the same structure. After all participants arrived in the room, the team members confirmed that their name was included in the list of participants for that session. The team started by briefly introducing the session, explaining the purpose and reading the consent form, and then registered participants by collecting the signed consent forms and giving them a small piece of paper with their ID number for the session. This ID number was used as an identifier for the remainder of the session, allowing us to keep track of the data collected for each participant while ensuring anonymity in the data analysis. The first activity consisted of an effort task, which preceded the dictator game with information described in detail in Section 3.3.

Following a short health break, participants played a few rounds of a redistribution game (not considered in the analysis in this paper) and filled in a survey. At the end, we calculated and distributed their respective payments. The baseline gratuity was VND160,000 (about US\$6) in Viet Nam and MZN250 (about US\$4) in Mozambique. To this, we added the amounts accrued in the redistribution game. The maximum attainable payments were VND310,000 (about US\$12) and MZN400 (about US\$6) in Viet Nam and Mozambique, respectively.

### **3.2 Understanding of inequality: absolute versus relative**

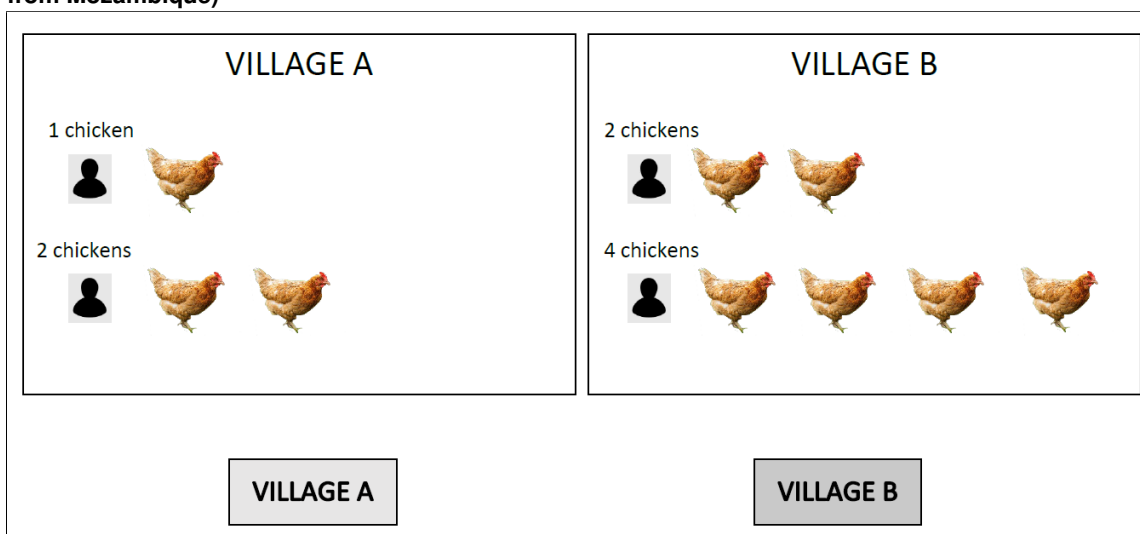
Before the information treatment was provided and participants played the dictator game (which we explain in the next subsection), we asked them to compare the levels of inequality in two villages to infer whether they think in relative or absolute terms. The following text was read out aloud (using again the example of Mozambique) at the same time as one enumerator held a poster with the diagram presented in Figure 2:

*I would like you to imagine two different villages. For example, villages like Iapala and Neguru.*

*In Village A, the poorest person has 1 chicken, while the richest person has 2 chickens. In Village B, the poorest person has 2 chickens, while the richest person has 4 chickens. What do you think about inequality in these villages?*

*We are using ownership of animals only as an example. We ask you to imagine this scenario, but we know that this might not be important in the same way in every context. Here we imagine that all the chickens are the same. We know that some chickens are skinnier while others are bigger, but here we assume that all these chickens are the same. When we talk about inequality, we have in mind the difference between what the richest person owns and what the poorest person owns in each village. We want to know, in which of the villages do you think this difference is the largest, i.e. which one is more unequal?*

**Figure 2: Diagram accompanying question about comparison between inequality in two villages (example from Mozambique)**



Source: authors' compilation.

Based on the answers to this question, we classify participants as absolute or relative thinkers. 'Relativists' are participants who answer that inequality is the same in the two villages, as the levels of relative inequality are equal between Village A and Village B. In other words, the rich have two times more chickens than the poor. In contrast, if participants indicate Village B as more unequal than Village A, we classify them as 'absolutists', as the absolute differences between the inhabitants of the village are higher in Village B. While in Village A the rich have one more chicken than the poor, in Village B the rich have two more chickens than the poor. We classify the participants who selected Village A under 'Other'.

### 3.3 Dictator game with information treatment

After the task of comparing the two villages, the session proceeded with a dictator game with an information treatment. The game was a simple (non-incentivized) dictator game<sup>8</sup> with low and high stakes that allowed us to observe the differences in the amount participants would be willing to donate depending on the overall value that was at stake.

We started by providing an information treatment, which was read to participants before they played the dictator games. All participants received information about the difference in wealth of the poorest person and the richest person in one village. To be specific, in the case of Mozambique, we told participants they would hear some information about a village in Mozambique. To half of the participants in the session, we framed this information in absolute terms (our ‘absolute’ treatment) and showed a diagram to highlight the absolute differences (see Figure 3a):

*This information is about a village in Mozambique. Many people live there. As you can see in this drawing, the richest person has six goats more than the poorest person.*

To the other half of the participants, we framed the information in relative terms (our ‘relative’ treatment), again showing a diagram to highlight the relative differences (see Figure 3b):

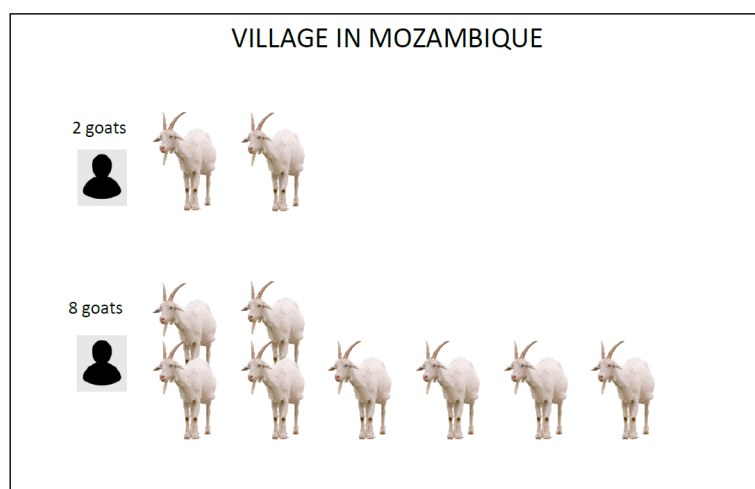
*This information is about a village in Mozambique. Many people live there. As you can see in this drawing, the richest person has four times more goats than the poorest person.*

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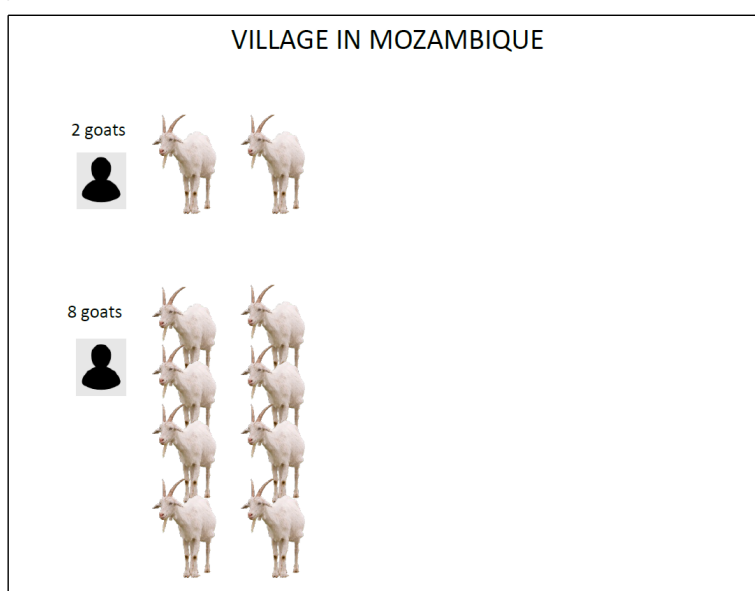
<sup>8</sup> The specific games used in this study were not incentivized based on participants’ answers, but participants received a baseline monetary compensation for their participation and played other incentivized games as part of the same session. We decided not to provide monetary incentives for these games given that the amounts at stake are large in the population contexts where they are implemented and due also to budget constraints. Still, we believe valid insights can be derived from the analysis of participants’ decisions (see Voslinsky and Azar 2021 for a discussion on incentives).

**Figure 3: Diagrams shown in Mozambique**

(a) 'Absolute' treatment



(b) 'Relative' treatment



Source: authors' compilation.

This allows us to assess whether providing information about inequality in relative or absolute terms influences the participants' answers in the dictator games.

We followed this information up with two rounds of the dictator game, which we use to derive a measure of altruism.<sup>9</sup> Illustrating again with the Mozambican case, the following was the text used in the first round, i.e. the low-stakes round:

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<sup>9</sup> We think of the amount donated as altruism rather than as cooperation because, even if the hypothetical contribution is towards a public good, there is no payoff to the contribution from the dictator. Moreover, we do not consider the amount donated as a measure of inequality aversion given that the scenario is not framed as an income distribution but rather as a contribution to a public health centre, which would, in principle, benefit the entire population.

*Imagine that you were given MZN200 that you could keep or donate (a share or the entire amount) to build a well-functioning hospital or health centre in the village I described. (...) In this case, how much would you choose to keep and how much would you choose to donate?*

Varying the amount at stake between the two rounds allows us to observe the differences in the amount participants were willing to donate. In Mozambique, the value increased from MZN200 to MZN1,000. In Viet Nam, the value was VND1,000,000 in the first round and VND5,000,000 in the second round.

The design of the study is based on between-subject comparison. In Mozambique, we ran a total of 40 sessions, 20 in rural settings and 20 in urban settings. In Viet Nam, we ran double this number, with 40 sessions in the North and 40 sessions in the South, split equally between urban and rural areas. The treatment was implemented within sessions, i.e. each ‘absolute’ and ‘relative’ information treatment was randomly allocated to half of the participants in each session.

Sometime prior to the sessions, our local teams collected lists of potential participants from the local authorities, with a request for balance between gender, age, and income.<sup>10</sup> Based on these lists, we selected random subsamples (stratified on gender) of participants allocated to the first and the second sessions in each location.<sup>11</sup> At the beginning of each session, we checked that the participants present in the room were those selected to participate in that specific date/time. The obtained country samples are described in more detail in the next section.

## 4 Methods and data

We divide our analysis into two parts. First, we examine the link between differences in the understanding of inequality (derived as explained in Section 3.2) and altruistic behaviour. To do that, we estimate the correlation between the amount donated by participant  $i$  in the dictator game,  $d_i$ , and  $AThinking_i$ , which is a dummy taking the value of 1 if individuals think about inequality in absolute terms. The equation looks as follows:

$$d_i = \alpha + AThinking_i\beta_1 + X_i'\beta_2 + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where  $X_i'$  is a vector of individual controls (including gender, age, education, and income) and  $\varepsilon_i$  the error term.

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<sup>10</sup> While we cover different administrative units within each province, the samples are not representative of the full population in the provinces.

<sup>11</sup> This was important for an additional treatment that we ran across sessions, which is not discussed in this paper.

In the second part of the analysis, to test the causal relationship between the framing of inequality in relative or absolute terms and the amount donated, we adapt model 1 and estimate the following equation:

$$d_i = \alpha_l + Absolute_i \beta_1 + X_i' \beta_2 + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

where  $AThinking_i$  is replaced by  $Absolute_i$ , a dummy indicating that the individual heard the information treatment in ‘absolute’ rather than in ‘relative’ terms. In this case,  $\alpha$  allows for fixed effects at the location level.

The summary statistics for the main variables of interest are presented in Table 1. The samples are equally split between female and male participants. The average age of the Mozambican participants is 38, while the average Vietnamese participant is 50 years old. In both countries, the median level of education completed is middle school. The median Mozambican participant reports earning up to MZN750 per month (close to US\$12), whereas the median Vietnamese participant reports earnings of up to VND3,000,000 (about US\$123).<sup>12</sup> The country samples are balanced on the main characteristics (see Table A1 in Appendix A.1).

**Table 1: Summary statistics**

	Mean	St. dev.	Min.	Median	Max.	N
<i>MOZ</i>						
Donation (low stakes)	5.48	1.63	0.00	5.00	10.00	903
Donation (high stakes)	5.54	1.71	0.00	5.00	10.00	903
Female	0.50	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00	894
Age of respondent in 2023	38.39	13.68	19.00	35.00	82.00	893
Education level (cat.)	2.23	0.92	0.00	2.00	5.00	892
Monthly income level (cat.)	2.34	1.65	1.00	2.00	6.00	881
<i>VNM</i>						
Donation (low stakes)	5.65	2.46	0.00	5.00	10.00	1,681
Donation (high stakes)	5.63	2.39	0.00	5.00	10.00	1,681
Female	0.54	0.50	0.00	1.00	1.00	1,678
Age of respondent in 2023	49.64	11.64	18.00	51.00	83.00	1,673
Education level (cat.)	2.58	1.04	0.00	2.00	5.00	1,676
Monthly income level (cat.)	2.92	1.58	1.00	2.00	6.00	1,671
<i>Total</i>						
Donation (low stakes)	5.59	2.21	0.00	5.00	10.00	2,584
Donation (high stakes)	5.60	2.18	0.00	5.00	10.00	2,584
Female	0.52	0.50	0.00	1.00	1.00	2,572
Age of respondent in 2023	45.72	13.49	18.00	47.00	83.00	2,566
Education level (cat.)	2.46	1.01	0.00	2.00	5.00	2,568
Monthly income level (cat.)	2.72	1.63	1.00	2.00	6.00	2,552

Note: donation (low stakes) and donation (high stakes) correspond to the amounts donated in the dictator games with low and high stakes, respectively. Education level is categorical and ranges from 0 (no education) to 5 (postgraduate). Monthly income level is categorical with categories ranging from 1 (no income) to 6 (highest income level).

Source: authors' compilation.

<sup>12</sup> In 2020, the average monthly income in Nampula province was MZN1,859. In 2022, the average monthly income was VND4,745,000 in Hà Nam province and VND3,711,000 in Trà Vinh province. Thus, the participants in the study have generally lower income compared to the population averages.

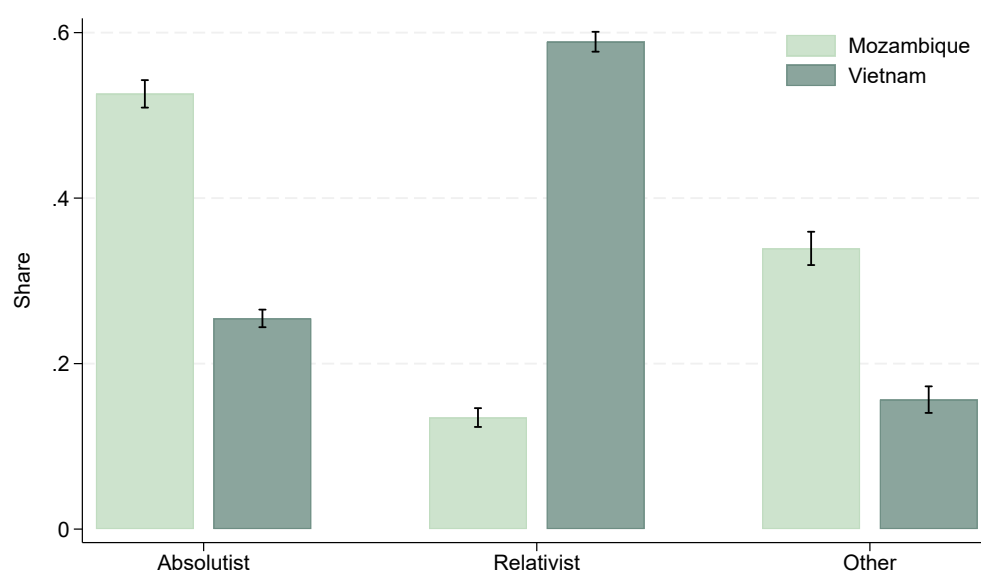
## 5 Different understandings and altruistic behaviour

### 5.1 Differences in how people think about inequality

Recall from Section 3.2 that, based on the answers of the participants, we classified them as thinking about inequality in either relative terms—relativists—or absolute terms—absolutists. While we also have a category for ‘other’ if they did not fit in either of these categories, we focus here only on the first two categories of participants.

The resulting shares of absolutists and relativists are presented in Figure 4. There is a stark difference in the shares between the two countries. In Mozambique, half of the participants think in absolute terms compared to only 14 per cent who think in relative terms. In contrast, in Viet Nam, close to 60 per cent of participants think in relative terms, whereas a smaller share of 26 per cent think in absolute terms.

**Figure 4: Shares of absolutists, relativists, and others**



Note: shares calculated according to the definitions described in the text.

Source: authors' compilation.

In trying to explain these differences between the two country samples, we found no statistically significant correlations between thinking about inequality in absolute or relative terms and gender, age, income level, or education. Still, we found that participants in rural areas in Mozambique are more likely to think in absolute rather than in relative terms, while the country differences persist even when including a dummy for rural areas. We hypothesize that these differences are at least partially explained by country-specific factors. The brief description of the two countries' trajectory in Section 2 provides clues. While in Viet Nam the progress in economic growth improved the situation of the population at large, in Mozambique, people have, for some time, felt left behind and are not accruing the benefits from growth. The post-

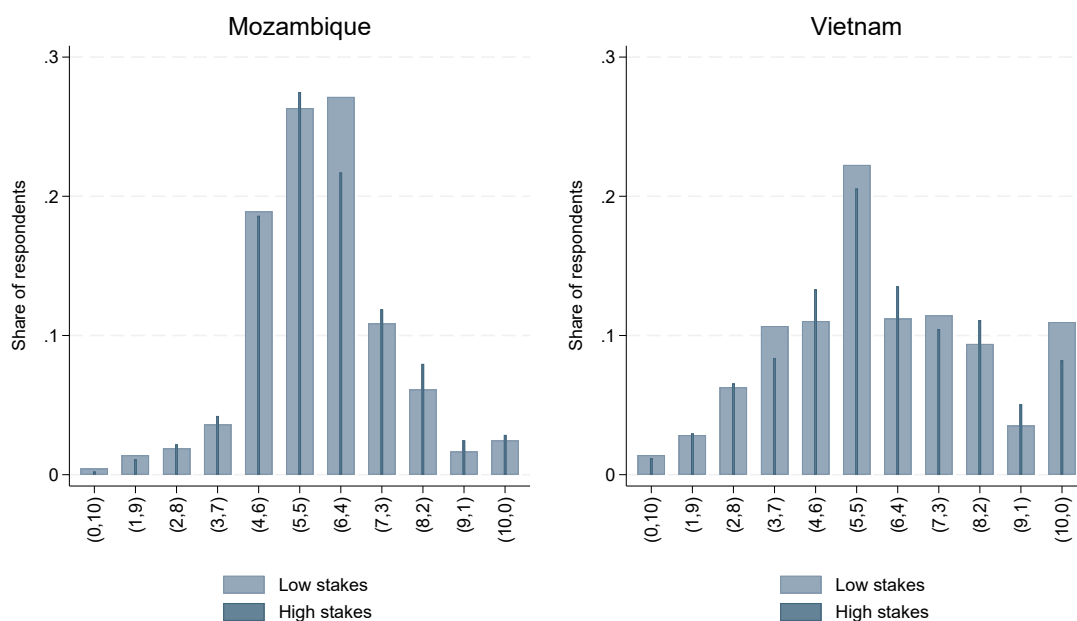


2024 election situation of instability and violence is partially a result of the society's grievances and discontent with the governance of the ruling party (Jones 2024). We hypothesize that this might help explain how absolute differences may be more relevant to how people understand inequality in Mozambique in comparison with Viet Nam.

## 5.2 Correlations with altruistic behaviour

Before turning to the correlations between different understandings and altruistic behaviour, we start by showing an illustration of the amounts kept and donated by all participants in each round of the game. Figure 5 presents the distributions for each country in the low-stakes round (light blue bars) and the high-stakes round (dark blue thin lines). For each ordered pair (D,K) represented, D corresponds to the amount donated to building the health centre and K to the amount kept for oneself. We observe that similar shares of participants in both countries chose to donate half of the available amount (five units). In the low-stakes, this share was 26.36 per cent in Mozambique, compared to 22.25 per cent in Viet Nam. Similarly, in the high-stakes, 27.46 per cent choose this combination in Mozambique, compared to 20.52 per cent in Viet Nam.

**Figure 5: Distribution between amounts donated and kept**

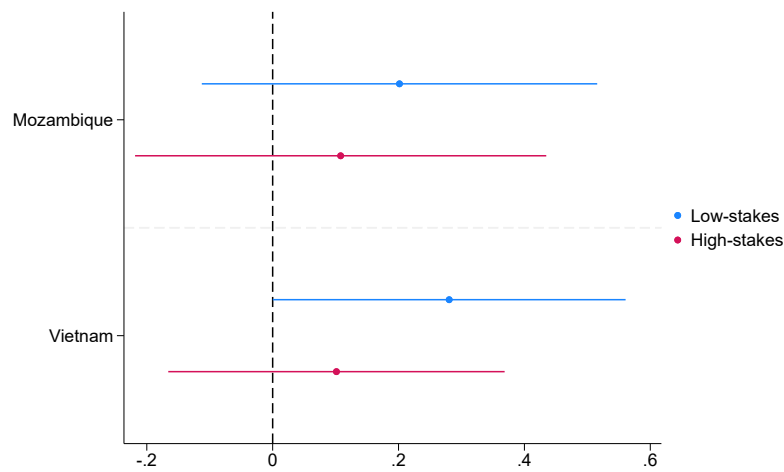


Note: in each ordered pair (D,K), D corresponds to the amount donated and K corresponds to the amount kept.  
Source: authors' compilation.

We focus on the two main categories—absolutists and relativists—and test whether there is any correlation between the way in which participants think and their decisions in the dictator games, controlling for basic socio-demographic characteristics (female, age, high education, and high income). In Figure 6, we show that there does not seem to be a statistically signifi-

cant difference in the donations based on the way participants think about inequality, nor in the low- or the high-stakes rounds.

**Figure 6: Difference in the donations between absolutists and relativists**

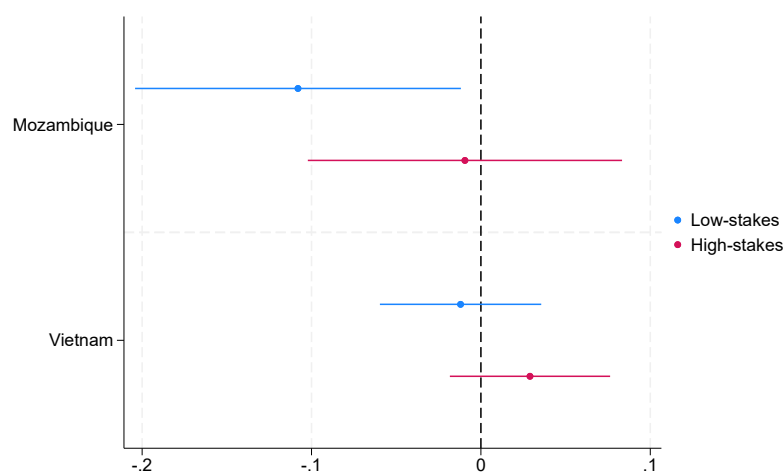


Note: correlation coefficient between the amount donated and the measure of absolute/relative thinking, considering the low- and high-stakes scenarios.

Source: authors' compilation.

As an alternative, we check whether the way in which participants think about inequality is correlated with choosing to split the amount equally between themselves and the donation. The results are illustrated in Figure 7, which shows that there is lower preference for equality among absolutists (compared to relativists) but only in Mozambique in the low-stakes scenario.

**Figure 7: Difference in the preference for equality between absolutists and relativists**



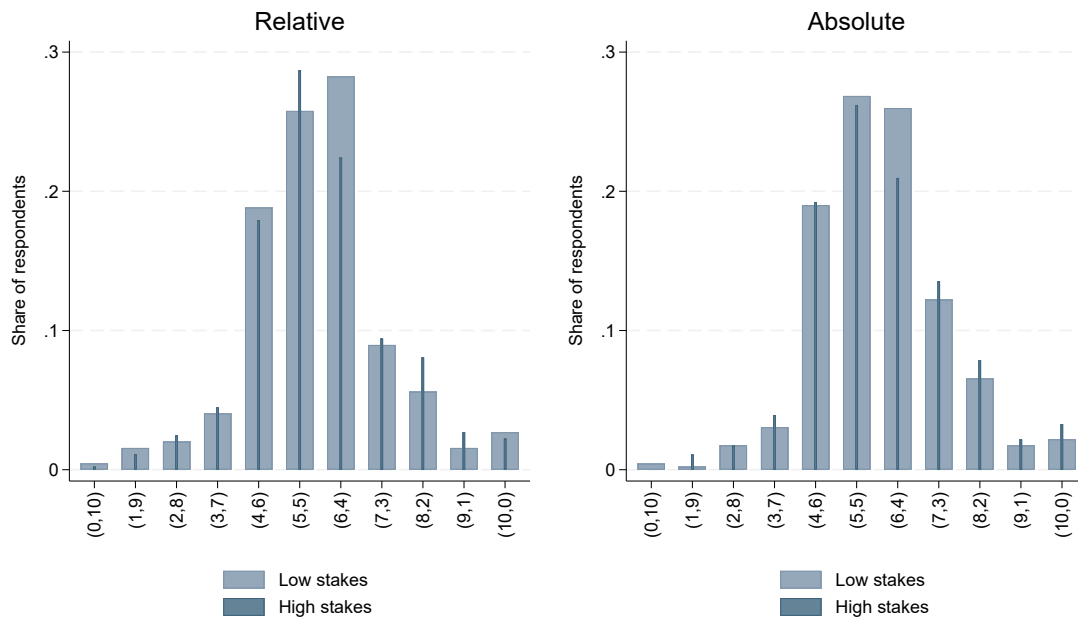
Note: correlation coefficient between preferring equality (donating half of the amount available) and the measure of absolute/relative thinking, considering the low- and high-stakes scenarios.

Source: authors' compilation.

## 6 Different framings and altruistic behaviour

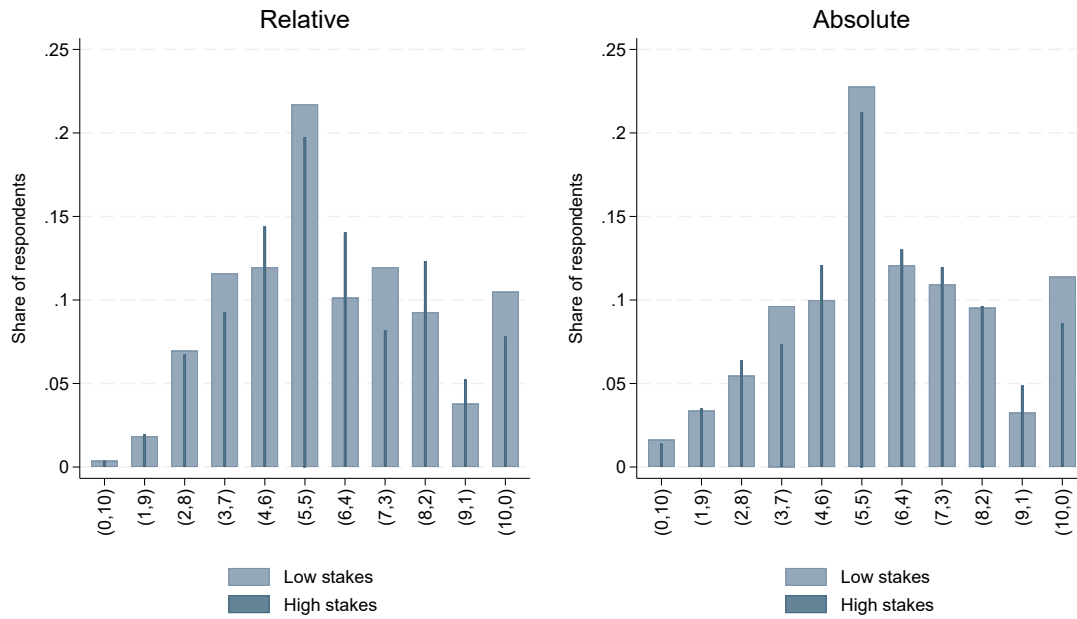
We now consider the same relationship, but instead of focusing on the way people think about inequality, we turn to the framing in which information about inequality was conveyed. Our outcome of interest remains altruistic behaviour. Figures 8 and 9 show the distributions of amounts kept and donated for Mozambique and Viet Nam, respectively, now considering the two information treatments separately (as explained in Section 3). They do not suggest clear differences between the two treatments. Comparing the distributions between the low- and high-stakes scenarios, there are some apparent differences in the relative treatment in the Viet Nam subsample, but not in the remaining subsamples.

**Figure 8: Distribution between amounts donated and kept by treatment, Mozambique**



Note: in each ordered pair (D,K), D corresponds to the amount donated and K corresponds to the amount kept.  
Source: authors' compilation.

**Figure 9: Distribution between amounts donated and kept by treatment, Viet Nam**



Note: in each ordered pair (D,K), D corresponds to the amount donated and K corresponds to the amount kept.

Source: authors' compilation.

## 6.1 Baseline results

We present the baseline results of estimating model 2 in Table 2. The dependent variable is the amount donated in a specific round. Panels A and B present the results for the low-stakes and the high-stakes rounds, respectively. The basic t-test is presented in columns (a), which show that there is no effect of varying how inequality is framed in the information treatment on the amount donated. In columns (b), we add controls for gender, age, high education, and high reported income. Individuals with higher education in Mozambique donate more in both rounds, and in the second round, individuals with higher reported income levels also donate a higher amount. In Viet Nam, these socio-economic characteristics are not correlated with the amounts donated. Finally, the conclusions remain unchanged when we add location fixed effects in columns (c).

**Table 2: Baseline results on amount donated**

	Mozambique			Viet Nam		
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(a)	(b)	(c)
<i>Panel A: Low stakes</i>						
Constant	5.413*** (0.108)	5.223*** (0.271)	5.470*** (0.239)	5.643*** (0.128)	5.803*** (0.440)	4.941*** (0.836)
Absolute	0.132 (0.150)	0.150 (0.151)	0.146 (0.152)	0.009 (0.185)	0.006 (0.186)	0.020 (0.189)
Female		-0.096 (0.127)	-0.107 (0.128)		0.025 (0.143)	0.143 (0.140)
Age		-0.000 (0.006)	-0.003 (0.006)		-0.004 (0.008)	0.002 (0.008)
High education		0.470*** (0.123)	0.373*** (0.124)		-0.056 (0.136)	0.141 (0.126)
High income		0.154 (0.119)	0.102 (0.118)		0.151 (0.152)	0.234 (0.141)
Observations	903	874	874	1,681	1,658	1,658
R <sup>2</sup>	0.002	0.028	0.064	0.000	0.001	0.120
<i>Panel B: High stakes</i>						
Constant	5.476*** (0.110)	5.147*** (0.283)	5.323*** (0.480)	5.646*** (0.136)	5.609*** (0.427)	4.634*** (0.712)
Absolute	0.124 (0.155)	0.120 (0.160)	0.117 (0.160)	-0.031 (0.182)	-0.028 (0.184)	-0.015 (0.187)
Female		0.036 (0.145)	0.020 (0.151)		0.070 (0.151)	0.205 (0.147)
Age		0.001 (0.006)	-0.002 (0.005)		-0.002 (0.008)	0.007 (0.008)
High education		0.342** (0.129)	0.215 (0.130)		0.086 (0.135)	0.293** (0.123)
High income		0.379*** (0.115)	0.296** (0.118)		0.135 (0.145)	0.210 (0.126)
Observations	903	874	874	1,681	1,658	1,658
R <sup>2</sup>	0.001	0.025	0.081	0.000	0.002	0.141
Controls?	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Fixed effects?	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

Note: the dependent variable is the amount donated. Panel A shows results for the question with low stakes, and Panel B presents the results for the question with high stakes. Columns (a) present the simple correlations between the treatment and the dependent variable.

Columns (b) include as controls gender (1 if female), age, high education (1 if higher than sample median), and income (1 if monthly income higher than sample median). Columns (c) consider location fixed effects. Standard errors (clustered at the session level) are in parentheses. Significance: \*\*\* 0.01, \*\* 0.05, \* 0.1

Source: authors' compilation.

## 6.2 Heterogeneity analysis

We then consider whether the difference in how inequality was framed affected certain groups of participants differently. The results in Table 3 show the main coefficients obtained when adding an interaction term between the treatment and each of the control variables—gender, age, high education, and high reported income—and confirm that there are no statistically significant interaction effects in either round or country sample.

**Table 3: Heterogeneity analysis**

	Mozambique					Viet Nam				
	Female	Age	High educ	High inc	Rural	Female	Age	High educ	High inc	Rural
<i>Panel A: Low stakes</i>										
Absolute	0.112 (0.185)	0.115 (0.199)	0.301 (0.190)	0.091 (0.169)	0.065 (0.168)	-0.094 (0.236)	-0.098 (0.232)	0.191 (0.216)	0.146 (0.236)	0.070 (0.228)
Absolute x female	0.068 (0.163)					0.211 (0.246)				
Female	-0.137 (0.151)	-0.102 (0.127)	-0.100 (0.126)	-0.104 (0.127)	-0.095 (0.124)	0.029 (0.195)	0.140 (0.140)	0.141 (0.140)	0.141 (0.140)	0.020 (0.145)
Absolute x older		0.061 (0.255)					0.241 (0.245)			
Older	-0.069 (0.161)	-0.100 (0.211)	-0.077 (0.161)	-0.067 (0.160)	-0.018 (0.157)	-0.004 (0.163)	-0.127 (0.215)	-0.007 (0.162)	-0.005 (0.162)	-0.136 (0.165)
Absolute x high education			-0.388 (0.251)					-0.355 (0.242)		
High education	0.384*** (0.120)	0.385*** (0.121)	0.579*** (0.202)	0.387*** (0.121)	0.436*** (0.116)	0.128 (0.127)	0.132 (0.126)	0.310* (0.159)	0.132 (0.126)	-0.063 (0.148)
Absolute x high income				0.160 (0.238)					-0.290 (0.277)	
High income	0.096 (0.118)	0.097 (0.118)	0.093 (0.120)	0.016 (0.188)	0.160 (0.119)	0.222 (0.146)	0.223 (0.147)	0.227 (0.146)	0.375* (0.225)	0.138 (0.156)
Absolute x rural					0.171 (0.300)					-0.123 (0.371)
Rural					-0.222 (0.209)					0.010 (0.266)
Observations	874	874	874	874	874	1,658	1,658	1,658	1,658	1,658
R <sup>2</sup>	0.064	0.064	0.068	0.065	0.030	0.121	0.121	0.122	0.121	0.002
<i>Panel B: High stakes</i>										
Absolute	0.116 (0.206)	0.038 (0.213)	0.258 (0.211)	0.010 (0.170)	0.043 (0.194)	-0.205 (0.239)	-0.053 (0.221)	0.132 (0.223)	0.106 (0.233)	0.047 (0.252)
Absolute x female	0.002 (0.190)					0.349 (0.257)				
Female	0.023 (0.194)	0.024 (0.150)	0.026 (0.150)	0.020 (0.150)	0.034 (0.143)	0.024 (0.203)	0.207 (0.147)	0.208 (0.148)	0.208 (0.148)	0.067 (0.153)
Absolute x older		0.160 (0.263)					0.073 (0.243)			
Older	-0.018 (0.157)	-0.099 (0.222)	-0.025 (0.157)	-0.014 (0.157)	0.032 (0.166)	0.166 (0.149)	0.130 (0.184)	0.164 (0.149)	0.166 (0.148)	-0.019 (0.153)
Absolute x high education			-0.354 (0.295)					-0.308 (0.219)		
High education	0.229* (0.132)	0.230* (0.131)	0.406* (0.209)	0.234* (0.133)	0.287** (0.121)	0.278** (0.123)	0.281** (0.122)	0.437*** (0.152)	0.283** (0.122)	0.063 (0.150)
Absolute x high income				0.311 (0.217)					-0.281 (0.265)	
High income	0.291** (0.119)	0.291** (0.120)	0.287** (0.120)	0.133 (0.186)	0.390*** (0.115)	0.205 (0.129)	0.209 (0.130)	0.212 (0.130)	0.355* (0.203)	0.125 (0.146)
Absolute x rural					0.151 (0.320)					-0.148 (0.368)
Rural					-0.303 (0.201)					-0.104 (0.278)
Observations	874	874	874	874	874	1,658	1,658	1,658	1,658	1,658
R <sup>2</sup>	0.080	0.081	0.083	0.082	0.029	0.142	0.141	0.142	0.142	0.003

Note: the dependent variable is the amount donated. Panel A shows results for the question with low stakes, and Panel B presents the results for the question with high stakes. Each column presents the results for a specific factor, obtained by adding an interaction term between that factor and the 'absolute' term to the baseline specification. The factors considered are: female (1 if female), age (1 if older than sample median), high education (1 if education higher than sample median), and income (1 if average monthly income higher than province average). All other controls and location fixed effects are included in all specifications. Standard errors (clustered at the session level) are in parentheses.

Significance: \*\*\* 0.01, \*\* 0.05, \* 0.1

Source: authors' compilation.

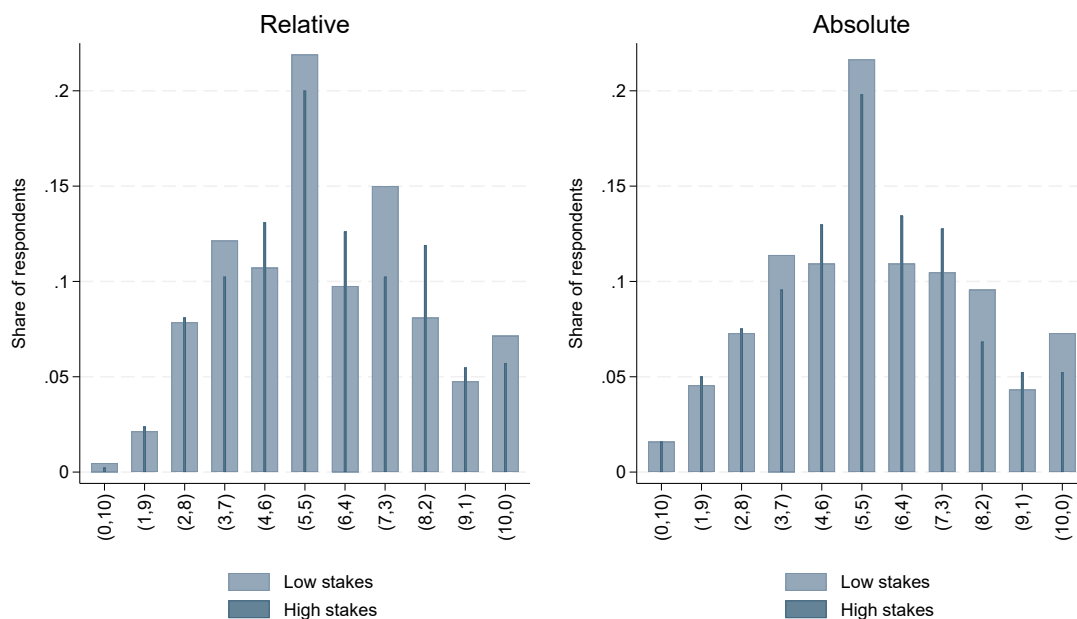
### 6.3 Robustness checks

Next, we run three robustness checks, which we present in Table A2 in Appendix A.2. First, we take into account the challenges of the first day of data collection and rerun the analysis without the sessions held on this day. Second, we consider as the alternative dependent variable a dummy for equality, i.e. the variable takes the value of 1 when the participant chose to donate, and keep, five units. Third, we replace location fixed effects, first with fixed effects for the team of enumerators and second with fixed effects for the enumerator(s) reading the scripts. Overall, there is no change in the conclusions, i.e. we do not find any evidence of an effect of the framing of inequality on altruism.

### 6.4 Regional analysis

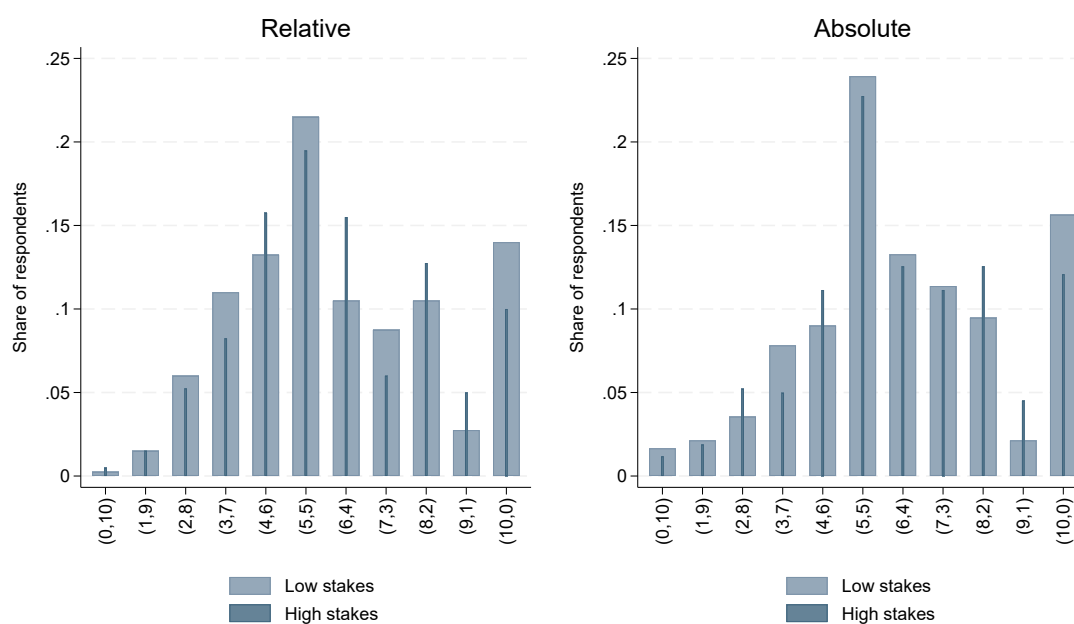
Finally, we take advantage of the fact that we have data available for both the northern and southern provinces of Viet Nam, to check whether there was any effect within the country. Comparing the distributions of decisions between the two rounds, again we do not find clear differences in the subsample from the northern region nor in the subsample from the southern region (see Figure A1 in Appendix A.3). When considering the absolute versus relative information treatments (Figures 10 and 11), one observes that a similar share of participants donates half of the available amount, both across treatments and across regions. In terms of the shape of the distribution, there are no clear observable differences in either subsample.

**Figure 10: Distribution between amounts donated and kept by treatment, North Viet Nam**



Note: in each ordered pair (D,K), D corresponds to the amount donated and K corresponds to the amount kept.  
Source: authors' compilation.

**Figure 11: Distribution between amounts donated and kept by treatment, South Viet Nam**



Note: in each ordered pair (D,K), D corresponds to the amount donated and K corresponds to the amount kept.

Source: authors' compilation.

Table 4 shows the results for our baseline estimation in each regional subsample. We observe no significant effect of the treatment on the amount donated in either round.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> In Table A3 in Appendix A.3, we include some heterogeneity analysis. The main result is that the gender of the participant matters in the sample for north Viet Nam. Women donate more than men in the 'absolute' treatment.



**Table 4: Baseline analysis, regions in Viet Nam**

	Viet Nam (North)			Viet Nam (South)		
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(a)	(b)	(c)
<i>Panel A: Low stakes</i>						
Constant	5.493*** (0.167)	4.592*** (0.690)	4.664*** (1.052)	5.800*** (0.195)	6.097*** (0.540)	6.785*** (1.112)
Absolute	-0.167 (0.234)	-0.199 (0.236)	-0.170 (0.239)	0.191 (0.287)	0.192 (0.288)	0.201 (0.293)
Observations	859	837	837	822	821	821
R <sup>2</sup>	0.001	0.015	0.135	0.001	0.016	0.115
<i>Panel B: High stakes</i>						
Constant	5.507*** (0.195)	4.587*** (0.691)	4.677*** (0.891)	5.793*** (0.188)	5.656*** (0.546)	6.614*** (0.917)
Absolute	-0.268 (0.252)	-0.281 (0.256)	-0.257 (0.257)	0.215 (0.260)	0.218 (0.262)	0.223 (0.266)
Observations	859	837	837	822	821	821
R <sup>2</sup>	0.003	0.018	0.157	0.002	0.031	0.140
Controls?	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Fixed effects?	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

Note: the dependent variable is the amount donated. Panels A and B show results for the question with low- and high-stakes scenarios, respectively. Columns (a) present the simple correlations between the treatment and the dependent variable. Columns (b) include controls (gender, age, high education, and income), and columns (c) add location fixed effects. Standard errors (clustered at the session level) are in parentheses.

Significance: \*\*\* 0.01, \*\* 0.05, \* 0.1

Source: authors' compilation.

## 7 Conclusion

We draw on data from Mozambique and Viet Nam to assess how different understandings and framings of inequality in absolute or relative terms affect donations to a public good. While most of the discourse and debate on inequality is based on relative measures, there is evidence that a share of individuals think in absolute terms instead. This may create a disconnect between what the trends communicate in policy and academic discourses and how people perceive or think about inequality, with implications for their positions in important debates, such as income redistribution.

In line with early enquiries (Ravallion 2014, 2018 and others), we found that indeed some of our participants think about inequality in absolute rather than in relative terms: half of the sample in Mozambique and over a quarter in the Viet Nam sample. Moreover, our data showed considerable differences in how people understand inequality in our two country samples. In the Viet Nam sample, there was a much higher share (close to 60 per cent) of relativists than absolutists, while we found the opposite in the Mozambique sample.

We considered several correlates of the differences in the ways of thinking but did not find evidence of a link between them and socio-demographic characteristics, including gender, age, income level, or education. Even if there was some indication that living in rural areas in Mozambique was correlated with absolute thinking of inequality, controlling for this factor showed that country-specific factors continue to matter for the observed differences. We linked these results with the trajectories of our two countries of interest, specifically with the fact that in Viet Nam the progress in economic growth has been inclusive, whereas in Mozambique inequalities have aggravated and people have felt left behind. We hypothesize that this affects people's views and actions and thus might explain at least partially the observed differences. This speaks to international comparisons of how people view and perceive inequality (see, for example, Janmaat 2014), though we have not found other studies that look specifically at the absolute versus relative dimension. Moreover, while existing literature on differences in perceptions and views on inequality has mainly focused on WEIRD settings or the dichotomy between the North and South, our results contribute to a better understanding of differences between countries in the Global South and suggest that exploring this heterogeneity further is of relevance.

Second, we found no correlation between being a relativist/absolutist and altruistic decisions in a dictator game, where the amount donated was used to build a health centre. Moreover, against our expectations, we did not find evidence that changing the framing of inequality in a hypothetical place in the country affected altruism. While this is, to the best of our knowledge, the first study to specifically address this question experimentally, we note that there is room for building on, and improving, our experimental design. Our information treatment was highly simplified with a view to it being implemented across diverse populations in low-income settings, which may have weakened the link between the information and the dictator game.

An avenue for further research could be to use different games to explore other social preferences. For instance, Markussen et al. (2021) found that inequality leads to lower contributions to the public good using a representative sample for Viet Nam and a one-shot public goods game. Other possibilities include using a modified dictator game with inequality in the initial endowments (Cappelen et al. 2007) to examine the link between different understandings of inequality and distributive decisions. We propose these developments for further research.

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## A Appendix

### A.1 Balance tests

**Table A1: Balance tests**

	Relative	Absolute	Difference
<i>Mozambique</i>			
Female	0.484 (0.500)	0.509 (0.500)	0.025 (0.461)
Older than median	0.505 (0.501)	0.483 (0.500)	-0.021 (0.529)
Education higher than median	0.406 (0.492)	0.392 (0.489)	-0.013 (0.682)
Income higher than median	0.353 (0.479)	0.337 (0.473)	-0.016 (0.615)
<i>N</i>	<i>446</i>	<i>458</i>	<i>905</i>
<i>Vietnam</i>			
Female	0.544 (0.498)	0.536 (0.499)	-0.008 (0.744)
Older than median	0.485 (0.500)	0.493 (0.500)	0.008 (0.731)
Education higher than median	0.473 (0.500)	0.485 (0.500)	0.012 (0.631)
Income higher than median	0.428 (0.495)	0.443 (0.497)	0.016 (0.513)
<i>N</i>	<i>820</i>	<i>861</i>	<i>1,681</i>

Note: standard deviations presented under each treatment column are in parentheses. p-values for the difference in means presented are in parentheses in the column 'Differences'.

Source: authors' compilation.

## A.2 Robustness checks

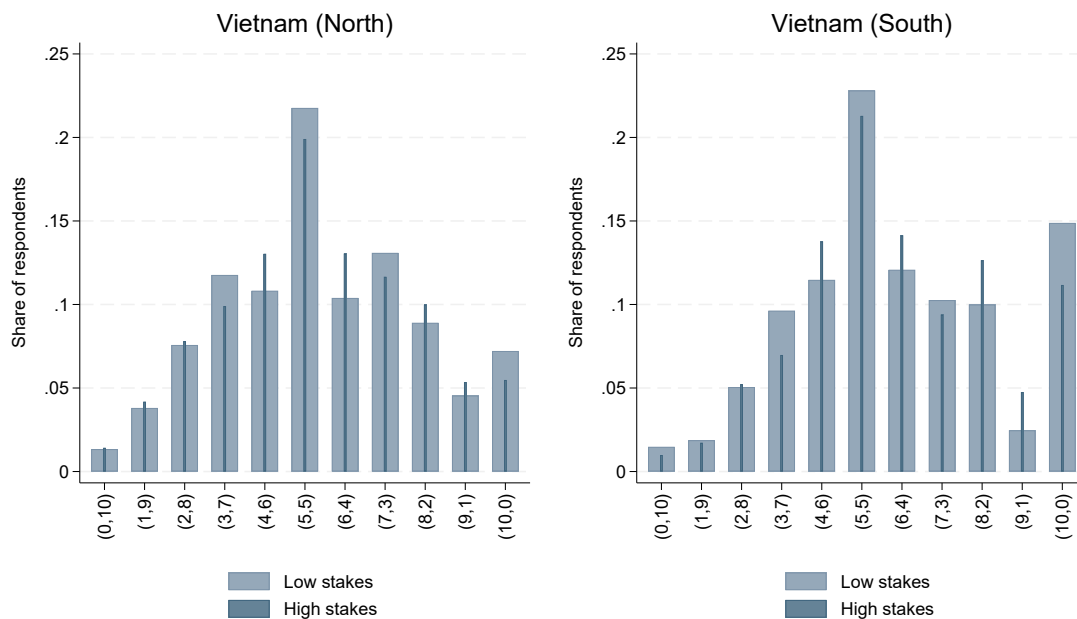
**Table A2: Robustness checks**

	Mozambique									Vietnam								
	First day			Equality			Enumerator FE			First day			Equality			Enumerator FE		
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(a)	(b)	(c)	(a)	(b)		(a)	(b)	(c)	(a)	(b)	(c)	(a)	(b)	
<i>Panel A: Low stakes</i>																		
Absolute	0.103 (0.155)	0.127 (0.157)	0.124 (0.158)	0.015 (0.191)	0.014 (0.193)	0.027 (0.196)	0.011 (0.034)	0.018 (0.037)		0.018 (0.037)	0.011 (0.023)	0.012 (0.023)	0.012 (0.023)	0.152 (0.151)	0.228 (0.163)	0.009 (0.187)	0.026 (0.246)	
Female		-0.106 (0.132)	-0.105 (0.135)		0.003 (0.148)	0.122 (0.145)		0.017 (0.033)	0.015 (0.032)		0.000 (0.021)	0.002 (0.022)	-0.101 (0.130)	-0.109 (0.118)	0.087 (0.137)	0.064 (0.141)		
Age		-0.002 (0.006)	-0.002 (0.006)		-0.003 (0.008)	0.004 (0.008)		0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)		0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.006)	-0.002 (0.006)	0.005 (0.007)	-0.002 (0.008)		
High education		0.522*** (0.123)	0.424*** (0.124)		-0.052 (0.144)	0.161 (0.132)		-0.013 (0.030)	-0.016 (0.035)		-0.038* (0.022)	-0.033 (0.025)	0.496*** (0.125)	0.396*** (0.120)	0.086 (0.130)	-0.005 (0.134)		
High income		0.147 (0.126)	0.117 (0.124)		0.144 (0.159)	0.226 (0.148)		-0.053 (0.034)	-0.045 (0.034)		-0.005 (0.021)	0.011 (0.021)	0.148 (0.120)	0.150 (0.123)	0.173 (0.147)	0.135 (0.146)		
Observations	857	832	832	1,608	1,585	1,585	904	875	875	1,681	1,658	1,658	874	861	1,658	1,658		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.001	0.034	0.058	0.000	0.001	0.124	0.000	0.006	0.037	0.000	0.004	0.042	0.035	0.087	0.056	0.033		
<i>Panel B: High stakes</i>																		
Absolute	0.102 (0.162)	0.107 (0.167)	0.103 (0.168)	-0.069 (0.187)	-0.065 (0.190)	-0.054 (0.193)	-0.025 (0.026)	-0.026 (0.027)	-0.027 (0.027)	0.015 (0.021)	0.018 (0.020)	0.018 (0.021)	0.122 (0.160)	0.259 (0.170)	-0.023 (0.184)	-0.067 (0.257)		
Female		0.035 (0.153)	0.033 (0.160)		0.081 (0.156)	0.216 (0.152)		0.016 (0.030)	0.011 (0.030)		0.019 (0.021)	0.019 (0.021)	0.024 (0.149)	0.026 (0.140)	0.135 (0.146)	0.101 (0.151)		
Age		-0.001 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.005)		-0.000 (0.008)	0.010 (0.008)		-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.002)		0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.002 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.005)	0.009 (0.007)	0.000 (0.008)		
High education		0.394*** (0.130)	0.259* (0.133)		0.100 (0.143)	0.330** (0.129)		-0.061* (0.033)	-0.061* (0.036)		-0.058*** (0.021)	-0.053** (0.023)	0.360*** (0.126)	0.255* (0.129)	0.234* (0.126)	0.147 (0.129)		
High income		0.361*** (0.120)	0.294** (0.118)		0.147 (0.147)	0.219* (0.127)		-0.057* (0.030)	-0.032 (0.030)		0.013 (0.021)	0.023 (0.021)	0.374*** (0.112)	0.370*** (0.116)	0.133 (0.139)	0.118 (0.144)		
Observations	857	832	832	1,608	1,585	1,585	904	875	875	1,681	1,658	1,658	874	861	1,658	1,658		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.001	0.028	0.073	0.000	0.002	0.145	0.001	0.011	0.058	0.000	0.006	0.055	0.033	0.081	0.067	0.034		
Controls?	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Fixed effects?	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes		

Note: the dependent variable is the amount donated. Columns (a) present the simple correlations between the treatment and the dependent variable. Columns (b) include as controls gender (1 if female), age, high education (1 if higher than sample median), and income (1 if monthly income higher than sample median). Columns (c) consider location fixed effects. Standard errors (clustered at the session level) are in parentheses. Significance: \*\*\* 0.01, \*\* 0.05, \* 0.1  
Source: authors' compilation.

## A.3 Regional analysis

**Figure A1: Distribution between amounts donated and kept, regions in Vietnam**



Note: in each ordered pair (D,K), D corresponds to the amount donated and K corresponds to the amount kept.  
Source: authors' compilation.



**Table A3: Heterogeneity analysis (regions in Vietnam)**

	Vietnam (North)				Vietnam (South)			
	Female	Age	High educ	High inc	Female	Age	High educ	High inc
<i>Panel A: Low stakes</i>								
Absolute	-0.768** (0.297)	-0.367 (0.250)	-0.005 (0.306)	0.097 (0.279)	0.526 (0.334)	0.068 (0.359)	0.314 (0.301)	0.193 (0.373)
Absolute x female	1.068*** (0.283)				-0.622* (0.352)			
Female	-0.834*** (0.243)	-0.277 (0.212)	-0.269 (0.210)	-0.279 (0.212)	0.895*** (0.212)	0.572*** (0.145)	0.569*** (0.146)	0.570*** (0.146)
Absolute x older		0.337 (0.287)				0.333 (0.366)		
Older	-0.002 (0.237)	-0.155 (0.265)	0.014 (0.242)	-0.002 (0.239)	-0.100 (0.205)	-0.273 (0.318)	-0.102 (0.207)	-0.096 (0.207)
Absolute x high education			-0.299 (0.357)				-0.280 (0.340)	
High education	-0.157 (0.158)	-0.132 (0.157)	0.020 (0.206)	-0.132 (0.156)	0.404** (0.185)	0.414** (0.186)	0.551** (0.242)	0.409** (0.184)
Absolute x high income				-0.598 (0.378)				0.019 (0.396)
High income	0.222 (0.206)	0.222 (0.209)	0.213 (0.208)	0.523* (0.304)	0.303 (0.209)	0.278 (0.207)	0.287 (0.206)	0.276 (0.329)
Observations	837	837	837	837	821	821	821	821
R <sup>2</sup>	0.144	0.133	0.133	0.135	0.117	0.114	0.114	0.113
<i>Panel B: High stakes</i>								
Absolute	-0.953*** (0.298)	-0.280 (0.296)	-0.069 (0.367)	-0.048 (0.334)	0.488 (0.333)	0.087 (0.321)	0.259 (0.275)	0.259 (0.319)
Absolute x female	1.241*** (0.294)				-0.512 (0.372)			
Female	-0.936*** (0.245)	-0.288 (0.203)	-0.281 (0.203)	-0.291 (0.205)	0.984*** (0.218)	0.719*** (0.171)	0.716*** (0.173)	0.718*** (0.172)
Absolute x older		0.031 (0.325)				0.336 (0.337)		
Older	0.139 (0.210)	0.142 (0.213)	0.157 (0.215)	0.145 (0.211)	0.077 (0.197)	-0.098 (0.270)	0.079 (0.198)	0.082 (0.197)
Absolute x high education			-0.343 (0.344)				-0.094 (0.309)	
High education	-0.082 (0.129)	-0.052 (0.124)	0.121 (0.193)	-0.053 (0.123)	0.635*** (0.191)	0.645*** (0.191)	0.687*** (0.227)	0.641*** (0.193)
Absolute x high income				-0.473 (0.405)				-0.091 (0.331)
High income	0.151 (0.180)	0.140 (0.185)	0.141 (0.184)	0.385 (0.286)	0.347* (0.187)	0.325* (0.185)	0.333* (0.184)	0.379 (0.284)
Observations	837	837	837	837	821	821	821	821
R <sup>2</sup>	0.171	0.154	0.155	0.157	0.143	0.141	0.140	0.140

Note: the dependent variable is the amount donated. Panel A shows results for the question with low stakes, and Panel B presents the results for the question with high stakes. Each column presents the results for a specific factor, obtained by adding an interaction term between that factor and the 'absolute' term to the baseline specification. The factors considered are: female (1 if female), age (1 if older than sample median), high education (1 if education higher than sample median), and income (1 if average monthly income higher than sample median). All other controls and location fixed effects are included in all specifications. Standard errors (clustered at the session level) are in parentheses.

Significance: \*\*\* 0.01, \*\* 0.05, \* 0.1

Source: authors' compilation.