



PART 3

Read the text below and answer questions 27–40.

THE PARADOX OF CHOICE: WHY MORE IS LESS

In affluent consumer cultures, choice has become a moral ideal as well as an economic condition. The sheer variety of goods, services, and life plans is often celebrated as proof that individuals are autonomous, informed, and empowered. Yet the lived experience of choice is frequently more ambivalent than the rhetoric implies. Faced with supermarket aisles that contain dozens of near-identical items, or digital platforms that offer seemingly endless subscription tiers, consumers can find themselves hesitating, second-guessing, or abandoning decisions altogether. In such contexts, freedom is not necessarily felt as liberation; it can be felt as exposure—an obligation to choose correctly, repeatedly, and publicly, in a world that rewards optimisation.

Psychological research has increasingly converged on the counterintuitive claim that an abundance of options may undermine both decisiveness and satisfaction. When the number of alternatives expands beyond a manageable range, many people report heightened anxiety, delayed commitment, and a reduced sense of contentment after selecting. Social scientist Barry Schwartz brought these findings to a wide audience by naming them the paradox of choice: the tendency for more alternatives to generate less well-being. The paradox is not merely that individuals sometimes choose poorly; it is that, as the choice set grows, the emotional and cognitive costs of choosing can rise faster than the practical benefits of increased variety, so that the process itself becomes burdensome.

Schwartz further argues that the emotional burden is distributed unevenly across decision-makers. He distinguishes between maximisers and satisficers—two decision styles that react differently to large menus of options. Maximisers strive for the best possible outcome. They often conduct extensive searches, compare features obsessively, and remain alert to the possibility that a superior alternative exists somewhere else. Research suggests that while maximisers often achieve objectively better outcomes, they feel worse about them. Even after an apparent resolution, maximisers may continue to rehearse the forgone options, mentally re-running the decision as new information appears, which can amplify regret. Satisficers, by contrast—a term associated with Herbert Simon—seek a “good enough” option that meets pre-set criteria. Once those criteria are satisfied, they commit without demanding perfect optimisation, and are therefore less likely to be haunted by counterfactual possibilities.



Classic demonstrations of choice overload illustrate how excess variety can backfire in observable behaviour rather than self-report alone. In a widely cited study, shoppers encountered a tasting booth offering either 6 or 24 varieties of gourmet jam. The larger display attracted more attention, consistent with the intuition that abundance is enticing; however, the smaller display yielded far more purchases, suggesting that limited choice can facilitate follow-through. Similar effects have been reported in domains as varied as chocolate selections, retirement-plan menus, and even essay topics, where too many prompts can produce procrastination rather than creativity. Importantly, the effect is not that people dislike variety in principle; rather, the relationship between options and action appears non-linear: moderate variety can invite engagement, while very large sets can paralyse.

Several mechanisms have been proposed to explain why more becomes less. First, deliberation effort rises with each additional alternative. Evaluating many options can strain attention and working memory, producing cognitive overload; under such conditions, individuals may rely on superficial cues, postpone decisions, or default to the status quo. Second, abundant choice can inflate expectations. If the perfect option is presumed to exist, ordinary outcomes begin to feel like disappointments, and even a sensible selection is experienced as a compromise. Third, greater choice intensifies opportunity costs: the attractive features of rejected alternatives remain vivid, which reduces enjoyment of the chosen option by keeping “what was missed” psychologically present. Finally, extensive choice can increase self-blame. When an outcome is imperfect, people may attribute the failure to personal misjudgment—because, with so many options available, they assume they should have been able to choose better.

These dynamics have implications beyond consumer purchasing. In healthcare, an overload of treatment pathways can delay urgent decisions, particularly when risks are uncertain and outcomes are probabilistic rather than guaranteed. In education, sprawling catalogues of electives may prompt students to retreat to familiar courses, not because they lack ambition, but because evaluating trade-offs across dozens of unfamiliar modules is cognitively taxing. In workplaces, complicated benefit menus can lead employees to stick with sub-optimal defaults, even when better packages exist, because the cost of comparison is immediate while the benefit is distant and uncertain. In each case, abundant choice can widen the gap between formal freedom (many options) and functional freedom (the capacity to decide well).

In response, policymakers and organisations have increasingly adopted what is sometimes called choice architecture, drawing on behavioural economics to design environments in which the “path of least resistance” aligns with beneficial outcomes. So-



called nudges do not remove alternatives; rather, they shape how alternatives are presented. For example, making pension enrolment the default can raise participation while still allowing opt-out, and presenting a smaller curated shortlist can help people act without feeling trapped by an endless menu. Such interventions recognise that the architecture of a decision—order, framing, and default settings—can matter as much as the content. Schwartz does not advocate abolishing options altogether. Instead, he argues that cultivating the ability to satisfice—setting good-enough standards, relinquishing perfectionism, and reserving attention for decisions that genuinely shape a life—may protect mental energy in an age where trivial choices can proliferate without limit.

Questions 27–32

Choose YES if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer, choose **NO** if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this.

27 The passage suggests that choice is widely portrayed as evidence of personal autonomy in wealthy societies.

28 According to the passage, the main problem with large choice sets is that people consistently select inferior options.

29 The writer suggests that having more alternatives can make the process of deciding increasingly burdensome, even when the extra options offer some practical advantages.

30 The passage indicates that maximisers always end up with objectively worse results than satisficers.

31 The passage claims that choice overload has been shown only in food-related experiments such as jam and chocolate.

32 The writer argues that “nudges” eliminate alternatives in order to guarantee better decisions.

Questions 33–36

Choose the correct ending for each sentence.

33 In the jam study, a larger display drew attention, but the smaller display

34 One explanation for dissatisfaction is that abundant choice can make people believe

35 When many attractive alternatives are rejected, decision-makers may enjoy their final choice less because



36 In workplace benefits, employees may remain with sub-optimal arrangements because

Endings

A comparing options is immediately effortful while the payoff feels distant and uncertain.

B an ideal solution should exist, so ordinary outcomes seem like compromises.

C students are prevented from exploring unfamiliar subjects due to strict institutional rules.

D encouraged follow-through and resulted in far more purchases.

E the appealing features of what they did not choose stay psychologically vivid.

F people dislike variety in principle and prefer having only one option.

Questions 37–40

Look at the following summary and the list of words below. Choose the correct letter, **A–H**, for each answer.

The Effects of Excessive Choice and Possible Solutions

The passage explains that extremely large menus of options can create **37**, as attention and working memory are strained. It also notes that too many alternatives may raise **38**, so that even sensible outcomes feel disappointing. In response, organisations use choice architecture, including setting beneficial **39** and offering a smaller **40** to reduce friction while keeping opt-out available.

Word Box

A mental strain

B unrealistic hopes

C pre-set options

D restricted selection

E ethical standard

F processing capacity

G sense of loss

H personal fault

Answer Key

27. YES

28. NO

29. YES

30. NO



31. NO

32. NO

33. D

34. B

35. E

36. A

37. A

38. B

39. C

40. D