

MARKETING COLLOQUIA

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VALUES-BASED AND CONSEQUENCE-BASED POLICY ATTITUDES

ABSTRACT: Frustratingly, intractable policy debates often emerge around complex issues that people have impassioned views about despite not understanding deeply. Part of the explanation for this lies in the incommensurability of “values-based” and “consequence-based” reasons that provide the basis for people’s attitudes. Values-based thinking relies on an elemental determination of right and wrong, whereas consequence-based thinking entails an evaluation of the probability of possible outcomes. The first two studies explore the correlates of values-based and consequence-based thinking about several important public policies. Values-based thinking is associated with less perceived resolution tractability, higher perceived issue understanding, greater position extremity, and greater attitude certainty, but not with better objective knowledge about the issue. Similarly, elaborating on consequences (compared to elaborating on values) leads to increased optimism about resolution and decreased perceived understanding. The third study shows that the values-based/consequence-based distinction predicts attitudes toward different instantiations of genetically engineered products. People opposed to GMOs on predominantly consequence-based grounds react more strongly to manipulations of “contact level” (e.g. products that are eaten vs. sprayed in the air). In contrast, those opposed on values-based grounds react more strongly to manipulating the similarity of the donor and target organism (e.g. transferring a gene from a green bean to a soybean vs. from a chicken to a soybean).