

Emotion responses to command and control

June 2 2015, by Rebecca Edelman, David Just

**CONFRONTATIONAL POLICIES CAUSE
CONSUMERS TO RESIST...**



**POLICIES THAT SUPPORT HEALTHY
CHOICES ARE MORE EFFECTIVE.**



© David Just & Andrew Hanks (American Journal of Ag Econ, 2015)

Credit: Daniel Miller

"No taxation without representation!" As we learned in American history class, restrictions to personal liberties often trigger strong emotional reactions instead of deliberate, rational economic responses. Just like the

tea tax helping to spark the American Revolution, public policies today can have volatile, emotional reactions depending on how they are framed.

In a new Cornell Food and Brand Lab paper published in the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, researchers David Just, PhD, at the Cornell Food and Brand Lab and Andrew Hanks, PhD, at Ohio State University (formerly at the Cornell Food & Brand Lab), reviewed existing literature on the consequences of past public policies to form suggestions to improve future regulations.

The researchers found that creating a conflict with the population that a policy targets can backfire. The most successful public policies are those that are framed positively and support choice. "It's clear that people value freedom of choice. When policies seem to encourage good choices, rather than limit bad ones, we see a much more positive response" says David Just. For example, in one study, 173 adults were told to select various meals for lunch reacted differently depending on how the price of each item was proposed. When changes in the price were framed as a tax on unhealthy items, more people chose the unhealthy foods. However, when the change was framed as a price discount for healthy foods, demand for healthy items went up. This shows that rebelling against noxious policies is an important driver of consumer demand and cannot be ignored in policy recommendations.

Drs. Just and Hanks' research highlights important considerations for policy makers and policy advocates. "Many decisions that we make are not totally rational," concludes Dr. Just, "When trying to impose any sort of change, it is important to try and empathize with our audience and to work with, rather than against the targets of that policy."

More information: Just, David; and Andrew Hanks (2015). The

Hidden Cost of Regulation: Emotional Responses to Command and Control. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*. [DOI: 10.1093/ajae/aav016](https://doi.org/10.1093/ajae/aav016)

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