

Ideological Bias Prevents Evidence-Based Policy Adoption: Experimental Evidence from Local Policy Makers

Pedro Rey Biel
ESADE

Abstract

Despite growing interest in evidence-based policies, an important gap exists between socially relevant research results and their policy adoption. We established a collaboration with ideologically opposed think tanks and newspaper outlets to conduct a pre-registered experiment with policymakers from 5678 municipalities in Spain. We study whether ideological alignment between the policy-maker and the institution or media outlet endorsing the research evidence affects the implementation of a low-cost, non-ideological and effective tourism policy. We find that policy adoption increases by more than 50 per cent when the same research is communicated from an ideologically aligned media outlet or think tank. We also find that the communication instrument (a policy brief vs a media article) does not have any differential effect on policy implementation. A post-intervention experimental survey allows us to identify an important mechanism that could explain these results: policymakers are more likely to update their beliefs when evidence is received from corresponding ideological institutions.