UC Merced

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

Motivated Reasoning in Causally Ambiguous Explore-Exploit Situations

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9d68d5m2

Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 41(0)

Authors

Caddick, Zachary
Rottman, Benjamin

Publication Date

2019

Peer reviewed

Motivated Reasoning in Causally Ambiguous Explore-Exploit Situations

Zachary Caddick

University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States

Benjamin Rottman

University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States

Abstract

Two studies investigated how political attitudes affect causal learning. Participants were tasked with testing economic policies to maximize the economic output of an imaginary country. Based on their political attitudes, participants were either strongly in favor or strongly against the policies (Study 1), or could also have neutral attitudes (Study 2). Some policies had fairly clear positive or negative effects. But some were more ambiguous; they initially had positive effects but eventually had negative effects on the economy, or vice versa. After testing the policies, participants falsely believed that the policies that fit with their political attitudes were more effective, and this bias was exacerbated for the policies that had different short vs. long-term effects. This research shows the power of motivated reasoning and provides a well-controlled method to study the effects of motivated reasoning on causal learning in explore-exploit situations.