

## **REDISCOVERING THE CIVIC AND ACHIEVING BETTER OUTCOMES IN PUBLIC POLICY**

### **Policy Briefings Number 11**

**Title:** The impact of discussion versus information on organ donation attitudes and organ donor registration: a laboratory experiment

#### **Background to the Project:**

- There is an acknowledged shortage of organ donors in the UK, with less than a third (28%) of the UK population signed up to the National Organ Donor Register
- A national education campaign is underway in an attempt to increase the number of people on the Organ Donor Register
- Yet we know relatively little about how the effectiveness of education and information in terms of increasing organ donor registrations
- In many areas of public policy where behaviour change is needed, policy makers are exploring the possibilities of 'nudging' – techniques which use the principles of behavioural economics to steer citizens towards certain choices which are viewed as socially beneficial
- An alternative approach which is more 'bottom-up' is for citizens to educate one another and make decisions, through discussion and deliberation, facilitated by the State or by civic institutions
- The study explores the impact of these two contrasting approaches as methods for encouraging organ donor registration

#### **Aims of the project and methods:**

- The project compared the impact of information alone versus information & discussion on organ donor registration levels and attitudes towards organ donation

- 180 students took part in the study, conducted as an iterated series of laboratory experiments over 6 months
- Students in each experiment were randomly assigned to receive one of the following three interventions:
  - (1) A four page information booklet using techniques from behavioural economics to encourage registration
  - (2) The above booklet followed by a 15 minute group discussion on topical organ donation issues
  - (3) An information booklet about swine flu (placebo control)
- After reading the relevant booklet/ taking part in the discussion, students completed an attitudinal questionnaire and were subsequently invited to join the organ donor register (either using a registration leaflet provided at the event or afterwards via the national organ donor website)
- We tracked the number of students in each group signed-up to the organ donor register before and after the intervention, following up 2 months after the end of the experiment to allow time for subsequent online registrations

## Key Findings:

### The impact on organ donor registration levels

- Registration on the National Organ Donor Register was increased by statistically significant levels across all three groups, with the vast majority signing up using registration forms on the day of the experiment rather than online at a later date
- In the information nudge group **23%** were registered **before** and **57%** were registered **after** the experiment
- In the information nudge & discussion group **26%** were registered **before** and were **41%** registered **after** the experiment
- In the control group **35%** were registered **before** and **65%** registered **after** the experiment
- The biggest increase was generated in the **information nudge group (34% increase)**, followed by the **placebo control group (30% increase)**, and lastly the **information nudge & discussion group (15% increase)**

## The impact on attitudes towards organ donation

- Three attitudinal questions explored attitudes to organ donation (% in favour of organ donation; % willing to donate posthumously; % intending to join the organ donor register) – **across all three measures attitudes were most pro-donation amongst the information nudge group**
- **94%** of the information nudge group were in favour of organ donation, as compared to **88%** in the information and discussion group, and **87%** in the control group
- Willingness to donate posthumously was highest in the information nudge group (**77%**), followed by the control group (**73%**) then the information and discussion group (**67%**)
- Of those who had not already signed the organ donor register, intention to register was highest amongst the information nudge group (**65%**), followed by the information and discussion group (**56%**), then the control group (**39%**)

## Policy Relevance and Implications:

- Tailored information booklets based around behavioural economics principles create increases in organ donor registrations and are more effective than combined information and discussion
- However rates of conversion are similar in a placebo control group and an information nudge group, suggesting it may be that act of providing an registration mechanism which changes people's behaviour rather than the content of the information appeal
- Combined information and discussion seems to create some uncertainty about registering as an organ donor when compared to 'nudging' approaches alone
- For controversial and sensitive areas of civic behaviour such as organ donation it may therefore be important to give citizens the opportunity to discuss and deliberate before making decisions

- Registration outcomes were significantly higher overall for this study than for our online organ donor registration experiment (see policy brief 12), suggesting that interventions delivered in person may hold greater promise than online interventions. In view of the relative costs of the two studies (with the online survey costing approximately four times as much as the present study), interventions delivered in person may provide a more cost-effective way of generating organ donor registrations
- Extending the study from the laboratory to the field would help determine the effectiveness of these approaches amongst the general public – the interventions would be replicable in contexts such as workplaces, further and higher education institutions, community centres and places of worship

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