

10-10-1997

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Recommended Citation

(1997) "The Psychology of Country-of-Origin Labeling: An Example from Environmentalism," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 11 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol3/iss11/3>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: The Psychology of Country-of-Origin Labeling: An Example from Environmentalism

Author: Editor

Volume: 3

Issue: 11

Date: 1997-10-10

Keywords: Environment, Security

Abstract. This paper describes psychological Issues that affect the political consequences of country-of-origin labeling.

How rational is a political process? In representative democracies, legislators identify, are made aware of, or respond to a problem. They develop and vote on legislation to resolve the problem. Then implementation of the legislation through policies and program occurs. Problem solved? Often not. Even in cases not involving significant corruption, nepotism, cronyism, special interests, careerism, egoism, coercion, lack of attention, and lack of ability, the consequences may be inadequate--even inimical--to one's goal.

Some of this untoward state of affairs relates to political psychological factors. For example, the problem of tropical deforestation in Southeast Asia has led to a number of legislative recommendations including (1) the outright banning of exports and/or imports of tropical woods or products made from it, (2) the banning of the above if the tropical woods have been harvested or its derivative products made in a specific manner, and (3) requiring country-of-origin labeling on wood products. The rationale for the third option is that wholesalers, retailers, and consumers may consider origins in deciding on purchases.

Yet the political psychology of purchase decisionmaking suggests that the consideration of origins, even if widely prevalent, may involve Issues contraindicating the intent behind the rationale: that people will not buy products from countries violating real or putative standards set by local, regional, national, and international authorities. People may still purchase a product falling under a country-of-origin labeling mandate because they (1) were not aware of the producing country's alleged misbehaviors; (2) view the implemented legislation as a violation of the producing country's sovereignty; (3) take a psychologically reactant stance towards sanctions involving desirable products; (4) exhibit a sense of entitlement or egocentric stance towards such sanctions; (5) possess a positive affinity towards the producing country via racial, ethnic, religious, or other identification; (6) possess a negative affinity towards the sanctioning country or authority; (7) don't care about environmental Issues; (8) manifest an aversion to environmental Issues and so-called environmentalists; or (9) purchase products solely based on price--high or low.

The above psychological factors would be operative regardless of whether country-of-origin labeling pertains to an imported product--usually already the case--or to components of the product. Also operative--but so far only alluded to--are the irrational, illogical, emotional, and unconscious phenomena of human psychology. All together, these psychological factors present an insurmountable challenge to legislators and those who attempt to implement the law. And like some of the forests in Indonesia, the best of plans go up in smoke. (Jarman, R.E. (October 4, 1997.) Labels won't work. The New York Times, p. A20; Miller, G. (October 4, 1997.) Tropical forests are ravaged by free trade. The New York Times, p. A20; Punamaki, R-L, Qouta, S., & El Sarraj, E. (1997). Relationships between traumatic events, children's gender, and political activity, and perceptions of parenting styles. International Journal of Behavior Development, 21, 91-109; Sears, D.O. (1997). The impact of self-interest on attitudes: A symbolic politics perspective on differences between survey and experimental

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findings. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 492-496; Wojciszke, B., & Klusek, B. (1996). Moral and competence-related traits in political perception. *Polish Psychological Bulletin*, 27, 319-324.)(Keywords: Environment, Security.)