
Think about it, and decide: Do active-decision mechanisms increase organ donations?

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Abstract

Evidence suggests that enrollment mechanisms known as active decision (AD) facilitate decision making in contexts such as organ donation or choice of retirement plans, and raise positive outcomes, meaning organ donor registration rates and the amount of savings respectively.

We study the effect of AD on the choice to become an organ donor. We conducted two field experiments to test the two channels through which AD is believed to affect outcomes: the stimulation of reflection and the elimination of the tendency to procrastinate by means of a commitment nudge. We find that reflection has a statistically significant negative effect on the decision to become an organ donor and that the commitment nudge reduces putting off the decision, but does not lead to donation rates higher than in the control group. Our results suggest that AD mechanisms as a policy instrument may be far more limited than previously thought.

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