

Do American consumers with low confidence in the government buy American?

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When we don't feel confident about our government, we choose indirect ways of showing support, like buying U.S. based products, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Today, we can barely watch television for any length of time without hearing about verbal attacks on the government, or a given religion or [education system](#)," write authors Keisha M. Cutright (Duke University), Eugenia C. Wu (Cornell University), Jillian C. Banfield (University of Waterloo), Aaron C. Kay (Duke University), and Gavan J. Fitzsimons (Duke University).

The results suggest that consumers respond differently to threats to entities they depend upon. "We find that people are often quite motivated to defend their governments and other entities when threatened, but that their approaches differ a great deal depending on how confident they are in such entities," the authors write.

In a series of five studies, the researchers found that people who are not confident in their government respond to threatening attacks on it by choosing subtle ways of showing support. "They choose products based in the United States over those based in a foreign location," the authors write. "They are more likely to choose Nike over Adidas, Chevy over Toyota."

Individuals with high confidence in the government, on the other hand, do not distinguish between such choices. "They only show preferences

for national products when such products make strong, explicit statements in support of their [government](#)," the authors explain. "For example they show a strong preference for Nike over Adidas if Nike is associated with a statement such as 'Love it or Get Out' (surrounding a U.S. flag)."

In times of threat, marketers may want to be clear about whether their targeted consumers can be characterized as having high or low levels of confidence in their socio-political systems. "While a simple push towards American-made [products](#) may be enticing for low-confidence individuals, it may be deemed ineffective as a means of defending the threatened system for high-confidence individuals," the authors conclude.

More information: Keisha M. Cutright, Eugenia C. Wu, Jillian C. Banfield, Aaron C. Kay, and Gavan J. Fitzsimons. "When Your World Must Be Defended: Choosing Products to Justify the System." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2011. Further information: ejcr.org

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