Rating-Scale Instructions from Experiments 1 and 2

For this task, we will ask you to rate how well you feel you understand different political issues. You will make your ratings on a 7-point scale where 1 indicates "vague understanding" and 7 indicates "thorough understanding." Before you get started, this introduction will try to explain what the different scores on the scale are supposed to reflect. Below you will see three different levels of understanding of the how immigration policy impacts the economy. The understanding is shown by depicting the person's knowledge with a verbal description. Please read each explanation level in order to understand how to use the rating scale. As you will see, a 7 implies detailed and deep knowledge of the impacts of immigration policy on the economy. A 1 implies very little knowledge and a 4 is in the middle.

Level 7 Knowledge: A person with level 7 knowledge has very deep and detailed knowledge of immigration policy and its impacts on the economy. For instance he or she will know that one consideration of immigrant impact on local economies is the relationship between taxes paid versus social services received. But immigration also has less direct impacts on the local economy by influencing pay for higher-skilled workers, prices for goods and services produced by immigrant labor, and efficiency and wages for some owners of capital. He or she will also know that immigrant workers compete with domestic workers for low-skilled jobs, but some immigrants specialize in activities that otherwise would not exist in an area, and thus can increase the overall labor force.

Level 4 Knowledge: A person with level 4 knowledge has some knowledge of how immigration policy affects the economy though he or she does not understand the issue in great depth or detail. For instance, he or she might know that immigration can have both positive and negative effects on the economy. He or she might know that immigrants can be a drain in social services and create competition for jobs but also provide an inexpensive source of labor and often fill jobs that domestic residents do not want to do.

Level 1 Knowledge: A person with level 1 knowledge knows very little about the immigration policy issue and how it impacts the economy. He or she might know in a cursory way that immigration has economic impacts like affecting competition for jobs.

Example Instructions for Explanation- and Reason-Generation Tasks

Explanation-Task Instructions (words in brackets varied by issue being asked about):

"Now, we'd like to probe your knowledge in a little more detail on two of the political issues. This is the first one. Please describe all the details you know about [the impact of instituting a 'cap and trade' system for carbon emissions], going from the first step to the last, and providing the causal connection between the steps. That is, your explanation should state precisely how each step causes the next step in one continuous chain from start to finish. In other words, try to tell as complete a story as you can, with no gaps. Please take your time, as we expect your best explanation."

Reason-Generation-Task Instructions (words in brackets varied by issue being asked about):

"Now we'd like to understand a little more deeply why you hold the positions you do for two of the political issues. This is the first one. Please write down all the reasons you have for your position on [instituting a 'cap and trade' system for carbon emissions], going from the most important to the least. That is, you should state precisely why you hold the position. Try to tell as complete a story as you can about the reasons for your position. Please take your time, as we expect you to carefully state your reasons."

Analysis of Reasons Given in Experiment 2

Methods: One of the authors looked through the reasons given and determined a set of categories. The categories were as follows: 0 = no reason/ I don't know, 1 = fairness, 2 = effects of the policy, 3 = evaluation of the policy, 4 = alternative policies, 5 = mechanism by which the policy would lead to effects, 6 = definition of the policy. Two hypothesis-blind research assistants then independently coded the reasons given. In a case where a participant provided more than one reason, the RA coded both, but we used only the first given in our analysis. The RAs then met over Skype and reconciled any disagreements via discussion.

Results and Discussion: Understanding change and extremity change by reason type are shown in the table below. A negative number for understanding change means that understanding decreased after explanation. A negative number for extremity change means that the position became less extreme after explanation. Understanding change was significantly negative when participants could give no reason, $t(13) = -2.9$, $p = .01$. Change in understanding was not significant for any of the other reason categories, all ps $> .1$. Based on the results in the mechanism condition it is somewhat surprising that mechanism-based reasons did not induce a decrease in understanding. This may be because participants who voluntarily offered a mechanism-based reason were more knowledgeable than average. Extremity change was marginally positive (i.e., participants became more extreme) when participants generated a reason that was an evaluation of the policy, $t(14) = 2.0$, $p = .07$. Change in extremity was nonsignificant for the other reason categories, all ps $> .1$.

	N	Understanding Change	Extremity Change
No Reason/ I Don't Know	14	–0.50*	–0.07
Fairness	23	–0.35	0.09
Effects of the Policy	51	–0.18	–0.12
Evaluation of the Policy	15	0.07	0.47**
Alternative Policies	10	0.50	–0.10
Mechanism by Which the Policy Would Lead to Effects	11	–0.18	–0.09
Definition of the policy	4	–0.25	–0.50

*$p < .05$, **$p < .1$.