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Attitudes to nanotechnology may be determined by religious and cultural beliefs, suggest researchers writing in the journal *Nature Nanotechnology*.

They say religious people tend to view nanotechnology in a negative light.

The researchers compared attitudes in Europe and the US and looked at religious and cultural backgrounds.

They say the findings have implications for scientists and politicians making policy decisions to regulate the use of nanotechnology.

'Religiosity'

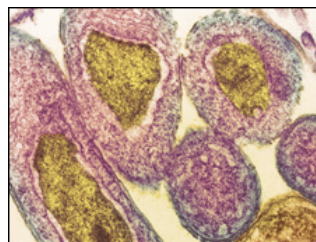
The researchers compared attitudes to nanotechnology in 12 European countries and the US.

They then rated each country on a scale of what they called "religiosity" - a measure of how religious each country was.

They found that countries where religious belief was strong, such as Ireland and Italy, tended to be the least accepting of nanotechnology, whereas those where religion was less significant such as Belgium or the Netherlands were more accepting of the technology.

Professor Dietram Scheufele from the Department of Life Sciences Communication at the University of Wisconsin, who led the research, said religious belief exerted a strong influence on how people viewed nanotechnology.

"Religion provides a perceptual filter, highly religious people look at information differently - it follows from the way religion provides



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'nanotechnology is morally acceptable' is largely meaningless, because 'nano' can be as varied as the technology to which its innovations are applied."

A similar study in the US looked at attitudes to nanotechnology and wider cultural and political beliefs.

People were asked about their views on a range of subjects, including risk from the internet, genetically modified food, nuclear power and mad cow disease.

Broadly, if they thought these were risky, they thought nanotechnology was too.

The researchers say their finding support the idea that underlying cultural beliefs have a stronger influence on opinions formed about nanotechnology than science based information about its potential and pitfalls.

Professor Scheufele says the findings have implications for policymakers trying to regulate nanotechnology.

"How do we regulate something where we have different moral ideas from the public?

"We need to get to grips with the idea that the exact same piece of information can have a different meaning to different people, its the age-old dilemma for science about what could be done versus what should be done."

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