Discrimination and polarization of vaccination status groups

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Abstract

Public discord between those vaccinated and those unvaccinated for COVID-19 has intensified globally. Building on theories of intergroup relations, we propose a novel measure of vaccination status identification (VSI) to capture people's vaccination-related social identity. We show across several cross-sectional and panel survey studies that VSI helps to explain substantial variance in a range of polarizing attitudes and behaviors, including policy acceptance. Moreover, people who identify strongly with their vaccination status—whether vaccinated or unvaccinated—tend to exhibit greater and, importantly, opposite distortions of recall of the COVID-19 pandemic. This motivationally biased recall is further related to the evaluation of past political action and future behavioral intent, including adhering to regulations during a future pandemic or punishing politicians and scientists. The findings are discussed regarding the social processes affecting societal cohesion vs. polarization during crises.

Background readings

This presentation provides an overview of the most important findings from the following papers:

Henkel, L., Sprengholz, P., Betsch, C., & Böhm, C. (2023). The association between vaccination status identification and societal polarization. *Nature Human Behavior*, *7*, 231-239. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-022-01469-6

Korn, L., Böhm, R., Meier, N. W., & Betsch, C. (2020). Vaccination as a social contract. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *17*, 14891-14899. https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1919666117

Sprengholz, P., Henkel, L., Böhm, R., & Betsch, C. (2023). Historical narratives about the COVID-19 pandemic are motivationally biased. *Nature*. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-023-06674-5