

Social identity within the anti-vaccine movement

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A study of more than 1,000 demographically representative participants found that about 22 percent of Americans self-identify as anti-vaxxers, and tend to embrace the label as a form of social identity.

According to the study by researchers including Texas A&M University School of Public Health assistant professor Timothy Callaghan, 8 percent of this group "always" self-identify this way, with 14 percent "sometimes" identifying as part of the anti-vaccine movement. The results were published in the journal *Politics, Groups, and Identities*.

"We found these results both surprising and concerning," Callaghan said. "The fact that 22 percent of Americans at least sometimes identify as [anti-vaxxers](#) was much higher than expected and demonstrates the scope of the challenge in vaccinating the population against COVID-19 and other [vaccine-preventable diseases](#)."

Researchers also found that participants who scored high on the anti-vaccine [identity](#) measure were less trusting of scientific experts and more individualistic. Additionally, study results show that there is increased opposition to childhood vaccine requirements among those who self-identify as anti-vaxxers.

The study serves as a "blueprint" for other researchers to further examine how socially identifying as an anti-vaxxer impacts health policies and public health. Callaghan notes that Americans socially identifying as anti-vaxxers adds another layer of complexity to mitigating the anti-vaccine movement. Changing a core feature of one's underlying [social identity](#) is a difficult task—one that likely cannot be fixed with traditional [public health](#) messaging.

Moving forward, Callaghan and other members of the research team hope to investigate how endorsement of the anti-vaccine label varies across the country based on states and levels of rurality, as well as interventions that might reduce individuals' social attachment to the label.

More information: Matt Motta et al, Identifying the prevalence,

correlates, and policy consequences of anti-vaccine social identity, *Politics, Groups, and Identities* (2021). DOI: [10.1080/21565503.2021.1932528](https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2021.1932528)

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