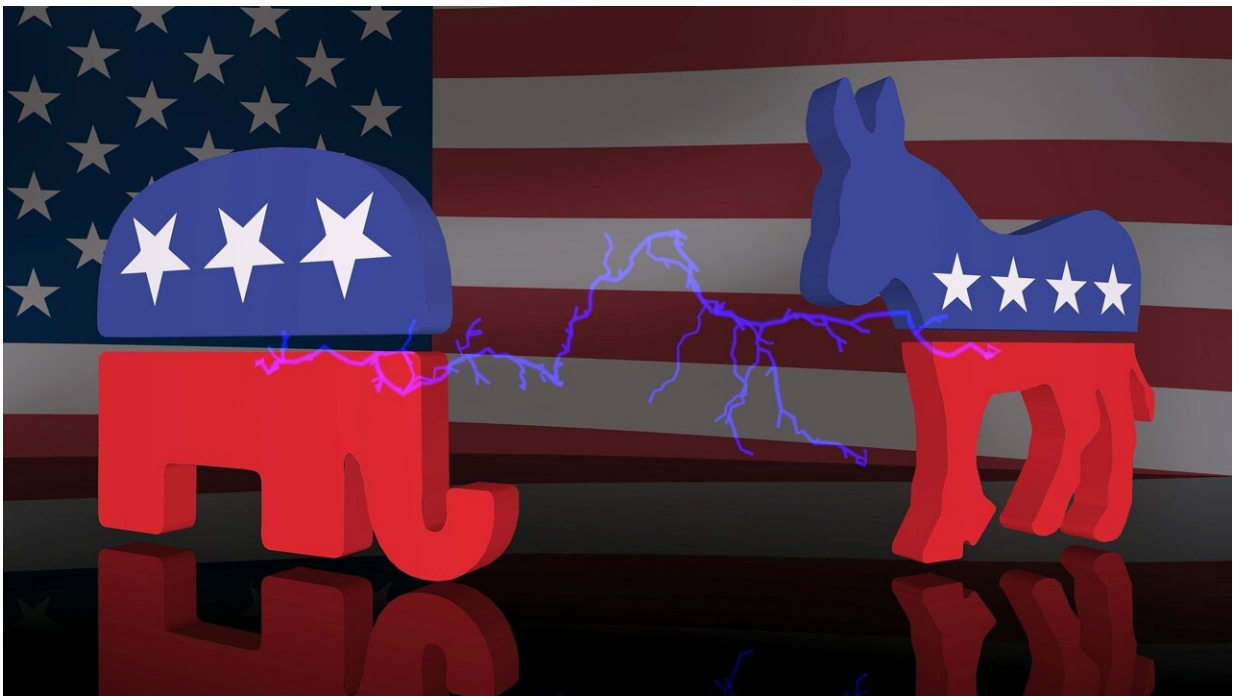


# Which political ideologies make people more likely to dismiss the risk of COVID-19?

February 3 2022

---



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

A study published in the journal *Risk Analysis* suggests that people who embrace the ideologies of libertarianism and anti-egalitarianism are more likely to disregard the risks of COVID-19 and oppose government actions.

Assistant professor Yilang Peng of the University of Georgia analyzed

data from two surveys to investigate the relationship between attitudes toward COVID-19 and specific political ideologies. The first survey of approximately 500 Americans asked participants to specify their party identity, rate their [political views](#) (from extremely liberal to extremely conservative), and indicate their agreement on a scale with various statements related to Social Dominance Orientation (related to equality and the distribution of resources among groups), libertarianism, and other ideological factors. The participants included roughly equal numbers of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents/other party.

In his statistical analysis of the data, Peng found that individuals who endorse principles of libertarianism and anti-egalitarianism were less concerned about COVID-19 and more likely to oppose government actions such as mask mandates and vaccination. (Libertarians uphold the principles of individual liberty and generally oppose government involvement in citizens' private lives and economic activities, while the principles of anti-egalitarians are contrary to those of social equality and fairness.)

To test his initial findings, Peng conducted a second analysis of data from another survey conducted by the American National Election Studies (ANES) before and after the 2020 U.S. presidential election. A sample of 7,449 adults participated in both surveys. The questions were different than those in Peng's survey but covered the same concepts of political ideologies and attitudes toward COVID-19. His analysis of the data revealed the same results: that individuals who endorse libertarianism and anti-egalitarianism are more likely to oppose government responses to COVID-19.

Political ideology incorporates ideas, worldviews, and issue positions that occupy multiple dimensions. For example, citizens may hold a liberal position regarding [economic issues](#) (such as social welfare), but a conservative stance on social issues like abortion. Past research has

documented the association between political ideology, often measured with a liberal-conservative spectrum, and attitudes toward COVID-19.

Peng argues that different dimensions of political ideology can pose distinct effects on attitudes toward sociopolitical issues, including science topics like vaccines, climate change, and emerging technologies such as self-driving cars. "Simply identifying as a liberal or conservative does not cover the full scope of political ideology and world views," says Peng. "Since [political ideology](#) reflects citizens' ideas about how an ideal society should be structured, it would naturally influence citizens' preferences for societal responses to a crisis such as the COVID-19 outbreak."

Both survey analyses found that trust in science was impacted by an individual's political orientation and party identification and also shaped attitudes toward the pandemic. "This contributes to accumulating evidence that trust is a crucial variable in risk communication about science issues," says Peng.

In addition, the data showed that political orientation and party identity still play a role in shaping COVID-19 attitudes. Peng argues that such findings confirm that elite cueing is a powerful mechanism that shapes public perceptions of science issues. "An examination of the role of ideological components may advance our theoretical understanding of why certain science issues become polarized while also providing implications for the design of communication campaigns and policies that effectively resonate with partisan audiences."

For example, prior research has observed that COVID-19 communications from left-wing activists and politicians largely focus on the themes of care and fairness. This might not resonate well with people across the political spectrum. In particular, says Peng, individuals with anti-egalitarian views may not be highly attentive to the enhancement of

equality and the protection of vulnerable populations.

He adds that future research can test if communication strategies that address libertarian ideologies—for example, framing public health interventions as a way to enhance the liberty and freedom of citizens and to give people more choices and autonomy—can better appeal to partisan audiences.

**More information:** Yilang Peng, Give me liberty or give me COVID-19: How social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, and libertarianism explain Americans' reactions to COVID-19, *Risk Analysis* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/risa.13885](https://doi.org/10.1111/risa.13885)

Provided by Society for Risk Analysis

Citation: Which political ideologies make people more likely to dismiss the risk of COVID-19? (2022, February 3) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-02-political-ideologies-people-dismiss-covid-.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.