

Study: Slogans protesting COVID vaccine mandate displayed three themes

August 26 2022, by Sharita Forrest



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When the Biden administration announced COVID-19 vaccine mandates on Nov. 4 for businesses with 100 or more employees, protests erupted in cities across the U.S.

A recent study of the slogans displayed by protestors found three distinct themes.

Tim F. Liao, a professor of sociology at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, analyzed the content of 150 images with anti-vaccination themes that were published online by [news media](#) between the day of the announcement and Jan. 13, the day after the U.S. Supreme Court blocked the federal vaccine-or-test mandate for large businesses.

Using a popular search engine, Liao located and collected images containing text with the keywords "anti-vaccine," "protest," "U.S." and "America" and grouped them based on similar messages or intents.

Liao found that three major themes emerged: Support for [individual freedom](#)/rights, opposition to [government control](#), and anti-science [misinformation](#) or disinformation.

While misinformation may contain incorrect or debunked material, it is not intentionally deceptive, whereas disinformation contains purposely false allegations that are intended to deceive or mislead consumers, according to the study.

"The majority of the slogans opposing COVID-19 vaccines were about evenly divided between assertions of [individual rights](#) and resistance to government control, which composed 46% and 44% of the sample, respectively," said Liao, who also holds appointments in statistics and East Asian languages and cultures at the university.

"The remaining 10% of the slogans contained anti-science misinformation/ disinformation such as false claims about the safety or origin of the vaccines or conspiracy theories."

Some of the popular slogans in the first two categories were "my body,

my choice," "medical freedom" and "stop the mandate," Liao found.

Among the disinformation slogans in the sample were false declarations that the vaccines were poison, known to cause seizures and not placebo-tested, Liao found.

"It's important to note that slogans asserting individual rights and resistance to government control may be two sides of the same coin, as individuals who strongly believe in personal liberties are likely to oppose any policies that they perceive as infringing on those liberties," Liao said.

Likewise, individuals who believe disinformation are more likely to resist a mandate and assert the primacy of personal rights, he said.

Slightly more than 67% of the U.S. population was fully vaccinated—defined as having received two doses of a COVID-19 [vaccine](#)—by the time Liao completed the study on May 24, according to the study.

Published in the journal *Frontiers in Communication*, the study sheds light on the sentiments of people who oppose vaccinations in general or perceived government overreach, as well as the power wielded by propaganda and misinformation in undermining public health directives.

In response to the ongoing proliferation of misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 and vaccines, the World Health Organization issued a warning that the "infodemic" of inaccurate information poses as great a risk to public health as the disease itself, according to the WHO website.

Some researchers have called for "psychological inoculation"—informational campaigns that prepare people to identify

and disregard false and misleading messages about the vaccines, according to the study.

With new omicron variants circulating and fewer people wearing masks in public, vaccination is becoming the main defense against the disease, Liao wrote.

"Anti-science misinformation must be vehemently corrected," Liao said. "The only way forward is to correct the misinformation and [disinformation](#) about vaccinations and for the federal government to emphasize each person's civic responsibilities—which include vaccination—for the benefit of society and our collective future."

More information: Tim F. Liao, Understanding Anti-COVID-19 Vaccination Protest Slogans in the US, *Frontiers in Communication* (2022). [DOI: 10.3389/fcomm.2022.941872](https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2022.941872)

Provided by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Citation: Study: Slogans protesting COVID vaccine mandate displayed three themes (2022, August 26) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-08-slogans-protesting-covid-vaccine-mandate.html>

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