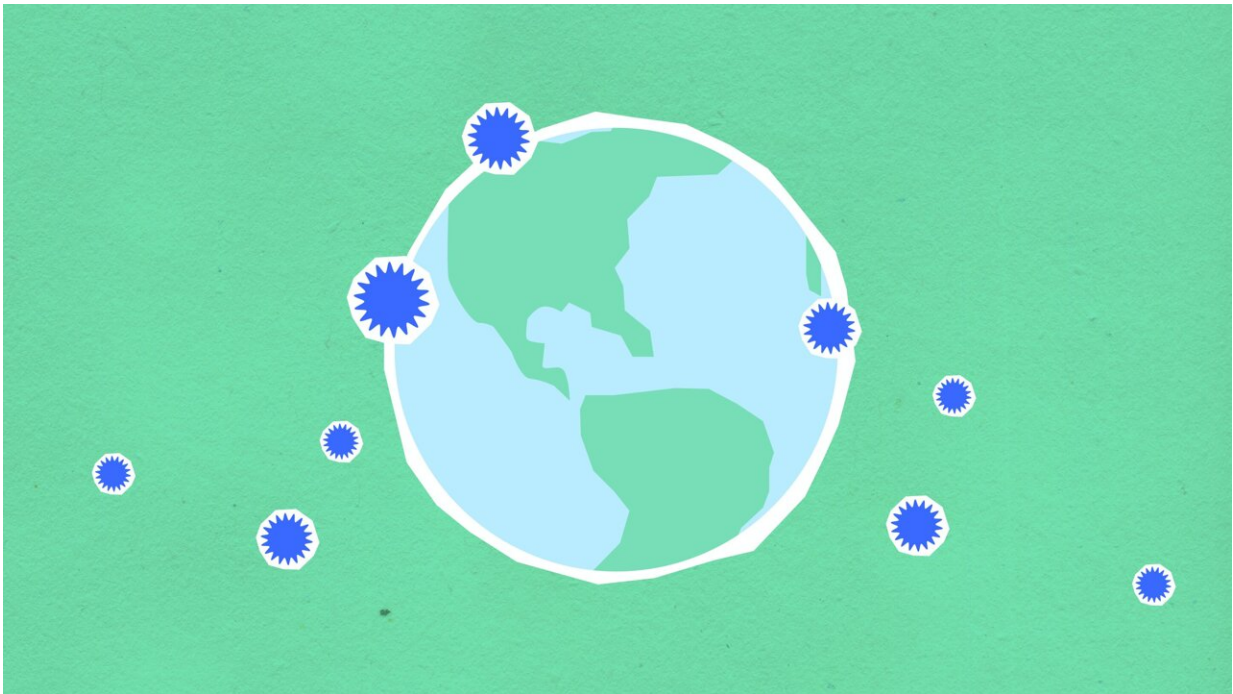


# Morality plays a role in COVID-19 conspiracy theories and prevention behaviors

September 7 2022

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Cardboard composition of the Earth surrounded by bacteria. Credit: Monstera, Pexels, CC0 ([creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/](https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/))

A new, international analysis links belief in COVID-19 conspiracy theories to a lower tendency to support and participate in public health efforts to mitigate spread; however, people's sense of morality appears to weaken this link. Theofilos Gkinopoulos of the University of Crete, Greece, and colleagues present these findings in the open-access journal

*PLOS ONE* on September 7, 2022.

People who believe in COVID-19 [conspiracy](#) theories—for instance, the idea that the ongoing pandemic is fake and was designed to control people—may avoid using masks or getting vaccinated, posing a significant threat to public health. In addition, recent research suggests that people's sense of morality plays a significant role in conspiracy theory belief.

To help clarify the role of morality in COVID-19 conspiracy theories and prevention, Gkinopoulos and colleagues conducted a study of 49,965 adults across 67 countries. The data were collected as part of the International Collaboration on the Social & Moral Psychology (ICSMP) of COVID-19. Participants completed questionnaires evaluating several measures, including belief in COVID-19 conspiracy theories, [support](#) for public health policies, adherence to public health behaviors, individual sense of morality, and morality in the context of cooperation within groups.

Statistical analysis of the results suggests that belief in COVID-19 conspiracy theories is associated with reduced support of public health policies and less adherence to public health behaviors. However, both individual and cooperative morality appear to weaken the impact of belief in conspiracy theories on support for and participation in public health measures.

These findings highlight the role of morality in conspiracy theory beliefs, which could help inform efforts to reduce such beliefs and encourage behaviors to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The authors suggest that such efforts could involve appeals to people's moral foundations.

The researchers also outline several possible directions for future

research, including experimental investigation of links between [moral traits](#), belief in different forms of conspiracy theories, and support for [public health policies](#).

The authors add: "Believing in conspiracy theories reduces adoption of [public health](#) behaviors, but moral identity and morality-as-cooperation significantly mediate this relationship. Beliefs in [conspiracy theories](#) do not simply constitute antecedents of cognitive biases or personality-based maladaptive behaviors, but are morally infused and should be dealt as such."

**More information:** Morality in the echo chamber: The relationship between belief in COVID-19 conspiracy theories and public health support and the mediating role of moral identity and morality-as-cooperation across 67 countries, *PLoS ONE* (2022). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0273172](#)

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