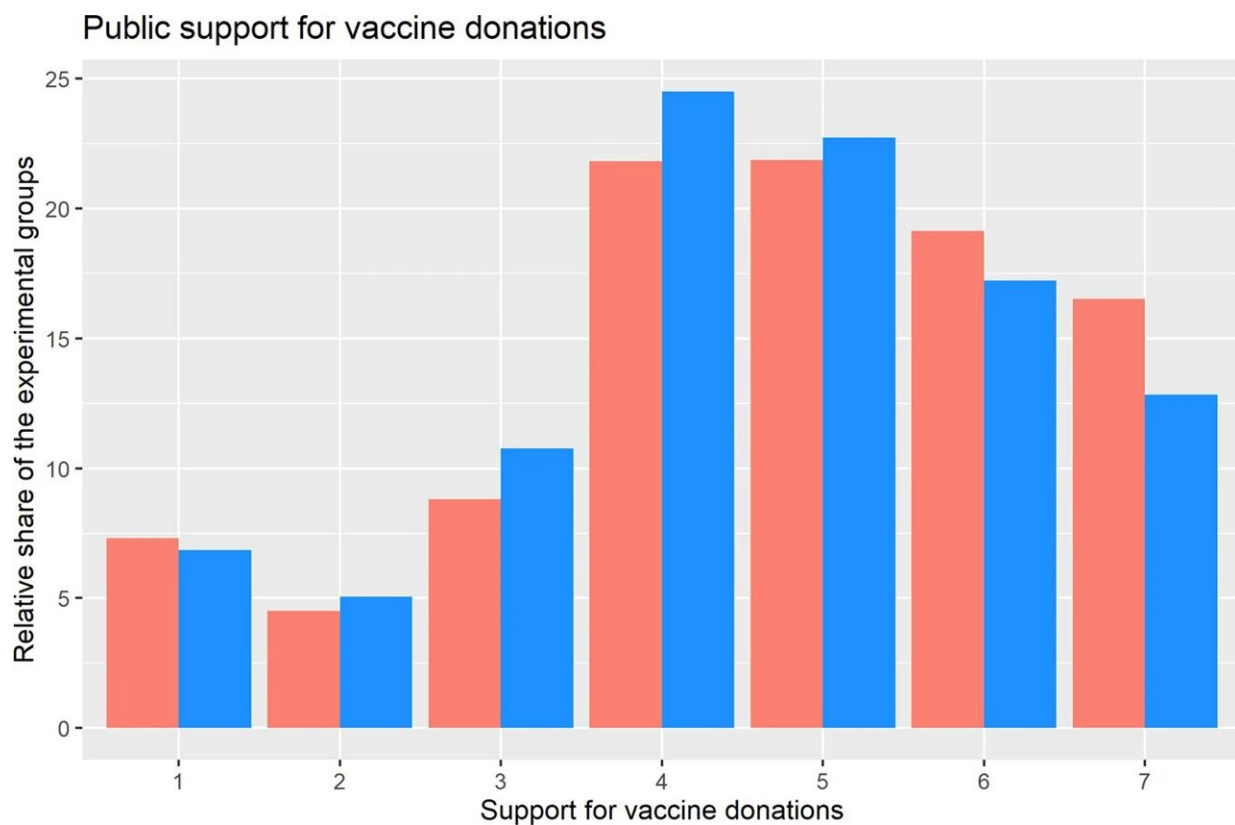


Better communication leads to more international vaccine solidarity, find researchers

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Support for vaccine sharing, separated by experimental groups (‘information treatment’); treatment group in red, control group in blue; likert scale ranging from complete objection to full support. Data collected in Germany in May 2021, n = 4022 (treatment group n = 1974, control group n = 2048). Credit: *npj Vaccines* (2023). DOI: 10.1038/s41541-023-00625-x

What promoted citizens to favor a fair distribution of vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic? This is the focus topic in the current study of Konstanz researchers, political scientists Dirk Leuffen, Pascal Mounchid and Max Heermann as well as sociologist Sebastian Koos, published in *npj Vaccines*.

Based on data from a large-scale survey on COVID-19 and [social inequality](#), the researchers identify communication strategies that moved citizens in Germany to support international vaccine solidarity. They found that in order to promote international willingness to help, future crisis communication should clearly identify the risks of acting without solidarity and highlight what donors and recipients have in common.

Vaccine nationalism

During the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmaceutical companies and governments around the world collaborated to develop, produce and distribute vaccines. Nevertheless, many governments secured vaccines primarily for their own citizens. The result: Especially in countries of the global North, multiple vaccinations could be administered nationwide soon after the first vaccines were approved. In many places, vaccines even exceeded their expiration date unused. At the same time, the [poorest countries](#) in the world were left almost empty-handed.

In addition to the question of moral reprehensibility, this "vaccination nationalism" also carried a medical risk, since insufficient global vaccination coverage potentially favored the emergence of new, possibly resistant viral variants. Particularly in [democratic countries](#), [decision-makers](#) therefore faced a dilemma when it came to distributions, Leuffen says, "Politicians were torn between the advice from experts and the accountability to their own people." But what factors favored solidarity?

The undecided can tip the balance

To find out, the researchers surveyed 4,000 German citizens in an experiment in May 2021, when only 12 percent of German citizens had received their second vaccination shot: Participants were asked to indicate to what extent they were in favor of giving vaccines to a hypothetical recipient country. In the process, they received different information about the recipient country itself as well as the potential benefits of acting in solidarity.

In this way, the researchers were able to determine what type of information increases vaccination solidarity and develop specific recommendations for crisis communication that promotes solidarity.

The researchers recommend emphasizing the self-interest of the donor side in addition to references to humanitarian need in the recipient country. "Clearly illustrating the dangers of [vaccine](#) nationalism promotes international [solidarity](#)," Leuffen explains.

"Moreover, short-term cost considerations should be replaced by a long-term profit orientation. As soon as a certain vaccination rate has been achieved in one's own country, dispensing vaccines is the safest strategy."

It is also beneficial to emphasize common ground between aid donors and recipients, the authors say. "Undecided citizens are particularly receptive to these messages—and their voices can be crucial in creating social majorities for international aid efforts," Leuffen concludes.

More information: Leuffen, D. et al, Mobilizing Domestic Support for International Vaccine Solidarity—Recommendations for Health Crisis Communication, *npj Vaccines* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s41541-023-00625-x](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41541-023-00625-x).

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