

Survey: Half of Americans uncertain about ability to identify false political claims

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Only 8% of nearly 25,000 Americans correctly identified all false political claims presented to them as part of a recent national survey.

The survey also found that those who believed false [vaccine](#) statements were more than twice as likely to believe inaccurate claims about politics when compared with those who could correctly identify false vaccine claims.

The researchers surveyed 24,948 American adults across all 50 states between Dec. 22, 2022, and Jan. 17, 2023, and asked respondents to identify popular vaccine and political misinformation claims as true or false. "Not sure" was included as a third option.

The study, "Health and Political Misperceptions in the U.S.," was conducted by the COVID States Project, a multi-university research collaborative that includes Northwestern, Harvard, Northeastern and Rutgers universities.

Vaccine misperceptions

Responses to COVID-19 vaccine misinformation, such as claims that vaccines may cause infertility, alter DNA or contain microchip trackers, revealed that overall, 20% of Americans endorsed at least one misperception. Another 45% did not endorse any vaccine misperceptions, but were uncertain about the accuracy of some claims.

The survey shows that the number of Americans believing false information about vaccines has remained consistent since the COVID States Project began its national polling in March 2020.

Political misinformation

Responses to political misinformation, such as Donald Trump's legal team quit after the FBI found classified documents at Mar-a-Lago, that voting machines in the 2020 election were rigged in favor of Democrats

and that a dying FBI agent confessed to government involvement in 9/11, showed that 41% of Americans believed at least one false claim, while just over half (51%) did not endorse any political misinformation, but reported their uncertainty about them.

Belief in inaccurate political claims was most common among those who endorsed vaccine misperceptions. The survey found 71% of those also believed false vaccine claims also believed inaccurate political claims. In contrast, just 32% of those who correctly identified all false vaccine claims believed inaccurate political statements.

"We suspect that the relative prevalence of political misperceptions versus vaccine related misperceptions stems from politics being a more contested domain without consensus experts," said political scientist James Druckman, one of the project's principal investigators.

Druckman is the Payson S. Wild Professor of Political Science in the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences and associate director of the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern.

Other key findings

- Misperceptions about vaccines were more common among [younger people](#), with 25% of those ages 18 to 45 endorsing at least one false statement.
- Individuals who held both vaccine and political misperceptions were more prevalent among those who earned less and had less education, as well as among those who identified as Republicans.
- People who held vaccine-related or political misperceptions were more likely to get their news from friends and family, radio news, podcasts and Fox News.
- Vaccine-related and political misperceptions were strongly associated with low trust in government, science and medicine.

They were also associated with high trust in Donald Trump and high levels of conspiratorial thinking.

"These findings are concerning to the extent that they may alter the preferences people have or the actions they take, such as getting vaccinated, voting, that contribute to the collective good," Druckman said.

"And while social scientists have identified many techniques to minimize misperceptions, technological and political realities make it difficult to keep pace with the spread of [misinformation](#)."

More information: Health and Political Misperceptions in the US: www.covidstates.org/reports/health-and-political-misperceptions-in-the-us

Provided by Northwestern University

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