

Religious intolerance predicts science denial, surveys suggest

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Does being more religious make a person more likely to reject scientific findings? Or is it the level of intolerance of other religions that better predicts rejection of science?

Yu Ding and colleagues hypothesize that people with high levels of religious intolerance are more likely to reject science, which can be conceptualized as a competing belief system.

The authors used local religious diversity as a proxy for religious tolerance, reasoning that where religious diversity is lacking, religious tolerance will be low.

The study is [published](#) in *PNAS Nexus*.

Aggregated cellphone location data revealed that religiously diverse US counties engaged in more [social distancing](#) in April 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, even when controlled for the percentage of [religious people](#) in each county. Vaccination uptake followed a similar pattern.

Countries around the world with higher religious diversity showed higher scores on a high school science test known as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Additionally, countries with higher religious diversity were less likely to say that religion is a better guide to truth than science when filling out the World Values Survey.

In surveys of Christians from the United States, Hindus from India, and Muslims from Pakistan, those who described themselves as intolerant of other religions also reported higher levels of science denial.

According to the authors, there have always been religious believers at the forefront of science, but usually those from minority faiths who have wide exposure to people of other faiths.

The authors note that people who don't have exposure to individuals of other faiths can grow up regarding their religion as the one true faith that trumps all others—and also trumps science.

More information: Yu Ding et al, When the one true faith trumps all: Low religious diversity, religious intolerance, and science denial, *PNAS Nexus* (2024). [DOI: 10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae144](https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae144)

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