

Survey reveals racial, political differences in COVID-19 responses

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America's stark racial disparities in health care have been exposed by COVID-19, but a new study from Michigan State University suggests that Black individuals are more likely than conservative White people to adhere to public health standards due to disparities.

The study, published in the *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, used data from MSU's State of the State Survey that was captured during the initial COVID-19 outbreak from a representative group of 800 adults in Michigan.

"Our findings suggest that although COVID impacts all Michiganders, reactions to COVID are politicized. This is significant because if people base their response to COVID on politics rather than science, they may be placing themselves at risk," said Zachary Neal, MSU associate professor of psychology and study co-author.

What's more: Michigan residents' race impacted how much politics affected their views of COVID.

"When COVID was politicized, partisanship mattered more to White Michiganders than it did to Black Michiganders," Neal said. "This is significant because it could mean that White Michiganders are more likely to misjudge COVID risks due to politics. For example, although Black Michiganders on average said they would comply with stay-at-home orders, only the more liberal White Michiganders said they would comply."

In considering [political ideology](#), the findings reveal that conservative White individuals were more likely to have noncompliance attitudes toward local and state COVID orders than more liberal White people and Black people who tend towards compliance.

Overall, Black Michiganders' attitudes toward the pandemic were more in line with public health recommendations around mask wearing and stay-at-home orders than views held by their White counterparts. Researchers point to a long history of health, social and economic disparities as the driving force. They found that Black Michiganders were more likely to contract COVID-19 or lose their job as a result of

COVID-19 and thereby more likely to comply with regulations.

"Black Americans experience a disproportionately greater rate of preexisting conditions, such as hypertension and diabetes, that place them at an elevated COVID risk," said Kaston Anderson-Carpenter, MSU assistant professor of psychology and study lead author. "Since social determinants of health adversely impact Black Michiganders, adhering to the restrictions may also be perceived as a preventive health measure. Black people who work in essential jobs may also care for family members who have preexisting conditions, which may also influence their adherence to COVID restrictions."

Using data from the State of the State survey, conducted by MSU's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research, Anderson-Carpenter and Neal measured 12 areas of COVID-19 sentiment across four categories: personal impacts, the perceived severity of the virus, the state of Michigan's response to rising caseloads and Michigan's initial stay-at-home order.

Beyond the politicization of the virus, Anderson-Carpenter and Neal's paper reinforces the national conversation about Black people being disproportionately affected by the virus.

"Very little has happened between May and now to reduce racial disparities or political divisions; if anything, both are now worse than before," Neal said. "Knowing now what was happening then—and, now that we're experiencing another surge in cases—more resources need to go to the Black communities to address both the health and economic impacts of COVID, particularly now that vaccines are available."

By highlighting the impact of partisan perceptions, the researchers hope their study stresses the extensive disparities related to COVID [health care](#) and encourage public [health](#) officials to focus on providing

assistance to Black communities.

"It is imperative to understand how COVID has been politicized in Michigan as a microcosm of the nation, and we hope the study encourages politicians to make COVID a nonpartisan issue," Anderson-Carpenter said.

More information: Kaston D. Anderson-Carpenter et al, Racial Disparities in COVID-19 Impacts in Michigan, USA, *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* (2021). [DOI: 10.1007/s40615-020-00939-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-020-00939-9)

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