

Study: Fox viewers more likely to believe COVID falsehoods

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A man walks past promotional posters outside Fox News studios at News Corporation headquarters in New York on Saturday, July 31, 2021. From left to right are hosts Tucker Carlson, Sean Hannity, Laura Ingraham, Maria Bartiromo, Stuart Varney, Neil Cavuto and Charles Payne. A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation says that people who trust Fox News Channel and other outlets that appeal to conservatives are more likely to believe COVID-19 falsehoods than those who go elsewhere for news. Credit: AP Photo/Ted Shaffrey, File

People who trust Fox News Channel and other media outlets that appeal to conservatives are more likely to believe falsehoods about COVID-19 and vaccines than those who primarily go elsewhere for news, a study has found.

While the Kaiser Family Foundation study released this week found the clear ties between [news outlets](#) that people trusted and the amount of misinformation they believe, it took no stand on whether those attitudes specifically came from what they saw there.

"It may be because the people who are self-selecting these organizations believe (the misinformation) going in," said Liz Hamel, [vice president](#) and director of public opinion and survey research at Kaiser.

Kaiser polled people on whether or not they believed seven widely-circulated untruths about the virus, among them that the government is exaggerating the number of deaths attributable to the coronavirus, hiding reports of deaths caused by vaccines or that the vaccines can cause infertility, contain a microchip or can change DNA.

For people who most trusted network or local television news, NPR, CNN or MSNBC, between 11% and 16% said they believed four or more of those untrue statements, or weren't sure about what was true.

For Fox News viewers, 36% either believed in or were unsure about four or more [false statements](#), Kaiser said. It was 46% for Newsmax viewers and 37% for those who said they trusted One America Network News.

The most widely-believed falsehood is about the government exaggerating COVID deaths. Kaiser said 60% of Americans either believe that or said they didn't know whether or not it was true.

A sharp partisan divide on trust in news outlets has been evident for

years, and Kaiser said this extends to COVID-19 news. Kaiser found, for example, that 65% of Democrats say they believe what they hear about COVID-19 on CNN, while only 17% of Republicans do. Roughly half of Republicans believe what they hear about the coronavirus on Fox, while only 18% of Democrats do.

The extent to which COVID-19 has become a political battleground is evident nearly every day. Most recently, some Republicans complained about "government propaganda" after the "Sesame Street" Muppet character Big Bird tweeted about getting vaccinated.

A Fox News spokeswoman would not comment directly on Kaiser's findings on Tuesday, but pointed to several network personalities who have spoken out in favor of getting vaccinated. Most recently it was Neil Cavuto, a multiple sclerosis sufferer who came down with the disease but had a mild case because he was vaccinated. He pleaded with viewers to get the shot: "Life is too short to be an ass," he said.

Yet [vaccine](#) and mandate skepticism has been a steady drumbeat on several Fox shows.

Newsmax issued a statement that the network "strongly supports the COVID vaccine, has encouraged its viewers to get the vaccine and has on air only medical experts that support the vaccine."

The company last week took its White House correspondent, Emerald Robinson, off the air for an investigation after she tweeted: "Dear Christians: The vaccines contain a bioluminescent marker called Luciferase so that you can be tracked." She remained grounded on Tuesday.

Hamel said Kaiser's findings on attitudes of people who have not been vaccinated illustrate a real challenge faced by public health authorities.

Their distrust of COVID-19 news ran wide and deep: the highest percentage of unvaccinated people who said they trusted what an outlet said on the topic was the 30% who cited Fox.

"The one thing I did not realize going in was how little trust there was across [news](#) sources among unvaccinated people," she said.

Among social [media outlets](#) like Facebook and Twitter, the trust numbers were particularly small. But Hamel said that doesn't mean social media hasn't had a big impact in spreading stories that sow doubt about the vaccines.

Kaiser's study was conducted between Oct. 14-24 in a random telephone sample of 1,519 American adults.

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