

Aussies say they're more COVID compliant than their peers

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The majority of Australians say they are extremely diligent when it comes to complying with COVID-19 restrictions, but think others aren't, according to a study from The Australian National University (ANU).

A [national survey](#) of almost 1,700 [people](#) measured participants' self-reported compliance with COVID directives. The data, collected in 2020, found more than 80 percent of respondents rated their own compliance as being higher than others around them, with a tendency to assume others in their community are less compliant.

The findings reveal Western Australia and New South Wales had self-reported compliance levels slightly below the national average, while Victoria's was slightly higher. The remaining states and territories didn't significantly differ from the national average.

The study also found Victoria and the ACT gave their fellow citizens the most unfair assessments when it came to rating other people's compliance with COVID restrictions.

Lead author Dr. Zoe Leviston, from the ANU Research School of Psychology, said the results reflect a social phenomenon known as the "better-than-average" effect.

"This is our tendency to think that we're better than others on a whole range of attributes; we think we're better drivers, we think we're more intelligent than other people and we also think we're less biased than others," Dr. Leviston said.

"We expected to see this effect whereby we think we're better than others when it comes to complying with COVID restrictions."

According to Dr. Leviston, the mindset that we are better than others also arises from our tendency to fixate on instances of COVID non-

compliance in the community, regardless of how infrequent these events are.

"People are very conscious of the personal sacrifices they've made such as staying home, only going out for essential purposes and wearing a mask at all times, so when we see someone that behaves in a way they shouldn't, that sticks in our mind," Dr. Leviston said.

"For instance, if you walk through a shopping center and see 10 people wearing a mask and the eleventh person is not wearing a mask, you tend to ignore the 10 people who are doing the right thing.

"Instead, all of your attention focuses on the one person doing the wrong thing, even though this stranger might have a valid reason for not wearing a mask."

Dr. Leviston says the media fuels this "recall bias" by devoting a lot of news coverage to instances of non-compliance such as anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination protests, no matter how infrequent they may be.

"As humans, what we think other people are doing has an influence on our own behavior over time. If I think nobody else is complying with restrictions, over time I will become resentful that my own efforts are becoming pointless," Dr. Leviston said.

"The compliance levels were so high towards the end of last year, it's reasonable to assume they haven't changed a great deal in 2021.

"But there is the possibility that this underestimation of other peoples' compliance during the pandemic has reduced peoples' own motivation to comply and that's something that we obviously want to deter.

"But if state and territory leaders continue to promote the good work of

the vast majority of the public in terms of complying with restrictions, then we can guard against potential [compliance](#) fatigue."

The findings have been published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

More information: Zoe Leviston et al, Australians underestimate social compliance with coronavirus restrictions: findings from a national survey, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2021).

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