

More trusting societies have been more successful at reducing coronavirus cases and deaths

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Countries where people have more trust in each other have been more

successful in bringing down waves of coronavirus cases and deaths, a new study shows.

Researchers found there is a "threshold effect" in nations where at least 40 percent of people agree "most people can be trusted". This supported effective reduction of cases and deaths during 2020.

Previous studies show levels of [trust](#) in the UK are at the critical 40 percent compared to more than 60 percent in Scandinavian countries. China also has high levels of trust within society.

Analyzing coronavirus data during 2020 the researchers found more trusting societies tended to achieve a faster decline in infections and deaths from peak levels.

This is likely because behaviors vital to stopping the spread of COVID-19, such as mask wearing and social distancing depend on mutual trust to be effective.

The study, by Professor Tim Lenton and Dr. Chris Boulton from the University of Exeter, and Professor Marten Scheffer from Wageningen University, is published in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

Professor Lenton said: "Our results add to evidence that trust within society benefits resilience to epidemics. Building trust within communities should be a long-term project for all nations because this will help them cope with future pandemics and other challenges such as [extreme events](#) caused by climate change."

The study shows the effect of stringent government interventions on coronavirus spread is not straightforward. Most governments applied similarly stringent restrictions but had hugely varying success in bringing down case numbers and deaths. This is partly because more stringent

governments tend to be associated with less trusting societies.

The researchers measured more than 150 countries' resilience to COVID-19 as the nationwide decay rate of daily cases or deaths from peak levels, using information from the Our World in Data COVID-19 dataset up to 1 December 2020—before vaccines were available.

Resilience to COVID-19 varied by a factor of 40 between countries for cases/capita and by a factor of 25 for deaths/capita.

All countries where more than 40 percent of respondents agreed "most people can be trusted" achieved a near complete reduction of new cases and deaths. So did some less-trusting societies—indicating that trust in each other is only one of several factors at play.

Looking across countries, the researchers found no significant correlation between trust in government and success at bringing down cases and deaths. Wealth and associated healthcare helps, but it is less important than trust in each other.

More information: Resilience of countries to COVID-19 correlated with trust, *Scientific Reports* (2022). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-021-03358-w](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-03358-w)

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