

Rising number of Americans think it's OK to harass public health officials

August 2 2022



U.S. health officials are in the crosshairs as a result of the COVID-19

pandemic, facing threats and harassment from the public they serve.

And a growing percentage of U.S. adults are fine with that, according to a [new Cornell University study](#).

Analysis of public opinion [surveys](#) conducted during the pandemic found double-digit increases among Republicans who considered [harassment](#) and threats against [public health officials](#) justified. The surveys were conducted in November 2020 and again in July and August 2021.

By the end of the study, there was a gap of 15 percentage points between Democrats and Republicans in support of intimidation tactics against health officials.

During the pandemic, [health officials](#) have suffered attacks at hospitals, telephone threats, and armed protestors at their homes, the researchers said in a university news release. They said "[pandemic fatigue](#)" may be a factor.

Even among those with high trust in science, the researchers saw an 8 percentage point increase in believing such threats were justified. Increasing support of threatening behavior also was observed among people with higher pay, political independents and those with more education.

"We can see the human cost of this harassment," said Colleen Barry, dean of Cornell's School of Public Policy, in Ithaca, N.Y. "[Public health workers](#) are leaving the profession in large numbers and those who have chosen to stay report dealing with mental health consequences."

The surveys studied included more than 1,000 U.S. adults.

The findings were published online July 29 in *JAMA Network Open*.

More information: Johns Hopkins has more about [harassment of public health workers](#).

Rachel J. Topazian et al, US Adults' Beliefs About Harassing or Threatening Public Health Officials During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *JAMA Network Open* (2022). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.23491](#)

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Citation: Rising number of Americans think it's OK to harass public health officials (2022, August 2) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-08-americans-health.html>

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