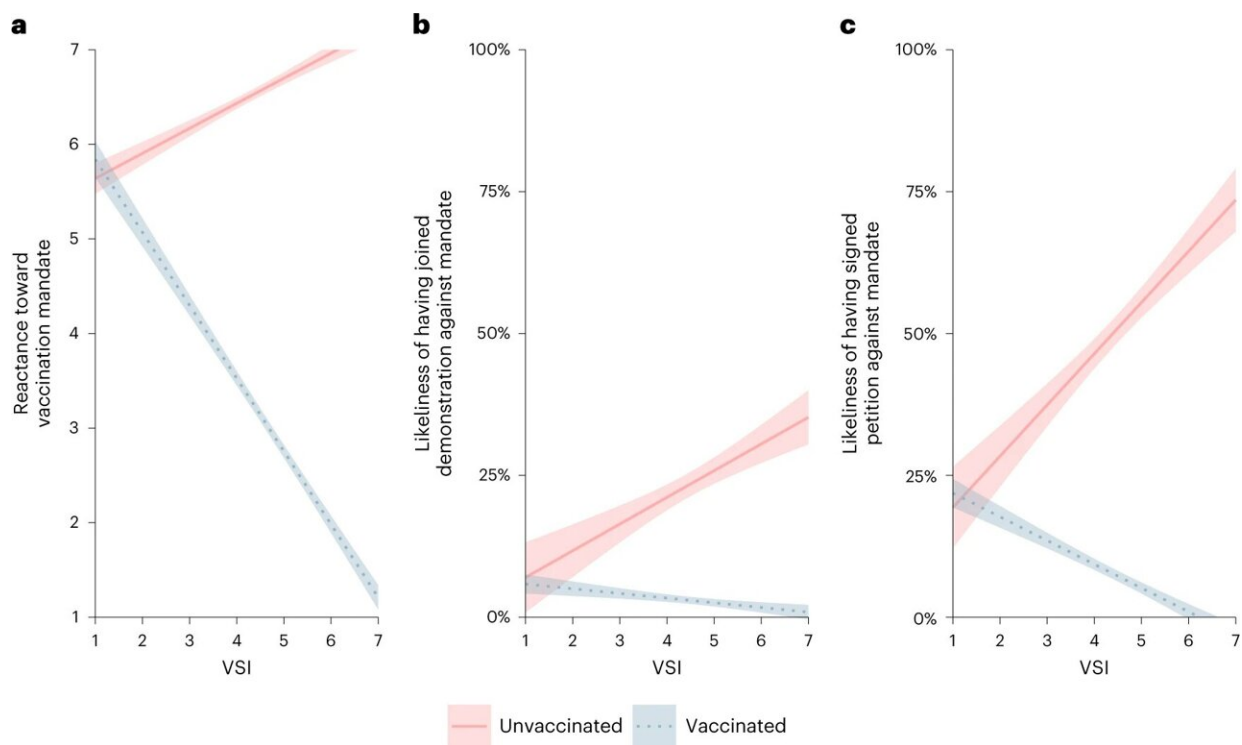


COVID-19: Vaccination status polarizes population

November 4 2022, by Svenja Ronge



Effects of VSI on reactance toward mandatory policies and activism behavior. **a–c**, Linear regression analyses of VSI, vaccination status and their interaction, predicting: psychological reactance to a hypothetical vaccination mandate (measured by anger assessed on a 7-point scale, data from December 2021), $R^2 = 0.56$ (**a**); whether participants reported demonstrating against a vaccination mandate since January 2022 (binary variable, data from February 2022), $R^2 = 0.12$ (**b**); and whether participants reported signing a petition against a vaccination mandate since January 2022 (binary variable, data from February 2022), $R^2 = 0.28$ (**c**). The pattern of results did not change qualitatively when controlling for sociodemographic variables, the 7C and, in the case of **a**, further

experimental manipulations. Lines represent the linear fit, with ribbons visualizing 95% CI. Credit: *Nature Human Behaviour* (2022). DOI: 10.1038/s41562-022-01469-6

People who strongly identify with their COVID vaccine status discriminate more strongly against the respective other group. This is shown by a study conducted by the team led by Luca Henkel, member of the Cluster of Excellence ECONtribute at the University of Bonn, with the participation of the Universities of Erfurt and Vienna and the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine Hamburg. The study was published in the journal *Nature Human Behaviour*.

The researchers analyzed the extent to which participants defined themselves by their status as vaccinated or unvaccinated and how they perceived the other group. The result: The more participants identified themselves as vaccinated or unvaccinated, the more likely they were to distance themselves from the other group.

The team surveyed more than 3,000 vaccinated and 2,000 unvaccinated people from Germany and Austria from December 2021 to July 2022. They had to rate on a scale of one to seven how strongly they agreed with five different statements about their [vaccination status](#). For example, from both groups, about half of the respondents said they were proud to be (un)vaccinated.

In the second step, the participants were given 100 euros to divide between themselves and another person. They learned in advance whether their counterpart was vaccinated or unvaccinated. If the person belonged to a different group than themselves, the person handing out the money discriminated more strongly and gave significantly less. For example, vaccinated people gave an average of 48 euros to other

vaccinated people, but only 30 euros to unvaccinated people.

Unvaccinated are more likely to feel socially excluded

In general, unvaccinated people perceived the [public debate](#) on compulsory vaccination as more unfair and said they experienced more [social exclusion](#). The study provides evidence for the theory reported in the literature that conflicts are promoted the more people identify with a [social group](#), because they see their own conviction as the right one and feel morally superior. For example, the study shows that the more [unvaccinated people](#) identify with their vaccination [status](#), the more willing they are to demonstrate against COVID-19 measures.

"We show that getting vaccinated against COVID-19 has become not just a health decision, but also an ideological value decision," Henkel says.

Respondents not only identified themselves individually as vaccinated or unvaccinated, but also see themselves as part of a social group. Conventional information campaigns are therefore not very effective. "We need more exchange instead of one-sided appeals," Henkel said. The researchers see it as the duty of public figures, for example, to advocate for a stronger dialogue.

More information: Luca Henkel et al, The association between vaccination status identification and societal polarization, *Nature Human Behaviour* (2022). [DOI: 10.1038/s41562-022-01469-6](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01469-6)

Provided by Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

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