

The Covid-19 Vaccine: Why Data Lacks Persuasive Force. Covid Consciousness and Perceptions Determined by “Partisanship”

KFF vaccine poll reveals partisan identity key predictor.

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A recent KFF poll on perceptions and attitudes about the COVID-19 and other vaccines says it all in the byline: “[Partisanship Remains Key Predictor of Views Of COVID-19, Including Plans To Get Latest COVID-19 Vaccine](#).”

The key takeaway:

Mirroring the partisan differences in views on vaccines, there is a persistent partisan divide on overall views of COVID-19, the current caseload in the U.S., whether they could be sick from COVID, and changes to behavior – including willingness to take a diagnostic test when sick. Democrats are more likely to report changing their behaviors because of recent news of increases in COVID-19. More than half of Democrats (58%) say they’ve recently modified their behavior to be more COVID-conscious compared to 16% of Republicans. Democrats (19%) are also more than twice as likely as both independents (8%) and Republicans (9%) to say that in the past three months they have had symptoms they thought could be COVID-19, and therefore took a COVID-19 diagnostic test. Most Democrats (77%) also say there is a new wave of COVID-19 infections hitting the U.S. now, while half of Republicans (51%) disagree.

The poll results are striking evidence of something that philosophers and anthropologists have long observed—namely, facts and data alone possess little persuasive force if they challenge long-held beliefs, emotional attachments, and social identities.

We humans are hyper-social and tribal. For most of pre-history and history, cohesion was essential for a tribe's survival in a world of different tribes competing for scarce resources. Intellectual authority about the world—both the natural and the supernatural—resided in a small priestly class that made the decisions about the best course of action when the tribe was threatened.

Thus, opening one's mind to a new way of looking at the world—a process that involves a willingness to consider emerging data—is always a difficult and painful experience. Doing so requires recognizing and acknowledging that we have been wrong about things, and accordingly made wrong decisions and invested our time and energy into wrong things. No one relishes doing that.

What prompts us to change our point of view is when we suffer pain as a direct and readily identifiable consequence of our false beliefs—that is, when the pain of holding fast to erroneous beliefs exceeds the pain of abandoning them.

I often think of this during my daily reading of Steve Kirsch's Newsletter, which I highly recommend. By longstanding habit, Steve is deeply attached to data, the key determinant in shaping his view of reality.

Unfortunately, in his valiant effort to make factual reality triumphant, he often finds himself addressing institutions, groups, and individuals for whom data he presents has no persuasive force. Their attachments and allegiances preclude them from considering it.

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