

Liberals Moralize COVID-19 Precautions and Vaccines More than Conservatives

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Moralizing COVID-19 Precautions and the Vaccine: The Impact of Political Ideology

Abstract

This study investigated whether moralization of COVID-19 precautions and moralization of COVID-19 vaccines differed as a function of political orientation. MTurk participants ($N = 333$) reported their political orientation and the degree to which their beliefs about Covid-19 precautions and vaccines were grounded in moral conviction (i.e., beliefs about fundamental right and wrong). Liberals reported moralizing precautions and vaccines more than conservatives and individuals who were not politically identified.

Introduction

During the Covid-19 pandemic, numerous events have been politically and morally charged, including debates about precautions, masking, vaccines, and mandates. This study investigated whether levels of moral conviction about precautions and vaccines differed for liberals and conservatives.

Moral conviction refers to an individual's perceptions that their attitudes are based upon and firmly grounded in their morality (that the attitude is grounded in fundamental right and wrong) (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). Moral conviction is generally measured by relying on very straightforward and face-valid measures. (Morgan & Skitka, 2014).

During the Covid-19 pandemic individuals had to take a series of precautionary measures to protect themselves from getting infected with the Covid-19 virus. These precautions included measures such as wearing a mask, avoiding public places, wiping down groceries, social

distancing, and avoiding large gatherings and groups of people. Starting in December 2020, Covid-19 vaccines began to become eligible for select groups of individuals to receive. The vaccines are composed of MRNA and became available from three different companies: Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson. With the production of vaccines increasing, groups of people began to increasingly express their distaste and opposition towards the vaccine. Thus, we wanted to see how many people who participated in our survey shared this sentiment.

Within our study we looked at the intersectionality between political ideology and moral conviction. Individuals' morality can vary based upon their political ideology. Different political parties have different views surrounding morally charged topics such as abortion. With this idea in mind, different individual's morals will vary based upon which political party they most closely identify with.

Based on the data and research, we hypothesized that (a) liberals will moralize precautions more than conservatives, and (b) liberals will moralize vaccines more than conservatives.

Methods

Participants

The participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (mTurk), a survey service in which participants are compensated for each questionnaire that they complete. Participants were recruited from anywhere within the United States. After starting with 376 participants in total, we removed anyone who did not complete at least 75% of the questionnaire (n=23) which left 353 participants. We also removed any participant who failed the attention checks (n=19) which left 334 participants. Finally, we removed any participant who answered with nonsense data (n=1) which left us with 333 participants that we used in our data analyses.

Procedure

This study focused on different participant's ideas and interactions surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine and the pandemic. As part of a larger study amongst many other items, participants completed a self-report questionnaire that assessed their morality and moral convictions towards COVID-19 precautions and the vaccine and their political ideology. In total, the questionnaire took approximately 15-20 minutes. Before data analysis, we averaged out all the values of moral conviction towards precautions and moral convictions towards the vaccine into two variables.

Measures

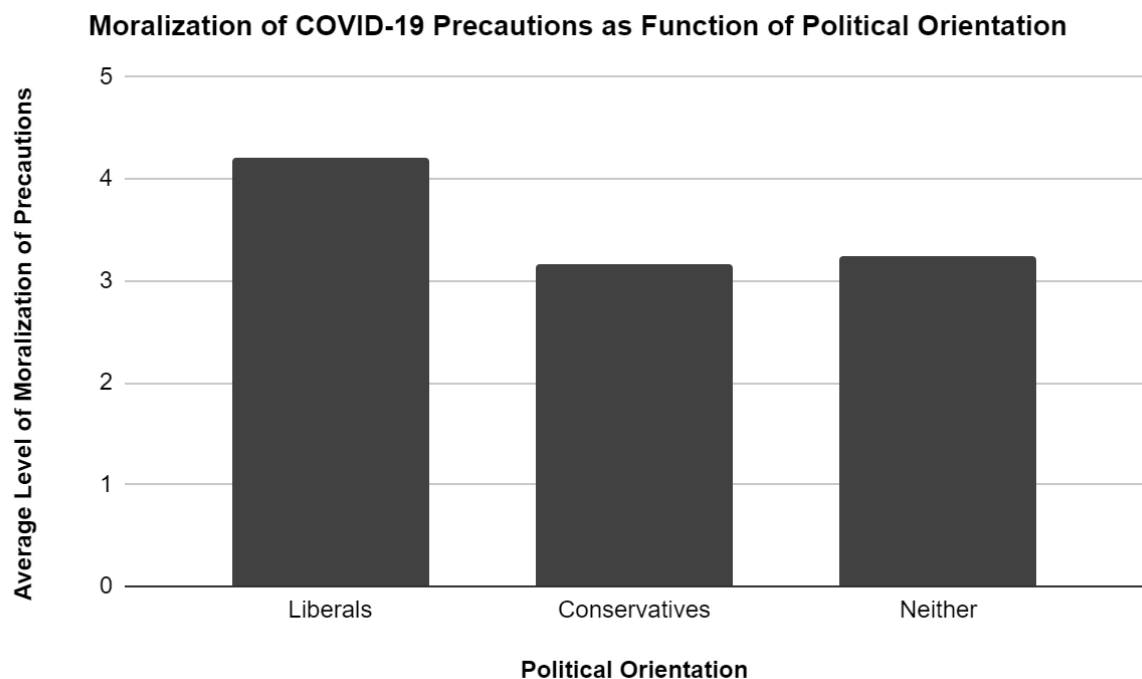
To measure whether people moralized precautions, they responded to five items: “To what extent is your position on Covid-19 precautions important to you?”, “To what extent is your position on Covid-19 precautions important compared to other issues that you are dealing with?”, “To what extent is your position on Covid-19 precautions related to your core moral beliefs and convictions?”, “To what extent is your position on Covid-19 precautions based on fundamental right and wrong?”, and “To what extent is your position on Covid-19 precautions based on moral principle?”. They also reported their agreement or disagreement with: “People should take careful precautions -- even if those precautions are inconvenient or disruptive -- to protect themselves and others against Covid-19.”

To measure whether people moralized vaccines, they responded to five items: “To what extent is your position on the Covid-19 vaccine important to you?”, “To what extent is your position on the Covid-19 vaccine important compared to other issues that you are dealing with?”, “To what extent is your position on the Covid-19 vaccine related to your core moral beliefs and convictions?”, “To what extent is your position on Covid-19 precautions based on fundamental

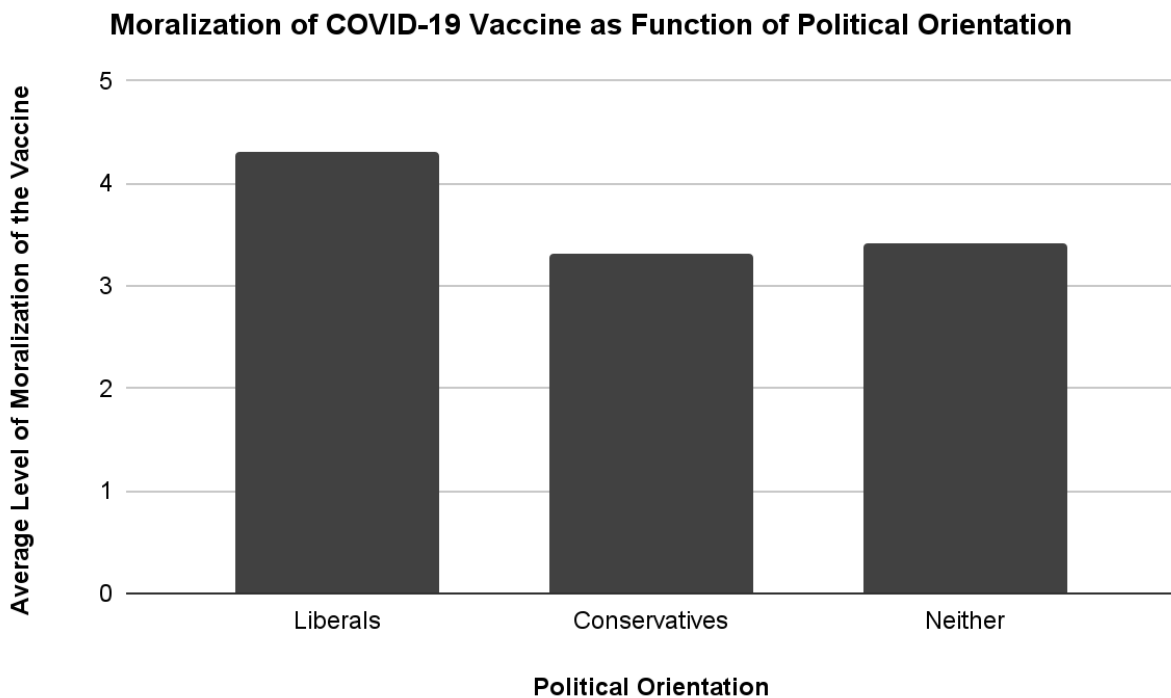
right and wrong?”, and “To what extent is your position on the Covid-19 vaccine based on moral principle?”. People reported their political orientation by responding to this item: “What best describes your political orientation?” with the options *liberal*, *conservative* or *neither*.

Results

To test the hypothesis that liberals will moralize precautions more than conservatives, we conducted a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) comparing precaution moralization as a function of political orientation. According to the ANOVA, liberals and conservatives differed in the degree to which they moralized precautionary measures, $F(2, 328) = 29.49, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .152$. A post hoc Tukey's HSD test showed that liberals moralized precautions ($M = 4.31, SD = .87$) more than did conservatives ($M = 3.31, SD = 1.43, p < .011$), and more than people who are not politically identified ($M = 3.41, SD = 1.31, p < .001$). However, conservatives and people who were not politically identified did not differ in the degree to moralized precautions, $p = .82$.



To test the hypothesis that liberals will moralize the vaccine more than conservatives, we conducted a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) comparing vaccine moralization as a function of political orientation. According to the ANOVA, Liberals and conservatives differ in the degree to which they moralize getting the vaccine, $F(2, 328) = 28.20$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .147$. A post hoc Tukey's HSD test showed that liberals moralized vaccines ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.01$) more than did conservatives ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.42$), $p < .001$, and more than people who are not politically identified ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.36$), $p < .001$. However, conservatives and people who were not politically identified did not differ in the degree to moralized vaccines, $p = .92$.



Discussion

In summation, our study was intended to see different people's ideas, views, and actions surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine and pandemic. To test our hypotheses, we assessed

participants' moral conviction of COVID-19 precautions and the vaccine as a function of political ideology. We found the political ideology was a statistically significant predictor of moralizing COVID-19 precautions and the vaccine. In further studies, it would be of interest to look further into how these viewpoints have changed in the present day. Additionally, in future research, it would be beneficial to look at if liberals and conservatives moralize the vaccines in different ways. That is, are conservatives morally opposed to the vaccine whereas liberals are morally supportive of the vaccine? Overall, our findings support our hypotheses and suggest an important insight as to how political orientation can impact the moralization of actions taken in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. More broadly, this can help shape our knowledge on how moralization of health and social concerns can be politicized. In the future, we can use this information to assist in the creation of bipartisan precautions that can be used for handling public health crises.

References

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