

How to distinguish climate sceptics, antivaxxers, and persistent sceptics: Evidence from a multi-country survey of public attitudes

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Abstract

Distrust in science has been linked to scepticism over both vaccines and climate change. We analyse the results of nationally representative online surveys administered in eight key countries critical to global efforts to mitigate climate change and COVID-19 (Australia, Brazil, China, India, Japan, South Africa, the UK and US). Consistent with previous studies, we find distrust in science is an important explanatory variable for the larger majority of sceptics, those who are sceptical of one or the other issue but not both, across the countries examined. However, the association is significantly weaker among the segment of hardcore persistent sceptics who are both climate sceptics and antivaxxers, instead we find that these individuals, who fit with the typical sceptic profile, are driven by an underlying distrust of elite institutions rather than a specific distrust of scientists. Our results imply that different communications strategies are needed for different types of sceptics.

Keywords climate scepticism, anti-vaccine, public perceptions, trust, COVID-19

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