
Anti-vaxxers and faith: findings of a survey identify the religious affiliation of the most reluctant groups

(from New York) After over six months into the COVID-19 vaccination rollout, the highest rate of hesitancy was recorded among evangelical Protestant groups, according to data published on 28 July by the Public Religion Research Institute and the Interfaith Youth Core, a nonpartisan organisation dedicated to conducting independent research at the intersection of religion, culture, and public policy. Key subgroups with significant numbers who remain hesitant, anxious or postpone vaccination include white evangelical Protestants, Latino Catholics, African-American Baptists. Some are Trump voters, others are waiting for official approval from the drug agency; some live in Southern states. All of them share the refusal to be vaccinated against the coronavirus. *After more than six months into the COVID-19 vaccination rollout, the highest rate of hesitancy was recorded among evangelical Protestant groups*, according to data published on 28 July by the [Public Religion Research Institute](#) and the [Interfaith Youth Core](#), a nonpartisan organisation dedicated to conducting independent research at the intersection of religion, culture, and public policy. Key subgroups with significant numbers who remain hesitant, anxious or postpone vaccination include white evangelical Protestants, Latino Catholics, African-American Baptists. Some are Trump voters, others are waiting for official approval from the drug agency; some live in Southern states. All of them share the refusal to be vaccinated against the coronavirus. Approximately 24% of white evangelical Protestants said they would not get vaccinated in June, a decrease from 26% in March, yet a significant portion nonetheless. Evangelical Protestants in all race and ethnic groups amount for about 25% of the overall US population, with health officials stating that their vaccination is crucial to slowing the spread of the Delta variant - causing a dramatic surge in infections. *It is nothing new for the US to discover white evangelical Christians ranked among the anti-vaxxers, not least because the same uncompromising approach has been found in other mandatory vaccinations for children against measles, mumps and rubella.* There is little pastors can do, as they fear a drop in donations and therefore do not press for a change in attitude. *Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints register the second highest rate of vaccine hesitancy among believers (19%).* Jewish Americans account for the highest proportion of accepters with 85%. Findings show that vaccine hesitancy declined among Americans as a whole and among all religious groups in just three months, from 28% to 15%. The influence of the Faiths4vaccines movement promoted by religious leaders, who set up information campaigns in their communities, including mobile vaccination units in remote locations, played a major role. *Hispanic Catholics and white Catholics in hesitant groups, have increased most in vaccine acceptance. Up to 80% and 79% respectively.* The Survey equally identified political affiliation, with 19% of Republicans who said they would refuse the vaccine – only 4% of Democrats are refusers. In an effort to boost the vaccine rollout across party lines, US President Joe Biden tweeted on Friday: "The vaccine was developed and authorised under a Republican administration, and has been distributed and administered under a Democratic administration. The vaccines are safe, highly effective. There's nothing political about them." Thirteen percent of Americans say they would definitely not get a vaccine which they deem to be an invasive government tool to test the extent of its impact on people's lives; or argue that emergency authorisation does not provide sufficient certainty as to its effectiveness. *Black Americans –who experienced discrimination and poor health treatment in the past- account for a high proportion of hesitant and refusing groups.* Last weekend, however, well over half a million Americans lined up to be vaccinated, driven both by rising mortality and contagion among the unvaccinated and by new workplace policies whereby corporate executives require proof of vaccination from their employees or frequent COVID-19 testing and compliance with all medical safety precautions, from masks to social distancing. In New York City, all 340,000 municipal employees, including police officers, will have to be vaccinated or face at least weekly testing. Google is pushing for its employees to be vaccinated

before entering the company's offices. Even numerous Wall Street banks are requiring their workers to get Covid-19 vaccines or tests to return to their offices. More than 600 colleges and universities are requiring that at least some of their students, faculty and staff be vaccinated. Several hospitals and health care facilities are urging employees to get at least a dose of the vaccine. On Friday, New York's 41 Broadway theatres will request that spectators, actors and technical staff be vaccinated, and children under the age of 12 will be asked to submit a negative Covid test six hours before the start of performances. *Restrictions on access to workplaces or leisure facilities, as well as being unable to visit loved ones or having witnessed new hospitalisations and deaths are prompting a rethinking among vaccine hesitancy groups,* although in southern states such as Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Missouri and Nevada, cases continue to rise at a weekly pace of 171%. Centres for Disease Prevention reported on Friday that even vaccinated persons can be infectious and can become ill with the virus, but not with severe symptoms. Only a few vaccinated persons were hospitalised due to complications. The average number of new cases in the two weeks between July 3 and 17 was 177 per 100,000 residents. In addition to the healthcare situation, the USA are likely to have to face legal challenges from vaccine refusers who consider it an exercise of freedom that cannot be infringed by either government or employer. This situation is not new in the USA, since already in 1902, a minister who had been fined for refusing to be vaccinated against smallpox, which was surging in Cambridge, Massachusetts, petitioned the Supreme Court to condemn the State. *In addition to the healthcare situation, the USA are likely to have to face legal challenges from vaccine refusers who consider it an exercise of freedom that cannot be infringed by either government or employer.* This situation is not new in the USA, since already in 1902, a minister who had been fined for refusing to be vaccinated against smallpox, which was surging in Cambridge, Massachusetts, petitioned the Supreme Court to condemn the State. The Court replied that "the liberty secured by the Constitution of the United States to every person within its jurisdiction does not import an absolute right in each person to be, at all times and in all circumstances, wholly freed from restraint", adding that "there are manifold restraints to which every person is necessarily subject for the common good." States and employers intend to apply this constraint to require proof of vaccination, while allowing for exceptions including disability or religious beliefs - valid reasons for refusing the anti-Covid vaccine.

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