

Peer Review Report

Review Report on Politics in Public Health: Growing Partisan Divides in COVID-19 Vaccine Attitudes and Uptake Post-2021 Presidential Inauguration

Original Article, Int. J. Public Health

Reviewer: Abanoub Riad

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EVALUATION

Q 1 Please summarize the main findings of the study.

- The partisan divide in COVID-19 vaccine attitudes widened in the month following President Biden's inauguration, with greater declines in refusal observed in pro-Biden states.
- Counties that supported Trump more strongly experienced a significantly smaller increase in vaccination rates compared to pro-Biden counties during the same period.
- Distrust in government and vaccines accounted for approximately 80% of the inter-state variation in vaccine refusal, highlighting the politicised nature of health behaviours.

Q 2 Please highlight the limitations and strengths.

Strengths:

- The study leverages a well-defined political transition as a quasi-natural experiment, offering a timely and original perspective on the intersection of politics and public health behaviour.
- It employs a large, multi-source dataset with appropriate temporal granularity and uses a flexible differences-in-differences approach to assess dynamic effects.

Limitations:

- The analysis is ecological in nature, and inferences about individual-level attitudes and behaviours are therefore limited by the risk of ecological fallacy.
- The study population is restricted to adults aged 65 and above, which limits the generalisability of findings to the broader population.

Q 3 Please provide your detailed review report to the authors. The editors prefer to receive your review structured in major and minor comments. Please consider in your review the methods (statistical methods valid and correctly applied (e.g. sample size, choice of test), is the study replicable based on the method description?), results, data interpretation and references. If there are any objective errors, or if the conclusions are not supported, you should detail your concerns.

Major Comments:

- The "Introduction" section should not reveal any results of the study; therefore, the paragraph in Lines 49-57 needs to be erased or accordingly modified.
- The manuscript presents an ecological study; therefore, the tone should be adjusted to match the level of certainty that can be possibly derived from these studies. I found that the narrative was a little bit more affirmative than it should be.
- Sensitivity analysis was not performed; however, it is strongly recommended for ecological studies. I do not know if the data sources that the authors used could have enabled them to perform such analyses or not. If it is not possible, then this should be explicitly stated in the Limitation section.
- The age limitation of the investigated population should also be acknowledged not only in the Limitations section but also across the manuscript by avoiding a generalizing tone.

Minor Comments:

- The title can be better modified to reflect the study design and time of interest. When I read the title for the first time, I thought the authors were about to discuss the impact of the Trump 2.0 administration with the new HHS sec RFK Jr.
- There was a very interesting study by Prof. Asch D. on reporting rates of COVID-19 AEs to the VAERS database stratified by state-level political inclination. This study's findings align very well with the narrative built by this manuscript. The authors are recommended to integrate these results into their manuscript. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2816958>
- The language was super and free of errors; however, there were a few instances of redundancies. Please revise the entire manuscript to relieve this problem.
- Some figures were too small to read.

PLEASE COMMENT

Q 4 ▶ Is the title appropriate, concise, attractive?

Mostly, yes.

- The title can be better modified to reflect the study design and time of interest. When I read the title for the first time, I thought the authors were about to discuss the impact of the Trump 2.0 administration with the new HHS sec RFK Jr.

Q 5 ▶ Are the keywords appropriate?

Yes.

Q 6 ▶ Is the English language of sufficient quality?

Yes. Language and style were perfect.

Q 7 ▶ Is the quality of the figures and tables satisfactory?

Yes.

Q 8 ▶ Does the reference list cover the relevant literature adequately and in an unbiased manner?)

Mostly, yes.

- There was a very interesting study by Prof. Asch D. on reporting rates of COVID-19 AEs to VAERS database stratified by state-level political inclination. This study findings align very well with the narrative built by this manuscript. The authors are recommended to integrate these results into their manuscript. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2816958>

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Q 9 ▶ Originality



Q 10 ▶ Rigor



Q 11 ▶ Significance to the field



Q 12 ▶ Interest to a general audience



Q 13 ▶ Quality of the writing



Q 14 Overall scientific quality of the study



REVISION LEVEL

Q 15 Please make a recommendation based on your comments:

Minor revisions.