

How cultural tribalism is feeding the anti-vaccination and COVID conspiracy movement

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in an intensification of... personal identity as a way to push conspiracy theories, unproven treatments and ideological agendas.

Anti-maskers say, for example, that face coverings infringe their [constitutional rights](#). And if you are the kind of person who is for constitutional rights (and who isn't?), then you should be against masks — or so the argument goes. Likewise, lockdowns and physical distancing are [framed as attacks on](#) basic democratic freedoms.

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If [a] YouTuber speaks to and confirms a pre-existing worldview that is core to who you are, that message has a good chance of winning out over science-informed information from an expert.

When a belief becomes linked to personal identity, it can become very resistant to change. Indeed, once a person feels part of a community or a movement, the adherence to a science-free position may begin to feel not fringe-y, but “brave and righteous” — as a [recent study of the Australian anti-vaccine](#) movement found.

What can be done? One thing to consider is speed. [Studies have shown](#) that the best debunks of misinformation are targeted and happen quickly. A study published in Nature Human Behaviour concluded that a [prompt communication response to Covid-19 misinformation](#) can “make a major difference in determining the social outcome” of the misinformation.

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