

Apocalyptic and conspiratorial views are escalating as the pandemic persists

Since ancient times, pandemics have spurred sharp turns in political beliefs, spawning extremist movements, waves of mistrust and wholesale rejection of authorities. Nearly a year into the coronavirus crisis, Americans are falling prey to the same phenomenon, historians, theologians and other experts say, exemplified by a [recent NPR-Ipsos poll](#) in which nearly 1 in 5 said they believe Satan-worshipping, child-enslaving elites seek to control the world.

As shutdowns paralyzed the economy in the first months of the pandemic, Americans sharply [increased searches for extremist](#) and white supremacist materials online.

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[C]ovid-19 has “reminded Americans of their own mortality” and created a sense of “social dislocation and a loss of confidence in all institutions,” said Richard Land, president of Southern Evangelical Seminary outside Charlotte and a longtime evangelical leader.

The result, he said, is a surge of extremism on the right and the left, including widespread embrace of counterfactual versions of current events.

“In a healthy society, the government and the church would say, ‘This is nonsense,’ and people would believe them,” Land said. But during the pandemic, he said, that check on extremist impulses has failed for some people who crave connection with others: “God created us as social creatures, and when we isolate from other human beings, we tend to malfunction.”

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