

# How much do vaccinated Americans dislike the unvaccinated? We measured.

Unvaccinated Americans don't dislike the vaccinated with the same intensity

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January 27, 2022 at 6:00 a.m. EST



Nearly a year after the first coronavirus vaccine was administered in the United States, about 1 in 5 American adults have yet to get vaccinated. By doing so, they remain at a greater risk for contracting, spreading and dying from the virus. That prolongs the pandemic, public health experts say.

While some media figures on the right talk about the unvaccinated as heroes fighting for liberty, others rage against them in national outlets under headlines like “I’m Furious at the Unvaccinated,” “Unvaccinated People Need to Bear the Burden” and “Readers are Furious at Vaccine Refusers.”

We wanted to know how many Americans are actually as angry as these headlines suggest.

## How we did our research

In the summer of 2021, we collected a sample of 2,560 U.S. adults on [Lucid’s](#) opt-in Internet survey platform, with quotas to ensure researchers get the correct number of any given group to create a nationally representative sample. We asked them to tell us whether they were vaccinated or unvaccinated. Then we asked them for one word that would describe a vaccinated person and one word that would describe an unvaccinated person. Finally, we asked them to rate the two words they chose on a seven-point scale, measuring what feelings the word conveys, from “very negative” at minus-three to “very positive” at three, with zero for neutral.

Since the respondents rate the words themselves, they are giving their own emotional evaluation of vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. These newer ways to measure open-ended responses help researchers identify and quantify the respondents’ state of mind.

## Vaccinated Americans don’t like the unvaccinated

First, both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals think of themselves positively. Vaccinated individuals most often report words like “smart,” “safe,” “good,” “responsible,” “caring” and “protected” when describing other vaccinated people. When respondents were asked to assign a sentiment to their word, 90 percent of vaccinated Americans report a positive feeling. At the same time, unvaccinated individuals report words like “smart,” “cautious,” “scared,” “normal,” “good” and “independent” when describing other unvaccinated individuals. While only 56 percent of unvaccinated citizens report a positive sentiment, that’s still a majority.

Second, most vaccinated individuals dislike the unvaccinated. They most commonly characterize these individuals as “stupid,” “selfish,” “ignorant,” “dumb,” “unsafe” and “foolish.” A majority of vaccinated people, fully 58 percent, report

that their word conveys a negative sentiment. When we examine how positively vaccinated individuals feel toward their own group compared with how negatively they feel toward the unvaccinated, we find that 72 percent of vaccinated individuals feel more positively about vaccinated individuals than they do about the unvaccinated and only 23 percent feel roughly the same about both groups.

### **The unvaccinated don't reciprocate that dislike**

Third, unvaccinated individuals do not report similar levels of hostility toward the vaccinated. They most commonly refer to the vaccinated as “safe,” “sheep,” “good,” “dumb,” “stupid” and “smart.” While some of those words are negative, overall, only 29 percent of the unvaccinated report that their word conveys a negative sentiment. When we examine how positively unvaccinated individuals feel toward their own group compared with how negatively they feel toward the vaccinated, we find that 40 percent of unvaccinated individuals feel more positively about unvaccinated people than they do about the vaccinated, while 36 percent feel roughly the same about both groups.

### **How will this affect pandemic politics?**

Our research finds that, as journalists have been reporting, many vaccinated Americans are angry at those who have not been vaccinated. We expect that is likely to deepen the longer the pandemic endures.

Of course, that's not true for all vaccinated Americans; some used positive words to describe the unvaccinated. But this strong dislike could limit interactions with the unvaccinated, further dividing the country and potentially making it harder for unvaccinated Americans to learn why or how they might want to get a coronavirus vaccine.

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