

Red Covid

Covid's partisan pattern is growing more extreme.



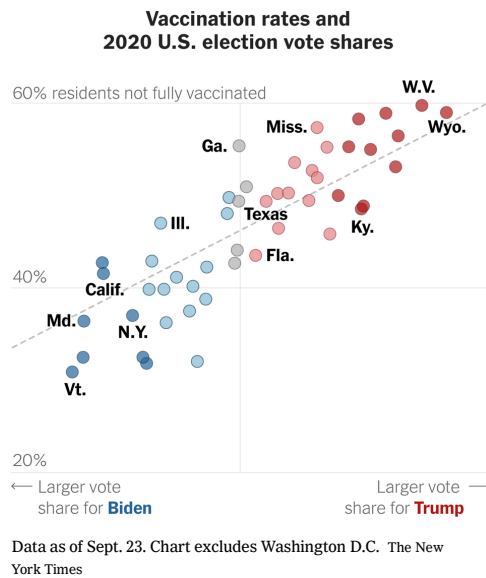
By David Leonhardt

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During the early months of Covid-19 vaccinations, several major demographic groups lagged in receiving shots, including Black Americans, Latino Americans and Republican voters.

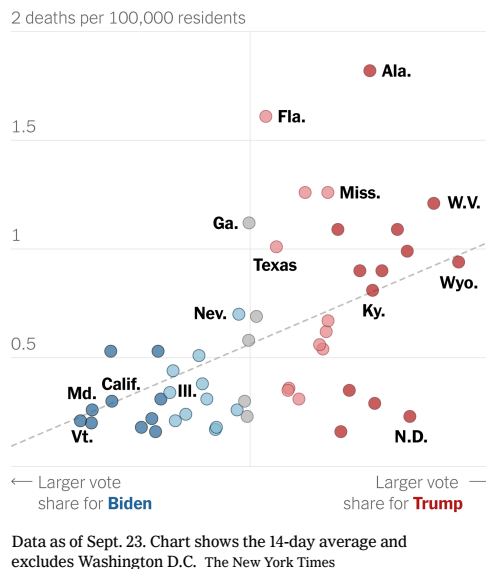
More recently, the racial gaps — while still existing — have narrowed. The partisan gap, however, continues to be enormous. A Pew Research Center poll last month found that 86 percent of Democratic voters had received at least one shot, compared with 60 percent of Republican voters.

The political divide over vaccinations is so large that almost every reliably blue state now has a higher vaccination rate than almost every reliably red state:



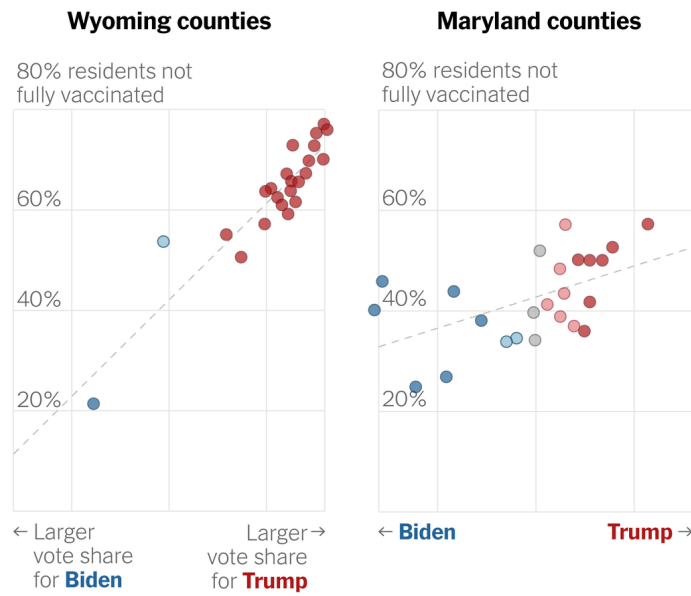
Because the vaccines are so effective at preventing serious illness, Covid deaths are also showing a partisan pattern. Covid is still a national crisis, but the worst forms of it are increasingly concentrated in red America.

Covid deaths and 2020 U.S. election vote shares

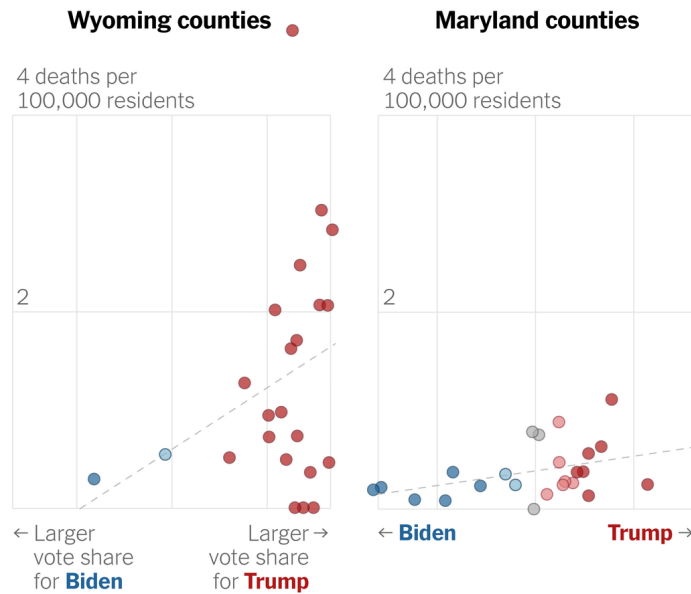


As is often the case, state-by-state numbers can understate the true pattern, because every state has both liberal and conservative areas. When you look at the county level, the gap can look even starker.

Below is a set of charts, created by my colleague Ashley Wu, that offers a close-up of one typical red state, Wyoming, and one typical blue state, Maryland:



Data as of Sept. 23. The New York Times



Data as of Sept. 23. Charts show the 14-day average. The New York Times

When Covid was bluer

It's worth remembering that Covid followed a different pattern for more than a year after its arrival in the U.S. Despite widespread differences in mask wearing — and scientific research suggesting that masks reduce the virus's spread — the pandemic was if anything worse in blue regions. Masks evidently were not powerful enough to overcome other regional differences, like the amount of international travel that flows through major metro areas, which tend to be politically liberal.

Vaccination has changed the situation. The vaccines are powerful enough to overwhelm other differences between blue and red areas.

Some left-leaning communities — like many suburbs of New York, San Francisco and Washington, as well as much of New England — have such high vaccination rates that even the unvaccinated are partly protected by the low number of cases. Conservative communities, on the other hand, have been walloped by the highly contagious Delta variant. (You can find data for hundreds of counties [here](#).)

Since Delta began circulating widely in the U.S., Covid has exacted a horrific death toll on red America: In counties where Donald Trump received at least 70 percent of the vote, the virus has killed about 47 out of every 100,000 people since the end of June, according to Charles Gaba, a health care analyst. In counties where Trump won less than 32 percent of the vote, the number is about 10 out of 100,000.

And the gap will probably keep growing:

Average daily Covid deaths in the U.S.

1.5 deaths per 100,000 residents

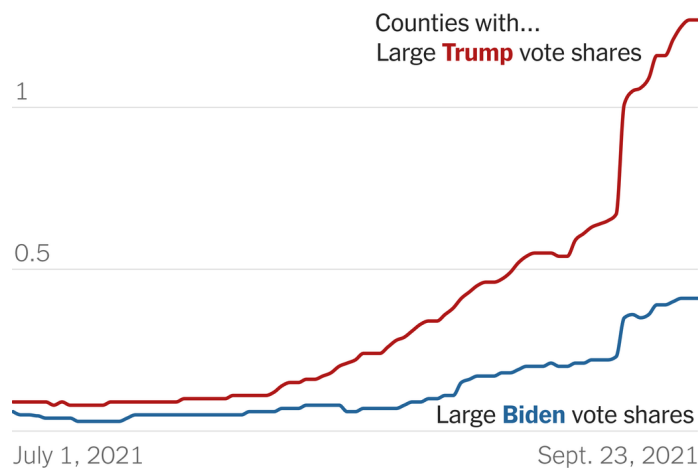


Chart shows the 14-day average. Excludes parts of Alaska, New York and Washington D.C. because of data availability. The New York Times

Why is this happening?

Some of the vaccination gap stems from the libertarian instincts of many Republicans. “They understand freedom as being left alone to make their own choices, and they resent being told what to do,” William Galston has written in The Wall Street Journal.

But philosophy is only a partial explanation. In much of the rest of the world, vaccine attitudes do not break down along right-left lines, and some conservative leaders have responded effectively to Covid. So have a few Republican governors in the U.S. “It didn’t have to be this way,” German Lopez of Vox has written.

What distinguishes the U.S. is a conservative party — the Republican Party — that has grown hostile to science and empirical evidence in recent decades. A conservative media complex, including Fox News, Sinclair Broadcast Group and various online outlets, echoes and amplifies this hostility. Trump took the conspiratorial thinking to a new level, but he did not create it.

“With very little resistance from party leaders,” my colleague Lisa Lerer wrote this summer, many Republicans “have elevated falsehoods and doubts about vaccinations from the fringes of American life to the center of our political conversation.”

‘Owning the left’

With the death count rising, at least a few Republicans appear to be worried about what their party and its allies have sown.

In an article this month for Breitbart, the right-wing website formerly run by Steve Bannon, John Nolte argued that the partisan gap in vaccination rates was part of a liberal plot. Liberals like Biden, Nancy Pelosi, Anthony Fauci and Howard Stern have tried so hard to persuade people to get vaccinated, because they know that Republican voters will do the opposite of whatever they say, Nolte wrote.

The Coronavirus Pandemic: Latest Updates ›

Updated 2 hours ago

- A Louisiana health system will increase insurance fees of employees with unvaccinated spouses.
- The mayor of Baltimore tests positive for Covid.
- Pfizer vaccine provides 90 percent protection against hospitalization for six months, study finds.

His argument is certainly bizarre, given that Democratic politicians have been imploring all Americans to get vaccinated and many Republican politicians have not. But Nolte did offer a glimpse at a creeping political fear among some Republicans. “Right now, a countless number of Trump supporters believe they are *owning* the left by refusing to take a lifesaving vaccine,” Nolte wrote. “In a country where elections are decided on razor-thin margins, does it not benefit one side if their opponents simply drop dead?”

Promising ideas

How might more conservative Americans be persuaded to get vaccinated?

One intriguing anecdote involves the football team at the University of Mississippi, which is entirely vaccinated even though the state has one of the nation's lowest vaccination rates. Coaches there emphasized the tangible, short-term costs of getting Covid, rather than the more remote chance of death: The players might have to miss a game, and the team might have to forfeit it, if they tested positive.

A related message is duty, Timothy Carney has written in *The Washington Examiner*. If Carney had refused to get vaccinated, he explained, he would have risked loading more work onto his wife, his colleagues and his partner in teaching Sunday school, as well as forced his children to miss school.

In *The Atlantic*, Olga Khazan has argued that fear remains the best motivator, based on her interviews with Tucker Carlson viewers who nonetheless have been vaccinated. And Daniel Darling, an evangelical author, has said that one-on-one conversations encouraging conservatives to talk with their doctors will have more success than any top-down campaign.

Then again, Darling's message also shows why the vaccination gap exists in the first place. After he wrote an op-ed in *USA Today* about his decision to get vaccinated, Darling's employer — NRB, an association of Christian broadcasters — fired him.

More on the virus:

- Costco will limit sales of toilet paper and water because of "Delta-related demand."
- U.S. airline travel — which had been recovering — declined over the past two months, according to Michael Sivak, a transportation analyst.
- Misuse of a deworming drug to treat Covid has contributed to at least two deaths in New Mexico.

THE LATEST NEWS

German Election



The chancellor candidate Olaf Scholz, center, celebrating his party's victory. Christof Stache/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

- The Social Democratic Party won Germany's election, narrowly defeating Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative party.
- The Social Democrats will need to form a coalition with at least one other party before they can govern.
- Merkel changed Germany into a modern society, *The Times's* Katrin Bennhold writes.

Other Big Stories

- Texas' near-ban on abortions has some women traveling to neighboring states. At one Oklahoma clinic, two-thirds of patients now come from Texas.
- Hurricane Ida caused dozens of oil spills in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Critics raved about a documentary about Yazidi women sexually enslaved by the Islamic State. But many of the women said they hadn't agreed to be in the film.
- "Moulin Rouge!" and "The Inheritance" won the top prizes at the Tonys. "Slave Play," which received 12 nominations, won none. Here are the winners.

Opinions

Gail Collins and **Bret Stephens** discuss the debt ceiling and older politicians.

MORNING READS



Sherry Poppins, left, and Qhris Almighty, performers at an annual drag festival in New York. Camila Falquez for The New York Times

Photos: See the avant-garde performers at Bushwig.

The Media Equation: A \$40 million conference call gone wrong.

Fashion: Are these goggles the next cool sunglasses?

Shut out: She bought her dream home. Then a “sovereign citizen” changed the locks.

The State of Vaccine Mandates in the U.S.

- **Vaccine rules.** On Aug. 23, the F.D.A. granted full approval to Pfizer-BioNTech’s coronavirus vaccine for people 16 and up, paving the way for mandates in both the public and private sectors. Such mandates are legally allowed and have been upheld in court challenges.
- **College and universities.** More than 400 colleges and universities are requiring students to be vaccinated against Covid-19. Almost all are in states that voted for President Biden.
- **Schools.** California became the first state to issue a vaccine mandate for all educators and to announce plans to add the Covid-19 vaccine as a requirement to attend school, which could start as early as next fall. Los Angeles already has a vaccine mandate for public school students 12 and older that begins Nov. 21.

[SEE MORE](#) ▾

Quiz time: The average score on our latest weekly news quiz was 6.5. Can you do better?

Advice from Wirecutter: How to organize your fridge.

Lives Lived: Jay Sandrich won Emmys for directing “The Mary Tyler Moore Show” and “The Cosby Show,” and made a crucial casting decision about “The Golden Girls.” He died at 89.

ARTS AND IDEAS



The “Jasper Johns: Mind/Mirror” exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Jasper Johns/VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Charlie Rubin for The New York Times

An American art pioneer

This week, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and the Philadelphia Museum of Art will both open “Jasper Johns: Mind/Mirror,” a two-city retrospective that is the largest-ever exhibition of his work.

Johns, widely considered the greatest living American artist, is most famous for his early paintings of flags and targets, which laid the groundwork for the Pop movement. But he long divided critics, some of whom felt he produced extraordinary work at the start of his career and then delivered little else.

The twin exhibitions put any doubts of his genius to rest, the Times art critic Holland Cotter writes. Seen together, the shows provide a “rigorous but passionate personal diary, a six-decade record of work, need, love, anger, renewal, sweat, fear and resolve.”

The shows open Wednesday and run through Feb. 13.

For more: The Times’s Deborah Solomon profiles the 91-year-old Johns, and ARTnews looks at seven of his most famous works. — *Tom Wright-Piersanti, a Morning editor*

PLAY, WATCH, EAT

What to Cook



David Malosh for The New York Times

Meefun, a stir-fried rice noodle dish common in Taiwan, is easy to make and packed with umami.

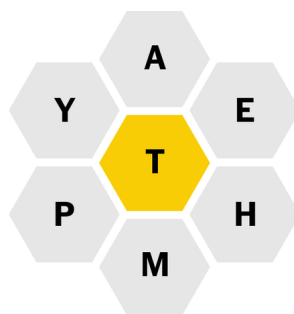
What to Watch

For a break from prestige TV, stream “Highway 1, U.S.A.,” a 20th-century American opera. It’s about 50 minutes long.

Sports

Enter the world of cheer moms.

Now Time to Play



The pangram from Friday's Spelling Bee was *wheezing*. Here is today's puzzle — or you can play online.

Here are today's Mini Crossword and our other games. (The website may be experiencing difficulties. Our apologies.)

Thanks for spending part of your morning with The Times. See you tomorrow. — David

P.S. Congress voted to establish the Department of Education 42 years ago today in what The Times called a “victory” for Jimmy Carter.

Here's today's print front page.

“The Daily” is about a crisis at the border. On the Book Review podcast, Randall Kennedy and Mary Roach discuss their new books. “Sway” features Beto O'Rourke.

Claire Moses, Ian Prasad Philbrick, Tom Wright-Piersanti, Ashley Wu and Sanam Yar contributed to The Morning. You can reach the team at themorning@nytimes.com.

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