

Health 1: Polarization Effects on Public Health

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Ways Polarization affects Public Health

- Indirect Health consequences
 - How it affects our perception of health issues
 - Consequences of that perception
 - Other indirect consequences

- Direct Health consequences

Motivated Reasoning

Motivated reasoning is when a person uses emotionally biased reasoning to produce justifications or make decisions that are most desired rather than those that accurately reflect evidence.

Why Motivated Reasoning is Important

When political messaging divides sides on a health issue, it increases the likelihood of the public interpreting the issue through their own political identity, resulting in motivated reasoning.[PD13]

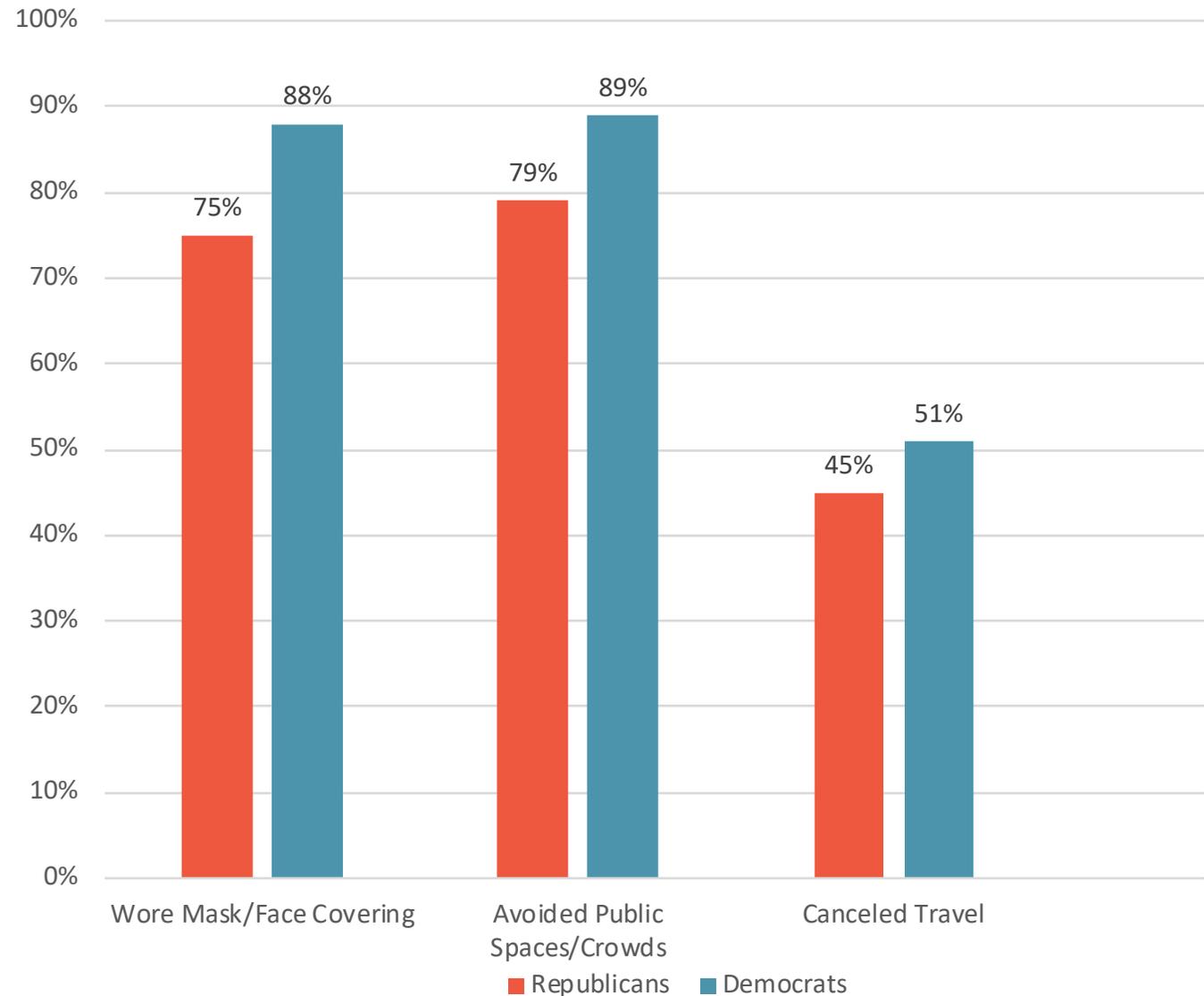
Ultimately, this leads to people “picking sides” on health issues, leading to more people believing in misinformation and behaving more unhealthily.

How This Affects Us: Covid-19

Covid-19 demonstrates the dangerous effects of this rather clearly:

- Harder to make health policy decisions on a political level
- Significant differences in actions between political affiliations [PD2]
- Republicans also significantly more likely to spread Covid-related misinformation [PD4]

Differences in Disease-limiting actions by Political Inclination

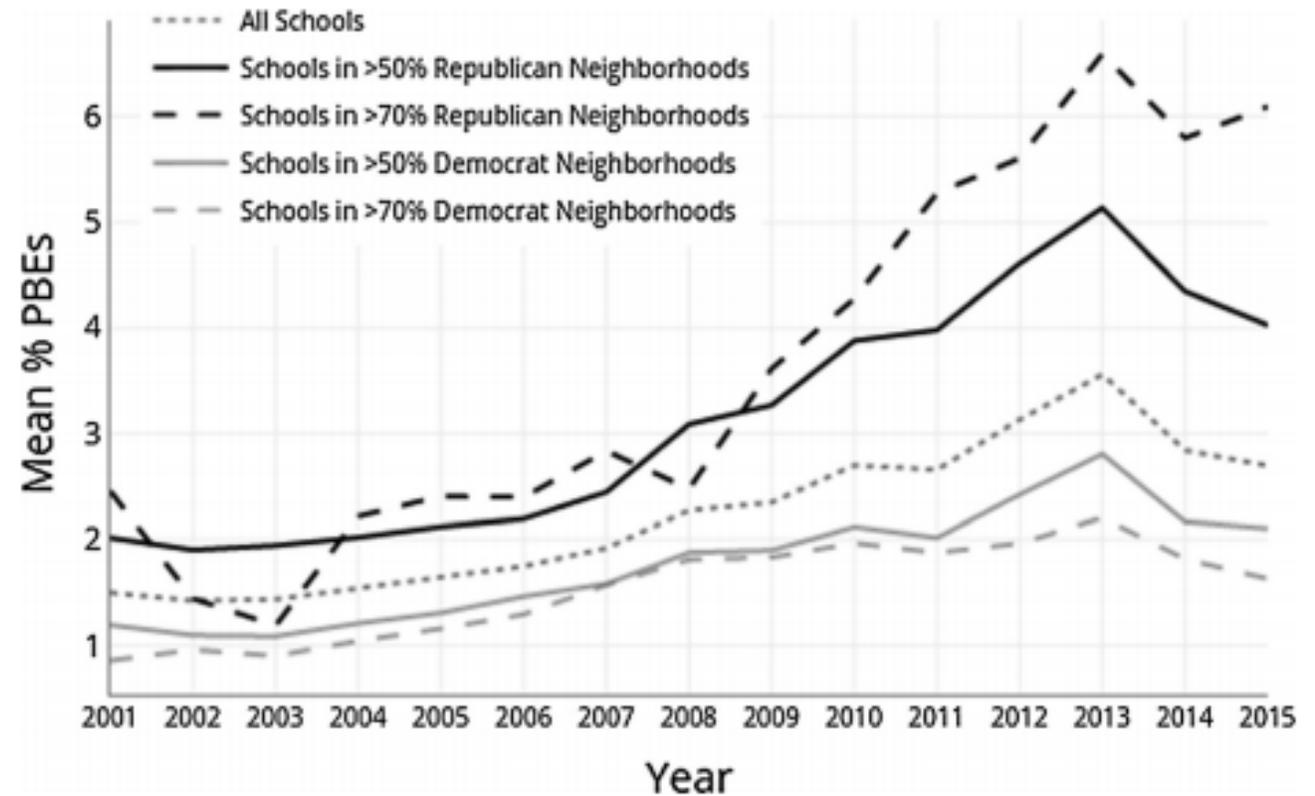


How This Affects Us

This is not limited to Covid-19, it has happened before and will continue to happen.

- One such example is vaccine exemption rates
- In 2015, highly Republican Neighborhoods had PBE exemption rates over 3x higher than those of highly Democrat Neighborhoods

Personal Belief Exemptions for Vaccines by Political Affiliation

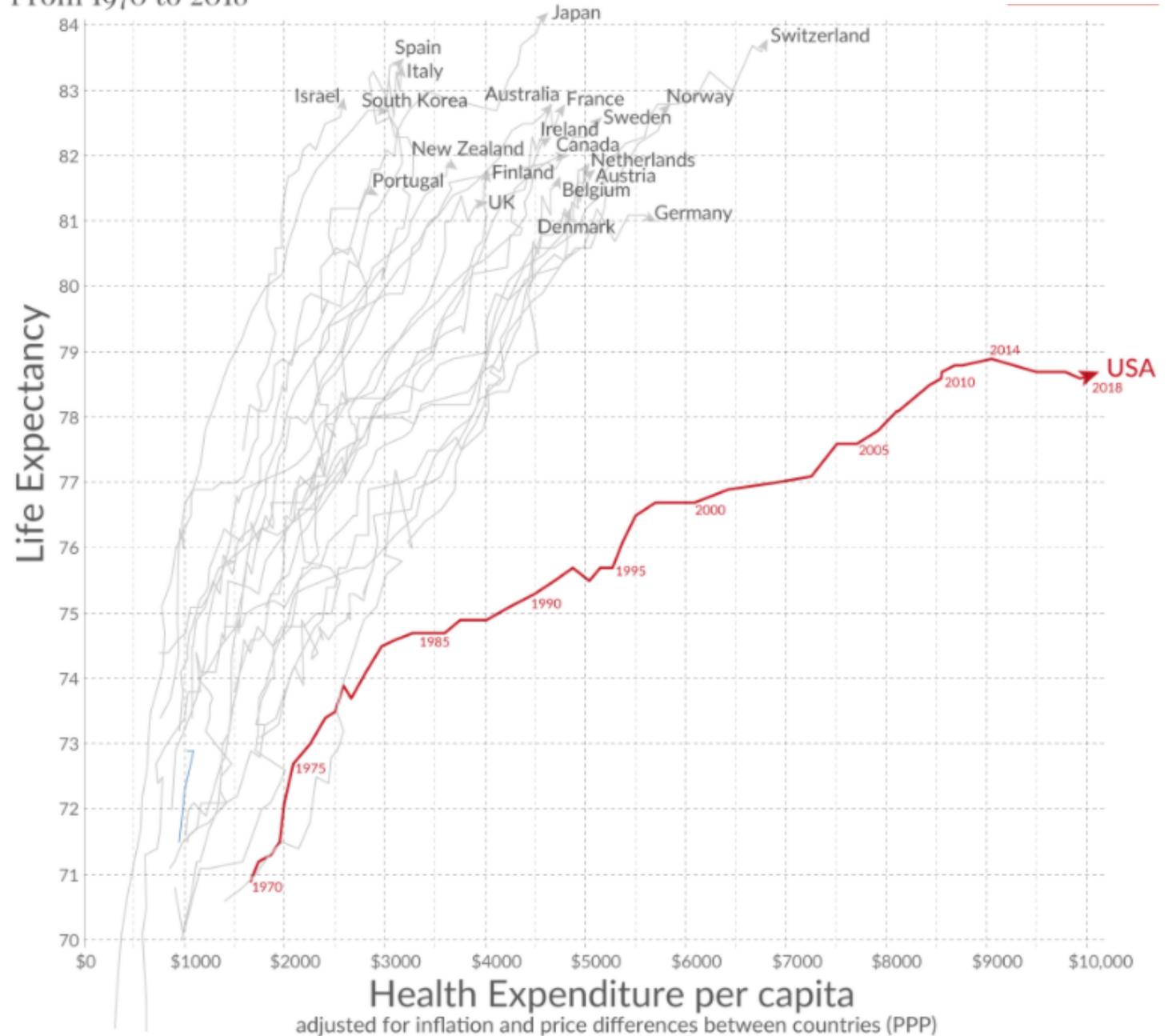


Other Indirect Effects

- American life expectancy is significantly shorter than other developed countries, despite spending much more money on healthcare [PD17]
- Many different reasons for this, one being the lack of universal access to health insurance

Life expectancy vs. health expenditure

From 1970 to 2018



Other Indirect Effects

- A majority of Americans (63%) are in favor of a single-payer healthcare system
- This would provide healthcare to more Americans, especially impoverished ones who are more at risk for numerous negative health consequences, including obesity, chronic disease, infant mortality, and more; and currently least able to get healthcare and treatment
- Despite a fair amount of public agreement, there have not been policy effects, partially due to animosity between political sides, polarization.

Direct Health Effects of Polarization

The consequences of polarization are not limited to bias, but have more direct consequences as well.

Direct Health Effects of Polarization

- Increased stress: from 2016-2018, people are 15% more likely to describe talking about politics with those they disagree with as “stressful and frustrating” vs “interesting and informative” [PD10]
- As to racial polarization: increased racial bias leads to increased stress and anxiety when dealing with those of another race, even in a non-threatening context [PD13]
- It even hurts Thanksgiving dinner- Families that were likely to have voted for different presidential candidates spent about 30 to 50 fewer minutes together [PD15]

Direct Health Effects of Polarization

- Nearly 6/10 adults (59 percent) report that the current social divisiveness causes them stress[PD16]
- Too much stress is physically harmful, contributing to high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

FUTURE OF OUR NATION IS A SIGNIFICANT SOURCE OF STRESS

2020



2019



THIS IS THE LOWEST POINT IN OUR NATION'S HISTORY THAT I CAN REMEMBER

% AGREE

2020



2019



Takeaways

- Polarization results in motivated reasoning, or biased thinking
- This results in poorly-informed health decisions, increased misinformation
- Additionally, it directly harms us by creating a more stressful environment, which has many harmful health impacts
- The plan that reduces polarization best will have significant health benefits in the US

Works Cited

[PD2] Bruine de Bruin, W, et al. (2020). Political polarization in US residents' COVID-19 risk perceptions, policy preferences, and protective behaviors. *Journal of Risk & Uncertainty*. 1-18, 2020 Nov 18. <https://dx-doi-org.ezp1.lib.umn.edu/10.1089/heq.2016.0016>

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[PD16] American Psychological Association (2020). Stress in America™ 2020: A National Mental Health Crisis [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2020/report-October>

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