Risk Perception, Political Standing and Behavior Response: Evidence from the US in the Pandemic

by

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Abstract: People often change their behavior in response to risky events. Such behavioral response may be largely determined by their attitude (e.g., risk aversion) and what they believe, i.e., risk perception. In this study, we use U.S. residents' location data from a large sample of mobile phone users during the pandemic from 2020 to 2021, and the political standing of the local county measured by the partisanship in the recent Presidential election in 2016 and 2020, to study how people's political standing may affect their response to risky event. We argue that such a difference is due to varying risk perception due to drastic contrast of view regarding the pandemic. We find that compared to residents in the "blue" counties, those in "red" counties tends to conduct more trips to various POIs including those deemed as riskier in getting the Covid virus; have a lower vaccination rate; experienced lower number of Covid cases, but higher number of Covid deaths. We also find that vaccination is effective in reducing number of covid cases and deaths, and the effect may get stronger over time. Our results suggest that risk misperception can lead to big social costs, and the impact of bi-polar partisanship on information acquisition should be considered when evaluating the effectiveness of public policies, or other related political economic studies.
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Key Words: Risk perception, partisanship, behavior response, pandemic.

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