

Weekly COVID-19 Disinformation and False Propaganda Report

Key Highlights

July 13, 2020

- [Apprehension](#) and fear among Americans regarding the prospective COVID-19 vaccine persists. One of the most prolific sources of disinformation on this issue was last week's pronouncement by Kanye West, during an interview with Forbes, [referring](#) to vaccines as "the mark of the beast" and claims that a COVID-19 vaccine was an attempt to "put chips inside of us."
- Numerous disinformation campaigns have emerged against the World Health Organization, Big Pharma, and billionaire Bill Gates under false narratives that the virus was created for the purpose of making profits vis-a-vis the development and distribution of a vaccine. These claims are particularly prominent within the anti-vaxxer community on Facebook and YouTube and have been further amplified by figureheads on Twitter such as Tracy Beanz (219.2K followers).
- Donald Trump [tweeted](#), with a giant reach of 83M Twitter users, claiming that U.S. COVID-19 mortality rates are among the lowest in the world. Contrary to this claim, U.S. mortality rates are estimated to be the [9th highest worldwide](#). The U.S. is also 2nd in mortality rates among the [highest affected nations](#).
- Videos claiming standard masks have 5G wires embedded in them received up to 1.3 million views on Twitter and other social media platforms.
- Public criticisms of Dr. Anthony Fauci from the White House resulted in overall negative sentiment toward the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases director.

Key Trends

Ongoing conspiracy theories regarding mask use

A [video](#) on Twitter claiming that the metal wire in store-bought face masks are 5G antennas received 1.3 million views, 14.7K Retweets and Comments. Another video followed a pattern of conspiracy theories denouncing mask use as [harmful](#) or a [systematic "deep state" effort](#) to control the public. Other videos with similar messaging have been spreading this week on Facebook by a community of anti-vaccination activists:



On July 9, Russ Diamond, a Pennsylvania state representative with over 1,300 followers on Twitter, tweeted [combative messages to journalists and misleading posters](#) questioning the safety of face masks for children:



Tweets that fit our methodology and included the keyword “Fauci” (Dr. Anthony Fauci) indicated an overall 69% negative sentiment during the reporting period. These trends followed recent criticism of Fauci from the White House, including reports that the President has not received a [briefing](#) regarding the COVID-19 crisis from Dr. Fauci since early June and an appearance on [FOX News](#) in which the President admitted Fauci had made “many mistakes.”

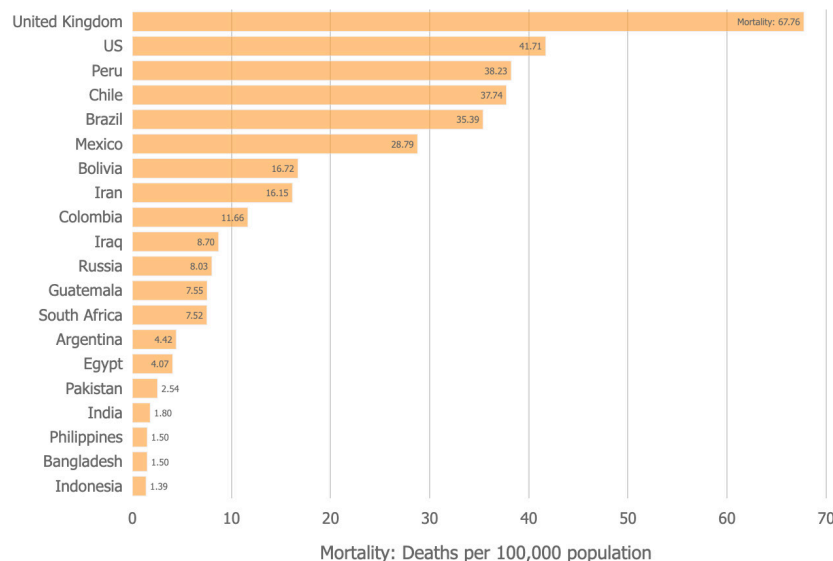


Mortality rates

During the reporting period, President Donald Trump made two false claims about U.S. mortality rates. These tweets had the highest reach of all tweets searched using our methodology. On July 6, he [tweeted](#): “Why does the Lamestream Fake News Media REFUSE to say that China Virus deaths are down 39%, and that we now have the lowest Fatality (Mortality) Rate in the World. They just can’t stand that we are doing so well for our Country!”

And on July 7, he [tweeted](#) ““COVID-19 (China Virus) Death Rate PLUNGES From Peak In U.S.” A Tenfold Decrease In Mortality. The Washington Times @WashTimes Valerie Richardson. We have the lowest Mortality Rate in the World. The Fake News should be reporting these most important facts, but they don’t!” On July 8, he [retweeted](#) his July 7 tweet.

Mortality rates have decreased as we have improved measures to shelter the elderly and take care of the ill, but U.S. mortality rates are still extremely high: the Hopkins data shows that U.S. mortality rates are [9th highest worldwide](#). In fact, when looking at countries that are most impacted by the pandemic, U.S. mortality rates are [the second highest](#) of any nation.



Skepticism and systematic campaigns against a COVID-19 vaccine

As the development of a COVID-19 vaccine continues, a number of disinformation campaigns have emerged against the World Health Organization, Big Pharma, and billionaire Bill Gates for planning or creating the virus to profit from the development and distribution of a vaccine. These claims are particularly prominent within the anti-vaxxer community on Facebook and YouTube and have been substantiated by claims by prominent figureheads on Twitter.

In recent months, environmental lawyer and activist Robert Kennedy Jr., who is noted as a vaccine skeptic, was [quoted](#) by conspiracy news sites as a prominent figurehead exposing “Big Pharma” and questioning the safety of vaccines. Kennedy has publicly accused Bill Gates of [controlling](#) the World Health Organization and has substantiated theories that Gates and Dr. Anthony Fauci both aim to [profit](#) from a COVID-19 vaccine. Following conspiracy theories propagated by the [Plandemic](#) documentary earlier this summer, [Bill Gates](#) has become the target of many conspiracy theories,

including one propagated by Kennedy in an [op-ed](#) suggesting that the World Health Organization is a marketing arm of Gates' vaccine empire.

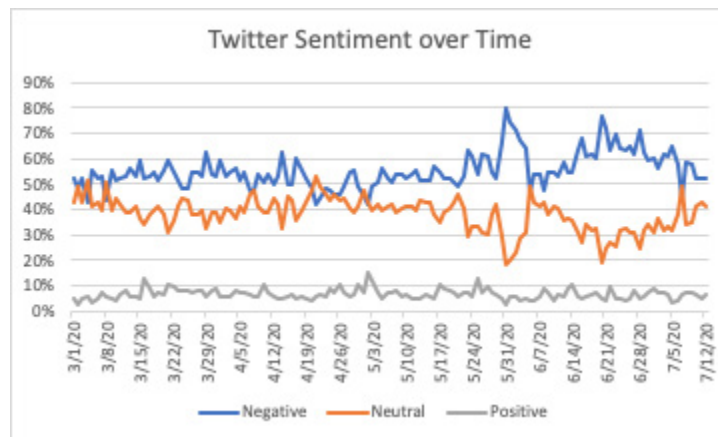
Our analysis has also revealed overall [apprehension](#) and fear among Americans regarding the prospective uptake of a COVID-19 vaccine. A recent poll indicated that most [Americans](#) say they will not take a vaccine, when it is produced. This week, rapper Kanye West [referred](#) to vaccines as "the mark of the beast" and substantiated claims that a COVID-19 vaccine was an attempt to "put chips inside of us." On July 4, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan gave a three-hour [speech](#) about the [danger of vaccines](#), imploring Africans and African-Americans to be wary of "their medications."

Editor-in-Chief of Uncover DC, Tracy Beanz (219.2K followers), shared a [thread](#) (3K retweets, 1.8K likes) and played to fears that if one were to refuse treatment or vaccine, the state health department would have the authority to vaccinate you "By any means necessary". Comments in response to the tweet used terms like "unconstitutional" and "illegal" and challenged theories regarding vaccination.

Twitter Statistics

Of 6.71M tweets regarding mentioning COVID-19 testing, vaccines, treatment or mask use, overall sentiment was negative (56%). This was a decrease in negativity, compared to the previous time period of June 26 - July 3, during which the overall sentiment was negative (61%). Top locations for tweets were the United States (5.6M) and the United Kingdom (574K).

Our analysis shows that negative sentiment has fluctuated since the start of the pandemic:



Methodology

Using open-source investigation techniques, FAS evaluated the volume of social media interactions regarding coronavirus using Twitter posts and digital news articles published between July 3-12. The breakdown of the following information was primarily focused on results in the United States, but also provided data from other English-speaking contexts, including Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. FAS analysts evaluated the volume of tweets that emerged over time, the reach of trending tweets, and overall public sentiment. The search term used to identify highest reaching tweets were ("COVID", "virus", OR "coronavirus") AND ("testing" OR "cases" OR "test" OR "rate") OR ("Vaccine" OR "treatment") OR ("mask" OR "masks").



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