

## Why don't government rules make sense?

COVID-19 – the excuse for the destruction of neoliberalism

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@thinkingslow1

(v 1.1)

We started our COVID obsession with the realisation that the results of a real life unmitigated pandemic onboard the Diamond Princess led to an outcome that did not match the model predictions made by Professor Ferguson in his famous paper of 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The paper predicted 510,000 deaths in the UK and 2,200,000 deaths in the United States.

We thought that once it became clear that the threat was exaggerated the policy response would be quickly wound-down. By way of illustration, Professor Levitt estimated that deaths in the UK would be around 60,000 using his observations. The key point of his analysis was that this was carried out in February and could easily have been used to compare to estimates produced by Imperial college.

We were wrong in assuming that government rules would quickly be relaxed based on evidence that lockdowns (national and local) do not have any real benefit. Professor Giesecke called such policies “all but futile”<sup>1</sup>.

We all understand that we were lied to over the purpose of the lockdown, which we were told was to flatten the curve in order to prevent hospital capacity being overwhelmed. The absolute peak of ICU utilisation in the UK was 50% between 5<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> April 2020 even more astoundingly the peak utilisation for acute beds freed up for COVID patients was 29% (71% empty) on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2020. Even under the most cautious approach, it was clear by 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020 that the lockdown should be lifted since the NHS was not in any sense overwhelmed<sup>2</sup>.

As we now know, we were then given a number of new and evolving metrics from the government and members of SAGE;

- R0 had to be less than 1, it is a very difficult measure, but this has been below 1 for several months (possibly apart from local pockets).
- SAGE members then complained that with cases running at 8,000 cases per day (they were never that high) it was too risky to lift lockdown, that rate is now around 750 per day for the UK but areas of England are still locked down<sup>3</sup>.

None of this makes sense as the cost of lockdown in terms of lives lost are stupendous. We have covered this in various other papers but anyone with sense realises that thousands are dying due to lack of treatment for cancer and cardiovascular diseases, jobs are being lost at the rate of hundreds of thousands per month and we are accumulating debt at billions per month. Every day of lockdown and related uncertainty ensures that economic activity which was suspended becomes closed.

Most recently, the idea of zero COVID seems to be gaining traction, again with no account being taken of the cost of such a policy or even its feasibility.

We have been fighting this situation for months along with several other commentators. As every week passes the scale of the overreaction becomes increasingly clear and yet the prospect of lifting all of the restrictions drifts off into the future. Some key data points on COVID from studies;

- The years of life lost from COVID will likely be around (or less than) the 1957 and 1968 influenza outbreaks<sup>4</sup>.

- There is no known correlation between lockdown and mortality outcomes<sup>5</sup>.
- The infection fatality ratio could be around 0.26% (0.1% to 0.41%) - so 99.74% will survive with deaths concentrated in elderly with pre-existing health conditions.

The explanation that politicians are simply innumerate is possibly not complete.

Let's start with zero COVID, that is now considered "good" (New Zealand) and Sweden killing people with herd immunity is "bad". The best place to look at the endorsement of zero COVID is to visit the World Economic Forum site.

<https://www.weforum.org/covid-action-platform>

As we started to interact with individuals for whom no amount of lockdown was ever enough, we identified some common characteristics;

- Individuals who are strongly in favour of Big State and correspondingly dismissive of personal liberty;
- People who do not like the neo-liberal system.
- People who have limited grasp of numbers including no interest in understanding trade-offs.

If you look through the WEF site, you will find a very strong rejection of neo-liberalism, this quote from Nabil Ahmed, head of executive strategy Oxfam International is illustrative;

"Change is coming. Neoliberalism faces its reckoning. But the old way will not die fast."

There are many such quotes and opinions.

Nobody believes that neo-liberalism is anywhere near perfect and its recent failure to generate meaningful growth in real wages and the questions of inequality must be addressed. Having said that, any plan that starts with the destruction of the existing order is unlikely to pan out well for anybody.

A particularly worrying feature of the WEF site is a document which lists technologies useful for "public space monitoring" including a number of monitoring methods developed by China, Moscow and United Arab Emirates to apply to the population.

In addition to the idea of the Big State there is a corresponding fixation with vaccines and calls from some politicians to have the G20 spend USD 10.4 billion on vaccines<sup>6</sup>. Around 10 x more that the UK spends on cancer research.

Bringing this back to the United Kingdom, we transferred a considerable amount of decision making to university professors. Perhaps the most contentious group is the Scientific Pandemic Influenza group in Behaviours (SPI-B). Whilst we still have democracy, we were still able to view the minutes of their meeting where they recommended;

**Appendix B: APEASE evaluation grid for options to rapidly increase general social distancing**

Option	Evaluation criteria (APEASE)					
	Acceptability	Practicability	Effectiveness	Affordability	Spill-over effects	Equity
1. Provide clear, precise, credible guidance about specific behaviours	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH IF ACCOMPANIED BY OTHER OPTIONS	HIGH	POSITIVE	UNCERTAIN
2. Use media to increase sense of personal threat	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH IF ACCOMPANIED BY OTHER OPTIONS	HIGH	COULD BE NEGATIVE	UNCERTAIN
3. Use media to increase sense of responsibility to	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH IF ACCOMPANIED BY OTHER	HIGH	POSITIVE	UNCERTAIN

For us, this is a fairly amazing acknowledgement that a government would deliberately scare a population in order to increase compliance with the government’s rules, especially as the extreme rules (lockdown) were based on a model that is largely wrong. The process of scaring people is unethical and we imagine that it is also to some extent irreversible.

The extent of the misinformation is that peoples’ assessment of the fatality of COVID is 6% (even as high as 10%) compared to a real value which will likely be between 0.1% and 0.41%<sup>7</sup>. This means that in general people have overestimated the risks of dying from COVID by a factor of 20, making it impossible to make rationale choices, whilst at the same time being happy to surrender all liberty.

We happened to look at two outspoken participants of SPI-B, Professors Stephen Reicher and Susan Michie.

During the crisis, Professor Reicher co-authored a book called Together-Apart, essentially it is some form of collectivist manifesto, which develops the theme that "we must sweep away a century of anti-collectivism"<sup>8</sup>.

The second individual, Professor Michie is a senior figure in the Communist party of Britain, their stated objective is “putting an end to capitalism and replacing it with a socialist society”<sup>9</sup>.

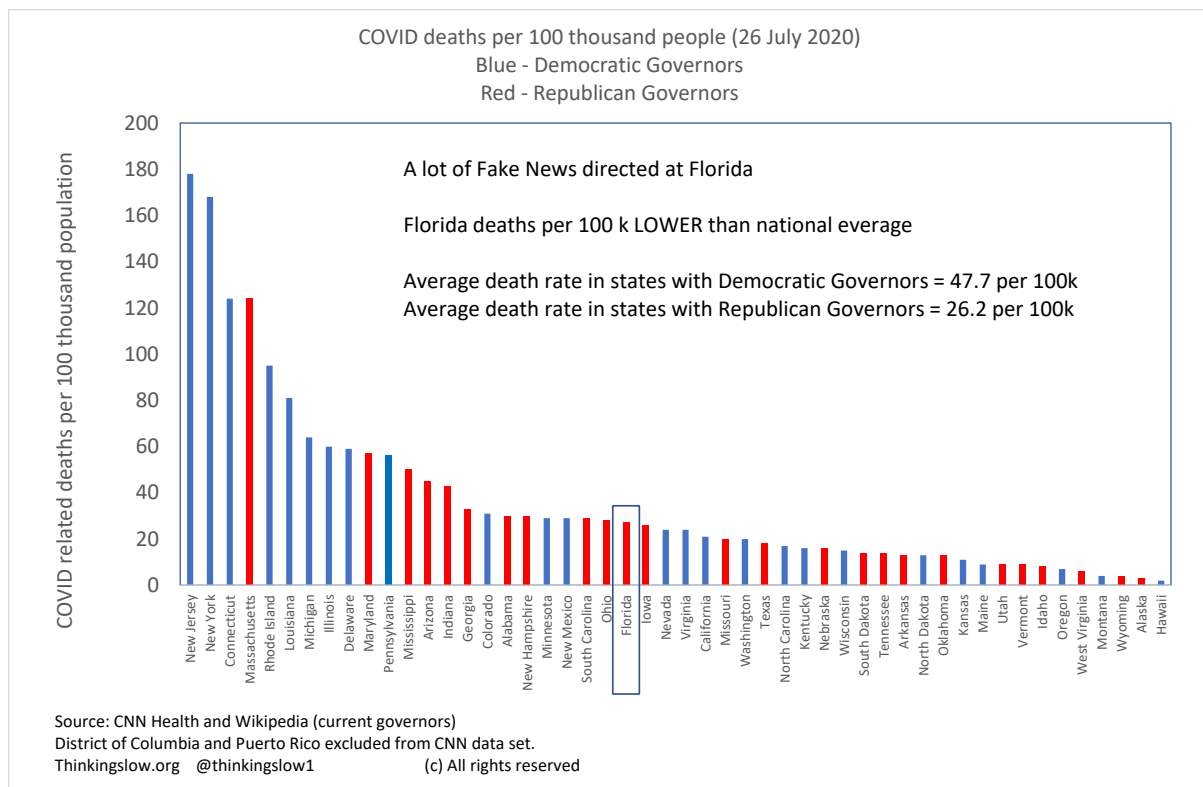
Both individuals are politically active and have far left worldviews, is it possible that those attitudes do not impact their advice of how to modify the behaviour of the British people? We think not and do not believe it makes sense to have political activists involved in policy advice without careful monitoring.

Ron Paul identified the forces behind coronavirus as “hysteria and special interests”, it is clear that big pharma and big tech benefit greatly from continued lockdown and the compulsive search for a vaccine. Together with the vehemently anti neo-liberal views above, this would represent a strong constituency for keeping lockdown in place, in some shape or form.

Just a couple of words about the media, which is supposedly a fourth estate and plays some kind of balancing role. During the COVID crisis the media (with some heroic exceptions; Unherd, Spiked and Spectator) has been awful. It is clear that headlines need to be eye catching to attract viewers, but much of the mainstream media has been very dishonest, producing stories that support the narrative that;

- Lockdowns should be earlier/harder/longer and
- States with Republican governors (Florida, Arizona and Texas) are killing people through incompetency.

In terms of the political bias of the second bullet, we leave you with this chart;



## Conclusions

Much of what UK politicians are doing makes no sense with various last-minute random restrictions with random durations. In terms of “the science”, that has been increasingly against lockdown and some extraordinarily well qualified epidemiologists (and others) have expressed varying degrees of concern including; Professors Giesecke, Gupta, Dingwall, Friston, Bhakdi, Sikora, Dr John Lee etc. In addition, seemingly many front-line doctors have expressed their concerns (and been taken down from social media).

We believe that a simple inability to comprehend the coronavirus on the part of our political leaders (all flavours) is only a partial explanation. A more complete explanation requires identifying those who could be in favour of maintaining a partial lockdown despite the astronomical costs. This note identifies some possible beneficiaries of lockdown on a cui bono basis.

## Where does that leave people

Watching Ron Paul<sup>10</sup>, we think that he summarised this nicely that we are facing a significant fork in the road. For the reasons given above the old normal is probably gone. There is going to be a new normal, which we as conservatives (small c) are sure will be worse than old normal, the question is by how much. The fork in the road is;

- a) COVID is the excuse to finally depose the individual and move us into some form of intolerant, collectivist society. This requires the final destruction of the private sector and promotion of identify politics in order to ensure people are divided and cannot join forces to oppose oppressive government (largely already happened).
- b) The small c conservatives understand how high the stakes really are and actively oppose the Big State agenda and engage with sectors where far left theory has flourished, generally

government funded areas with poor governance structures – a few universities and some non-governmental organisations.

We understood perhaps two months ago that hard data and a growing body of very credible epidemiologists are having limited impact on policy and politicians and there is a need for people (like us) to push for a political solution using democratic processes. It won't happen by itself and there are likely several key special interests that want the lockdown to move to become a largely permanent feature.

These are some thoughts that attempt to rationalise what is otherwise a very irrational situation.

Many thanks

Thinking Slow

Most of the links to the technical sources that are used for this paper are on our website [thinkingslow.org](http://thinkingslow.org), a full set of footnotes will be added in v 2.0.

If you found any of the above interesting them please retweet and look at the documents on our website. We are always happy to hear from anyone that would like to assist us in producing tweets or writing material at [info@thinkingslow.org](mailto:info@thinkingslow.org).

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31035-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31035-7/fulltext)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/readying-the-nhs-and-adult-social-care-in-england-for-covid-19/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/29/covid-19-spreading-too-fast-to-lift-uk-lockdown-sage-adviser>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(20\)30484-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(20)30484-9/fulltext)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2589-5370%2820%2930208-X>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.lse.ac.uk/News/News-Assets/PDFs/2020/FINAL-LETTER-2-to-G20-leaders.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cebm.net/covid-19/global-covid-19-case-fatality-rates/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/together-apart/book275359>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.comunistparty.org.uk/programme/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://youtu.be/rTfZyRrADdA>