

What Will Not Recover: Government

What becomes of government credibility in the post-lockdown period? There are thousands of politicians in this country for whom this is a chilling question, even a taboo topic.

The reputation of government was already at postwar lows before the lockdowns, with only 17 percent of the American public saying that they trusted government to do the right thing. That was before the federal government and 43 state governors decided to turn a virus into a pretext for totalitarian closures, lockdowns, travel restrictions, and home quarantines of most people.

The lockdowns and random policy impositions by government will surely contribute to take the confidence number down to rock bottom. Already, loss of confidence has [devastated](#) consumer sentiment. No matter how many headlines blame the virus for all the carnage, the reality is all around us: it's the government's response that bears the responsibility.

In 2006, the great epidemiologist Donald Henderson [warned](#) that if government pursued coercive measures to control a virus, the result would be a "loss of confidence in government to manage the crisis." The reason is that the measures do not work. Further, the attempt to make them work turns a manageable crisis into a catastrophe.

Prophetic.

So much so, in fact, that this might account for why "[14 Days to Flatten the Curve](#)" has stretched to five months in which the Bill of Rights has been a dead letter, many are still locked out of their gyms, we can't go to the movies, and we are forced to dance around each other in public spaces as if every person might be carrying a deadly pathogen.

No society can function this way, not if it desires prosperity and peace.

Why do the lockdowns and restrictions still last? Governments around the country never had an exit strategy. They locked down with no sense of what would be next, either for the policy or for the virus. If infections go down, they credit the lockdowns, in which case they cannot unlock. If infections are still high, that's also a case for locking down. If the virus isn't there, that's yet another case for locking down.

If coercive stringency is the way to control and finally suppress the virus (impossible), there is no exit strategy except for the arrival of a vaccine, which itself doesn't promise lasting immunity, if we even get a safe one.

We are besotted with these public health authorities and government officials who made a terrible, life-wrecking error. They can't admit it because the devastation has been so complete. It's no easier to dial that back than it was for the U.S. government to admit their terrible mistakes in Iraq and Afghanistan. They keep having to do the stupid thing – whether keeping troops in for 20 years or maintaining travel restrictions and mask mandates in the present case – in order to pretend as if they were right all along.

It took almost 20 years after the Iraq invasion for the conventional wisdom to emerge that it was a mistake. Surely it will not take that long for people to realize what a disaster governments have made this time around.

So where does the public stand now on lockdowns? It's not easy to find reliable polls. We do know that 3 in 4 Americans are willing to [tell pollsters](#) that the country is headed in the wrong direction. In addition, [one poll](#) records about half the public rating the federal government as poor in its response, while state governments don't do much better, with half the public calling the response fair to poor.

Still, these polls rarely ask the right question. What we want to know is how people feel about having their rights violated. I took a Twitter poll regarding people's opinions on lockdown skepticism. What percentage of Americans no longer believe in coercive measures of disease suppression? The results were equally divided: 20 percent, 40 percent, 60 percent, and 80 percent.

We know anecdotally that ever more people are ignoring the limits on gatherings and forced separation measures. *The Wall Street Journal's* Allysia Finley went so far as [to say](#) that the whole country has become a Speakeasy, with brazen disobedience wherever it is possible.

Meanwhile, I can find no politician in America who backed the lockdown has had the spine to stand up and say: "I was completely wrong. I panicked. I violated your rights. I'm tremendously sorry. I do not deserve to stay in office even one more day. I resign."

In the long run, governments need to seek the consent of the governed. They can rule through police powers only in the event of panic. It works for a while. But when people start thinking normally again, the scale of what has happened will dawn on people. Then there could be hell to pay.

If the lockdowns really had lasted 14 days only, it would have gone down in American history as a legendary disaster. But five full months of this nonsense? What does that mean for the future? The [blowback](#) will be the dominant issue in American life for many years to come. If we ever do get a new crop of leaders who are firmly committed against lockdowns, brought in by a [new anti-lockdown movement](#), they could start serious investigations and hearings. They will be commissions and reports on precisely how all this came to be and why it all lasted so long.

Even so, it could be a generation or two before the

credibility of government and public health authority returns. And as Harvard infectious disease professor [Martin Kulldorf](#) warns, “When the fog clears, one of the consequences of the pandemic will be **public distrust in science and scientists.**”

And rightly so. Professor Kulldorf has distinguished himself for his brave anti-lockdown stance. The same cannot be said of many others. Many in his position have weighed in for coercive measures without the slightest concern for what this could mean for regular people and with zero actual knowledge as to whether their recommended plans had any hope for actually working. This is the height of intellectual irresponsibility.

Still, even if ignorant medicine men like Anthony Fauci and his friends spout off for shutting down society, in the end it is governments that bear responsibility for carrying out their recommendations. It is they, and not the scientists, that deserve the brunt of public anger that will be unleashed in the days, months, and years ahead.

In the very early days of the pandemic, Henry Kissinger obliquely warned of this in an article for *The Wall Street Journal*. “When the COVID-19 pandemic is over,” [he wrote](#) on April 3, “many countries’ institutions will be perceived as having failed. Whether this judgment is objectively fair is irrelevant. The reality is the world will never be the same after the coronavirus.”

Let us hope the lesson is imparted. No matter the crisis, government action is destined to make it worse.

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