

Twenty Lessons From 2020's Fallout

This year has been a shock. Here is an early sketch of what I think I've learned.

1. Governments are fully capable of doing the unthinkable, and doing so suddenly with no exit plan, little consideration of cost, and a callous disregard for individual rights.
2. The U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights are largely irrelevant when governments declare an emergency.
3. The business lobby is far less powerful than I had previously assumed.
4. Many politicians care more about their personal power than public opinion.
5. People in general are less committed to their freedoms than I had previously believed.
6. Economic understanding is rare.
7. There is no such thing as settled science; scientists disagree, sometimes radically, and many times for political reasons.
8. The structure of law and the regime are fully capable of dramatic and even overnight change.
9. Influence is mysterious: the media report what fits their preferred narrative and ignore everyone with a different view.
10. Professional credentials are useful but not decisive for any argument: in a crisis they are weaponized.
11. People under duress, in the shock of lockdown, are capable of stunning lies and cruelty.
12. Most people haven't the slightest clue about how to think about statistics and hard science; for many people, data are mere abstractions.
13. Hardly any political lobby or interest group genuinely

cares about the poor, working classes, or marginalized groups, at least not enough to put their interests above a political agenda.

14. Very often people's proclaimed "principles" are nothing but social signalling devices.
15. The propagation of truth is burdened by disadvantages relative to error and lies.
16. Known science is fully capable of vanishing in one generation.
17. No matter how seemingly intelligent and impressive are our institutions, they are neither created nor managed by equally intelligent people.
18. Markets are adaptive beyond anything I ever imagined possible.
19. Psychological health for most people is bound up with possessing rights and freedoms.
20. Individual moral courage is the society's most precious treasure, as rare as it is powerful.

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