

BROWNSTONE

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I N S T I T U T E

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ARTICLES OF INQUIRY:  
THE ROLE OF MEDIA

## THE ROLE OF MEDIA

The media, both traditional and social media, had an outsized role during the pandemic in pushing the US government's Covid response and defending the resulting coercive measures, including lockdowns, school closures, mask and vaccine mandates, while ignoring collateral damage and treating skeptics of these measures as having bad motivations. Their result was a one-sided, often factually misleading or unsubstantiated narrative on important issues concerning science, economics, and health, for the better part of two years.

This has had a chilling effect on information flows and journalism, and it dra-

curity, but the problem began much earlier and continues to this day. And yet even as of this writing, many attempts to share science-based articles on Facebook are met with discouraging warnings, while users of Twitter and LinkedIn are threatened with account deletion.

Many crucial questions remain about precisely how this happened and is still happening. These are in need of investigation. Among the questions: To what extent did the media cooperate with the government in the effort to drive one narrative and suppress competing ones? Were there sociological reasons? Financial? Was it

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This report reviews the main issues that require investigation, cites examples of the bias and censorship, presents a timeline of pro-lockdown media coverage, and suggests an agenda for more extensive investigation.

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matically distorted public understanding in many areas from science to health to economics to the proper role of media in a free society. A consequence of this shift in the ethos of the media, [trust has declined dramatically](#) to only 16% of the total population with trust in papers and only 11% with trust in TV, with partisan differences in the way people answer pollsters.

In addition, cancellation and censorship have been institutionalized in legacy media culture in a way that has been injurious to the free exchange of ideas as well and public health messaging in general. This culminated in the creation (and almost immediate dissolution) of a Disinformation Board at the Department of Homeland Se-

purely a case of the free press acquiescing to government control or imagining themselves to be part of the regime, in which case what has become of the First Amendment? Is it right that legacy media alone should be the arbiter of science and admissible opinion?

This report reviews the main issues that require investigation, cites examples of the bias and censorship, presents a timeline of pro-lockdown media coverage, and suggests an agenda for more extensive investigation. The authors hope this report can serve as a useful guide for a deeper look into this unprecedented use of media power to shape the pandemic response.

## MEDIA BIAS

The pro-lockdown bias was unbearably obvious throughout the pandemic, from the initial celebrations of China's lockdowns through the fomenting of disease panic to the adoring coverage of Anthony Fauci to the brutal condemnations of anti-lockdown protests to the predictions of doom for red-state openings. Policy pathways other than closures and lockdowns were treated as dangerous and even seditious. Though lockdowns, closures, quarantines of the well, man-

dates, and the rest of these "nonpharmaceutical interventions" were without precedent in the history of public health, media messaging in the United States tended to treat them all as normal, expected, and clearly consistent with science even when the opposite was true.

A study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research ([Why Is All COVID-19 News Bad News?](#)) documented that in 2020:

Ninety one percent of stories by U.S. major media outlets are negative in tone versus fifty four percent for non-U.S. major sources and sixty five percent for scientific journals. The negativity of the U.S. major media is notable even in areas with positive scientific developments including school re-openings and vaccine trials. Media negativity is unresponsive to changing trends in new COVID-19 cases or the political leanings of the audience. U.S. major media readers strongly prefer negative stories about COVID-19, and negative stories in general. Stories of increasing COVID-19 cases outnumber stories of decreasing cases by a factor of 5.5 even during periods when new cases are declining. Among U.S. major media outlets, stories discussing President Donald Trump and hydroxychloroquine are more numerous than all stories combined that cover companies and individual researchers working on COVID-19 vaccines.

- What was it about the US media in particular that drove this result?
- Can this be wholly explained by the need for attention and clicks or was there more going on?
- Was this coordinated or merely a reflection of pre-existing bias?
- How much interest did the CDC and NIH take in media outcomes and what hand did they play?
- Were there additional stakeholders outside US media and government (e.g., foreign and/or economically motivated entities) who had a vested interest in pressuring US media toward this type of negative coverage, and did US media succumb to such pressures?
- How much influence did the Trusted News Initiative, founded by the BBC in 2019, have in dictating media outcomes?

## FACT CHECKERS

The fact-checking industry, a recent concoction devised by political actors, functions as a reinforcement mechanism for corporate press and Big Tech Covid narratives. Of all the topics available to fact check, it was the pandemic response that unleashed the most focused effort. Moreover, the fact-checking industry provided media advocates with pseudo legitimacy to claim that opponents of lockdowns and other NPIs were spreading misinformation.

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- [PolitiFact \(Poynter Institute\)](#)
  - [FactCheck.org](#) & [SciCheck](#)
  - [FlackCheck](#)
  - [Washington Post Fact Checker](#)
  - [Snopes](#)
  - [Fact Check from Duke Reporters' Lab](#)
  - [Media Bias / Fact Check](#)
  - [NPR FactChecks](#)
  - [Reuters Fact Check](#)
  - [AFP Fact Check](#)
  - [USA Today Fact Check](#)
  - [AP Fact Check](#)
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Google Trends suggests the longest running spike in “fact check” searches has been during the pandemic. This served as a form of back-door censorship: we are not censoring; we are merely blocking false information based on facts alone. Moreover, the fact-checking was applied almost exclusively to the opponents of official government policy. The policy itself and its proponents’ statements were never “fact-checked,” regardless of how little their policy was supported by actual facts.

Early on in the pandemic, one author of this report was subjected to this with an article covering the 1968-1969 flu pandemic and how the music festival Woodstock

took place regardless. The article was initially viral and then “fact-checked” as true. Just a few days later, a fact check labeled the article as “mostly true,” then “partially false,” then “mostly false,” and finally “false.” The basis of the change was dubious at best (having to do with the meaning of the phrase “middle of the pandemic”) and clearly an attempt to suppress content that argued in favor of traditional public health approaches.

All of this occurred within the space of ten days. Subsequently, social media algorithms based on “fact-checking” demoted the article and it went from viral to nearly invisible in the course of several weeks.

On the other hand, when then [CDC Director Robert Redfield said in September 2020](#) that face masks offered more protection than vaccines could, his comments were published and amplified with no factual concerns whatsoever.

The funding and management of the fact-checking industry needs a thorough investigation:

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### Questions:

- What are the institutions behind these fact-checkers?
  - What training do fact-checkers get?
  - Who determines which fact-checkers to use?
  - Who decides what constitutes facts and on what basis are such decisions made?
  - How do fact-checkers report on emerging facts?
  - Why were fact-checkers making determinations on subjective issues?
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## BIG TECH

Meta (Facebook), Google (via YouTube), and Twitter wield incredible power in influencing public opinion. Over the course of the pandemic, the social media public square corporations worked in tandem with powerful governments, health agencies, and the traditional media to become the arbiters of health and truth.

This was true from the outset of the pandemic. On March 15, 2020, the Sunday before the Trump/Fauci/Birx press conference that announced lockdowns, Mark Zuckerberg sent the following email to Anthony Fauci. The response from an NIH staffer follows.

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**From:** Mark Zuckerberg (b) (6)  
**Sent:** Sunday, March 15, 2020 12:18 PM  
**To:** Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] (b) (6)>  
**Subject:** Thanks and ideas

Tony:

I wanted to send a note of thanks for your leadership and everything you're doing to make our country's response to this outbreak as effective as possible. I also wanted to share a few ideas of ways we could help you get your message out, but I understand you're incredibly busy, so don't feel a need to reply unless these seem interesting.

This isn't public yet, but we're building a Coronavirus Information Hub that we're going to put at the top of Facebook for everyone (200+ million Americans, 2.5 billion people worldwide) with two goals: (1)

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make sure people can get authoritative information from reliable sources and (2) encourage people to practice social distance and give people ideas for doing this using internet tools. This will be live within the next 48 hours.

As a central part of this hub, I think it would be useful to include a video from you because people trust and want to hear from experts rather than just a bunch of agencies and political leaders. This could be done in a number of formats if you're open to it. Probably best would be recording a Q&A where you answer people's top questions, but we'd be open to other formats too.

I'm also doing a series of livestreamed Q&As with health experts to try to use my large following on the platform (100 million followers) to get authoritative information out as well. I'd love to have you do one of these Q&As. This could be the video we put in the Coronavirus Hub or it could be a different thing that we distribute separately, but I think it could be effective as well.

Finally, (b) (4)

Again, I know you're incredibly busy, so don't feel the need to respond if this doesn't seem helpful. If it's easy to talk live, give me a call anytime on my mobile phone: (b) (6).

Thanks again for everything you're doing.

Mark

# BIG TECH

**From:** Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E]  
**Sent:** Tue, 17 Mar 2020 00:23:16 +0000  
**To:** Billet, Courtney (NIH/NIAID) [E]  
**Cc:** Folkers, Greg (NIH/NIAID) [E]; Conrad, Patricia (NIH/NIAID) [E]; Stover, Kathy (NIH/NIAID) [E]; Routh, Jennifer (NIH/NIAID) [E]  
**Subject:** RE: offer from Mark Zuckerberg

I will write to or call Mark and tell him that I am interested in doing this. I will then tell him that you will get for him the name of the USG point of contact. I agree it should be Bill Hall who could then turf to the White House Comms if he wishes

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**From:** Billet, Courtney (NIH/NIAID) [E] (b) (6) >  
**Sent:** Monday, March 16, 2020 6:53 PM  
**To:** Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] <(b) (6) >  
**Cc:** Folkers, Greg (NIH/NIAID) [E] (b) (6) ; Conrad, Patricia (NIH/NIAID) [E] (b) (6); Stover, Kathy (NIH/NIAID) [E] (b) (6) >; Routh, Jennifer (NIH/NIAID) [E] (b) (6) >  
**Subject:** ASF: offer from Mark Zuckerberg

Per email below, Mark Zuckerberg has extended a few offers to do videos with you that we would be happy to seek clearance on for you to do, if you are amenable. These would have the weight and impact of television – really, more so. Please advise if you want to do and we will seek clearance with VP office and work with Patty to sort out the logistics.

But an even bigger deal is his offer (b) (4)  
The sooner we get that offer up the food-chain the better. I gave Bill Hall a heads-up about this opportunity and he is standing by to discuss this with HHS and WH comms, but I didn't want him to do anything without you being aware of the offer. Is it OK if I hand this aspect off to Bill to determine who the best point of contact would be so the Administration can take advantage of this offer, soonest?

Do you plan to call MZ? His cell number is in his message below.

This set the stage from everything that followed. Why would Facebook's management jump at the chance to become an official amplifier of Fauci's opinions at the expense of everyone else even at a time when scientists the world over were working on the unknown factors? Why did Zuckerberg so quickly decide that "social distancing" was the optimal response?

Government officials have routinely taken to urging [Facebook and other major platforms to censor](#) what they deemed "Covid misinformation" or competing scientific narratives. This led to a chilling effect on all Covid coverage, including and especially from sources and institutions that published questions about the Covid orthodoxy.

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## Questions:

- What was the role of WHO/CDC/NIH-NIAID in Big Tech (Facebook, Twitter, etc) censorship activities?
  - What conflicts of interest exist between government and Big Tech vis-a-vis regulations, antitrust, desire for censorship?
  - How did it come to be that these once-independent outlets so willingly signed on to become amplifiers of CDC/NIH priorities which were decisively in favor of every manner of public control?
  - How did this skewing of debate affect public perceptions of the virus and the politics surrounding the response?
  - PROPOSED: How big a role did inauthentic social media campaigns by domestic and/or foreign actors play in disseminating regime propaganda, and how big of an influence did this have on the near-lockstep response of many other countries? [what I'm referring to here is 50 Cent Army, botnets, TikTok, basically anything that isn't US-based Big Tech]
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## THE EXPERTS

The corporate media published its Covid reports and advocacy based on the “expert” opinions of a select group of “Public Health Experts,” the vast majority of whom adhered to some version of the zero-Covid perspective, in which the only possible way to deal with a pandemic is closures, stay-at-home orders, travel restrictions, masking, and eventually vaccine mandates.

Experts from top international institutions with hundreds of publications in epidemiology, public health and fields directly related to Covid were almost never given air time if they disagreed with zero-Covid, and their science and evidence-based views were completely blocked on mainstream media platforms.

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### Questions:

- How did mainstream media choose their Covid experts?
  - What criteria did they use to include or exclude top scientists from the reporting on Covid?
  - How much did the media rely on government scientists for expert opinions?
  - Did the media intentionally delegitimize and present as untrustworthy scientists and academics who disagreed with the zero-Covid policy?
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## THE OLIGARCH INFLUENCE

American oligarchs, particularly Bill Gates, were enormously influential in the media’s coverage of Covid-19. Gates is weaponizing his robust network of control and influence to pursue lockdowns and other forms of human subjugation measures ostensibly designed to fight a virus. Gates and the oligarchs displayed massive conflicts of interest in using their weight to lobby for Covid policy demands.

Jeff Bezos, the owner of the *Washington Post* that pursued lockdown advocacy, has seen his Amazon brand thrive during the Covid era. Gates, for his part, held a pre-IPO equity investment in BioNtech and other pharmaceutical companies that delivered a multi-billion dollar return to he and his foundation. We know for certain of Gates’ funding of IHME, but the funding also includes media (BBC, NPR, *Guardian*, *Der Spiegel*, *Le Monde*, CNN). He became for a time “[the world’s most powerful doctor](#).”

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### Questions:

- Why should anyone assume that billionaires know more about ‘science’ than doctors, scientists, and epidemiologists?
  - Why is Bill Gates and other super-wealthy individuals considered experts on Covid and relied on by the media to comment on Covid policies?
  - What conflicts of interest exist and how extensive are they?
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## FAILED INTERVENTIONS

After occasionally questioning the efficacy of measures like masks, lockdowns, and social distancing in the beginning, establishment media went into full lockdown/restriction mode in March 2020 and never looked back, even in the face of [increasing evidence](#) that none of the interventions worked to stop the spread. In fact, such measures were never expected to stop the spread of airborne respiratory viruses, with Covid measures merely providing a present-day, ongoing example of this well accepted, decades-old epidemiologic knowledge.

Along the way, they doggedly ran stories about “studies” (many published by the very government agencies that were imposing the zero-Covid measures) that clearly used cherry-picked data to attempt to show that masking and other restrictive measures and mandates worked to slow the spread of Covid.

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### Questions:

- Why did the media accept without question the abrupt and extreme reversal in March 2020 of decades-long accepted guidelines in epidemiology and public health that specifically excluded measures like quarantining healthy people and universal masking?
  - Why did media, almost without question, report high degrees of efficacy for population-wide, restrictive nonpharmaceutical interventions when the science in question was trending in the other direction?
  - Why were prominent, internationally recognized experts in epidemiology and public health who tried to publish research showing the ineffectiveness and harms of these NPIs silenced and even demonized in the mainstream media?
  - Why did almost no one in establishment media question the clearly problematic “studies” published by government agencies and supporters of government policies, while dismissing serious research conducted by top scientists around the world?
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## MEDIA CONFORMITY

The decisive early months of the Covid-19 pandemic saw remarkable unity on lockdowns and mask mandates from across the political landscape. Contrary to conventional belief that the pro-lockdown bias was only among self-identified liberals, the conservative press was also on board at least so long as Donald Trump was pushing lockdowns in the early stages. This only began to change in the summer of 2020 and leading to the election. The conservative press only got on board with the full skeptic position at the inauguration of the Biden administration.

Some examples: Rich Lowry, editor of National Review, for [Politico](#), wrote “The Absurd Case Against the Coronavirus Lockdown” on April 15, 2020. Brad Polumbo, later joining FEE, wrote in the [The Washington Examiner](#): “Why conservative critics are wrong to oppose local face mask mandates.” Later in the summer of 2020, the [Washington Post](#) [reported](#) (June 30, 2020): “And even Sean Hannity and Steve Doocy, two of Trump’s most fervent and loyal boosters on Fox News Channel, have joined the chorus of mask advocates.”

Non-establishment media also avoided Covid-related topics at some frequency, decreasing throughout the pandemic, effectively reinforcing establishment narratives. Notably, those dependent on ad revenue, or deeply dependent on their Facebook pages and Google traffic, made editorial decisions to avoid “controversial” Covid takes.

Over time, in the United States, lockdown and mandate advocacy has transformed into an exclusively partisan endeavor.



## MEDIA CONFORMITY

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### Questions:

- Why did the media uniformity in support of restrictive measures exist at the beginning?
  - Why were scientific and editorial dissidents on both left and right relegated to such small corners of opinion and even then subjected to takedowns and bans?
  - Why did conservative media outlets change course to some degree while left-leaning outlets went along with the administration's pro-lockdown narrative?
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## MEDIA DELEGITIMIZATION CAMPAIGNS

The media has waged a constant stream of propaganda campaigns against doctors and scientists who did nothing more than express dissent from the Covid orthodoxy. Instead of reporting on the wide landscape of solutions from within the scientific and medical communities, the media acted as arbiters of science itself. The corporate media established a track record of unanimous approval for lockdowners, while dismissing and stigmatizing legitimate inquiry.

There is no greater example of this than the press's concerted effort to delegitimize

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There is no greater example of this than the press's concerted effort to delegitimize the thousands of signatories to the Great Barrington Declaration, many of whom are the top epidemiology and public health experts at the world's most highly regarded institutions.

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## MEDIA DELEGITIMIZATION CAMPAIGNS

the thousands of signatories to the Great Barrington Declaration, many of whom are the top epidemiology and public health experts at the world's most highly regarded institutions. A media storm of outrage followed the issuance of that document on October 5, 2020.

A possible explanation is that the media were actively influenced by government officials, as suggested in the infamous Francis Collins and Anthony Fauci [exchange of emails](#) on the need for a "quick" and "devastating takedown" of the Declaration.

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### Questions:

- Why did mainstream media actively engage in attempts to delegitimize world-class scientists without addressing the scientific validity of those scientists' claims??
  - On what scientific basis did media choose one side over the other (pick any issue)?
  - What influence did government officials exert in pushing the bias against "dissenting" scientists and how involved were the NIH and CDC, particular Anthony Fauci, in attacking scientific challenges to their policies?
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## MEDIA IDEOLOGY

The media's spiral into hackery and hubris has reached unprecedented levels. Instead of seeing themselves as reporters of fact and those who "speak truth to power," many media outlets and personalities in the Covid era became self-proclaimed arbiters of truth and ideological "science" activists. The dispensing and enforcement of regime talking points became sacrosanct. Speaking truth to power went out the window in lieu of maintaining the power in the name of health. Auras of expertise were granted only to like-minded individuals, those who appeared to be allied with government policies, while anyone questioning those policies, even when supported by sound research and scientific analysis was branded not only as illegitimate but as ill-intentioned.

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### Questions:

- What happened to speaking truth to power and how did the most powerful of all, the administrative state, succeed in so effectively controlling public messaging?
  - Why did media feel the need to interpret the facts in ways that conformed to the administration's policies, instead of just reporting them?
  - Why did the media attack violators of Covid mandates when they gathered to protest the mandates themselves but not when they protested other important issues (like police brutality in the wake of the killing of George Floyd)?
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## CONSERVATIVE MEDIA SELF-CENSORSHIP

Throughout the pandemic, conservative media dependent on Big Tech platforms for readership were genuinely afraid to post anti-zero-Covid-policy stories they might have otherwise desired to publish. This Big Tech chilling effect caused important stories to be spiked or never completed in the first place. If it wouldn't pass Facebook's censors, it couldn't be done. In hindsight, too many conservative media outlets rely on Facebook and other Big Tech platforms for readership. While this is still the case, this is changing with the rise of alternative outlets like Truth Social, *Epoch Times*, *Getter*, and others. But these alternative venues occupy a much smaller part of the market.

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### Questions:

- What role did actual or potential Big Tech censorship play in story selection, especially in conservative media?
  - What stories were conservative venues hesitant to publish during the pandemic due to what could happen with censorship or threats of losing one's page and media reach?
  - To what extent is media reliance on advertising reach of major social media platforms skewing editorial content, thus further privileging government narratives to which these platforms tacitly or explicitly support?
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## MEDIA MANTRAS

The pandemic years saw the mass dissemination of clichés and slogans for easy public consumption that lent themselves toward acquiescence with dictates from public-health agencies. These easily memorable, bumper-sticker slogans reinforced and propagated the pro-lockdown policies, effectively serving as government propaganda. Many of them deployed euphemisms. Among them were:

- two weeks to stop the spread
- 14 days to flatten the curve
- killing grandma
- pandemic of the unvaccinated
- masks work
- we're all in this together
- vaccines save lives
- the greater good
- slow the spread
- stop the spread
- super-spreader events
- trust the science (follow the science)
- trust the experts
- anti-science
- if it only saves one life
- social distancing
- stay home, save lives
- community spread
- track, trace, isolate

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### Questions:

- Where did these mantras come from and who pushed them?
- Were there focus groups on which these were tested or media teams within government that worked with the private sector to make these slogans ubiquitous in the public sphere?
- What was the epidemiological thinking behind these and why did establishment media accept and repeat them so uncritically?

## PHARMA/MEDIA ADVERTISING

During the pandemic, Big Government, Big Pharma, and the corporate media became a nearly united cohesive unit. Pharmaceutical companies made enormous profits from the Covid vaccines, freely allocating advertising and marketing dollars for campaigns in the press. Because the vaccines were approved by the government under Emergency Use Authorization, they were rushed to market with much less oversight and research than would normally be the case.

Instead of investigating how this rush might have compromised the credibility and/or effectiveness of the vaccines, the media acted essentially as an advocacy arm for the government pushing the vaccines and, consequently, an advertising arm of the drug companies that made the vaccines.

This government-pharma-media partnership allowed pharmaceutical companies to become completely free from what should have been vital scrutiny of its products.

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### Questions:

- How much public money was spent in vaccine development?
- Why are there so few questions concerning the tax-funded financing of the development of a product by a private company, then mandating or attempting to mandate its use?
- How extensive is this conflict of interest between private pharmaceutical companies, government, and media advertising and grants of support by pharma and media venues?

## MEDIA TIMELINE

In order to understand the full role of the media in the unfolding disaster, we need a clearer picture of the course of events before they are entirely forgotten. Each of the following stories had an enormous role in shaping public understanding of the virus and the response.

**December 31, 2019:** First mention in China: Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, China, reported [a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan](#), Hubei Province. A novel coronavirus was eventually identified.

**January 2, 2020:** "[Viral Pneumonia Outbreak in Central Chinese City Ignites Panic.](#)"

**January 4, 2020:** In its first public statement on the outbreak, [WHO tweets](#), "China has reported to WHO a cluster of pneumonia cases—with no deaths—in Wuhan, Hubei Province."

**January 24, 2020:** [LAD Bible](#): "Footage Shows People Dropping To The Ground In China Amid Coronavirus Outbreak." (This footage ended up panicking many people even though it turned out to be fake news.)

**February 11, 2020:** Coronavirus fatality rate [estimated](#) by Imperial scientists: "According to the latest estimates from the team, from the MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis at Imperial, one percent of people with the disease will die from their infection."

**February 24, 2020:** World Health Organization [declines](#) to declare Covid a pandemic. It did [declare it](#) March 19, 2020.

**February 27, 2020:** *New York Times* [podcast](#) with lead virus reporter Donald G. McNeil Jr, later terminated, in which he announced in an interview with Michael Barbaro a "2% lethality rate of 50% of the country." The podcast included no discussion of known risk gradients. The entire ethos of the podcast was panic. To our knowledge, this is the first major media presentation that pushed disease panic over calm. The venue here is important.

**February 27, 2020:** *New York Times* publishes EcoHealth's Peter Daszak's [article](#) on Covid, arguing that it is of animal origin and wholly expected by many. It was later [revealed](#) that EcoHealth Alliance, from Daszak's personal relationship with Anthony Fauci, received a grant from NIH that was then channeled to the Wuhan institute of Virology.

**February 28, 2020:** Early pro-lockdown panic porn from the *New York Times*, had a major effect. "[To Take On the Coronavirus, Go Medieval on It](#)," By Donald G. McNeil Jr: "For the first time in more than a century, the world has chosen to confront a new and terrifying virus with the iron fist instead of the latex glove....Harsh measures horrify civil libertarians, but they often save lives, especially when they are imposed in the early days."

**March 6, 2020:** [SXSW shut down](#). A conference of 250,000 was abolished by the mayor of Austin, Texas, by executive fiat.

**March 8, 2020:** Fauci [says](#) "There's No Reason To Be Walking Around With A Mask." Until the Covid era, it was common knowledge that masks didn't stop or slow highly contagious respiratory viruses. When Fauci switched this position in early April 2020, masking as effective became the dominant narrative.

## MEDIA TIMELINE

**March 9, 2020:** *Time* Magazine: [The WHO Estimated COVID-19 Mortality at 3.4%. That Doesn't Tell the Whole Story.](#)

**March 16, 2020:** [Press conference](#); Fauci contradicts Trump on lockdowns. Media began adoring coverage of Fauci. Vox: [Trump finally had a competent press conference on the coronavirus](#): "He also gave the podium to experts, including respected public health officials like Anthony Fauci and Deborah Birx, to explain both the guidelines themselves and the evidence behind them. Trump even let them correct his comments — particularly that the guidelines will be reevaluated after 15 days, after Trump suggested they could be necessary until July or later."

**March 19, 2020:** [Rethinking the Coronavirus Shutdown](#) (*Wall Street Journal* going against the establishment media line) "No society can safeguard public health for long at the cost of its economic health." [FAIR](#) - WSJ op-ed: "Horrific."

**March 19, 2020:** [Coronavirus: The Hammer and the Dance](#): What the Next 18 Months Can Look Like, if Leaders Buy Us Time. This internal viral article presented the popular case for locking down to "slow the spread." The author, previously unknown, was head of an online academy that was rewarded handsomely in the lockdowns.

**April 4, 2020:** Coast Guard on a speedboat [chase down](#) a California surfer for violating lockdown orders. The man was portrayed by the media as a "Covidiot" despite the fact that he was literally alone in the ocean.

**April 11, 2020:** [The Costly Toll of Not Shutting Down Spring Break Earlier](#) (*New York Times*): An article that implicitly accepted the "zero-Covid" goal, raised tremendous alarm about Florida parties and gatherings, one that somehow failed to demonstrate the "costly toll."

**April 16, 2020:** '[The Absurd Case against the Coronavirus Lockdown.](#)' Rich Lowry of *National Review* drawing this mainstay of the conservative press into the lockdown cause.

**April 29, 2020:** "[They did it brutally, but brilliantly.](#)" ~ Donald G. McNeil Jr, lead virus reporter for *New York Times* on China's lockdowns, as quoted by National Public Radio, April 29, 2020.

**May 8, 2020:** This [Vanity Fair piece](#), titled, "If 80% of Americans Wore Masks, COVID-19 Infections Would Plummet, New Study Says," was among the first of many significant promises that if "everyone" or "enough" people wore masks in public, the pandemic would end. All of them were, of course, proven wrong with time as places that were heavily masked did no better than places that were not.

**May 25, 2020:** The *Lancet* [published](#) an analysis of government and media response to the 1957 and 1968 influenza pandemics, noting that frightening media headlines were rare. "For the most part newspapers seem to have behaved responsibly during the pandemic. Publishers were also reluctant to be seen to be stoking public fears..."

**June 3, 2020:** (9 days after George Floyd's death): [Open letter](#) advocating for an anti-racist public health response to demonstrations against systemic injustice occurring during the Covid-19 pandemic. Over 1,000 health professionals sign a letter saying, [Don't shut down protests using coronavirus concerns as an excuse.](#)

## MEDIA TIMELINE

**August 10, 2020:** [How China Controlled the Coronavirus](#). This one is from the *New Yorker*, and one among thousands of articles celebrating China's hard lockdown experience.

**September 8, 2020:** [Sturgis rally may have caused more than 250,000 new coronavirus cases, study finds](#) (NBC): "Economists researching the cost of a "superspreading event" estimate that the public health price tag of Sturgis could be more than \$12.2 billion."

**September 8, 2020:** [Officials slam study's claim that Sturgis rally was 'superspreader event'](#).

**September 17, 2020:** Fact check: [Post online misstates Sturgis Rally's coronavirus cases](#)  
A recent study found the rally could have resulted in 260,000 cases. But the study has been criticized and faced some questions about its conclusions and methodology and it is not yet peer-reviewed.

**October 4, 2020:** Release of the [Great Barrington Declaration](#), which argued for a focused protection strategy instead of lockdowns. The criticisms started early. From *Wired* on 10/7: "There is no 'scientific divide' over herd immunity."

**October 8, 2020:** Francis Collins of NIH writes Anthony Fauci [requesting](#) a "quick and devastating takedown" of the Great Barrington Declaration.

**October 31, 2020:** Release of a [Kansas mask "study"](#) that cherry-picked a time period before the Fall 2020 surge and purported to show mask mandates worked to slow the spread of Covid-19 in Kansas counties that implemented them vs those that did not. This study, later partially [debunked](#) and eventually [entirely discredited](#) by a more thorough study showing case and death rates in mask-mandated areas in the state to actually be higher than non-mandated, was widely cited by establishment media without question.

**November 5, 2020:** The *New York Times* [praised](#) Australia's zero-Covid policies by what turned out to be a vastly premature headline: "Australia has almost eliminated the coronavirus — by putting faith in science." Of course, Covid eventually spiked in Australia (and the other places headlines like this ran) and is spiking now despite lockdowns, mask-wearing, and near-universal vaccination rates.

**November 24, 2020:** *Washington Post* op-ed by alarmist Laura Wen: "[Most schools should close and stay closed through winter](#)." "Without a national mandate for regular testing and trusted reporting, we simply won't have evidence that there isn't greater transmission in schools."

**December 20, 2020:** "[Should Schools Stay Open? Not So Fast](#)." *US News and World Report*. "With uncertainties about the long-term effects of infection on an individual's health, the evidence of children being asymptomatic spreaders and the increase in pediatric cases recently, public pleas for closing schools have grown."

**March 3, 2021:** [President Joe Biden says Texas made "big mistake" by lifting mask mandate, suggests "Neanderthal thinking"](#). Was he right? From May 17, 2021: [Texas reports zero COVID deaths 2 months after Biden slammed 'Neanderthal thinking.'](#)

## MEDIA TIMELINE

**May 13, 2021:** Charles Cook for the *New York Post* on Rebekah Jones: "[How a fake whistleblower peddled lies about Florida's COVID deaths.](#)" May 2022 - vindication for DeSantis: "[IG report finds Rebekah Jones' claims of COVID-19 manipulation to be unfounded.](#)"

**June 9, 2021:** Dr. Anthony Fauci [claims](#) that criticisms of himself are "attacks on science."

**August 13, 2021:** FBI [lists](#) among terror threats those who warn of "the potential re-establishment of public health restrictions across the United States."

**December 17, 2021:** [Joe Biden warns of 'winter of death' for the unvaccinated](#), with Omicron 'here now and spreading.' "We are looking at a winter of severe illness and death for the unvaccinated — for themselves, their families and the hospitals they'll soon overwhelm," he said.

**Dec 23, 2021:** Fauci: [Large holiday gatherings are unsafe, even with COVID booster.](#) "There are many of these parties that have 30, 40, 50 people in which you do not know the vaccination status of individuals."

**January 5, 2022:** "[America doesn't have enough teachers to keep schools open.](#)" (Vox)

**Jan 10, 2022:** [Psaki Defends Biden's Description of 'Pandemic of the Unvaccinated.'](#) "There is no excuse, no excuse for anyone being unvaccinated. This continues to be a pandemic of the unvaccinated. So we got to make more progress," she said.

**January 25, 2022:** "[Schools should normalize pauses for coronavirus safety.](#)" (*Washington Post*).

**April 27, 2022:** "The [Disinformation Governance Board](#) (DGB) was an advisory board of the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS), announced on April 27, 2022. The board's stated function is to protect national security by disseminating guidance to DHS agencies on combating foreign misinformation, malinformation, and disinformation."

**May 18, 2022:** Disinformation Governance Board "paused."

**June 8, 2022:** Senator Charles Grassley [makes public via a DHS whistleblower](#) the vast agenda of the Disinformation Governance Board and its intention to work closely with social media companies to suppress dissent.

This report is published as an aid to the direction of questions to be addressed in future inquiries concerning what went wrong in the pandemic. Its primary contributing authors are Jordan Schachtel, Scott Morefield, and Jeffrey Tucker, while Debbie Lerman assisted with edits. It is produced by Brownstone Institute.



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ARTICLES OF INQUIRY:  
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