

Again, What Were the Benefits of Locking Down?

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The school closures, stay home orders, shuttering of businesses, banning of elective surgeries, closure of physical entertainment events, blocked flights, and sudden imposition of a central plan – it all happened suddenly from mid-March in the course of only a few days, and to enormous shock on the part of people who had previously taken their freedom and rights for granted.

Despite [enormous pressure](#) from Washington, eight states did not lock down or used a very light touch: South Dakota, North Dakota, South Carolina, Wyoming, Utah, Arkansas, Iowa, and Nebraska.

After 100 days, we are in a position for some preliminary analysis of the performance of locked down states versus those that did not lock down. AIER has [already published](#) the evidence that lockdown states had higher rates of unemployment.

[The Sentinel](#), a nonprofit news source of the Kansas Policy Institute, confirms our research by reporting the following data: locked down states have overall a 13.2% unemployment rate, while open states have a 7.8% unemployment rate.

Employment Change May 2019 to May 2020 - States Locked Down vs. States Not Locked Down							
Geography	Private Job Change	Private Rank	State Gov't. Change	Geography	Private Job Change	Private Rank	State Gov't. Change
States Locked Down by the Governor				States Locked Down by the Governor			
Alabama	-8.8%	11	0.1%	New Mexico	-12.4%	25	4.1%
Alaska	-13.1%	29	-5.9%	New York	-20.4%	48	-2.7%
Arizona	-6.3%	3	6.5%	North Carolina	-11.7%	24	-6.3%
California	-14.3%	35	-4.7%	Ohio	-14.3%	36	-7.6%
Colorado	-9.5%	14	5.7%	Oregon	-12.5%	26	1.0%
Connecticut	-15.4%	39	-3.0%	Pennsylvania	-15.7%	40	0.6%
Delaware	-17.6%	42	-1.8%	Rhode Island	-18.0%	44	5.4%
Florida	-10.7%	21	-4.9%	South Carolina	-9.9%	18	-7.9%
Georgia	-9.7%	16	-5.9%	Tennessee	-9.2%	13	-4.4%
Hawaii	-22.1%	50	-19.3%	Texas	-7.9%	7	-5.7%
Idaho	-6.0%	2	-3.3%	Vermont	-19.3%	47	-5.2%
Illinois	-13.0%	28	-4.1%	Virginia	-9.8%	17	-8.6%
Indiana	-11.5%	23	-9.2%	Washington	-12.6%	27	-8.8%
Kansas	-8.2%	8	-3.1%	West Virginia	-13.9%	34	-10.5%
Kentucky	-15.8%	41	-12.3%	Wisconsin	-13.1%	30	-22.3%
Louisiana	-13.3%	32	0.9%	totals	-13.2%		-5.2%
Maine	-14.7%	37	-9.1%	States Not Locked Down by the Governor			
Maryland	-13.5%	33	-5.6%	Arkansas	-7.4%	6	-6.2%
Massachusetts	-17.7%	43	-8.3%	Iowa	-10.9%	22	-12.5%
Michigan	-21.1%	49	-9.4%	Nebraska	-7.0%	5	-5.3%
Minnesota	-13.2%	31	-3.2%	North Dakota	-9.6%	15	-7.0%
Mississippi	-8.4%	10	-8.7%	Oklahoma	-8.3%	9	-3.4%
Missouri	-10.3%	20	-8.1%	South Dakota	-6.9%	4	-14.1%
Montana	-9.1%	12	-2.8%	Utah	-4.6%	1	-10.6%
Nevada	-19.0%	46	-1.7%	Wyoming	-10.0%	19	-6.1%
New Hampshire	-15.4%	38	-12.7%	totals	-7.8%		-7.9%
New Jersey	-18.5%	45	-0.4%				

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

But perhaps this better economic performance came at the expense of health?

In terms of health, locked down states have nearly four times the death rate from COVID-19.

States Not Shut Down Have Better COVID Outcomes - June 17					
State	Cases	Deaths	Mortality Rate	Case/M	Death/M
North Dakota	3,193	75	2.3%	4,190	98
South Dakota	6,109	78	1.3%	6,905	88
Nebraska	17,226	234	1.4%	8,905	121
Iowa	24,805	679	2.7%	7,862	215
Arkansas	13,928	208	1.5%	4,615	69
Oklahoma *	8,904	364	4.1%	2,250	92
Wyoming *	1,114	18	1.6%	1,925	31
Utah *	15,839	152	1.0%	4,940	47
totals	91,118	1,808	2.0%	5,208	103
All others	2,110,153	116,501	5.5%	6,791	375

*Source: Worldometers, Census. *lockdowns in certain metropolitan areas but not statewide. Population is July 2019 estimate*

The results do not prove that staying open necessarily caused the good outcomes, but should certainly lead us to question the notion that “lockdowns are necessary or else we all are going to die.”

To be sure, many mitigating factors may exist. Open states may have had fewer long-term health facilities housing people with low life expectancies; in every state, these account for roughly half of all deaths from COVID-19. [In fact](#), “deaths among a narrow 1.7% group of the population are greater than deaths from the other 98.3%.”

Population density between the states also varies and that could have been an explanatory variable. The open states also lacked [governors who mandated that nursing homes accept active COVID-patients](#). Earlier this month, we published some more detailed research [“Unemployment Far Worse in Lockdown States, Data Show”](#) by economist Abigail Devereux who found similar results.

A routine trope in the media is that people who oppose lockdowns are pushing freedom and wealth over safety and health. But as we can see from this clean examination of the results, the open states experienced less economic pain and less pain from the disease itself.

We are seeing desperate attempts by politicians, public health officials, and media commentators somehow to make sense of why the United States pursued the course it did with the closures, stay-home orders, travel bans, and near-universal quarantine, in violation of every principle that America has celebrated in its civic culture.

With the evidence coming in that the lockdowns were neither economically nor medically effective, it is going to be increasingly difficult for lockdown partisans to marshal the evidence to convince the public that isolating people, destroying businesses, and destroying social institutions was worth it.

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