

The ZeroCovid Movement: Cult Dressed as Science

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Global Research, February 23, 2021

[American Institute for Economic Research](#)

21 February 2021

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

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This past year has given rise to some strange and novel methods of disease containment, including lockdowns and mask mandates. It is unsurprising that the natural next step in this progression has been the development of a movement known as “[ZeroCovid](#).” Its growing influence is, perhaps, predictable given that for nearly a year we have been inundated by the views of so-called experts seeking to legitimize their myopic worldview that public health is determined solely by prevention of Covid-19.

Rather than acknowledge to a weary public that their approach has been a failure, they are doubling down and attempting to save their reputations by claiming that the problem is not that lockdowns do not work, but that they have not gone far enough.

There is, apparently, some [diversity](#) of [opinion](#) among the ZeroCovid crowd as to whether the term is to be [interpreted](#) literally, as some of its most impassioned and vocal proponents argue, or whether it simply means a more [extreme version](#) of the ideology that has dominated societies around the globe for the past year: the belief that suppressing the coronavirus is a singularly important goal, to replace all others and to be pursued with no or only minimal consideration of the effects of doing so.

ZeroCovid promoters appear to agree that much [stricter border controls](#), lockdowns, and mask mandates are needed than exist in most nations today. Sam Bowman, one of the most prominent ZeroCoviders, [claims for instance that](#) the only way to address the coronavirus problem is with “lockdowns, school closures, travel bans, mass testing, contact tracing, and masks.” Likewise, former United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair’s think-tank [has stated](#) that the only way to avoid another lockdown is to bring coronavirus cases to zero. China, Australia and New Zealand are [portrayed as successes](#) by ZeroCovid proponents, and prove that suffering now brings with it the promise of eventual freedom.

While marketing themselves as theoretically opposed to lockdowns, ZeroCovid adherents actually aspire to implement a totalitarian-style state, which we are supposed to believe will exist only temporarily. For example, Devi Sridhar, one of the movement’s most public faces in the United Kingdom, [has claimed](#) that the only way out of endless lockdown is a “crude, harsh, catastrophic lockdown” now, the first phase. Given that the third phase of Sridhar’s plan entails an “East Asian and Pacific model of elimination” that prohibits travel abroad, I can only imagine precisely what sort of totalitarian nightmare Sridhar envisions during

phase one.

Those who follow this philosophy fail to recognize the glaringly obvious truth that suppression tactics have not succeeded because they run contrary to human nature (as well as basic cell biology) and entail severe deprivations of human rights and liberties. They also do not acknowledge the fact that if the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) managed to eliminate the coronavirus (a [questionable assumption](#) given the CCP's tenuous relationship with the truth), it did so using tactics that *prima facie* constitute human rights [violations](#).

Even Australia and New Zealand, which before 2020 were considered beacons of liberal democracy, have recently been the subject of investigations or inquiries by [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Amnesty International](#). The ZeroCovid proponents do not address the reality that China, Australia, and New Zealand have [continually](#) had to [implement lockdown policies](#) in response to new cases arising even after declaring victory over the virus, and that the latter two are island nations able to effectuate border control in a way that cannot possibly be applied to nations that are geographically proximate to others and in which the virus has already [become endemic](#).

The "[Covid Community Action Summit](#)," a conference held at the end of January, and led and attended by many of ZeroCovid's main players - needless to say, over Zoom - offers a glimpse into the warped worldview that pervades the ideology.

Image on the right: Featured Speaker Yaneer Bar-Yam preparing for his talk in the Barbican Hall on Day 2 of Wikimania 2014. (CC BY-SA 4.0)



The architect of ZeroCovid, and the first speaker at the Summit, was [Yaneer Bar-Yam](#), an American scientist who specializes in complex systems and quantitative analysis of pandemics and founded the New England Complex Systems Institute (NECSI). The participants came from a variety of backgrounds: in addition to doctors and scientists, political consultants and communications specialists were in attendance. Many presenters had [business interests](#) in [pharmaceuticals](#) and diagnostics, and those from the United States tended to be affiliated with [Democratic Party](#) politics and campaigns.

One of the most [disturbing presentations](#) was delivered by Blake Elias, a researcher at the NECSI who [works directly](#) under Bar-Yam. Given Elias's position, it is fair to assume that his views, as articulated at the Summit, reflected those held by its organizer.

Elias, like [numerous](#) other "ZeroCovid" advocates, believes that the "lives versus economy" framing of the problem is incorrect (notably, [many lockdown](#) opponents also consider this

the wrong lens through which to view the issue, but for different reasons; namely that the economy and people's lives are inextricably intertwined and lockdown policies do not take into account crucial considerations such as mental health and civil liberties).

Valuing each life—somewhat arbitrarily and without regards to life expectancy—at \$10 million, Elias plugged a bunch of numbers into a machine and voila! came up with irrefutable proof that locking down hard and fast is less costly than failing to do so. Elias earnestly stated that his airtight equation demonstrates that if you are against elimination (ZeroCovid) the only conceivable reason could be that you dispute one of his premises, so you therefore believe one of the following: the cost of infections is lower than it is; the cost of lockdowns is more; hospital capacity is greater; the importation rate is higher; or complete vaccination is achievable in a shorter time frame.

At no time did he mention psychology, human rights, or civil liberties. If Elias had the slightest understanding of these concepts, he did an exceptional job of hiding it.

Michelle Lukezic and Eric Nixon, like Elias, gave a presentation akin to what I imagine it would be like to watch aliens discuss human psychology and behavior. Presumably a couple, Lukezic and Nixon founded a company called [MakeGoodTogether](#), and [believe that](#) the coronavirus problem boils down to a lack of individual discipline and accountability. They acknowledged that the extreme social distancing they touted as the answer to the world's woes is contrary to our nature, but insisted that we simply must try harder.

We could eradicate coronavirus, they solemnly instructed us, if only we would insist upon declining social invitations, and suggested that people post pledges on social media to that effect. They apparently spent little time considering the plight of essential workers whose employment does not allow them the luxury of distancing, apart from a comedic description of the psychic discomfort they experienced when the mask of a workman in their home slipped down his face. Lukezic was very proud of Nixon for refusing to shake the man's hand upon his departure. I had to double-check the link a couple of times to make sure I had not inadvertently stumbled upon a *Saturday Night Live* episode.

Another noteworthy contributor to the ZeroCovid Summit was [Michael Baker](#), the architect of New Zealand's coronavirus strategy. Baker insisted that "following the science" indisputably leads to the ZeroCovid strategy, as though science alone informs policy. He made several stunning admissions, among which are that containment should also be the strategy for influenza, and that the coronavirus pandemic has given us the opportunity to reset in order to address inequities in society and threats posed by climate change. In other words, Baker does not foresee a return to normal life.

As demonstrated by its presenters at the Summit, ZeroCovid is the unfortunate end result of the inexplicable belief held by too many people that it makes sense to fixate upon one problem to the exclusion of all others. No one at the Summit, or in any other context for that matter, has ever made a convincing case for elevating the coronavirus pandemic above all other considerations. There is a reason for this: the facts and logic all point in the opposite direction.

An argument could certainly be made that a virus or other threat calculated to wipe out humanity or a significant portion of it, across age ranges, warrants exclusive focus on that threat for its duration. [As I and others](#) have written before, the coronavirus simply does not constitute such a danger. We now have a year of data from which to conclude [beyond all](#)

[doubt](#) that exposure to the virus only poses a significant risk, beyond those we are accustomed to taking in everyday life, to the [very old](#). The overwhelming majority of those infected with the virus suffer not at all, or minimally, and recover within days or weeks. This does not mean that the problem should be ignored, but rather that it should be addressed utilizing the same methodology with which we approach [all public health matters](#): by taking into account the effects of the policies enacted in response to them.

ZeroCovid adherents are not qualitatively different from the epidemiologists and politicians who have advocated for and imposed lockdowns and mask mandates across the globe. They all believe that they can force billions of people to behave, for an indefinite time period, in ways that are contrary to our nature and deleterious to our well-being. They see nothing wrong with assuming control over every facet of our lives.

They are maniacally focused upon theories and models, and uninterested in what works in practice. They have no conception of human liberty or dignity. Rather than recognize that lockdowns, forced human separation, and masks are [ineffective at quelling](#) the spread of the coronavirus, while carrying enormous costs, not least among them the erasure of liberal democracy, the most fervent adherents to this ideology believe that the answer is more, and harder. That means deprivation of our rights and liberties, and denial of our basic human needs, until the coronavirus is eradicated from the globe. If they get their way, that may well be until the end of time.

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