

# The Resurgent

## Why Are There So Many Pandemic Deniers On The Right?

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March 31, 2020

Okay, someone had to ask it so it might as well be me. Why is it that so many people on the right are skeptical about the whole idea that the country is facing a deadly pandemic?

For the record, I'm on the right myself. I'm a lifelong conservative-libertarian (small "l") and, up until 2016, I was a lifelong Republican as well. I follow and talk with people on both sides of the political spectrum and in my journeys around the interwebs over the past few weeks, it has seemed to me that most of the people who could be called "pandemic deniers" fall into one of two groups: small factions of either Trump supporters or Libertarians.

Before I go further, I'll stipulate that most Trump supporters and Libertarians take the pandemic seriously. The deniers are subcategories of these two groups. In my experience, I haven't found any liberals who question the reality of the Coronavirus pandemic but there are probably some out there somewhere.

The Republican skeptics that I have run into online who deny the reality and/or the severity of the pandemic seem to be almost exclusively ardent Trump supporters on social media. Reluctant Trump voters seem to be among the majority that are taking the pandemic and the social distancing strategy seriously.

Among the Libertarians, it also seems to be an internet minority who take a skeptical position. This isn't libertarians like Justin Amash or the Cato Institute staff. These are people who fantasize online about a "boogaloo" (also called "the big igloo") in which they rise up against the government.

The two groups have different rationales for denying the pandemic. The Trump supporters believe that it is a plot to make Donald Trump look bad and cost him the election, either by crashing the economy or by making him seem to be an inadequate leader. The Libertarian skeptics believe that it is a plot to take away freedoms, possibly by imposing martial law.

The skeptical attitudes can run the gamut but go farther than mere disagreement with how the stimulus was handled. Some believe that the entire pandemic is a hoax. Others believe that it is real but that the danger is exaggerated. Some still say it is no worse than the flu. Others question the social distancing strategy and theorize that more people will die from the economic downturn than would be killed by the virus.

The two groups overlap in a few areas. One of these is a belief in conspiracy theories. While your results may vary, the people that I see questioning the pandemic are often the same people

who think that Hillary Clinton is a mass murdering pedophile or that Barack Obama was going to declare martial law in the Southwest under the guise of the Jade Helm military exercise.

Another commonality is a distrust in the mainstream media. While much of the media (not all of it) is left-leaning, that doesn't mean that it is always wrong. Sometimes even the leftist media is right. Quite often, the alternative conservative media is wrong. A recent relevant example is Rush Limbaugh who said that Coronavirus was nothing more than the "common cold" and attacked medical experts as part of the Deep State.

For many in these groups, there is a sort of reverse confirmation bias in which anything the media says is not to be believed simply because the media said it. This sort of attitude was seen among the Trump supporters of 2016 who supported Trump largely because the media and the Democrats opposed him, reasoning that, since he had the right enemies, that was good enough for them.

Part of the problem of denial in recent weeks was due to Donald Trump's waffling. When the president worried last week that the cure might be worse than the disease, it was followed by a wave of Trump supporters arguing that the damage to the economy was not worth the lives that would be saved by social distancing.

The other question is why the left is not jumping on the conspiracy bandwagon when it could appeal to partisan illogic that it would be Donald Trump, their political adversary, who would be likely to use a Trojan horse pandemic to seize authoritarian power. Liberals would argue that they are more in tune with science, but the leftist assault on biological gender shows that argument to be partly true at best.

Instead, my theory is that it is a matter of leadership. Democratic thought leaders are united in the idea that the pandemic is a serious threat. Where we do see conspiracy thinking among the left is the belief that the Trump Administration is steering medical supplies to friendly administrations and holding them back from blue states.

Now that President Trump has extended the social distancing guidelines through April 30, it will be interesting to see whether these skeptics follow the president's lead or remain fixed on how good the economy might have been if we had just let a couple of million people die. After all, some argue, many had health problems and probably would have died anyway.

In most cases, believing conspiracy theories over the media stories is relatively harmless, but that isn't the case during a pandemic. At this point in our history, believing fake news won't just make you look like an idiot, it might get people killed.