

## **Fox News bashes mainstream media for not covering economists' flawed meta-analysis of COVID lockdowns**

**WRITTEN BY CASEY WEXLER**

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Fox News jumped on a meta-analysis published by economists to declare lockdowns and other public health measures implemented to stop the spread of COVID-19 were useless — ignoring experts who pointed out the paper's many flaws — and later started attacking mainstream media for not covering the anti-lockdown research.

In early February, three economists published a non-peer-reviewed working paper as part of Johns Hopkins University's "Studies in Applied Economics" analyzing 34 studies on the impact of lockdowns on mortality rates during the first wave of COVID-19 in 2020. The researchers concluded that under their definition, "lockdowns" reduced deaths by only 0.2% in Europe and the U.S. and the economic damage caused by the policy did more harm than good.

Fox News immediately jumped on this study to declare any policy meant to reduce the spread of the coronavirus useless.

In reality, this meta-analysis is deeply flawed and contradicts previous research. For example, a 2020 public health study that did undergo peer review — unlike the economics working paper — found that lockdown measures in Europe alone actually saved millions of lives. That much-cited 2020 research, however, is excluded from the new meta-analysis, which ignores many other public health studies finding that lockdowns have been effective.

The new working paper also defines "lockdown" as "the imposition of at least one compulsory, non-pharmaceutical intervention." By this definition, masking requirements are counted as a form of "lockdown."

Additionally, the authors were studying the effect of "lockdowns" only on mortality and didn't consider what effect — if any — lockdowns had on the infection rate, meaning people who got

sick and were hospitalized but did not die were excluded in this review, leaving out valuable context about how well lockdowns stopped the spread of the coronavirus.

Multiple public health experts released statements calling out the economics paper for its numerous flaws.

While Fox's segments frequently highlighted the paper's connection to Johns Hopkins to lend credibility to its findings, they often declined to mention that it was not endorsed by the university and only one of the authors is actually affiliated with the school. That author, economics professor Steve Hanke, is also a senior fellow with libertarian think tank the Cato Institute, a contributor to *National Review*, and a former adviser to President Ronald Reagan — details largely ignored on Fox. There was also no mention of the fact that he has publicly opposed lockdowns as “fascist” measures taken by “authoritarians.”

Instead of acknowledging the numerous holes in this research, Fox News has used it to declare victory over any politician or scientist who advocated for lockdown measures and to excoriate other media outlets for not covering a non-peer-reviewed, non-university-endorsed economics paper.

### **Fox hosts run a victory lap over anti-lockdown study, using it to attack Fauci and the Democrats**

- On February 2, *Fox & Friends* co-host Brian Kilmeade used the paper's conclusion to go on a tirade against lockdown measures, claiming, “They did nothing to reduce the spread [and] never should have been implemented.”
- Over a chyron claiming that “lockdowns should be rejected out of hand,” *Outnumbered* co-host Harris Faulkner tried to give the paper credibility by saying it came from Johns Hopkins: “They're like the most trusted source.” She did not acknowledge that the literature review was not endorsed by the university.
- In a segment on “Dems' lockdown failures,” *The Five* co-host Dana Perino described a hypothetical scenario: “Imagine if you were a mom whose daughter had a mental health crisis and committed suicide during the pandemic, and then you find out that John Hopkins says it helped to 0.2%? You will maybe never get over that.”
- Fox prime-time hosts Sean Hannity and Tucker Carlson used the paper as a launching pad to attack Dr. Anthony Fauci for supporting lockdown measures.

### **Fox hosts attack mainstream news for not covering the review**

- Fox News' website published a piece on February 4 claiming that there was a “media blackout” of the working paper and that “the Johns Hopkins study received no mention on any of the five liberal networks this week.” The article failed to mention that the paper did not undergo peer review and was not actually endorsed by the university.
- Fox media analyst Howard Kurtz appeared on air multiple times to attack mainstream media for not mentioning the flawed research. Unlike other Fox hosts, Kurtz did

acknowledge that public health experts are criticizing the paper, which he noted was not peer-reviewed, and he included more context on Hanke's background. However, Kurtz still argued that mainstream news should be engaging with the study to "deepen the debate" over lockdowns, even if they just want to criticize the research, and he did not acknowledge Fox's role in inflating the paper's importance in the first place.

- Hannity switched from going after Fauci to going after news networks for supposedly ignoring anti-lockdown research, claiming they "only follow the science when it's convenient."
- Fox anchor Bill Hemmer went after multiple mainstream outlets for not covering the paper during an appearance on *One Nation with Brian Kilmeade*. Hemmer did not acknowledge the numerous flaws in the research.