

# Grasping Reality with Both Hands

The weblog  
of Brad DeLong. Since 1999.  
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## Steve M.: But Giving People þe Opposite of What þey Want Has Worked so Well for Republicans Until Now!—Weekend Reading

**Weekend Reading:** Since the mid-1800s, the primary way conservatives have won elections has been to mobilize fear of strangers and of the strange to trump the majority economic interest in a less unequal society. But while fear can trump interest, can fear Trump fear? Perhaps not:

**Steve M.:** *But Giving People þe Opposite of What þey Want Has Worked so Well for Republicans Until Now!*  
<https://nomoremister.blogspot.com/2020/07/but-giving-people-opposite-of-what-they.html>: ‘Shockingly, it appears that trying to kill constituents is bad for your poll numbers if you’re an elected official.... Since the Reagan era, corporatist Republicanism has weakened the middle class, increased inequality, gutted regulations on corporations, and, in this century, crashed the economy twice. But because Republicans distract their base with culture-war talk and other forms of lib-owning, none of the harm GOP politicians do to their voters has ever seemed to cause them trouble at the polls...

...I’m reminded of something I read a few years ago in a review of Arlie Russell Hochschild’s book *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*:

The paradox that most baffles Hochschild is the question of environmental pollution.... A Cajun oil rig engineer named Mike Schaff.... Texas Brine drilled too closely to an oil deposit and the structure ruptured, sucking down forest and causing seismic damage to the homes of 350 nearby residents.... Texas Brine refused to take responsibility for the accident.... Four years later the sinkhole is 750 feet deep at its center and has grown to thirty-five acres. Methane and other gases bubble up periodically. Residents who defied evacuation orders avoided lighting matches....

[Schaff] marched on the statehouse, wrote fifty letters to state and federal officials, granted dozens of interviews to local, national, and foreign press. When state officials claimed they had detected no oil in the bayou, he demanded that the EPA check their work.

But Schaff continued to vote Tea Party down the line. He voted for the very politicians who had abetted Texas Brine at every turn, who opposed environmental regulation of any kind. He voted to ‘abolish’ the EPA, believing that it ‘was grabbing authority and tax money to take on a fictive mission... lessening the impact of global warming’. The violent destruction of everything he held dear was not enough to change his mind.

So you can understand why Republicans thought they could refuse to build public-health infrastructure, ridicule and block mask mandates, and demand the premature reopening of businesses and schools—sure, some folks would die, but GOP politicians won’t be blamed, will they? They never are....

But in this case, it’s simple: Get the virus and you might die—and the Republican governor doesn’t think it’s a terrible thing if that happens. GOP politicians have gotten away with so much. Is it surprising that they thought they’d get away with this, too?...

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