Grasping Reality with Both Hands

The weblog of Brad DeLong. Comments (mostly) welcome, or email me at delong@hey.com with "delong-weblog" as the subject.
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Rachman: Coronavirus Could Kill Off Populism—Noted

That neofascists propose to win elections not by doing any heavy policy lifting to expand the pie or redirect pieces of it—heavy lifting that would require the slow boring of holes through hard materials—was originally a source of political strength. But when there are clear things that a government needs to do for the safety and well-being of the public, the fact that neofascism has no policy competence turns into a weakness:

Gideon Rachman: *Coronavirus Could Kill Off Populism* https://www.ft.com/content/3bcf2b5e-e5f1-48e4-bb15-cd29615a9198: 'Populists hate to be unpopular. That is why they have proved so bad at handling Covid-19, a crisis that brings nothing but grim news—death, economic destruction and curtailed freedoms. Donald Trump, the US president, and Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil's president, are the two most prominent populist leaders in the western world. The disastrous results of their approach to coronavirus are now becoming apparent...

> ...Last week, Brazil became the second country in the world, after the US, to record more than 50,000 Covid-19 deaths. The distinguishing characteristic of the Trump-Bolsonaro approach to Covid-19 is a fatal inability to face reality....
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> In Britain, Boris Johnson has been more respectful of the scientific consensus. But, early in the crisis, the prime minister did succumb to one of the biggest flaws in the populist approach: a dangerous reluctance to act on bad news. As other European nations went into lockdown, he proclaimed that "we live in a land of liberty" and delayed taking action. Partly as a result, the UK has the highest number of Covid-19 deaths in Europe. In just two months, Mr Johnson has gone from record popularity to a negative approval rating.
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> By contrast, Angela Merkel—who is detested by Mr Trump and many other populist leaders—has had a good crisis. Germany has one of Europe's lowest per capita death rates. When Mr Johnson protested in parliament last week that there is not a single example of a country with an effective contact-tracing app, Sir Keir Starmer, the leader of the opposition, responded with a single word: Germany. The contrast between Ms Merkel's performance and those of the populists demonstrates that an ability to understand evidence is a useful trait in a leader....
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> Francis Fukuyama of Stanford University speculated to the BBC recently: "The Covid-19 epidemic may actually lance the boil of populism."... The defeat of Mr Trump in particular would have global implications....
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> [But] there is the possibility that, amid a crisis, the norms of democratic politics will simply break down. Mr Trump has already unnerved many political observers with his repeated assertions that November's election will be rigged. Mr Bolsonaro has packed his cabinet with generals and said that the military will ignore "absurd" rulings "to remove a democratically elected president".... Populism may indeed be rejected by voters in the wake of Covid-19. But there is no guarantee that the populists will go quietly...

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