

# Chapter 15

## Societal Shutdown and Reopening and Reclosing in the U.S. as Expressed in Social Imagery Narratives: COVID-19 Pandemic Seven/ Eight Months In

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### ABSTRACT

*In the COVID-19 pandemic era, political leaders have to navigate a difficult socio-political landscape balancing mass public health with socio-economic interests. They have to protect their susceptible populations and protect the social structures supporting their respective economies, healthcare systems, educational systems, international relationships, law and order, cultures and subcultures, national values, and others. A pandemic tends to disrupt systems and spark other social discontents among roiling publics. In May 2020, the U.S. started reopening from a mass lockdown involving a majority of its states, even as viral transmission rose. This work explores visual senses of societal shutdown, societal reopening, and societal (partial) reclosing in the U.S. in social imagery (all captured July 3, 2020, during the crisis) to better understand public responses to public health and other government interventions.*

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## INTRODUCTION

*“EVEN THE DARKEST HOUR  
ONLY HAS 60 MINUTES  
BE STRONG  
THE SHOW WILL GO ON”*

-- An encouraging message on a marquee overhang over a diner, with the words showing above the head of man in shades standing in front (from one of the social imagesets)

**Dedication:** This work is dedicated to all the frontline people fighting the good fight for human health. This is also for those who adapt and engage the 3Ws: wear a mask, wait to avoid crowding others, and wash hands. I am one, and you are one, and our respective lives are everything to each of us. We need to respect that. We’re in it together, and we need to protect ourselves and each other.

The spillover of a pathogenic virus from an animal species into humanity is always a cause for concern, given various health effects from such common viral spillovers. One of the features of such viruses that is of special concern is human-to-human transmissibility, and in particular, through aerosolized droplets and airborne transmission, given how social humanity is and how congested and high-density the world is with its nearly 8 billion people. Such a feature of high transmissibility of a virus enables the propagation of infection to a global population (distributed around the world) and could lead to mass infections, diseases, and death, in a global pandemic. If humanity is tinder for novel viral spread, according to one popular epidemiological model, humans can be in only a few states: susceptible (without defenses, without prior experience of the virus), infected (and infectious or contagious, able to shed the virus and pass on the infection to others), and recovered (no longer infectious to others, likely with some resistance against reinfection by the same virus) and / or removed from the population (dead). At some point, a population will achieve “herd immunity” if enough people have been infected, but arriving at that state entails a high cost in disease and death. [More recent research suggests that people may be re-infected with SARS-CoV-2, given the mutations of the virus, which puts into question the ability to achieve a state of “herd immunity” based on natural immunity. The “protection” is limited by the strain of the virus and is seen to diminish over time. This research also suggests the need for effective and potentially more frequent vaccinations for human health, assuming such a vaccination is possible (Howard, Aug. 24, 2020).] Optimally, a population can achieve some herd immunity if they can design various vaccines for immunity (to trigger the person’s immune response against actual infection by the target virus), without the dreadful cost in human suffering and death. Another approach is to achieve various therapeutic interventions that may protect people against death and against permanent health harm to various body systems and organs.

The endeavors to “flatten the curve” refers to the societal efforts to slow the spread of a virus in the population (given points of exponential spread), so that healthcare systems are not overwhelmed and so scientific researchers can find ways to effectively combat the pathogen. If left unchecked, the virus will burn through the world’s population, with rising infections leading to uncontrolled exponential spread (with the doubling of the infected rising exponentially in ever-shortening time periods). [The world added a million cases in four days in late July 2020 (Haworth, July 26, 2020).]

For researchers, the emergence of the novel coronavirus [first referred to as “2019-n-CoV” in late January 2020 by the World Health Organization (“Novel coronavirus (2019-n-CoV) Situation Report –

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