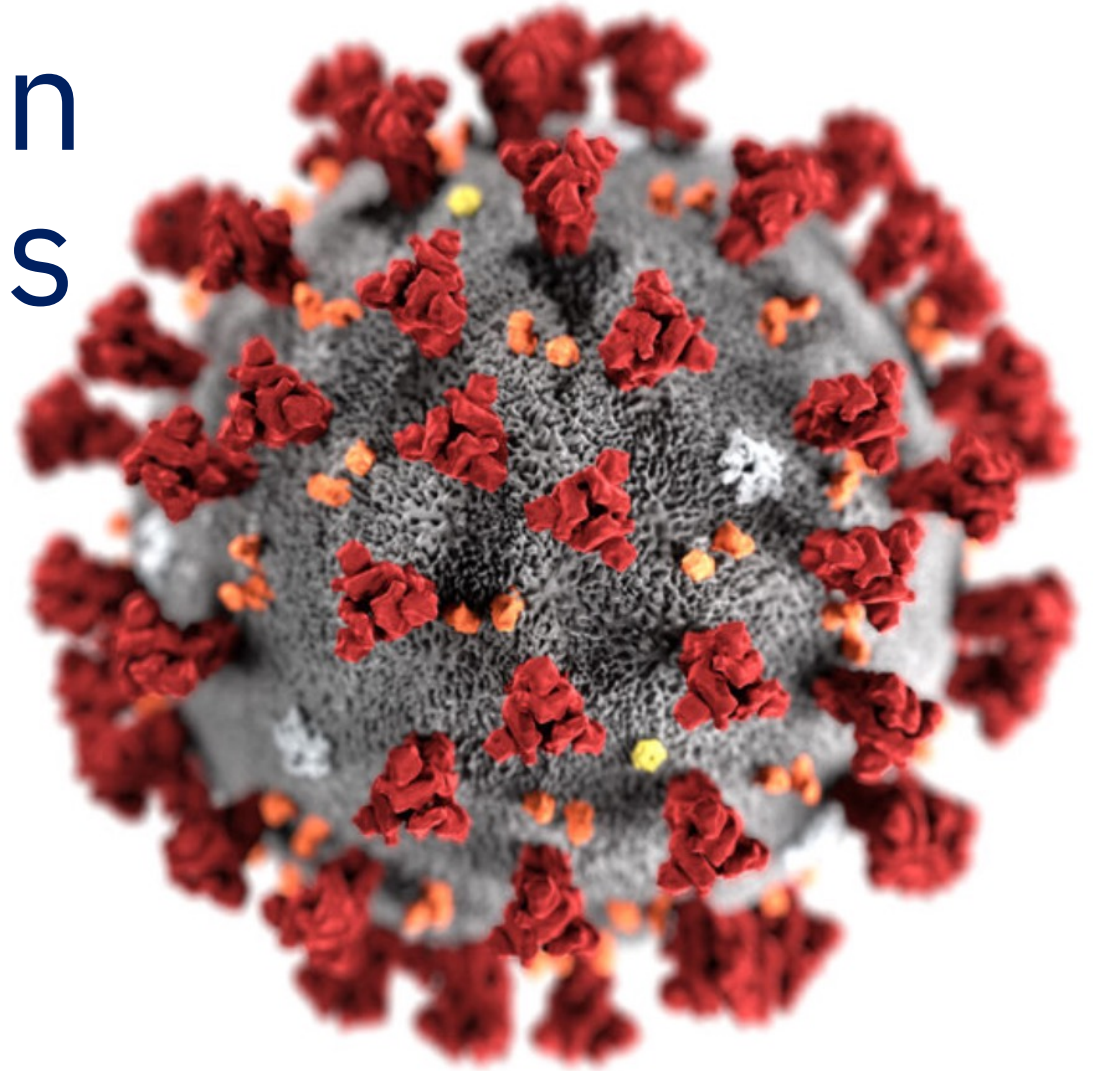


# Western Civilization and Its Discontents *in pandemic*

Brian Castellani and Tim Fowler  
Durham University



# Overview

- COVID-19 – a very postmodern pandemic
  - 1918 Influenza versus 2020 COVID-19
- Western civilization and its discontents
  - The western societal cracks COVID-19 exposed
- How COVID-19 is changing western life.
  - It's all about technology

# Our central theme

- As Snowden points out in *Epidemics and Society* (2019),
  - Pandemics are not random events that afflict societies capriciously and without warning. Instead, they reveal a civilisation in its political, economic, cultural and social complexity, including its vulnerabilities and its capacity to handle crisis.
- The same is true of COVID-19.

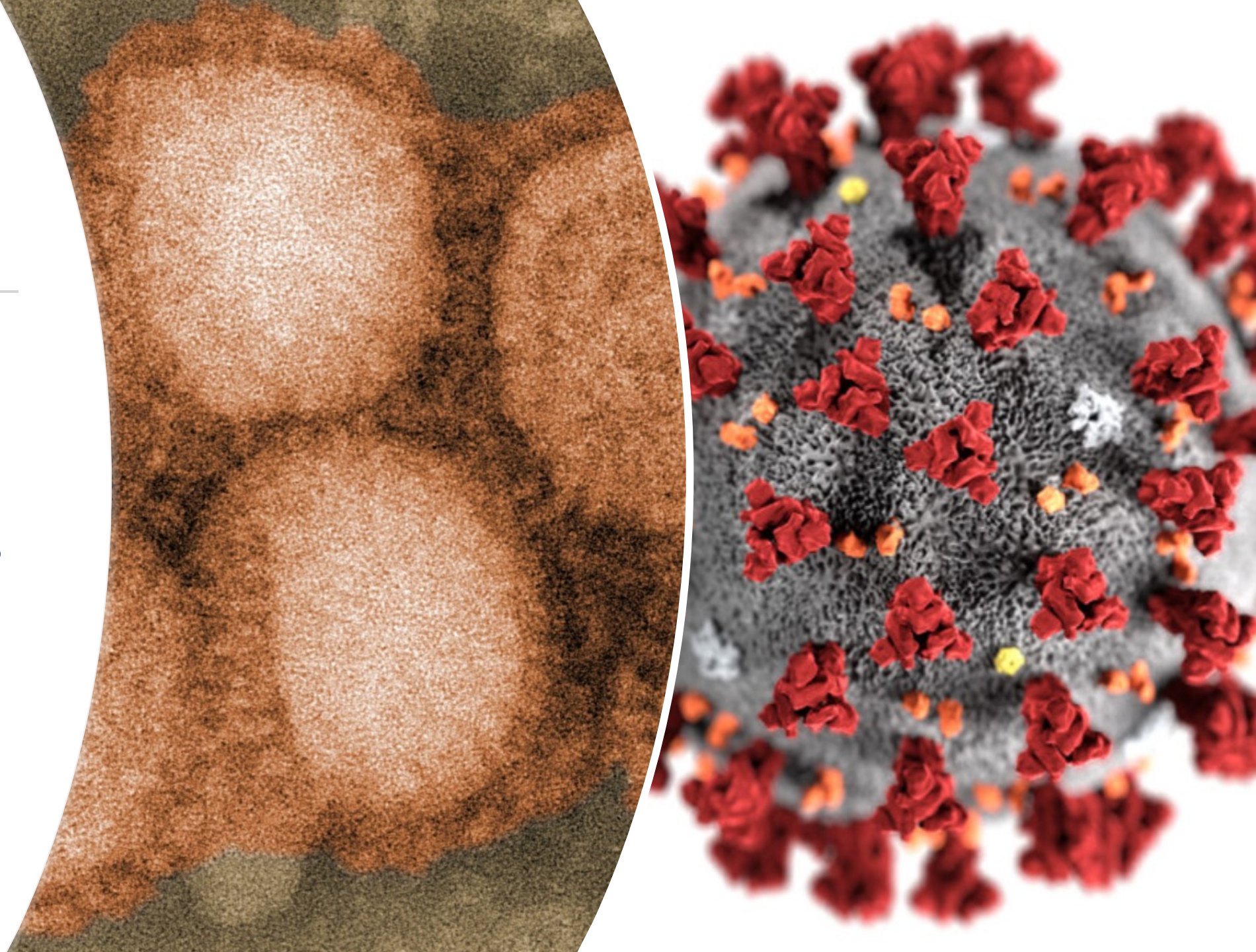
# Our approach

- This is not about rating things or taking a normative stance.
- We are taking an overview of societal effects.
- We are only focused on western societies in the global north.



## COVID-19 – a very postmodern pandemic

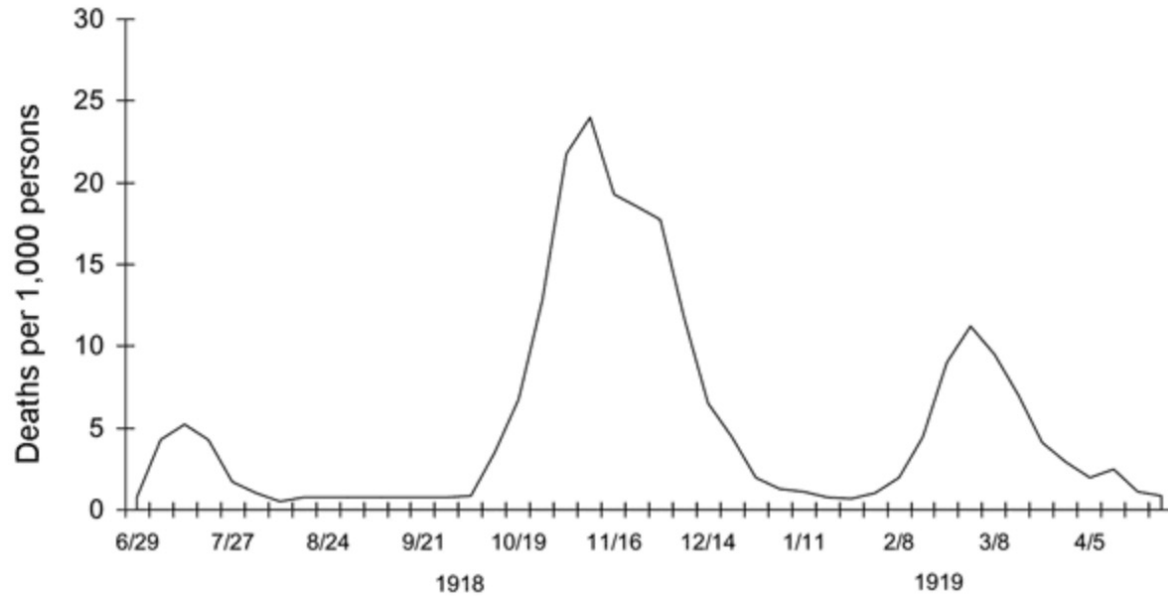
- To get a better picture, we will start by comparing the 1918 Influenza versus 2020 COVID-19.
- What does a hundred years difference make?



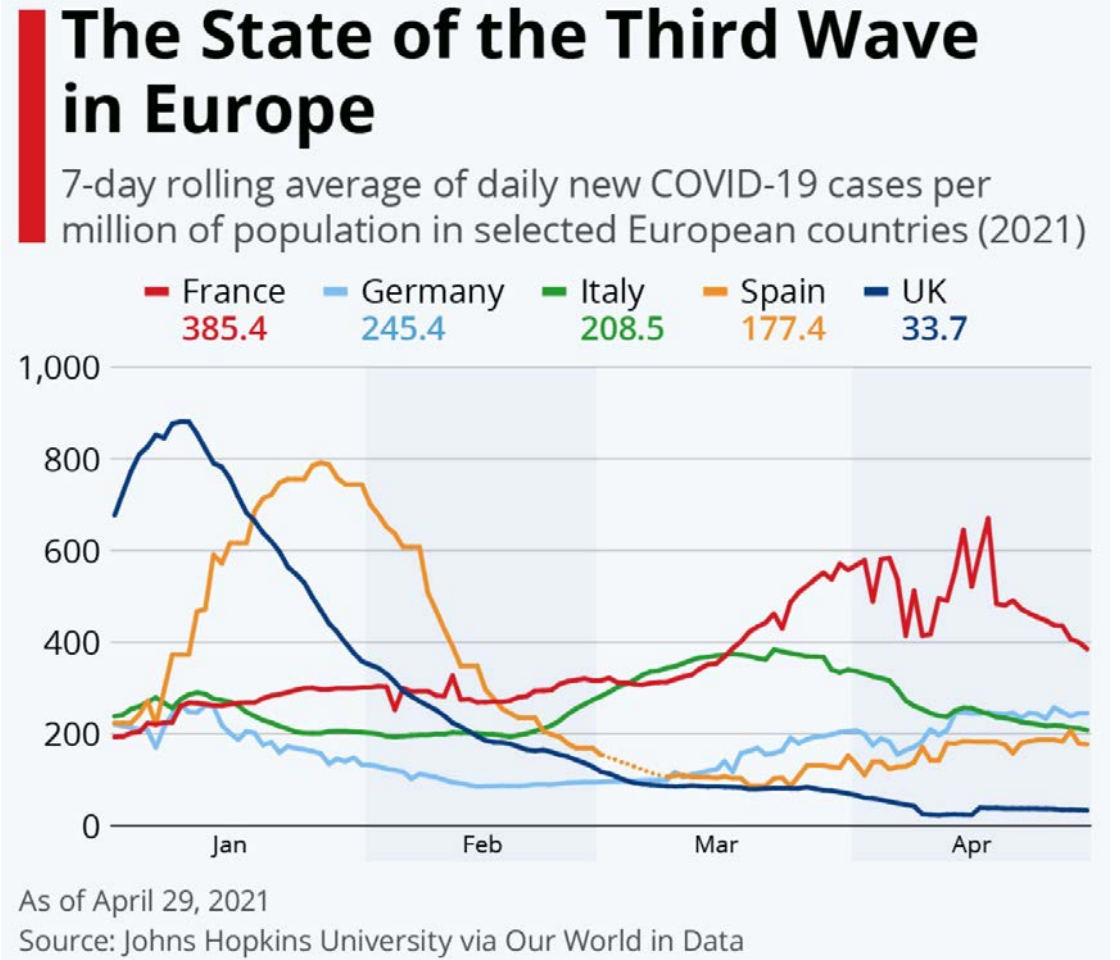


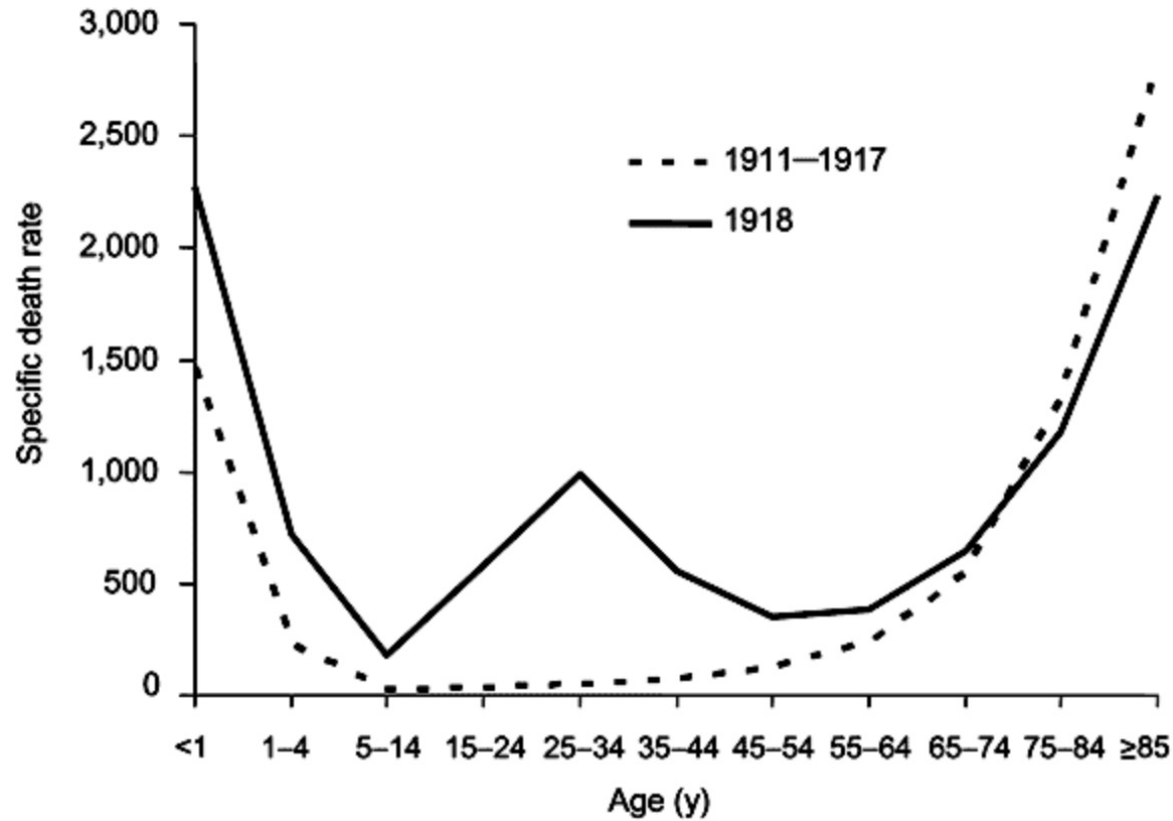
# 1918 pandemic versus 2020 COVID-19

## *A visual comparison*



Three pandemic waves: weekly combined influenza and pneumonia mortality, United Kingdom, 1918–1919

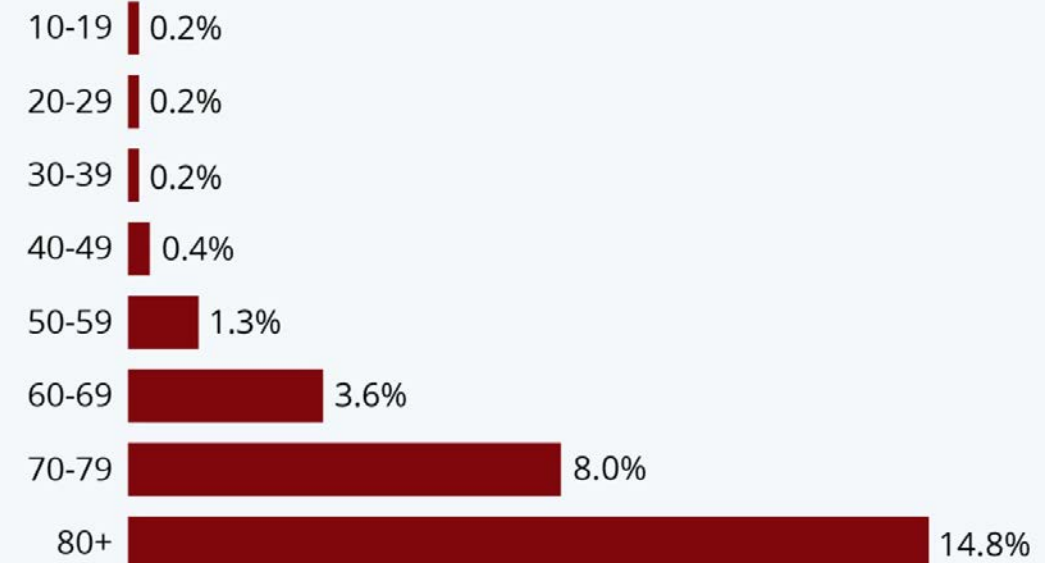




Difference between the influenza mortality age-distributions of the 1918 epidemic and normal epidemics – deaths per 100,000 persons in each age group, United States, for the inter-pandemic years 1911–1917 (dashed line) and the pandemic year 1918 (solid line)

## Study: Elderly Most At Risk From The Coronavirus

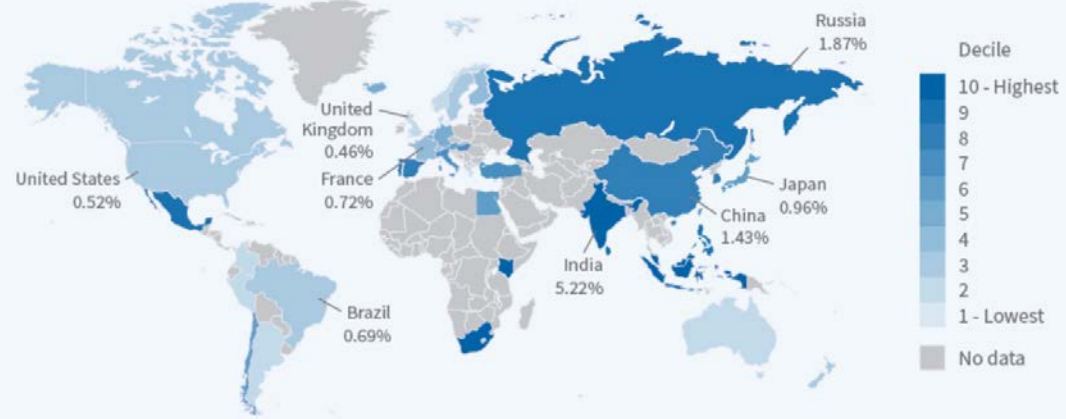
COVID-19 fatality rate by age (as of February 11, 2020)



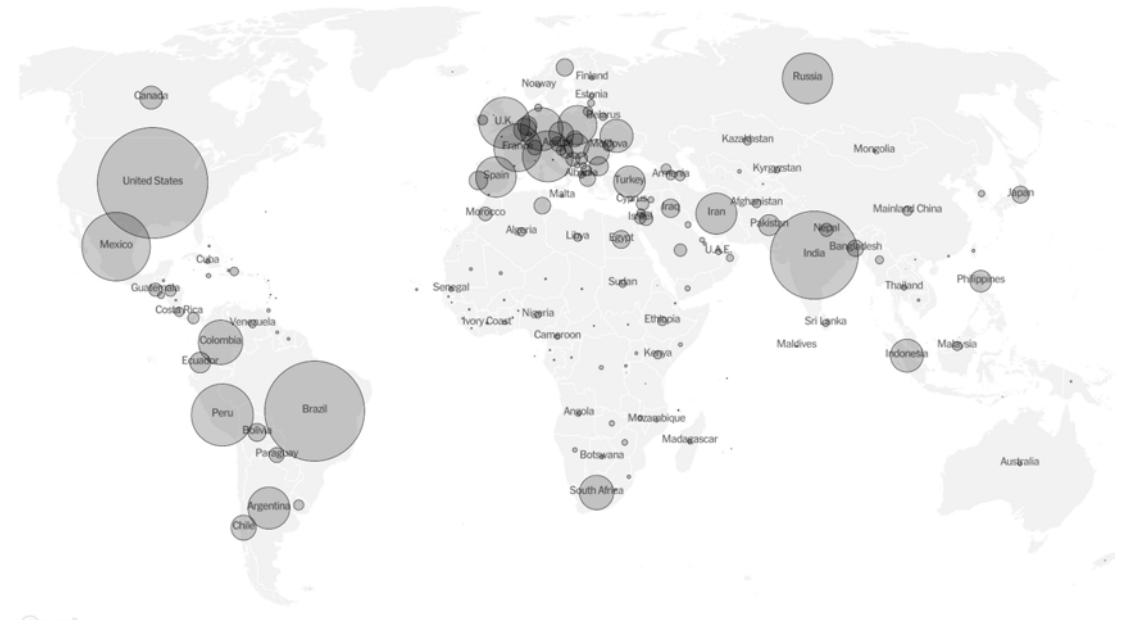
n=44,672 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Mainland China  
Source: Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention

### Death Rates during the Great Influenza Pandemic, 1918–1920

Total flu deaths as a share of country's population



Source: Researchers' calculations







## To Prevent Influenza!

Do not take any person's breath.  
Keep the mouth and teeth clean.  
Avoid those that cough and sneeze.  
Don't visit poorly ventilated places.  
Keep warm, get fresh air and sunshine.

Don't use common drinking cups,  
towels, etc.

Cover your mouth when you cough  
and sneeze.

Avoid Worry, Fear and Fatigue.

Stay at home if you have a cold.

Walk to your work or office.

In sick rooms wear a gauze mask  
like in illustration.

# COVID-19 ALERT



# WEAR A MASK



MEGAN MOLTENI

BACKCHANNEL 05.13.2021 06:00 AM

# The 60-Year-Old Scientific Screwup That Helped Covid Kill

All pandemic long, scientists brawled over how the virus spreads. *Droplets! No, aerosols!* At the heart of the fight was a teensy error with huge consequences.



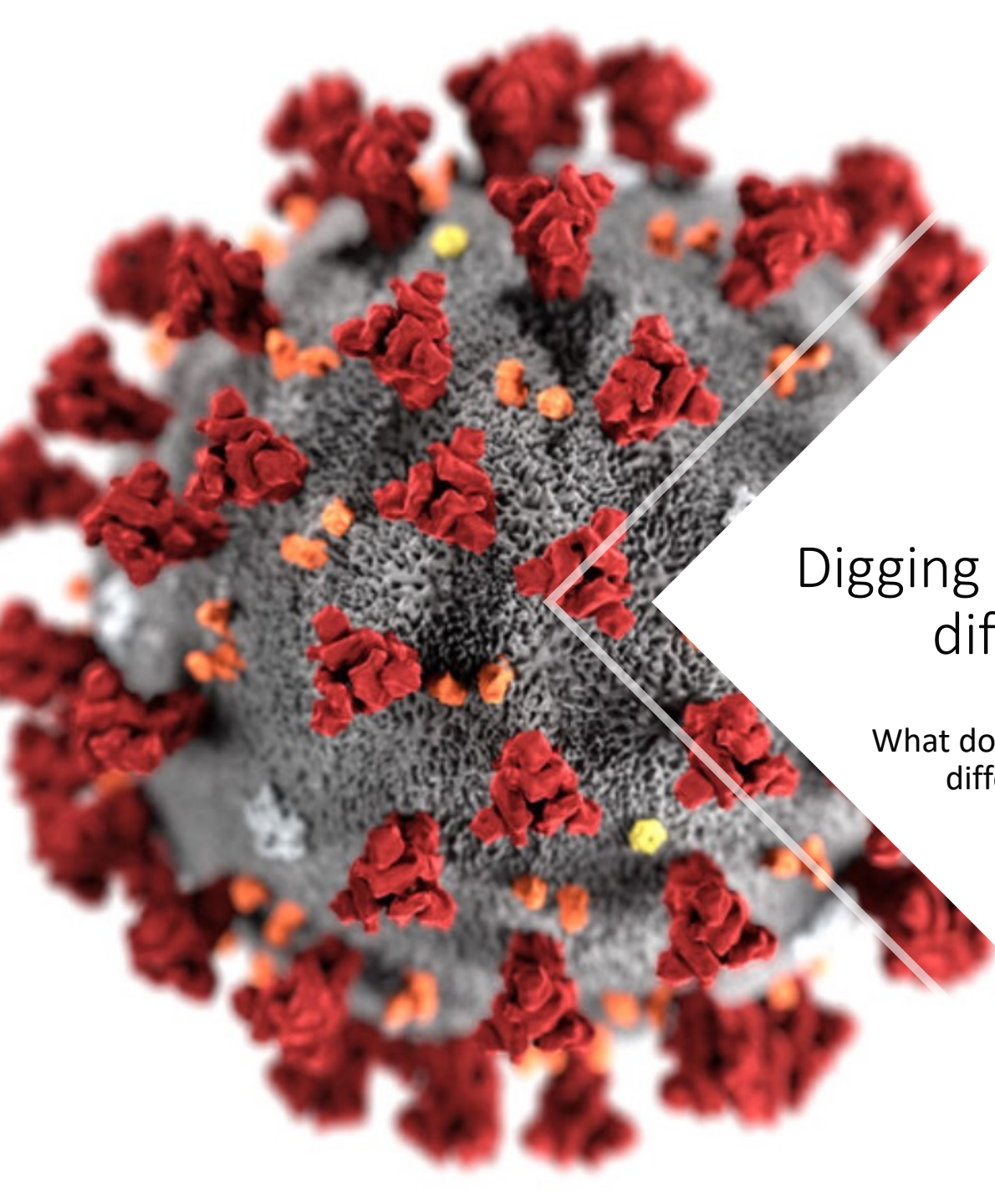
# FIGHT THE 'FLU'

Rigid Quarantine Rules Established

**YOU** ARE ASKED TO AID  
IN ENFORCING THEM

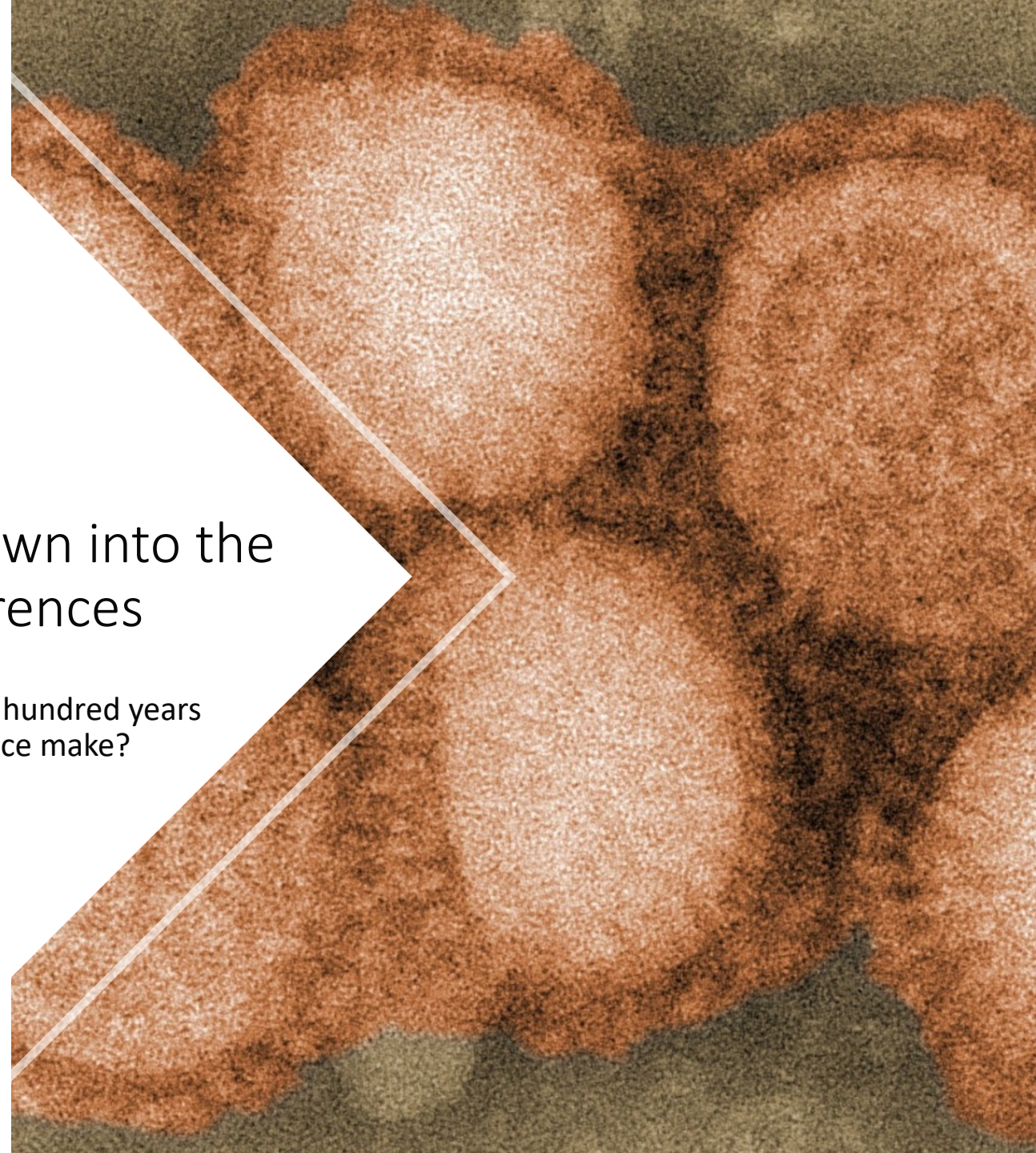






## Digging down into the differences

What does a hundred years  
difference make?





# 1918 Influenza

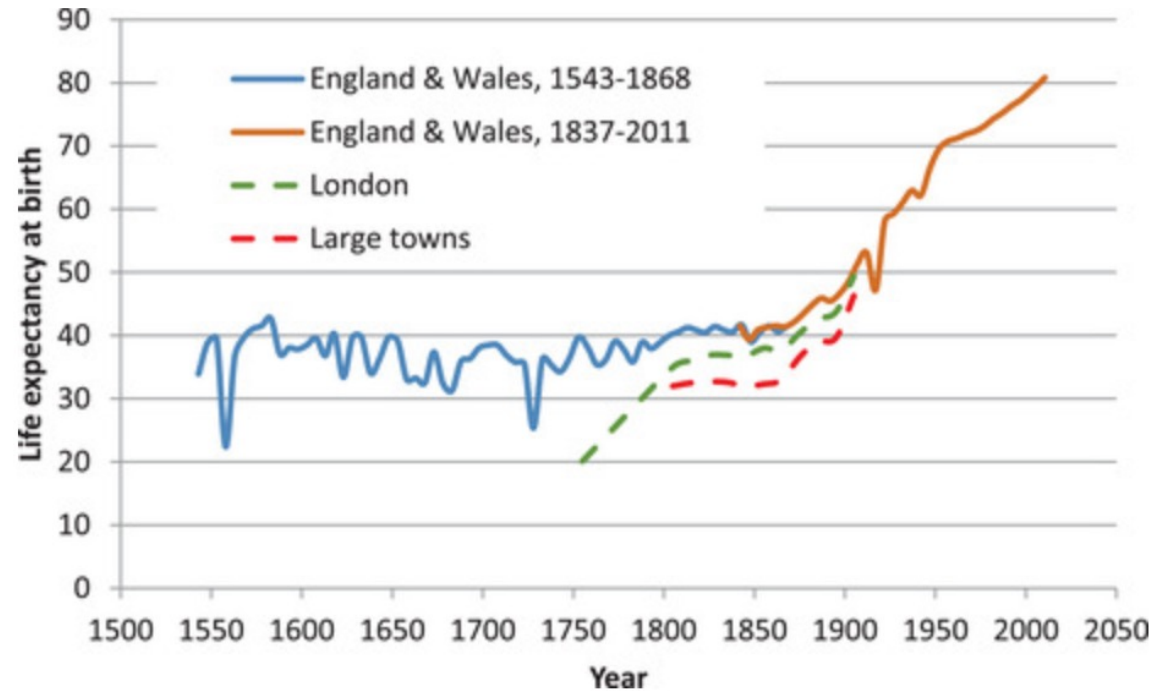
- **What made this pandemic modern?**
- Pandemic exposed massive health and social inequalities.
- Immigrants and the poor affected disproportionately.
- The pandemic revealed how poor the level of public health was.
  - In the years that followed, the idea that a healthy population was a societal good led to the foundation of organisations that were the forerunners of WHO and CDC.

# 1918 Influenza

- **What made this pandemic modern?**
- Children born during the pandemic had poorer life outcomes.
- The 'Roaring Twenties' followed.
- 1918 is mentioned surprisingly little in mass media,
- In fact, it was not even mentioned much during the current pandemic.

# 1918 Influenza

- **What made this pandemic modern?**
- The casualties of 1918 Pandemic were in the tens of millions (we'll never know how many).
- COVID-19 is much less deadly.
- In many ways we are healthier today and certainly live longer due to modern medical and public health advances.





100 years later



# 2020 COVID-19

- **What made this pandemic postmodern?**

- How fast it spread – globalized transport networks
- How fast the world responded – global cyberinfrastructure
- Government and post-truth society
- The pressures of neoliberalism and the global marketplace
- Public health and big data
- Social media and global awareness
- Access to knowledge
- Virtual rather than viral





Ultimately, it is all about  
technology

# It's all about technology

- OUR MAIN ARGUMENT:
- Amongst western societies of the global north, the pandemic, in terms of our response to infectious disease, resulted in major advances in:
  - New public health involvement in policy and politics.
  - The new approach to government – get pragmatic or face ruin.
    - Examples
      - Keynesian economics and spending a country's way out of it.
      - UK's bet on vaccination was a success.
      - Trump's bet on ignoring the pandemic resulted in losing the election.



# It's all about technology

- OUR MAIN ARGUMENT:
  - A renewed commitment to infectious disease.

## Infectious Diseases: Considerations for the 21st Century <sup>FREE</sup>

Anthony S. Fauci ✉

**Published:** 01 March 2001

### Abstract

The discipline of infectious diseases will assume added prominence in the 21st century in both developed and developing nations. To an unprecedented extent, issues related to infectious diseases in the context of global health are on the agendas of world leaders, health policymakers, and philanthropies. This attention has focused both on scientific challenges such as vaccine development and on the deleterious effects of infectious diseases on economic development and political stability. Interest in global health has led to increasing levels of financial support, which, combined with recent technological advances, provide extraordinary opportunities for infectious disease research in the 21st century. The sequencing of human and microbial genomes and advances in functional genomics will underpin significant progress in many areas, including understanding human predisposition and susceptibility to disease, microbial pathogenesis, and the development new diagnostics, vaccines, and therapies. Increasingly, infectious disease research will be linked to the development of the medical infrastructure and training needed in developing countries to translate scientific advances into operational reality.

# It's all about technology

- OUR MAIN ARGUMENT:
  - An increased agility amongst citizens to life *in pandemic*.
    - But this has a very short half life.
    - Is entirely a function of social class, occupation.
    - It is also a function of divisions along major health inequalities and disparities.
    - Also significantly linked to mental health, resilience and social networks.





## Here's to the workers

who are helping the  
NHS get to where  
they need to be  
smoothly and reliably



## Here's to the workers

who are keeping  
our roads clear  
and our shelves full



## Here's to the workers

who are making sure  
that essential  
journeys still happen



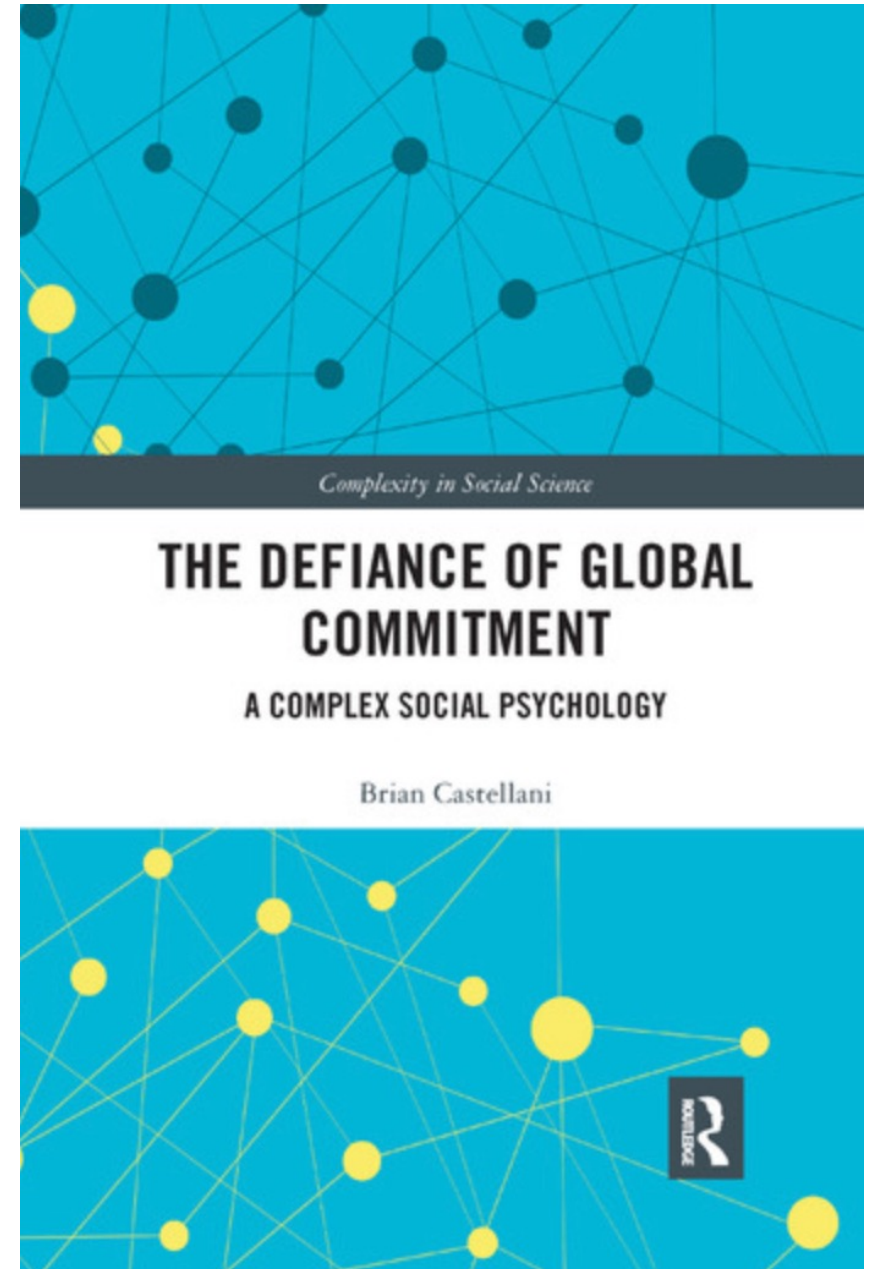
#TransportHeroes





# It's all about technology

- **OUR MAIN ARGUMENT:**
- But that is it. The discontents otherwise remain the same and the cracks in western society are revealed:
- **We see COVID-19 as a stress test**
  - Individualism
  - Resistance to local public commitments
  - Defiance of global civil society
  - Global capitalism
  - Global warming
  - Ecological destruction



# It's all about technology

- OUR MAIN ARGUMENT:

- Another issue is reactive government –
  - Science and public health experts raises alarm
  - Public worried and asks for response
  - Government consults and waits
  - Misinformation, conflict, anxiety and confusion emerge
  - Government finally responds but later rather than sooner
  - Cycle repeats itself
- *In a democracy can it be done differently?*



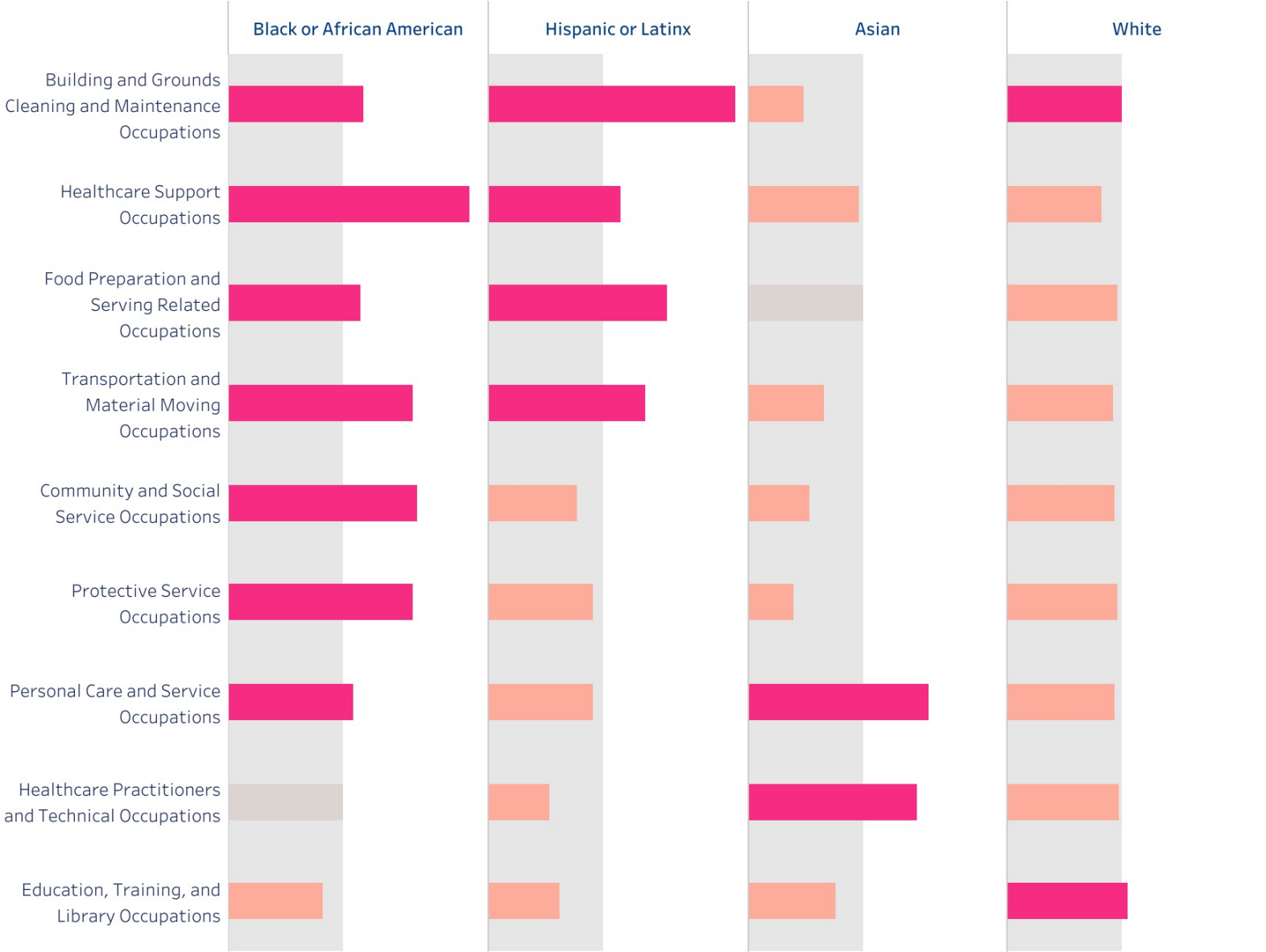
# It's all about technology

- OUR MAIN ARGUMENT:
  - Other main cracks in society
  - Anti-science propaganda.
  - Intensified political resentments and divisions.
  - Racism, anti-immigration and xenophobia.
  - Classism.
  - Health disparities and inequalities, particularly along the lines of social class, gender, age and ethnicity.

HIGH-RISK OCCUPATIONS during COVID-19 in the UNITED STATES:  
racial and ethnic representation by population

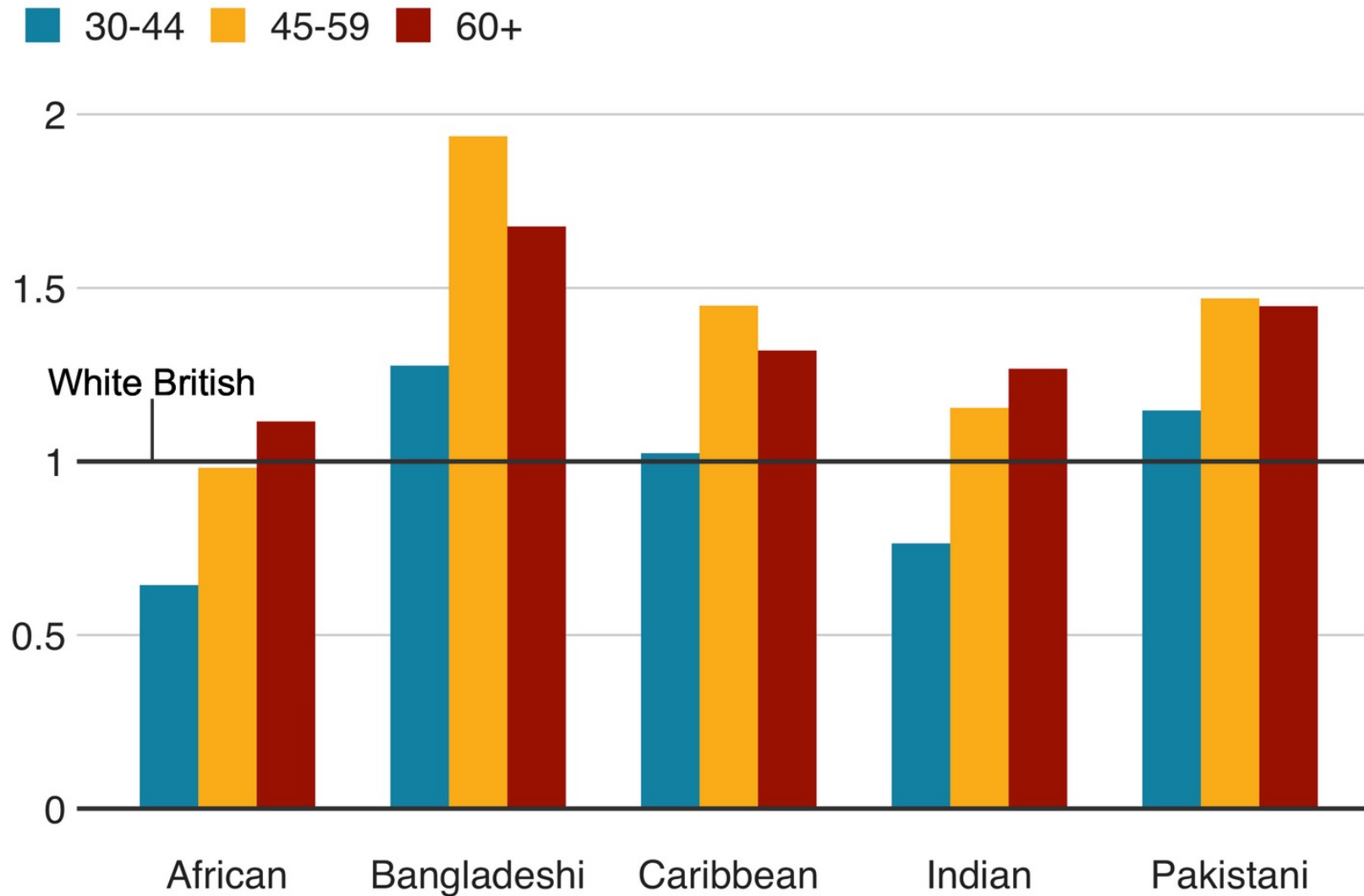


*select an occupation category to view individual occupations*



# Long-term health conditions

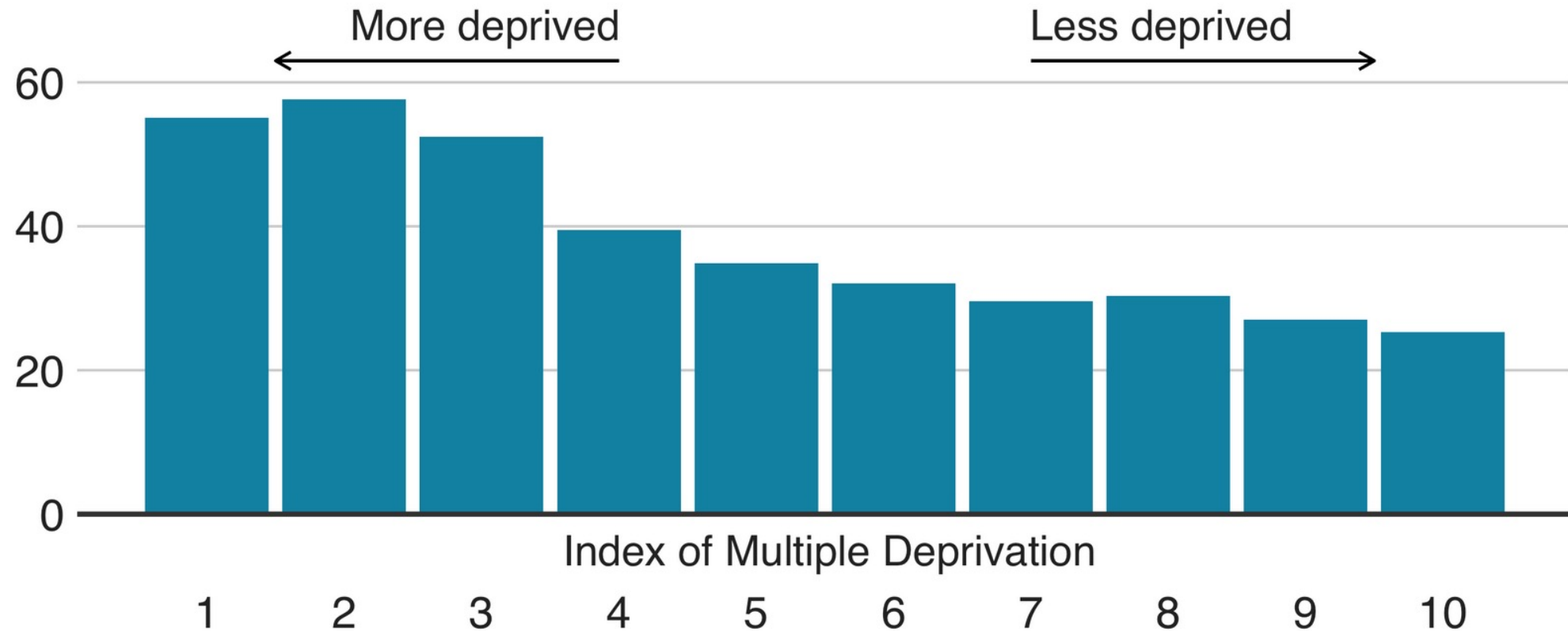
At risk health problems by minority group and age relative to White British population





# Coronavirus deaths higher in England's poorest communities

Deaths per 100,000 people

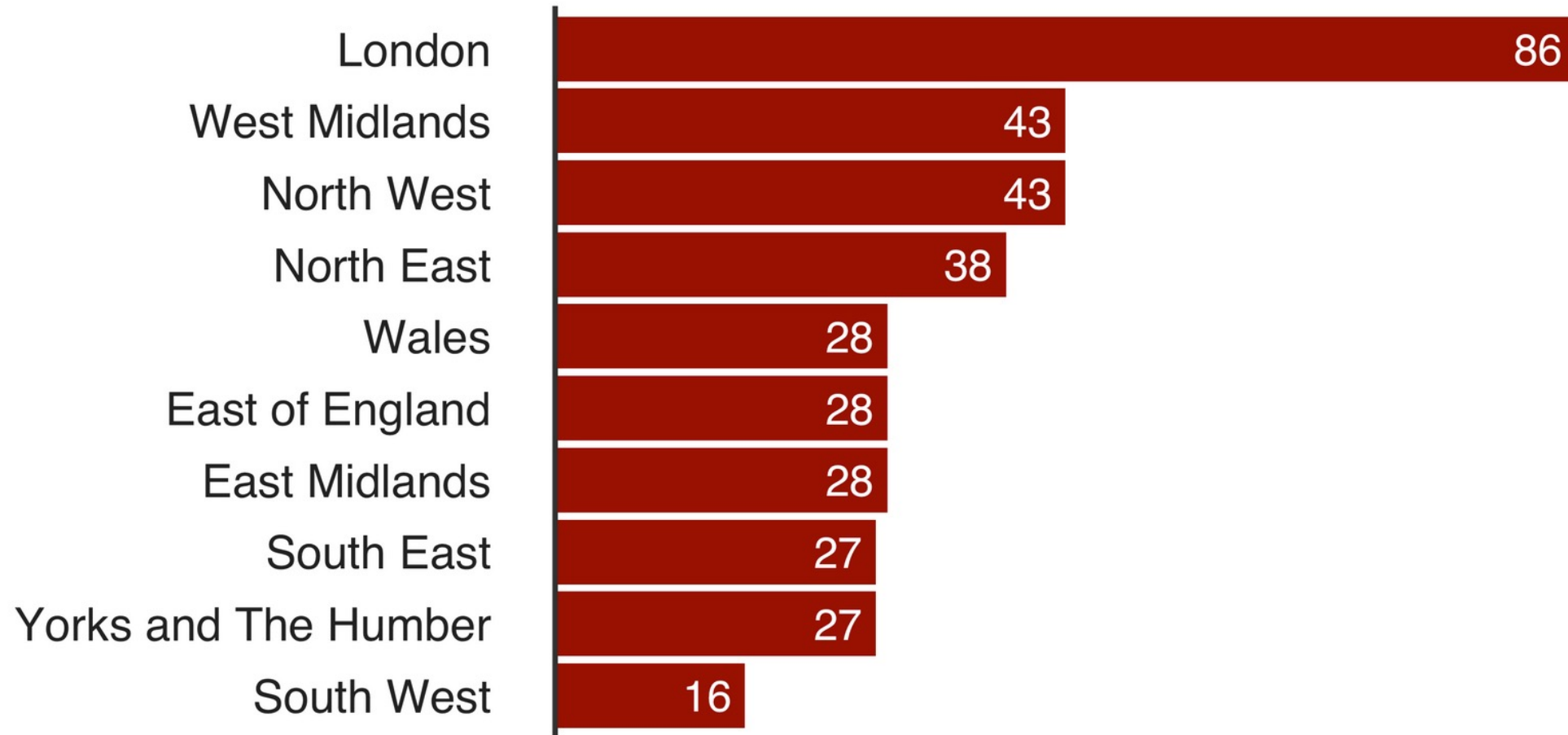


The Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks English areas from most deprived (1) to least deprived (10)

Source: ONS

# London's coronavirus death rate is highest in England and Wales

Age-standardised mortality per 100,000 people

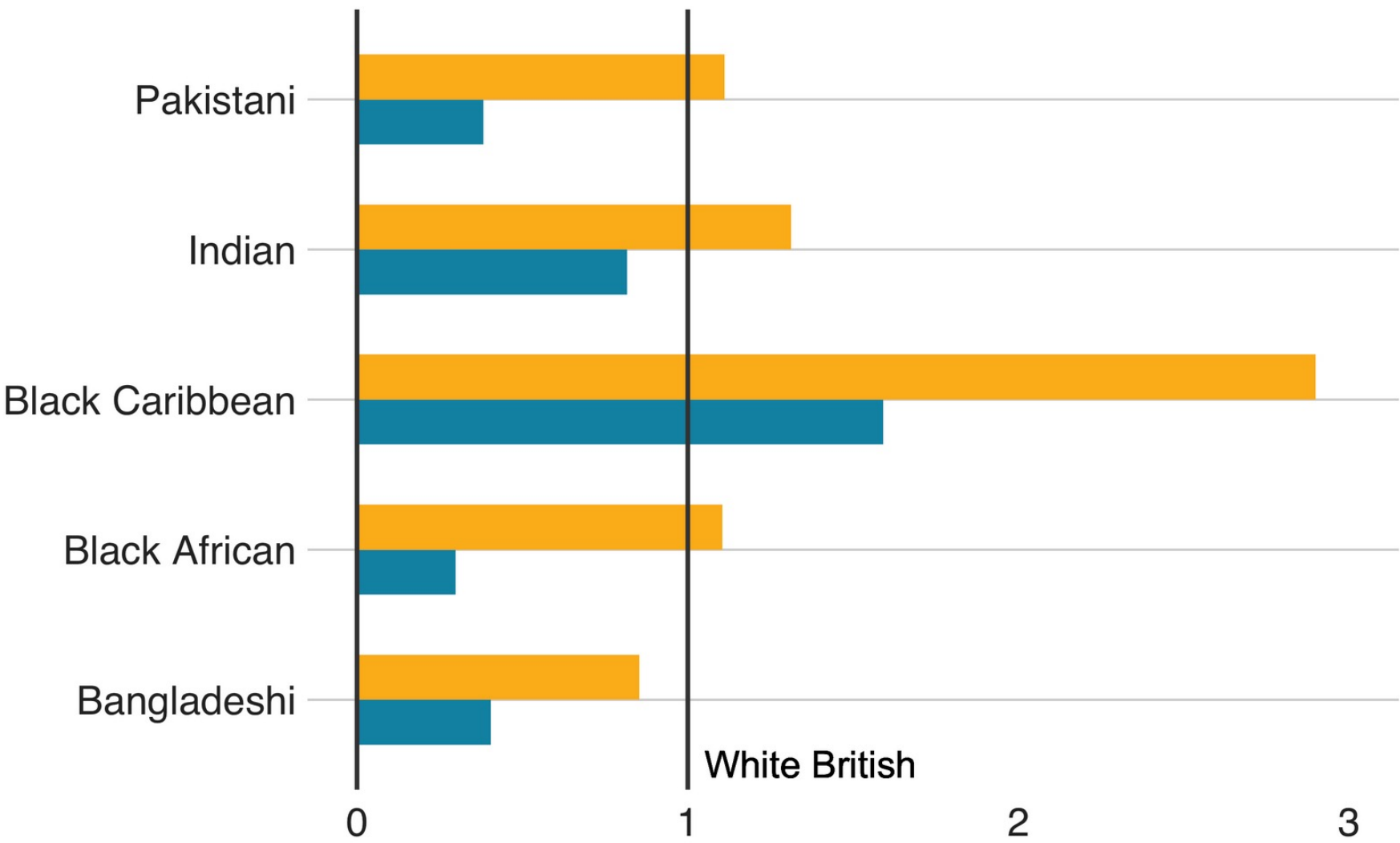


Deaths occurred between 1 March and 17 April 2020

Source: ONS

# Predicted and actual death rate of minority groups relative to White British population

■ Predicted adjusted for age and location of group   ■ Actual hospital deaths





# It's all about technology

- OUR MAIN ARGUMENT:
- Technology is what ultimately is changing our world
  - Medical science and vaccinations
  - Amazon society, Gig services and the work-at-home economy
  - Zoom culture and social networks
  - Simulation Science – modelling of public health issues

# The mRNA vaccine revolution is just beginning

mRNA brought us a Covid-19 vaccine in record speed. Next it could tackle flu, malaria or HIV



- Medical science and vaccinations
- The research sandbox that the pandemic is providing for making massive advances in health.



# The Amazon That Customers Don't See

Each year, hundreds of thousands of workers churn through a vast mechanism that hires and monitors, disciplines and fires. Amid the pandemic, the already strained system lurched.

By [Jodi Kantor](#), [Karen Weise](#) and [Grace Ashford](#)  
June 15, 2021



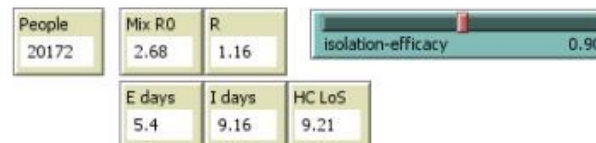
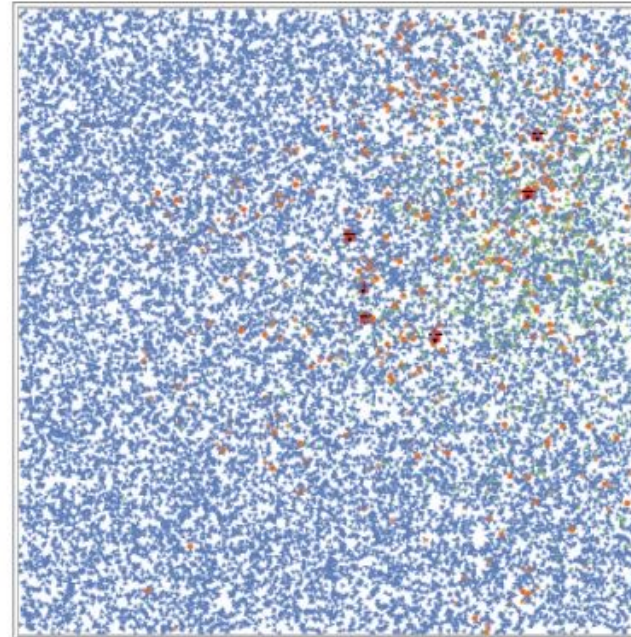
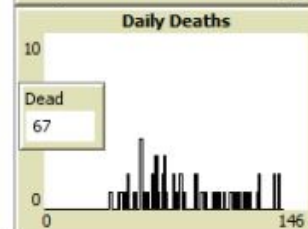
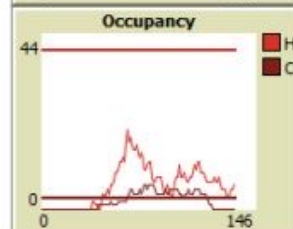
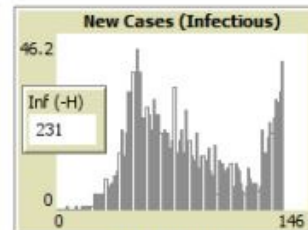
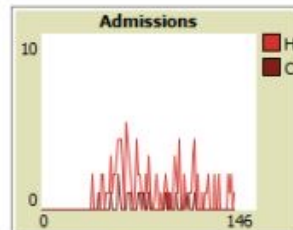
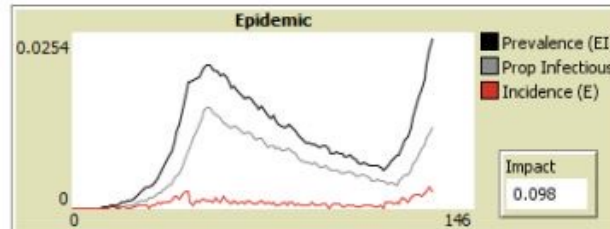
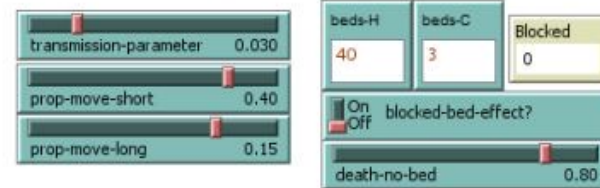
Amazon society, Gig services and the work-at-home economy





Zoom culture and social networks

## Epidemic Progression



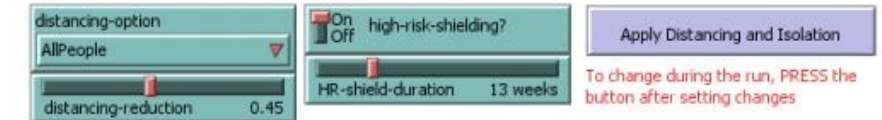
## Interventions

All Interventions Off

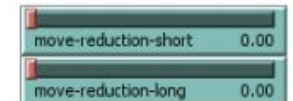
### Social Distancing

Select what is meant by social distancing and how strongly the distancing works.

- (1) ByContact: the probability of a transmitting contact is reduced by the specified proportion.
- (2) AllPeople: everyone reduces their activity (attempted contacts) by the specified proportion.
- (3) AllOrNone: the given proportion of people isolate (includes high risk if isolation also selected), but others make no reduction.



Movement restrictions are a form of distancing as people come only in contact with the same other people repeatedly, reducing mixing between infectious and susceptible people.



### Social Distancing Timing

When does the social distancing policy start (and stop)?



### Response to Symptoms

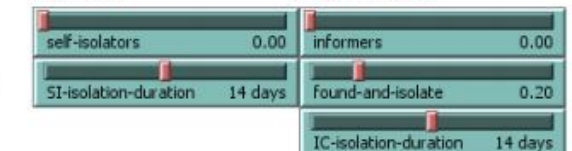


Self-isolating people reduce contacts as soon as they get any symptoms. Informers attempt to notify recent contacts of potential exposure, some of whom choose to isolate.

Self-isolation and informing contacts (if switched on) apply regardless of whether distancing interventions have been triggered.

Only some of mildly infected may show symptoms (plus all in hospital).

#### Self-Isolate



#### Inform Contacts



Simulation Science – modelling of public health issues





Thank you

Questions?