

STEPHEN MOORE | CREATORS SYNDICATE

In the end, Sweden did it right

What if two years ago, when COVID-19 first hit these shores, our politicians hadn't panicked?

What if the government did what it has done every time we were confronted with a deadly virus, such as the Spanish flu or polio? Instead of locking down our schools, churches and businesses, the government could have simply informed citizens of the risks of getting sick and urged people to be extra careful about hygiene, stay out of crowded places and protect the vulnerable.

It turns out there was one country that mostly rejected lockdowns and let life go on as normal as possible under dire circumstances. That country was Sweden.

There were some restrictions and temporary lockdowns, but they were minimal.

The hero of this story is Anders Tegnell, Sweden's chief epidemiologist. He was Sweden's Anthony Fauci, but unlike the now widely discredited Fauci, Tegnell eschewed lockdowns. The international media pilloried him for not following "the science." At first, it seemed the Swedish live-and-let-live strategy was a miserable failure. Death rates soared higher than in other European nations.

But to their credit, the Swedes ignored the "mad modelers" such as Britain's Imperial College team, which predicted multiple times that the number of deaths around the world would be more than actually occurred.

Sweden made some mistakes at the beginning. Like many states in the United States, the Swedes failed to protect elderly nursing home residents adequately, which was a significant reason that deaths in Sweden were higher than in neighboring Norway or Denmark. But Tegnell argued that the collateral damage of lockdowns would outweigh what good they do on a societywide basis. He was proven right.

Two years later, Sweden's COVID-19 death rate is 1,614 per million people — lower

than Britain (2,335) or the U.S. (2,836), which both had more stringent lockdowns.

Sweden appears to have achieved herd immunity more swiftly and thoroughly than other nations. Deaths were higher at the start of the pandemic but fell lower than other lockdown nations in succeeding months.

What is clear today is that the Swedes saved their economy. This year, it's projected to be 5% larger than before the pandemic, compared to a 2% gain for Germany and a 1% gain for Britain. Moreover, the extra debt Sweden has had to take on is a fraction of that of lockdown countries. So it will not have to spend decades paying for the costs of lockdowns.

Swedish schools stayed open with no face masks. Test scores are up, and there is no talk in Sweden about "lost" years of education.

What is sadly ironic about the Sweden story is this should have been the U.S. We're the land of the free, not Sweden. We are the nation of rugged individualism, not Sweden, with its more socialist economy and collectivist mindset. We have more solid constitutional protections to guarantee citizen rights against heavy-handed government.

But the politicians from local health officials and mayors all the way up to the top federal medical experts and lawmakers opted for deadly decisions to shut down the engines of our economy and lock people in their homes. Those policies did irreparable harm that will be felt for years to come. Those who supported this great mistake need to be held accountable.

Sweden's successful response strategy reminds us that we must never again shut down our businesses and schools. I just pray we have all learned that enduring lesson before another virus wave arrives.