

COVID-19: Freedom Means That We Can Do Stupid Things, Not That We Have To

NBC News reports that US president Donald Trump is “furious” over “underwhelming” attendance at his June 20 campaign rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Only 6,200 of 19,000 seats ended up cradling Trump supporters’ butts. An optimistically pre-arranged overflow area went unused.

Explanations abound: Trump’s campaign spokesman, Tim Murtaugh, blames “radical protesters, coupled with a relentless onslaught from the media.” Others note the 95-degree heat combined with thunderstorms — not the weather combination most conducive to standing in lines. Still others credit a social media campaign to request but not use tickets to the event.

The most obvious and likely explanations are simpler.

First, Trump isn’t as popular, nor is his base as enthusiastic and energized, at the moment as was the case four years ago.

Second, despite what you may have heard, an individual’s support for Trump does not necessarily indicate more general idiocy.

Believe it or not, COVID-19 really is a thing, people really are worried about it, and it really is sensible to take precautions.

Has COVID-19 been abused by opportunistic bureaucrats and authoritarian politicians as an excuse to violate our rights? Yes.

Have we found ourselves bombarded by dubious claims about everything from how COVID-19 is transmitted to what must be done for humanity to survive it? Absolutely.

Have mask-wearing and other measures transcended their practical containment value and become more like public testimonials to belief in junk “science” as a state-sponsored religion? Yep.

The “lockdowns” should never have happened, it’s a good thing they’re ending, and the sooner life gets back to something resembling normal the better.

On the other hand, it’s a real disease that’s really killing people, and taking reasonable precautions is, well, reasonable.

Yes, as freedom returns, some people will throw caution entirely to the winds. They should

be free to act like idiots, right up to the point they actually — not prospectively, not hypothetically, ACTUALLY — cause harm to non-consenting others.

They should also be free to refrain from acting like idiots.

Packing tens of thousands of people from hundreds or thousands of miles around into an arena for a rally in Tulsa was an idiotic idea that might as well have been designed specifically to maximize the spread of COVID-19. But hey, it turned out that most of Trump's supporters from that area weren't idiots after all.

Packing thousands of Republicans from all over the country into an arena in Jacksonville, Florida in August, or hundreds of Libertarians from 50 states into a hotel ballroom in Orlando, Florida in July, for gratuitous "national convention events" are idiotic ideas too.

No, those events shouldn't be prohibited. Freedom demands that they not be interfered with. But freedom also allows us non-idiots to avoid the events and scorn their organizers.