

Political Economy of Mass Neurosis during the COVID-19 Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Using the background of COVID-19 crisis, we study past mass neurosis and its social-economic impact (transforming the pandemic in syndemic). Negative information which is spread through mass media repetitively can affect public health negatively in the form of nocebo effects and mass neurosis (in general) and hysteria (in singular). We argue that mass and digital media in connection with the state may have had adverse consequences during the COVID-19 crisis. The resulting collective hysteria may have contributed to policy errors and wrong management by governments not in line with

health recommendations. While mass hysteria can occur in societies with a minimal state, we show that there exist certain self-corrective mechanisms and limits to the harm inflicted, such as sacrosanct private property rights. However, mass hysteria can be exacerbated and self-reinforcing when the negative information comes from an authoritative source, when the media are politicized, and social networks make the negative information omnipresent. We conclude that the negative long-term effects of mass neurosis are exacerbated by the size of the State.

Keywords: COVID-19, Nocebo effects, Mass hysteria, Mass neurosis, Political Economy.

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