Twitter Thread by Soumya



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I cannot count the number of people who've tweeted at me about how masking and social distancing don't work, and how California's surge is proof. Florida is the most common point of contrast, since while California was suffering in December, things in Florida were quiet(ish).

Even Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has pointed to CA as evidence that lockdowns and mask mandates are ineffective.

So, why was COVID calm in Florida when it was exploding in California? There's some randomness to when outbreaks hit , so everyone won't be hit at the same time.

Yes, CA has a higher compliance with masking and social distancing but CA *needs* higher compliance to stave off a New York-style disaster. CA is just far more vulnerable to a big outbreak, due to its higher levels of poverty, crowding & because it's a travel hub

The CDC measures "social vulnerability," -- how severely affected a region may be by a disease outbreak, based on average income, education, housing status etc. While 55% of CA residents live in counties with high “social vulnerability," fewer than a quarter of Floridians do.

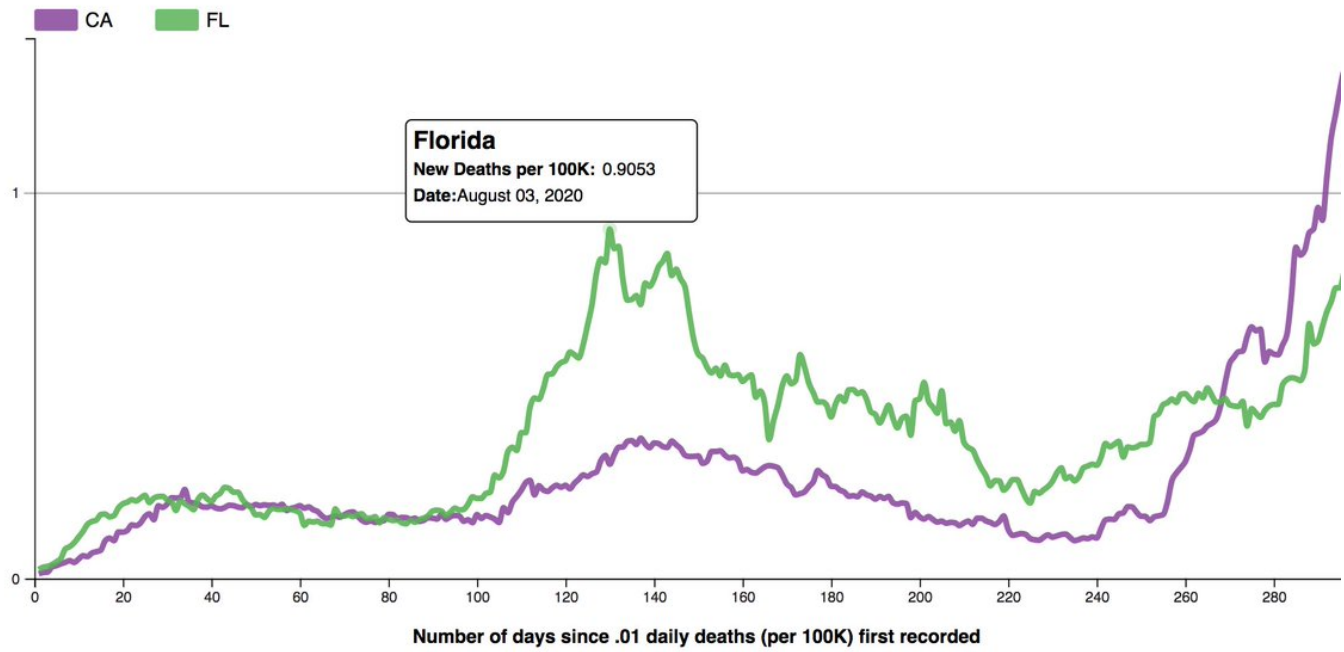
So that's why, sometimes, it may seem that Floridians take fewer precautions, more businesses are open indoors etc, and they are not getting slammed with COVID in the way LA might be at that moment, for example.

But a lot of those contrasts are inaccurate. First of all, they often are based on case counts, so they make California's numbers look huge because we do so much more testing than Florida. Hospitalizations or death are better metrics for understanding how severe a surge truly is.

Also those Florida/California contrasts were floating around, they were only looking at a single moment in time: the winter. It completely excluded the fact that Florida had a huge surge in the summer -- much larger than California's

New deaths attributed to Covid-19, reported to CDC, in CA and FL

Seven-day moving average of new deaths (per 100K), by number of days since .01 average daily deaths (per 100K) first recorded.



Here's the main takeaway: Outbreaks are somewhat unpredictable, and preventing deaths is the most important thing.

California ranks 37th out of the 50 states in terms of its total per capita death toll from COVID. Florida is 25th.

California has tallied 90 COVID deaths for every 100,000 residents, compared with 119 out of 100,000 in Florida. In other words, if California had the same death rate as Florida, California would have a cumulative death toll of more than 47,000, instead of its 35,000.

I'm not saying 35,000 deaths is something to be lauded, but looking to Florida as a way to justify being less cautious is not a valid argument.

The one thing I have heard from experts is that perhaps Florida's decision to be more liberal with its rules allowed people who wanted to be safe to gather outdoors -- even though indoors is open too in a lot of settings -- and feel like they had some freedom.

Some experts said that California may have sparked some backlash by being so strict with rules about outdoor settings that led to people becoming defiant. But most experts said they also thought that even the bans on outdoor things ultimately drove down the number of COVID cases

We wrote a story trying to debunk some of these Florida comparisons and also explain how California ended up with such a massive surge. Understanding how we got to that scary place may help us avoid getting there again.

my latest w/ @ronlin https://t.co/SAElwVsAf1

Just wanted to address this because it's totally true! There is defiance and a lack of enforcement in CA that creates the appearance that we have a lot of strict rules when in fact ... there are lots of pockets where we don't.

https://t.co/d94VnenOcc

> The sheriffs flat out said they will not enforce the governors orders. So yeah we have a strict order but it\u2019s not enforced. I just wanted to add this because the hot spot areas in CA are the ones not masking and throwing parties.
>
> — Alyssa (@alyangel88) January 22, 2021

As one public health professor told me -- but I couldn't put it in the story because of the cursing -- "People from Florida tweet at me and they say like, 'Oh you're locked down, but you're having a bad COVID surge.' I mean, nobody's fucking locked down here."