International Studies Quarterly (2025) **69**, sqaf023

The Temporal Politics of Inevitability: Mass Death during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Katharine M. Millar
London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

Yuna Han
University of Oxford, UK

AND

Martin J. Bayly
London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

Many international phenomena, from complex, interconnected processes to specific catastrophes, have been deemed "inevitable" by elites, policymakers, and scholars. Yet existing scholarship treats "inevitability" as an objective fact to be assessed retrospectively, rather than an expression of politics and contestation. To see the "politics of inevitability," we argue, requires attention to the underlying politics of time through which inevitability is narrated and naturalized. Drawing upon the "temporal turn" in IR, we identify three constitutive practices of inevitability: problem definition, designations of agency and responsibility, and distribution throughout a political community. Empirically, we illustrate our argument through a discourse analysis of how mass death was produced as "inevitable" (or not) during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe. The politics of inevitability does not *cause* the outcomes that are deemed inevitable, but through narrating time in a particular way, it provides the conditions in which certain policy choices become imaginable and/or desirable. This has vital implications for the ways that other future events are cast as inevitable, including climate change, war, and future pandemics.

Existen muchos fenómenos internacionales, desde procesos complejos e interconectados hasta catástrofes específicas, que han sido considerados ≪inevitables≫ por las élites, los responsables políticos y los académicos. Sin embargo, la literatura académica existente trata la ≪inevitabilidad≫ como un hecho objetivo que debe evaluarse retrospectivamente, en lugar de como una expresión de política y de impugnación. Argumentamos que para poder ver la ≪política de la inevitabilidad≫ es necesario prestar atención a la política subyacente del tiempo a través de la cual se narra y se naturaliza la inevitabilidad. Partimos del ≪giro temporal≫ de las RRII e identificamos tres prácticas constitutivas de la inevitabilidad: la definición del problema, las designaciones de la agencia y la responsabilidad y la distribución a lo largo de una comunidad política. De forma empírica, ilustramos nuestra hipótesis a través de un análisis del discurso en materia de cómo las muertes masivas que se produjeron durante la primera ola de la pandemia de COVID-19 en Europa se presentaron (o no) como ≪inevitables≫. La política de la inevitabilidad no causa los resultados que se consideran inevitables, sino que, a través de una narración del tiempo de una manera particular, proporciona las condiciones en las que ciertas opciones políticas se vuelven imaginables y/o deseables. Esto tiene implicaciones fundamentales con respecto a las formas en que otros eventos futuros podrían presentarse como inevitables, incluyendo el cambio climático, la guerra y futuras pandemias.

Nombre de phénomènes internationaux, des processus complexes et interconnectés aux catastrophes spécifiques, ont été qualifiés ≪ d'inévitables ≫ par les élites, les législateurs et les chercheurs. Toutefois, la recherche existante traite ≪ l'inévitabilité ≫ comme un fait objectif à évaluer de façon rétrospective, plutôt qu'une expression de la politique et de la contestation. Nous affirmons que voir la ≪ politique de l'inévitabilité ≫ requiert une attention à la politique de temporalité sous-jacente qui permet la narration et la naturalisation de l'inévitabilité. Nous fondant sur le ≪ tournant temporel ≫ des RI, nous identifions trois pratiques constitutives de l'inévitabilité : la définition du problème, la désignation de l'agence et de la responsabilité, et la distribution dans une communauté politique. Sur le plan empirique, nous illustrons notre argument par le biais d'une analyse discursive de la production du caractère ≪ inévitable ≫ (ou non) du décès en masse lors de la première vague de la pandémie de COVID-19 en Europe. La politique d'inévitabilité ne cause pas les issues réputées inévitables, mais, par son traitement particulier de la temporalité, elle fournit les conditions dans lesquelles certains choix politiques deviennent imaginables et/ou souhaitables. Cela s'accompagne d'implications vitales pour la présentation d'autres événements futurs ≪ inévitables ≫, comme le changement climatique, la guerre et les pandémies à venir.

Katharine M. Millar is an Associate Professor in the International Relations Department at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She researches gender and international relations, with a focus on the politics of violence.

Yuna Han is a Departmental Lecturer in International Relations in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford. She researches the politics of international law, with a focus on international criminal law and human rights accountability.

Martin J. Bayly is an Associate Professor in the International Relations Department at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He works on historical International Relations with a focus on the South Asia region.

Authors' note: This study was generously supported by a grant from the London School of Economics' COVID-19 Pilot Research Fund and the British Academy Small Grant (SRG20\201297). The authors acknowledge and gratefully thank Anaïs Fiault, Zoe Knight, Lily Yu, Annie Hsu, Irene Morlino, and Katharina Kuhn for their invaluable research assistance on this project. We also thank participants in the LSE IR Theory/Area/History seminar, the Queen's University Belfast Politics and IR seminar, and the University of Oxford IR Colloquium, the two anonymous reviewers, and the editors of ISQ for their generous feedback on earlier versions of this article.

Millar, Katharine M. et al. (2025) The Temporal Politics of Inevitability: Mass Death during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Studies Quarterly*, https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqaf023

Introduction

Political and academic discourse often claims that certain events are inevitable. Globalization (Hay and Rosamond 2001), the First World War (Nye 2014), climate change (Parry et al. 1998), the weaponization of space (Pavelec 2012), cybersecurity failures (Greiman 2023), wars in general (Mearsheimer 2001), and the formation of a world state (Wendt 2003) all feature on the long list of phenomena regarded as "inevitable" by political elites, policymakers, and politics and International Relations (IR) scholars. It is common for specific events (e.g., the 2008 financial crisis, the end of the Cold War, Brexit) to be diagnosed as "inevitable" after the fact.

Existing accounts of inevitability in political science and IR favor a deductive-nomological causal understanding of inevitability judged on retrospective analysis. They imply the existence of objectively knowable, even "natural," conditions leading to pre-determined outcomes. These assessments of inevitability are depoliticizing. The objectification of inevitability neglects the concept's political operation and constitution. "Inevitability" refers to the material world but is made meaningful via social and political processes of construction and contestation.

Our argument has significant stakes. The diagnosis of particular events or a general category of phenomenon as "inevitable" implies that nothing can be, or could have been, done. Treating claims of inevitability as objective serves an important political function: it exonerates individuals and collectives from having to change their practices in the present or to take (or assign) accountability for past events. The naturalization of inevitability via its temporal politics has significant implications for our ability to effectively respond to complex challenges, including future pandemics to war and climate change.

This article performs two core functions. First, drawing upon the "temporal turn" in IR, we argue for an understanding of inevitability as *a narration of time* that, through its representation of future events, creates the conditions of possibility for policy choices, shaping assessments of what happened (or will happen) and who is to blame. We argue inevitability is heterotemporal: it is constituted through the blurring of two "cultures" of time: a modernist culture of knowable, controllable, time and an ostensibly archaic culture of unknowable, uncontrollable time. The political operation and meaning of "inevitability" is produced through temporal narration that (re)presents heterotemporality as monolithic and singular, such that a given outcome becomes inescapable. Using the temporal turn and the limited existing critical literature on inevitability, we identify three practices—*problem definition*; designations of *agency and responsibility*; and *sovereign distribution* of time—as central to this political negotiation of time.

Second, we illustrate our analysis of the temporal constitution of inevitability through a discourse analysis of elite political discourses on the possibility of mass deaths during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, January to July 2020. The uncertainty of the first wave, combined with public fear, created political pressure for elites and policymakers to address the public daily on the nature of the pandemic, its risk to life, and its potential trajectory. As a result, the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic offer an unusually well-documented window into the *contemporaneous* construction of inevitability. This enables us to trace the play of the three practices noted above in constituting death as inevitable—or not—as it occurred within public policy and discourse, absent the knowledge of what was to come.

To differentiate our analysis of the temporal constitution of inevitability from post-hoc diagnosis of whether mass deaths (or the pandemic itself) was "really" inevitable, we specifically consider the first wave in the UK, Italy, and Germany. At the outset of the pandemic, political elites in each of these states differed in the way they constructed the possibility of mass COVID-19 deaths. These differences enable us to illustrate how instances of mass death are produced as inevitable—or not—despite similar material and/or structural circumstances.

The article proceeds by demonstrating that inevitability is under-theorized in existing IR scholarship, understood in largely empirical terms. We then use the temporal turn to argue that inevitability is produced through an interaction between different understandings of time. Next, we identify three key temporally constituted practices in the production of inevitability: how the event is defined (*problem definition*); who/what is constructed as an agent and thus responsible for the event's outcome (*agency and responsibility*); and how time is distributed between members of the community (*sovereign distribution*). We then use this framework to illustrate the political production and contestation of inevitability through the case of COVID-19 deaths in Italy, Germany, and the UK in early 2020. We conclude with a reflection upon the implications of the fundamentally political nature of "inevitability" for the ways that other future events, including climate change and war, are cast as inevitable.

Inevitability in International Relations

"Inevitability" is rarely directly theorized or the focus of inquiry in IR scholarship. A small but significant exception is found in critical international political economy (IPE) (Peck and Tickell 2002; Skonieczny 2010). This scholarship argues that discourses of "inevitability" are deployed by political elites to naturalize contentious elements of neoliberal globalization, transforming political choices into matters of material fact (Gills 1997, 11; Gilbert 2008, 210). In other words, critical international political economy scholarship has suggested that certain events become understood as inevitable through political processes.

In broader IR literature, however, inevitability is understood as an objective fact rather than as a form of politics itself. Within empirical analysis, inevitability usually features in one of three ways: the claim that a specific event was inevitable; the claim that an outcome is inevitable even if the specific course of events may have been variable; or the claim that a general category of events is inevitable (Nye 2014, 185–87).

For example, many Realist scholars argue that great power rivalry and war are inevitable as a general category of events (e.g., Mearsheimer 2001; Morgenthau 2005).[1] Classical Marxism holds that the current capitalist mode of production will inevitably be supplanted by another (Marx 2016 [1844]). Liberalism suggests that progress, "civilization," and even perpetual peace are inevitable consequences of humanity's capacity for reason (Doyle 1983; Fukuyama 2006; Skonieczny 2010). International legal scholars debate the "inevitability" of harm to civilians and civil infrastructure ("collateral damage") in war (Crawford 2007; Dill 2014).

[1] As an exception, Waltz (2010 [1979]) argues that while anarchy makes war more likely, it is not technically inevitable.

These assessments of inevitability reflect two distinct understandings of time within IR theory: as cyclical and recurring, in the case of realists, and as linear and progressive, in the case of liberals (Hom 2020, 17; MacKay and LaRoche 2017).

Epistemologically, inevitability is implicit in explanations of recurrent international outcomes through rationalist models, empirically generalizable theories, or an amalgam of both (see Jackson 2010, 3). Inevitability relies upon the presumption of a causal relationship between material and/or structural forces and particular outcomes (Berlin 2002, 159): the anarchic nature of the international system; the hierarchical nature of capitalism; or humanity's capacity for reason or will to power. Positivist accounts of linear causality may be understood as the investigation of the conditions under which outcomes become inevitable (Berlin 2002; Hutchings 2008). Wendt, in his case for the inevitability of a world state, pushes this logic further, arguing for the validity of teleological theories of the international (2003).

Each of these accounts, save Wendt's, focuses on establishing the inevitability of a particular outcome *after the fact*. As Nye points out, "[i]n retrospect, things always look inevitable" (2014, 186). None of these studies considers what is at stake in deeming a particular outcome "inevitable" *at the time* of the event. Because inevitability is understood as an objective fact derived from political contexts rather than as a form of politics itself, the focus of analysis is not on how a certain event becomes understood as inevitable, or how that perception matters politically.

We share the analytical orientation of critical IPE by focusing on *how* events become understood as inevitable. Literature drawn from critical IPE reveals two factors key to empirically constructing specific events as inevitable. First, globalization, as argued by Peck and Tickell, is constructed through "a mode of exogenized thinking in which globalism/neoliberalism is presented as an external 'force'" (2002, 382), often directly analogized to nature. This continues a long Western philosophical tradition of separating nature and humanity (Haraway 2003). Nature is then imbued with a form of normativity that can be invoked to legitimize various beliefs, policies, processes, etc., as "natural," and not susceptible to human intervention (Rayner and Heyward 2013).

The second component of inevitability is agency. Hay and Rosemond identify two contending discourses characterizing globalization. One is "an inexorable and fatalistic unfolding economic logic of no alternative operating beyond the control or purview of political actors whom we might hold accountable for its consequences." The second is "an open-ended, contingent, and crucially political dynamic to which potentially accountable agents might be linked" (2001 cited in Skonieczny 2010, 7; Amoureux 2020). Events are constructed as inevitable when they are framed as beyond the control of potentially identifiable individual agents.

Whilst the critical IPE scholarship demonstrates how ideas of nature and agency can be politically deployed to "inevitablize" events (in this case, globalization), it departs from our contention in that it does not directly question the meaning of inevitability. As observed by Skoniecsny, critical IPE literature focuses primarily on what the discourse of "inevitability" does to a given political context and thus takes the *meaning* of inevitability for granted, conceptualizing it simply as the opposite of contingency (Skonieczny 2010, 5–8). In particular, the colloquial understanding of inevitability implicitly negates the passage of time, suggesting that since the future is already written, we do not need to see how "things play out." This leaves open the possibility for both contemporaneous and post-hoc exoneration. The temporal politics of inevitability are thereby overlooked. To grapple with the meaning and constitution of inevitability, we must also engage with the different conceptions of time through which it is narrated.

The Temporal Turn and the Constitution of Inevitability

We argue that inevitability, conceptually, is constituted via a political narration of two "cultures" of time—modern, rationalized, "knowable" time and archaic, natural, "ungovernable" time—into a singular, seemingly linear outcome that seems to make the future known in the present. Many different forms of temporality may coexist within these cultures of time, but through the politics of inevitability this underlying "heterotemporality" is (re)presented as monolithic, making events (even disastrous ones), if not comfortable, at least comprehensible by rendering them matters of past or future fact rather than present politics.

Our argument draws upon the insights of the philosophy of history and the "temporal turn" in IR. These bodies of work share an understanding that time is not simply a unit of measurement or demarcation but is a site for the production of power through appeals to shared experience (past, future, and present); politicized attempts at temporal narration; and temporal processes of knowledge construction. As argued by Hom, "international politics is not only intrinsically temporal, but also temporally diverse" (2018, 69).

Conceptualizing time through narration rather than objectively perceived events is a central argument of philosophers of history and historical sociologists (Abbott 2001). Reinhart Koselleck recalls Goethe's aphorism that "One will, in the same city, hear an important event narrated differently in the morning and in the evening" (2002, 114). This raises three connected premises of the philosophy of history as it relates to time. First, interpretation plays a significant role in our experience of events—past, present, and future. Second, the narration of events is *positional*; it is dependent on subjective appraisals related to our location in time. Third, consequently, there are multiple narrations of events.

Koselleck argues that modernity introduced new temporal characteristics, including narrative forms of "progress," "decline," "reform," "crisis," "evolution," and "revolution" (Koselleck and Presner 2002; Edelstein et al. 2020). His concept of *Neue Zeit* ("new time") is key to understanding the distinctiveness of modern views on time and its political narration (Koselleck and Presner 2002). Modernity produced a stacked, stratified, sedimented, and saturated formation of time as multiple political, sociohistorical, and technological imperatives organized experience differently. Drawing upon Heidegger, Koselleck also understood the experience of time as dualistic: the "space of experience" informed, and was informed by, the "horizon of expectation" of events yet to come (2004, 258). Although the "legibility of the future" was obscure, it could be subject to prognosis and narration, in part through reference to past experience.

Building on this scholarship, the "temporal turn" within IR establishes that the horizon of the future is principally narrated in acts of "timing." "Narrative timing" relates to "the way in which stories configure actions and agents to unfold a stylized world that communicates meaning and reconfigures our experience of time as a dimension amenable to understanding and action" (Hom 2021, 215; 2020, 82–107). Much of contemporary narrative timing, as alluded to by Koselleck, reflects what we term a "modern" culture of time, wherein time is understood as linear, measured,

quantified, and knowable—echoed in what Hom terms "Western standard time"—reflecting Enlightenment theories of the mind/matter and nature/culture distinction (Haraway 2003; Hom 2010; 2020, 9), time is produced as an exogenous "material" force, amenable to human intervention. It is this culture of time that unites positivist social scientific inquiry with popular conceptualizations of inevitability.

"Modern time" exists in contrast with a second, seemingly more archaic culture of time, what Hom terms "the problem of time": a source of "disorder, dissolution, and death … [where] time passes naturally and carries human projects and lives away in its wake" (Hom 2020, 10). Time is narrated as ungovernable, uncontrollable, and even non-political—sweeping away human endeavor, including efforts to control time (Hom 2020, 14–6). Kimberly Hutchings' (2008) reading of the ancient Greek concepts of *chronos* (abstract, measured time) and *kairos* (exceptional, eventful, transformational time) captures a similar distinction, connecting it to socio-political notions of the "right time" for action (Bicchi 2022, 3). Importantly, these understandings of time are not monolithic or discrete; they are empirically and experientially blurred and entangled.

Accordingly, temporal turn scholarship shows that although we may perceive ourselves to be modern, these two cultures of time—the modern and the archaic[2]—operate simultaneously (Hom 2020, 17). A multitude of possible temporal narrations and "timing practices" (Hom 2020) exist within (and beyond) these two cultures of time, even as some may be asserted as universal. Time may be seen as a "*totality-in-multiplicity* of all the timing practices that humans undertake," which the temporal turn conceptualizes as "heterotemporality" (Hom 2018, 75). This awareness of temporal multiplicity enables scholars to explore the politics operating across particular historically and socially embedded intersubjective understandings, or "regimes," of time (Edelstein et al. 2020, 14; Hom 2018; 2020). Power and time are therefore understood as co-constituted, as "power operates by arranging, managing, and scaling temporal regimes and conflicts … [and] is often undone in the cut and thrust of temporal antagonisms" (Edelstein et al. 2020, 11). Studies of transitional justice, for instance, have documented the way the linear, modern temporality of formal court systems—and the implication that "justice" marks an end to war—are contested by community references to the cyclical nature of experiential trauma (Igreja 2018; van Roekel 2018).

The heuristic distinction between modern and archaic time does not, of course, exhaust the empirical scope of heterotemporality. A significant body of work traces the emergence of more concrete temporal metaphors and narratives, such as "war,"' "crisis," and pandemic time (Edkins 2003; Walker 2020; Jarvis 2022a). These accounts, which frequently center the (re)narrativization of moments of crisis or trauma (Agathangelou and Killian 2016), share with our study an interest in the political negotiation of heterotemporality. They too are concerned with the narration of not only the past (see Kopstein, Subotić, and Welch 2023) but also potential futures—often understood in terms of temporal exception or rupture. Our study, in contrast, is interested in the obverse dynamic: the way narrations of heterotemporality serve to objectify and naturalize similarly traumatic events through not only the production of specific empirical events as inevitable but also through the constitution of the idea of "inevitability" per se.

[2]This term encompasses what Hom terms "the problem of time" (Hom 2020).

Conceptual Framework: Three Temporal Processes of Inevitability

In this section, we identify three practices that, together, produce inevitability. Informed by the critical IPE literature's analysis of references to nature and conceptualizations of agency, we argue that inevitability is constituted by: (1) defining the nature of an event ("problem definition"); (2) determining who and what is exercising agency ("agency and responsibility"); and (3) how time as a resource or experience is distributed between members of the community ("sovereign distribution"). Our conceptual framework (Table 1) explicates the temporal constitution of each of these practices via an underlying negotiation of modern/archaic cultures of time.

Problem Definition

Problem definition refers to how a sequence of occurrences throughout time becomes framed and understood as a "problem" requiring a social and political solution. The definition of the issue at hand consequently modulates the type of responses that become possible as appropriate or exigent.

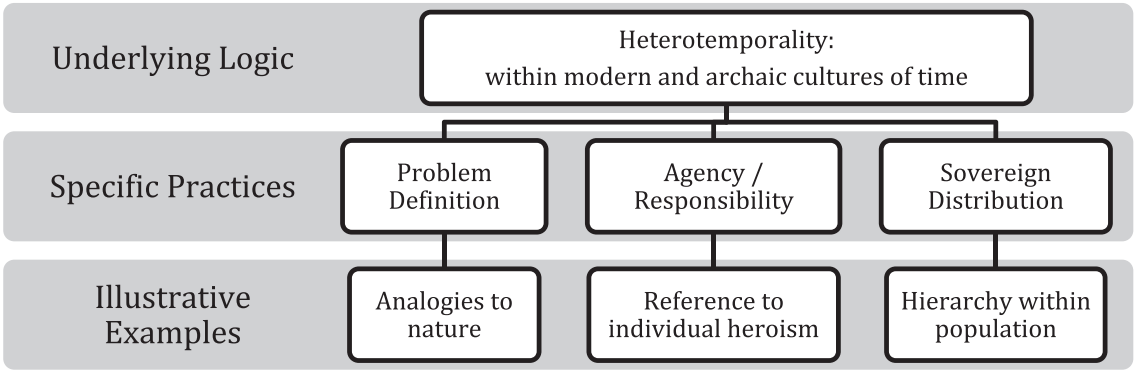
Problem definition contains two elements. First, before an issue can be designated as a "problem," a sequence of occurrences needs to be intersubjectively understood as a discrete "event" (Lundborg 2012). The mere passage of time does not necessarily constitute an event of political significance, nor are similar occurrences always given the same political or social meaning. Instances of peacetime gun violence, for instance, are not automatically regarded as "events" of social and political significance (McIntosh 2022). The naming and defining of an event is an act of sovereign temporal power. It separates the event from the past (and connotations of normality/continuity) and positions it in relation to the future (Lundborg 2012).

Second, the definition of a series of incidents as a "problem" is linked with making it knowable. The construction of an event as a problem requires rendering it a) amendable to comprehension by reason and b) intelligible within an existing domain of cultural and epistemic references (Foucault 2020). Knowability can operate via analogy, grafting unfamiliar events into a cohesive chain by borrowing the causal logic, narrative, and identification of a familiar problem, and/or via scientific inquiry. Consider, for instance, the dual stakes in understanding gun violence as, first, a societal rather than individual problem and, second, a matter of public health versus a matter of individual crime (McIntosh 2022).

Naming the problem and designating an event *as such* thus also involves diagnosing the nature of the problem. This diagnosis only makes sense, however, against the backdrop of "natural," "ungovernable," and "modern," rationalized heterotemporality. In "modern" accounts of time, the knowability of the problem is typically a matter of determining its amenability to scientific assessment. Quantified, rationalized time, as observed by Hom (2018, 70; McIntosh 2015, 475–79), facilitates the construction of scientific knowledge by naturalizing linear accounts of cause and, correspondingly, generalization or even prediction.

Events "knowable" through modern social science are contrasted with those associated with nature/the natural. Here, nature is not the material world observed through scientific method but rather phenomena that escape its intervention as uncontrollable and ungovernable: subject to archaic, problematic time. Think here of the way neoliberalism is constructed as inevitable via its analogy to nature

Table 1. The Temporal Constitution of Inevitability



in the globalization literature, or alternatively, the play between predictable occurrences covered by conventional insurance policies and those excluded as natural disasters or acts of God.

This interaction between modern temporal rationalization and archaic uncertainty is key to the constitution of inevitability. Specifically, modern temporal "scientification" normalizes the occurrence, if not the specifics, of ungovernable events. Skonieczny refers to this as "contingent inevitability" (2010, 3). By presenting future possibility as a probabilistic fait accompli, this type of problem definition wrangles with disruptive, archaic temporal processes by turning temporal ungovernability itself into a fact. This is seen, for instance, in efforts to model the future impacts of global warming on sea levels. Through narrations of probabilistic modelling, the public is invited to act as if the future has already become the present, thus leveraging the heterotemporal tension between the "natural" inevitability of an event and the modern knowability of its unfolding within the future.

Agency and Responsibility

The second temporal process of inevitability captures how problem definition is made normatively and socio-politically meaningful. The narration of the problem typically contains an account of agency specifying whether humans can exercise control over the problem.

More specifically, when considering inevitability, agency is read primarily in terms of the capacity to prevent the problem from occurring. For example, in his discussion of historical inevitability, Nye recounts the British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, upon the onset of World War One, reflecting that he had "come to think that no human individual could have prevented it" (2014, 179). Preventability, in turn, is entangled with implicit understandings of responsibility and accountability. Grey's account of the First World War suggests that reference to inevitability involves the removal of responsibility from specific, identifiable, human individuals. It is silent on the possibility of complex configurations of collective or corporate agency.

Like problem definition, intersubjective understandings of agency are situated within a specific empirical context and constituted within a particular regime of time. "Modern" cultures of time are anthropocentric and individualistic (Quijano 2007). The underlying negotiation between modern and archaic cultures of time that moves an event from "preventable" to "inevitable," however, complicates seemingly homogenous understandings of "modern" agency. Invocations of inevitability raise the possibility that the modern individual may be powerless to intervene in "natural," archaic time as it passes them by. Gestures to archaic cultures of time facilitate the narration of events as inevitable by dissolving the temporal basis of individualized modern agency, creating the appearance of a lack (or inefficiency) of politics. This supports an implicitly temporal logic of responsibility, qualified by an agent's capacity to intervene in *chronos* (the abstract passage of quantified time) and seize *kairos* (the fortuitous moment to act) (Hutchings 2008, 5). The implication is if an individual agent could not have acted *in time* (in both senses of the phrase) to stop an event from occurring, they are not responsible for its occurrence (and, often, its consequences). Political assessments of accountability (and the condition of possibility for exoneration) require an implicitly temporal analysis of who could/should have reasonably been expected to do what and when.

Sovereign Distribution

As alluded to above, the politics of inevitability also imply a question of scale that operates alongside and through time (Amoureux 2020; McIntosh 2022). Cultures (and socially and historically located political regimes) of time are *bounded* (Walker 1993; Hom 2010). Temporal regimes produce community in a manner like, but not duplicative of, the territorial logics of the modern nation-state (Cohen 2018). Sovereign power, typically wielded by the nation-state in the "modern" culture of time, plays a dual function in constituting the subject of time and, in so doing, *distributing* time.

Not everyone gets to be the normative subject of the regime of time at hand. As argued by Cohen, time "is an important political variable that can be manipulated to achieve greater or lesser degrees of inclusion in the population … [separating] in from out, enfranchized from disenfranchized, and rights-bearing from rights-less" (2018, 30). Consider how a state expropriates time from citizens daily through queues and wait-times, disbursing political membership based on bureaucratic immigration deadlines or extracting time through incarceration (Moran 2012; Cohen 2018). As in the practices above, this distribution of time relies on a manipulation of the boundaries between "controllable" and "uncontrollable" time.

In the most exigent example, the state manages citizens' death. As demonstrated by the necropolitics literature, marginalized peoples, frequently belonging to racial, gender, and sexual minorities, are abandoned and/or made to die by the state (Mbembe 2011; Puar 2017). Some lives—often those who "fail" to be economically productive—are more "losable" than others (Kafer 2013; Carney and Gray 2015). The elderly, the disabled, and people with "pre-existing conditions" are constructed as closer to death than the presumedly healthy. Some deaths are constructed as more "natural," or as less amenable to modern intervention and control, than others.

Though it is easiest to see this disaggregation of the temporal politics of inevitability with respect to death, the process pertains more generally. The distribution of the inevitability of climate change differs in time and scale for the people of Global South small island states and people in the Global North; the "inevitability" of World War One differed according to race, class, coloniality, and gender. The routinized exposure of marginalized, minoritized, and/or disabled people to being "worn out" (Berlant 2007) and to death (Tyner 2019) is an inequitable distribution of *inevitability*.

In sum, we conceive of inevitability as a politicized temporal regime containing two cultures of time: the modern and the archaic. The three timing practices identified above—problem definition, agency and responsibility, and distribution—contribute to the construction of an event as inevitable (or not); they are constitutive of inevitability. Together, the three practices are not discrete and sequential building blocks but are entangled and mutually reinforcing. The way a problem is defined, for instance, will inform the presumed scope and character of agency, as the examples of heroization and idealized agency in the following case study show. Likewise, ideas of agency will inform which people or institutions are posited as authoritative in problem definition. These three practices are also subject to (re)construction before, during, and after the event at hand. The diagnosis of an event as "inevitable" (or not) is a political act that should be situated at the moment of its expression, understood not in terms of objective material or social forces, but rather as a temporally constituted and contested narration of time.

Constituting Inevitability: Mass Death in the First Wave of COVID-19

In the balance of the article, to illustrate the politics of inevitability, we examine discourses regarding the likelihood of mass COVID-19 deaths during the "first wave" of the pandemic in Western Europe. On 11 March 2020, over two months after the first confirmed cases of the novel virus were identified in Wuhan, China, the World Health Organization (WHO) designated the COVID-19 virus as a "pandemic," characterized by a global spread of infection outside of its origin point and by an exponential growth in infection rates (WHO-1). The "first wave" of the pandemic in Western Europe commonly refers to the period between January 2020, when the first confirmed COVID-19 infection case was discovered, and the end of June 2020, when the number of infections declined sharply for most countries in the region (Kontis et al. 2020).

The first wave of COVID-19 offers a unique opportunity to empirically study the oft-lost contemporaneous political constitution—and contestation—of inevitability. The scale of the pandemic and disruption of regular life compelled political elites and policymakers to narrate the pandemic daily (Jarvis 2022a, 28), creating an archive of contemporaneous assessments of the nature of the pandemic and its likely severity. Relatedly, as both pandemics and death are typically considered natural and/or biological processes at a remove from human agency, the occurrence of mass pandemic death offers a hard test for our analysis of the social and political constitution of inevitability.

The nature of the pandemic as an on-going event with various stages—rather than a singular event with a short timeframe such as a tsunami—also makes it useful in illustrating the contemporaneous interaction of different temporal cultures to produce inevitability. Many academic and lay discussions of inevitability occur after a given event has concluded or are more general assessments of whether the class of phenomenon can be prevented in the future. These assessments of inevitability happen *outside* of the temporal regime in which the event is occurring. Discussions of an event's inevitability *as it is unfolding*—within the event's own temporal regime—are rare.

Method & Logic of Inquiry

The temporal turn in IR presents a general analytic challenge of making abstract constitutive dynamics empirically observable. To address this, we empirically trace the workings of the three practices of "timing"—problem definition, agency/responsibility, and sovereign distribution—in our analysis of elite public discourse. Discourse analysis is concerned with uncovering how discourses produce certain power relationships, social dynamics, and histories, as common-sensical, desirable, normal, or sufficiently "natural" they disappear from explicit political and social debate (Doty 1993, 229). Epistemologically, this aligns with our conceptualization of inevitability as a temporal process of sociopolitical construction.

We analyzed statements that refer to the nature of the pandemic (problem definition), issues of human intervention and responsibility (agency), and who is entitled to time (sovereign distribution) to substantiate our analysis of the more implicit interaction of modern and archaic cultures of time in constituting inevitability, following the inferential logic of thematic discourse analysis (Taylor and Ussher 2001). This discourse was interpreted against the broader backdrop of the pandemic, as summarized in table one. Furthermore, where appropriate, we have referenced secondary literature regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in the specific countries to cross-check our interpretations.

Empirically, we concentrate our examination of the COVID-19 pandemic on the UK, Italy, and Germany for three reasons. First, these countries experienced the first wave of the pandemic on approximately similar timelines, allowing us to examine the political construction of inevitability under (relatively) similar conditions. We can reasonably expect that relevant policymakers operated in comparable informational environments. Second, we prioritized countries with abundant publicly available discourse on the pandemic. This supports robust discourse analysis and ensures we can capture the *concurrent* construction of inevitability as the first wave pandemic unfolded. Third, following the temporal turn's caution about inadvertently universalizing temporal cultures, we selected democracies in Western Europe with shared political institutions and socio-cultural understandings of space-time (Amoureux 2020, 5).

Given the political stakes of policymakers' construction of death as inevitable, we examine government policies and communications, contextualized by print media reporting

across the political spectrum, produced between 1 January and 31 July 2020 in the UK, Germany, and Italy (listed in the online Appendix).[3] Texts were sourced through keyword searches for "COVID" and/or "pandemic" and "death," rather than "inevitability" per se, to track the relationship between explicit references to death and more implicit plays of time. Each individual reference to pandemic death was read in the context of its entire document.

We understand these texts to be representative of elite discourse and authoritative public culture regarding first-wave pandemic deaths (see Millar 2022, 12–3). This focus on conventional political authority necessitates a tradeoff with considering other social actors, such as non-governmental organizations and social media users, that might plausibly offer an alternative account of the inevitability of pandemic death. Consequently, we are not able to see forms of temporal contestation outside of print media, such as online COVID-19 denial (Rothmund et al. 2022). While the inclusion of a broader array of social actors—an important avenue for future research—may result in differing constructions of COVID-19 death, we are confident that our analyses serve as a useful illustration of the broader phenomenon of interest, namely the temporal constitution of inevitability.

Finally, the aim of our empirical analysis of mass death during the COVID-19 pandemic is to demonstrate our conceptual argument regarding the temporal constitution of inevitability. We do not address the question of whether the eventual death toll was preventable, nor do we weigh the efficacy of particular medical interventions or policy decisions. These important assessments of pandemic response are the domain of comparative public health policy literature (e.g., Villani et al. 2020; Liu and Geva-May 2021; Wang and Mao 2021; Abou Ghayda et al. 2022) and the topic of many on-going public inquiries (e.g., UK-GOV-31). Our focus is on the discursive practices of "timing" that allowed deaths to be *understood* as "inevitable" *at the time*.

The balance of the article presents our aggregated analysis, illustrated with key examples, of the broad practices of timing that constituted pandemic mass death as inevitable during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK, Italy, and Germany.

Problem Definition

The novel nature of the COVID-19 virus, alongside the relative dearth of recent public experience of viral epidemics, meant globally policymakers faced a challenge in defining the "problem" of COVID-19. The WHO, in both naming the virus and labelling it a global "pandemic," constituted COVID-19 as an event—a break from normality—and laid the groundwork for understanding it as a scientific emergency. Following this, in Italy, Germany, and the UK, the pandemic was defined as an explicit public health crisis that legitimated and necessitated direct, drastic government interventions. Italy was first to declare a state of emergency on January 31 (ITA-MED-2). The UK declared its first lockdown order on March 23 (UK-GOV-23; the German parliament passed legislation declaring the epidemic a "situation of national significance" with effect from March 28 (GE-MED-8).

Statistical data and modelling—particularly forecasting models that utilized time series analysis—also played a significant role in constructing the inevitability of mass COVID-19 deaths. The concepts of "data-driven" or "evidence-based" policymaking, referring to the use of systematic research in the design, evaluation, and communication of public policy, have been a mainstay in scholarship and practice for the past three decades (Head 2008; van Veenstra and Kotterink 2017). The role of data, both as a general idea and as an input to specific statistical models, however, was amplified during the pandemic (Weingart et al. 2022). A pandemic, by definition, is characterized by how many people have been infected by the virus and how quickly this number is multiplying (e.g., Morens, Folkers, and Fauci 2009). Data is the idiom in which the pandemic was made "knowable" to policymakers and the public.

But given how quickly the virus spread and how little was known about its nature, compiling this data was not straightforward. The WHO found that states diverged in their methods for calculating COVID-19 fatalities with respect to, for instance, accounting for deaths outside of hospitals (WHO-2). How that data was communicated to the public, including which statistics were emphasized and how they were contextualized, also varied significantly between countries (Millar et al. 2020, 16–44). This variation in how death-related data was framed—the way in which statistics were *narrated*—was both constituted by and constitutive of the politics of inevitability.

In the broadest sense, the UK's political discourse framed the "problem" of the pandemic as one that inevitably leads to mass levels of death, mobilizing at different points during the first wave tensions between archaic and modern temporal cultures. Boris Johnson, then-Prime Minister of the UK, declared the pandemic as the "worst public health crisis of a generation" (UK-GOV-22; c.f. Jarvis 2022b, 32). By defining the pandemic in heightened terms, the UK government both conveyed the urgency of the situation and generated a discursive structure in which the future outcome of the pandemic was a fait accompli: high levels of death were naturalized as an inevitable result of the spread of the virus.

On March 12, 2020, Johnson announced that the UK government was moving from a "contain" to "delay" strategy for the COVID-19 pandemic, warning that "[i]t [COVID-19] is going to spread further, and I must level with you; I must level with the British public: many more families are going to lose loved ones before their time" (UK-MED-28). The UK government's explicit assertion that the virus will multiply—and result in mass levels of death—constituted the pandemic within an archaic culture of time, in which the passage of time and its effects was impervious to human intervention. As reflected in the UK's initial advocacy of a "herd immunity" strategy (UK-MED-19), predicated on acceding to an inexorably spreading virus, the pandemic was constituted as an ungovernable problem.

But tracking the statistical narration of mass death in the UK reveals a more complex interplay between temporal cultures that contributed to the constitution of inevitability. This is particularly apparent in the role played by epidemiological models that presented plausible future scenarios, both in terms of justifying and contesting government policy. In the UK, policymakers often insisted that they were "following the science" in designing their responses to the virus (Engelmann et al. 2023, 132), where "science" almost exclusively referred to various modelling data provided by its Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies (SAGE). This was true even when the models themselves did not provide a clear policy direction (Engelmann et al. 2023, 132). However, by March 16th, SAGE had reached a consensus that without introducing government-mandated lockdowns, the UK health system would go under serious strain and potentially end with catastrophic numbers of deaths

[3]Primary sources are cited via label, rather than standard author-date format. All primary sources used in the discourse analysis, and the label key, are available in the online Appendix.

(Engelmann et al. 2023, 132). "Report 9," which modelled the impact of lockdown-type interventions on the progression of the virus and included visual demonstration of projected mass death levels if no drastic policy were implemented (UK-CIV-13), shaped the government's response (UK-MED-33).

At the time when the UK government was still maintaining that national lockdowns were not necessary, the media used alternative narrations of epidemiological models that seemed to contradict the government's assumptions regarding the trajectory of the virus to criticize the government (e.g., UK-MED-32). In other words, the existence of varied epidemiological models suggested that the *future* of the pandemic also could vary—dependent on the type of interventions the UK would decide to take. Models made "knowable" an uncertain future, not necessarily by projecting an outcome as "inevitable," but by concretizing the choices in front of the public. The use of time series models evoked a modern temporal culture, characterizing the pandemic as an unfolding yet controllable event by positioning it in relation to a *comprehensible* if uncertain future.

Once the UK lockdown was instituted, however, high-level political discourse quickly moved from contesting potential futures presented in SAGE models to implicitly accepting the high levels of death projected by the models' worst-case scenarios as reality. As in other contexts during the pandemic, probabilistic and contingent modelling came to be seen as predictive and determinative (see Saltelli and Di Fiore 2023). We can see this in the narration of death tolls. In the early days of the pandemic, the daily UK press briefings headed by various members of the cabinet reported the number of deaths and offered a brief note of sympathy (e.g., UK-GOV-11). By June 2020, all direct discussion of the mass levels of death had ceased. Fatality-related data was invoked sporadically, typically in the context of gauging the success of other policy aims, such as safeguarding the National Health Service (NHS) and revitalizing the economy (UK-GOV-14). Although death tolls were updated on the UK government COVID-19 website, the absence of direct discussion suggests a certain level of COVID-19 fatalities had become normalized in the government's approach (Millar et al. 2020, 17).

Thus, the gradual de-emphasis and eventual omission of death-related data implicitly framed mass levels of death as acceptable and, consequently, inevitable. In the UK, the statistical narration of time-series models served, counterintuitively, to shift the constitution of the pandemic away from that of a modern, rationalized culture of time to an archaic, ungovernable time.

This contrasts with the use of the R-value and other statistical narration in Germany. Germany's political discourse was also reliant on statistical models, particularly the reproduction value of the virus (i.e., "R-value") (GE-GOV-15). Representation of the data emphasized the nature of the pandemic as an *unfolding event* in which the outcome was not predetermined. Angela Merkel, the then-Prime Minister of Germany, and other high-ranking politicians communicated to the public that normalization of everyday life was only possible *if* the R-value dropped below a certain threshold (GE-GOV-3). Mass deaths were not a forgone conclusion but were still within an unknown future subject to human intervention. In contrast to the UK case, the German political class also resisted normalizing any real or projected level of death as acceptable (GE-MED-24). For example, the death rate of around 100 reported in May 2020 was not considered "acceptable" by political commentators (GE-GOV-18). The German case thus most squarely evidences a modern temporal culture through its rationalized, knowable passage of time and the recognition of an uncertain future.

It may be argued, of course, that the constitution of inevitability was a result of Germany experiencing a less significant death rate. The juxtaposition of Italy and the UK, however, demonstrates that even with similarly catastrophic levels of death by COVID-19, the construction of mass death as inevitable was not a predetermined political outcome. Italian discourse constructed deaths, especially those of elderly people, to be addressable tragedies rather than as an inevitable consequence of the pandemic (Morlino 2020, 28). The Italian government's statistical narration emphasized death as such, rather than as a datapoint for future recovery planning (Morlino 2020, 31; e.g., ITA-MED-14; ITA-MED-5; ITA-MED-9).

Individual and mass death resulting from the pandemic was presented as something that needed to be avoided at all costs by the government (ITA-MED-15)—a denial of the past to posit the future, even the present, as alterable. Italian discourse suggested that the health and survival of every citizen were to be prioritized above economic recovery (ITA-MED-1). Press statements expressed concern that an "entire generation [of elderly Italians] was passing away" due to the pandemic (ITA-MED-20), labeling it as a massacre, following an investigation by the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* into care home deaths that found fault with the regional government's handling of vulnerable residents (ITA-MED-14; ITA-MED-9). In contrast again with the UK, Italy's framing of catastrophic levels of death implied an interplay between the two cultures of time, wherein the pandemic was framed in the idiom of timeless tragedy drawn from archaic notions of time, whilst on-going mass death was posited as controllable and modern.

The production and presentation of specific forms of data in the different country cases demonstrates the varying temporal constitution of the pandemic as a particular type of "problem" within a temporal regime suggestive of both archaic and modern cultures of time. Specifically, the variance in death rate reporting, contextualization, and emphasis demonstrates differing constructions of the temporal politics of inevitability regarding pandemic mass death (c.f. Peckham 2020). If the Germany case was situated squarely within a modern temporal culture, constructing the pandemic as an uncertain but knowable unfolding event, the UK case exhibited a tension between multiple modernist models of time that were nonetheless narrated through an archaic culture of time stressing the inevitability of death. Italy resisted its material past by framing mass levels of death as a preventable tragedy, thus holding open the possibility for action in the present and future.

Agency and Responsibility

Problem definition also influences the construction of agency and responsibility. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the temporal constitution of agency—and related assessments of human control—was most evident in the use of historically and contextually evocative analogies. In the UK and Italy, analogies to World War Two were common (Browning and Haigh 2022; Venuleo et al. 2020). In the UK, Johnson referred to his cabinet as a "wartime government" as early as March 17th (UK-GOV-22). The Italian media also referred to the government as a "wartime cabinet" (ITA-MED-7); political elites implicitly framed the pandemic as a war that could be combatted through solidarity and state action (ITA-MED-11; ITA-MED-4, 7; ITA-MED-18).

The Italian version of the war analogy reflects a modern culture of time, wherein the outcome of events can be actively understood and shaped through human action. In theory, wartime (if not in contemporary practice) (Hom and Campbell 2022; Palestrino 2022) has a linear trajectory—a beginning and an end. The Italian invocation of "wartime" was not deployed to make inevitable a catastrophic future but rather to form a periodized horizon of the future that may be improved. The first wave of the pandemic was constituted as the "darkest hour" (ITA-MED-13, 1) of the "war."

Conversely, the UK's use of war analogy punctured the modernist culture of time by positing the inevitable future as a "natural," ungovernable event. Humans can act *within* wartime, but not always to change it. Indeed, war as a concept demonstrates the simultaneous interplay between modern and archaic temporal regimes—on the one hand, as constituted by quintessential acts of individual agency and, on the other hand, as an event that creates a temporal disconnect, as an archaic "catastrophe" that interrupts the progression of modernity. The Clausewitzian notion of the "fog of war" (Clausewitz 2015), for instance, holds that war is constituted by an internal velocity and "friction" that defies rational comprehension and predictable human intervention. War has an emergent, archaic temporal property that interacts with a modern temporal regime of rationalized military strategy.

Similar war analogies were thus put to different ends in Italy and the UK, with one emphasizing hope for change while the latter served to inevitabilize the mass loss of life. This naturalization of mass death was contested in the British press. Comparisons to World War Two were immediately criticized by the political opposition and civil society members writing in major presses (e.g., UK-MED-31; UK-MED-3; UK-CIV-8; UK-MED-7). The press noted that while the war metaphor did imply a "victory" over the virus, it also implied that the government could not be held directly responsible for the consequences of inevitable "enemy actions" (Jarvis 2022a; Palestrino 2022).

In Germany, there was no attempt to make the pandemic 'knowable' through references to past wars. Instead, the pandemic was frequently analogized to the 2008 global financial crisis (GE-GOV-20; GE-GOV-21). The invocation of "crisis time," analogous to the complex, slower-moving, and grinding experience of the 2008 financial crisis, rather than antagonistic "wartime," directed public attention to the *response* of socio-political leadership to the pandemic rather than the exogenous shock of the pandemic itself (Kuhn 2020, 45–6; cf. Koselleck and Richter 2006). Indeed, the crisis frame was offered as a direct refutation of the war analogies deployed elsewhere. On 11 April, Frank Walter Steinmeir, the President of Germany, stated, "this pandemic is not a war. Nations are not standing against nations, soldiers against soldiers. But it is a test of our humanity" (GE-GOV-4). The pandemic was frequently framed as a "stress test" (*Bewährungsprobe*) for society that could be successfully "passed" by collective efforts (GE-GOV-2; GE-GOV-4; GE-MED-7).

"Crisis time" negotiates heterotemporality differently than war analogies. Wartime, in its sometimes-contradictory negotiations between archaic and modern temporal regimes, constituted COVID-19 agency as presentist and reactive. In Italy, pandemic agency was temporally oriented towards enacting a less tragic future in the present; in the UK, war analogies constituted presentist pandemic agency as highly circumscribed—directed towards preparing for an inevitable future of mass death. Germany, in contrast, through "crisis time," constructed pandemic agency *both* in terms of its present capacity to prevent a bleak future, but also in terms of past actions taken to ameliorate the effects in the present. Agency was constituted with a modernist culture of rational time, wherein, because "bad events" are generically foreseeable, pandemic agency was expected to have *already* been exercised proactively in preparation. During the first wave in Germany, elite emphasis on systems resilience resulted in social discourses that focused on addressing the pandemic per se rather than the spectre of mass death; it was presumed that "something could be done" about COVID-19 in the present *and* in the past. Mass death was something that "happened somewhere else," whereas Germans and their social system had taken, and continued to take, responsible actions that prevented catastrophes (Kuhn 2020, 45). In "crisis time," the future was manageable, and mass death was not only not inevitable but had perhaps already been prevented.

These temporal constructions of the general possibility of pandemic agency—both in terms of "wartime" and "crisis time"—were also reflected in how heroism, as a specifically idealized form of concrete agency, was framed in the three countries. During the first wave, each state constructed workers in key roles as "heroes" required for pandemic response. In Italy, medical professionals were framed as battling a war, with "doctors in trenches" (e.g., ITA-MED-21; ITA-MED-4, 7; ITA-MED-18). In the UK, the "hero" frame began with medical personnel and was subsequently extended to include transport (UK-CIV-34), delivery, and retail workers (UK-MED-12; Browning and Haigh 2022). In Germany, health professionals were subsumed under a broader, more diffuse category of "system relevant worker" that received collective recognition in political discourse (GE-MED-1; GE-GOV-3).

The question of how much agency individual "heroes" had during a dangerous time and thus who was ultimately responsible for the comparatively high death rates of frontline workers varied in relation to the dominant temporal regime (Steele and Collins 2023). Martial analogies had the paradoxical result of hyper-emphasizing the agency of the individual "hero" whilst accepting their deaths as inevitable. Despite differences in how their respective invocations of "wartime" negotiated heterotemporality, the inevitablization of hero death occurred in both Italy and the UK. In Italy, the press centered the sacrifices of nurses and doctors, framing their deaths as "a never-ending massacre" (ITA-MED-5). Their deaths were used to encourage the public to comply with lockdown regulations out of respect for those "who put their lives at risk to guarantee cures and services" (ITA-MED-20). In the UK, the early deaths of doctors were described as a "stark reminder to the whole country that we must take this crisis seriously" (UK-MED-5). These deaths were prominent in the mainstream press, accompanied by photos and narrative obituaries (UK-MED-27; UK-MED-33). In emphasizing the risk undertaken by the medical profession, not only were Italian and British political figures generating public support for pandemic measures but, supported by martial metaphors, normalizing the high mortality rate within the profession.

Soldiers are agentic in the sense that they respond to the call of duty as individuals. They are also, however, placed within the archaic temporalities of wartime wherein their control over their fate is severely circumscribed. Soldiers must follow orders; they die in wars as a general fact (Millar 2022, 109–110). In a similar fashion, healthcare workers in Italy and the UK were constructed as having accepted the risk of their own deaths. Sacrifice, like that of a soldier's, was a function of individual agency rather than an

outcome resulting from broader societal choices. While individual deaths may have been tragic, the general occurrence of key worker death was constructed as inevitable. This was clearest in the UK, where an archaic culture of time most directly constructed martial metaphors: the heroism of "[k]ey workers" resided in their acceptance of their disposability in the pursuit of social and economic recovery (UK-CIV-36).

Italy and the UK's overemphasis on key workers' individual agency in accepting the risk—and therefore responsibility—for their own deaths contrasts with Germany's construction of "heroes" as a product of the social system. Germany's use of "crisis time" constituted a form of heroization that did not normalize significant fatalities among key workers (e.g., GE-MED-13; GE-GOV-19). German discourse focused on the relatively poor working conditions and pay of many "system relevant" workers, emphasizing their marginalized or disadvantageous position within the broader economy compared to "normal" jobs that were able to shield from the virus (GE-MED-6; GE-MED-9). "Heroes" were not represented as individually responsible for their own mortality. Responsibility was a function of society's rational temporal management of an uncertain, but plausibly knowable, future.

Overall, throughout the first wave, each state drew upon contending, layered cultures of modern and archaic times to constitute the possibility for general agency in relation to the pandemic, frame a heroized model of idealized individual agency, and, in so doing, both distribute and deny responsibility for responding to the pandemic. The inevitability of mass death is produced by a temporal negotiation of not only who should respond—but who *can* and when.

Distribution

Discourse in all states demonstrated a differential distribution of the inevitability of mass death within society. Empirically, the distribution of COVID-19 deaths in each state mirrored pre-existing patterns of socio-economic disparity, health inequality, and racial and ethnic marginalization, which, in turn, reflect the existing societal distribution of *time*. Older people, people with "pre-existing conditions," and people living in socio-economically deprived areas were more at risk of dying of COVID-19 (Raleigh 2020; UK-GOV-20; GE-GOV-16; Soneji et al. 2021). These similarities in patterns of death, however, did not correspond with a uniform construction of these deaths as inevitable.

In the UK, the strategic shift from "contain" to "delay" was underpinned by an implicit understanding that some lives were more expendable (Baraitser and Salisbury 2020). Following the March 20 speech that declared many would die "before their time," government statements and tabloid reporting emphasized the age and health status of the deceased (see UK-GOV-24; UK-MED-16; UK-MED-10). The discourse made it clear that those who would die were "only" the elderly, ill, and disabled. This trivialized the number of vulnerable people (an estimated 18.5 million—nearly a third of the UK population) within these categories (Walker et al. 2021).

It also constructed the deaths of vulnerable people as less preventable and therefore more acceptable than those of younger, healthy people. Charities gave advice to the bereaved, who felt that society had "excused" the deaths of their elderly or vulnerable loved ones (UK-CIV-9). This discourse reflects a temporal tension, wherein people are dying "before their time," yet it is suggested that the only people who will die are those who already *lack* time. This lack of time is implied to be a "natural," material phenomenon, distinct from social hierarchies and political decision-making. Even before the pandemic, economic standards of valuation produced the lives of the elderly and disabled as less viable (Cross 2013) and their deaths as inevitable.

In Italy and Germany, in contrast, COVID-19 deaths were constructed as a compounded tragedy, rather than an expected and acceptable outcome. As seen above, Italian discourses suggested that age made lives *more* valuable. German media referred to the elderly as "the weakest" (GE-MED-7) and called for society to "protect the grandparents" (GE-MED-10). The primary aim of the pandemic response was avoiding the deaths of anyone—*particularly* the elderly. The Italian President of the Council stated, "[T]he government's top priority is to protect citizens' fundamental right to health […] we protect the freedom of each citizen from the disease and death" (e.g., ITA-MED-15). German politicians stressed that accepting high risks to the elderly and people with underlying health conditions was intolerable, even if it meant damage to the economy (GE-MED-14). What was an inevitable private loss in the UK was unacceptable collective defeat in Italy and Germany.

This inequitable distribution of (life)time and inevitable death also pertained to race and ethnicity. During the first wave, only the UK explicitly discussed racial and ethnic disparities in COVID-19 deaths. Public interest research groups and government agencies tracked the disproportionate vulnerabilities of people of color to COVID-19 (Raleigh 2020; UK-GOV-25; UK-GOV-26). NGOs called for policies to reduce these racialized COVID-19 risks (UK-CIV-1; UK-CIV-2). The deaths of migrant health workers and/or health workers of color were frequently covered in the press (see UK-MED-17; UK-MED-18). Paired with the Black Lives Matter movements of June 2020, these discourses revealed how minoritized people's lives, as with elderly and disabled people, had been rendered less viable by "normal" British politics (UK-MED-30). They connected COVID-19 deaths with pre-existing, pre-pandemic patterns of socio-economic deprivation, social and health care inequalities, and individuated and structural racism and discrimination (UK-GOV-26) that already impeded access to time.

Italy and Germany did not collect race- or ethnicity-disaggregated data (e.g., EU-MED-1). Anecdotal data suggests people from racially and ethnically minoritized groups in Germany and non-nationals (who are often of color) in Italy were more likely to be hospitalized with COVID-19 (GE-MED-5; Baronio et al. 2021). Given that in each state *all* deaths were posited as at least partially unacceptable, we could interpret minoritized peoples as included in this overall frame. Italy (ITA-MED-3) did, however, note the particular vulnerabilities to COVID-19 of some groups—notably poorer people. As the first wave wore on, Italian political discourse attached COVID-19 to the so-called migrant "crisis," with right-wing groups accusing refugees of bringing disease (ITA-MED-10) and some communities refusing to accept refugees who tested positive (ITA-MED-17; Pacciardi 2023).

Such discourses, combined with evidence of Islamophobia in Germany during the first wave (GE-MED-25), suggest that rather than encompassing minoritized peoples into a universal temporal regime, the "unacceptability" of COVID-19 death (and presumed extension of (life)time) is connected to pre-existing notions of political belonging. The "invisibilization" of the deaths of minoritized and marginalized groups reflects an implicit hierarchy between the lifetime of citizens and non-citizens, white Europeans, and

racialized Others. The deaths of immigrants, refugees, and people of color exist outside assessments of the temporal normality of lifetime within popular discourse, and, as a result, beyond state and collective responsibility. Despite empirical patterns in COVID-19 deaths, it is the hierarchical distribution of access to (life)time, in line with pre-existing patterns of marginalization and discrimination, that is key to the production of their deaths as "inevitable."

Conclusion: Inevitability as Fact of the Future

Inevitability, both as an empirical diagnosis and concept, is not an objective function of material processes but instead constituted through a socio-political negotiation of time. Conceptually, inevitability is produced (or denied) through the narration of two temporal cultures—modern, rationalized, "knowable" time and archaic, natural, problematic, "ungovernable" time—into a singular, seemingly linear/obvious outcome. This play of heterotemporality is more specifically expressed in three temporal practices—problem definition, designations of agency/responsibility, and sovereign distribution—that interact to make it possible to designate events (both specifically and as a general type) as "inevitable."

In our examination of mass death during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Western Europe, we saw that the "inevitability" of mass death was not a mechanistic expression of material forces, scientific models, or empirical patterns of death. Instead, it was the result of a fine-grained interaction between modern and archaic cultures of time that allowed COVID-19 deaths to be contested in Italy and Germany and regarded as facts of the future in the UK. A claim to inevitability *at the time of an event* is a deeply political act rather than a reflection of objective reality.

The relevance of this temporal constitution of inevitability to IR is straightforward. Attending to the play of heterotemporality in constructing inevitability offers an analytical lever to unpack and challenge the "inevitabilization" of various global events, future pandemics, geopolitical risks, wars, and (most vitally) climate change. As we saw in the case of Germany, it also points us towards the possibility of a counter-politics of inevitability, as public advocacy groups, NGOs, scientific bodies, or international organizations contest the "inevitabilization" of events.

Analytically distinguishing between the contemporaneous and post-hoc construction of inevitability also draws our attention to the *ongoing* temporal politics of re-assessments of inevitability. This is seen, for instance, in recent waves of "pandemic revisionism" (Jetelina and Yamey 2023), wherein debates regarding policy choices implicitly revolve around the inevitability (or lack thereof) of both the pandemic and its resulting mass deaths. Conversely, as argued by du Bois (2017 [1935]) regarding early twentieth-century claims of the "inevitability" of abolition, the concept may perversely transform positive achievements of social justice into a necessary virtue of the original, oppressive system, obscuring the struggles of marginalized people. As events progress and are better empirically understood, "inevitability" may be invoked to objectify a previously contingent series of events and, in the process, dissolve claims of social and political accountability into depoliticizing contestations of fact.

This last point highlights the analytical and political stakes of our analysis. The link between time, "knowability," and agency within the temporal politics of inevitability suggests that a key function of references to inevitability is individual and, crucially, collective, exoneration. If a future event is inevitable, then nothing can be done (just as nothing could be done about past inevitabilities). Consequently, no one needs to change their practices in the present—a troubling thought from the perspective of future pandemic responses or climate change mitigation. Thus it is imperative that IR theory recognize that inevitability is not a neutral category but rather one that appears neutral only through its deeply political constitution via time/timing. The empirical, analytical, and conceptual deployment of "inevitability" within IR scholarship, as in political discourse, thus requires significant reflexivity. We must attend to what is enabled (and precluded) in terms of the capacity for change, intervention, and exoneration when we diagnose complex and/or structural phenomenon as "inevitable."

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available in the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

References

Abbott, Andrew. 2001. *Time Matters: on Theory and Method*, 1st ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Abou Ghayda, Ramy, Keum Hwa Lee, and Young Joo Han et al. 2022. "The Global Case Fatality Rate of Coronavirus Disease 2019 by Continents and National Income: a Meta-analysis." *Journal of Medical Virology* 94 (6): 2402–13.

Agathangelou, Anna M., and Kyle D. Killian, eds. 2016. *Time, Temporality and Violence in International Relations:* 1st ed. Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge.

Amoureux, Jack. 2020. "Is Faster Better? Political and Ethical Framings of Pace and Space." *International Theory* 12 (2): 163–88.

Baraitser, Lisa, and Laura. Salisbury 2020. "'Containment, Delay, Mitigation': Waiting and Care in the Time of a Pandemic." *Wellcome Open Research* 5 (129): 1–16. https://doi.org/10.12688/wellcomeopenres.15970.2

Baronio, Roberto, Lucia Saravé, and Jessica Ruggiero et al. 2021. "Impact of Ethnicity on COVID-19 Related Hospitalizations in Children during the First Pandemic Wave in Northern Italy." *Frontiers in Paediatrics* 9 (625398): 1–8.

Berlant, Lauren."2007. Slow Death: Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency." *Critical Inquiry* 33 (4): 754–80.

Berlin, Isaiah. 2002. "Historical Inevitability." In *Liberty*, edited by, Henry Hardy. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bicchi, Federica. 2022. "Communities of Practice and What They Can Do for International Relations." *Review of International Studies* 48 (1): 24–43.

Browning, Christopher S., and Joseph Haigh. 2022. "Hierarchies of Heroism: Captain Tom, Spitfires, and the Limits of Militarized Vicarious Resilience during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Global Studies Quarterly* 2 (3): 1–13.

Carney, Gemma M., and Mia Gray. 2015. "Unmasking the 'Elderly Mystique': Why It is Time to Make the Personal Political in Ageing Research." *Journal of Aging Studies* 35: 123–34.

Clausewitz, Carl von. 2015. *Clausewitz on Small War*, edited by, Christopher Daase and James W. Davis. First ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cohen, Elizabeth F. 2018. *The Political Value of Time: Citizenship, Duration, and Democratic Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crawford, Neta C. 2007. "Individual and Collective Moral Responsibility for Systemic Military Atrocity." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 15 (2): 187–212.

Cross, Merry. 2013. "Demonized, Impoverished and Now Forced into Isolation: The Fate of Disabled People under Austerity." *Disability & Society* 28 (5): 719–23.

Dill, Janina. 2014. *Legitimate Targets?: Social Construction, International Law and US Bombing*, Vol. 133. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Doty, Roxanne Lynn. 1993. "Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of US Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines." *International Studies Quarterly* 37 (3): 297–320.

Doyle, Michael W. 1983. "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 2." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12 (4): 323–53.

Du Bois, W.E.B. 2017 [1935]. *Black Reconstruction in America*. New York: Library of America.

Edelstein, Dan, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Natasha Wheatley, eds. 2020. *Power and Time: Temporalities in Conflict and the Making of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Edkins, Jenny. 2003. "The Rush to Memory and the Rhetoric of War." *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 31 (2): 231–51.

Engelmann, L., C. M. Montgomery, S. Sturdy, and C. Moreno Lozano 2023. "Domesticating Models: On the Contingency of Covid-19 Modelling in UK media and Policy." *Social Studies of Science* 53 (1): 121–45.

Foucault, Michel. 2020. "Power/knowledge." *The New Social Theory Reader*, edited by Steven Seidman and Jeffrey C. Alexander, 73–9. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Fukuyama, Francis. 2006. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Gilbert, Emily. 2008. "The Inevitability of Integration? Neoliberal Discourse and the Proposals for a New North American Economic Space after September 11." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95 (1): 202–22.

Gills, Barry K. 1997. "Globalisation and the Politics of Resistance." *New Political Economy* 2 (1): 11–6.

Greiman, Virginia. 2023. "Known Unknowns: The Inevitability of Cyber Attacks." In *European Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security* 22 (1): 223–31.

Haraway, Donna. 2003. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Vol. 1. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.

Hay, Colin, and Ben Rosamond. 2001. "Globalisation, European Integration, and the Discursive Construction of Economic Imperatives: A Question of Convergence?" London: Queen's Papers on Europeanisation.

Head, Brian W. 2008. "Three Lenses of Evidence-Based Policy." *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 67 (1): 1–11.

Hom, Andrew R. 2010. "Hegemonic Metronome: The Ascendancy of Western Standard Time." *Review of International Studies* 36 (4): 1145–70.

———. 2018. "Timing is Everything: Toward a Better Understanding of Time and International Politics." *International Studies Quarterly* 62 (1): 69–79.

———. 2020. *International Relations and the Problem of Time*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2021. "Time and History in International Relations." In *Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations*(1st ed.), edited by, Julia Costa Lopez Benjamin de Carvalho and Halvard Leira, 210–8. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Hom, Andrew R., and Luke Campbell. 2022. "The Liturgy of Triumph: Victory Culture, Popular Rituals, and the US Way of Wartiming." *International Relations* 36 (4): 591–615.

Hutchings, Kimberly. 2008. *Time and World Politics*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Igreja, Victor. 2018. "Post-hybridity Bargaining and Embodied Accountability in Communities in Conflict, Mozambique." In *Hybridity on the Ground in Peacebuilding and Development: Critical Conversations*, edited by, Joanne Wallis, Lia Kent, Miranda Forsyth, Sinclair Dinnen and Srinjoy Bose, 163–79. Canberra, Australia: ANU Press.

Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus. 2010. *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Jarvis, Lee. 2022a. "Counting Coronavirus: Mathematical Language in the UK Response to Covid-19." In *Pandemic and Crisis Discourse. Communicating COVID-19 and Public Health Strategy*, edited by, Andreas Musolff, Ruth Breeze, Kayo Kondo and Sara Vilar-Lluch, 79–93. London, UK: Bloomsbury.

———. 2022b. "Constructing the Coronavirus Crisis: Narratives of Time in British Political Discourse on COVID-19." *British Politics* 17 (1): 24–43.

Jetelina, Katelyn, and Gavin Yamey. 2023. "House Select Subcommittee, GBD, and Revisionism." *Substack*. 8 March. Accessed March 26, 2025. Retrieved from: https://yourlocalepidemiologist.substack.com/p/house-select-subcommittee-gbd-and

Kafer, Alison. 2013. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. 1st ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Kontis, Vasilis, James E. Bennett, and Theo Rashid et al. 2020. "Magnitude, Demographics and Dynamics of the Effect of the First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic on all-cause Mortality in 21 Industrialized Countries." *Nature Medicine* 26: 1919–28.

Kopstein, Jeffrey S., Jelena Subotić, and Susan Welch, eds. 2023. *Politics, Violence, Memory: The New Social Science of the Holocaust*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Koselleck, Reinhart, and Todd Samuel Presner. 2002. *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*. Standford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Koselleck, Reinhart, and M. W. Richter. 2006. "Crisis." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67 (2): 357–400

Koselleck, Reinhart. 2004. *Futures Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Kuhn, Katharina. 2020. "Germany." In Millar et al. 2020. *Confronting the Covid-19 Pandemic. Grief, Loss and Social Order*. London: LSE. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/106739/1/Confronting_the_covid_19_pandemic_grief_loss_and_social_order.pdf.

Liu, Zhilin, and Iris Geva-May. 2021. "Comparative Public Policy Analysis of COVID-19 as a Naturally Occurring Experiment." *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 23 (2): 131–42.

Lundborg, Tom. 2012. *Politics of the Event: Time, Movement, Becoming*. Abingdon: Routledge.

MacKay, Joseph, and Christopher David LaRoche. 2017. "The Conduct of History in International Relations: Rethinking Philosophy of History in IR Theory." *International Theory* 9 (02): 203–36.

Marx, Karl. 2016. "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844." In *Social Theory Re-Wired*, edited by, Wesley Longhofer and Daniel Winchester, 152–8. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Mbembe, Achile. 2011. *Necropolitics*. Durham: Duke University Press.

McIntosh, Christopher. 2015. "Theory across Time: The Privileging of Timeless Theory in International Relations." *International Theory* 7 (3): 464–500.

———. 2022. "Framing Collective Violence as War Time: Temporality, Circulation, Resistance." *Security Dialogue* 53 (6): 515–30.

Mearsheimer, John. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: Norton.

Millar, Katharine. 2022 *Support the Troops: Military Obligation, Gender, and the Making of Political Community*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Millar, Katharine, Martin Bayly, Yuna Han, Katharina Kuhn, and Irene Morlino. 2020. *Confronting the Covid-19 Pandemic. Grief, Loss and Social Order*. London: LSE. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/106739/1/Confronting_the_covid_19_pandemic_grief_loss_and_social_order.pdf.

Moran, Dominique. 2012. "'Doing Time' in Carceral Space: Timespace and Carceral Geography." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 94 (4): 305–16.

Morens, David M., Gregory K. Folkers, and Anthony S. Fauci. "2009. What is a Pandemic?" *The Journal of Infectious Diseases* 200 (7): 1018–21.

Morgenthau, Hans J. 2005. *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 7th ed. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education.

Morlino, Irene. 2020. "Italy," In Millar et al. 2020. *Confronting the Covid-19 Pandemic. Grief, Loss and Social Order*. London: LSE. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/106739/1/Confronting_the_covid_19_pandemic_grief_loss_and_social_order.pdf

Nye, Joseph. 2014. "Inevitability." In *warthe Next Great War?: The Roots of World War I and the Risk of U.S.-China Conflict*, edited by, Richard N. Rosecrance, Thomas Otte and Steven E. Miller et al., 179–92. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Pacciardi, Agnese. 2023. "Viral Bodies: Racialised and Gendered Logics in the Securitisation of Migration during COVID-19 in Italy." *Critical Studies on Security* 11 (3): 176–93.

Palestrino, Mirko. 2022. "Inking Wartime: Military Tattoos and the Temporalities of the War Experience." *International Political Sociology* 16 (3): 1–20.

Parry, Martin, Nigel Arnell, Mike Hulme, Robert Nicholls, and Matthew Livermore. 1998. "Adapting to the Inevitable." *Nature* 395 (6704): 741–.

Pavelec, Sterling Michael. 2012. "The Inevitability of the Weaponization of Space: Technological Constructivism versus Determinism." *Astropolitics* 10 (1): 39–48.

Peck, Jamie, and Adam Tickell. 2002. "Neoliberalising Space." *Antipode* 34 (3): 380–404.

Peckham, Robert. 2020. "The Chronopolitics of COVID-19." *American Literature* 92 (4): 767–79.

Puar, Jasbir K. 2017. *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Quijano, Aníbal. 2007. "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality." *Cultural studies* 21 (2-3): 168–78.

Raleigh, Veena. 2020. "Deaths from Covid-19 (coronavirus): How Are They Counted and What Do They Show?" *United Kingdom: The King's*

Fund. Retrieved 26 March 2025. https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/long-reads/deaths-covid-19#:~:text=Covid%2D19%20deaths.-,How%20are%20Covid%2D19%20deaths%20counted%3F,an%20underlying%20or%20contributory%20cause.

Rayner, Steve, and Clare Heyward. 2013. "The Inevitability of Nature as a Rhetorical resource." In *Anthropology and Nature*, edited by, Kirsten Hastrup, 125–46. New York: Routledge.

Rothmund, Tobias, Fahima Farkhari, Carolin-Theresa Ziemer, and Flavio Azevedo. 2022. "Psychological Underpinnings of Pandemic Denial-patterns of Disagreement with Scientific Experts in the German Public during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Public Understanding of Science* 31 (4): 437–57.

Saltelli, Andrea, and Monica Di Fiore, eds. 2023. *The Politics of Modelling: Numbers between Science and Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Skonieczny, Amy. 2010. "Interrupting Inevitability: Globalization and Resistance." *Alternatives* 35 (1): 1–28.

Soneji, Samir, Hiram Beltrán-Sánchez, Jae Won Yang, and Caroline Mann. 2021. "Poplulation-level Mortality Burden from Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Europe and North America." *Genus* 77 (7): 1–14.

Steele, Brent, and Curtis D. Collins. "2023. The Unrecognized Heroism of US Health Care Workers during the COVID-19 pandemic." *Paper Presented at International Studies Association: Annual Convention, Montreal, Canada* (March 15th-18th, 2023). Draft on file with authors.

Taylor, Gary W., and Jane M. Ussher 2001. "Making Sense of S&M: a Discourse Analytic Account." *Sexualities* 4 (3): 293–314

Tyner, James. 2019. *Dead Labor: toward a Political Economy of Premature Death*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Van Roekel, Eva. 2018. "Traumatic Home: Argentinian Victimhood and the Everyday Moral Comfort of Trauma." *Ethos* 46 (4): 537–56.

van Veenstra, Anne F., and Bas Kotterink. 2017. "Data-Driven Policy Making: The Policy Lab Approach." In *Electronic Participation*, edited by, Peter Parycek, Yannis Charalabidis, Andrei V. Chugunov, Panos Panagiotopoulos, Theresa A. Pardo, Øystein Sæbø and Efthimios Tambouris, 100–11. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Venuleo, Claudia, Tiziana Marinaci, Alessandro Gennaro, and Arianna Palmieri. 2020. "The Meaning of Living in the Time of COVID-19. A Large Sample Narrative Inquiry." *Frontiers in Psychology* 11: 577077.

Villani, Leonardo, Martin McKee, Fidelia Cascini, Walter Ricciardi, and Stefania Boccia. 2020. "Comparison of Deaths Rates for COVID-19 across Europe during the First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Frontiers in public health* 8: 620416.

Walker, Gavin. 2020. "The Discreet Charm of Coronavirus." Positions Politics. Retrieved January 17, 2024. https://positionspolitics.org/episteme-2-walker/.

Walker, Jemma L. et al. 2021. "UK Prevalence of Underlying Conditions Which Increase the Risk of Severe COVID-19 Disease; a Point Prevalence Study Using Electronic Health Records." *BMC Public Health [Electronic Resource]* 21 (484).

Walker, Rob BJ. 1993. *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Waltz, Kenneth. 2010 [1979]. "Theory of International Politics." Reissue. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc.

Wang, Di, and Zhifei Mao. 2021. "A Comparative Study of Public Health and Social Measures of COVID-19 Advocated in Different Countries." *Health Policy* 125 (8): 957–71.

Weingart, Peter, François van Schalkwyk, and Lars Guenther. 2022. "Democratic and Expert Legitimacy: Science, Politics and the Public during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Science and Public Policy* 49 (3): 499–517.

Wendt, Alexander. 2003. "Why a World state is Inevitable." *European Journal of International Relations* 9 (4): 491–542.

Millar, Katharine M. et al. (2025) The Temporal Politics of Inevitability: Mass Death during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Studies Quarterly*, https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqaf023