

The Pandemic Puzzle

An Introduction

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In December 2019 and January 2020, the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)¹ — Covid-19 — took the world by storm. The virus shutdown major cities around the world, depressed the global economy, caused substantial excess mortality, and plunged national economies into deep recessions, pushed millions into unemployment and took the lives of more than four million people as of July 23, 2021². In the United States alone, life expectancy dropped to its lowest age since World War II as a result of the lives lost to the deadly disease.

Covid-19 has violently disrupted lives and livelihoods, leaving some countries and communities without access to appropriate medical care and the emergency vaccines that have been introduced. Again, in the U.S. alone, the cost of the pandemic is now forecasted to be as high as \$16 trillion by the 4th quarter of 2021³.

The pandemic has highlighted several realities worldwide and once more evidenced the critical importance of prevention and preparation. In many places around the globe, prevention was abandoned or neglected, despite warnings of possible future pandemics. Instead of prioritizing preventive measures and preparedness,

¹ According to Glaunsinger, et. al. (2020) “The SARS-CoV-2 genome is a strand of RNA that is about 29,900 bases long – near the limit for RNA viruses. Influenza has about 13,500 bases, and the rhinoviruses that cause common colds have about 8,000.”

² “Covid-19 Dashboard.” Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center. 23 July 2021. www.jhu.edu. Web. [coronavirus-jhu.edu/map.html](https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html).

³ “Covid Was Just One – There Could Be 850,000 Other Animal Viruses in the Zoonotic Pipeline.” Phys.org. 30 Oct. 2020. www.phys.org. Web. phys.org/news/2020-10-covid-onethere-animal-viruses-zoonotic.html.

governments focused on responding to detection, containment and hope for rapid development of vaccines and medicines.⁴

What should we be preparing for or trying to prevent from occurring? In one report, scientists warned that an “estimated 1.7 million currently undiscovered viruses are thought to exist in mammal and avian hosts. Of these, 540,000–850,000 could infect humans.”⁵

In another realm in the battle against Covid-19, we witnessed “tension between maintaining social freedoms and engaging in efforts of collective defense against the virus,” which led to the political appropriation of healthcare policy (mask wearing practices and social distancing requirements that varied depending on political persuasions, as well as debates between liberal and conservative governments about the efficacy of getting the vaccine, once it was available). Not lost in the wake of such debate was a resurgence of nationalism in many parts of the world as the world wrestled to develop and launch measures to slow down the spread of the virus.⁶

The Western world, it appears, is beginning to return to its old life rhythms, co-managing the spread of the virus and possessing ample amounts of the vaccine to support those who choose to vaccinate. The U.S., for instance, is seeing a return to the workplace, greater social interactions and an economy that is trending upward. The successful development of an effective vaccine has brought a sense of relief to other parts of the world as well.

This “emergence” stands in sharp contrast to what is being experienced in the

⁴ Woolaston, Katie, and Judith Lorraine Fisher. “UN Report Says up to 850,000 Animal Viruses Could Be Caught by Humans, Unless We Protect Nature.” *The Conversation*. 24 June 2021. www.theconversation.com/un-report-says-up-to-850-000-animal-viruses-could-be-caught-by-humans-unless-we-protect-nature-148911.

⁵ “Escaping the Era of Pandemics’: IPBES Workshop on Biodiversity and Pandemics.” Bonn, Germany: Intergovernmental Science–Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). 2020. [www.ipbes.net](https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-12/IPBES%20Workshop%20on%20Biodiversity%20and%20Pandemics%20Report_0.pdf). Web. https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-12/IPBES%20Workshop%20on%20Biodiversity%20and%20Pandemics%20Report_0.pdf.

⁶ Disparte, Dante. “Preparing for the next pandemic: Early lessons from Covid-19.” *Brookings Institution*. 16 Feb. 2021. www.brookings.edu. Web. https://www.brookings.edu/research/preparing-for-the-next-pandemic-early-lessons-from-covid-19/?utm_campaign=Economic%20Studies&utm_medium=email&utm_content=111473062&utm_source=hs_email.

non-Western, less-developed, less-affluent world. While many countries in Africa weren't as heavily impacted during the first and second waves of the disease spread, the surge in the new Delta coronavirus in Africa is a reminder that we are not out of the woods yet; the new variant has already increased case and death counts where access to vaccines is limited or non-existent⁷. The Delta variant has now been confirmed in 22 African countries and "has been found to spread 225 percent faster than the original virus."^{8,9} Africa is the least-vaccinated region in the world, with only around one per cent of the population fully vaccinated.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, this second-largest and second-most populated continent has seen a rapid surge in the spread of the Delta variant of the virus — "There has been a tripling in the number of Covid cases and 30,000 fatalities on the continent since the end of April when the Delta variant emerged in Uganda."¹¹

Scientists are warning that we are living in an era of emerging pandemics. That means "future pandemics will emerge more often, spread more rapidly, do more damage to the world economy and kill more people."¹² Unless we learn the right lessons and translate these lessons into concrete policies to prepare for future pandemics, the problem will only grow in scale and severity because we are more interconnected than at any other time in history.

⁷ "Devastating Human Toll as the Delta Covid Variant Takes Hold in Africa." Africa Center for Strategic Studies. 9 July 2021. [www.africacenter.org](https://africacenter.org/spotlight/devastating-human-toll-as-the-delta-covid-variant-takes-hold-in-africa/). Web. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/devastating-human-toll-as-the-delta-covid-variant-takes-hold-in-africa/>.

⁸ Doucleff, Michael. "The Delta Variant Isn't Just Hyper-Contagious. It Also Grows More Rapidly Inside You." NPR. 8 2021. [www.npr.com](https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2021/07/08/1013794996/why-the-delta-variant-is-so-contagious-a-new-study-sheds-light). Web. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2021/07/08/1013794996/why-the-delta-variant-is-so-contagious-a-new-study-sheds-light>.

⁹ Li, Yan, et al. "Viral Infection and Transmission in a Large Well-Traced Outbreak Caused by the Delta SARS-CoV-2 Variant." *Virological*. 7 July 2021. [www.virological.org](https://virological.org/t/viral-infection-and-transmission-in-a-large-well-traced-outbreak-caused-by-the-delta-sars-cov-2-variant/724). Web. <https://virological.org/t/viral-infection-and-transmission-in-a-large-well-traced-outbreak-caused-by-the-delta-sars-cov-2-variant/724>.

¹⁰ Kelly-Linden, Jordan. "World Faces 'Catastrophic Moral Failure' in Race to Vaccinate against Covid, WHO Warns." *The Telegraph*. 18 Jan. 2021. [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/world-faces-catastrophic-moral-failure-race-vaccinate-against/). Web. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/world-faces-catastrophic-moral-failure-race-vaccinate-against/>.

¹¹ "Devastating Human Toll as the Delta Covid Variant Takes Hold in Africa." Africa Center for Strategic Studies. July 12, 2021. [www.africacenter.org](https://africacenter.org/spotlight/devastating-human-toll-as-the-delta-covid-variant-takes-hold-in-africa/). Web. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/devastating-human-toll-as-the-delta-covid-variant-takes-hold-in-africa/>.

¹² "Escaping the Era of Pandemics": Ipbes Workshop on Biodiversity and Pandemics," (Bonn, Germany: Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Accessible from https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-12/IPBES%20Workshop%20on%20Biodiversity%20and%20Pandemics%20Report_0.pdf,2020).

With near-supersonic air travel between countries around the world, a virus outbreak in Wuhan, China, can travel to New York, London, Buenos Aires or Pretoria in a matter of just hours. Covid-19 has driven home the importance and the need for scientists, medical experts and healthcare professionals to transform approaches to disease mitigation. We must radically change our global approach to dealing with infectious diseases; if not, we have done nothing to circumvent the possibility of a return of the current pandemic or the introduction of something newer and even more deadly.

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Covid-19 also exposed the glaring gaps in pandemic prevention, preparedness and response around the world. A recent report calls for world leaders to:

“...invest in globally networked surveillance and research that can help to prevent and detect emerging infectious diseases early, strengthen national systems in order to strengthen a critical foundation for global pandemic preparedness and response, make improvement in the global supply chain for medical supplies to radically shorten the response time to a pandemic and deliver equitable global access.”¹³

Above all, the report calls on world leaders to ensure the system is tightly coordinated, properly funded and with clear accountability for outcomes.

The horrible onslaught of Covid-19 has further exposed the gap between countries separated by socio-economic and political characteristics. One example is noted

¹³ A G20 High Level Independent Panel (HLIP) on Financing the Global Commons for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, “A Global Deal for Our Pandemic Age,” (A G20 High Level Independent Panel (HLIP) on Financing the Global Commons for Pandemic Preparedness and Response. Accessible from https://pandemic-financing.org/report/foreword/?utm_source=NASEM+News+and+Publications&utm_campaign=c4029fbe0b-NAP_mail_new_2021_07_12&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_96101de015-c4029fbe0b-102439521&goal=0_96101de015-c4029fbe0b-102439521&mc_cid=c4029fbe0b&mc_eid=0b96f12522_2021).

among our entries in this Fall 2021 Special Issue: By late March 2021, 86 percent¹⁴ of all vaccinations had been administered in Global North countries, a shameful 0.1 percent in the Global South. Western countries are home to the primary vaccine manufacturers, and as such may experience a greater level of safety and security in their ready access to protective jabs. But, with a new mutation underway and able to spread at mach speed, the security and safety of the West depends to a large extend on the ability of non-Western countries to share in such access to treatments. Without such access, the new mutation could pose a greater threat in the future, as previously vaccinated people become susceptible to contracting new variants and fast-mutating strands.

What 2019 and 2020 have taught us is that no one is safe unless all are safe; the security of the West depends on ensuring equal access to the vaccine for those who are currently unable to secure such attention and care.

In our Fall 2021 Special Issue, we aim to bring together advances in the tools researchers are developing to combat this pandemic — from epidemiological research to social, political and economic instruments deployed around the world to tackle the pandemic. In this Special Issue, we seek to take stock of the consequences of and the lessons learned from the pandemic, and to explore what is currently known about the novel coronavirus. This deadly and widespread virus poses known and unknown dangers to the world community; the ramifications extend beyond public health.

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While 2020 was a challenging year, 2021 is set to be equally challenging with the emergence of multiple variants of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus

¹⁴ Collins, Keith, and Josh Holder. "See How Rich Countries Got to the Front of the Vaccine Line." *The New York Times*. 31 Mar. 2021. [www.nytimes.com. Web. https://www.nytimes.com/web/interactive/2021/03/31/world/global-vaccine-supply-inequity.html](https://www.nytimes.com/web/interactive/2021/03/31/world/global-vaccine-supply-inequity.html).

2 (SARS-CoV-2), new SARS-CoV-2 variants 501Y.V1 (B.1.1.7) in the UK and 501Y.V2 (B.1.351) in South Africa¹⁵. The arrival of vaccines and the advancements in therapeutic remedies have sparked a flickering light at the end of a dark tunnel.¹⁶ But the fact that the rapidly mutating variants evade immunity poses new threats that the world must confront. What are the different paths to end this pandemic?

In our Fall 2021 Special Issue, we asked scholars, researchers, policymakers, advocates and business leaders to think about the relationship between public health and politics, public health and economics, and public health and society in light of the novel coronavirus. What are the economic implications of the coronavirus epidemic? What are the impacts and implications of the coronavirus on systems of governance, economies and society? What have we learned from the emergence of the novel coronavirus, the various interventions, and what are the different ways forward? What are the impacts of coronavirus on specific cities and neighborhoods? What are the impacts of “social distancing” and other interventions adopted to contain the transmission of the virus? How have different regions, countries and the international community responded to the coronavirus pandemic, and what lessons are we able to apply successfully to slow down and even end this stifling worldwide pandemic?¹⁷

In his contribution, Dr. Rajan Menon, a widely published research expert in the areas of international relations of Asia and Russia, humanitarian intervention issues and global ethics, presents readers with a crippling consequence of the Covid-19: “The concentration of wealth and power globally has enabled rich countries to all but monopolize available vaccine doses. For the citizens of low-income and poor countries to have long-term pandemic security, this inequity must end, rapidly.”

In “Going to Work with Covid,” Dr. Robert Sanders, a retired U.S. Navy JAG Corps

¹⁵ Erik Volz, et al. “Transmission of Sars-Cov-2 Lineage B.1.1.7 in England: Insights from Linking Epidemiological and Genetic Data,” *medRxiv* (2021); Houriiyah Tegally et al., “Emergence and Rapid Spread of a New Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome-Related Coronavirus 2 (Sars-Cov-2) Lineage with Multiple Spike Mutations in South Africa,” *ibid.* 2020.

¹⁶ L. R. Baden, et al. “Efficacy and Safety of the Mrna-1273 Sars-Cov-2 Vaccine,” *N Engl J Med* 384, no. 5 (2021); F. P. Polack, et al. “Safety and Efficacy of the Bnt162b2 Mrna Covid-19 Vaccine,” *ibid.* 383, no. 27 (2020).

¹⁷ Arnaud Fontanet, et al. “Sars-Cov-2 Variants and Ending the Covid-19 Pandemic,” *The Lancet*. 2021.

Captain, posits: “The terrible irony of 2020 and 2021 is that what Usama Bin Laden hoped to achieve from the September 11, 2001, attacks is exactly what Covid-19 accomplished through its viral scourge, a shutdown of the American economic engine, and an accumulation of over 600,000 casualties.” Sanders makes the case that economic security is national security and argues that Covid-19 is simultaneously a national security problem and a public health concern that has impacted the American and global economies.

In his contribution, author Dr. Ian Scoones, an agricultural ecologist and a Professorial Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex in England, asks “Can we learn about how to address uncertainties within wider society — including around disease pandemics — from pastoralists who live with and from uncertainty?” His answer: Yes, we can learn from others, including pastoralists, who have long embraced uncertainty as part of life.

In “Science Doesn’t Work that Way” contributor Dr. Gregory E. Kaebnick, director of the editorial department and the editor of the *Hastings Center Report*, explores questions about the values at stake in developing and using biotechnologies and, particularly, in questions about the value given to nature and human nature. He writes, “What objectivity science is able to deliver derives not from individual scientists but from the social institutions and practices that structure their work.”

Best-selling *New York Times* author and well-known investigative journalist Nina Burleigh tackles the pitfalls of our ability to forget the horrors of a pandemic, and the consequences. She writes we best not forget hard lessons learned, quoting a UN report: “Future pandemics will emerge more often, spread more rapidly, do more damage to the world economy, and kill more people than Covid-19, unless there is a transformative change in the global approach to dealing with infectious diseases.” In Part 2 of “The Great Forgetting,” the veteran reporter and author documents a sampling of behind-the-scenes “political scheming and chaos” of profit-motivated U.S. government mismanagement and irresponsibility that impacted the country’s ability to more effectively battle the spread of the coronavirus disease.

Kutumbakam is the age-old Indian concept of the world as one family. In “Health-War Politics,” African Studies Professor Suresh Kumar explores “the status of

India's — and, consequently, the world's — biological health war, the crippling propaganda of opposition parties and the affirmative role of the government in overcoming the health economy for the betterment of the society and the general economy in the South Asian country.” In other words, living *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

Dr. Rose Jaji is a senior lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the University of Zimbabwe, conducting research in the areas of migration/refugees and conflict and peacebuilding. Jaji argues that any gains in mobility realized by low-income migrant Zimbabwean women have been retarded by the impacts of Covid-19, which has “eroded and even reversed the gains of migration among low-income migrant women in terms of capacity to meet basic needs and socioeconomic status.”

Contributor Richard Atimniraye Nyelade explores the discriminatory aspects of Covid-19 in his look at the Sino-African paradoxes of the pandemic. In “From China Virus to Africa Virus,” the author writes that the disease “has led to an increase in acts of Sinophobia as well as prejudice, xenophobia, discrimination, violence, and racism against people of East Asian, North Asian, and South Asian descent and appearance around the world.”

“South Africa's Response to Covid-19” looks at the “multi-modal approaches adopted in enhancing economic recovery by the South African government in responding to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic,” writes contributor Dr. Andrew Enaifoghe. With a doctorate in public administration from the University of Zuzuland, Enaifoghe claims a reconceptualization of responsibilities and relationships is necessary to build a future, post-Covid.

A review by Sudd Institute (Juba, South Sudan) co-founder and scholar Dr. James Alic Garang contributes to the debate on how Covid-19-induced hysteresis effects could impact growth in South Sudan. It addresses two related questions: What channels would transmit the scarring effects of Covid-19 to the national economic output? And, what can public policy do to support recovery?

Dr. Beth Raps takes a problem-solving, heuristic approach to “help policymakers, communicators and human beings seeking to understand each other across ideological differences explore how each of us may be making decisions about Covid.” In her contribution, she admits the effort is hard-won, but that “informed

compassion can help spare lives, relationships, resources and the possibilities for pluralistic participatory democracy.”

As each of the contributors would agree, there is so much more work to be done to address and manage the Covid-19 challenge. Because it kills without prejudice, perhaps we can learn how to approach, treat and defeat this disease without prejudice of our own. Perhaps we can find a way — we must find a way — to provide equal levels of support to all our brothers and sisters around the world. Maybe we can learn that it is best when we share our research, share our discoveries and share the results; imagine working together as one for the betterment of all. What if Covid could bring us together to act responsibly and unselfishly?

It is our hope that this special issue and the work done by our valued experts will provide you with a better understanding — as seen through the thoughts and perspectives of others — of the evolving health crisis, its economic impact and ways we can design an effective intervention to halt the spread of the virus while also working on an effective vaccine.

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Abut the author

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