



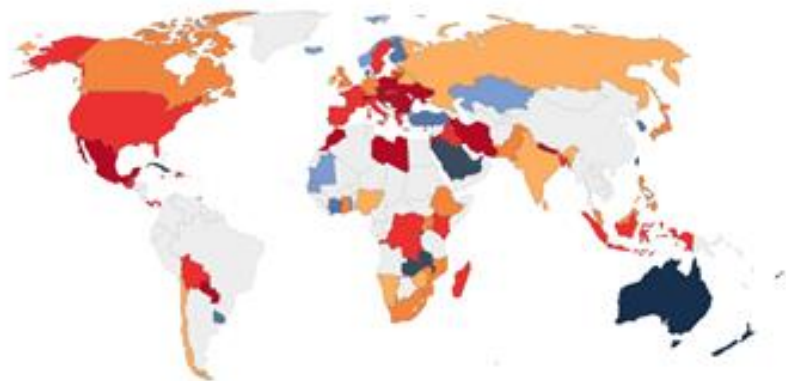
Eurasia Center Brief: Humanitarian Program

December 1, 2020

COVID-19's Impact on International Relations

The share of COVID-19 tests that are positive, Nov 13, 2020
The daily positive rate, given as a rolling 7-day average.

Our World
in Data



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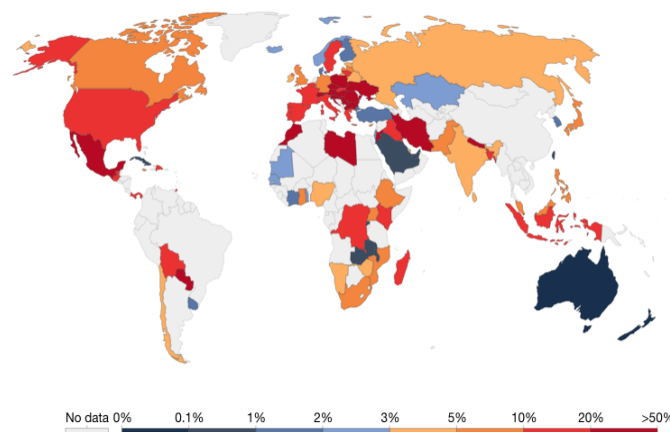
www.USEBC.org

Introduction:

On the 11th of March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified the COVID-19 virus as a global pandemic. The virus originated in Wuhan, China, and spread across the globe in a matter of weeks despite government efforts to implement policies to stop the outbreak. The virus has proven to be incredibly destructive; According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) the international death toll has exceeded 1.2 million, with cases continuing to rise.¹ Along with rising death tolls as a result of COVID, people are struggling to survive because of limited job opportunities. Starting with the early cases of COVID-19, the disease has made an enormous impact on international affairs and globalization. The effects of this disease alone accompanied by social distancing, lockdowns, quarantine, and travel bans have been considerable upon the world. This article will examine the barriers created by COVID-19 and how international affairs have changed because of this.

The share of COVID-19 tests that are positive, Nov 13, 2020
The daily positive rate, given as a rolling 7-day average.

Our World
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Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data
Note: Comparisons of testing data across countries are affected by differences in the way the data are reported. Daily data is interpolated for countries not reporting testing data on a daily basis. Details can be found at our Testing Dataset page

Obstacles to International Affairs:

Beginning from the very onset of the COVID-19 virus, the international community faced large obstacles to international communication and cooperation. Countries around the world shut down and closed themselves off to visitors. Italy was hit by the virus earlier than a significant portion of the world. In response, the Italian government imposed a strict lockdown; clubs, bars, restaurants, and schools were shut down, all non-essential travel was banned, a national curfew was implemented, and social distancing and mask-wearing were strictly enforced. These regulations helped to limit the spread of Corona in Italy and bring down their numbers. However, these regulations also cut off Italy from the rest of the world, marking a distinct change in the global

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/index.htm>

nature of politics in this day and age. Italy was not the only country to impose these harsh regulations resulting in a significant decrease in interaction between countries which hinders international cooperation.

International Trade:

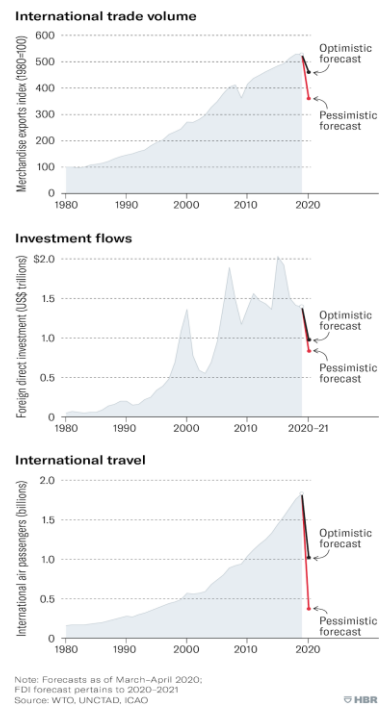
Trade flows can be considered an important marker of international cooperation. Due to COVID-19, trade growth forecasts have been notably downgraded from the 2019 predictions. The latest forecasts from the World Bank forecast that trade will shrink anywhere from 10%-24% in 2021.² It is important for the overall health of the global economy to continue trade among countries. However, in order to have trade, there needs to be a degree of cooperation and trust between countries which is currently being challenged as a result of increased restrictions on trade due to COVID-19. Each country is facing new economic strains because of this virus which leads to the implementation of regulations such as increased tariffs. This trust needs to be restored among countries in order to create a foundation for renewed trading relationships which goes hand in hand with political relationships.

International Cooperation:

Another aspect that impacts international affairs is the inability of countries' leaders to interact on a face-to-face level as a result of the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. Without the ability to interact with each other in person, leaders around the world have been faced to conduct international affairs in a different manner. In September, the world saw the first virtual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in history. This meeting set a precedent for the continued operations of international diplomacy during the time of Covid. The meeting that typically takes place in New York is replaced with a new virtual setting online. The heads of state were able to address the global audience on topics via pre-recorded videos from the safety of their own countries. This meeting represents the resilience of the world and the ability to overcome obstacles by creating new norms. While there were obvious challenges due to the new setting, the virtual assembly marks a continued commitment to global cooperation.

Plummeting International Trade, Investment, and Travel

The Covid-19 crisis and the necessary public health response are causing the largest and fastest decline in international flows in modern history.



² <https://www.stern.nyu.edu/experience-stern/about/departments-centers-initiatives/centers-of-research/center-globalization-education-management/covid-19-0>



Katalin Bogyay, Permanent Representative of Hungary to the United Nations, prepares her ballots during the elections in the General Assembly Hall.

Cooperation through Science

The COVID-19 virus poses an international challenge that the whole world is focused on solving creating a unique opportunity for cooperation via science. The collective focus on trying to understand the disease presents a common cause that countries can rally behind. Scientists are working together inside and outside of laboratories to find and relay accurate information about the virus. Scientists across the world have been researching and sharing information internationally with remarkable speed. This cooperation has allowed for a greater understanding of the virus than any scientist could include independently. In December, a group of Chinese researchers published their findings of the genetic sequence of the disease online via the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data.³ These findings have allowed scientists around the world to speed up their research in the hopes of finding a vaccine. Mahlet Mesfin in his article “It Takes a World to End a Pandemic” states “Infectious diseases, it is commonly said, know no borders, and neither does the knowledge needed to fight them”.⁴ This idea perfectly summarizes how the entire international community is affected by the virus, and thus must come together to create solutions, which is exactly what scientists are currently doing. Scientific knowledge has become a global commodity that traverses the globe. The pandemic greatly supersedes the scientific competition that has been occurring among countries and promotes global cooperation.

³ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2020-03-21/it-takes-world-end-pandemic>

⁴ IBID

Increased Cooperation within the European Union

The European Union is a formidable entity that is home to over 450 million people and the largest economy in the world.⁵ However, Europe's potential to become more powerful has been hindered by economic and political limitations. The COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity for a reinvigorated European Union (EU). Europe's haste and organization in implementing lockdowns and listening to scientific advice after the onset of COVID-19 earned them international prestige. Other countries look to them as an example in how to handle the pandemic which creates increased confidence in the



EU. European leaders passed a \$2 trillion economic recovery package which set them up for a strong economic recovery and presented an opportunity for the potential expansion of the EU's ability to have greater financial control.⁶ The EU's increased power would be a large change from the past, and would pave the way for a more unified Europe that can come together to create solutions for large-scale problems. The EU has also seen the revival of certain partnerships between countries. The Franco-German alliance has grown even stronger due to COVID-19 which has advocated for a stronger EU in the past. This potential for a reinvigorated EU presents an opportunity for increased global cooperation both within Europe, but also internationally.

⁵ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2020-08-20/europes-geopolitical-awakening>

⁶ IBID

Conclusion

While the COVID-19 pandemic presents an obvious threat to the nature of international relations, countries have been able to overcome these obstacles and create new modes of communication. The nature of globalization has changed, but not necessarily for the worse. It is important that cooperation between countries is sustained. COVID-19 is all-encompassing and is unique because every country feels its effects. It is more important now than ever to come together as a unified front to ensure a future of strong international relations, and to bring an end to the pandemic.



