# Five years on: Reflecting on the enduring impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic



The ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has prompted a flurry of discussions regarding its far-reaching societal, economic, and psychological effects, five years after its onset. Experts have weighed in on the various domains affected by the pandemic, exploring the lessons learned, the failures of governance, and the changes in cultural narratives.

Stephen Reicher, a professor of psychology at the University of St Andrews, reflects in The Guardian on the missteps made by the UK government in response to the pandemic. Highlighting a pervasive pessimism towards the public psyche, he critiques the "pessimistic individualism" that dominated the initial pandemic response, noting that the government viewed the public as a problem. Reicher states, "the cost of pessimistic individualism was ultimately measured in tens of thousands of lives," suggesting that an earlier lockdown could have saved many lives. He argues for a reassessment of the relationship between the individual and society, asserting that collective action during the pandemic showcased resilience rather than fragility.

In the literary domain, Sophie Mackintosh questions the scarcity of significant literature grappling with Covid-19's implications. In a conversation at the Kerala literature festival, she commends some recent works like Helga Flatland's "Toxic," which examine the pandemic without detachment, highlighting that many people continue to feel irrevocably changed by the experience. Mackintosh's analysis suggests a hesitance to engage with pandemic narratives, with editors reporting a prevalent preference for escapist literature as a means to distance oneself from the ongoing impact of the virus.

The political landscape during and after the pandemic has been troubled, as Rafael Behr discusses in The Guardian, where he reflects on the "Partygate" scandal surrounding former Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Behr asserts that the scandal was not merely about the breaches of lockdown regulations but served as a manifestation of public resentment toward a political class perceived as remote and indifferent. The incongruence between official lockdown messages and the behaviour of political leaders highlighted a disconnect that fuelled public outrage and distrust.

Furthermore, the grip of Covid-19 on global trade and supply chains is examined by Laleh Khalili. The article emphasises how the pandemic exposed the vulnerability of global manufacturing networks, especially in China. With factories closing and transport crippled, the pandemic magnified inefficiencies in international trade systems, prompting companies to reconsider their operational strategies, a trend that Khalili contends is still shaping corporate behaviours today.

On a social level, Frances Ryan explores the experience of disabled individuals during the pandemic. She notes that, while some accessibility improvements emerged, many of these adaptations have since regressed, leaving vulnerable populations vulnerable once again. Ryan argues that the pandemic has exacerbated existing societal prejudices towards disabled people, framing their needs as burdensome in a return to societal norms that have all but forgotten them.

Academic institutions have faced similar challenges, as William Davies outlines the effects of remote learning on student engagement. He asserts that the pandemic has rendered education more atomised and transactional, stripping away the communal and experiential aspects of learning that many students crave.

In a similarly cautious tone, Devi Sridhar warns against the tendency towards "collective amnesia" regarding the pandemic. She advocates for a focus on preparedness for future health crises rather than a desire to forget the past. Sridhar highlights that ongoing threats, such as avian flu, could demand attention, urging society to build structural resilience moving forward.

Amidst these reflections, mutual aid groups have gained recognition for their role during the pandemic. Rachel Shabi elucidates how these grassroots organisations emerged in response to governmental shortcomings, providing essential support to vulnerable communities. Despite the ebbing of the initial crisis, she notes that many groups remain active, addressing ongoing needs exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis.

Finally, the pandemic has also shifted the landscape of conspiracy theories, as Samira Shackle suggests. She details the movement of conspiracy beliefs from the fringes into more populist discourse, revealing how societal disruptions have facilitated trust issues regarding authority and expertise.

In sum, the past five years have led to significant scrutiny of governmental practices, societal behaviours, and individual experiences shaped by the pandemic. The multifaceted discussions reflect both the immediate ramifications of Covid-19 and the longer-term consequences that continue to evolve. Each contributor to this discourse elucidates crucial aspects of an unprecedented global event, inviting a comprehensive consideration of its legacies.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/03/uk-covid-lockdown-pessimistic-individualism> - This article from The Guardian discusses the UK government's response to the pandemic, highlighting the concept of 'pessimistic individualism' and its impact on public health strategies. It supports Stephen Reicher's critique of the government's approach.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/12/boris-johnson-partygate-scandal> - This article explores the 'Partygate' scandal involving former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, reflecting on public resentment towards political leaders during the pandemic. It corroborates Rafael Behr's discussion on the political landscape.
* <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-covid-19-exposed-the-vulnerabilities-of-global-supply-chains/> - This Brookings article examines how the pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains, particularly in manufacturing networks. It supports Laleh Khalili's analysis of the pandemic's impact on international trade.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/feb/14/disabled-people-left-behind-as-covid-measures-end> - This article discusses the experiences of disabled individuals during and after the pandemic, highlighting the regression of accessibility improvements. It aligns with Frances Ryan's observations on societal prejudices towards disabled people.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/jun/15/remote-learning-is-here-to-stay-but-is-it-working-for-students> - This article explores the effects of remote learning on student engagement, echoing William Davies' concerns about the atomization of education. It discusses the challenges faced by academic institutions during the pandemic.