



A World Reshaped by COVID

SUMMARY: As the worst pandemic in more than a century ebbs through the early 2020s, some of its effects will prove ephemeral, as deeply rooted habits and institutions return to their previous states, while other trends that have been kicked into higher gear will accelerate. Associations will face an evolving, patchwork environment of regressing and accelerating trends.

Forecasts

- The emerging consensus scenario is that the virus is likely to be substantially controlled over the course of 2021, at least in the developed world. However, the "2020 continues" or "viral catastrophe" scenarios listed in "Potential Alternative Futures" (below) would prolong and deepen the disruptions that began in 2020.
- COVID-19 is likely to become endemic, permanently circulating in populations around the world. In a 2021 survey, 90 percent of the scientists consulted forecast that this would be the case. This will cause friction in travel and other interactions between countries and within societies in which some social or political groups are vaccine resistant.
- Work will not return to its previous state: Telework will grow in many fields. This will have effects in career paths and pay, business location and office use, and the structure of cities and suburbs.
- Consumer expectations will be shifted long-term to include more remote services of all kinds, pushing businesses to make them permanent.

Key Uncertainties

How rapidly mutations emerge if the main wave of the pandemic is suppressed, and whether vaccine development can keep pace

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Economic impacts and the pace of economic recovery

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Whether virus mutations prove to be much more contagious or deadly

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Whether herd immunity is possible in the U.S. or around the world

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The extent to which consumers and businesses retain habits created during the pandemic

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The extent to which the virus is controlled in different regions of the world