ANSWER

The disease COVID-19 has spread rapidly within China and to neighboring countries and beyond.Since the new coronavirus was first reported in Wuhan, China, in December, the infectious respiratory. The first confirmed coronavirus cases outside China occurred on Jan. 20, in Japan, Thailand and South Korea. On Jan. 21, the first case in the U.S. was identified in Washington state.

On Jan. 24, the first two European cases were confirmed in France. By Feb. 1, eight European nations had confirmed cases of COVID-19, and a month later that count had risen to 24 countries with at least 2,200 cases, most of them in Italy. On March 11, [Italy eclipsed 10,000 cases](https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/03/11/814343063/as-coronavirus-in-china-wanes-italy-south-korea-see-brunt-of-epidemic) and the World Health Organization [declared the outbreak a pandemic](https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/03/11/814474930/coronavirus-covid-19-is-now-officially-a-pandemic-who-says) — the first since H1N1 in 2009. That's also when China, the original epicenter, began seeing drops in daily counts of new cases.March also saw exponential spread of the virus throughout the U.S., with all 50 states reporting cases by March 17.This particular virus, officially known as SARS-CoV-2, is only the third strain of coronavirus known to frequently cause severe symptoms in humans. The other two strains cause Middle East respiratory syndrome and severe acute respiratory syndrome.

The novel coronavirus continues to spread around the world, with new cases being reported all the time. Spreading just as fast, it seems, are conspiracy theories that claim powerful actors are plotting something sinister to do with the virus. Our research into medical conspiracy theories shows that this has the potential to be just as dangerous for societies as the outbreak itself.

Reality, however, is generally more disruptive, as national governments and supranational agencies balance health security, economic and social imperatives on the back of imperfect and evolving intelligence. It’s a governance challenge that may result in long-term consequences for communities and businesses. On top of this, they also need to accommodate human behaviour.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is no exception. The disease - an epidemic that could become a global pandemic - emerged in a densely populated manufacturing and transport hub in central China and has since spread to 29 other countries and regions (as of 20 February 2020), carried along by Chinese New Year and international travel.

In contrast to the Western Africa Ebola emergency of 2013-2016 – more deadly but less contagious, arguably more isolated, and eventually contained in part by richer countries putting money into Africa – COVID-19 presents larger, more interdependent economies with management dilemmas. It has also surfaced at a time of eroding trust within and between countries – with national leadership under pressure from growing societal unrest and economic confrontations between major powers.

Effective governance of cross-border crises such as pandemics involves preparedness, response and recovery at local, national and international levels. Epidemic preparedness assessments show many countries, especially in regions where new pathogens might emerge, are not well equipped to detect, report and respond to outbreaks.One conspiracy theory proposes that the coronavirus is actually a bio-weapon engineered by the CIA as a way to wage war on China. Others are convinced that the UK and US governments introduced the coronavirus as a way to make money from a potential vaccine.

Although many of these conspiracy theories seem far-fetched, the belief that evil powers are pursuing a secret plan is widespread in every society. Often these relate to health. The spread of fake news and conspiracy theories around the coronavirus is such a significant problem that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has created a “myth busters” webpage to try and tackle them. The global impact of the coronavirus pandemic poses a fundamental question: is this one of those historic moments when the world changes permanently, when the balance of political and economic power shifts decisively, and when, for most people, in most countries, life is never quite the same again?

Put more simply, is this the end of the world as we know it? And, equally, could the crisis mark a new beginning? Genuinely pivotal global moments, watersheds or turning points (pick your own terminology) are actually quite rare. Yet if the premise is correct that there can be no return to the pre-Covid-19 era – then it poses many unsettling questions about the nature of the change, and whether it will be for better or worse.For countless individuals and families, normal life has already been upended in previously unimaginable ways. But how will the pandemic influence the future behaviour of nation states, governments and leaders – and their often dysfunctional relationships? Will they work together more closely, or will this shared trauma further divide them?

Some analysts see grounds for optimism, for example in beneficial environmental effects in northern Italy and China. Countries hitherto at odds, such as Iran and the UAE, are cooperating, at least temporarily. In the Philippines, the crisis prompted a ceasefire with Communist rebels. Global interdependence and the importance of collective, multilateral approaches have been vividly underscored. But there is also a more pessimistic view, typified by Stephen Walt, professor of international relations at Harvard University. “The pandemic will strengthen the state and reinforce nationalism. Governments of all types will adopt emergency measures to manage the crisis, and many will be loath to relinquish these new powers when the crisis is over,” he wrote in Foreign Policy magazine.

Walt continued: “Covid-19 will also accelerate the shift in power and influence from west to east. The response in Europe and America has been slow and haphazard by comparison [with China, South Korea and Singapore], further tarnishing the aura of the western ‘brand’… We will see a further retreat from hyper-globalisation, as citizens look to national governments to Aprotect them and as states and firms seek to reduce future vulnerabilities.

“In short, Covid-19 will create a world that is less open, less prosperous and less free.”Is Walt right? The cop-out answer is only time will tell. Yet the outcome is not preordained. The responses of everybody, from presidents and prime ministers to ordinary citizens, to the myriad challenges and upheavals arising from the pandemic will help determine what happens next.It’s a chance to reset both global and personal landscapes. Notwithstanding present feelings of powerlessness, there are choices to be made about what kind of future awaits. After Covid-19, everything could be up for grabs.