



Book Review

In Covid's Wake: How Our Politics Failed Us Covid's Wake,
Stephen Macedo, Frances Lee. Princeton University Press (2025).

Covid-19 has left a deep and lasting impact on our lives and has shown up in countless research output.¹ However, there is still no clear consensus on the overall impact and the effects of the policy measures used to deal with and mitigate the impact of Covid-19. Were lockdowns, widespread use of masks, school closures and social isolation effective in lowering the spread of the virus and ultimately its death toll? How much did these policies cost society at large, both in direct and indirect terms? Were these social costs outweighed by the social benefits? Were policy makers able to understand the advice of scientists? Were scientists themselves impartial? How much did society's trust in institutions and science matter in compliance with the rules? Can we truthfully say that policy measures, as extreme as some were, were based on solid scientific bases and were all the costs and benefits gauged and considered?

This timely book aims to help us in answering these questions, to better understand how world leaders fared in addressing the Covid-19 emergency and, especially, to highlight problematic issues to be better prepared, in a learning perspective, to deal with future challenges.

The book is written by two political scientists who clearly have done their homework: the massive research effort behind the writing is clear from the start and the documentation is impressive. The authors strike a balance between academic depth and reading pleasure, something that has allowed me to read both sitting at my desk and while on a sunbed at the beach. The style is reminiscent of good investigative journalism, with several (at times, maybe, too many) quotes from scientists, policy and decision makers and scholars, making for a lively read. Once finished, this manuscript will leave the reader with lots of information, some clear conclusions and a set of questions that will spur the need for delving more into the subject. Social scientists will find a bucket list of future research topics; good-willed decision makers will be analyzing their understanding of policy setting during crises and question their relationship with scientists and citizens. Regional scholars will find many references to space-specific issues, both in terms of impact and policy decisions, as the authors consider spatial characteristics throughout the whole book. While the authors provide an in-depth analysis of the situation and policies in the United States, they also provide several detours around the world, making this book a relevant read for an international audience. The main themes addressed and the conclusions are rather universal.

What are the book's main themes? Not in order of appearance, the analysis revolves around the following:

- the relationship between science, scientists and policy-making,

- how this relationship is influenced by partisan politics,
- the importance of trust between citizens and institutions, both political and scientific,
- how the centralized or federalist nature of a nation can influence decision making and the impact of policies,
- the role of analytical evaluation tools such as Cost Benefit Analysis in policy-making, especially during emergencies and periods of duress. The lack of formal consideration by public decision makers of the social costs associated with non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) is a recurring issue the authors highlight throughout the book.

Interesting aspects for a regional scientist include the importance of preferences and voluntary behavior of state residents, which are highly clustered in space and are highly correlated with partisanship and make disentangling the underlying determinants of Covid-19 impacts difficult in an a-spatial setting.

The authors amass facts, analyses and research to provide the readers with the means to successfully form an educated opinion on the themes summarized above. They also provide a few personal anecdotes hinting towards the conversation that the authors must have had while writing the book and help in engaging more with the nuances. Overall, the book is a pleasant and highly informative read and is recommended to anyone who, for personal or professional interests, wants to understand what has been at stake during the war against Covid-19 and in the aftermath, what we should have learned and what we should be exploring to be more prepared if the need should arise.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Chiara F. Del Bo: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Chiara F. Del Bo 

Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy

E-mail address: chiara.delbo@unimi.it.

¹ A simple search for "Covid 19" in Scopus, limited to "Social Sciences", "Business, Management and Accounting" and "Economics, Econometrics and Finance" in the "Title, abstract and keywords" filed yields a total of 162,499 documents (search performed July 8th, 2025).