

The Covid Border Shutdowns: An Overview

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Timeline of the Early Pandemic

- *January 9, 2020* – World Health Organization announces early-stage pandemic unfolding in Wuhan, China
- *January 20* -- Three U.S. airports set to begin screening for Covid-19
- *January 21* -- First U.S. Covid-19 case confirmed in Kirkland, WA
- *January 23* -- Wuhan enters quarantine
- *January 30* -- WHO declares a Global Health Emergency
- *January 31* -- U.S. restricts travel from China for foreign nationals



The World Health Organization and Travel



February 29, 2020:

“WHO continues to advise against the application of travel or trade restrictions to countries experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks.”

“In general, evidence shows that restricting the movement of people and goods during public health emergencies is ineffective in most situations and may divert resources from other interventions. Furthermore, restrictions may interrupt needed aid and technical support, may disrupt businesses, and may have negative social and economic effects on the affected countries.”

North American Responses

- March 13, 2020: U.S. imposes a travel ban on non-citizens returning from Europe.
- March 20: U.S. declares restrictions at the land borders under Title 42, a law that bars entry to non-citizens when “there is serious danger of the introduction of [a communicable] disease into the United States.”
- March 21: The U.S. and Canada jointly impose a “temporary” restriction on “all non-essential travel.” This would be renewed monthly until Aug. 9, 2021 for Canada, and Nov. 8, 2021 for the U.S.



US-CANADA JOINT INITIATIVE:

The United States and Canada are temporarily restricting all non-essential travel across their borders, effective March 21. Essential commercial activity will NOT be impacted and we will continue to maintain a strong and secure economic supply chain.

Both governments are taking action to prevent the further spread of coronavirus.

SUSPENDED TRAVEL:
TOURISM
RECREATIONAL

UNAFFECTED TRAVEL:
ESSENTIAL COMMERCE
ESSENTIAL TRADE/TRAVEL



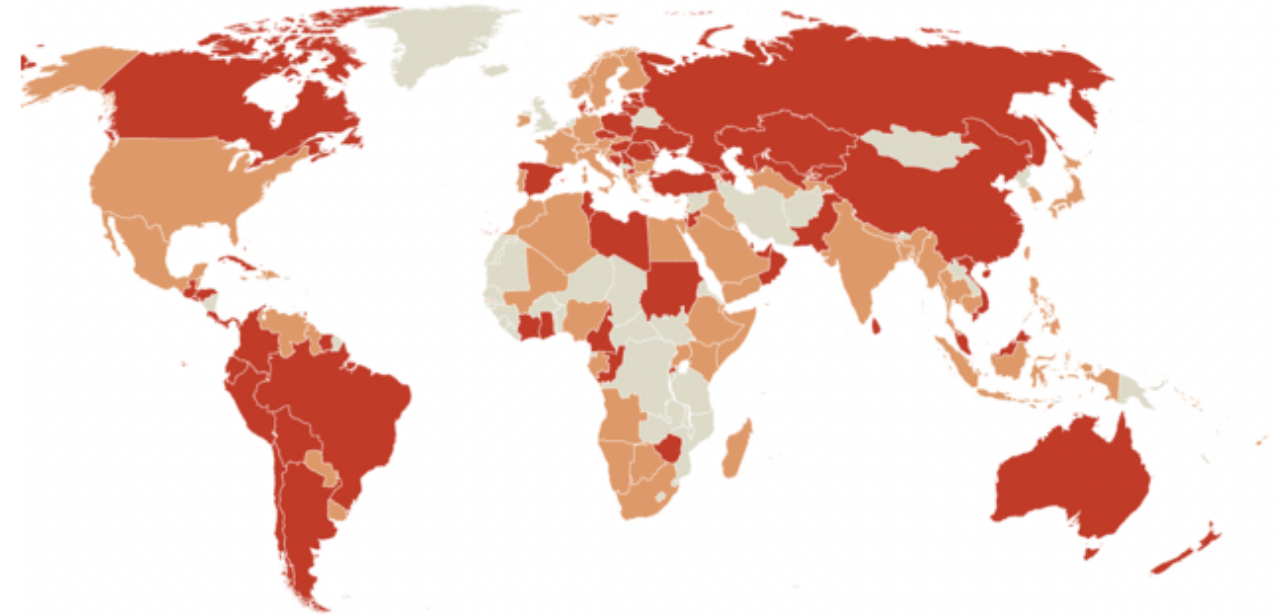
Global Responses

- By the end of March, according to the International Organization for Migration, there were no fewer than 43,000 separate restrictions on international travel intended to slow the spread of Covid.
- At one extreme, countries like Australia and New Zealand restricted returns even by their own citizens.
- At the other extreme, some tourist-dependent economies like Mexico and the Caribbean islands imposed few, or very temporary, restrictions

Most countries in the world have imposed partial or complete border closures to foreign nationals due to coronavirus outbreak

Countries with borders closed to the movement of noncitizens and nonresidents as of March 31, 2020

■ Complete closure ■ Partial closure



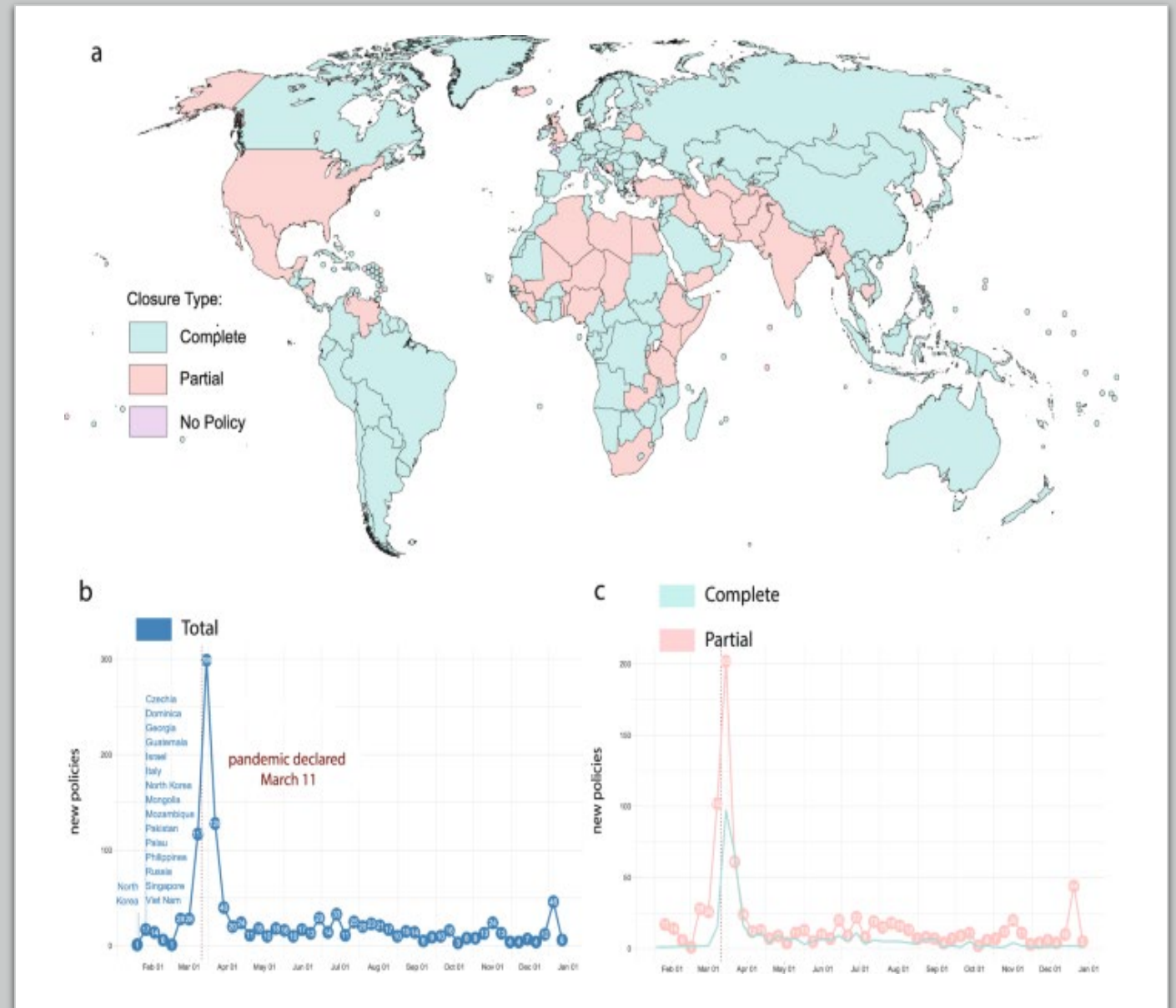
Note: Partial closure is a border closed to people arriving from other countries who are neither citizens nor residents of the destination country, including tourists and other noncitizen visitors. Partial closure also includes country situations where not all types of borders are closed (land, sea, air). Complete closure refers to a ban on anyone arriving who is not a citizen or resident of the destination country, with some possible exceptions such as scientists, diplomats, airline crews and humanitarian personnel.

Sources: The New York Times and Al Jazeera (border closures), accessed March 31, 2020.

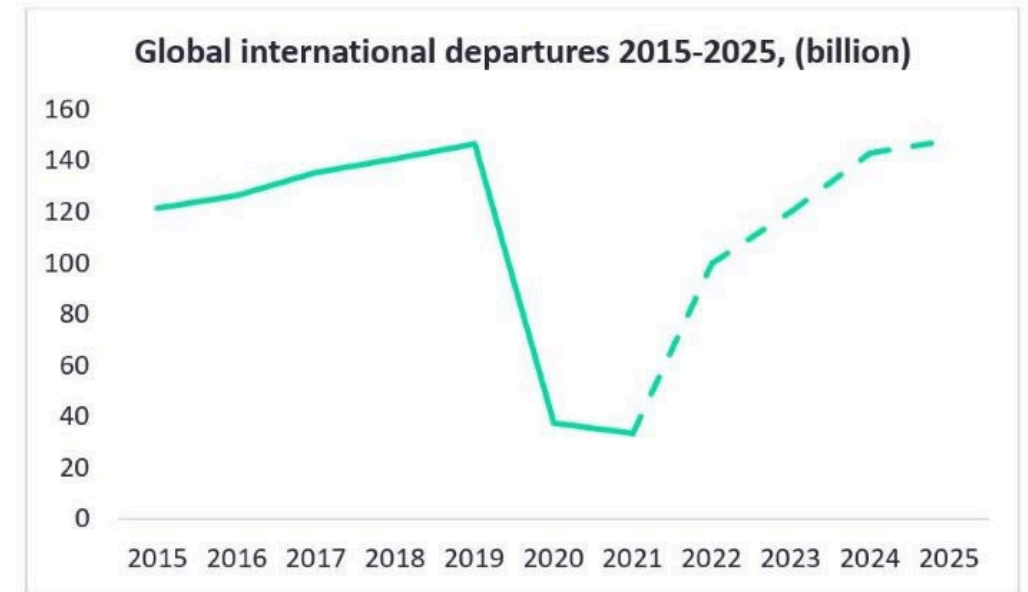
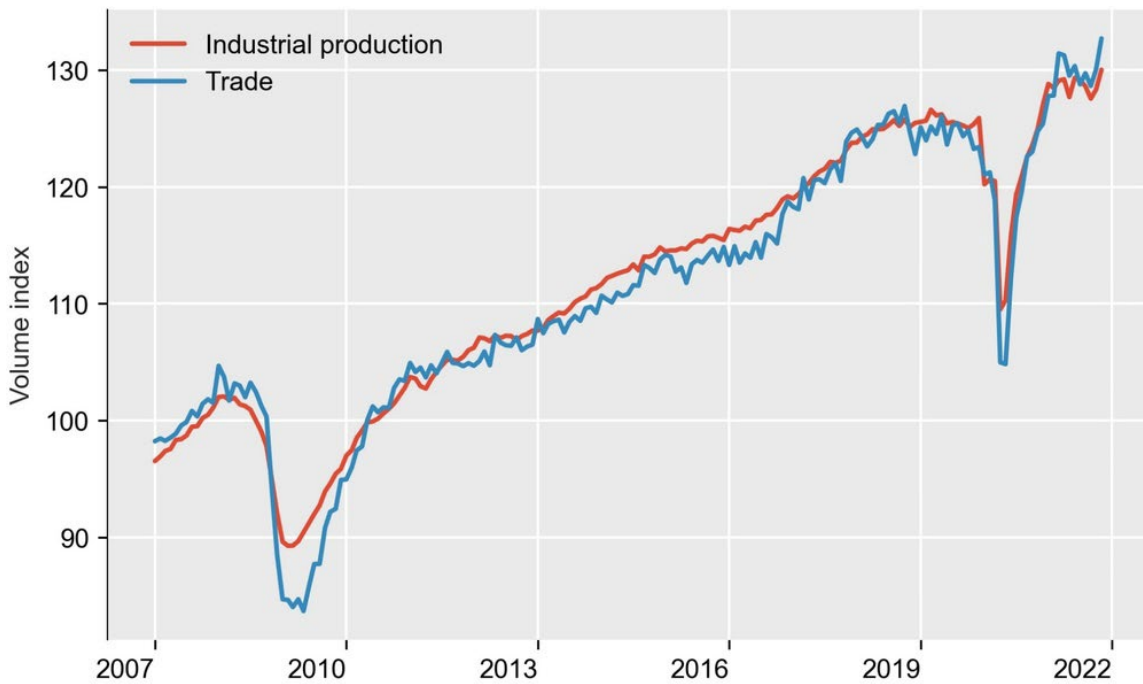
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Why Did Countries Ignore the WHO?

- Uncertainty: the virus could be spread by asymptomatic travelers.
- Speed of transmission: especially the early outbreaks in Italy and Iran.
- Global politics: the virus came at a time of growing geopolitical tensions with China.
- “Political theater”: the desire by politicians to be seen as taking strong actions.



Trade vs Travel During the Pandemic



Did Border Closures Slow the Spread of Covid?

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Did border closures slow SARS-CoV-2?

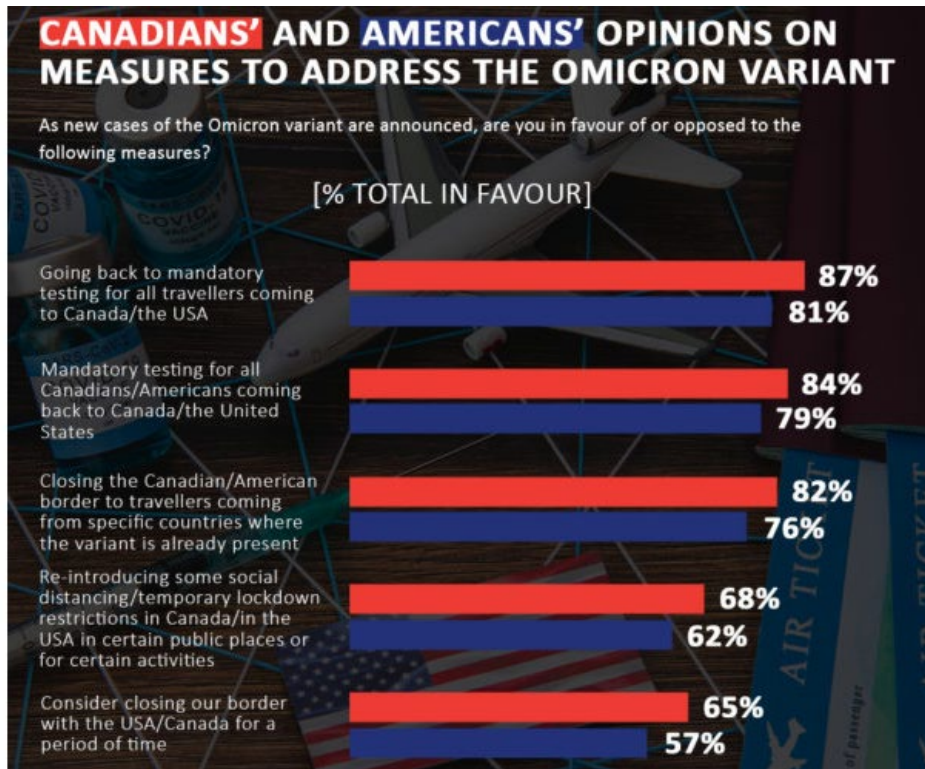
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- “We found no evidence in favor of international border closures, whereas we found a strong association between national-level lockdowns and a reduced spread of SARS-CoV-2 cases.”
- “More research must be done to evaluate the byproduct effects of closures versus lockdowns as well as the efficacy of other preventative measures introduced at international borders.”

Why Did Borders Stay Closed for So Long?



- Japan still remains closed to tourism.
- Spain just last week reopened its land borders with Morocco.
- Taiwan still maintains a 5-day quarantine requirement (down from 10) for foreign travelers.
- More than 20 countries still maintain Covid restrictions on asylum seekers, including U.S. Title 42.
- China and Hong Kong remain largely closed to all foreign travel under China's "Zero Covid" strategy.

The Legacy of the Border Closures

“Reducing the spread of COVID-19 is a global problem, not a national one. No country will be secure unless the virus can be brought under control everywhere.”

“The pandemic should become an example of how the world can cooperate to solve a common problem—perhaps setting a model for tackling others such as climate change or the international flow of refugees. Instead, the pandemic is fast becoming a historical case study in how crises drive countries apart.”

FP

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VOICE

The World Needs to Reopen Borders Before It's Too Late

Even as they struggle to control the pandemic, governments should move quickly to reopen borders instead of giving in to xenophobia, nationalism, and illusions of autarky.



By [Edward Alden](#), a columnist at *Foreign Policy*, a visiting professor at Western Washington University, and a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.