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From Globalization to Fragmentation? COVID-19 and the Politics of Global Business Resilience

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic represents a critical point in contemporary international relations, affecting global economic governance and international business dynamics. This paper analyzes the pandemic's impact on global business from an international relations perspective, emphasizing the interaction between economic disruption, state power, and geopolitical competition. The study examines the immediate consequences of the pandemic, showing how a public health emergency rapidly evolved into a systemic economic and geopolitical shock. Disruptions to global supply chains, mobility restrictions, and border closures challenged established patterns of globalization and reinforced the central role of the state in crisis management. These developments intensified geopolitical rivalries, particularly among major powers, and reshaped strategic competition over critical resources, technology, and medical supplies. The paper further explores the transformations triggered by the pandemic, including rapid digitalization, changes in labor markets, and the reconfiguration of multinational business models. Firms increasingly prioritized resilience, supply chain diversification, and risk management over efficiency, reflecting a shift toward economic security and strategic autonomy. The analysis assesses the role of governments and international organizations in responding to the crisis. While multilateral institutions provided essential financial and operational support, the pandemic exposed significant limitations in international coordination and global governance. The paper concludes that COVID-19 acted as a catalyst for change in international relations, accelerating the transition toward a more fragmented and competitive global order in which geopolitical considerations increasingly shape global business and economic governance.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, Global Business, Globalization, Labor Market, Supply Chain