# New from Princeton

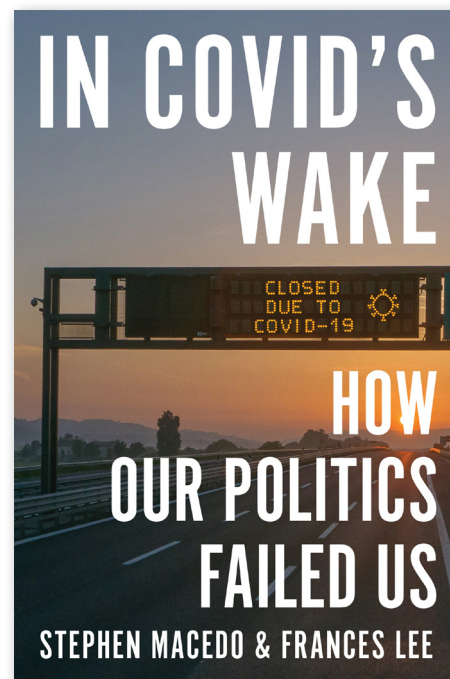## In Covid's Wake *How Our Politics Failed Us*

Stephen Macedo & Frances Lee

**What our failures during the pandemic cost us, and why we must do better**

The Covid pandemic quickly led to the greatest mobilization of emergency powers in human history. By early April 2020, half the world's population—3.9 billion people—were living under quarantine. People were told not to leave their homes; businesses were shuttered, employees laid off, and schools closed for months or even years. The most devastating pandemic in a century and the policies adopted in response to it upended life as we knew it. In this eye-opening book, Stephen Macedo and Frances Lee examine our pandemic response and pose some provocative questions: Why did we ignore pre-Covid plans for managing a pandemic? Were the voices of reasonable dissent treated fairly? Did we adequately consider the costs and benefits of different policy options? And, aside from vaccines, did the policies adopted work as intended?

With *In Covid's Wake*, Macedo and Lee offer the first comprehensive—and candid—political assessment of how our institutions fared during the pandemic. They describe how, influenced by Wuhan's lockdown, governments departed from their existing pandemic plans. Hard choices were obscured by slogans like "follow the science." The policies adopted largely benefited the laptop class and left so-called essential workers unprotected; the benefits and harms were distributed unfairly. Extended school closures hit the least-privileged families the hardest. Science became politicized and dissent was driven to the margins. In the next crisis, Macedo and Lee warn, we must not forget the deepest values of liberal democracy: tolerance and open-mindedness, respect for evidence and its limits, a willingness to entertain uncertainty, and a commitment to telling the whole truth.

**Stephen Macedo** is the Laurance S. Rockefeller Professor of Politics and the University Center for Human Values at Princeton University. He is the author of *Just Married: Same-Sex Couples, Monogamy, and the Future of Marriage, Diversity* and *Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy*. **Frances Lee** is professor of politics and public affairs at Princeton University. She is the author of *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign* and *Beyond Ideology: Politics, Principles, and Partisanship in the U.S. Senate*.

"*In Covid's Wake* is a masterwork in the study of government response to crises. Stephen Macedo and Frances Lee have produced a gripping narrative of the Covid pandemic, revealing how experts became trapped by overconfidence and disdain for their critics, how rational discussion was subordinated to political agendas, how consideration of the larger public good got lost in pursuit of ideological purity."
—**Thomas B. Edsall**, *New York Times* columnist

"The most devastating exploration of social and political groupthink that I have ever read. Everyone interested in how human beings think should read it. So should everyone interested in handling the next comparable disaster."
—**Jane Mansbridge**, Harvard University

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"As the Covid pandemic recedes, we need an honest reckoning not only of what worked but of how democracies make choices during public health emergencies. Macedo and Lee have given us an essential contribution to that conversation. Their account makes for uncomfortable reading, which is exactly why everyone—expert and citizen alike—should read this book."
—Kyle Harper, author of *Plagues Upon the Earth: Disease and the Course of Human History*

"When Covid hit the United States, it infected a country with preexisting conditions—partisan polarization, media fragmentation, and deep inequality. Macedo and Lee astutely assess how the country, especially its educated elites, responded to the pandemic. Which policies worked? Which failed? Which values were upheld? Which were sacrificed? Whose voices were amplified? Whose were silenced? This book is a reckoning. It deserves to be widely read and fiercely debated."
—Alison McQueen, author of *Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times*

"This book provides a disturbing account of how public health authorities failed to follow the science, lied about conflicts of interest, besmirched the reputations and squelched the views of qualified dissenters, and eroded confidence in their own profession. There aren't many books that have the potential to improve American democracy, but this one has a shot."
—Morris P. Fiorina, editor of *Who Governs? Emergency Powers in the Time of COVID*

"An incisive and honest look at how politics created challenges for effective health policy during the pandemic. This book asks the hard, necessary questions that can help us learn from the Covid years to shape better approaches in the future."
—Sandro Galea, author of *Within Reason: A Liberal Public Health for an Illiberal Time*

"*In Covid's Wake* offers a comprehensive, constructive, and necessary examination of the policies adopted during the recent pandemic, urging us to step back and dispassionately assess how and why events unfolded as they did. As very succinctly articulated by Macedo and Lee, such an analytical approach yields significant insights into the broader preservation of liberal democratic values, the relationship between science and society, and the practice of science in and of itself."
—Sunetra Gupta, University of Oxford

"Lucid and provocative, *In Covid's Wake* provides an invaluable political and democratic assessment about what we—as citizens but especially our political and public health leaders—did wrong during the pandemic. Macedo and Lee's argument could not be more important or salient as we struggle to create a politics that responds successfully to the natural and human-made crises that surely lie ahead."
—Archon Fung, author of *Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy*