

Pandemic Powers Without a Pandemic Autopsy

What the Fauci Files Reveal About the Risks of the WHO Pandemic Agreement

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Executive summary

The release of Anthony Fauci’s pandemic diary and private Slack communications among the authors of “The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2” has reopened an argument that should never have been closed: how much uncertainty did influential scientists and officials privately recognize about COVID-19’s origin, and how fully did they communicate it to the public?

The records do not prove that SARS-CoV-2 was engineered or that it escaped from a laboratory. Natural zoonotic emergence remains possible, and later studies have presented evidence linking the earliest recognized cases to the Huanan wet market in Wuhan. The documents do, however, show that leading scientists initially regarded a research-related origin as plausible; that some continued privately to discuss laboratory mechanisms after publication of *Proximal Origin*; and that officials who had institutional interests in the matter helped convene, follow and later invoke an analysis presented publicly as independent scientific judgment.

The significance of this episode extends beyond the unresolved origin of COVID-19. In May 2025, the World Health Assembly adopted the WHO Pandemic Agreement. The Agreement cannot open for signature until its Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS) annex is adopted, and negotiations remained unfinished after the seventh Intergovernmental Working Group meeting in July 2026. The

Agreement seeks closer coordination in surveillance, pathogen sharing, research, regulation, financing and public communication. Those objectives may be useful, but they depend on institutions reporting candidly, managing conflicts and exposing uncertainty.

COVID-19 demonstrated that these conditions cannot be assumed. Governments may conceal embarrassing evidence. Research funders may become participants in disputes involving work they supported. Scientists may be asked to assess questions that affect their fields, collaborators or funding. Journals and media outlets may mistake institutional consensus for independent confirmation. Authority may be exercised through advice and reputation while formal responsibility remains elsewhere.

The Agreement does not empower WHO to order lockdowns, close schools or impose vaccine mandates. Article 22.2 expressly denies WHO such authority. Its practical influence would instead operate through epistemic authority, declarations, technical standards, aid conditionality, expert assessments, regulatory reliance, procurement systems and coordinated communication. This distinction makes accountability more—not less—important. Influence can be powerful even when legal responsibility remains national.

The Agreement’s accountability machinery is too weak for that task. Parties report periodically on their own implementation, while the proposed implementation mechanism is expressly “facilitative,” “cooperative,” “non-adversarial” and “non-punitive,” and may make only non-binding recommendations. That may encourage participation, but it is poorly designed for investigating concealment by powerful states or institutions.

A credible system requires an independent pandemic inspectorate, pre-agreed access to relevant sites and records, transparent registries of high-risk pathogen research, reporting of accidents and near misses, durable record-preservation requirements, meaningful conflict-of-interest rules, protected dissent and whistleblowers, publication of minority scientific judgments, and an automatic post-pandemic inquiry into origins and institutional conduct. International cooperation may be necessary, but authority should expand only when accountability expands with it.

1. Two pandemic histories

The public history of early 2020 is familiar. Chinese authorities reported a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan; researchers rapidly published the sequence of a novel coronavirus; and governments struggled to understand its transmissibility and severity. On 30 January, WHO declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. On 11 March, it characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic (WHO, 2020a; WHO, 2020b).

The early public discussion of origin soon hardened. On 19 February, *The Lancet* published a statement signed by prominent scientists condemning “conspiracy theories” suggesting that COVID-19 did not have

a natural origin (Calisher et al., 2020). On 17 March, *Nature Medicine* published “The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2,” whose authors stated: “Our analyses clearly show that SARS-CoV-2 is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus” (Andersen et al., 2020, p. 450). These interventions were widely understood as excluding a laboratory-related explanation, although the paper’s narrower wording did not formally exclude every possible research-related scenario.

The private history was more complicated. Fauci’s contemporaneous notes describe senior scientists discussing unusual features of the virus, possible deliberate insertion and accidental release, coronavirus research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), and the need not to let the issue go. The newly released Slack messages show members of the *Proximal Origin* group continuing to debate laboratory mechanisms and the degree of confidence justified by the evidence (Paul, 2026a; Paul, 2026b).

This divergence does not establish a conspiracy or settle the origin question. Scientific views properly change as evidence changes. Private deliberation is also normally more speculative than public communication. The legitimate question is whether the change from private concern to public confidence was evidentially explained and accompanied by sufficient disclosure. On this point the record is troubling.

The relevant institutions were not disinterested observers. Fauci led the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), which funded EcoHealth Alliance. EcoHealth in turn supported coronavirus research at WIV. NIH Director Francis Collins oversaw the larger funding institution. Jeremy Farrar, who served as WHO Chief Scientist from 2023 to 2025 and is now WHO Assistant Director-General for Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Care, led the Wellcome Trust, a major biomedical funder. Peter Daszak of EcoHealth helped organize the *Lancet* statement and later joined the WHO-convened mission to China. None of these connections proves improper conduct. Collectively, however, they required unusually strong transparency because the institutions helping to assess a possible research-related origin also faced reputational questions arising from relevant research networks.

Instead, the origin debate was progressively moralized. A natural-origin judgment became associated with science and responsible public health; a laboratory hypothesis became associated with Donald Trump, anti-Chinese prejudice and conspiracy thinking. Political actors undoubtedly made reckless and unsupported claims. But the existence of bad arguments did not make the underlying question illegitimate. Once a scientific hypothesis became a marker of political identity, the incentives for dispassionate correction deteriorated.

2. What Fauci recorded in private

On 31 January 2020, Farrar connected Fauci with Kristian Andersen of Scripps Research. Andersen and Edward Holmes had been examining the viral genome. Fauci recorded that they were concerned about unusual features and about whether a key sequence could have arisen naturally without a still-

unidentified evolutionary pathway. His notes describe the scientists considering deliberate insertion followed by accidental release more plausible than an intentional release. Fauci distinguished these concerns from implausible claims then circulating that the virus contained HIV sequences. The Farrar-Andersen concern, he wrote, “was different” (Paul, 2026a).

Fauci’s reaction was initially appropriate. Rather than dismiss the concern, he supported bringing together specialists in coronavirus biology and evolutionary virology. A teleconference on 1 February included Fauci, Collins, Farrar, Andersen, Holmes, Robert Garry, Andrew Rambaut, Christian Drosten, Ron Fouchier and other scientists. Fauci’s contemporaneous account states that Fouchier and Drosten favored natural evolution, while “the rest” thought deliberate insertion remained possible. His notes also mention Shi Zhengli’s coronavirus work at WIV and conclude that “we could not let this go” (Paul, 2026a).

The wording must be handled carefully. Fauci was summarizing a fast-moving conversation, not recording a formal vote. “Deliberate insertion” does not by itself identify who might have performed it, why, or whether a modified virus caused the outbreak. Nor does it prove that the scientists retained that view after examining additional sequences and proposed natural mechanisms. What it establishes is that a research-related explanation was taken seriously at the highest level at the beginning of February.

Fauci later described the discussion differently. In a 2021 retrospective diary entry, he wrote that the group had been roughly divided and that subsequent analysis led Andersen, Garry and their colleagues toward natural emergence. Memory can compress an untidy discussion, and this discrepancy alone does not prove intentional deception. It does, however, make the contemporaneous account more important. The later “about half” description is not identical to the earlier statement that only Fouchier and Drosten favored natural evolution while the others regarded insertion as possible (Paul, 2026a).

Within days of the call, Andersen, Holmes, Garry and Rambaut began producing what became *Proximal Origin*, later joined by Ian Lipkin. A draft circulated to Farrar, Fauci and Collins by 4 February. On 9 February, Farrar suggested that anticipated pangolin coronavirus data might permit a “conclusive statement” and movement toward a scientific statement. The preprint appeared on 16 February, followed by the peer-reviewed article on 17 March (Andersen et al., 2020; Select Subcommittee, 2023).

Rapid scientific work during an emergency is not evidence of misconduct. Nor was it irrational to investigate whether apparently unusual features could be explained by natural evolution. The problem is the incomplete disclosure surrounding the process. When Fauci later cited the published work at a White House briefing, he presented it as the conclusion of highly qualified evolutionary virologists. He did not explain that the authors’ initial concern had been brought to him, that he and Collins had participated in the discussions preceding the paper, or that drafts had circulated among the same officials (Select Subcommittee, 2023; Paul, 2026a).

That omission mattered because the paper was performing two functions. It was a scientific analysis, but it was also becoming an instrument of institutional reassurance. The public heard that independent specialists had examined the virus and rejected manipulation. It was not given enough information to see that the inquiry had developed inside a network linking government science leadership, major funders and scientists whose work and fields could be affected by the outcome.

The *Lancet* statement created a similar problem. It declared solidarity with Chinese scientists and condemned non-natural-origin claims as conspiracy theories before a credible independent origins investigation had occurred. Daszak's role in organizing the statement was not initially disclosed, despite EcoHealth's collaboration with WIV. *The Lancet* later published an addendum disclosing his research and funding connections (Calisher et al., 2020). The issue is not that a conflicted person can never make a valid argument. It is that readers need the information required to judge the argument and the incentives surrounding it.

3. What the scientists continued to discuss

The Slack messages released in July 2026 complicate any simple account in which new evidence quickly removed the authors' doubts. They show continued discussion of the furin cleavage site, serial passage, tissue-culture adaptation, humanized-mouse experiments and other routes by which research might conceivably have influenced the virus. These messages do not prove that any such process occurred. They show that the authors did not regard every laboratory pathway as scientifically absurd after their paper appeared (Paul, 2026b).

Some of the most striking exchanges concerned public positioning. On 1 May 2020, Holmes wrote that the group had done Ralph Baric "a MASSIVE favour" in relation to scrutiny of coronavirus research; Andersen replied, "No shit." Baric is a leading coronavirus researcher whose work was relevant to arguments about the capabilities and risks of laboratory experimentation. The exchange can be read as gallows humor among colleagues under pressure, but it also suggests awareness that the paper had protected a research community as well as advanced a scientific conclusion (Paul, 2026b).

On 6 May, Holmes wrote that the group had been the first to raise laboratory escape but "obviously can't say that." Andersen responded that they were the first to take it seriously. Again, this is not an admission that their published conclusion was false. It is evidence that the authors understood there was a publicly difficult history behind the conclusion—one in which they had initially been alarmed by the very possibility subsequently treated as disreputable (Paul, 2026b).

The broader release contains later expressions of quantified uncertainty. The Senate committee reports that Andersen assigned a 30 percent probability to a laboratory origin and Holmes 20 percent, later reduced to 10 percent. Andersen also wrote that their paper had been "pretty strong" in saying there was

“no way” manipulation had occurred, while acknowledging reduced confidence as further issues emerged (Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, 2026a). Probabilities expressed in private messages are provisional judgments, not findings. Yet even a 10, 20 or 30 percent possibility is incompatible with treating the hypothesis as too irrational to investigate.

The strongest defensible conclusion is therefore limited but consequential. *Proximal Origin* did not fabricate genomic data, and its authors could reasonably favor natural emergence. But the public authority acquired by its categorical sentence exceeded the certainty visible in the underlying deliberations. The paper was repeatedly used to close debate that its own authors had not entirely closed in private.

Later research strengthened the case for zoonotic emergence. Spatial analyses located early recognized cases around the Huanan market, and phylogenetic work argued for more than one zoonotic introduction (Worobey et al., 2022; Pekar et al., 2022). Those studies deserve serious weight, although their conclusions remain contested and do not answer every question about earlier cases, missing animal evidence or the completeness of Chinese records. US intelligence agencies have also remained divided, with different agencies favoring different hypotheses at varying confidence levels (ODNI, 2023). The proper conclusion is continued uncertainty, not a reversal in which laboratory origin must now be declared proven.

A deeper conflict can arise between institutional leaders and political actors, on the one hand, and individual scientists widely perceived as authoritative experts, on the other. The private conversations confirm uncertainty inherent in the scientific enterprise. The public messaging shows how an appeal to scientific consensus can help mobilize political support while delegitimizing dissent and scrutiny. The risk is greatest when experts depend on, advise, or are convened by institutions with reputational stakes in the answer.

4. Influence without responsibility

The diary also illuminates how authority operated during the domestic response. Fauci did not possess statutory power to close a school, restaurant or business. Governors, mayors, health departments and school authorities made those decisions. Yet his own notes show that his influence was not merely academic. He was well aware of that influence and exploited it.

On 15 March 2020, Fauci recorded speaking with New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and persuading him to close the city’s schools. He also advised closing bars and restaurants, and wrote that de Blasio would base his action on Fauci’s recommendation. Fauci recorded a similar conversation with Ann O’Leary, then chief of staff to California Governor Gavin Newsom, and noted that his television appearances had influenced California’s decisions (Paul, 2026a).

These entries do not make Fauci solely responsible for school closures. Political officials retained legal authority and had independent information. The decisions were also made amid genuine fear that hospitals could be overwhelmed. Nevertheless, the diary conflicts with later formulations suggesting Fauci had nothing to do with closing schools or “shutting down” the country. The narrower legal claim was true; the broader practical implication was not. He exercised considerable persuasive and reputational authority.

This is a recurring accountability problem. Experts influence policy without signing the orders. Elected officials rely on expert advice while claiming they followed science. International organizations issue recommendations while emphasizing that sovereign governments choose whether to implement them. When policies succeed, every participant may claim credit. When they fail, responsibility disperses across the network.

The consequences of school closures illustrate why this matters. In March 2020, temporary closures were understandable under severe uncertainty. Prolonged closures required continuing assessment of educational loss, mental health, inequality and changing evidence about children’s risks. Yet once closure became identified with caution and scientific responsibility, revisiting it became politically difficult. The question was no longer simply what balance of harms the evidence supported; it was whether disagreement signaled indifference to death.

The timing sharpens the contrast. While the origins group was privately debating manipulation, passage and laboratory escape, the United States was moving into an unprecedented social shutdown. On 13 March, President Trump declared a national emergency. Over the following days, jurisdictions closed schools, restricted public gatherings and suspended ordinary commercial activity. These measures were not caused by *Proximal Origin*, and the immediate case for reducing transmission did not depend on whether the virus arose naturally or through research. Nevertheless, the two processes shared a source of authority: a small network of scientific advisers was helping define both what caused the emergency and which responses counted as responsible.

At the same time, governments and much of the press still depended heavily on information shaped by China and transmitted through WHO. Chinese authorities had initially denied or minimized human-to-human transmission, disciplined medical professionals who warned colleagues, and controlled access to early records. Fauci’s own 26 January entry recognized that the market was probably an amplifier rather than the original source and that transmission had begun earlier than the first official account suggested (Paul, 2026a). Yet there was no comparably forceful public reckoning with the reliability of the information environment on which policy was being built.

This did not mean every WHO recommendation was wrong or every Chinese datum unusable. It meant the public faced a severe asymmetry. Institutions demanded rapid compliance with interventions because uncertainty was high, while uncertainty about official narratives was narrowed or politicized. Precaution was expansive when it justified restrictions on citizens but much less visible when it justified investigating laboratories, funding relationships or state concealment. A defensible emergency policy can coexist with an open origins inquiry. Treating the latter as a threat to the former confused public unity with scientific certainty.

The same structure appeared in the origins debate. Scientists wrote the paper; journals published it; officials invoked it; platforms and media amplified it; and each participant could describe itself as relying on another. The appearance of multiple independent confirmations obscured how closely connected parts of the process were. This does not prove coordination toward a deliberately false result. It shows why formal independence and disclosure are necessary when institutional judgments move through a mutually reinforcing network.

5. The missing media check

The release of Fauci's diary received meaningful coverage, so it would be inaccurate to describe a complete mainstream blackout. The Washington Post, CBS, NPR, The Guardian and Forbes all reported on the documents. The Wall Street Journal offered some of the strongest scrutiny among major print outlets. Some coverage addressed the origins dispute, and Forbes noted the tension between Fauci's diary and his later presentation of school closures (Westfall and Diamond, 2026; Yilek, 2026; Daniel, 2026; Pengelly, 2026; Murray, 2026; Lukpat, 2026).

The dominant framing nevertheless often shifted attention from institutional discrepancies to personalities. Coverage emphasized Fauci's descriptions of Trump, his sudden fame, his relationship with Rand Paul and attacks from the political right. These themes were genuinely present in the diary and were legitimate news. But they were easier to narrate than the technically and institutionally harder questions: What changed between the 1 February call and the *Proximal Origin* draft? Why was the government's role in the process not disclosed when Fauci cited the paper? How did the authors' later private doubts compare with the public use of their conclusions? What safeguards failed when conflicted institutions assessed issues affecting their own work?

STAT's short item on 28 July offers a particularly revealing example. It described Paul as seeking to pressure Fauci over what Paul "believes" was a cover-up, quoted Fauci calling the inquiry a "colossal waste of time" driven by the "far right," and suggested that online criticism of Fauci's private reflections on fame corroborated his view that commentators sought to vilify him (STAT, 2026). It did not mention the 31 January concern, the 1 February discussion, "we could not let this go," or the Slack messages.

The item did not need to endorse Paul's claims, or those of the right-wing media. But journalism should not allow the excesses of critics to decide whether primary evidence deserves examination. STAT's framing effectively assessed the inquiry through Fauci's view of his opponents before assessing the documentary contradictions at issue. This was exculpatory by emphasis and framing rather than false in its individual statements.

Conservative media create the converse problem when they describe uncertainty as proof, use "lab leak" and "engineered virus" interchangeably, or infer criminal conspiracy from undisclosed conflicts. Such overstatement makes legitimate criticism easier to dismiss. The public is left between institutional media that minimize and partisan media that overclaim.

Specialist journalism faces an additional structural difficulty. Health reporters depend on agencies, journals, funders, prominent researchers and editors for access, interpretation and publication. During an emergency, those sources are indispensable. But a reporting system heavily dependent on the same network it must investigate can become a closed epistemic circle: officials cite scientists, scientists cite journals, journals rely on peer reviewers from the field, and journalists quote all three as independent sources of confirmation.

The 2026 indictment of David Morens, a former senior NIAID adviser, shows why aggressive scrutiny remains necessary. Prosecutors allege that Morens conspired to evade Freedom of Information Act requests and concealed or destroyed records connected with COVID-19 research grants. These are allegations, and Morens is presumed innocent. Fauci has not been charged in that case. Moreover, President Biden granted Fauci a full and unconditional pardon for any federal offenses he may have committed between 1 January 2014 and 19 January 2025 arising from his specified public service. The pardon would bar federal prosecution for covered conduct, although it does not preclude investigation or congressional scrutiny (Biden, 2025). The indictment therefore cannot be used as proof of a wider conspiracy. It does demonstrate that record preservation and access are substantive parts of pandemic accountability, not procedural distractions (US Department of Justice, 2026).

Fauci was scheduled to testify before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on 29 July 2026 after being subpoenaed. A serious hearing should avoid a hero-versus-villain spectacle. It should establish a documentary chronology: who initiated each discussion, what evidence changed, which drafts were circulated, what conflicts were disclosed, what records were preserved, and why later public formulations differed from contemporaneous private accounts (Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, 2026b).

6. What the Pandemic Agreement assumes

The WHO Pandemic Agreement responds to real failures. COVID-19 exposed inequitable access to vaccines, diagnostics and treatments; fragmented surveillance; fragile supply chains; and inadequate preparedness in many countries. Better coordination can accelerate detection, reduce duplication and improve access to countermeasures. The Agreement's supporters are right to reject claims that it creates a supranational power to order lockdowns or vaccination. Article 22.2 explicitly withholds that authority from the WHO Secretariat and Director-General (World Health Assembly, 2025).

The Agreement was adopted on 20 May 2025 but is not yet open for signature or ratification. That step follows adoption of the PABS annex. Once opened and ratified, it will enter into force 30 days after the sixtieth instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval, formal confirmation or accession has been deposited (World Health Assembly, 2025; WHO, 2026b).

The stronger concern is about indirect authority. During a fast-moving emergency, WHO declarations, technical recommendations, laboratory networks and assessments can define the presumptively responsible course for national governments. The Agreement would deepen cooperation in surveillance and prevention (Article 4), research and development (Article 9), PABS (Article 12), supply chains (Article 13), whole-of-government approaches (Article 15), public communication (Article 16) and financing (Article 18). National governments remain sovereign, but departing from a coordinated international position may carry substantial political and reputational cost.

Such a regime depends on several assumptions. It assumes states promptly report outbreaks and relevant incidents; laboratories preserve records and disclose accidents; scientific experts reveal conflicts; WHO communicates uncertainty rather than protecting relationships; and the media can distinguish genuine consensus from coordinated institutional assertion.

COVID-19 provides reason to doubt all of them. China delayed and restricted access to data and sites relevant to the outbreak's origin. The WHO-China joint mission operated under constraints and classified a laboratory incident as "extremely unlikely," while WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus subsequently stated that all hypotheses remained on the table and more data were required (WHO, 2021). In the United States, records concerning publicly funded coronavirus research emerged slowly through litigation, congressional demands and document releases. Scientists and officials who were connected to the funding and research ecosystem participated in defining the public account.

The Agreement contains valuable language about transparency, accountability, best available science, biosafety and biosecurity. Article 12 says the PABS system should be safe, accountable and transparent and should address traceability and open access to data. But the meaning of these commitments depends heavily on the unfinished annex. After the July 2026 negotiations, unresolved issues still included

contractual arrangements, laboratory-network structure and the definition of benefits from pathogen sharing. The eighth negotiating meeting was scheduled for 14–18 September 2026 (WHO, 2026a).

The general accountability structure is weak. Under Article 21, parties periodically report on their own implementation. Article 19 creates an implementation mechanism that is facilitative, cooperative, non-adversarial and non-punitive and makes non-binding recommendations. Reports are generally to be public, but information exchange remains subject to national law concerning confidentiality and privacy (World Health Assembly, 2025).

This model may be appropriate for ordinary capacity building. It is not an investigative system for a politically sensitive outbreak. If a future pathogen may be connected to a state laboratory, military program, major funder or internationally supported research project, the actors possessing the most information may also have the strongest incentives to delay or restrict it. A mechanism designed not to be adversarial or punitive has little leverage against deliberate obstruction.

The danger is not that the Agreement will reproduce one individual. It is that it may internationalize the institutional pattern visible in the Fauci documents: experts assess work connected to their own networks; uncertainty is narrowed for public consumption; officials cite externally published conclusions they helped cultivate; dissent is classified politically; and formal responsibility remains dispersed.

Coordination can magnify good information, but it can also magnify error. A mistaken national assessment can be challenged by other jurisdictions. A globally harmonized assessment may become embedded simultaneously in guidance, regulation, funding, procurement and media coverage. The more efficient the system is at distributing consensus, the more important it becomes to ensure that the consensus is contestable.

7. Accountability before authority

The Pandemic Agreement should not be rejected merely because institutions failed during COVID-19. International cooperation is unavoidable in a world where pathogens cross borders rapidly and medical supply chains are global. The appropriate response is to make cooperation more auditable.

First, pandemic-origin investigations should be institutionally independent of WHO leadership, national health agencies, funders and laboratories whose conduct may be examined. A standing inspectorate should have a protected budget, multidisciplinary staff and authority established before an emergency. Its mandate should include natural spillover, laboratory accident, research-related adaptation and deliberate release without presuming any conclusion.

Second, access cannot depend entirely on the goodwill of the state under investigation. Participation in the Agreement and PABS system should entail pre-agreed obligations to preserve and provide relevant

laboratory records, sequence databases, sample inventories, incident reports, personnel health information subject to appropriate safeguards, grant records and subcontracting chains. Refusal should be documented publicly and carry proportionate consequences within the benefits and privileges of the system.

Third, the PABS annex should provide traceability beyond the transfer of samples and sequence information. It should allow authorized investigators to reconstruct where a pathogen or sequence moved, who accessed it, what experiments were undertaken, what modifications were made, and whether accidents or unexplained illnesses occurred. Traceability that ends at the receiving laboratory is insufficient.

Fourth, high-risk pathogen research should be registered publicly before funding or commencement, with narrow and reviewable national-security exceptions. The registry should identify funders, institutions, principal investigators, foreign partners, subcontractors, research objectives, relevant biosafety levels and material changes in scope. Accidents and near misses should be reported through a protected international channel. Absence of such records during COVID-19 made it harder to distinguish unsupported allegations from legitimate concern.

Fifth, expert panels must operate under rules stronger than ordinary journal disclosure. Members should report relevant grants, institutional relationships, collaborations, advisory roles and public positions. A conflict need not automatically exclude an expert—the most knowledgeable people will often have connections—but it should affect leadership roles, voting and public presentation. Officials should not describe an assessment as independent without disclosing their role in convening, shaping or reviewing it.

Sixth, scientific disagreement should be preserved. Emergency assessments should publish competing hypotheses, confidence levels, principal evidence, missing evidence and minority views. Changes in judgment should be dated and explained. Public communication can be clear without pretending to certainty. Saying that one hypothesis is favored while another remains credible is not weakness; it is honest risk communication.

Seventh, records must survive the emergency. Official business conducted through private email, messaging applications or informal channels should remain subject to preservation rules. Whistleblowers need protection across borders and institutions. The Morens indictment illustrates how an accountability system can fail if relevant communications disappear before review, regardless of how the criminal case is ultimately resolved.

Eighth, every declared pandemic should trigger an automatic independent autopsy after the acute phase. It should examine origin, surveillance, scientific advice, conflicts, procurement, regulatory decisions,

communication, rights restrictions and the distribution of harms. Findings, supporting evidence and unresolved questions should be public. The purpose should not be to punish every error made under uncertainty. It should distinguish reasonable error from undisclosed conflict, reckless certainty, record destruction or deliberate obstruction.

These reforms would not eliminate political influence or guarantee that an origin could be established. They would make concealment harder and correction more likely. They would also protect honest officials and scientists by showing when decisions were reasonable based on the evidence available at the time.

The Fauci diary should therefore be read neither as proof that one man created or concealed a pandemic nor as an irrelevant collection of private reflections exploited by political enemies. Its importance lies in the institutional gap it exposes. Early private discussions contained uncertainty, conflict and concern. The public narrative rapidly became cleaner, more confident and more politically policed. Later records show that some uncertainty survived behind the apparent consensus.

That pattern is precisely what a new pandemic-governance system must be designed to withstand. Trust cannot be created by coordinating messages or labeling doubt. It must be earned through disclosure, independent scrutiny and the ability to correct powerful institutions. Before the world gives greater practical influence to an international pandemic network, it should require that network to preserve evidence, expose conflicts and answer for failure.

This paper's critique of the Pandemic Agreement is deliberately narrower than the wider case for reform. It does not assess in detail the quality of the data and evidence underpinning the pandemic-preparedness agenda, its costs and benefits, or the opportunity costs it may impose on other health and social priorities. Those broader questions are examined in the International Health Reform Project's technical report (IHRP, 2026).

The governing principle is simple: authority should expand only when accountability expands with it.

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