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## Governance: Struggle and Strife—Or Synergy and Success—In the Trans-COVID Era Editorial

We are virtually there: Virtually past the horrors of 2020. Virtually past the difficulty of a very tumultuous presidential transition in the United States. Virtually able to see hope at the end of the COVID-19 despair as vaccines roll out across the globe. And, in large part, we are still “virtually” there, convening our meetings remotely via videoconference from the comforts of our own homes. Our atmosphere continues to be one of great uncertainty. I have dubbed this the Trans-COVID era; we are now comfortably situated somewhere between the commencement of the global pandemic a year ago, and its foreseeable end, which may be a year yet to come. The effects will, of course, linger for years or potentially decades. We are fully engaged in fighting a disease that is sufficiently understood to be treated, no longer waiting on bated breath for answers, but rather for the implementation of solutions and answers that have been revealed. And yet, we continue to writhe in time-honored debates about equity, safety, and fairness as states and localities roll out and adapt localized solutions to the pandemic and the secondary problems it has caused, including modified election procedures. The effects on constructs such as transparency and accountability will likely come to be explored in greater detail once the crisis has come to its natural end. Fear of the disease is now accompanied by the fear of economic uncertainty, fear of government itself, fear of over-reaching executive authority, fear that government plans for vaccine rollout will be too late, fear for the loss of individual liberty, and even fear that the pillars of democracy have been too far shaken to allow our republic to persist. I speak from the U.S. perspective, because it is the one in which I am situated, and with which I am most familiar, not to overlook or belittle similar strife around the globe.

In general, the amorphous has begun to solidify, but many things that seemingly held together through the brunt of this storm are, only now, beginning to unravel. Doctoral programs are suspending admissions—and thoughtfully so—as the market for academic positions has contracted to a trickle,

and as data collection necessary for original research is virtually impossible (Korn 2020). State and local governments are beginning to realize the true impact of the pandemic and associated closures on revenue and budgets. Nonprofit organizations have closed the calendar year with new answers about how their revenues and programs have been, and might yet be, affected. While the election served to quiet much of the social discord experienced throughout the year with protests across our cities, new discontent has ripened to challenge the results of that very election. As I write this editorial, the U.S. Congress is debating the acceptance of the electoral college votes following a protest that resulted in a breach and subsequent lockdown of the U.S. Capitol. All is not yet well in the world, and whether we reflect on government or governance, fundamental questions are being reshaped on a daily basis. Fortunately, scholars of public management and policy are always engaged by these topics, and they will quickly work to fill such knowledge chasms as they begin to gape.

The micro-level foundations of these companion crises—pandemic and social discord—offer one avenue for exploration. Individualism manifests in various ways; stress, uncertainty, and crisis have a way of guiding people to focus on their core values. We rest on the certainty of our belief systems—our culture, heritage, and values—when all else is seemingly embroiled in the tumultuous turmoil of uncertainty. We begin to characterize everything as right or wrong, and the natural result is to polarize ourselves around the events of the day. I have witnessed—even pointed out on occasion—considerable hypocrisy over the past year as both professional news reporters and self-appointed citizen analysts evaluate circumstances differently depending on the perceived value set of the perpetrators. Sadly, individualism has given way to self-interest, and that to pure selfishness. Factions, large and small, run rampant across our republic.

I called, in a previous editorial, for a return to decency (Hall and Battaglio 2020). I would now expand

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that call to include not only decency, but also dignity and respect. What has happened in the United States over the past year is purely undignified, indecent, and disrespectful; it is painful to behold. In my many trips to Washington, DC, I have gazed in awe at the buildings that symbolize the very foundation of our democracy. I have walked their hallowed halls. I have observed from the gallery of the U.S. House of Representatives, and met with members of the House and Senate in their offices. On each such occasion, I felt honored to be there, playing a small part in our time-honored system. It fascinates and concerns me that others can behold these same symbols, which house the very institutions constituted by the framers, with any less regard or awe than that in which I hold them myself. No clearer image of the structural division of our government exists than in the architecture of the capitol: three buildings, three branches, so divided to ensure that factions would not be able to overtake our nation's government or overturn the principled foundation on which it stands (Madison 1787).

Individual liberty is characteristic of western democracies, which sets us apart from nations in the global east and south. The internet, while connecting us at the speed of light, has also empowered individuals to voice discontent, and to make hurtful statements with little or no consequence. It has provided a mechanism to link like-minded individuals and to mobilize that discontent in ways that transcend the geography of place or the continuity of a local community. Short-term and temporal opportunities have increased in magnitude vis-à-vis long-term, strategic concerns. Take the last two weeks in United States for example: the U.S. Congress passed yet another stimulus plan, offering \$600 payments to individuals. How quickly social media, media, and elected officials lit up with proposals (or demands) for \$2000 payments. Nowhere in these conversations do we hear mention of the national debt, inflation, the value of the dollar, or other tangible and important associated concerns. Individualism should be celebrated, as our uniqueness distinguishes us; acting in one's own self-interest is important to the efficient functioning of a free market system, but selfishness that results in harm to others cannot be tolerated. Some of us might be bowling together once again, rather than alone (Putnam 2000), but I fear we are not playing in the same league, with the same lanes and pins, or even with the same kind of ball. I am reminded of a southern colloquialism about things being more awkward than a football bat; that may now be apropos.

The return to base concerns, at an individual level, crowd out concerns for society and the common good. Coupled with advances in telecommunications and social media, these trends forbear important concerns for governance. Think speed and bandwidth, of course, but also consider 'fact-checking,' restrictions on posting material judged to be taken out of context or in violation of community standards, or deploying algorithms that adjust the visibility of messages—social media has the power to police thought unlike ever before in history (Schia and Gjesvik 2020). While the media enterprise cannot control an individual's thoughts, they can certainly limit or expand the exposure of messaging to shape or reshape the appearance of problem salience and magnitude. Many have argued that big tech has had undue influence on the 2020 election, for example (Daly and Gold 2020). This has clear import for the public policy agenda setting process, both informal and formal. It also likely affects implementation in important ways.

As I reflect on the content of PAR and other public administration journals over the past few years, it is clear that the emphasis is on trans-organizational cooperation, and involvement of stakeholders and citizens in government has shown tremendous potential. We have published numerous articles that explore collaboration (Douglas and Ansell 2021; Huang 2020; Lindsay et al. 2021; Min, Lee, and Yang 2020; Mosley and Jarpe 2019; Stadler and Karakulak 2020; Van der Wal 2020), coproduction (Cheng 2019; Gazley, LaFontant, and Cheng 2020; Steen and Brandsen 2020; Voorberg et al. 2018 and Xu and Tang 2020), partnership (Grizzle, Goodin, and Robinson 2020; Jung, Malatesta, and LaLonde 2018; Tan and Zhao 2019), participation (Ingrams and Schachter 2019; Migchelbrink and Van de Walle 2020; Moon 2020; Muthomi and Thurmaier 2021; Rutherford, McDonnell and Hogg 2021; van den Berg et al. 2020), and other approaches to solving problems outside the structural framework of government. Electronic media can motivate and mobilize citizens around ideas; it can create the focus needed for policy entrepreneurs to intervene. Windows of opportunity can be pried open or slammed shut with ease. Just as easily as support can be mustered to promote an initiative, it can be organized for destructive purposes. These trends reflect an important change to our social fabric; one that can quickly unravel the best-sewn plans, or just as easily knit such fabric anew. These changes portend important challenges to the way we perceive and understand governance. As the informal dimensions have risen in importance, these changes—changes that directly impact the positions and perspectives of participants—will force us to reflect on our core theories and constructs to reveal how they must be shaped and reshaped to accommodate the realities of modern life.

In line with this focus on governance, issue 81(1) presents a series of informative research articles and viewpoint articles.

Guul, Pedersen and Petersen (2021) utilize a survey experimental vignette design to explore how two generic nondemographic client attributes—competence and motivation—shape frontline employees' willingness to help their clients; they find that clients who appear motivated and competent are the ones caseworkers are most willing to help. Fusi (2021) uses survey data from 2500 departments in 500 U.S. cities to examine how routinized, formal nonroutinized, and informal coordination mechanisms facilitate access to influential stakeholder data. Results indicate that formal nonroutinized coordination facilitates access to data requested from governmental actors, while informal coordination *decreases* access to data requested from nongovernmental organizations. Bertelli and Busuioc (2020) consider how reputation-building impacts principals' ability and motivation to oversee administrative policy making. They argue that bureaucrats develop reputations with audiences that impede ex ante incentives while also de-legitimizing subsequent oversight because monitoring and compliance must compete with reputational authority as well as resistance from the audiences at the source of such authority. In each of these pieces, it becomes clear that stakeholders and clients affect governance in important ways.

Turning to partisanship and institutional processes, we begin with an article by Ozymy, Menard, and Jarrell (2021). Seeking to better understand how partisanship affects environmental enforcement outcomes, they perform content analysis to build a comprehensive dataset of 2588 criminal enforcement prosecutions over nearly

40 years (1983–2019). Their results fail to suggest that outcomes under Democratic presidents are always substantially more punitive; nor do they suggest that outcomes are significantly reduced under Republican administrations. Over time outcomes reflect growing sophistication and institutionalization of the enforcement process, budgetary realities, and agency commitment to deter serious environmental crimes. An and Bostic (2021) seek to understand how the allocation of local voting power within regional governing policy boards influences the spatial allocation of transportation investments. They find that the power structure of regional policy boards is a driving force behind observed geographic distribution of investments; in fact, the degree of power concentration of the dominant city in the region influences whether the remaining cities' power matters. They rightly conclude that institutional governance rules may be considerably more important than previously acknowledged. Appe, Rubaii and Whigham (2021) frame atrocity prevention around public administration theories, and illustrate how practitioners can contribute to atrocity prevention by focusing their attention on upstream stages to prevent conflict before it emerges. These articles reveal how politics and external events can shape the formal rules and processes through which governance is carried out.

The next group of articles considers approaches to service delivery and the role of structural and institutional characteristics on governance outcomes. Schmidhuber, Ingrams, and Hilgers (2020) suggest that the positive impacts of openness are contingent on citizen's democratic capacity; specifically, their individual sense of empowerment to influence governmental systems. They match individual survey data from the European Social Survey with secondary institutional data to investigate the relationship between individual- and structural-level variables. Structural openness is found to have a positive association with trust, mediated by an individual's perception of meaningful opportunities for political participation. In a compelling study, Lee, Jilke, and James (2021) find that, once choice is established in service delivery options, the satisfaction gains are not further increased by expanding service delivery alternatives. Their study utilizes a survey experiment to investigate the effect of provider choice on parents' satisfaction with schools under both performance declines and increases. Government agencies face turbulent and complex choice architectures that are multiple, overlapping, ambiguous, and sometimes incompatible (Trondal, Haslerud, and Kühn 2021). Trondal, Haslerud, and Kühn (2021) outline two conceptual images of agency governance with distinct predictions about how agencies are likely to maneuver when embedded in integrated multilevel administrative orders. They then examine these propositions using a large-N dataset on agency officials ( $N = 1963$ ) from 47 government agencies, finding that government agencies are primarily biased toward a pragmatist compound dynamic. Jo and Nabatchi (2020) use data from field experiments to investigate the relative efficacy of public meetings, focus groups, and citizen juries on participants' issue awareness, competence, empowerment, and trust in service professionals. Their findings help us to better understand public participation, particularly with respect to participatory design and associated outcomes. These articles demonstrate that the way we manage complexity, organize, and deliver public services indeed influences performance outcomes in meaningful ways.

Issue 81(1) includes three salient Viewpoint articles. A provocative piece by Moynihan and Roberts (2021) introduces the concept of administrative Trumpism, arguing that elements of Trumpism will continue to exert political force, constraining the incoming Biden administration's ability to restore federal administrative capabilities. Knill, Steinbacher, and Steinebach (2021) propose using vertical policy-process integration (VPI) as a solution to the modern phenomenon of policy accumulation without corresponding expansions in administrative capacities necessary for their implementation. They conceptualize VPI around both bottom-up integration affecting policy design and effectiveness, and top-down integration concerning the allocation of implementation costs and constraining responsiveness incentives. Finally, Mergel, Ganapati, and Whitford (2020) introduce the modern *agile* government movement as a way to efficiently respond to changing government needs. Agile project management values and techniques replace traditional phasing by allowing project teams to work on smaller increments, review their work often, and include feedback right away to avoid costly failures. They reflect on *agile's* benefits and identify challenges that must be confronted in the quest to make organizations more flexible and responsive. These Viewpoint articles offer clear and salient advice to policy makers, managers, and practitioners seeking to make government more effective and more responsive.

This issue is bittersweet for me. My editorship continues now without the benefit of my longstanding partner in this endeavor: Paul Battaglio. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the profound respect and gratitude I have for Paul, his insight, his judgment, and his support over the last three years. He has been exceptionally apt at hewing my rough edges, and in no place is that more apparent than the opening editorial for each issue. I am afraid those thoughts will now be presented in their pure, unadulterated, form. I am glad to have Paul continue on the team, but I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to formally commend him for his service as *PAR's* Co-Editor in Chief for volumes 78–80.

As we enter this new year, let us remember to be decent to one another. We likely will not all agree on a host of subjects, but we need not resort to violence in search of resolution. Decency, mutual respect, discourse, and debate have served us well; that is the path toward progress and prosperity as a nation and a global community. Let us restore dignity to our institutions, our interactions, and our conversations that we might all share in the success and prosperity of renewed synergy as the Trans-COVID era gives way to whatever lay ahead.

In the way of reminders, we continue to speed the rate of knowledge transfer from our authors to the public administration research and practice community through our new Accepted Article format. Access to newly accepted PAR articles has never been faster. You can view newly accepted articles here: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/15406210/0/ja>. Be certain to visit our website at Wiley (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/15406210/0/0>) to retrieve the newest articles as they appear on Early View.

Do not forget that our full collection of COVID-19 Viewpoint essays is currently set to FREE access in its own virtual issue (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/15406210.covid-19>). Be sure to take a free look at articles appearing

in our other virtual issues (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/topic/vi-categories-15406210/p1u2b3i4c5-a6d7m8i9n1-r2e3v4i5e6w/15406210>). We especially want to draw your attention to our newest virtual issue, which contains recent *PAR* articles that discuss the logistical and theoretical aspects of navigating public emergencies (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/15406210.public-emergency-management>). Also, recently updated, is our FREE virtual issue of highly cited recent articles, available here: [https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1540-6210.highly-cited-par-articles](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/(ISSN)1540-6210.highly-cited-par-articles).

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