

# Redefining Public Administration: New Paradigms for the Post Pandemic Era

## Call for Conference Papers

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In May 2020, the *Public Administration Review* initiated publication of a collection of viewpoints on COVID-19 focusing on how governments and societies have responded to this crisis. As the pandemic reaches the one-year mark, we seek to organize a symposium that will focus upon a forward-looking examination of key paradigm shifts in public administration. We are guided by the belief that “Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next,” wrote Arundhati Roy (2020), a novelist commenting on the pandemic.

Consequently, this symposium builds on the unprecedented intellectual explosion arising from the pandemic, and collectively we hope to explore questions like what does the past year’s events mean for the future of public administration? What do they mean for the future of democratic government? What are the consequences for public policy and in what new directions will these events lead? We welcome proposals regarding these and all other relevant topics. In particular, we are interested in the following themes:

### **Democratic Governance and Social Equity and the Need for A New “New**

**Public Administration**. The pandemic has had many terrible consequences. The most tragic and awful of these are found in the illness and death that it has brought to the world. However, almost as consequential has been its negative impact upon governments around the world, especially regarding issues of democratic governance and public sector effectiveness. This can be seen in many very concerning developments. Among them: continuing problems in the effectiveness of governmental responses to COVID-19, growing debate about the capacity of authoritarian versus democratic system responses, and increasing concerns that the pandemic has served as a vehicle for some governments to impose limits on the basic civil liberties of their citizens.

Thus, in the aftermath of the pandemic, one of the most critical challenges for the field of public administration will be to examine the nature of its relationship to democratic governance. Central to such efforts will be the recommitment of the discipline to democratic values, as well as the renewal of its commitment to greater social equity. The latter issue has taken on increased salience as major social movements such as BlackLivesMatter and StopAsianHate (ASPA sections, 2021) have increasingly raised concerns in the US and abroad about equal and fair access to, and distribution of, government services. In turn, this calls attention to the need to rebuild the public’s trust of government and ensure the development of an ethical and committed bureaucracy that represents all citizens.

The pandemic has called very great attention to the existence of major inequity in the society. For the past several decades, especially in the more highly economically developed countries, the degree of financial and resource inequality between the most wealthy and the least wealthy has been growing. Today, worldwide the top 20% of the population in terms of earned income receives approximately 80% of the world's income each year, while the bottom 20% receives 1.5%. As Rosenbaum (2021) has noted, this has a profound impact in terms of the consumption of goods and services and raises critical issues for both the field of public administration and democratic governments more generally.

An important goal of the symposium is to explore the ways in which public administration can enhance commitment to social equity, the “third pillar” of public administration as George Frederickson proclaimed. A related fundamental question is how bureaucracy can more effectively support democratic governance and particularly how public administrators can deal with the failure of the political system (Meier, 2021) in the area of social equity. In many ways, these issues are the very same ones addressed by many in the field in the aftermath of the 1968 Minnowbrook Conference. Thus, this symposium represents an opportunity to create a new “New Public Administration.”

**Pursuit of Alternative Solutions for Wicked Policy Problems.** Public Administration has been greatly challenged and tested by COVID-19, arguably rightly considered to be an extraordinarily compelling example of wicked policy problems. In the course of mitigating this unprecedented wicked challenge, alternative approaches (i.e., centralized versus decentralized; proactive versus passive) and policy responses (i.e., restrictive tools, economic incentives, and public information campaigns) have been adopted and adapted by different countries, which, in turn, has often led to quite different policy prescriptions and outcomes. Students of public administration would be well advised to revisit the strengths and weaknesses of the two different approaches of anticipation and resilience originally presented by Wildavsky (1988) in his seminal book, “Search for Safety.”

As Moon (2020) has noted, scholars of public administration may also need to revisit and redefine the locus and focus of primary public administration themes, including government and market, science and policy, public leadership and citizen participation, policy instruments and instrument choices, local problems and global problems, policy failure and types of organizational learning, and heuristics and rational decision-making, among other approaches. Governments also need to develop strategies needed in order to be well prepared for handling the uncertainties and complexities of future wicked policy problems.

**Redefining the Scope of Government, and Implications for Public Budgeting and Finance.** For the past four decades, the dominant theme in much discussion about the scope of government has focused on reducing its size, lowering taxes and deregulating the economy. One unanticipated consequence of the pandemic, Roberts (2020) has argued is that it may have killed a millennial governing paradigm which values “small government, free markets and open borders” (p.603) and left the American state to be “the ultimate bearer of major societal risks.” (p.606) This is not a new phenomenon. Perhaps the most lasting consequence of the 9/11 tragedy is the vast expansion of government security services. A critical question for public

administration is whether this is a temporary or lasting shift? Has the era of neo-liberal economics come to an end or not?

If so, what government capacities would need to be developed, enhanced, or redefined to meet the shift? In addition, divided states (Kettl, 2020) and inter-governmental relationships across the horizontal and vertical structure of governments have been contested. In what ways do the current public budgeting and finance systems need to catch up? Fiscal implications of the COVID-19 era's recovery and reinvestment spending will probably take years to show.

**Citizen Engagement and Digital Transformation.** Citizens are no longer considered as passive recipients of public services but re-position themselves as active co-producers and co-designers of public policies. As a result, their behaviors directly and increasingly impact government performance. How to work with citizens effectively and timely are critical issues for the future of public administration. The rapid digital transformation brought on by the pandemic that, otherwise, would have taken years to advance has uneven implications for citizen engagement. Zoom, social media, e-government, remote working, and online education, among others, have accelerated structural and cultural changes in public organizations as well as the fabric of our society in the post-COVID-19 era. Implications for new generations of the workforce and civic society need to be examined.

**Global Governance and Comparative Studies.** One thing that the pandemic has made clear is that local problems are often global and vice versa. Will countries continue globalization or will they increasingly take on a protectionist approach? The choices that countries make will carry a significant impact on global governance and resilience and, therefore, the building of international governing infrastructures takes on a new salience. The need to understand how to quickly respond, adapt, and implement continuous operations across borders could elevate the importance of international and comparative public administration studies. This idea that we need to learn from what other countries are doing administratively, while dates back to as early as Wilson (1887), is critical for the next generational of global governance for the post pandemic era.

In sum, the purpose of this symposium is to explore all of the many issues that COVID-19 has raised for the future of public administration in terms of challenges and prospects. This pandemic could be the portal to the development of the new “New Public Administration.” We are interested in both theoretical and empirical original research and welcome both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Example questions include but not limited to:

- What does the pandemic tell us about democratic governance?
- In what ways can bureaucracy contribute to improve social equity?
- What does the new “New Public Administration” look like?
- What will be characteristics of future governance for solving wicked problems?
- How are wicked problems politicized in a society? How can we avoid it?
- How to effectively conduct policy making under uncertainty?
- What are fiscal implications of the COVID-19 era's recovery and reinvestment spending?

What are the lessons and challenges of global governance for the post pandemic era?  
How does science or technology help to solve wicked problems?  
How do digital transformations impact citizen engagement?

### Timeline:

- June 30, 2021: please submit your proposal (400-500 words) via <https://forms.gle/YaXwxidRCoWJvNph6>. The deadline is 5 PM, June 30, 2021. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us. Prof. Elaine Lu: [ylu@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:ylu@jjay.cuny.edu) and Prof. Chun Yuan Wang: [g885422@seed.net.tw](mailto:g885422@seed.net.tw).
- July 20, 2021: Notification will be sent to all those who submit proposals.
- November/December 2021: Onsite + Zoom conference, organized by the Central Police University and Taiwan Association for Schools of Public Administration and Affairs (TASPA) in Taiwan
- Feb 20, 2022: Full papers are due.

Upon receiving the full papers, there will be publication opportunities with top journals in the field. Guest editors will facilitate the process leading up to submissions to journals. Then, the normal review process of journals takes over, which guarantees double blind review and offers no guarantee of publication. Authors should leave three months for review and initial decision, three months for revision, and three months for subsequent review. Upon successfully completing the review process of a journal, authors will be informed of a print date, depending on whether second revisions are required.

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