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Letter from the SICA Chair

Dear readers, I am excited to bring you our first special issue on Latin America! When we sent the call out, we received an overwhelming response resulting in volume 4 with eleven papers comprising two reflections, six research ideas, two policy briefs, and a paper on practitioner perspective.

The reflection article by Ricardo A. Bello-Gomez provides an excellent review of the rise of neoliberalism in Latin America. It makes a case for studying sub-national governments in Latin America. Most of the articles in this issue focus on COVID and its response in the region. The second reflection piece by Gabriel S. Rojas Salazar emphasizes the importance of transparency in policymaking and its impact on trust among citizens. The author uses examples from Mexico and Brazil to shed light on the challenges of crisis management during the pandemic.

The pandemic revealed major cleavages and inequities that exist across societies. Felipe Blanco provides excellent ideas to address the ethno-racial inequities in Latin American countries. In keeping with this theme, José César Romero Galván examined the vaccine distribution by the Armed forces in Mexico and Argentina, raising questions about the militarization of public administration. Sanchez and Medina utilized the tragedy of the commons argument to compare public policies adopted by different countries in combatting the pandemic. As a result of the pandemic, remote work was widely used across the globe. Using the Peruvian National Civil Service Authority (SERVIR) data, Braga focused on Peru’s efforts to address the new reality in the workplace. To address the wicked nature of the problems that arose due to the pandemic, authors Heidi Jane M. Smith and José Armando Perusquia Lara argue for employing methodological localism as a framework to study how local governments responded to the crisis. Given the challenges with federalism in Mexico, the authors suggest ways to improve administrative capacity at the local level. Samanta Varela Castro offers similar arguments to strengthen the governance capacity in her article titled: Soft Regulation and Meta-Organizations Research are Needed to Understand Global Governance. The author attempts to identify a list of variables and mechanisms for better governance during a crisis of this magnitude. The ideas presented in this section serve as excellent avenues for future researchers.

The two policy briefs by Guillermo M. Cejudo & Pablo de los Cobos Alcala and Everardo Chiapa Aguilón provide examples of social protections like the cash transfer programs (CTPs) that temporarily compensated for the loss of income in Latin America and the Caribbean and the implementation of No Driving Day during the pandemic. The practitioner’s perspective co-authored by Alejandra Rodas-Gaiter, Daniela Reina, and Óscar Escobar provides the readers with an example of how a medium-sized city in Colombia successfully responded to the pandemic.

I welcome you all to read this excellent collection of research articles on Latin America that will help expand our understanding of comparative public administration. We are so excited to bring this issue to you! This would not be possible without the leadership of Dr. Cristina Stanica, Editor of the Occasional Paper Series (OPS), and the guest editor, Manlio Castillo. We thank the reviewers for their thoughtful feedback that helped improve the papers. For the benefit of our readers, this issue is also translated into Spanish.
Thanks to the hard work of Manlio and Shahrin Upoma, SICA Secretary. We hope you will share this research widely across your networks.

Finally, I would like to mention that the Series is being released regularly and not occasionally, and we'd like this to be reflected in the name. We thank all the members who voted and provided suggestions for a new name we will announce before the next issue’s release.

I hope everyone is staying safe and healthy!

--Meghna Sabharwal, Ph.D., SICA Chair and Professor, The University of Texas at Dallas
Letter from the Guest Editor

The structural social and economic problems of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have worsened since the arrival of COVID-19. The pandemic highlighted the weaknesses of public social protection systems and exposed the limitations of governments in the region in managing a major health emergency. A general atmosphere of political polarization, social discontent, democratic erosion, distrust in government, and increasing militarization added to the pandemic's old social problems and the new ones. The results have been as diverse as the resources and skills of each country to fight COVID-19. However, the global balance is a large number of infections and deaths throughout the region. Today, LAC countries face the challenge of overcoming the economic and social problems heightened by the pandemic within the post-COVID-19 “new normal.”

In such context, this special issue provided a forum to reflect on the actions taken by LAC governments in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. The authors of this volume (young scholars, almost all) explore the dilemmas, challenges, limitations, and success factors in managing the health emergency in the subcontinent. They depict an exciting series of findings and ideas that mark the beginning of promising research or suggest new analysis perspectives for future studies.

Gabriel Rojas reminds us that government transparency works best when it has specific objectives, such as helping to build trust in the public; Felipe Blanco emphasizes the problem of ethnoracial inequality, evidenced and intensified by the pandemic; César Romero calls attention to the increase of militarization in some countries of the region, as a result of the lack of professional bureaucratic bodies to address the health emergency and its consequences. Alessandro Braga joins the discussion of remote work and its challenges for the public sector. Heidi Smith and José A. Perusquia call for methodological localism to better understand each local government's constraints on the implementation of national policies.

Suggestive approaches to analysis are also proposed. José Sánchez and Alejandra Medina invite us to reflect on public health from the perspective of the tragedy of the commons and the logic of collective action to rethink government interventions in the face of the pandemic. Additionally, Samanta Varela proposes to analyze the global governance of health from the perspective of meta-organizations, integrating the theoretical contributions of International Relations, Public Administration, regulation, and organizational studies.

In the policy briefs section, Guillermo Cejudo and Pablo de los Cobos document the importance of appropriate information to respond efficiently to a health emergency, and Everardo Chiapa analyzes a failed policy of mobility containment to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through the approaches of groupthink and blame avoidance. Finally, Alejandra Rodas-Gaiter, Daniela Reina, and Óscar Escobar share the successful experience of Palmira, Colombia, in the local management of the pandemic.

As Ricardo Bello-Gómez points out in his paper, these and other research about public management in LAC open a magnificent
opportunity to enrich comparative studies in public administration and public policies, expand our understanding of public organizations, and strengthen the theories and frameworks of our disciplines.

I am deeply grateful to Meghna Sabharwal, Chair of SICA, for inviting me to collaborate as editor of this special issue. I would also like to thank Cristina M. Stănică, Shahrin Upoma, and my colleagues of SICA and CIDE for their invaluable support in reviewing, editing, and publishing the papers in this volume. I am sure this issue will be fascinating and helpful to researchers, teachers, and public service professionals.

—Manlio F. Castillo, Associate Professor, Public Administration Department, CIDE
Letter from the Editor

The second publication of the Occasional Paper Series’ Volume 4 represents a special issue on Latin American government and governance challenges during and after COVID-19. The issue includes manuscripts that responded to our call for reflecting upon the challenges faced by Latin American countries in managing post-pandemic recovery. The pandemic exposed significant government weaknesses in managing the crisis and its socio-economic consequences, all within a context dominated by political polarization, social unrest, and economic instability.

To fulfill its goal of encouraging dialogue over public administration and policy issues and solutions in Latin American contexts and beyond, the issue features eleven manuscripts in the form of reflections, policy briefs, research ideas, and practitioner perspectives. The issue sheds light on timely and promising new approaches to build theory, research, and compare practices across different levels of government and covers the following topics: the value of studying Latin American subnational governments, transparency and public trust in Mexico and Brazil, ethnoracial inequalities and the power dynamics of racialization, the use of Armed Forces in COVID-19 emergency responses in Argentina and Mexico, COVID-19 and “the New Tragedy of the Commons,” Peru’s transition towards remote work, the role of metaorganizations in global governance, methodological localism in COVID-19 vaccine implementation in Mexico, social protection and the role of information in Latin America and the Caribbean, transportation, mobility, and groupthink, and evidence-based strategic planning in the City of Palmira, Colombia.

Each manuscript concludes with recommendations, lessons, and takeaways for several promising areas of comparative public administration and policy research. These include adjusting theoretical models in public administration while considering an intersectional approach, and proposing recommendations to inform and improve public decision-making.

I would like to express my gratitude to the guest editor, Manlio F. Castillo, Associate Professor at CIDE, for spreading the word about this issue, bringing more reviewers on board, and assisting with the Spanish translation. Thank you to Shahrin Upoma, SICA secretary, for aiding with translation and assisting with editorial work. I am grateful to Meghna Sabharwal, SICA Chair, for the ongoing support of all paper series endeavors and for proposing new initiatives that extend their scope. Lastly, thank you to all reviewers and the series committee for their thoughtful and timely feedback on submissions. I strongly believe in the value of continuing conversations around the future of the Occasional Paper Series. Thank you to all SICA members who have voted on re-naming the series.

Please keep following our website and Twitter account for more updates. The following special issue on “Global Food Insecurity” will be published in late summer 2022. There is also an open call for papers. If you wish to submit your paper for consideration, now is the time. The paper series invites submissions under the following formats: Policy Briefs, Practitioner Perspectives, Research Ideas, Case Studies, and Reflections.
Happy reading!

Sincerely,

-- Cristina M. Stănică, Ph.D., Assistant Teaching Professor, Northeastern University; Editor-in-Chief, Occasional Papers Series

Note:

The Section on International and Comparative Administration of the American Society for Public Administration is concerned with promoting research and communication of public administration with an international and comparative focus. The Occasional Paper Series was created to contribute to the public interest by disseminating the intellectual and professional work of the section’s members and opening it up (both through online and open access) to the global community of actors interested in comparative public administration and governance. The papers in the series are available for download free of charge. They can be used and referenced as any other academic reference, with offering proper credit and acknowledgment. However, we have no explicit copyright policy.

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Reflection

Subnational Governments in Latin America: An Opportunity for Advancing Theory Building and Generalization

Ricardo A. Bello-Gomez, Ph.D.¹

Abstract: Subnational (intermediate and local) governments have been the source of great advancements in the literature of public administration and public management in the last few decades. However, most of these studies focus on cases in the United States, the United Kingdom, and a few other European countries. By sidelining the experiences of other regions of the world, the public administration field misses the opportunity to study institutional arrangements and contextual environments that are not salient among industrialized developed nations. Particularly, subnational governments in Latin America can serve as cases of study to understand fundamental political, organizational, and managerial challenges in the provision of public services. Latin American countries are characterized by a deeply uneven distribution of national state capacity across their territories. Moreover, the region has experienced a rise of decentralization countered by national efforts to recentralize power and resources. In this context, Latin American subnational governments face issues of lacking capacity, threats of elite capture, and constant bargaining with national governments to achieve acceptable levels of service provision and policy implementation. This article will review recent public administration literature that leverages subnational governments in Latin America and will briefly outline key institutional factors for a research agenda.

The Study of Subnational Governments in Public Administration

The rise of decentralization since the 1980s (Rondinelli, Nellis and Cheema 1983, Hooghe and Marks 2016) has increased the salience of subnational governments, both at the intermediate and local level, as a subject of study in political science, public economics, and other social sciences. While decentralization is traditionally understood to comprise an economic, political, and administrative dimension (Schneider 2003), not all these aspects have received the same attention from social scientists. Scholars have studied the arrangements for fiscal distribution and redistribution, as well as their consequences for service provision (Bahl and Linn 1994, Bird and Vaillanourt 1998, Brosio and Jimenez, 2012). Moreover, the process of decentralization itself, with its political and economic causes, and the reshaping of the governance landscape have also become key subjects of study (Falleti 2010, Oxhorn, Tulchin and Selee 2004). Meanwhile, administrative aspects of decentralization such as local governments’ capacity building and intergovernmental / collaborative management have received less attention in the decentralization literature.

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The field of public administration has taken on subnational and local governments as an important subject of study, particularly during the last 20 years when the field has experienced an emergence of large-N quantitative analysis. Indeed, several advancements in studying key aspects of public management have used subnational governments as unit of analysis. For instance, English local governments (Andrews and Boyne 2010, Andrews et al 2012), Texas school districts in the United States (O’Toole and Meier 2003, Meier and O’Toole 2002) and US state governments (Ingraham, Joyce and Donahue 2003, Carley, Nicholson-Crotty and Fisher 2015) have frequently served to explore the role of management, organizational capacity, environmental context and other drivers on performance.

Subnational entities range from villages with some hundred inhabitants to states with dozens of millions of people such as Uttar Pradesh in India, California in the US, and Sao Paulo in Brazil. As such subnational governments can take the form of small organizations with heavy reliance on the top executive and of multi-organizational complex entities with thousands of public employees and plenty of policy responsibilities. Yet, in the scale from micro to macro levels of analysis in public administration (Jilke et al. 2019), subnational governments belong to the meso level.

Each subnational government is, in any case, a group of individuals, teams, or organizations, that operates in a jurisdiction and a policy space determined by an overall institutional framework. This is, precisely, a key advantage of subnational governments as units of analysis. In a given country, a common national institutional framework constraints subnational government, and these are often responsible for similar functional roles. As a result, researchers can focus on understanding the role of certain administrative, managerial, or environmental features while “holding institutions constant”. However, by restricting the survey to analyzing subnational and local governments in a handful of national contexts in the Western developed world, the field misses the opportunity to explore other institutional contexts and experiences that can enrich the field. The following section addresses these possibilities in detail.

The Need to Look at the Global South

In recent years, several voices have called for a more central place for comparative and international studies in the public administration field (Guljarani and Moloney 2012, Milward et al. 2016, Beagles, Schnell and Gerard 2019), particularly for greater attention to the developing world (Bertelli et al. 2020). By incorporating a more international and diverse perspective, the field could gain a better understanding of institutional contexts that do not play a significant role in the Western developed world. For instance, even with the current phenomenon of democratic backsliding facing several industrialized countries, they remain almost fully democratic systems while most of the partially democratic and authoritarian regimes correspond to middle- and low-income countries. Also, while Western developed countries tend to have consolidated party systems, there are plenty of cases in the Global South where political competition is more individualized and allegiances are fluid.

The extent to which societies uphold rule of law is also widely varying around the world. Thus, explaining administrative and citizen-government interactions require an understanding of social norms and informal
institutions that may play a heavier role than formal regulations. Finally, hiring systems and career paths for public personnel also have substantial differences in terms of their formal examination requirements and meritocratic components. Each and all of these institutional differences shape the accountability mechanisms for public managers and public officials, creating unique settings of incentives and challenges for them to perform their functions.

The environmental context surrounding governments and public organizations also differs substantially between high-income countries and the rest. From a resource-dependent perspective, organizations might be highly sensitive to environmental conditions such as munificence, turbulence, and complexity (Boyne and Meier 2009). For instance, public organizations in middle and low-income countries cannot always rely on a job market with enough qualified candidates to satisfy their personnel demands. This potential lack of properly trained human capital may also be compounded with scarcity of financial or technical resources, thus directly impacting organizations’ capacity and their ability to implement policy and provide services adequately. Meanwhile, industrialized nations seldom experience certain sources of turbulence and complexity that are more common in the Global South such as ethnic conflict, civil war, and socio-economic crises. This variety of settings necessarily questions the external validity of research findings in public administration. One alternative to address this need for generalization is focusing on the macro (national) level of analysis which has been often neglected in the contemporary study of public administration (Roberts 2020a).

This approach requires a deep understanding of the institutional and environmental frameworks facing policy makers to identify prominent macro-strategies at the governance level (Roberts 2020b). Similarly, others have highlighted the importance to identify the role of path dependence and tradition within governance and administrative systems (Painter and Peters, 2010).

Another alternative for expanding the scope and depth of theories in public administration is exploiting the meso level of analysis with subnational governments as a unit. Subnational analysis allows for theory building that incorporates different levels of explanation (Giraudy, Moncada and Snyder 2019).

Moreover, countries in the Global South tend to present greater levels of subnational inequality in terms of state capacity and policy outcomes (O’Donnell 1993, Soifer 2008).

Therefore, the study of subnational governments in the Global South can allow to explore the interaction between understudied national-level institutions with a wide range of levels of organizational capacity, expertise, and environmental conditions at the subnational and local level.

Why Study Latin American Subnational Governments?

Among the many possibilities for the study of subnational governments, this final section develops three arguments for the study of Latin American subnational governments:

**First**, Latin America is the world region that experienced the most dramatic rise of decentralization and subnational autonomy during the 1990s (Falleti 2010). As a result, Latin American countries have served as case studies to expand the theories of federalism and intergovernmental relations. For instance, Meza et al. (2019) study how features of federalism affect metropolitan governance and interlocal cooperation using cases from Mexico and Brazil. Yet, others have used cases
from unitary but highly decentralized countries to explore managerial and organizational aspects often downplayed in the literature of intergovernmental relations (see for instance, Bello-Gomez and Avellaneda 2021, and Bello-Gomez 2021). Meanwhile, the Latin American region has also experienced national-led efforts to recentralize power and resources (Lopez-Murcia 2022). In this setting, scholars have used local government actors in countries seldom studied in public administration such as Honduras and Ecuador to study behavioral and organizational reactions to changes in governance patterns (Zarychta, Grillos and Andersson 2020, Zambrano-Gutierrez and Avellaneda 2021).

Secondly, Latin American countries exhibit profound territorial unevenness in state capacity and thus in the ability of governments to implement policy and provide services across the territory (Luna and Soifer 2017). These differences might exist even for providing arguably simple services such as trash collection. For instance, de la Riva-Agüero (2022) explores the relationship between service complexity, collaborative governance and administrative capacity using the case of waste management in Peruvian municipalities. Furthermore, capacity unevenness is reflected not only in the capacity of subnational and local governments, but also in the substantial differences in the presence of the central government across the country. For example, Bello-Gomez (2020) identifies those different levels of capacity and resource endowment of locally managed schools moderate the contribution that a national agency in charge of child protection services has over education provision in Colombia.

Third, Latin American subnational governments also face turbulent and complex environmental conditions. As such, scholars have used these contexts to explore, for instance, the moderating role of political violence on the management-performance relationship (Avellaneda 2009), or the effect of municipal size on tax collection (Avellaneda and Gomes 2015). Similarly, these subnational governments are under constant threats of elite capture due to low levels of rule of law and pervasive corruption. As such, they become interesting cases of study for our scholarly understanding of corruption in the public sector. Pérez-Chiqués and Meza (2021), for instance, use a comparative analysis of two Mexican municipalities to study the influence of trust in the development of corrupt networks.

Conclusion

This brief review exemplifies the role that subnational analysis in Latin America is playing in advancing theory in diverse public administration topics. Subnational governments in the region hold a wide range of policy functions and degrees of autonomy. Moreover, they face distinct institutional and environmental conditions. Making use of available datasets and adding their own efforts to collect novel data, scholars are leveraging these characteristics of Latin American subnational governments to test, generalize and adjust theoretical models in public management. Achieving the internationalization and globalization of the public administration field demands the success of this and other regional initiatives that speak to the realities of governance in the Global South.
References


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Reflection

Transparency for What: An Analysis of Mexico and Brazil's Strategy During the Pandemic

Gabriel S. Rojas Salazar

Abstract: Transparency is often used in public management but not constantly defined, and it appears as a normative element that improves democracies. However, in a context with high ambiguity and uncertainty, what is the importance of transparency? This text argues that organizational transparency related to the development of trust offers a useful framework to analyze the importance of transparency as openness, competence, and reliability. In a context such as the pandemic, a transparent government strengthens trust among citizens, while an opaque one can reduce it. It is briefly analyzed how in the case of Mexico, the strategy based on hermeticism, mixed messages, and incompetence had affected the results of the health policies during the pandemic.

Introduction

Governments have to decide and act in contexts of great uncertainty and ambiguity. However, when they face an unknown virus pandemic, this vagueness increases. As we have seen, dealing with COVID-19 has implied a muddled learning process in which there is no definitive evidence, information change constantly, and aspects of the virus change in the space of weeks. Furthermore, the appearance of new strains alerts us about the evolutionary dynamics of the virus. Governments have to adapt fast and design policies that contain and treat the infection, albeit with scarce information. Moreover, governments are also compelled to communicate and inform about the virus, explain and detail the health measures implemented, and clarify information that could mislead people to follow the sanitary recommendations (Romero, 2021; Moon, 2021; Ding, 2020). These tasks are necessary to secure the effectiveness of health policies during the pandemic. However, suppose public servants do not communicate clearly. In that case, their information is fuzzy, or their decisions are opaque; citizens could lose their trust in authorities, thus questioning the policies and increasing the number of people infected (Lee & Li, 2021).

Therefore, it could be argued that transparent communication promotes generalized trust, which generates that citizens act according to the sanitary measures, reducing the contagions and deaths during the pandemic. Nevertheless, what happens when governments are opaque and do not inform or communicate transparently? One answer is that citizens lose trust in their authorities and thus do not follow sanitary recommendations or challenge them. Hence, this article suggests that in countries where governments are opaque; in other words: where communication is hermetic and unclear, where decisions are biased against social groups for political reasons, and there is no transparency or any explanation of the rationale of decisions made, untrust among the
population increases, facilitating the failure of health measures during the pandemic. In that line, Mexico and Brazil are fascinating cases to analyze. In both countries, the governments—and mostly the presidents—have questioned the seriousness of COVID-19 (Cavalcanti, 2021); diminished critics of scientists about their management (Renteria & Arellano-Gault, 2021) even promoted actions against transparency. For example, gaming reported data about deaths (Ahmed, 2020). Further, Mexico and Brazil had one of the highest tolls of infected population and deaths caused by COVID-19 worldwide.

This brief analysis reflects over the importance of transparency and communicative transparency in promoting generalized trust of the population that facilitates governments’ health strategies success during the pandemic. Thus, this text is divided into three sections. The first one discusses the different meanings of transparency and presents a helpful framework for organizational transparency and trust (Auger; 2014; Menon & Goh, 2005). The second section is dedicated to describing and explaining the case of Mexico and Brazil. The Mexican case is explored by analyzing the semáforo epidemiológico, a communication strategy system implemented by the Health Minister to inform about the contagion rates, consisting of four colors. Hugo López-Gatell, sub secretary of the Public Health Minister, was in charge of this strategy, who, until the date of writing this text (April 2022), is in charge of the pandemics control and health policies. He has been heavily criticized for his declarations and decisions, mainly because of his incoherence, mistakes, and lies. In the case of Brazil, it is examined the strategy of underreported deceases and the declarations of Jair Bolsonaro comparing COVID-19 with the flu. The last section concludes with some relevant reflections on the importance of transparency in constructing and strengthening generalized trust in citizens. In the discussion about the importance of communicating transparently, the pandemic has offered us a great example in which communication between government-society and how it is done is vital.

What is Transparency?

Transparency is a common concept in public management. Nonetheless, as Hood (2007) argues is a normative concept but not precisely well defined. Therefore, this concept's definitions and theoretical perspectives vary consistently throughout the literature. Transparency is often seen as essential to all processes in public management and as a critical condition for democracy. Likewise, transparency is discussed as an enabler for public value (Douglas & Miejer, 2016; Hood & Heald, 2006); thus, it is analyzed more as a tool than a condition or a value. In that line, Douglas and Meijer (2016) consider that public organizations can also use transparency to interact and collaborate with different stakeholders.

Nevertheless, transparency is frequently confused with other concepts such as accountability (Fox, 2007) or establishing a causal relationship between both terms, as transparency generates accountability. For example, Fox (2007) states that some phrases have been associated with this relation, like "information is power" or "speaking truth to power". Consequently, transparency seems to be associated with the information governments—public servants and politicians—offer and facilitate about their actions, decisions, and policies. But what kind of information? In what manner and with which mechanisms? Is there any quality standard and temporality, or should it be directed to specific audiences?
The debate around these questions is fundamental and requires a close examination of the different elements that distinguish transparency. Heald (2003) proposes a categorization of transparency in which he differentiates the following types of transparency:

- Event versus the process transparency.
- Real-time versus retrospective transparency.
- Direct versus indirect transparency.

Unfortunately, these categories are not enough to accomplish such an exercise. Transparency is associated more with the publication of information, government openness in their procedures, and the participation of different actors and groups in the design policy process (Fox, 2007). Although, transparency is also related to abilities to communicate and inform clearly and openly.

**Transparency and Trust**

Another form to define transparency is proposed by Auger (2014); she states that organizational transparency is built upon authenticity, legitimacy, and credibility since these elements develop trust among their stakeholders. Thus, transparency is closely connected with trust (Auger, 2014; Rawlins, 2008), so organizations must behave transparently. In other terms, organizations generate trust and commitment if they inspire confidence, which is attainable by being transparent, competent, and reliable (Hon & Gruning, 1999), which requires a specific type of communication: communicative transparency. Thus, Rawlins (2009) claims that organizational transparency requires integrity, openness, competence, and reliability. Hence, transparency is not only a value, a tool, or the exercise of publishing information, nor is it making an organization a box of glass; instead, it is about generating trust. Trust develops when an organization communicates clearly, informs what it will do, and fulfills expectations (Hon & Gruning, 1999). Auger (2014) mentions that “[w]hen organizations have demonstrated their competence to provide a service or product, stakeholders will expect the organization to continue providing such services or products competently, reliably, and safely” (p.327). In that way, transparency is related to the actual functions of organizations and their success, eliminating some of the critics about goal displacement in bureaucracies because of the obligations of transparency (Hood, 2006).

Additionally, Auger (2014) hypothesizes the interaction between reputation for organizational transparency and communicative transparency on trust and behavioral intentions. Organizations that communicate transparently have greater stakeholder trust and positive behavioral intentions in crises than non-transparent organizations that are opaquer. However, the author does not explain communicative transparency, resulting in an ambiguous concept about communication. Thus, transparency is essential to generate trust, positively impacting critical situations. Therefore, transparent governments are more trustworthy, thus making them more reliable and allowing them to implement health measures more effectively since their population supports them. This perspective could be related to the idea of Roberts (2005) about transparency related to perceptions, attitudes, and communicative skills of public managers. So it could be outlined that transparency is related to open communication, competence, and reliability in this framework, and those elements develop trust.
Then again, trust becomes a central concept for governments, as Peeters and Dussauge expose (2021). Li and Betts (2004) defined that trust contributes to reducing uncertainty. Trust is based on expectations related to organizational ability to conduct business or provide a service as expected by stakeholders (Auger, 2014). However, trust is constantly fluctuating; it requires a permanent reaffirmation, even if the relationship between the organization and stakeholders is stable and sustained. Paradoxically, trust originated all through perceptions that must be materialized at some point, but sometimes, governments only offer discourses and promises of change (Brunsson, 2007).

**The Mexican Strategy: López-Gatell, Semáforo Epidemiológico and Mixed Messages**

Mexico is a compelling case to analyze. The current president is considered a populist. During the pandemic, López Obrador has criticized and minimized the seriousness of the virus. Additionally, have questioned the expertise of scientists and doctors, arguing that their critics are based on political judgments. Despite their high popularity rates, López Obrador's government did not develop trust since their policies and decisions were neither transparent nor competent. Numbers speak for themselves: almost 4 million contagions in Mexico with approximately 300 thousand deaths; (updated on 14 December of 2021).

Furthermore, these numbers are high and underestimated (Ahmed, 2020; López-Calva, 2020). It can be argued that the management of this country is the farthest away from transparency in its three elements: open communication, competence, and reliability. To demonstrate how this country's governments have been opaque and close in their communication, incompetent in their decision-making, and unreliable, it will describe and analyze the *semáforo epidemiológico* strategy.

In May 2020, after two months of lockdown, health authorities in Mexico decided to implement actions for the "new normality", which included an epidemiological risk traffic light to control the use of public spaces, despite the high number of contagions. The "epidemiological risk traffic light" started as a way to communicate the advance in the return of activities within the states in Mexico. Hence, this system consists of four colors: red, orange, yellow, and green, each with a meaning and specific recommendations (Gobierno de México, n.d).

- **Red**: Stay home, economic and social activities controlled by the local or federal authority, and the mandatory use of facemasks in all public spaces.
- **Orange**: reduced community mobility; economic and social activities were regulated to 50% of their capacity, and the mandatory use of facemasks in all public spaces.
- **Yellow**: slight decrease in activities in public spaces, the operation of economic and social activities was deployed to 75% of capacity, the mandatory use of a facemask in all closed public spaces, and recommended in open spaces.
- **Green**: No mobility restrictions, economic and social activities will be carried out as usual, and facemasks are recommended in closed public spaces and mandatory in public transport.

The advance in the system was determined by four indicators: Hospital occupation, hospital trend, the reproduction rate of the coronavirus, and percent positivity. After two months, in July 2020, state governors asked that the
epidemiological traffic light be revised and modified every 15 days (Ordaz, 2020). However, the choice to change the colors was influenced by political aspects and discretionary factors, as later, the methodology was changed to promote more states with a green grade (Roldán, 2020). Also, it did not apply to president López Obrador or other politicians. For example, when the entire country was on the red level, López Obrador declared he would restart his political tours (Ferrer, 2020).

Moreover, AMLO offers a conference every morning, justified as an exercise of transparency and accountability (Natal, 2021). When the pandemic arrived, AMLO designated López-Gatell as the man in charge of crisis management. In the beginning, this charismatic public servant was well regarded for his explanations' clarity and openness to deal with the media. López-Gatell's answer to the pandemic was using the watchman model (Najar, 2020), a model developed in 2006 to control the cases of AH1N1 influenza. According to López-Gatell, this model could be used to monitor the cases of COVID-19 with better precision than massive testing, and also, it was cheaper. However, as months went by, it was clear that the model was inconsistent, and infection tracing was chaotic. Moreover, mixed messages between the sub secretary and AMLO were alarming. AMLO refused to use facemasks and lessened the seriousness of COVID-19 continuing his visits to different localities within the country. López-Gatell promoted the use of facemasks in public areas but rapidly changed his discourse to support the president, proclaiming "[t]he president's strength is moral, it is not a contagious force" (González, 2020).

In December 2020, Mexican authorities lifted mobility restrictions and the change to green in almost all the countries. Several specialists argued that Mexico was in its second wave during this period, with cases increasing in shocking numbers (Expansion Política, 2020). Nonetheless, newspapers took photos of López-Gatell on the beach with no facemask and surrounded by people without following any of the recommendations established by the Minister he managed (Ferri, 2021). These photos generated hassle and distrust among the population, who questioned that even the authority did not follow its own rules.

Scientists, public health specialists, and the population, in general, started to question the mechanism's reliability. Furthermore, it was seen as a simulation, and it was based on the interest in reactivating the economy and on the political concerns of López Obrador (Cahmaji, 2021). Even it was reported that data was manipulated to justify the changes in the traffic light system (Kitroeff, 2020; Ahmed, 2020). Until today (April 2022), this traffic light system is still used.

Brazil Strategy: Bolsonaro's Misinformation and Negligence

The case in Brazil shares some factors with Mexico; the presidents share a populist view. Both have disdained expert opinion and downplayed the severity of the pandemic. However, the case of Brazil reflects the negligence of a government when it comes to being transparent and communicating information. President Jair Bolsonaro questioned that COVID-19 was a serious disease, pointing out it is like "the flu" (Chaiib, 2020). Later, he declared to be against the vaccines. However, the problem is that this process has systematically denied reality, with doctors facing adverse conditions and the saturation of hospitals during the first months of 2020
In this sense, the narratives in Brazil were central in the formulation of health policies, so their failure is associated with biases and political discourses, as pointed out by Peci, González, and Dussauge (2022). Bolsonaro's management has been disastrous. Based on a report made by the Senate, the actions carried out by the administration were analyzed. The document is the product of six months of work by a special commission of the Senate and constitutes a welcome effort to ensure accountability in Brazil (Barbara, 2021).

According to the report, Bolsonaro spread false information. For example, the Department of Social Communication admitted that it paid influencers to offer positive comments about ineffective medicines provided by the government. In addition, the Department celebrated the fact that Brazil was one of the countries with the largest number of people "recovered" from COVID-19, which implies a high rate of infection, reflecting an ineffective strategy (Senado Federal, 2021).

Bolsonaro's actions reflect a lack of transparency, but there are negligent and harmful. The necropolitical approach used by the Bolsonaro government involved letting people fend for themselves, causing one of the worst responses to the pandemic (Filho & Feil, 2021).

How is it possible for the population to trust a government that acted negligently and intentionally? The case of Brazil reflects the importance of transparency and openness and considers the importance of verifying that a government is competent in acting in critical situations. The case of Brazil is an example of what happens when some essential elements of transparency and citizen trust are ignored.

**Final Reflections**

Overall, it is evident that transparency can be defined as how governments communicate and inform. Hence, transparency is related to trust; thus, the definition proposed by Auger (2014) is valuable. Organizational transparency implies competence, openness, communicative transparency, and reliability. Governments tend to promote discourses full of promises and expectations, but almost none of them fulfilled these expectations. In the pandemic, transparency is essential to communicate and perform according to the population's necessities in moments of unmatched stress and uncertainty.

This article is just a mere introduction to discuss this form of transparency and analyze the limits and scopes. Moreover, it suggests a causal relation worthy of study: in countries where their governments are opaque, the trust decreases, impacting public policy results. Here, it is just analyzed two examples, but these can be open to more policy areas in other countries, which could enrich this proposition. Nevertheless, the pandemic poses a situation of high ambiguity and uncertainty in which transparency is even more necessary than in other situations. Communicating information quickly with responsibility and reliability generates trust. This thought could save millions of lives in a pandemic or other natural disaster. The Mexican and Brazilian cases confirm this affirmation.

The management of the crisis in both countries has been closed, no one outside the party in power can be part of decisions, and members of the opposition are not considered. The governments' hermeticism has not allowed any feedback, critique, or improvement, dealing with the pandemic with biased information and prejudices that reduce the efficiency and
effectiveness of sanitary policies (Cavalcanti, 2021; Renteria & Arellano-Gault, 2021; Bauer & Becker, 2020). The impact on trust is undeniable since the expectations have not been matched with the strategies implemented by the government, which generates a vicious circle (Peeters & Dussauge, 2021; Rothstein, 2013).

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Research Idea

The ‘Other Pandemic’ in Latin America: Towards a Research Agenda to Address Ethnoracial Inequalities in a Post-pandemic World

Felipe Blanco

Abstract: This piece outlines a multidisciplinary research agenda to address the ethnoracial inequalities exposed and amplified in Latin America by the COVID-19 pandemic through the study of three interrelated dimensions: socio-historical, technical/administrative, and political. This approach allows asking important questions that may increase the chances of tackling ‘the other pandemic’ in the region through and within public administration and public policies.

Introduction

In multiracial and multiethnic societies, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and amplified pre-existing ethnoracial inequalities in diverse policy arenas. In the U.S., Gooden (2020) called this phenomenon ‘the other pandemic,’ that of the intensification of institutional racism and racial inequalities alongside—and because of—the spread of the virus. Evidence suggests that the other pandemic is also present in Latin America, aggravating historical inequalities faced by Indigenous and Afro-Latinx peoples and creating new disparities amidst and because of the propagation of COVID (ECLAC, 2021a, and 2021b; PAHO, 2021).

An eventual return to 'normalcy' cannot ignore these problems anymore. Consequently, this piece lays out a multidisciplinary research agenda hoping to address the 'other pandemic' in Latin America throughout the study of three interrelated dimensions: socio-historical, technical/administrative, and political. This multidisciplinary approach allows asking important questions that may, in turn, increase the chances of tackling ethnoracial inequalities in the region through and within public administration and public policies.

To develop the proposal, section one presents an overview of ethnoracial inequalities in Latin America during COVID-19. Section two presents and discusses the suggested research agenda, and section three offers some concluding thoughts on moving forward.

Ethnoracial Inequalities in Latin America during COVID-19

Black and Indigenous people in Latin America have historically suffered several and grave injustices. Today these groups face disadvantages in terms of economic well-being, access to essential public services and access to opportunities in general, compared to the rest of the population in the region (Frisancho and

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4 In this text I will use ethnoracial as “a generic umbrella descriptor to refer to any categorical distinction that names or delimits sets of human beings who are construed to belong together naturally, as a collectivity or community, due to some source of heritable similarity” (Loveman, 2004, p. 37).
Vera-Cossio, 2020). This situation puts them at higher risk of being affected by the novel coronavirus.

“Their lower incomes, lower levels of education, and other disadvantaged social determinants of health, compounded with their reduced access to health services, geographic barriers, discrimination, and stigma, make these populations particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 infection and mortality” (PAHO, 2021, p.4).

Although data on the impact of the pandemic by ethnoracial groups is scarce in the region, when available, it consistently shows that Indigenous and Afro-descendants are being disproportionally affected. In Chile, for example, evidence gathered early on the pandemic suggested that the municipalities with a higher percentage of Indigenous populations also had higher percentages of infection and mortality due to COVID-19 (Millalen et al., 2020). Likewise, Indigenous peoples in Mexico have a higher risk for hospitalization and death from the virus, especially when treated outside of hospitals (Serván-Mori, et al., 2021). Similar disparities have been documented for Indigenous peoples of Brazil (Soares et al., 2021), Ecuador (Cuéllar et al., 2021), Colombia (Cifuentes et al., 2021), among other countries.

For Afro-Latinxs the lack of data is even more alarming, with just Brazil and Colombia actively reporting statistics on COVID-19 for this group. According to the Inter-American Development Bank, as of March 2021 case mortality rates were higher for Afro-Colombians (3.24%) than the overall case mortality rate of the rest of the population (2.54%). Similarly, in Brazil, “the mortality rate of hospitalized patients with COVID-19 [was] higher for Afro-Brazilians (33.7%) than for the white population (30.3%)” (IDB, 2021, p. 2).

The uneven impact of the pandemic, in turn, will most likely exacerbate the pre-existing disparities in poverty, health, education, and several other areas, creating an even more dire situation for Afro-descendants and Indigenous peoples in Latin America (Clavijo et al., 2021; ECLAC, 2021c). In the scenario of an eventual return to ‘normalcy,’ public administration scholars and practitioners should urgently address these issues, and a collective multidisciplinary research agenda could contribute to doing so, as discussed next.

**A Multidisciplinary Research Agenda to Address the ‘Other Pandemic’**

To better understand and contribute to addressing ethnoracial inequalities in Latin America, public administration scholarship would benefit from a research agenda that acknowledges the socio-historical and political dimensions of such disparities, alongside the technical/administrative knowledge required to tackle them. This multidisciplinary perspective would allow to ask important questions that may in turn increase the chances of effectively deal with the ‘other pandemic.’

**Socio-historical dimension: Ethnoracial categories and the power dynamics of racialization**

Race and ethnicity are socially and historically bounded constructions with no biological nor
scientific basis. Nonetheless, these constructions order social life through racialization, or “the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship social practice or group” (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 111). In this way, racialization processes allow for the creation of arbitrary categories that produce real and differentiated effects on individuals and groups once racialized as Blacks, Whites, or in any other way (Omi & Winant, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

In Latin America, the violent colonial enterprise was anchored in and sustained by the creation of ‘others’ in opposition and as inferior to White Christian colonizers (Wade, 2010). In the process, Indigenous and people from African descent were racialized in particularly harmful ways that are still prevalent in the region under color-blind national ideologies like mestizaje⁵ or ‘racial democracy’ (LAPORA, n.d.). An acknowledgement of the vicious origin of ethnoracial categories and the enduring consequences of racialization processes is thus needed to contextualize the study of ethnoracial inequalities in the region properly. For public administration and public policy scholarship, this recognition also calls for the study of actions intended to heal historical trauma, such as the government apologies (Gooden, 2014) issued to Indigenous populations in Chile (EFE, 2017), Mexico (Associated Press, 2021), among others.

From the perspective above, another route for inquiry has to do with creating ethnoracial classifications themselves. Censuses and other administrative processes and practices create and normalize the usage of racial and ethnic categories, with important consequences for individual and group identities (Yanow, 2003). Critically questioning which categories have been constructed, through which administrative practices, and with which implications for the groups created and excluded in the process, is then a second potential area of research.

Similarly, a socio-historical perspective can bring important questions regarding the power dynamics arising from racialization processes recreated in contemporary public organizations. For example, how may public organizations and public policies reinforce or challenge Whiteness in Latin American countries? How may mestizaje or racial democracy narratives sustain inequalities within and through public administration and public policies? A small but growing group of literature in the US showing how legally mandated color-blindness may be reinforcing Whiteness in the administrative setting can serve as a reference for this research avenue (Heckler, 2017; Blanco, 2021). Most importantly, outstanding Latin American and Caribbean thinkers’ study of power dynamics related to ‘race’ could and should inform this research agenda. Among them are the critical works on Blackness by Fanon⁶ (1991), Whiteness by Echeverría (2015), and the relationship between national states and ‘Indigenous’ peoples by Cayuqueo (2012) and Aguilar Gil (2018), just to name a few.

A fourth promising research avenue for public administration and public policy from a socio-

⁵ Mestizaje is a nation-building narrative of a ‘new race’ made from the ‘biological’ and/or cultural mixture of ‘other races’ prevalent in different degrees and forms in countries like Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, among others (Telles, 2014; Wade, 2017, LAPORA, n.d).

⁶ Fanon was born in the French colony of Martinique, but developed most of his work in Europe, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, becoming highly influential across the whole global South (Drabinsky, 2019).
historical perspective is incorporating skin color as a central element of study. Following Telles and his colleagues (2014) work, this line of research may start by investigating what public administration ‘looks like’ in terms of skin color. This descriptive work may in turn, have implications in terms of representation, discrimination, and inequalities in the hiring and promotion processes of Latin American bureaucracies.

Technical/administrative dimension: Data, nervousness, and representation

A second research area to address the ‘other pandemic’ lies within a more traditional public administration and management framework. From this perspective, a first line of inquiry involves the generation and use of data disaggregated by ethnoracial origin. Reliable data on race is needed to successfully examine—and construct—public problems, and to design, implement and evaluate its potential solutions (Gooden, 2014). By 2010, most countries in Latin America included questions to identify Indigenous and Afro-descendants in one way or another in their national censuses (Loveman, 2014). However, the lack of data disaggregated by ethnoracial origin in ordinary administrative processes and public policies is still the norm. As such, where and how ethnoracial data is collected, and where is still needed are basic questions to answer to overcome the ‘other pandemic.’ Moreover, knowing how the data is being used and the barriers and challenges for its effective generation and usage in public organizations would be very valuable to address ethnoracial inequalities in the region.

One of those barriers may come from a reluctance to discuss the unequal effects of public policies in terms of race and ethnicity, as this topic may trigger nervousness at the individual and organizational levels (Gooden, 2014). The historical denial of racism by some countries in the region (Wade 2017, LAPORA, n.d.) may be related to this discomfort. Thus, the nervous area of government might be a fruitful framework to conduct research to help to overcome the ethnoracial inequalities in the region, as the studies of racial equity in Brazil (Rubin et al., 2020), and Indigenous and gender issues in Mexico (Rubaii and Appe, 2020) show.

A third area that is ripe for research within a traditional public administration framework is that of the study of representative bureaucracy with an ethnoracial lens in Latin America. A bureaucracy that mirrors the demographics of its society can increase the legitimacy of government and the trust that citizens have in governmental actions. A representative bureaucracy may also provide a way to incorporate the voices, concerns, and values of historically marginalized populations (Ricucci & Van Ryzin, 2017), thus helping to address the other pandemic. The work by Pardo (2013) on indigenous populations in Mexico, and more recently the studies on the racialization of bureaucracy in Bolívia (Borth, 2019), Indigenous Managers in Chile (Figueroa Huencho & Araya Orellana, 2020), and representation, reputation and expectations towards bureaucracy in Brazil (Dantas Cabral, et al., 2021), suggest an incipient regional interest in the topic. However, a gap remains in the study of representative bureaucracy with a racial and ethnic lens in Latin America (Bishu and Kennedy, 2020).

Political dimension: Visibility, mobilization, and public policies

Both, the socio-historical and administrative research agendas above have a political dimension embedded. The creation of
ethnoracial categories is a political enterprise with individual and collective implications in terms of identity, and the availability of ethnoracial data may incentivize political mobilization of excluded groups in the hope of gaining visibility and access to governmental resources. The making of Hispanics as a census category in the US, illustrates that interrelated political dynamic (Mora, 2014).

In Latin America, the recent recognition of Afro populations and its inclusion in the national counts of countries like Uruguay (Cabella and Porzecanski, 2015), Mexico (López Chávez, 2018), and Argentina (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2021) seems to be following a comparable pattern, with Afro-descendants organizing to gain visibility and political power to have their demands included in the policy agenda. In this way, the political process triggered by the creation or recognition of ethnoracial groups has implications for public administration and public policies, as an instrument that may help to address ethnoracial inequalities. As such, this mechanism needs to be further studied in the region to help to overcome the ‘other pandemic.’

Final Thoughts

The broad strokes offered here are intended to stimulate a collective academic agenda to better understand and eventually address ethnoracial inequalities in Latin America, through and within public administration and public policies. Evidently, the scope of this proposal may obscure national and local aspects of ethnoracial inequalities, so subsequent work should adapt this framework to the specific realities of those contexts. The research agenda is also leaving out important topics that must be included to tackle the ‘other pandemic,’ like the intersectional nature of inequalities, the legitimacy and effectiveness of affirmative action policies, and many others. This research agenda must be expanded to have these and other themes that might help address ethnoracial inequalities in the region. Despite the limitations above, this work shows the potential of incorporating the knowledge from other disciplines to the study of public administration and public policies. A multidisciplinary perspective like the one advocated for here allows for a better understanding of ethnoracial inequalities as a socio-historical, political, and administrative issue, thus increasing the chances to effectively tackling the ‘other pandemic’ in Latin America.

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Research Idea

The Experience of Mexico and Argentina in the Participation of the Armed Forces in the Distribution of SARS COV – 2 Vaccines

José César Romero Galván

Abstract: The participation of the Armed Forces in Latin America in tasks other than those for which they were created is due to a paradigm shift in the concept of national security in the 1970s and later, with the end of the Cold War, from a traditional conception that prioritized the State, foreign defense and military deterrence, the armies in the region began to adapt to the new challenges they face to their security and survival through a humanistic approach where the role of the military in matters such as the welfare of the people, economic development, natural disasters, climate change among others. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the governments of the region began to mobilize their Armed Forces to distribute vaccines to their population as soon as they had access to biological vaccines, focusing particularly on Mexico and Argentina, the central purpose of this article is to learn from experience from two of the most important countries in the region, in charge of distributing the AstraZeneca vaccine to the countries of the region except for Brazil.

Policy Problem Context

The use of the Armed Forces to carry out civilian tasks in Latin America has grown in the last decades from carrying out public security tasks, it has gone on to develop in other activities that correspond to civil authorities, among which civil protection stands out with the support of the military in the face of natural disasters and in the current context, transfer, and storage of vaccines against SARS COV-2.

The armed forces have become a toehold for governments in Latin America in the absence of strong institutions with technical, financial, human resources and political authority. The militaristic history in Argentina and Mexico are diametrically different, while military participation is not well seen by society in the country of the southern cone of the continent due to the past of its Armed Forces, in Mexico there is a wide acceptance of their society in the military intervention in various public affairs.

Opportunity in Literature

Government dependence on the military is a problem of public policy of the construction and development of institutions, infrastructure for these institutions and investment in the human resources that would make up these institutions.

What is the high level of trust of the armed forces in Mexico due to? and the low level of trust in Argentina?

Given the exponential increase in drug trafficking and organized crime, phenomena that generate high rates of violence and insecurity, confidence in the Armed Forces would be based on the significant role they
have had to assume in the fight against these scourges, considering the incapacity and corruption of a large part of the police. The Armed Forces have become the last resort for the protection of Mexican society. In the case of Argentina this could be due to several factors. In the first place, due to the history of military interventions in the government during the twentieth century, but particularly by that of 1976-1983, which, in addition, it had poor government management. Second, there would be the defeat of its Armed Forces in the Malvinas War, because of a deficient political and strategic leadership of the conflict. Finally, we estimate that they also contribute a long period after the return to democracy characterized by communication discredit, professional postponement, and social isolation of the Armed Forces (Izurieta, 2015).

This opportunity in literature it seeks to expand the investigation of the participation of the armed forces in responsibilities that go beyond the sphere of public security and in emergencies that concern the health sector, such as the SARS COV - 2 pandemic in Latin America.

We aim to develop research that contributes to strengthening civilian government institutions in the face of this preponderance of Latin American politicians to put military institutions at the forefront to solve public problems and stop the militarization of public administration.

**Theoretical Framework and Data**

Logistical support comprises the transportation and distribution supplies to hospitals and individuals. It makes the military use its great logistical capacity – after all, it is with efficient logistics that modern conflicts are overcome. The logistical support is comprised the distribution medical supplies and food, centralized in hospitals and warehouses. This task also involves soldiers distributing supplies directly to individuals and efforts repatriation citizens abroad (Medeiros, 2020).

Only in Argentina, 26 flights have been carried out through which 2,972 citizens have been repatriated through Operation Belgrano. The military deployment for the distribution of vaccines is presented below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Own Elaboration with Data from the Secretariat of National Defense of Mexico and the Ministry of Defense of Argentina**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mexican Armed Forces</th>
<th>Argentine Armed Forces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Military Deployed</strong></td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>61,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Redistribution centers</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vehicles</strong></td>
<td>120</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aircraft</strong></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The difference between the military deployed in Mexico and Argentina is abysmal, this is because in the southern cone country it was decided to fully deploy the army, while Mexico has more consolidated civil institutions that require support from the army and in this case, civil authorities are not substituted. The Mexico - Argentina alliance to produce the AstraZeneca vaccine for the Latin American region except for Brazil, together with the military deployment for its distribution, maintain them as the countries with the highest vaccination rates in the region.

In Table 2 we can see the number of vaccines applied up to the date of November 15, 2021.
Table 2: Own Elaboration with Data from Our World in Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mexican vaccinated</th>
<th>Argentines vaccinated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One dose</td>
<td>75,455,207</td>
<td>35,816,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully vaccinated</td>
<td>63,394,870</td>
<td>27,479,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booster dose</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>892,457</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Implications and Conclusion

Government dependence on the military is a problem of public policy of the construction and development of institutions, infrastructure for these institutions and investment in the human resources that would make up these institutions.

The operational capacity of the armies in Mexico and Argentina is the main reason why they are leading the fight against the pandemic. The inclusion of the Armed Forces to face public policy problems is increasingly constant in Latin American countries, particularly in Mexico and Argentina, the problem with their incorporation is the very nature of the military, not to be so open in terms of transparency or accountability that injures these values that have been incorporated into our societies through democracy, by which we can exercise responsible citizenship. There is not much information about how the Armed Forces operated or what budget they had to deal with the pandemic, this is the most important challenge to solve for those researchers interested in doing research on it.

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Research Idea

Revisiting the Classics: COVID-19 and its Management as the New Tragedy of the Commons

José Sánchez\(^8\)  
Alejandra F. Medina\(^9\)

**Abstract:** Paradigmatic examples of the challenges that collective action entails might experience a relative unfamiliarity through time due to contextual changes. By comparing public policies combatting COVID-19 and behaviors adopted by individuals in different countries, this piece aims to revisit the classic ideas by Hardin (1968) about the tragedy of the commons, and Elinor Ostrom’s (1990) solutions for *Governing the commons*. Mask mandates, vaccination campaigns, and vaccination mandates are some of the most relevant public actions implemented by governments and private organizations. Their timing and implementation strategy, as well as citizens’ reaction to these measures, has varied drastically in different countries and states. The lack of coordinated strategies and collective responsibility demonstrates how unmanaged commons evolve but classic ideas in public administration and public policy remain current.

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The Classic Problem of the Pasture

When discussing the impossibility of achieving a point where population and the available goods are both maximized, Hardin (1968) introduced the tragedy of freedom in a Commons. Self-interested rational individuals that share a common will seek to maximize their gain without limits. Although it is a popular misconception to understand the term *tragedy* in the sense of misfortune, Hardin (1968) intended to use the term in the sense of the inevitability of overexploiting commons when individuals maximize their utility in complete freedom.

The practical representation of this tragedy is well known as the pasture dilemma: in a pasture open to the public, herdspersons will try to introduce as many cattle as possible to maximize their individual utility. Given that all individuals will use their freedom in the same direction, it is inevitable that the aggregate of herdspersons will end up killing the pasture for everyone (Hardin, 1968).

One additional dimension to the tragedy of unmanaged commons, as was corrected by Hardin (1998) thirty years later, lies in the nature of the Commons. Given the example of the pasture, it has been assumed as a concept that involves human collective action over natural resources. However, commons can be simultaneously constructed and endangered collectively by the aggregate individual action. Unlike a pasture that can be thought as an asset produced by a fortunate accident of nature, public health is a common threatened by human action like pollution.

This dimension of collectively constructed commons that has been overlooked implies that individual actions, in the aggregate, can both preserve or diminish the commons. Rational individuals that discharge wastes into a river are “fouling [their] own nest” (Hardin,
1968, p. 1245) and produce a similar tragedy than the one of the pastures. By polluting a natural common -the river-, they are negatively affecting another socially constructed common: public health.

A Self-Governance Remedy to the Tragedy

Social dilemmas occur when individuals face situations in which the maximization of short-term self-interest generates outcomes leaving all participants in their worst of their feasible alternatives. The conflict emerges when there is a struggle between individual and group rationality (Olson, 1965).

In his Logic of Collective Action, Olson (1965) explained how the size of a group can affect the provision of a public good. One of his major contributions was explaining that most groups have difficulties in providing optimal amounts of collective goods without having selective incentives. This affects primary the larger groups because it is more difficult to achieve and optimal solution through a bargaining process than in smaller groups. Olson (1965) pointed out that unless a social dilemma involves a small group and there are rules that penalize individuals who act in their common interest, rational individuals will not act according to their group interests (p.2).

In Governing the Commons, Elinor Ostrom (1990) stated that a possible solution for the collective action problem are the institutional arrangements between individuals that commit voluntarily to a cooperative strategy, influenced to a certain extent by external actors as well.

Ostrom (1998) deemed necessary to create a behavioral approach to the rational choice theory for the analysis of collective action dilemmas. Behavior in social dilemmas is affected by many structural variables, like the information available to participants, the size of the group, the organizational levels, and their dependence on the benefits received, among others.

Contrary to what other theories of rational choice state, in one-shot or finitely repeated dilemmas structural variables do affect levels of cooperation. A theory of human behavior does not consider complete rationality as the only way to model human behavior. This behavioral approach suggested by Ostrom considers that citizens making partially rational choices can affect the long term of viability of democratic regimes (Ostrom, 1998).

One solution for finitely repeated social dilemmas can be found in reciprocity norms. These norms drive individuals to cooperate and only stop said cooperative behavior when others stop cooperating, in other words, when reciprocity stops. The specific rules that individuals choose to adopt depend on the individuals’ context (Ostrom, 1998).

According to Elinor Ostrom (1998), reputation and trust are salient elements that can foster productive social relations even in scenarios of repeated social dilemmas. Ostrom’s (1998) theory of public choice for common pool resources aims to understand the way in which individual behavior elements like trust, reputation and reciprocity strengthen levels of cooperation and lead to net benefits at the collective level.

COVID-19 and Public Health as a Common

The different ways in which countries are facing the COVID-19 pandemic can be analyzed through the conceptual lenses of the tragedy and governance of the commons explained before. Public health is the common shared by communities in a similar fashion that clean water was the common in Hardin’s (1968) pollution example.
Among several measures to control the pandemic, two of them have become controversial: vaccination campaigns and mask mandates. Perhaps in this case, the logic of rational individuals maximizing their utility is more salient. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2021), vaccines cause an immune response to the virus that causes COVID-19 and reduces its transmission. The use of masks helps to slow the spread of COVID-19 and prevents people who have the virus to spread it to others (Brooks, Butler, & Redfield, 2020). In this regard, the adoption of these measures produces utility to the individual who practice them (personal health) but perhaps more utility to the rest of the individuals, preserving public health. This example represents an exacerbated tragedy of the commons in which individuals might maximize their own utility - comfort of not wearing a mask and exercising their personal freedom, for instance - and produce an inevitable tragedy in terms of public health.

**Vaccines and Peer Effects**

Vaccination rates vary across countries and states as a result of a combination of factors. Availability of vaccines and the infrastructure to distribute them is one of them, but recent studies have identified other relevant elements. Safety and efficacy of the vaccine, mistrust in government, misinformation in social media, younger age, lower income, autonomy and personal freedom have been related to hesitancy toward the COVID-19 vaccine (Hill, 2021; Paul, Steptoe, & Fancourt, 2020; Paterson et al., 2016; Dror et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2020). Throughout the pandemic, there have been as well differences in the breadth of the vaccination mandates, if said mandates are applied. As can be seen in Figure 1, mandates to public sector workers and to attendees of public events are the most frequent ones (Reuters, 2021). The fact that large population groups are not included in these mandates leaves the decision of vaccination to free individuals who make decisions in contexts of high uncertainty and incomplete information (Simon, 1997) or abundance of misinformation (Dabla-Norris et al., 2021).

**Figure 1: Frequency of Vaccination Mandates, 2021(n=46 countries)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry to Public Events</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Workers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Workers</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Sector Workers</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Adults</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Hesitancy toward the COVID-19 vaccine produces a social dilemma in which individuals guided by mistrust or concerns regarding their individual freedom reject the vaccine. Under this scenario, individual rationality led to an increase in the rate of virus transmission. Notwithstanding, aligned to the solutions to social dilemmas proposed by Ostrom (1990), norms of reciprocity and trust can overcome some of the barriers of vaccine hesitancy.

Empirical studies emphasize the salience of peer effects and information. Particularly in contexts of high uncertainty produced by misinformation in social media, information
sharing by trusted peers can influence the decision to be vaccinated (Dabla-Norris et al., 2021). Moreover, faster vaccine rollouts increase the likelihood that individuals know someone who has received the vaccine. A context in which the norm is increasingly having more peers vaccinated in an individual’s network increases the likelihood to get the vaccine (Kalam et al., 2021; Dabla-Norris et al., 2021).

The Maximized Utility of Masks

Both the mask mandates and the behavior of individuals toward the use of masks have varied globally. In June 2020, survey data revealed that in countries like the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, between 10 and 30% of people stated that they wore a mask when going out. In countries like Japan, Mexico, South Korea, and Vietnam, between 60 to 80% of people stated that they wore a mask when going out (IHME, 2020).

The differences in the use of masks might find different explanations. The ambiguity with which governments have issued recommendations or mandates for their use is one of them. While in the Summer of 2021 vaccinated individuals in different cities of the United States were only required to wear masks in trains, airplanes or public transit, the national government of Japan recommended its citizens to wear a mask whenever in public spaces and businesses. More strictly, Germany issued a mandate that ruled out cloth masks, requiring medical masks in all businesses and offices, enforced by fines for individuals failing to adhere to these rules (Bloomberg, 2021).

The Link between Governmental Recommendations and Individual Behavior

According to Somers (2021), the inclination toward collectivism and individualism in communities and countries is correlated to the use of masks during the pandemic. In cultural psychology, a collectivistic culture can be defined as one where group needs are prioritized over individual interests. On the opposite, individualistic culture is characterized by individual needs being prioritized over collective ones.

The position where groups and countries are located in the continuum collectivistic-individualistic, contends Somers (2021) is linked to the likelihood of mask usage. Based on two between-country studies, in countries more inclined to a collectivistic culture, like South Korea, Vietnam, and the United Arab Emirates, mask usage is more prevalent than in more individualistic countries, like the United States and Australia.

It must be acknowledged that the direction of the causality can be inverse. That is, the probability of finding collectivistic or individualistic behaviors can be affected by the form of government. For instance, in more centralized regimes, the level of freedom for individualistic values might be lower than that of less centralized governments.

Although different factors explain the success in lowering transmission rates -vaccination rates, demographics, medical infrastructure, for instance- the usage of masks has contributed to reduce the spread in countries whose culture is collectivistic, as can be seen in Figure 2.
The fact that different countries show low rates of mask usage opens a question related to Olson’s (1965) warning of scale. Issuing recommendations of mask usage might work under Ostrom’s (1990) collective action paradigm only in small groups. However, considering that individuals increasingly live in densely populated areas, the norms of reciprocity and trust (Ostrom, 1998) might be weaker than those in smaller communities. Future research could focus on the relation between usage of mask and population density.

**Implications and Conclusion**

Far from concluding in a pessimistic note on the inevitability of tragedy in the governance of the COVID-19 pandemic, this research idea is intended to identify and generate a discussion about the limits of collective action, and to emphasize the salience of governments to overcome said limitations in order to preserve public health. Communities more inclined to individualistic cultures might produce better collective outcomes when governments issue formal mandates of mask usage, as in Germany and Japan. This scenario is closer to the conclusions that Hardin (1968) issued rooted in the acknowledgement that relying on individuals’ conscience is unrealistic. Notwithstanding, individualistic constituencies might as well elect governments that serve their individualistic expectations. In this regard, Ostrom’s (1990) approach to the logic of collective action might offer a more optimistic remedy. Regardless of their stand on the collectivistic-individualistic continuum, social groups of different sizes might cooperate and achieve better outcomes without the imposition of formal rules if they are provided with clear information that can guide their rational behavior. The pandemic has evolved...
swiftly in the past two years, but a clearer message from public health agencies might be the difference between governing public health or lamenting its inevitable fate.

References


Research Idea

Transitioning Towards Remote Working: The Challenge of the Peruvian Civil Service Authority in Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Alessandro Braga, Ph.D.10

Abstract: During the initial phases of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many countries immediately introduced emergency measures regarding social distancing, closing borders, schools, and non-essential businesses. They also arranged remote working for civil servants to avoid the suspension of essential and non-essential public services. Schuster et al., (2020: 792) highlight that “COVID-19 has changed the location of their work, their work tasks, the demands at work, and the demands they face beyond work”. In Latin American countries where vaccines shots were made available later compared to Western economies, governments started adopting policies and guidelines allowing civil servants to work from home safely (CEPAL, 2021; Sandoval-Reyes et al., 2021). This research aims at discussing how Peru is dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic by presenting the case of the Peruvian National Civil Service Authority (SERVIR) in the effort of wide-spread remote working. In particular, the paper will focus on the 2020 Peruvian Government policy about introducing a legal framework for remote working. The qualitative analysis is developed through the documental analysis of Government executive orders, guidelines (published y SERVIR), and other academic and professional contributions to reach the triangulation of sources. Moreover, the paper delivers a critical discussion of practices adopted and preliminary recommendations on how to strengthen remote working in Latin American countries.

Introduction

Recently, the literature on remote working has been particularly active also thanks to the application of new technological solutions in everyday work. In particular, scholars concentrate on explaining the logistical, psychological, motivational, and performance-related advantages of remote working. For example, Mahler (2012) specifies that remote working offers a greater variety of opportunities compared to traditional organizational settings by reducing office costs, requiring less space to accommodate employees (Flores, 2019; Morgan, 2004). Hence, remote working improves retention (Caillier, 2013; Flores, 2019; Lim and Teo, 2000), and motivation because it positively affects the work-life balance of employees (Caillier, 2012, 2016; Palumbo et al., 2021). About the latter, the literature shares contrasting results (de Vries et al., 2019). Nonetheless, contributions published during the COVID-19 pandemic confirm that remote working improves the wellbeing of employees (Almarcha et al., 2021), but they also warn about the potential dark side of technologies related to overload, complexity (Molino et al., 2020), and psychosocial risks (Barriga Medina et al., 2021).

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Latin American countries have rooted traditions of remote working, even before the mass-scale industrialization era (ECLAC/ILO, 2019). However, they recently pushed harder for encouraging remote working as a working modality for a larger number of employees (CEPAL, 2021; International Labour Organization, 2021). In a scenario where nations around the world are struggling to get citizens vaccinated, Latin American countries are generally behind Western countries as for the number of shots administered and they are still registering COVID-19 deaths. In Peru, there have been 2,192,205 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 199,945 deaths, reported to WHO and – as of October 22nd, 2021 – a total of 32,957,509 vaccine doses administered. In this scenario, it is absolutely relevant to understand which actions Latin American countries are pursuing in terms of promoting remote working. Accordingly, this research focuses on the recent efforts by the Peruvian Civil Service Authority (SERVIR) of enhancing remote working.

The Peruvian Civil Service and Remote Working before the COVID-19 Pandemic

Historically, Peru belongs to a group of Latin American countries within which political obstacles to civil-service reform are severe, due to civil services’ features (Braga, 2015). According to the classification by Geoffrey Shepherd, Peruvian Civil Service refers to patronage bureaucracies in which the spoils system is widespread, appointments are politicized and impermanent, and the turnover is high due to the change of the political elite. Historically, the Peruvian Civil Service has been characterized by its complexity and by the lack of effective planning and management mechanisms, due to the coexistence of different labor regimes with different rules. Starting from the 1990s, several reforms were implemented to better perform the Civil Service, but without producing the expected outcomes. After two unsuccessful attempts to reform the Civil Service, the 2008 reform aimed at introducing meritocratic, flexibility measures and by unifying labor regimes. The reform enclosed the creation of the National Civil Service Authority (Autoridad Nacional del Servicio Civil - SERVIR) as a specialized technical body under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, which is aimed at managing the Civil Service of Peru. According to the DL n. 1023 (art. 10-18), the National Civil Service Authority (SERVIR) acts as a regulatory, supervisory, and executive body.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic that hit Peru in March 2020, the public sector is facing a new reality and adversity concerning remote working. This change constitutes a challenge for public entities and a transition phase for civil servants, who need to adapt to the new reality. Figures 1a-b summarize the access to the remote working of civil service personnel.

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11 On October 8th, Latin America and the Caribbean surpassed 1.5 million deaths, while as of October 6th, only 37 percent of people in the region are fully vaccinated (source: WHO).

12 Geoffrey Shepherd classifies three main models of civil service systems: merit-based bureaucracies, administrative bureaucracies and clientelistic bureaucracies. Extract from Shepherd’s speech during the conference “Desafios y Alternativas para Mejorar el Servicio Civil en el Perú”, Instituto del Perú, March 15th, 2011.

13 The first attempt was put in place in 1990-1992 under the Fujimori Presidency with the aim of reducing the size of government and redefine its role. The second attempt in 1995-1997 focused on the modernization and deregulation of the State for achieving better efficiency. However, the reform received low political support because of the increasing costs of the non-personnel contracts and their conversion into civil service contracts.

14 SERVIR is also responsible for the dispute resolution, which is exercised through the Civil Service Tribunal and includes the ability to recognize claimed or rejected rights.
Data on working modalities and relative distribution among the public sector (SERVIR, 2020) shows that at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020), 53% of the civil service personnel were using paid leave, while 24% were remote working and 23% of the personnel were still in-person. The majority of civil servants on paid leave were from the national Government (61%), followed by local governments (52%). At the regional level, the majority of the civil servants used in-person working. Regarding remote working, as of March 2020 it was most widespread in the national Government (31%) and least used in local governments (12%).

Pushing Remote Working in the Peruvian Civil Service

Together with the emergency measures adopted by the Peruvian government to face the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government pushed for enhancing the remote work modality to support and safeguard the work of the civil service personnel and search for harmony between the work and family balance.

The legislative framework of remote working is governed by two main rules. First, the Title II of the Emergency Decree N. 026-2020 provides various exceptional and temporary measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 in the national territory. Second, the Legislative Decree N. 1505 establishes exceptional temporary measures about HR management in the public sector. For the application of remote working, public entities must take into account those civil servants who are included in the “risk group” according to the framework of the Emergency Decree n. 026-2020. Public entities identify civil servants belonging to the risk group for the mandatory application of remote work to safeguard the right to health and the general interest. Hence, SERVIR issued various provisions for the application of remote working in public entities, among which are those targeting the risk group 15.

The strategy for remote working followed a four steps process. First, public entities identified work teams. For the implementation of

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the first step, managers select the activities that can be carried out by remote working, define the people who will carry out remote working, and assign activities or tasks for each civil servant or team. Second, managers establish the methodology for remote working. Here, different methodologies can be used to organize the work. Supervisors need to establish a work schedule, define a monitoring system, and determine what technological tools the team uses to coordinate. Third, managers set up virtual meetings. This step is optional and based on the type and the nature of activities or tasks to be assigned. Supervisors can hold virtual meetings to start a new project or service, for explaining features of the project, deadlines, and other details to teams. Fourth, a follow-up phase is executed. Supervisors oversee the progress and fulfillment of the tasks or activities assigned. SERVIR suggests the use of a monitoring matrix for recording the progress, checking the completion of tasks and activities. Accordingly, periodic monitoring (e.g. weekly) can be carried out to review the progress.

More recently, SERVIR issued the Emergency Decree No. 055-202116, which is re-introducing the gradual return to the in-person working of the civil servants of public entities from sectors other than the Health sector. Nonetheless, the Decree specifies that the process will be gradual and according to the changes in the epidemiological conditions of the various regions. With this regard, SERVIR adds that the modality of remote working will be valid until December 31st, 2021 to safeguard the health and life of public servants, as well as their families. Lastly, SERVIR reaffirmed the commitment to ensure the safety and wellbeing of civil servants also strengthening their capacities to meet quality standards and effectiveness of public services.

Perspectives on Future Research

The present contribution presented the transition towards remote working for Peruvian civil servants amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to specify that this research concentrates on the transition towards the remote working of the public sector personnel only. It does not consider nor discuss the measures introduced for private sector employees.

Since the transition towards remote working together with the COVID-19 pandemic are still ongoing processes, it is still early for retrieving preliminary results on the impact of remote working in terms of motivation, effectiveness, among others. Nonetheless, this contribution highlights five main recommendations discussing the process so far as well as areas of development for strengthening remote working in Latin American countries.

First, it is fundamental to check the outcomes of remote working in terms of motivation, personal and team performance. In particular, it is important to understand the impact of remote working on the wellbeing of employees and the development/preservation of soft skills of civil servants (team building, time management, teamwork, and communication above all).

Second, we need to assess how public services have been impacted by the use of remote working. In particular, understanding the difference in performance about quality, efficiency, and effectiveness allows managers and politicians to evaluate which variable led to the change in performance and then which

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16 The Urgency Decree N. 055-2021 establishes extraordinary complementary measures that allow the financing of expenses to promote the dynamicization of the economy and dictates other provisions. In the final provisions (art. 2 and 4) it rules about the gradual return to the in-person working.
steps are required to enhance the institutional capacity building.

Third, decision-makers in Latin American countries should consider the use of remote working as a permanent working modality for specific back-office jobs and routine tasks. If this is a consolidated trend in Western countries, Latin American countries might want to finally pursue this new challenge. If environmental conditions are favorable, remote working can be a real alternative for specific positions and tasks in the public sectors of developing nations. This might lead to better working-life balance, costs savings for public organizations in the long run.

Fourth, environmental conditions need to be considered carefully. As the majority of Latin American countries, Peru has greater social and infrastructural differences between urban and rural areas. Since decrees about remote working involved national, regional, and local levels, it is important to assess which conditions restrict the effectiveness of remote working in all tiers of the Peruvian public sector. In particular, were civil servants adequately computer literate? According to the decrees, public sector organizations provide the hardware for the civil servants for allowing remote working. However, is the internet connection working properly in both urban and rural areas? Does the internet connection allow civil servants to work effectively and without stress related to the use of technology?

As pointed out by Molino et al. (2020: 2), “It is crucial to understand technology-induced stress and its relationship with remote working. This is particularly true in times of radical changes as the current ones, where the crisis has had psychological consequences”.

Lastly, supervision and team working can be harder, more time-consuming, and less effective in a remote setting. In this regard, a few academic contributions adequately investigated this topic, but many professional/newspaper articles pointed out the threats of working remotely. For example, Bakken, (2018) states that “the real challenge becomes adapting to the new workplace” and the major challenges are communication, trust, and productivity. Another study (The Economist, 2021) focused on more than 10,000 employees at an Asian technology company between April 2019 and August 2020 reveals that supervision is harder. Managers are inclined to arrange more meetings than necessary because managers are less certain of their team’s commitment and are holding more meetings to check on them. Nevertheless, the topic of virtual teams and remote working linked to motivation, commitment, and performance need to be investigated further. This is becoming more relevant nowadays because technological and social conditions are pushing harder toward permanent remote working solutions.

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Research idea

Soft Regulation and Meta-Organizations Research are Needed to Understand Global Governance

Samanta Varela Castro

Abstract: The COVID-19 crisis has reminded us that we need an effective form of governance to solve global problems collectively. Collaboration has not been easy and even actors with some directive capacity like the World Health Organization have had limited success at curbing the pandemic. This research idea states that we must strive to understand the variables, mechanisms, and scope conditions that drive success and failure at directing global action, especially in contexts where several weaknesses must be overcome. This piece defends the argument that actors like the WHO can be studied from an interdisciplinary perspective, starting from metaorganization theory. Metaorganizations have other organizations as members, in this case, States with more power and resources than them. Paradoxically, they can be effective despite lacking supra-national authority. Metaorganizations regulate the behavior of private and public actors across jurisdictions facing a high probability of failure, diffuse interests, irrationality, and institutional fragility (Anaya, 2013; Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). They have frequently changed the behavior of sovereign states by using soft regulation, that is, standards, declarations, and guidance documents that produce effects even without a formal element of coercion (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; Djelic & Sahlin-Anderson, 2006). The variables and mechanisms that explain how these instruments work can be identified in different contexts and hypotheses can be tested using a comparative perspective. This research idea shares variables and mechanisms already identified by delving into theories of International Relations, Public Administration, Regulation, and Organization Studies to strengthen the argument.

Global Governance Facing COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the world to generate effective global governance. Efforts at coordinating international action have been arguably successful. For example, European Union (EU) Member States responded in an uncoordinated manner to the first wave of SARS-CoV-2. Some took unilateral measures to close borders and restrict the free circulation of sanitary masks despite having access to joint monitoring and decision-making capacities within multi-level arrangements (Beaussier & Cabane, 2020).

Many hopes were placed on International Organizations to curb the pandemic. Expectations that the World Health Organization (WHO) was an effective leader have, in certain respects, fallen short. Some international policies, such as data sharing under the binding International Health Regulations (WHO, 2005), have been praised. The WHO became a data hub that shared crucial information for understanding Sars-CoV-2 with unprecedented efficiency (Bertelsmeier & Ollier, 2020). However, WHO regulation did not completely organize

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standard actions (Georgieva, 2021). After this UN authority declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency, at least 194 countries adopted unilateral cross-border measures. This is an increase compared to the 25% of countries that ignored WHO guidance during the A/H1N1 Influenza pandemic (WHO, 2020; Worsnop, 2017 in Lee et al., 2020).

Some of those countries were weak states with less inherent capacity to comply with international rules and more significant risk: a terrible combination facing an unusually complex crisis. Mexico, for example, had a lot of damage, perhaps because it has large urban populations with high proportions of obesity, diabetes, and cardiac disease (Sánchez-Talanquer et al., 2021). Although the country has a relatively good capacity to comply with international rules (Global Health Security Index, 2019), the government decided to follow few WHO recommendations and adapt their advice to national priorities. By December 2021, the countries with more COVID-19 deaths are backsliding democracies such as Hungary, and small or weak economies like Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, or Greece (Ritchie et al., 2020).

Crisis are hard to manage partly because they are uncertain and threatening. They demand making urgent decisions facing several unknowns (Boin et al., 2021; Meza et al., 2021). Global governance challenges during a pandemic are to be expected, especially because collective action must be achieved among sovereign, autonomous states, some strong, some weak. Nevertheless, the WHO produced a series of recommendations to tackle the pandemic, and many were followed.

The Academic Contribution: The Study of Soft Regulation from a Metaorganization

Facing the complex challenges of global governance during crises, academia has an opportunity and a duty. We must ask how soft regulation changes behavior and strive to understand variables, mechanisms, and scope conditions, especially in contexts where several weaknesses must be overcome. Focusing on International Organizations (IOs) is interesting because they can be crucial during transboundary crises like the WHO. They are increasingly powerful actors worldwide. Some have capacities previously reserved for States like judiciary and institution building (Zamudio, 2012). They outnumber countries. There are more than 74,000 of them (Union of International Associations, 2021). IOs are the ever-growing locus of production of modern standards and regulations aiming to change the behavior of States (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, p. 540).

In academia, actors like the WHO have recently been an object of interdisciplinary study standing at an intersection between International Relations and Organization Studies (Zamudio, 2012). Within this promising field, metaorganization theory allows to classify empirical findings from an understanding of these creatures’ puzzling nature: they are autonomous actors formed by other independent actors, which creates a power paradox. Since the members of an international metaorganization, like the UN, are sovereign States, they might have more power and resources than the organization. Competition for the capacity to make rules and for resource control abounds. Adding to the many conflicts of identity brought about by the paradox monitoring, and sanctioning members is not easy for metaorganizations (Ahrne et al., 2016). Because of power asymmetry, decisions
within such actors frequently require consensus and even if regulations are binding, they can easily be overturned like during COVID-19. Legal mechanisms and hard regulation are complicated for metaorganizations, not just in terms of compliance but of diversity. If regulation is to work facing different authority loci, local, national, and transnational sets of rules will compete or contradict each other. If means and ends are not congruent, regulation loses sequentiality, rationality, coherence, and predictability (Koop & Lodge, 2015). That is why, at the global level, compliance becomes less related to the fear of sanction than to the will of States (Hurd, 2007).

Frequently, metaorganizations succeed at changing the behavior of private and public organizations by using soft regulation. Standards, declarations, codes of conduct, and guidance documents produce effects despite lacking a formal element of coercion (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005). Their effectiveness does not depend on a standard legal system to succeed. Soft regulation works in highly fragmented contexts (Perez in Levi-Faur, 2011) perhaps because its source of authority is like that of governance networks: mutual vigilance and deliberation (Möth, in Djelic & Sahlin-Anderson, 2006). Although much is known, most of the research on soft regulation was produced for routine rather than crisis times.

**Lifting Theory Off the Ground: How Does Soft Regulation Change Behaviors?**

The benefits and problems of using soft regulation to face a pandemic had been discussed during the A/H1N1 outbreak (Stefán, 2020). Yet more studies emerged about how it worked during COVID-19 (Yurtagüí, 2020; Eliantionio et al., 2021). Some of this research was comparative. It showed that soft regulation was common in interacting with hard rules and originating new forms of mutual support (Boscetti & Pauli, 2021). Soft rules were a fast, cheap, and flexible resource that allowed room for adaptation (Eliantionio et al., 2021, Stefán, 2020). These studies add to literature suggesting that soft regulation is about discretion (Reinicke & Witte in Shelton, 2000). It may spark innovation and learning and sometimes substitute for the lack of formal rules facing uncertainty (Karlsson-Vinkhuysen in Levi-Faur, 2011).

During COVID-19, soft regulation was not ideal. It might have posed risks for fundamental rights and confused the public (Eliantionio et al., 2021, p.7). Perhaps the speed and flexibility of producing soft instruments did not respect the rule of law checks and balances. The question remains of whether it is legitimate, given that it cannot be ensured through ex-post judicial review (Stefán, 2020). Transparency and legitimacy problems had been discussed extensively about routine times (Möth, p. 133 in Djelic & Sahlin-Anderson, 2006), but this research still has room to grow. The question of how soft regulation changes behavior, specifically during a global crisis, demands a more systematic answer (Eliantionio, Korkea-Aho & Vaughan, 2021). If the theory moves forward, we need to identify variables, mechanisms, and scope conditions capable of explaining soft regulation.

Part of this path has already been explored by using theories of International Relations, Public Administration and Regulation (Zamudio, 2012; Varela Castro, 2018). These perspectives suggest interesting variables. For example, the realist and neo-realist perspectives in International Relations might point to political strength, mutual monitoring, and threats of sanction (Haas, 2000 in Shelton, 2000; Waltz, 1979; Morgenthau, 1993; in Zamudio, 2012). Functionalist and neo-

Generally, the rational version of regime theory can help us understand that soft regulation works based on a stable structure of mutual expectations that help establish property rights and reduce information asymmetries and transaction costs. Soft rules might be the constraints of equilibria (Zamudio, 2012). This rational regime strand is compatible with principal-agent studies of regulation where what matters is incentives, administrative procedures, obligations, credible commitment, and information (McCubbins, Noll, Weingast, 1987).

On a very different theoretical tradition, the constructivist version of regime theory might be useful (Zamudio, 2012) for explaining the nuts and bolts of soft regulation. The relevant mechanism from this standpoint is related to the production of symbols in a certain institutional environment. Because such symbols are embedded in a set of inter-subjective norms, roles, and expectations, they are collectively legitimated. Then actors appropriate them and use them as political resources to formulate interests, "construct" authority, and even define payments in strategic games (Hurd, 2007. p. 12). Consent is no longer an issue when internalized norms direct the actions of regulators. Within this perspective, ideas, legitimacy, and socialization are the aspects to be observed (Hurd, 2007; Zamudio, Arellano & Culebro, 2016). Communication and arguments used by epistemic communities or policy entrepreneurs might work the same way and get to regulate more effectively than International Law (Hurd, I, 2007; Anaya, 2013).

Arguments within the constructivist logic also lead to asking: what if national public policies on the use of sanitary masks followed WHO decisions based on a certain logic of appropriateness? What if common understandings stemming from constant socialization among scientists and politicians in the WHO explain at least part of the homogeneity in national responses to COVID-19? Would we consider the role of this UN organization as a failure then? Perhaps it is surprising that it achieved even a moderate role in transferring regulation worldwide. Many of the guidance documents the WHO produced in January 2020 (WHO, 2021), their statements, press conferences, roadmaps, and situation reports influenced countries to define the problem and in decisions on whether containing, protecting, or mitigating risk.

This list of theories, variables and mechanisms is by no means exhaustive. Soft regulation might also work through other strategies, like metaorganizational membership and status management, decision accumulation, learning, or mutual adaptation (Ahrne et al., 2016). However, if the list presented is enough to raise interesting questions regarding previous findings, we should continue working down this path.

**Scope Conditions and the Comparative Quest**

Variables and mechanisms are essential, and so are scope conditions. Most of the studies previously cited belong in a time frame that is very different from crises. Not all have been made from a metaorganization perspective. Crises are urgent and institutional environments take a long time to build. Crises are threatening, and information might not flow freely if affected parties fail to trust. Most of all, crises are uncertain. Like COVID-19, its
causes and consequences might be partially unknown, and leaders must make highly consequential decisions while being partially blindfolded (Boin et al., 2021). If meanings are uncertain, then common understandings might break during crises (t’ Hart, 1993). How could constructivist mechanisms work then? Furthermore, similarities between critical and routine times are also puzzling: can soft regulation work during crises just like it does in highly fragmented contexts where rationality and coherence are unlikely? Previous studies suggest it might, but we can still do more.

Global governance is about diversity, different countries, cultures, legal systems, economic and demographic conditions. To know why soft regulation works in some cases, but not in others, we can harness the analytical capacity of the comparative method. Coincidences and differences among International Organizations, countries, regions, or situations can precisely be the means for good explanations (Pérez-Liñán, 2010).

Research at the intersection between International Relations, Regulation and Organization Studies should not be limited to positivism. Constructivist theories are feasible too within comparative studies using a pragmatic epistemology. Naturally, a lot of work remains to be done. Contexts must be described and classified; typologies need to be created (Hague et al. in Landman, 2008). The list of variables and mechanisms described here must grow. Then, the time for hypothesis-testing and theory building will come, preferably sooner if we wish to be better prepared for the next transboundary crisis.

References


Research Idea

Implementing the COVID-19 Vaccine in Mexico: A Call for Methodological Localism

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Abstract: This study summarizes a brief literature of global public policy, through a critique of methodological nationalism, transnationalism and orientalism and presents an alternative approach to study of known as methodological localism. Evidence using a case study of vaccine implementation in Mexico City shows this completely new approach to address wicked problems. This is done in the midst of a discussion about the distribution of wealth in Mexico and describes not only vertical fiscal imbalances that have brought more inequities in the Mexican Federation but also its importance for local policy implementation. Evidence has shown that even at the very local level, various policy imbalances affected the strategy to address COVID-19 pandemic. Results demonstrate that the States with the highest vaccination rates are Mexico City, Quintana Roo and Querétaro, which are considered some of the more developed states, while their poorest counterparts are the ones that have the lowest vaccination rates Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas. Within Mexico vaccines from all over the world have been applied, yet due to its existing administrative structure, these inequalities also exacerbate the implementation of the health policies.

Table 1: Vaccines Applied as of Dec 9, 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vaccine</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AstraZeneca</td>
<td>81,233,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pfizer</td>
<td>45,269,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinovac</td>
<td>20,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sputnik V</td>
<td>20,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cansino</td>
<td>14,136,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderna</td>
<td>3,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson &amp; Johnson</td>
<td>1,350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL:</td>
<td>185,716,825</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Context of Policy Problem

The emergence and rapid spread of the virus identified as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), named COVID-19, has highlighted the vulnerabilities of the health systems in many national economies. This study seeks to analyze what type of subnational government, which may include a combination of either states, local or municipal governments, were more prepared to combat the crisis in Mexico. Using a new perspective, we consider many public policies were necessary to be implemented at the local level to be effective during the crisis. These policies include facemask mandates and enforcement, school business and community closures, and local programs to help the infected, their families and communities. Therefore, in a crisis of this magnitude, public administration analysts and

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20 Citation from the https://transparencia.sre.gob.mx/gestion-diplomatica-vacunas-COVID.
managers must also be acutely aware of the institutional capacity and authority that local administration have when applying various public policy solutions. By applying a local-global approach to political economy, this analysis reviews what type of states and subnational governments may be better prepared to meet these challenges, and which are not, and may need external or global interventions.

**Academic Literature**

In comparative studies, “typical public policy and public administration studies focus on the [national] State, its Agencies, its subnational interactions, and the actors and processes influencing national policy creation and its administration.” (Stone & Moloney, 2019, p.3). In this regard, methodological nationalism is the intellectual orientation that conceives the nation state as the only unit of analysis or as a container for all social processes of the state. However, “the State has been unable to claim exclusive domains to create policy and administer programs, […] one result of this is a rise in global policy and its transnational administration.” (Stone & Moloney, 2019, p.4). That is why public administration scholars need to use alternative approaches to study global public policy in its different manifestations applied by the state: methodological nationalism, transnationalism orientalism, or localism. “Not only because the state is no longer the only progenitor of policy and its administration, but also because policy and its administration are no longer products of exclusively public action.” (Stone & Moloney 2019, p. 4).

“Methodological nationalism is a research practice that institutionalizes a particular narrative bias in recollections of the past. It perpetuates the nation as immanent in history through an initial proposition that nations are an obvious level of description and explanation. By embodying this choice of abstraction, methodological nationalism does not innocently reflect on the world out there.” (Vasilev 2008, p. 44).

The main reason is that methodological nationalism reflects and reinforces all the researcher’s prior identification and biases with what a nation can do as well as its subnational actors and government units. “The methodological nationalist researcher “can submit himself [or hersel] entirely to the force of facts and logic and yet still arrive at a one-sided conclusion that nations hold the key to understanding what took place in the past, what is happening in the present, and how we ought to act in the future.” (Vasilev 2008, p. 7).

Methodological nationalism has several drawbacks that force many researchers to make one-sided conclusions by extrapolating public policy actions taken by a particular situation in the past and globalize them into the future only by which to capture the national government’s priority of the time of that social phenomenon. The most common methodological downsides are: conceptual overstretch, selection bias, the misrepresentation of governing bodies, which can conflate culture and national identity.

When focusing on methodological nationalism, policy analysts and academics tend to ignore the plurality of states, considering that minorities, such as indigenous people and multinational communities often remain highly ignored or underrepresented, as it tends to overstate national bias and de-emphasizes asymmetries between countries and their subnational governments. “Needed is a multisided research design, which are informed by the insight that locales are
connected by social practices and resource flows within and also across borders, are the most valid for investigating transnational social spaces.” (Barglowski 2015, p. 216).

Other approaches to be considered such as transnationalism, which uses a multi-design method that allows analysts to study countries with different contexts and conditions, concentrating on factors such as ethnicity, gender and social classes. Another methodological approach, which reduce this bias, gives equal attention to minorities and lower-level governments when they try to play a central role in politics and social rights.

Another drawback is that methodological nationalism ignores the importance of foreign actors, which ironically in most of the cases influence local people in several ways to national as well as subnational politics and policies. “In classical political science, public policy occurs inside nation-states. In the field of international relations, a “realist” perspective would also hold that states are the dominant actor in the international system and that international policies are made between states.” (Stone 2008, p. 23). Another way to study these views is through “Transnational Administration (TA) which refers to the regulation, management and implementation of global policies of a public nature by both private and public actors operating beyond the boundaries and jurisdictions of the state, but often in areas beneath the global level.” (Stone & Ladi 2015, p. 107).

Therefore, if comparative public administration researchers do not consider the qualities of administrative capacity and interventions by globalization and global forces into subnational governments, we are missing a great deal of analysis of why a phenomenon happens and how it interacts with national political and administrative processes.

“The social sciences have become obsessed with describing processes within nation-state boundaries as contrasted with those outside and have correspondingly lost sight of the connections between such nationally defined territories. It also downplays nationalism’s role in modern state building by analytically separating the rise of nationalism from that of the modern state and of democracy. In this way, the national framing of the modern state building experience and of democratization become almost invisible. State and nation become two separate objects of enquiry.” (Wimmer & Glick 2002, pp. 1-5).

According to Stone and Ladi, global public policy analysis is challenging because:

- Public policies are executed inside a nation state at varying levels of government.
- Different scales and meanings attached to each state should be considered.
- Each state is different, so the implementation within each state is unique.
- Varying degrees of complexity should be applied to global public policy within different states.
- Global institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, etc. are no longer the main external decision makers or factors for internal needs.

All these factors can cause a lineal model of policy cycle process that is not grounded in reality and is not as accurate as real politics and tensions within the policy cycle and between actors within and across the bureaucracy. Indeed, policymaking is messy. Conceptualizing policy as a chaos of purposes and accidents is not enough. This means that the following four stages do not happen in a
linear way: problem definition and agenda setting, formal decision making, policy implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

In order to avoid analysts to get drawn into indecision on how to study a problem, especially when facing wicked problems, they should take a different approach by considering multiple viewpoints to address outcomes rather than choosing between them. This can help to confront numerous ambiguities between policy options. For example, that subnational authorities can have access to global markets and might have different capacities to reach out to policy makers in international institutions. “In this regard, it should be followed those steps to address wicked problems correctly: research context, data collection and analytical approach.” (Burke, et al. 2020, pp. 364-368).

Let us think about the public policies that are needed to combat COVID-19: isolation, face masks, boosting the economy of local businesses. Those are policies made by mayors, local representatives and neighborhood leaders who are in charge of public health policies among their communities where they live. Indeed, public policies needed to address effectively COVID-19 pandemic which are also related to national priorities such as distribution of hospital equipment, oxygen tanks, management of cases and deaths, but there is also space for additional public policies such as ensuring that SMEs and medium-sized companies have liquidity among other fiscal policies. Those public policies, as mentioned before, need to be addressed at the local level.

**Theoretical Framework**

Therefore, studying methodological localism is not just a regular study of local governments, but how these local governments also have to content to inter-governmental relations, competing political agendas of the presidency and other actors at the top of the administrative structure and politicians buying for power when they are encouraged to implement a global public goods (like the vaccine) suggested from outside the state’s domain. The policy complexity comes when international public goods are encouraged to be implemented at the local level, while additional actors are also be included in the process. An example of this are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nation have the mandate to be implemented at the local level.

In terms of vaccination implementation, the value added is that Mexico was a net importer of vaccines, buying and also receiving donations, and also donated to the international vaccination campaign COVAX. For example, 18 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine were used for booster shots announced by the Ministry of Foreign Relations Marcelo Ebrad in February 2022. But earlier in 2021, Ebrad announced donations of 250,000 USD to help other countries. Furthermore, data from December 2021, shows this dynamic of a net importer and also a donor country. While this might sound odd, this middle-income country is also performing its role in the

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21 In June 2021, during the Gavi COVAX AMC Summit “One World Protected”, Mexico announced a donation of 250,000 USD for the Gavi COVAX AMC as a first contribution to Gavi. https://www.gavi.org/investing-gavi/funding/donor-profiles/mexico
23 https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/infographic-mexicos-vaccine-supply-and-distribution-efforts
national stage while also receiving and distrusting its own vaccination program internally, with relative success. While methodological nationalism rightfully criticizes that too much of the public administration literature is focused on the state without considering (a) how transnational actions influence the state (local or national level), (b) how the state is not the only global actors with policy power at the supranational level, and (c), often omits other actors like global NGOs, MNCs, transnational public private partnerships, foundations, which also influence the creation of global policy and its administration. The role of middle-income like Mexico struggle with global policy integration and performing as leader on the world stage, they also internally have to apply local strategies within their nation state often with a dysfunctional administrative structure (such as implementation of the vaccine across its 32 state governments and over 2,500 municipalities).

Studies of federalism as a legal system in which a national government and a subnational exist together in which they make agreements related to their public finances, is further too short sided to explain how these subnational local government also work on the international stage. For example, the 1st Article of the Mexican Fiscal Coordination Law establishes that the Mexican will enter into an agreement with each Federative Entities (States) adhered to the National Fiscal Coordination System through Federation Mexican Ministry of Finance (Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público), in order to make sure that they receive the public funds that are established in the rules of the Mexican Federal Fiscal System. As it can be seen, the nature of fiscal federalism implies a definition of competencies between the competing levels of the Federation to carry out tax collection and public spending but also implementing public policies.

In theory, this system will allow to increase citizens welfare, as the Federation collect the public resources and distributes to each State that will allocate it more efficiently, as long as at the local level, governments have more contact with people and data to better understand their needs. Doing this, “will also be cheaper, as local governments will offer goods and services the population at the lowest cost, while performing this task, it will also allow them to strengthen their fiscal responsibility as members of a Federation.” (Oates 2005, pp. 349-373).

On the other hand, if the central government had those functions, it would be unknown the specific needs of the entire population, so it will probably be provided the same amount and type of goods to the entire population, without considering their particular needs and peculiar characteristics. When international relationships are involved into the policy making process, they circumvent the nation state all together and therefore they may provide vaccines not accounted for by the national government, may buy vaccines from different entities not federally approved, or they may receive donations not registered at the federal level. Furthermore, it is up to the federal government to ensure that equal treatment of each subnational entity but often is not able to do so because of capacity issues and competing agendas at the national level.

Data and Analytic Methods

In this section we develop a brief case study of Mexican distribution of the vaccine. This will help to show how a new approach, the methodological localism, is needed to address...
effectively wicked problems caused by COVID-19 pandemic. First of all, the main public policies implemented in Mexico during the pandemic are analyzed, considering the States with more and less cases using the data from the National Public Policy Laboratory, known in Spanish as Laboratorio Nacional de Políticas Públicas, from the Center for Research and Teaching in Economics, known as CIDE or Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas. This will allow us to understand the economic decisions that state governments used when faced by the economic shock represented by the current COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose is to know the efforts of the State to face this difficult situation, providing elements for public discussion and decision-making, especially in the social policy implementation moving forward after the pandemic and into new fiscal reforms for the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Policy Type</th>
<th>More cases</th>
<th>Less cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student scholarships</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment insurance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for COVID-19 infected</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for labor reintegration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for indigenous people</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for older adults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pantry delivery</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutritional support</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for vulnerable people</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for public transport drivers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: September 2020 data. Source: Own elaboration based on CIDE data

To show the imbalances that have brought Mexican Federalism, we study the distribution of the vaccine considering the States with higher and lower vaccination rates considering the official data reported by Federal Health Ministry (Secretaría de Salud Federal) from México last November 22nd.

Table 2: Public Policy Implementation in the States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Policy Type</th>
<th>Ciudad de México</th>
<th>Estado de México</th>
<th>Durango</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student scholarships</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment insurance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pantry delivery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nutritional support</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for vulnerable people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports for public transport drivers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: States with Highest and Lowest Vaccination Rates

Source: Secretaría de Salud Federal México
Findings

In practice, Federalism in Mexico has become increasingly unbalanced, as States are highly dependent on Federal resources. Indeed, “Mexican Federalism continue to be highly centralized in terms of income and increasingly decentralizing in spending. This imbalance must be corrected through mechanisms of joint responsibility between the Federation and States in issues related to public finances and the establishment of guidelines and regulations in the case of debt contracting.” (Gandarilla, N., 2012).

This unbalanced Federalism has had an effect on States and municipal governments’ quality of public policy. The consequences of this imbalance have been evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the largest number of patients and deaths are highly concentrated in Mexico City, Chihuahua, Baja California and Sonora, which present much more cases than in the rest of the States. Indeed, if they are omitted, the cases seem to be distributed in a more balanced way respect to the others.

Given the situation of the economic and health crisis facing the Mexican government, actions were announced to address the emergency in order to reactivate the economy. Therefore, each of the 32 states in the country designed contingency. The information on the situation found at the state level must be considered to have a general overview and make decisions to face the economic problems that the pandemic brought with it.

Mexico City (CDMX) is a state that, despite having a greater number of cases and deaths from COVID, is the one that has implemented a greatest variety of public policies, among which are: support for student scholarships, unemployment insurance, patients with COVID 19, labor reintegration, indigenous people, older adults, pantries, food support, among others. The foregoing contrasts with the State of Mexico, which has only implemented food aid and support for vulnerable people. Mexico City presents a clear example of the imbalance mentioned before. It is a State where power is highly centralized, it has been developed many different public policies to address COVID-19 Pandemic, but, at the same time, it can be seen a higher number of COVID-19 cases and deaths.

At the same time, it can be seen that the States with the highest vaccination rates (more than 95% of the population), are Mexico City, Quintana Roo and Querétaro, which are considered one of the most developed States, while the poorest Mexican States are the ones that have the lowest vaccination rates (less than 75%): Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas.

The COVID-19 crisis reinforces how public policy implementation is often asymmetrical at the local level, where fiscal imbalances exacerbate administrative capacities and income inequalities.

Implications and Conclusion

The objective is to capture information on the public policies that states are implementing to support their local economies during the health contingency due to COVID-19, as well as in the subsequent recovery period. The above, in order to be able to know what are the policies that work for the prevention of pandemics that could generate another health crisis such as COVID-19, as well as the economic
consequences that put at risk the progress made in social development, being able to affect vulnerable groups to a greater extent. It should be noted that all entities in the country have registered an increase in the number of infections due to the COVID-19 virus, although the number of deaths has been decreasing. In this sense, the entities that have registered an increase in the number of infections by COVID-19 seek to implement sanitary measures that are stricter, in order to prevent the pandemic from spreading further and contribute to the prevention of the closure of the activity economic in the country again. Also, more developed States have higher vaccination rates than their poorest counterparts. As a result, the measures are different in each State, not only in scope but also in impact. This is due both to the implementation capacity of each State, as well as to the composition of its economy. We know that all States are going to suffer the crisis, but some Entities will have a stronger impact than others, due to the dependence they may have on the different economic variables, among which are trade, tourism, exports. The states that will be least affected are those in which their economy depends on the production of basic necessities such as food.

We can also see how the Northern states implemented a greater number of measures than those in the south, since the latter represent the most backward economies in the country. The above indicates the inefficiency to be able to cope with the crisis in times of the pandemic, as well as the measures that must be taken to recover from it. It is particularly important to note that the analysis of the level of incidence that priority social programs may have to support the most affected sectors by the pandemic, as well as social ones as relevant to address poverty, in the short term, their operation may be useful to address the drop in the income of the population.

It is necessary to expand and strengthen responsive measures such as the programs presented above in order to design priority programs that have a positive impact on citizens. Likewise, it is important to improve the operational capacity of these programs, and ensure that they are adequately focused on meeting the needs of their target population, as well as considering additional measures to assist those who lose their source of income, as well as the urban sectors, as they are more exposed to those vulnerabilities.

References


Policy Brief

Using Information to Deliver Social Protection in Latin America and the Caribbean: Lessons from Cash Transfer Programs Implemented during the Pandemic

Guillermo M. Cejudo, Ph.D. 24
Pablo de los Cobos 25

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic tested the capacity of social protection systems in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Given the fragmentation of social protection provision in the region—and the dramatic effects on jobs and income—, LAC governments expeditiously reacted with cash transfer programs (CTPs) that temporarily compensated the loss of income. From March 2020 to March 2021, 31 LAC governments implemented 134 CTPs. Based on our analysis of these CTPs’ attributes and the countries’ existing social information (Cejudo et al., 2021), we describe how available information enabled rapid responses that directly reached 24.6% of the region’s population and draw lessons about the future of social information systems.

We find that some countries were prepared: they had social registries (information about potential beneficiaries) and beneficiary registries of other CTPs to easily enroll and transfer the payments. Other countries had to rely on additional administrative databases (not designed to implement CTPs), such as school registries or electricity billing records. Yet, there were countries where CTPs were made as usual: in person, both in offices or households, gathering new information to enroll and pay, creating burdens and limiting the coverage.

These findings help in describing responses to the pandemic, but also shed light on the opportunities for building better social protection systems: building flexible programs to adapt social protection, using new data sources to implement agile responses, lightening administrative burdens, and working within a new logic in information systems where agencies share and use interoperable data.

Introduction

The health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) led to an economic shock that included the dramatic loss of 30 million jobs, the increase of both informality in the labor market by 5.8% (from 130 to 137.5 million) and the number of people living in poverty by 6.1% (from 81 to 86 million) (Acevedo et al., 2021; ECLAC, 2022; ILO, 2021). While most governments around the world have responded with social protection measures aimed at containing the impact of income loss among their population, those in LAC have done so from a diverse, fragmented and highly stratified system of social protection, in a...
context of great labor informality and levels of poverty (Blofield et al., 2020).

Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic tested the capacity of social protection systems in the region. LAC governments expeditiously reacted with cash transfer programs (CTPs) that temporarily compensated the loss of income. As in the rest of the world (Gentilini et al., 2020), CTPs were chosen as a potential solution to this problem because they allow governments to increase available income in households with sudden income losses, in an expedited manner.

From March 2020 to March 2021, 31 LAC governments implemented 134 CTPs. In Cejudo et al. (2021), we analyze how these responses were enabled by available information. Countries that had social registries (information about potential beneficiaries) and beneficiary registries of other CTPs were able to easily enroll and transfer the payments. Other countries had to rely on additional administrative databases (not designed to implement CTPs), such as school registries or utilities' billing records. And, finally, there were countries where CTPs were made as usual: in person, both in offices or households, gathering new information to enroll and pay, creating burdens and limiting the coverage.

In this note, we explain the role of information as a form of policy capacity deployed to respond to the pandemic, analyze how LAC governments implemented cash transfer programs and explain how the available information was used for doing so. Our findings shed light on the opportunities for building better social protection systems, with flexible programs, new data sources, extending the use of technical tools and building interoperable systems. In the final section, we point out three ideas about how LAC countries can strengthen their capacity to face future emergencies.

Why Was Information Important?

Governments need information to carry out all their tasks. When designing and implementing policies, organizations and public officials use available information and analytical capacities (Mukherjee and Bali, 2019) to devise solutions and implement interventions. Information is crucial for understanding policy problems, assessing alternative courses of actions and monitoring progress; it is also essential for identifying and reaching target populations or potential beneficiaries. During the COVID-19 crisis, information has been critical for implementing testing and quarantine programs, contact tracing, and vaccination strategies (Woo, 2021; Capano et al., 2020).

In LAC, information was indispensable for being able to identify beneficiaries of CTPs implemented during the pandemic. Facing an economic crisis and an increase in poverty, LAC governments made extensive use of CTPs aimed at partially compensating the temporary loss of income, although with wide variations. These differences can be explained by political and ideological preferences, fiscal conditions, policy legacies, and even broader institutional factors, such as levels of democracy or decentralization. But beyond the reasons that may explain why some countries attempted more encompassing interventions, whereas others opted for limited reactions, these responses could only be implemented using available information or expeditiously obtaining new one. Many countries had been investing in obtaining this information prior to the pandemic. In order to implement CTPs, governments need information to target and reach people in need (Leite et al., 2017). Given the growing role of this type of intervention as
Part of the social protection regimes in the region, governments needed information for its regular operation. This information is usually contained in their social protection information systems, which consist of social registries (with information about potential CTP beneficiaries), and beneficiary registries (with information about current CTP beneficiaries in one or various databases, including bank accounts in which they received other social-assistance benefits). By making these registries interoperable (with each other or with other information databases), governments are able to know the socioeconomic conditions of a larger share of the population (Barca, 2017; Leite et al., 2017). Before the pandemic, social registries contained information about 41.6% of LAC population, and countries such as Argentina and Uruguay were able to include as much as 100% of their population. But not all countries had this information available, and thus their capacity to deploy CTPs was limited: 10 out of 33 LAC countries did not even have social registries.

Data and Sources

In order to account for these differences, we study CTPs26 implemented during the first year of the pandemic (spanning from March 2020 to March 2021) in 33 LAC countries. Using previous social protection systematizations developed by Cejudo et al. (2020), ECLAC (2020), Gentilini et al. (2020), and Rubio et al. (2020a, 2020b) to identify interventions, we looked for relevant characteristics of those programs in government websites and social media. We obtained information about general characteristics of each program, including type of intervention, coverage (number of beneficiaries), and beneficiary selection and delivery mechanisms.

There were three types of interventions: completely new programs, vertical expansions (increases in the size of the payment), or horizontal expansions (increases in the number of beneficiaries). We operationalize coverage as the number of direct beneficiaries divided by the countries’ population27. The third and fourth variables are referred to the mechanisms used to select and deliver the benefit, especially if the government used new information or previous one contained, for example, in social or beneficiary registries, as well as in other administrative databases such as electricity billing registries or employment data.

How Available Information Enabled Governments’ Responses

LAC governments responded to the economic effects of the pandemic with social protection interventions that consisted mainly of new cash transfer programs. Indeed, out of 31 countries in the region that responded with a CTP28, 30 launched at least one new CTP to respond to the pandemic (in total, 98 new programs were implemented). In addition, there were 25 vertical expansions in 11 countries, and 11 horizontal expansions in 9 countries.

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26 We include CTPs that transferred money both in cash or as vouchers.

27 Our coverage measure sums up the coverage of different CTPs and divides it by the country’s population. Bolivia exceeds the 100% coverage because one person could receive more than one program (being considered different times). Indeed, Bono contra el Hambre (a Bolivian CTP in response to the pandemic) benefited part of the population that received Bono Universal (a previous CTP) among other beneficiaries.

28 Cuba and Nicaragua did not implement a new or expanded CTP in response to the pandemic. However, while Nicaragua did not respond with any other new or expanded social protection measures, Cuba implemented two new wage subsidy programs.
The coverage of these measures — understood as the aggregate number of benefits delivered as a proportion of the population — is equivalent to a quarter of the population in the region (24.6%), although with important variations between countries, in part because not all of them were equally equipped to provide efficient and effective social protection responses.

Launching new programs, expanding the number of beneficiaries from programs already under way, or increasing the amount of cash transferred requires specific information and capacities, which were not present in all countries. Government capacities have been influenced by their experience designing and operating social protection programs, as well as the availability of information about the people it seeks to benefit (Cejudo et al., forthcoming).

Indeed, for the implementation of these responses, the information already available on potential beneficiaries or on payment mechanisms to reach them was crucial. Most countries and programs, and most of the benefits delivered, were based on socioeconomic, administrative, or banking information about beneficiaries that was already available. Indeed, the agile response to the pandemic was made possible by information systems that helped identify beneficiaries with, for example, social records, as well as deliver support, with information on bank accounts or cards in which people already received another program.

Governments needed information to perform two critical functions for the implementation of these interventions: to identify and select people and, in addition, to deliver support to each person identified. Most countries used the available information for these purposes: 27 used prior information to select beneficiaries, while 22 did so to deliver support (in some cases, this use of prior information was supplemented by new information). As a result, most of the people reached were identified using already available information (99.1%) and most payments were done based on existing information about beneficiaries (91.8%). Figure 1 shows countries' coverage and their use of existing (or new) information to identify beneficiaries and deliver the payments.

**Figure 1: Use of Information to Select Beneficiaries and Deliver the Benefit by Coverage Reached**

![Graph showing use of information to select beneficiaries and deliver the benefit by country's population]

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

As this figure shows, to select the beneficiaries, as well as to transfer the benefits, LAC countries made use of information generated before the pandemic to implement their social policy. These countries also innovated in the use of administrative records that, although they were not developed for social policies, contained information on individuals or households (contact, location, banking, employment, or socioeconomic data).
Contrasting National Experiences

There were some countries in which information allowed governments to respond swiftly: they knew who to benefit with a CTP (according to their socioeconomic characteristics) and how to reach them. There were some of them that even automatically benefited their population, such as Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. For example, Costa Rica implemented Subsidio de Emergencia IMAS that reached 17.3% of households in poverty. Beneficiaries of this CTP did not have to apply for it because of the information contained in their social protection information system (SINIRUBE). Similarly, the Dominican Republic implemented Quedate en Casa that benefited people considered in the first, second and third levels of poverty in SIUBEN (the social protection information system), reaching 46.6% of the country’s households.

Likewise, three of the ten CTPs with a higher coverage used social registries (along with other mechanisms) to select beneficiaries: Auxilio Emergencial in Brazil, Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia in Chile, and Bono Familiar Universal in Perú. These countries were prepared for expeditiously responding to the economic effects of the pandemic and previous information enabled rapid and effective responses.

However, not having a good quality social registry did not prevent countries from using previous information to ease their responses. El Salvador and Guatemala used electricity billing records to select beneficiaries of their largest CTPs implemented during the pandemic. Although using these mechanisms could bring some exclusion errors, they allowed to target benefits for the people in need and notify them: based on their electricity consumption, people received a message in their electricity bill indicating the steps to receive the CTP. Other types of information not designed to implement social policy were also helpful. Jamaica used their labor administrative databases to implement a CTP that principally benefited people working in the sectors more affected by the pandemic, while Trinidad and Tobago used its scholar administrative records to reach students to compensate them with a CTP due to the closures that will not allow them to receive school meals. Bolivia combined different sources in different programs to reach as many people as possible: beneficiaries of current CTPs, school records and new information. Other countries implemented their CTPs as usual, with the consequence of creating additional administrative burdens both to people interested in being benefited by a program and to agencies that had to personally go to offices or receive multiple applications with a lot of new information to process. In the Bahamas, people had to send their scanned registry forms along with documents confirming their job loss. In other places, as Guyana, their councils verified in person the socioeconomic condition of potential beneficiaries and authorized officials delivered the support directly to each household.

Finally, there were countries that innovated not only to obtain new information (such as the deployment of apps or specific websites to apply), but in the way they transfer the benefit. Panama implemented a digital voucher linked to the national ID: when paying at registered supermarkets, benefited people give their national ID that was scanned and the charge was made. Other countries such as Belize, Haiti and Uruguay used apps to transfer the benefit, while in Brazil a digital account was made for people without a bank account.
Lessons for the Future of Social Protection

During the pandemic, cash transfers made a difference in how households dealt with the economic effects of the global emergency. As Lustig et al. (2021) simulated, the countries with a greater social protection response would be those with lesser increases in poverty, even reducing it in the case of Auxílio Emergencial in Brazil. The foregoing was confirmed by the Fundação Getulio Vargas (2020), who finds that Auxílio Emergencial managed to move 15 million Brazilians out of poverty. Positive results on food consumption and financial inclusion are also found by Gallego et al. (2021) for the Ingreso Solidario program in Colombia. For Ecuador, Jara et al. (2021) find that the Bono de Protección Familiar program mitigated the effects of the pandemic, especially for poorest households.

By itself, good information does not guarantee effectiveness. Yet, available information opens up possibilities for action. When governments do not have information, their alternatives for interventions are reduced, even when political will and resources are available. For instance, without information about potential recipients, when governments tried to deploy a new program, public servants had to verify the requests from scratch, as in the described programs in the Bahamas and Guyana.

The dramatic expansion of social protection may be stopped by governments once the pandemic is over, but it is crucial to maintain and strengthen the capacity to address both structural and extraordinary problems. As shown in this policy brief, one of the main capacities that enabled governments’ response was information on its current and potential beneficiaries. Based on the responses and the use of information governments did, considering different levels of preparation, it is possible to obtain three important lessons.

- Although the COVID-19 pandemic (and its sheer size) could not be expected, it has shown the critical importance of being prepared to face future emergency events. The region will be tested in the future by the climate crisis, political destabilization, migration crisis, and natural phenomena. Social protection systems must consider this reality and be prepared with information to timely detect problems, but also with a course of action for possible responses: flexible programs that could be expanded or adapted in response to an emergency need to be examined and contemplated in advance, not in the rush of a possible catastrophic event.

- Some of the required information to implement CTPs during the pandemic was previously gathered by governments to deploy regular interventions (such as the one contained in social registries). This practice linked with technological tools (such as apps, SMS or IDs as debit cards) must be continued since it reduces administrative burdens both for beneficiaries and agencies and expands the possibilities of response. Moreover, some governments used information that was not originally designed to implement social protection programs. This use of information allowed them to agilely identify, enroll and transfer the benefits, even in the context of reduced mobility. These countries lacked robust social protection information systems but found a way to start building them: for future interventions, governments do not need to have the ideal social protection information system, but they can use the available information to start building up and improving their CTPs deployment. This information could be the beginning of a path towards a solid social protection information system.
since it creates experience, as well as relevant data resources that are better than working without information (or better than waiting for a perfect social protection information system that could not take place).

Finally, it is not only necessary to build and strengthen better social protection information systems, but to conceive them as a shared responsibility among the different actors to achieve data interoperability and its actual use to inform policy decisions: the task to develop these systems is not the task of only one agency, ministry, or level of government. To sustain these systems over time and despite changes in governments, it is vital to socialize among different agencies its benefits and the importance to maintain a logic of shared responsibility. Regular and future interventions will be facilitated if this logic is in place.

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Rubio, M., Escaroz, G., Machado, A., Palomo, N., Vargas, L., & Cuervo, M.
Policy Brief


Everardo Chiapa Aguillón, Ph.D.29

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic led the state government of Hidalgo, Mexico, to take drastic measures on vehicular mobility, trying to inhibit people's movements and, thus, avoid increased contagion. However, since implementing the measure known as Hoy no circula (No-Driving Day) in the state, there has been an upturn in mobility. The relative failure of the measure is explained from theoretical approaches to groupthink and blame avoidance, framing the government's decisions that led to suboptimal outcomes. A descriptive statistical analysis, using Google's Community Mobility Reports database, shows a comparison of the reduction in mobility in Hidalgo with other states.

Context of an Emergent Policy

Once the federal government in Mexico announced the Jornada de Sana Distancia (Healthy Distance Campaign) in response to COVID-19, a set of prevention measures were put in place. This included basic prevention measures, rescheduling of mass events, suspension of non-essential activities and care for the elderly (Ramirez, 2020). In an unprecedented event in the State of Hidalgo, using an agreement published in the Official Gazette of the State of Hidalgo on 2 May 2020 (and effective as of 4 May), a temporary measure was imposed to reduce vehicular mobility to mitigate the spread and propagation of the SARS-CoV2 virus among the population. The strategy adopted by the Hidalgo state government, commonly known as Hoy No Circula (in allusion to the famous program in the country's capital, which has been in operation since 1989), restricted the circulation of vehicles up to four days per week in the following order:

Table 1: Distribution of Days in the Mobility Restriction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last digit of the license plate</th>
<th>No driving days</th>
<th>Sundays</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Even-numbered</td>
<td>First Sunday of</td>
<td>Monday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odd-numbered</td>
<td>Second Sunday of</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even-numbered</td>
<td>Third Sunday of</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odd-numbered</td>
<td>Fourth Sunday of</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even-numbered</td>
<td>Fifth Sunday of</td>
<td>Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odd-numbered</td>
<td></td>
<td>Saturday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: POEH, 2 May 2020.

The drastic provision resonated with the population, triggering widespread complaints.

29 Guest Researcher, Center for Research and Higher Learning in Social Anthropology, everardo.chiapa@gmail.com
(El Independiente, 1 September 2020). While the state government subsequently announced that *Hoy No Circula* had reduced mobility in Hidalgo, even when the executive’s decisions were not based on sufficient reasons or evidence to ensure it. In addition, surveillance was not strict, but by checkpoints set up on the borders of Pachuca (as the central municipality of the Pachuca Metropolitan Zone). These checkpoints could control access to the municipality, but not mobility within it; in other words, the emergency measure worked to restrict mobility between municipalities. Within them, the citizens’ decision could not be attributed to obedience to the agreement.

**Theoretical Framework**

As an atypical case, *Hoy No Circula* in Hidalgo represents the possibility of analyzing the implications of emerging programs in the face of contingencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The main point here is that not even the most drastic measures are capable of producing convincing results, especially when government decisions have been taken based on suppressing criticism among the group that makes them—and among the population—. This suppression operates, therefore, to prevent dissenting points of view and having a directive leader (Zimbardo 2007), whose figure, in this case, is the governor of the state. Similarly, the decision-makers around *Hoy No Circula* tended to anticipate expected outcomes hastily, even when such outcomes were neither proven nor probable, leaving them in a position of necessarily seeking justification and evading responsibility. Closer to an attempt to make automatic and quick decisions, the state government opted for alternatives that were not the product of complex processes of choice.30

In addition to the risk of fallacy incurred by the government in assuring that its provision had affected the population, after the restriction on vehicle circulation came into force, there was an upturn in mobility. The official argument regarding the effects of *Hoy No Circula* not only lacks logic (due to false attribution) but is false in itself. This situation leads to framing the state government’s decisions in the groupthink theory that explains the phenomenon under analysis. In this sense, there is a set of interrelated assumptions about the government cabinet, as a policy-making group, that has to be taken into account: a) its members act under an illusory logic of invulnerability (Janis, 1973; Barr & Mintz, 2018); b) have a stereotypical view of rival or dissenting opinions by discouraging or ignoring them (Janis, 1973; Coles et al., 2020), and c) are subjected to pressure and self-censorship as “members who protect the group from adverse information that might shatter their shared complacency about the effectiveness and morality of their decisions” (Janis, 1973, p. 21-22).

Almost four decades ago, Irving Janis (1973) explained groupthink as a phenomenon found when group members regard group loyalty as the highest form of morality, avoiding raising controversial issues, questioning weak arguments, or trying to prevent softened thoughts. In this sense, as Hidalgo is a state with political group roots—where government practices have historically been based on unconditional support for the governor’s decisions—support for the governor’s decisions in the face of the pandemic would be guaranteed. In addition, the party tradition within the state intervenes as an element of cohesion among the governor’s support group. Any show of resistance by cabinet members (as a consolidated support group for the governor), especially when the situation before COVID-19 called for prompt action, would mean, in

30 In allusion of two systems of mind referred by Daniel Kahneman (2012).
the sense that Zimbardo (2007) points out, “challenging the groupthink mentality and being able to document all allegations of wrongdoing” (p. 456).

The discussion of Hoy No Circula was far from the public's knowledge. There is no evidence to suggest that it was backed by an expert or empowered bodies in the field, but rather that it went from an unproven idea to the execution of a poorly reasoned mandate. In this sense, and consistent with Janis (1987), the illusion of invulnerability to the dangers arising from risky action was present. Not even the heads of the Executive Secretariat of Public Policy or the Secretariat of Mobility and Transport would rationally be willing to compromise their position as part of the group by contradicting the government's decision. Cabinet members would show unanimity to avoid disparities and provoke a 'black sheep' effect (Dubé and Thiers, 2017).

Importantly, groupthink may not be pervasive in every decision-making process in a state government. Still, it occurs when the group structure and a given situation conform to specific antecedent conditions: a) group cohesion, b) structural faults in the organization, and c) a provocative situational context (Janis and Mann, 1977, in Lee, 2019; Carolan, 2017). In case of decisions around the vehicle restriction measures in Hidalgo, group cohesion is explained by the alignment and homogeneity of thinking among the government cabinet; structural faults are defined by the set of organizational pressures to censor or disapprove disagreement, and the COVID-19 crisis is the provocative situational context, which calls for government interventions.

In addition to groupthink, this analysis incorporates a blame avoidance approach, understood as the evasion of liability for failed outcomes. In this case, the government of Hidalgo would be liable for the adverse consequences of a restrictive measure that has been proven to be invalid. According to Christopher Hood (2011), this blame avoidance shapes the behavior of officials, the architecture of organizations, and their operational routines and policies. The outcome of taking a decision such as Hoy No Circula could represent a political (or blame) risk for the state government; therefore, blame avoidance behaviors, in this case, could have involved anticipating possible outcomes.

The perception of a possible scenario with a worse situation than the one when the government decides to intervene, restricting people's mobility, may not necessarily lead to a pressure to avoid blame or evade responsibility, but rather to gain credit for the situation. When costs are high and benefits are perceived to be low, the politician can do little more than merely adopt and display a stance of opposition to the adverse outcome, for which they receive credit for the decision. Whether decisions are made in one direction or the other, either as credit claimers or blame avoiders, depends on the situations that may generate blame avoidance behavior and the perception of how high or low are the perceived net benefits and costs (Weaver, 1986).

Taking the above to the case of Hoy No Circula, the dynamics of groupthink explain, if anything, the decisional environment in which the state government acted on the mobility restriction (in a moment A), but the anticipation of positive outcomes following the implementation of Hoy No Circula is rather a product of credit claiming behaviour (in a moment B).
Methodology

Trends in reducing mobility in Hidalgo were described in a statistical analysis based on data from Google Community Mobility Reports. For this purpose, the state of San Luis Potosí and Mexico City were used as reference cases. The reasons for choosing the latter for comparison are, in one hand, that there were no traffic restriction measures implemented in San Luis Potosí, a state in the centre of the country (as is Hidalgo). In the other hand, Mexico City was chosen because Hoy No Circula program has been in place for more than three decades, regardless of the presence of the pandemic.

The data collected covers 11 fortnights, from 15 February to 31 July 2020, for mobility levels in Hidalgo, San Luis Potosí, and Mexico City. According to Google's page for mobility data, "the reference value for each day is the average value for the five weeks in January" (between 3 January and 6 February), as there is no baseline as such. From the different datasets showing the variation in the number of visits to certain locations, the categories of "Retail & Recreation" and "Transit Stations" were chosen. The reason for selecting these categories is that attendance at places included in the "Retail & Recreation" category reflects the recurrence of non-essential activities and thus resistance to government measures. The presence of people at public transport stations captures the need for transit for people in general, particularly for people who had to travel for work or other essential reasons.

Results

The analysis indicates that following the announcement of Hoy No Circula, levels of reduced mobility decreased (i.e., an increase in mobility is assumed). This can be seen in Figure 1, which shows the increase in people's mobility for leisure purposes since 4 May. This was reinforced by the federal government on 10 November 2020, when it was said that among 12 other states (out of 32 in total in Mexico), Hidalgo had had "a notable increase in mobility" (Milenio, 20 November 2020). Contagions did not stop and deaths increased, while people did not restrain the need to move freely.

The measure's failure cannot be attributed solely to the unsubstantiated decision of the state government but to behaviors that would naturally be observed as a consequence of the collective mood of disgust with the health measures. Nor can one allege civil disobedience to the governor's orders, since the measure does not seem to have generated sufficient echo in the actions of the citizens. Perhaps it had no influence, either in a positive or negative sense. What can simply be observed is that, contrary to expectations, the mobility of inhabitants was greater than before the measure came into force.

Figure 1: Trend in Levels of Reduced Mobility for Recreational Purposes in Hidalgo Following the Announcement of Hoy No Circula, 2020.

Source: Own elaboration, based on Google Community Mobility Reports.
Note: The “Linear Post HNC” line indicates the smoothing of the leisure mobility decline series by weekly moving averages. The horizontal dashed line represents Google’s reference value. The series “Post HNC Trend” starts on 4 May, the day when the announcement of the mobility restriction in Hidalgo was made. A thick orange line indicates the start of the Healthy Distance Campaign (23 of March). These notes apply to the following two figures.

The same situation is observed in both San Luis Potosí and Mexico City (Figures 2 and 3). This generalised trend shows a similar behaviour, regardless of the measures taken in the states. Hoy No Circula in Hidalgo does not seem to have had any significant effect in reducing mobility. Mexico City, despite the historical experience in implementing such restrictions (but not having to modify the traffic flow provisions), had a more significant decrease in mobility, even though the trend was also increasing from May onwards.

**Figure 2: Trend in Levels of Recreational Mobility Reduction in San Luis Potosí Following the Announcement of Hoy No Circula in Hidalgo, 2020.**

Source: Own elaboration, based on Google Community Mobility Reports.

The calculation for the trend slope of Hidalgo falls between the levels shown by Mexico City and San Luis Potosí. Ordinary least squares were used for estimating the linear trend in the three cases, running a consecutive daily time series with the levels of mobility reduction. The daily mobility reduction series in Hidalgo showed a slope of 0.2538, while for Mexico City and San Luis Potosí it was 0.29122 and 0.25005, respectively. Therefore, it cannot be assured that Hoy No Circula in Hidalgo has had different effects than in other places where there was no contingent measure restricting vehicle traffic.

It is worth noting that it all stems from the fulfilment of conditions that triggered groupthink practices to make decisions that attempted to deal with the health crisis, but without achieving the expected (but not foreseen) results. In other words, the decision to restrict mobility would have been perceived as having a high benefit and a relatively low cost. In this sense, it could be assumed that there would be no way of not incurring the costs of implementing Hoy No Circula if the
credit or gain were expected to overcompensate them.

Conclusions

This paper analyzes the case of the implementation of Hoy No Circula as an atypical measure in the context of COVID-19 restricting vehicle circulation in the state of Hidalgo. The state government's arguments, beyond the optimism shown, do not hold up after the comparison of data showing that Hidalgo did not have a marked difference in the reduction of its mobility after the announcement of Hoy No Circula. On the contrary, a generalised increase in mobility was observed as an adverse result. Based on a groupthink approach, the inefficient decision adopted by the state government was framed, which, far from being based on evidence that it would be a good measure, is assumed to be the result of a dynamic of loyalty and group cohesion among the cabinet. In other words, decisions based on loyalty to the leader of an organization, in this case, the state executive branch, can result in consensus with adverse consequences and inefficient results. The COVID-19 pandemic ultimately triggered the making of these decisions, framed by contextual conditions that caused the presence of vicious group behaviors.

Likewise, the decisions made by the state government of Hidalgo were framed in terms of blame avoidance behaviour. This approach is based on the fact that the government decided to implement Hoy No Circula as an unusual but transcendental measure assuming it would attract the recognition of public opinion. However, the search for recognition would be transformed into strategies of blame avoidance in the face of the effects of a decision that turned out to be counterproductive. The program failed since not only was there no greater decrease in mobility than in other states that did not adopt a measure similar to Hoy No Circula, but it increased since its entry into force.

References


Practitioner Perspectives

COVID-19 as a Public Administration Challenge: How the City of Palmira (Colombia) Implemented a Coordinated Strategy Based on Evidence

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Abstract: Scholarship has discussed the importance of coordination, evidence-based decisions, teamwork, and preparedness for successful public administrations. The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented chaos and instability to governments. In Palmira, a medium-sized city in Colombia, COVID-19 forced the municipality to decide on substantial matters before the national government provided any guidelines. One of the main challenges for public administrators was the lack of preparation and technical information describing the implications of the virus and its evolution. For this reason, it was necessary for the government of Palmira, which had been in office for less than three months when the pandemic started, to establish the required administrative capacity while transmitting its new style of government characterized by active two-way communications with citizens and the use of technological aids.

From a practitioner's perspective, this document describes how Palmira established a coordinated scheme for its cabinet focused on four fundamental aspects: health, economic reactivation, social, and rules compliance. The main contribution of this document is to show how a new government, without the necessary technological resources and information sources, in a city with already many social problems, was able to face the pandemic and be recognized by the national government for its good practices.

Government of Palmira: The Transition to a Transparent and Modern City

Palmira is a medium-sized city in Colombia located in the southwestern part of the country. Most of the inhabitants live in the municipality's urban area and are characterized by a medium-to-low-income level. One of the biggest challenges the city has faced in recent years is insecurity. Its location, strategic for logistics processes, is also attractive for criminal groups, making it one of the cities with the highest homicide rates in the world. When designing and implementing public policies, this combination of inequality and insecurity represents a more significant challenge for local authorities. Furthermore, these social conditions became a challenge when making decisions in response to the pandemic due to its differential implications for the most vulnerable populations.

Colombia is a presidential regime where cities democratically elect their mayors every four years. Mayors in Colombia are the head of the local executive branch and are responsible for political and administrative functions (Avellaneda 2009a, 2009b, 2013). They must

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execute and enforce the normative framework, preserve the public order, administrate the municipalities, and implement national and local policies and programs (Colombian Constitution, 1991). The last local elections were held in October 2019 and resulted in a change in the governing party in Palmira, breaking a 12-year trend. On January 1, 2020, the new government took office. According to campaign statements, this new government sought:

"... a change for Palmira where the Public Administration is at the service of citizens without the need for levers or intermediaries. We will promote an open and participatory government, where the community is the main generator of solutions. We will learn from those who suffer and recognize the most felt and real needs, and we will involve them in the search for solutions. We will connect knowledge with territorial pains. We will deconcentrate the power of the Municipal Administration building, and we will take it to the entire territory." (Escobar, 2019, Page 4)

The change in government was reflected in a renewal of 98% of the municipal cabinet and in the construction of a plan to implement the promises made in the campaign. In addition to this turnover of most of the senior employees, there were two additional aspects. First, a complex transition process did not allow the new government to be informed of ongoing programs and management indicators. On the other hand, the change in the workforce was not only at the senior levels. A large part of the city hall staff changed with the entry of the new government.

COVID-19 in Palmira: When an Advantage Works Against

Since December 2019, we started to see from a distance how a new disease was gaining more and more relevance in China. As had happened previously with SARS in 2003 and H1N1 in 2011, we saw how countries were making decisions hoping that they would stop the disease from reaching them. However, in March 2020, we realized that it was no longer a question of whether the new Sars-CoV-2 virus would arrive, but when and where. One of Palmira's main competitive advantages is its proximity to Colombia's main port on the Pacific and the fact that it has the most important international airport in the southwest of the country. However, at this point, it became a disadvantage. Palmira was one of the first cities with positive COVID-19 cases in the country.

On March 7, 2020, an inhabitant of Palmira that was coming back from Spain became the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the city. Due to the lack of knowledge, the person did not isolate himself, infecting his family group, including a nine-year-old child. As a result, this case became the first outbreak involving one school and a large group of inhabitants. This situation quickly forced Palmira's cabinet to work on strategies to interrupt the chain of contagion. As one of the first cities in the country, even in Latin America, to have confirmed cases of COVID-19, there were no explicit references on the steps to follow. At that moment, Palmira, based on the information provided by the city's health and epidemiology team, decided to cancel in-person classes as an extreme measure to stop the rapid spread of the virus. Hours later, the national government ordered the rest of the mayors to suspend in-person classes until further notice.
COVID-19 Strategy: How to Organize the Government to Face a Significant Challenge in Public Administration

In a short time, Palmira's cabinet went from thinking only about initiating multiple transformations because a new administration had just sworn in into office to facing one of the most relevant public administration challenges of the last decades. Without any prior reference and awareness of the limitations of access to information, we initiated a strategy directly led by the mayor to address the pandemic. In retrospect, it is possible to see today that a special task force was needed to face this new reality. Thus, what at one time was thought to take only a few days or weeks out of public officials' agendas, took up a large percentage of time over the first four months of the pandemic. It was necessary to diagnose the situation and its implications, outline a work plan to respond to the immediate needs, and propose a transition process to resume the life of the people of Palmira.

**Figure 1: Pandemic Response Coordination Plan**

The COVID-19 pandemic is a perfect example of a wicked problem due to its complexity. It could overload public and private systems' institutional capacity and lead to complex dilemmas between public values (Sanabria, 2020). This is the reason why, based on the recommendations of the World Health Organization, we established a plan that considered the coordination of different government levels, as well as areas other than health, such as education, transportation, tourism, public works, economy, agriculture, social protection, and environment (WHO, 2020). In Palmira, we established an intersectoral team in which we addressed different needs of the population and made decisions based on the available data and evidence. It is worth noting that due to the reasons stated above regarding the pandemic nature, the final work scheme resulted from learning by doing lessons. As a result, the final COVID-19 model of attention in Palmira had four sectorial axes (health, economic reactivation, social, and rules compliance) and one cross-cutting axis (see figure 1).

The first axis was health. Palmira had a deficit of ICU beds, which was a worrying situation to face the pandemic. That is why the necessity to expand the capacity of public and private hospitals in the city became a priority. The key actors in this axis were the health secretariat and the municipal hospital. During the four months, we held daily meetings (led by the mayor) to monitor the progress of the disease, the isolation of confirmed cases, and detailed follow-up of plans to expand the hospital's capacity. Palmira's hospital capacity expansion plan resulted in an 85% increase in hospital beds (from 240 to 445 beds) and a 221% increase in ICU beds (from 19 to 61 beds) in a period of four months. In order to achieve this last objective, we obtained resources from the national government and private organizations.
Given the socio-economic conditions of the city mentioned above, the social axis was central to the strategy. The pandemic did not affect us equally; the populations with the greatest needs and who did not have stable income sources could not simply wait for the reopening. For this reason, we began a characterization and aid delivery process to mitigate the negative aspects of the quarantine. The first social problem the city faced at the beginning of the quarantine was food insecurity.

For this reason, after a prioritization process, groceries were delivered to selected households. For this purpose, the social welfare secretariat created a software that allowed citizens to apply for assistance and cross-check the information with the selection criteria. Between March and July 2020, the government (local, regional and national) delivered 24,583 food subsidies using public resources and coordinating aid from private companies.

On the other hand, one of the most affected populations was school students. Since the closure in March, schools have had to continue providing their education virtually. However, in order to guarantee continuous education, the Secretariat of Education had to deliver internet to the schools and students, providing internet to almost 6 thousand students and tablets and laptops. Moreover, the above was reinforced with constant information to principals and teachers who had to adjust their educational schemes to this new reality.

At the same time, the third axis described the team focused on identifying the economic groups affected by the shutdowns to establish reactivation plans following the epidemiological situation in the city. Since April 27, the national government has authorized the opening of some commercial establishments in compliance with specific guidelines and protocols, that municipalities had to oversee and monitor. This opening process was progressive, and only until June 1 did most of the economic sectors were opened. For this reason, initiatives were taken to support businesses such as restaurants, shopping malls, and small businesses. For this, the mayor's office developed a website where companies and workers registered with basic information and uploaded for approval their opening protocols. In less than 24 hours, officials of the Secretariat of Commerce approved these protocols according to the guidelines of the Secretariat of Health. As of July 31, 3,603 companies had been authorized to open, and 2,023 were in process. The authorized companies had almost 43,000 workers. This initiative was accompanied by visits to the establishments and accompaniment with workshops on innovation and strengthening business models and conditions for the opening during the pandemic.

On the other hand, the last axis is control. There was a team focused on enforcing regulations. Although the decisions made by the local and national governments sought the welfare of all, it was not easy for all citizens to comply with the rules. Following national regulations, the municipality and police teams fined 5,123 inhabitants of Palmira, 39 daily violations for non-compliance with curfews, agglomerations, and drinking liquor in public spaces.

Finally, City Hall's back office supported other sectors with the necessary support. In this sense, the legal, planning, finance, human talent, communications, and technology teams focused on enabling the government to continue to function remotely and provide the necessary answers. This transversal axis (see the outer circle in Figure 1) played an important role in decision-making and implementation. These actors allowed the execution of the decisions that were made in
compliance with the style of the new mayor's government: close, innovative, modern, technical, and transparent. As mentioned in some of the previous examples, part of the strategies was based on technology, such as creating websites oriented to special populations or providing internet to schools. On the other hand, communication played a fundamental role, which will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

How to Maintain the Essence of Governance? Evidence-based Decision-Making

One of the main challenges we faced was that we did not have the information we needed to make decisions. Since we were campaigning, we realized that the city needed to modernize its information systems and track its population and programs. In this regard, we also had to push the plans for the first year and make them in the first quarter of the government's term. It was essential to have data on the evolution of the disease: number of cases, the development of positive cases, number of tests, test positivity, hospitalizations, ICU beds, deaths. However, this was not enough for us. We wanted to have information about Palmira's population, the municipality's capacity, and a dashboard to monitor the progress of the disease and the government's efforts.

For this reason, parallel to establishing the first steps of the action plan, the government focused on defining critical indicators for each plan's axis and reporting a daily progress to the mayor's office to have a consolidated dashboard. This process was not easy and required the expertise of the cabinet and its team. For example, the team responsible for the social approach encountered problems with the population databases. For this reason, they had to coordinate with the IT area and develop an application where citizens with specific needs could register their data and thus enter the process to identify whether they were eligible for government assistance. The above was an example of how the actors worked in a coordinated manner to achieve results: the secretariats combined their public policy expertise with the IT area knowledge to develop tools close to the citizens, which allowed them to have reliable data and indicators.

This team effort was essential to measure the evolution of the disease, see which programs were working or had bottlenecks and establish on-time corrective actions when necessary. This information was the primary input for the daily meetings of the work team. It supported the implemented measures according to an informed analysis of what was happening in Palmira. Finally, these data were the primary source of information for coordination with the national and regional governments since it was possible to provide them with a real-time diagnosis. It also facilitated the work with the private sector, which helped citizens and required reliable information to focus their efforts.

Maintaining Constant Communication with Citizens: How to Remain Open During a Pandemic

One of the characteristics of this administration that was the hallmark from day one was the level of clear communication with citizens. A two-way dialogue where the government is accountable to the citizens and tells them its plans, but at the same time listens to what they have to say. It is a government near to the people and characterized by reaching every Palmiran's household. However, at first sight, the nature of the
pandemic did not allow us to continue with that style.

First, the knowledge about Sars-CoV-2 changed rapidly. Medical organizations discover new features every day that cause preliminary information to become unreliable or change. Therefore, we as the government also had many of the citizens' doubts. Especially at the beginning. How is the virus transmitted? Why are some people sicker than others? What should I do if someone close is positive? When should I get tested? These are some of the questions that today have a straightforward answer for most of us but that no one was clear about at the beginning of the pandemic. In times of uncertainty, citizens turn to governments and experts to point them in the right direction in some cases. And yet here we were all in the same situation. Moreover, we were also part of those at-risk citizens worried about getting ill and making our family members sick. Many of the citizens' fears had also been our fears.

The other challenge we faced, resulting from the first, was the amount of fake news that began to be spread around. People searching for certainty believed in different theories, conspiracies, and miracle remedies that were untrue. However, these made our role as government more complex and increased society's level of uncertainty and fear.

Finally, the disease's nature did not allow us to continue with our style of being on the street “shaking people's hands”. We were all locked-up, and the farther the distance, the better. So how could we maintain close communication with the people of Palmira despite these difficulties? We quickly became aware of the importance of keeping fluid and constant contact. The longer we let time pass between official communication, the greater the
city turn the downtown area and the public marketplace into some of the areas with the highest traffic of citizens, especially the elderly. In this sense, we recognized a possible risk and developed a strategy that focused on providing information to citizens by using appealing characters. On the other hand, we reinforced the concept of social distance and the use of the mask using signs that congratulated or called people’s attention, depending on their behaviour. Finally, we made markings in the streets and pedestrian spaces to reinforce the message of social distance. These behavioral science-inspired actions, which were adjusted based on experiences from other cities, allowed for a friendlier and more communicative approach to implementing the national government’s rules. These strategies aimed to show citizens that complying with the regulations was an obligation as citizens and a way to take care of ourselves as a society. A similar approach was taken in the city’s central marketplace.

Conclusions and Takeaways

Today after two years, we can see that the described roadmap worked for us in Palmira. We were recognized on different occasions by the president of Colombia, and we were also able to control and avoid different scenarios that sadly happened in other cities. Although we had peaks of the pandemic, and hospital capacity has been stressed to the limits, no people had died for lack of attention, and we were able to leave some improvements in the health sector required decades ago. The national government acknowledged the scheme of work since we were able to implement measures that took more time to implement in other cities, as in the case of selective isolation of confirmed cases of COVID-19 with follow-up from the municipal government. Palmira’s experience was taken as a national pilot and later extended to the rest of the cities. This shows that although the town had critical behaviors in terms of infection indicators compared to the national average, the ICU occupancy rate during these first months did not exceed 80%. On the other hand, as the disease evolved, the local government transformed the strategy into mass vaccination plans and one of the first cities in the country to have in-person classes.

The main lessons learned from this experience are 1. communication is fundamental. The only way to know what inhabitants were concerned about was to open two-way and multichannel communication mechanisms to be able to explain the policies and receive constant feedback. For this purpose, different strategies were used, such as websites, social networks, public employees in the streets, and telephone lines. Technology helped in this proximity process. 2. In such uncertainty and with populations in economic need, prevention cannot rely solely on control. Although the mayor’s office had the legal obligation to
enforce the national law, we implemented accompaniment, training, and awareness-raising strategies. This allows for a balanced approach from the government. 3. When quick and sometimes difficult decisions must be made, it is important to form a team that is led by the head of the organization. This shows the issue's relevancy and, at the same time, provides the necessary coordination to get the job done. A transparent and explicit scheme, with responsible people acting as policy brokers, allows overcoming the limitations that may hinder the implementation of public decisions.

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