

# John Gaus Award Essay 2021: Public Administration and the War Against Covid

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**Abstract:** This essay based on the 2021 Gaus Award APSA lecture reflects on the governance, politics and public administration of the Covid pandemic. It comments on how governments have responded to the pandemic by deploying the whole range of available policy implementation tools, going well beyond the 'nudge' approach of low-cost and low-compulsion ways of shaping behaviour, and by putting more emphasis on a blame-sharing war-room style of 'dashboard government' than the quasi-contractual blame-shifting arms-length agency model associated with the 'New Public Management' era. Further, it discusses how the pandemic itself may shape future politics and public administration, identifying the possibility of 'encores and carryovers' of the Covid response style in future pandemics or similar high-stakes emergencies, the likely retrospective politics of credit and blame over the handling of the pandemic, and the near-certainty of future fiscal stress as future governments work with accumulated public debt at post twentieth-century World War levels.

**Keywords:** Covid, pandemic, dashboard government, tools of government, blame avoidance, risk

## **1. Introduction: The Gaus Award, the Gaus Lecture and Its Changing Ecology**

I'm not sure if surprise, delight or gratitude best describe my feelings about receiving this great honour. I experienced all of those emotions in full measure. So I must begin by sincerely thanking the APSA Public Administration section for conferring the 2021 Gaus award on me, and by saying how much it means to me. Looking at the list of Gaus award winners over the years, I am indeed awed to be included in their number. That's because there are so many names whose work I have deeply admired and some whom I have known quite well. Just three examples are George Frederickson, Vincent Ostrom and Aaron Wildavsky, all of whom were extraordinarily kind and generous to me and greatly influenced my work. I only wish they were still around so that I could thank them for all they did for me. The same goes for other now departed mentors, such as Mary Douglas, Andrew Dunsire and Bill Mackenzie, just to mention a few.

I first came across the work of the great John Merriman Gaus over fifty years ago when I was a young and diffident graduate student in Glasgow, Scotland, working on a thesis on the development of betting taxes under the supervision of W.J.M. (Bill) Mackenzie. Like most graduate students then and now, I struggled with the framing of my study, and Bill Mackenzie recommended John Gaus's work to me. Gaus's (1947: 8-9) ecological approach to public administration (his insistence that public administration needs to be studied literally from the ground up) made a big impression on me and prompted me to look for the ecological conditions for the tax state. I used it to introduce a key chapter in my first book (Hood 1976: 54), developed it as 'habitat' in an analysis of public policy reversals in the 1980s (Hood 1994) and later applied it to an analysis of the prospects for the tax state in the twenty-first century (Hood 2003).

Indeed, the ecology of the Gaus lecture itself has been notably transformed over the past two years, as a result of the Covid pandemic. Customarily it was delivered in person at the annual APSA meeting and accompanied by a reception providing a convenient networking opportunity for public administration academics. But Covid suddenly changed all that. I would have given a lot to be in the APSA 2021 meeting venue in Seattle in person for that very big day in my professional life. But in-person attendance was impossible due to the Presidential proclamation restricting non-essential travel from countries including the UK to the United States at that time. So my Gaus talk had perforce to be yet another Powerpoint presentation to be delivered online over Zoom - at 10 pm UK local time from the kitchen table of our two-room apartment in a gritty inner-city area of north-west London beside the Kilburn High Road.

As a further sign of the times I might add that in the past two years that Kilburn High Road itself has seen one of the more extraordinary times since it was remodelled into a standard-issue Roman road nearly two millennia ago in the days when the Romans ruled most of Britain. This relic of the Roman Empire is still one of the main routes in and out of north-west London. It is a byword for traffic congestion and pollution, usually chock-full of people of all kinds on the sidewalks and an endless procession of vehicles grinding up and down

from stop light to stop light day and night. But in the last week of March 2020 there were suddenly times when you could walk right down the middle of that road and have it completely to yourself, with no traffic and no people in sight at all. An ominous, eerie feeling in a city with a population of 8 million, roughly the size of New York.

So what was going on? Well, the first Covid lockdown was going on, or just getting going, as it turned out. It was a completely new experience for most people and indeed the very word 'lockdown' was only just beginning to come into general currency. And that first lockdown was part of many big and unexpected changes in everyday life which took globalisation to a new level in some ways as Covid spread round the planet and people all over the world (the developed world anyway) embarked on what was to be a new life of Zoom meetings at their kitchen tables. But along with that went a strong element of de-globalisation as well, as borders shut, travel stopped and just-in-time international supply chains broke.

Against the background of that remarkable change in the ecology of both academic and practitioner public administration over the recent past, there could only be one topic for the 2021 Gaus lecture. It had to offer some reflections on the governance, politics and public administration of Covid, which has been (and at the time of writing continues as) an episode comparable with some major wars in terms of its fiscal impact on the level of accumulated public debt, of numbers of civilian lives lost and of the degree of government intervention into intimate details of everyday social life. What follows is therefore not an orthodox research paper but rather an essay about the Covid experience written from a public administration perspective and mixing retrospective and prospective observation. What historical precedents are there for the Covid episode? What variations have there been in the ways that different states have tackled the pandemic? And what longer-term legacy effects can such an episode be expected to leave behind in politics and public administration?

## **2. Covid and Public Administration in Historical Perspective: Styles of Intervention and Legacy Effects**

Dealing with epidemic disease among animals, people or both is a long-standing function of the state, involving a type of classic 'public bad' whose spillover effects challenge simple doctrines of liberalism and is often associated with draconian intervention measures even in government regimes not normally classed as authoritarian. For example, in my own country tens of thousands of cattle and some other animals have been compulsorily slaughtered by government vets in recent years in an effort to control bovine tuberculosis, and indeed two decades or so ago when the BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis or 'mad cow disease') epidemic was at its height the British cabinet in desperation is said at one point to have seriously discussed the possibility of killing all 12 million or so cattle in the UK: as it was, over 3 million were killed (Beck, Kewell and Asenova 2007). From leprosy and typhoid to HIV/AIDS, BSE/CJD, SARS and Ebola, disease control challenges state capacity in every age. As a pandemic, Covid is huge beside most of those other examples in terms of the human death toll to date. But it is far smaller than HIV/AIDS and the so-called 'Spanish flu' (A/H1N1) pandemic that began towards the end of World War I is estimated to have had a death toll

some ten times that of Covid to date, even though its severity was underplayed by governments for political reasons at the time (Killingray and Phillips 2003).

Indeed, for those seeking for historical antecedents and analogies there is a rich historical literature on the subject of government and disease. One notable contribution is Peter Baldwin's (1999) remarkable *Contagion and the State*, which traces out what happened in four European states (France, Sweden, Britain and the German states, later unified into the German Empire) exposed to three types of mass killer disease (cholera, smallpox and syphilis) over the century from 1830 to 1930. In a careful and nuanced study published some two decades after the first recorded instances of the HIV-AIDs virus, Baldwin poses two basic questions that are just as applicable to Covid today.

One of those questions relates to how governments approach epidemics – what mixture of policy tools or instruments they use to suppress, mitigate or manage the threat, how common or variable those approaches are, and what accounts for variations in response to the same disease in different political systems. For instance, Baldwin notes that Sweden introduced general compulsion for vaccination in 1816, quite soon after vaccination emerged as an effective prophylactic for smallpox, while Prussia did not do so until over half a century later, under the 1874 Imperial law for unified Germany (Baldwin 1999: 261). Other countries went instead for indirect or selective compulsion, for example in making vaccination a condition for appointments to the military or civil service or for admission to schools (raising issues similar to today's hotly-contested debates over Covid 'vaccine passport' schemes for entry to specific jobs or places as an alternative to general lockdowns). The intellectual task prompted by Baldwin's first question is that of describing and tracking commonalities and variations in policy responses over time and place to explore how far those responses are explicable as the result of different worldviews or ideologies as against more technical or objective features (such as geographical position in the world's major virus transmission routes).

Baldwin's other question concerns how states and their politics were in turn shaped by their experience with coping with disease, and by how they were exposed to contagion. How did such experience shape later developments and the operation of states themselves through administrative path-dependency – routines that were adapted to deal with subsequent disease outbreaks, such as Sweden's nineteenth century compulsory-treatment approach to syphilis which re-emerged a century later in the era of HIV/AIDs?

For the current war against Covid, there is already plenty of high-level research effort going into tracking policies and responses around the world, for example in the excellent 'Our World in Data' Coronavirus website (<https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus>) that tracks the incidence of infections, testing, vaccination, mortality and government policies. Its account of the latter includes travel restrictions, school and workplace closures, cancellations of public facilities and gatherings, stay-at-home restrictions, face covering policies, public information campaigns and an overall 'government stringency index.'

The experience tracked by such analysis links to several important issues for those of us looking at it from a public administration and political science perspective. How do the

health outcomes reported in 'Our World in Data' relate to features of government (such as levels of centralisation, perceived corruption or authoritarianism in the various comparative quality-of-governance rankings) and the types of policy instruments employed? Do the biggest spenders achieve the best health outcomes or is efficacy more subtle than that? How does incumbents' electoral success or otherwise relate to performance on those indicators? What political challenges are involved in handling the Covid episode while it lasts as an acute threat, for example in response to non-compliance and organised resistance to restrictions or obligations? And what political challenges can be expected in a probable aftermath in which governments grapple with public debt at post-twentieth century-World-War levels, along with recriminations about how Covid was handled in the past and sharply conflicting visions of what the post-Covid political future should be like? This is not the place for a systematic or definitive answer to those questions but we can at least identify some of the issues.

### **3. Covid Decision-Making: Dashboard Government, Risk and Blame Management**

The battle against a newly emerging pandemic such as Covid resembles warfare in that (as Clausewitz (1968, Book 1, Chapter 7) said of war), 'the simplest things become difficult' when top decision-makers, front-line respondents and other coping forces are themselves disabled by the emergency they are intended to manage. It is hard to specify a stable response strategy or set of targets when a disease is mutating, knowledge about it keeps changing, the environment alters and weak links are successively being exposed in interconnected systems (such as supply, energy, food production). Further, different policy goals clash with one another as governments aim to limit or reduce infection (or even to eliminate the virus altogether as some governments have aimed to do, as in China), notably concerns to avoid health care system collapse on the one hand and on the other to keep the economy going to an extent sufficient to avoid mass destitution. Nor do the hard choices end there. Other balancing issues concern whether governments should follow or try to lead public opinion, and where priorities should lie in conditions where protecting physical health comes into conflict with protecting mental health, for example over lockdown requirements.

That sort of environment makes *resilience* (endurance in an unstable context) and the associated qualities of reliability, adaptivity and robustness the dominant consideration in public policy and management (Hood and Jackson 1990: 14). Such conditions do not lend themselves readily to the sort of vision of arms-length government by discrete agencies pursuing separate and relatively stable objectives expressed in quasi-contractual terms that provided much of the inspiration for the New Public Management approach of the 1980s and 1990s. Rather, it has tended to elicit a war-room style that might loosely be called 'dashboard government.' By that term is meant a process of decision-making and co-ordination within executive government that consists of a frequent or semi-continuous conversation between decision-makers, heads of different government agencies and various scientific experts over policy settings, against a background of high-consequence numbers changing in real time. But in contrast to wartime conditions, those key policy numbers –

rates of infection, testing, mortality, vaccination, hospitalisation – have been in the public domain (albeit with degrees of error that have to be interpreted).

Dashboard government in that sense is not new either in theory or practice. Over fifty years ago Stafford Beer (1966) spelt out the cybernetic logic of data-rich governance with high-variety feedback systems, inspired in that case by the contribution of operational research and similar analyses to military developments in World War II. In similar vein, Andrew Dunsire (1978 and 1996) coined the term ‘collibration’ to denote the ability to balance contradictory maximands as a – arguably *the* – key method of controlling complex bureaucratic institutions in modern societies. Such control more closely resembles the working of a nervous system (by selectively suppressing contradictory pressures) than the operation of a thermostat, and in principle it makes fewer demands on the controllers’ cognitive rationality without violating Ross Ashby’s (1956) ‘law of requisite variety’ (the idea that variety in a cybernetic sense can only be controlled by equivalent variety). Somewhat similar ideas about selective suppression of adversarial rationality and knowledge appeared in the risk management literature in the 1990s and 2000s (for example Hood 1996).

In contrast to those relatively technocratic or engineering-style approaches, dashboard government can also be viewed through the more squarely political-science lens of credit-claiming and blame-avoidance (Weaver 1986; Hood 2011). Seen from that perspective, dashboard government presents opportunities to incumbent political leaders or parties to share blame with other authorities in conditions when blame is hard to shift by means such as delegation of responsibility to autonomous entities, ‘automatic government’ through reliance on non-discretionary formulae (Weaver 1988) or inertia politics through persistence with inherited measures enacted by other players (Rose and Karran 1987). Those alternative approaches do not seem to offer more than limited scope for blame management over the handling of a new pandemic of once-in-a-century proportions, and what is arguably the other main alternative for political blame-sharing – grand (all-party) coalitions of one sort or another – has been a surprisingly rare response to Covid to date, paralleling earlier patterns over fiscal squeezes and welfare cutbacks (Pierson 1994).

#### **4. Handling Covid: Implementation Tools.**

At least across the developed world, biomedical responses to Covid have included assembling medical and other personnel to test, track and treat individuals at high volumes, along with a set of facilities, equipment, vaccines and legal powers. Such a task would be a hard logistical operation at any time and is made yet more challenging by a combination of time pressure, global shortages of necessary materials and concerns to limit the exposure of workers and their families to infection.

But handling the pandemic in most cases has gone much further than that biomedical response, to involve policy resets and changes in delivery across the whole range of policy and public services, from the operation of nursery schools to border controls, justice systems and prisons. Indeed, Covid responses not only go across policy domains but in most developed countries have also brought the whole range of government’s implementation tools into play – however we choose to conceive that range, for instance in terms of the

different organisational forms available (Saloman and Elliott 2002) or in terms of more generic forms of intervention such as ‘carrots, sticks and sermons’ (Bernelmans-Videc, Rist and Vedung 1998).

Table 1 illustrates the point by characterising government responses to Covid in terms of my own four-part typology comprising ‘nodality’, ‘authority’, ‘treasure’ and ‘organisation’ (‘NATO’) – a scheme originally developed at the University of Bielefeld in Germany some forty years ago (Hood 1983); and later adapted with Helen Margetts for developments in the digital age (Hood and Margetts 2007). The four elements are intended to denote basic resources that governments can draw on to implement their chosen policies – namely by the sort of information they send and pick up, by their various legal, official or semi-official acts, by their dealings in money or equivalents and by the physical operations or treatment of various kinds that they can perform. As Table 1 shows, applications of all four types can readily be observed in responses to Covid but each of those policy tools has its limits and governments vary in their ability to deploy them.

#### TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

For example *nodality*, the extent to which government is effectively linked into social information networks, depends at minimum on government – literally or metaphorically - using the same language or languages as the rest of society. That condition is rarely met in full and in some societies there is a dramatic gulf between the two (for instance in those African countries whose governments operate in inherited colonial languages like French and English rather than the languages spoken on the street). In such circumstances there are obvious challenges for governments’ ability to get across key messages at a very basic level, let alone more elaborate applications of nodality such as tracing contacts and movements by linking up with social networks.

The same goes for the extent to which governments possess *authority*, in the sense of the ability to forbid, permit or require – the exercise of the ‘public power’ of the state, going beyond obligations that can be imposed through civil law (in contracts, wills and the like). Possession of that power is a defining feature of the state, but the efficacy of this instrument obviously depends not only on official enactments but on the degree of ‘compliance culture’ in the society or in key groups within it.

Richard Thaler and Cass Sustein’s (2008) famous ‘nudge’ approach to governance through low-cost and minimal interventions to frame choice architecture in principle offers an alternative or supplement to heavy-handed uses of authority and it has played some part in Covid responses, in that behavioural scientists have contributed to debates over policy. But ‘nudge’ responses for Thaler and Sunstein are defined as low cost, minimal interventions that do not restrict options or change economic incentives. Many state responses to Covid have gone far beyond that libertarian approach to resemble something more like a powerful shove than a gentle nudge, with extra formal restraints concerning where to go (travel bans, sequestration and self-isolation requirement) what to wear (masks, PPE), what to do (compulsory closure of schools, businesses and places of worship), who to see or even live with (restrictions on household mixing) and how to relate to others in public (social

distancing). An emblematic example of the authority approach is the *attestation de déplacement* forms that people in France have been obliged to fill out during periods of lockdown, even for the briefest departure from their homes to take a dog for a walk.

Third, the amount of *treasure* at government's command (access to money or equivalents) is what determines its ability to purchase supplies or services of any kind and to go beyond 'nudge' to provide material incentives to shape behaviour in the form of cash or near-substitutes (such as vouchers, pledges, tax credits). Governments have dug deep into their pockets in response to Covid, mainly to fund high-cost subsidies and health measures in the same way that the United States funded its post-9/11 wars, namely by borrowing on an immense scale. Indeed, the UK government used 'treasure' not only to underpin lockdown requirements (by compensating employers for keeping their staff on furlough when not able to work, at a cost of about \$100bn over 2020-2021), but to induce people to come out of lockdown as well, with government 'Eat Out to Help Out' subsidies of individuals' café or restaurant bills up to a certain amount on specified weekdays in August 2020 as a stimulus to the hard-hit hospitality sector.

Fourth, *organisation* or treatment reflects government's own logistical capacity to mount operations involving some sort of physical production or control, whether undertaken alone or in combination with other actors. Within the military, this sort of capacity is provided by specialties such as engineering or logistics (the all-important ability to move objects and people around the earth's surface to fit in with battle plans). Indeed, the UK government used the military as part of its Covid responses, for example to build emergency 'Nightingale' hospitals for Covid victims early in the pandemic and later for tasks such as distribution of supplies hit by fuel tanker driver shortages. Other Covid responses drawing on government's capacity for 'organisation' or treatment in that sense include the provision and operation of quarantine, testing and vaccination centres, and the operation of internal and external border controls.

The deployment of that whole array of government policy instruments in the Covid era raises issues familiar in policy implementation studies. Commonly it is the way that policy instruments work together in combination – or not – that matters for policy outcomes. For instance, since 'no contemporary tyrant...can govern by mere fiat,' as James Meisel (1966: 203) put it, the level of compliance with authority (such as obligations to self-isolate) is likely to depend on what other policy instruments are in play (such as treasure in the form of financial compensation for those unable to work).

Similarly, the take-up resulting from the provision of medical staff and facilities such as testing or vaccination is likely to be enhanced by government's ability to use nodality to link effectively with informal social networks – 'soft' social factors whose critical importance is shown by studies such as Sabine Franklin's (2019) research into the handling of the 2014 Ebola epidemic in Liberia and Sierra Leone. And the Chinese government's legendary tracking and tracing system (linking QR code touch-in systems for smartphones as individuals enter apartment buildings, shops, workplaces or public transportation, and putting that information together with geographical location data to identify exposure to infection) represents a striking combination of nodality and authority. The nodality comes



from the state's links to mobile phone networks, something also reflected in similar apps in other countries, but in the Chinese case combined with authority in the form of compulsion to register all SIM cards on purchase to a single individual producing identity documents. It is the combination of the two instruments that determines the result. Samuel Finer (1950: 18) once put coordination first in a list of 'problems' in executive government and it could perhaps equally be said that the importance of effective combination of different policy instruments is highlighted by the challenge of the Covid pandemic.

#### TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Again, the preceding discussion has been somewhat technocratic in tone, but the choice of policy instruments is rarely if ever a purely technical matter. Politics and culture shape those choices too. Indeed, Peter Baldwin (1999) in his historical comparison of four European states dealing with contagion as mentioned earlier, takes as his point of departure the work of the eminent medical historian Erwin Ackerknecht dating from the 1940s. Ackerknecht (1948) meticulously traced nineteenth century European scientific debates between 'contagionists,' focusing on three mass killer diseases of that time, namely plague, yellow fever and cholera. 'Contagionist' theories of the origins of those diseases supported 'quarantinism' (state efforts intended to stop the spread of disease by identifying and isolating human carriers in one way or another), while 'anti-contagionist' views saw 'filth' as what accounted for the spread of such diseases and supported more 'environmental' approaches to the problem, focusing on changes such as improving housing conditions or by constructing urban sewers or parkland cemeteries to reduce risks posed by contaminated water or insanitary burial grounds. Ackerknecht showed that politics and economics were intertwined with scientific debates over these matters, in that contagionist theories of the spread of the 'big three' killers tended to serve landowning interests and were mostly advanced by physicians in high positions in the military or the civil service. By contrast the anti-contagionist position supported other commercial interests and most of the leading scientists and physicians who advanced it were radicals or liberals from bourgeois backgrounds who explicitly used political and economic arguments in attacking quarantinism. Both sides relied on observation rather than experimental data, with each side picking 'a set of more or less true facts that confirmed their theory, leaving out another set of equally true, but incompatible facts' for their opponents to present as proof of their rival theory (Ackerknecht 1948). There are some parallels here with those policy debates over Covid that were necessarily based on limited observations of developments, when systematic experimental data has not been available.

Ackerknecht's analysis of those nineteenth century debates is intriguing in the way it links etiology, prophylaxis and politics. But Baldwin's study of four European states tackling three diseases did not reveal a simple pattern in which the more liberal states of that time invariably followed an anti-quarantinist path while those of a more authoritarian type espoused quarantinism. One of the complications that Baldwin notes is that the balance of 'quarantinism' relative to 'environmentalism' may reflect level of development as much as political ideology or outlook. In so far as 'liberal' responses depend heavily on treasure and organisation, less developed countries by definition have less capacity to deploy those

instruments whatever the political bias of their governments may be. In such conditions, reliance on authority as a policy tool in pursuit of quarantinist efforts to break chains of infection may simply reflect a lack of practical alternatives.

A further complication is the question of where reliance on vaccination or testing is to be placed on the spectrum of authoritarianism or liberalism. Vaccination in particular cuts across quarantinist and environmental approaches to limiting contagion, and much appears to depend on the degree of formal or *de facto* compulsion involved in vaccination. After all, simply providing of testing or vaccination facilities or opportunities, on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, in principle offers choice without compulsion. And government can encourage, advise or nudge in favour of vaccination without making it obligatory. The question is, at what point does vaccination or testing become compulsory in practice: when people cannot work in their chosen profession without it, cannot access educational facilities, cannot legally cross borders?

Moreover, present-day government responses to Covid do not readily seem to fit a pattern in which liberal democracies emphasise individual choice and environmental measures while more authoritarian states put more stress on compulsion and quarantinism. Some states ordinarily scored as liberal democracies, such as New Zealand and Australia, have strongly emphasised quarantinist approaches with border closures, lockdowns and isolation requirements intended to eliminate the virus, with clear majority support from public opinion. And in the group of states ordinarily considered as more authoritarian, there is a striking difference between (for example) the relatively laissez-faire approach of Brazil's federal government under Jair Bolsonaro over matters such as social distancing and lockdowns and (in a very different sort of authoritarian state) China's zero-Covid policy approach accompanied by centralised quarantine, restrictions on travel, mass testing and strict localised lockdowns triggered at low infection levels, in addition to the tracking and tracing machinery that has already been referred to.

## **5. Legacy Effects: How Might Covid Reshape the State?**

The other major question posed by Peter Baldwin's study concerns what the experience of dealing with contagious and infectious disease leaves behind it, and how it may shape politics and the operating style of states dealing with subsequent epidemics or similar policy challenges. Table 2 sketches out three possible effects that the Covid experience might have on today's states.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

First, *encores and carryovers*.

The Covid-handling experience can be expected to carry over into government and politics in post-Covid times in several ways, most clearly if another major pandemic follows closely on the heels of Covid, but possibly also in the event of other high-stakes problems or catastrophes involving complex modelling, data analysis and uncertainty over the science combined with drastic applications of the government policy tool-set. And it seems likely that the political, bureaucratic and scientific players who are seen to have had 'a good

Covid' will take forward their reputations, networks, and operating styles into the handling of other or future challenges.

In principle, too, the 'dashboard government' element of Covid responses could be replicated in response to non-pandemic issues such as climate and CO<sub>2</sub> policy. A possible parallel could be drawn with the development of program budgeting (PPBS in the United States federal government, which is said to have originated in the War Production Board's Controlled Material Plan in World War II (Hirsch 1966: 259). But as the fate of peacetime PPBS perhaps illustrates, when circumstances change and there is no longer an exclusive focus on one overriding goal (like military victory or taming a pandemic), dealing with major issues that are chronic but not acute in the same way may turn out to bring different operating methods – and people – to the fore in government. People of 'push and go' (a term coined in 1915 by David Lloyd George as UK Minister of Munitions to refer to able young business executives he brought into government to find ways of speeding up the supply of military materiel for the Western front in the early days of World War I) who specialise in cutting bureaucratic corners and bypassing procedural constraints may be less successful in grappling with post-crisis conditions.

A second inevitable legacy of the Covid episode noted in Table 2 is that of *blame and credit*, expressed through channels including the ballot box, opinion polls, media, litigation and forensic investigations. Here again parallels can be drawn with conduct of warfare, in that credit and blame opportunities are likely to arise not only over the handling of the pandemic itself – for instance over avoidable deaths caused by moving patients with Covid from hospitals to care homes early in the pandemic to free up hospital beds or avoidable deaths of medical staff caused by lack of adequate protective clothing - but also over expectations or promises made about the post-Covid world. Like the twentieth-century world wars, the Covid era has produced various and conflicting visions of where government and public policy should go after the pandemic, ranging from getting back to the 'old normal' as far and fast as possible to various conceptions of what a 'new normal' should look like.

As already noted, grand all-party-coalition approaches to sharing blame over the handling of Covid have not been widespread. Some incumbents have come to grief (such as Japanese Prime Minister who announced his intention to stand down after record low approval ratings for holding the Tokyo Olympic Games during the pandemic) while others have gained credit for their handling of Covid (notably Jacinda Ardern's Labour party in New Zealand with its landslide re-election in 2020). And opposition parties have had to tread cautiously, criticising incumbents for incompetence while avoiding the counter-charge of negativity and of undermining governments in their efforts to defeat the pandemic.

Such inhibitions can be expected to disappear in a post-Covid era, when pressure is more likely to grow for forensic inquiries, litigation, claims for compensation over avoidable deaths or disappointment over post-Covid conditions, for example in tax levels. In 1948, responding to criticisms about high level deals struck among the allied leaders in World War II to re-draw the borders of Poland, the UK's wartime leader Winston Churchill (by then in opposition) famously remarked that it would be best 'to leave the past to history, especially

as I propose to write that history myself' (House of Commons Debates 1948 Vol 446, c.557). But that approach to handling blame is not always available.

A third post-Covid legacy issue for governments, overlapping with that of blame and credit is the management of *debt and fiscal stress*.

If, as Benjamin Franklin said, nothing in life is certain but death and taxes, one wholly predictable feature of government post (peak) Covid that has already been noted is that it will operate with public debt at post-twentieth century World War levels. The question then arises as to how that debt is to be managed, with what effect on taxes and public spending and which of the post-twentieth-century World War experiences the fiscal aftermath of Covid is more likely to resemble. Without venturing into technical economic issues, three comments can be made from a public administration/political science perspective.

First, in contrast to Adam Smith's expectation that levels of government spending normally fell back sharply after wars, Alan Peacock and Jack Wiseman (1961) observed a peak-and-rising-plateau pattern in the UK, with spending falling back from its wartime peaks after each of the two twentieth-century World Wars but remaining higher than the pre-war levels mainly as a result of extensions of the welfare state (they summed up the pattern as meaning 'it is harder to get the saddle on the horse than to keep it there'). The question then arises as to whether the post-Covid public spending pattern will more closely resemble the aftermath of the eighteenth-century wars on which Adam Smith based his observations or that of the twentieth century ones observed by Peacock and Wiseman.

Second, after both of the twentieth century wars in the UK, influential economists like Maynard Keynes argued that taxes needed to be kept high, in part to pay for post-war reconstruction efforts. But in both cases the voters decided otherwise, by electoral choices in support of tax reductions, which in turn meant recurring efforts to squeeze public spending or restrain its growth relative to GDP (Hood and Himaz 2017). The question that arises here is whether or how much tolerance of higher taxes to support higher government spending can be expected in the post-Covid world. The bulk of revenue in many developed countries comes from a small number of mass taxes (income taxes, social security taxes, sales taxes), all of which inevitably bite on middle-income voters, and tax innovation presents a long-term twenty-first century challenge (Hood 2003).

So how much scope there is for higher expenditure given those tax challenges depends on a third question, namely how much of that Covid debt incurred by governments will actually turn out to be repaid and on what terms. After all, the fiscal aftermath of World War I included substantial debt forgiveness, in the form of greatly extended maturity dates in the 1920s followed by the 1934 general default on war-related debt by France, Greece and Italy, (amounting to 36%, 43% and 52% respectively of 1934 GDP, according to Carmen Reinhart and Christoph Trebesch (2014)) against a background of trade wars, currency pressures and a deep global recession.

## **6. A Concluding Remark**

The Covid pandemic represents a change in the ecology of public administration that has tested systems of governance around the world and called into play the whole range of policy implementation tools. Whether the style of 'dashboard government' for the pandemic Covid survives seems likely to be depend on whether Covid is followed or accompanied by further acute threats to social resilience. In terms of blame and credit, it has already played a part in election outcomes, with some incumbents benefiting and others damaged from their handling of Covid, though arguably much of the post-Covid blame game has yet to begin. But given the way Covid responses have been financed to date – mostly debt, not much taxes - fiscal squeeze on the tax and/or spending side looks like a certainty for the 2020s.

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**Table 1: Covid and Four Basic Instruments of Government: How Effective Organisation Matters**

<b>Policy tool or instrument</b>	<b>Key feature</b>	<b>Application to Covid or equivalent</b>	<b>Limits</b>	<b>Implications/Comment</b>
'Nodality'	Government's place in information networks	Provision of credible information, & partnering in information sharing across society	Extent of public willingness to share information with government	Governments with high legitimacy and/or skill in inserting themselves into digital networks are most likely to be able to put stress on nodality as a tool
'Authority'	Government's effective ability to permit, prohibit, command & punish	Official requirements & constraints over issues like PPE, social distance, hygiene, isolation	Extent of public disposition to comply with laws regulations guidelines & standards	Governments in united societies with high levels of citizen compliance (voluntary or otherwise) are most likely to be able to put stress on authority as a tool
'Treasure'	Government's use of cash or equivalent resources to shape behaviour	Government subsidies such as furlough payments & commissions to provide goods/services	Extent of government fiscal power - to borrow, tax, attract aid, print money	Governments with ready access to tax handles in higher-income societies have the greatest ability to put stress on treasure as a tool
'Organisation' or Treatment	Government's ability to shape behaviour by logistical operations or production activity	Direct/indirect construction or operation of facilities like test & vaccine units or emergency hospitals	Extent of government ability to mobilize, deliver, process & produce	Governments with the highest managerial competence are most likely to be able to put stress on organisation as a tool



**Table 2: Legacies: Three Types of Possible Post-Covid After Effects**

Possible Legacy Effect	Some Specifics	Comment
<b>Encores and Carryovers</b>	‘Dashboard government’ policy style (involving trade-offs made in or around high policy forums against uncertain and changing target numbers); some policy-entrepreneurial ‘good war’ careers and reputations (as well as failures) likely to affect post-Covid careers; likely recurrence of specific policy routines such as lockdowns or tracking systems	Obvious potential carry-over to other policy applications involving changes in mass behaviour, such as CO <sub>2</sub> reduction/removal programmes. But what works in sudden emergency conditions (with palpable risks of collapse of health care provision) does not always fit other contexts, and the same goes for ‘fighting the last war’ policy responses
<b>Blame (and Credit)</b>	Incumbents vs challengers; clashing policy worldviews; poster children and awful warnings; likely war of the narratives in official histories or inquiries	To date, surprisingly few official ‘grand coalition’ responses to sharing Covid blame; more reliance on blame shifting or sharing with experts
<b>Debt and Fiscal Stress</b>	A likely debt mountain of post-World War I/II proportions; the likely extent of a post-Covid budgetary ‘peace dividend’ is uncertain; tricky post-emergency tax policy and execution issues, given fairly limited innovation in tax structure during the crisis.	Historically post-war debt politics has been variable (e.g. World War I, World War II, post 9/11 wars – which will post-Covid debt politics most resemble?); the politics of debt default or forgiveness is likely to recur, with extra complications if states like the UK break up