

# International Review of Public Policy

5:3 | 2023  
Special Issue  
Book Review

## Arjen BOIN, Allan MCCONNELL & Paul 'T HART, Governing the Pandemic: The Politics of Navigating a Mega-Crisis

OLOF OSCARSSON

p. 376-378  
<https://doi.org/10.4000/irpp.3818>

### Bibliographical reference

Boin, Arjen; McConnell, Allan & 't Hart, Paul, Cham: Palgrave Pivot, 2021, 130 p., ISBN 978303072679.



This site uses cookies and gives you control over what you want to activate

✓ OK, accept all

X Deny all cookies

Personalize

Privacy policy

lemic: The Politics of Navigating a Mega-Crisis" gives a ous dimensions included in crisis governance, helping < interplay between political decisions, administrative Its authors, Arjen Boin, Allan McConnell, and Paul 't, such a book, as they are prominent scholars with an t spans leadership, management, policy processes, and ie context of crises and disasters.

n it. The book delves very effectively into several crucial ellevance in shaping the outcomes of crisis responses. risis communication, crisis narratives, and institutional npass the key challenges faced by public administration h noting, however, that this terrain has been explored

extensively in the past, with much of the book's content aligning with established principles of traditional crisis management. Nonetheless, what distinguishes this book and renders it particularly compelling is the unique backdrop against which it frames crisis management—namely, the context of a global pandemic.

- 3 The central argument in the book is built through a careful progression of ideas across its six chapters with Chapter 1 serving as the foundation. Here, the authors set the stage by characterizing the pandemic as a unique amalgamation of a creeping crisis, a transboundary crisis, and a solidarity crisis. This distinctive blend poses extraordinary challenges, necessitating a fresh perspective on crisis management. The authors assert that prior crisis literature has struggled to fully address or adapt to this novel crisis configuration.
- 4 In Chapter 2, the authors then delve into the complexities of sensemaking, highlighting the formidable hurdles posed by vast, ever-shifting information streams. The complexity of scientific expertise and the competing interests of various stakeholders come to the fore. Expertise, though essential, is shown to be insufficient in isolation. Balancing political, economic, and social factors emerges as a critical theme in crafting effective pandemic governance strategies. Chapter 3 builds on this foundation by examining the practical challenges of implementing pandemic response strategies. Here, the authors emphasize the need to consider the political and economic context when deploying tools and mechanisms. Careful, strategic decision-making takes precedence, and the importance of introducing flexibility and adaptability into response strategies is stressed. The conclusion is clear: a singular, standardized administrative route to COVID success is elusive.
- 5 Chapter 4 further underscores the centrality of communication in crisis management. It offers a nuanced analysis of crisis narratives and their impact on public perceptions of the pandemic. The chapter emphasizes the need to comprehend how different actors craft and communicate these narratives and the ensuing implications for pandemic governance. The delicate balance between clear, consistent messaging and adaptability is highlighted once more. Chapter 5 addresses the formidable challenge of ending the pandemic. Achieving closure at both individual and collective levels is paramount. The authors explore how various countries have tackled this task, touching on facets such as accountability and the imperative of learning from the pandemic for future crises. The importance of sustained evaluation, investment in public health infrastructure, and preparedness to support accountability mechanisms are discussed.
- 6 Finally, in the concluding chapter, the authors provide five pathways for institutional learning. These pathways constitute a holistic, proactive approach to crisis management. They ensure that organizations and institutions are better equipped to adapt to evolving challenges in future crises.



This site uses cookies and gives you control over what you want to activate

s systematically build a compelling argument around the pandemic and the complexities it poses for crisis management, it extend beyond the pandemic and into the broader field. The book offers an extensive examination of the political and economic responses to the pandemic. It stands out for its in-depth analysis at public administration and politicians must address such as the pandemic.

lies in its expansive scope of analysis. The authors draw from the globe, encompassing national contexts as diverse as the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. This comprehensive approach allows the book to explore common challenges and trends across varying contexts, but also provides a nuanced understanding of the pandemic's impact.

in terms of clarity and accessibility. Despite the intricate nature of the topics, the authors adopt a lucid and engaging writing style. They use real-world examples to vividly illustrate their arguments,

rendering the book a good resource for individuals seeking to comprehend the intricacies of pandemic politics, irrespective of their level of expertise.

10 While the book's significant focus on political-administrative elites is undeniably valuable, it must be acknowledged that this emphasis may, at times, oversimplify the intricate realities further down the hierarchy. In practice, numerous factors and actors interact in unpredictable ways during crises. While it is essential to dissect the political-administrative dimensions of pandemic governance, such as the role of political leadership and the impact of various institutional arrangements, it is equally critical to recognize that these factors operate in a complex web of interconnected levels (Ansell et al., 2021; Tierney, 2012). This web is present to some extent, but it would be intriguing to see it emphasized even further. This would prevent the risk of unintentionally oversimplifying what goes on during crises, which could impede our ability to fully grasp the multifaceted realities that exist across different levels of crisis response. While political-administrative elements are undeniably significant, they are only one facet of a much broader and intricate puzzle. Therefore, it would be beneficial if the book provided a more in-depth examination of the actions and dynamics that occur at levels below the political-administrative elites in order to show how they influence each other, especially as the book claims to be concerned with explaining societal responses.

11 Overall, the book's broad exploration of the political and governance aspects surrounding the pandemic is likely to resonate with a diverse readership interested in crisis management, public policy, political science, and the pandemic itself. While the book offers a comprehensive snapshot of the real-time challenges posed by the pandemic rather than delving into intricate scientific analyses, its practical orientation makes it particularly valuable for policymakers and government officials.

12 However, it's worth noting that the book can also find a place in undergraduate courses, such as those focusing on crisis management or public administration. It serves as an illuminating resource, highlighting fundamental components of governance and crisis management through empirical examples, thereby offering valuable insights for understanding crisis governance.

---

## Bibliography

Ansell, C., Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2021). The COVID-19 pandemic as a game changer for public administration and leadership? The need for robust governance responses to turbulent problems. *Public Management Review*, 23(7), 949-960.

ce: Social, political, and economic dimensions. *Annual Review* 41-363.



This site uses cookies and gives you control over what you want to activate

---

CCONNELL & Paul 'T HART, Governing the Pandemic: The *International Review of Public Policy*, 5:3 | -1, 376-378.

CCONNELL & Paul 'T HART, Governing the Pandemic: The *International Review of Public Policy* [Online], 5:3 | 2023, section on 17 June 2025. URL: 18; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/irpp.3818>

---

## ***Copyright***



The text only may be used under licence CC BY 4.0. All other elements (illustrations, imported files) are “All rights reserved”, unless otherwise stated.



This site uses cookies and  
gives you control over what  
you want to activate