Comparative Public Policy Analysis of COVID-19 as a Naturally Occurring Experiment

ZHILIN LIU *, & IRIS GEVA-MAY **†

*School of Public Policy and Management, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China, **School of Public Policy & Administration, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, †Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

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ABSTRACT This collection presents an effort to draw on the COVID-19 global pandemic, as a rare “naturally occurring experiment”, to advance the comparative public policy scholarship and disseminate knowledge on international policy approaches to this extreme crisis situation. From a comparative lens, these articles reveal how factors such as partisan politics, intergovernmental relationships, culture, and state capacity shape crisis policy responses in contrast to normal policymaking. This collection also provides important lesson drawing: national–local coordination, social safety nets, and a well-organized sector of community workers are all part of a society’s capacity and resilience in a time of crisis.

Keywords: comparative public policy; policy analysis; COVID-19; public health crisis; natural experiment; comparative studies

Introduction

The COVID-19 global pandemic is now the biggest public health crisis that humankind has faced in a century.1 While governments are no stranger to natural disasters or human-made crises, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by a novel coronavirus (SARS-Cov-2), has presented an unprecedented challenge to governments of all levels
and regions. As a transboundary crisis of global scale, COVID-19 presents a rare naturally occurring experiment to draw on for comparative public policy research.

Policy scholars have long sought to understand why governments respond similarly or differently to the same problem and how policies work in different contexts (Baekkeskov 2016; Capano and Lippi 2016; Geva-May et al. 2018), but rarely does the same policy challenge occur at the same time and with the same intensity in different international locations. Facing the same, unknown coronavirus, national and subnational units have responded with degrees of similar or different sets of interventions and measures, adopted at similar or different points in time, enforced with similar or different degrees of intensity, met with similar or different levels of compliance, and sustained over similar or different time spans during 2020–2021 (Capano et al. 2020; Downey and Myers 2020; Hale et al. 2020; IMF 2020; Mei 2020; OECD 2020; Yan et al. 2020; Zhang and Warner 2020). Under these extraordinary circumstances, the comparative lens can lend a better understanding of the commonalities and dissimilarities of policy responses that countries have adopted in crisis situations, and the conditions of their adoption and effectiveness, thereby identifying the lessons that can be drawn and extrapolated across contexts.

Apart from a few studies (e.g. Comfort et al. 2020; Lee and Ma 2020; Nair 2020; Zhu and Zhang 2020), comparative research on policy experiments is scarce. A recent JCPA Special Issue has made an attempt in this direction (Zhu and Zhang 2020). This status in the field of comparative policy analysis is influenced by a number of constraints: ethics considerations over possible negative effects of experimenting on a population; the costs of access and experimenting on a target population; the inability to have a large enough target population for meaningful conclusions; and by and large because experiments happen at various periods of time – sometimes decades apart. As a once-in-a-century public health crisis, COVID-19 presents a problem situation that was affected by the same determinant and happened at approximately the same time among all comparable social units, sparing no layer of society. Even more strikingly, and very rare in public policy and at this scale, is that the problem situation requires similar types of medical or social interventions, allowing for a higher degree of validity and reliability in observing, analyzing, and comparing policy measures and outputs. Therefore, although we cannot claim at this stage that COVID-19 accounts for a policy “experiment” because too many variables need to be controlled for, this new year-long crisis nevertheless can be loosely viewed as a “naturally occurring experiment”, in which a comparative lens can apply to extend the existing public policy scholarship, which is primarily applied in non-experimental policy studies.

Traditionally, disasters in general have not been a focal topic in comparative policy analysis, according to a recent meta-analysis by Geva-May et al. (2018). The study of disaster responses usually falls into the disciplinary domain of emergency management, while pandemic responses (such as SARS, AIDS, Zika, and others) are a traditional topic in the field of public health. In previous years, JCPA has published studies that primarily focused on natural disasters that occurred at various points in time and geography (Comfort 2012a, 2012b), such as the 2004 Asian tsunami, 2005 Hurricane Katrina in the US, and the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake in China (Boulos et al. 2012; Henstra 2012; Lai 2012; White and Fu 2012). However, the recent rise of extreme events caused by natural hazards and human-induced crises have only elevated the need for concerted efforts among comparative policy scholars to study crisis policy responses and provide
timely lesson drawing. Natural hazard events include climate change-induced extreme weather events such as the 2017 Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico and other fierce hurricanes around the world as well as uncontrollable fires in Australia and California, USA, in 2020. Human-induced crises include infrastructure collapse incidences like the Genoa Bridge disaster in North Italy in 2018. Such events provide major tests of existing public policies designed to protect communities from harm.

The scale of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, as well as the complexity of policy responses that ensued from the crisis, has driven the emergence of what promises to be an extensive literature on national and subnational policy responses to this global crisis. In 2020, a myriad of studies was published as the pandemic was spreading globally (e.g. Capano et al. 2020; Mei 2020; Migone 2020; Rocco et al. 2020; Weible et al. 2020). This specific issue of JCPA (Vol. 23:2) as well as a recent issue on street-level bureaucracy in the pandemic (JCPA Vol. 23:1; Gofen and Lotta 2021) make a systematic contribution to the growing international and comparative literature on COVID-19. This emergency-driven scholarship of comparative public policy analysis has the added value of providing timely lesson drawing for better policy responses, avoidance of fallacies, and harmonization of policies for the greater global good. In the meantime, the circumstances innate in the pandemic, and the efforts to address the challenges it has posed, opened an opportunity for public policy scholars to contribute to both research and practice in ways that, in many respects, differ from the pace and foci of policy studies in normal times.

The divergent policy responses across countries and regions also amplify the need for comparative public policy research to understand how and why the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has been defined and handled across economic, social, political, and cultural contexts. While the coronavirus threat can be said to be the same, the timeline and (degrees of) impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak may vary by regions, cultures, politics, and demographics. Policy responses to COVID-19 have to be convergent but locally tailored to address the context in which they take place. During the crisis, policy decisions in all contexts have to be made under significant uncertainty and high time pressure (Geva-May 2005; Moynihan 2008; Ansell et al. 2010; Weimer and Vining 2017; Weible et al. 2020). Additionally, policy decisions are made under legal frameworks of emergency management, entailing different patterns of policy actors, authorities, and interactions during the rolling out (and terminations) of COVID-19 policy responses. These factors all constitute a common denominator of comparison which may enhance the existing public policy scholarship by answering, among others, important questions such as: to what extent does COVID-19 challenge or reinforce existing knowledge about the dynamics, processes, and outcomes of policy making and implementation? Does COVID-19 amplify paradoxes and roadblocks to effective policy making and implementation that are similar to those associated with “normal” policy issues? Or does COVID-19 reveal different political, institutional, or cultural factors that underlie the process of crisis policy responses?

Selecting Scholarship Reflective of the Naturally Occurring Experiment

In May 2020, the Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis announced a call for papers for the Special Issue on “The COVID-19 Crisis: Policies, Outcomes, and Lesson Drawing”. The rationale for this special issue was to take advantage of the unique opportunity of a
naturally occurring experiment to foster comparative public policy scholarship on national and subnational policy responses to the COVID-19 global pandemic crisis. Moreover, it sought to extend lessons that can be drawn across national contexts to shed light on issues that practitioners – whether decision makers or street-level public servants – have had to grapple with in the face of unexpected and unknown circumstances. To this end, for relevance, we tried to ensure a timely publication of a special issue in the JCPA that can extend some answers and support to the efforts to fully comprehend the scope, scale, content, instruments, and outcomes of COVID-19 policy responses.

As effective treatments and vaccines had been under development until recently, COVID-19 responses have primarily relied on non-therapeutic public health measures to contain and reduce the virus spread, as well as economic, fiscal, employment, and social policies to mitigate negative impacts of the pandemic. Fortunately, several online policy tracking websites have been providing real-time updates of a wide range of policy measures adopted by nations. Among the most widely used sources are the Oxford Government Response Tracker (Hale et al. 2020), the OECD Country Policy Tracker (OECD 2020), and the IMF Economic Policy Tracker (IMF 2020). These readily available sources have made cross-country comparative analysis of COVID-19 policy responses easier, allowing for a robust, informative common denominator.

Whereas articles selected for this special issue constitute a small fraction of the unprecedented 128 abstracts received within one month, they represent categories of key themes and different views through a comparative lens in approaching and understanding the COVID-19 policy responses (see Table 1). Interestingly, we found that the main clusters of investigation trends identified in these studies are related to: Categorizing and Contextualizing COVID-19 Policy Responses; Politics of Crisis Policy Responses; Agenda Setting and Interconnectedness of Crisis and Non-Crisis Policy Making.

Categorizing and Contextualizing COVID-19 Policy Responses

In the case of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, in accordance with the comparative public policy tenet, a first task for policy scholars is to categorize the most similar and most different policy measures adopted by national and subnational governments. Beyond comparing the stringency level of public health measures (Yan et al. 2021), how did tools and instruments across policy domains form an effective policy mix to address the multifaceted challenges brought by the public health crisis (Goyal and Howlett, 2021; Chen et al. 2021)? Moreover, how did contextualizing the adoption, enforcement, and effectiveness of similar bundles of policy measures through a comparative lens expand the benefits of policy learning and lesson drawing across institutional and cultural contexts (Mattei and Delpino 2021; Nemec et al. 2021; Yan et al. 2021)?

Politics of Crisis Policy Responses: Partisanship, Intergovernmental Relationship, and State–Society Tension

A key theme addressed in this collection concerns the politics and processes of crisis policy responses. History tells us that adopting and adhering to public health measures –
| Authors                  | Research Focus                                      | Country                        | Comparative Dimension             | Methods                      | Main findings                                                                 |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bélard et al.           | Agenda setting                                      | Canada, USA, Mexico             | Theory application               | Comparative case study       | COVID-19, as a focusing event, created a “policy window” for reforms to address pre-crisis policy issues in health care financing. |
| Dai et al.              | Agenda setting                                      | China                           | Theory development               | Text mining; Case studies    | Public-led agenda setting dominated during COVID-19, despite conditional government responsiveness to public-led agendas in China. |
| Warner and Zhang        | Social safety nets and crisis policy making         | USA (states)                    | Empirical policy research        | Statistical modeling         | Presence of strong social safety nets allowed US states to quickly enact and extend public health measures during COVID-19. |
| Curley et al.           | Politics of crisis policy making                    | USA (states)                    | Empirical policy research        | Statistical modeling         | Partisan politics and politicians’ own interests, not COVID-19 risks, influenced the policy design of public health measures by US states. |
| Liu et al.              | Multi-level governance and policy coordination      | China, USA                      | Theory development               | Comparative case study; content analysis | Both USA and China adopted a hybrid form of policy coordination, but with different levels of autonomy of provincial/state governments. |
| Yan et al.              | Culture, institutions and crisis responses          | 31 countries                    | Theory application               | Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) | Nuanced interaction of culture and state capacity determined the stringency level of national public health measures. |
| Sudhipongpracha and Poocharoen | Community workers in crisis responses               | Thailand, Kenya                 | Theory development               | Comparative case study; Interpretive Approach | Traditions, dilemmas, and narratives of community health workers shaped by national public health systems. |
| Goyal and Howlett       | Policy mix                                          | 190 countries                   | Methodology development          | Text mining / topic modeling | Significant variations in the intensity, density, and balance of policy mixes in national and subnational COVID-19 responses. |
| Chen et al.             | Fiscal responses                                    | 170 countries                   | Empirical policy research        | Descriptive statistics       | Cross-country similarities and heterogeneity in fiscal spending, policy types, and policy targets in fiscal responses. |
| Mattei and Delpino      | policy coordination                                 | Italy, Spain                    | Lesson Drawing                   | Comparative case study       | Challenges and innovations in central-regional coordination in highly decentralized policy systems. |
| Nemec et al.            | Crisis policy responses                             | Czech Republic, Russia, Slovak  | Lesson Drawing                   | Comparative case study       | The importance of rapidly enacting public health measures and motivating citizen compliance in controlling the COVID-19 outbreaks. |
some as simple as mask wearing, social distancing, limiting indoor gatherings – were crucial for slowing down the 1918 flu pandemic (Markel et al. 2007). Early observations have indicated that rapid and coherent policy responses (interventions) have determined the trajectory of the COVID-19 crisis in any given country (Capano 2020; Mei 2020; Migone 2020; Rocco et al. 2020; Zhang and Warner 2020). Sadly, these measures have become politicized in many countries.

Unraveling the politics and processes of crisis policy responses calls for a collective endeavor in comparative public policy scholarship. First, the interference of partisan politics has been most salient in the United States, but in other countries as well (Kettl 2020; Béland et al. 2021). How has partisanship hampered the willingness and capability of governments to adopt, enforce, and sustain public health measures to the COVID-19 crisis (Curley et al. 2021; Warner and Zhang 2021)?

Second, intergovernmental relationships have been identified as a key determinant of effective COVID-19 responses (Benton 2020; Downey and Myers 2020; Kettl 2020; Migone 2020; Rocco et al. 2020). How have countries, whether in unitary or federal systems, balanced national leadership with local autonomy to achieve coherent messaging and coordinated actions (Liu et al. 2021; Mattei and Delpino 2021)? How can unitary and federal countries learn from one another to develop institutionalized mechanisms of national–regional coordination in crisis responses (Liu et al. 2021)?

While governments assume a central position in crisis policy making, the state–society synergy is another key dimension of the “whole-of-society” approach to COVID-19 responses, as advocated by the WHO General Director. To what extent does an active civil society, coupled with a culture of cohesive social norms, supplement state capacity to achieve better policy outcomes in COVID-19 responses (Yan et al. 2021)? How, at the grassroot level, did community health workers function as an intermediary between the state and citizens while fighting the pandemic in developing countries (Sudhipongpracha and Poocharoen 2021)?

Agenda Setting and Interconnectedness of Crisis and Non-Crisis Policy Making

A third prevailing cluster of studies on the COVID-19 pandemic offers a rare opportunity to understand how the policy agenda is set and evolves amid enormous uncertainty and high public pressure. To what extent will COVID-19 change the prior dynamics of policy agenda setting in normal situations as the crisis brings in new stakeholders and changes the power balance between government and citizens (Dai et al. 2021)? COVID-19 also highlights the interconnectedness of crisis and non-crisis policy making. How did previous healthcare, social, and fiscal policy legacies affect a government’s capability to adopt timely and coherent public health measures to contain the virus (Warner and Zhang 2021)? To what extent did the crisis shift existing policy discourses, thereby opening up windows for new agendas that potentially lead to reforms in normal policy domains (Béland et al. 2021)?

Overview of the Collection of Studies in This Special Issue

This Special Issue presents seven research articles, as well as two Comparative Statistics & Analytics section articles and two Policy Insights & Innovation section articles.
reason for purposefully including this variety of scholarship is to allow for a wide range of policy topics, policy angles, methodological approaches, and theoretical perspectives. The Special Issue also deliberately presents a geographic diversity of scholarship that goes beyond economically advanced countries in North America and the European Union and includes articles reflecting experiences from developing countries such as Thailand and Kenya, authoritarian countries such as China, and post-socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, which have been less represented in the public policy scholarship but are not less affected by this health crisis.

Among the research articles, Béland and colleagues (2021) adopt Kingdon’s multiple streams theory framework (Kingdon 1984) to examine how the COVID-19 crisis may have reshaped the healthcare policy agenda in three countries of fiscal federalism in North America. Although Canada, the United States, and Mexico have had their own outstanding issues related to healthcare financing prior to COVID-19, the crisis, as a focusing event, may have created a “policy window” for reforms to address these issues. Given that the crisis is still ongoing, the extent to which the policy window viably leads to real policy changes is subject to the policy and political streams in each country, and remains a question that policy scholars should continue to observe.

Dai and colleagues (2021) directly address the issue of policy agenda setting during a crisis situation and extend the existing knowledge to an authoritarian context. Adopting big-data analytic techniques with social media data, they compare the roles of the government and the public in setting the policy agenda during the early stage of the COVID-19 crisis in China. Their findings reveal an overwhelming pattern of public-led agenda setting during COVID-19, but selective government responsiveness to public-led agendas. The article also suggests that, in the era of social media, government faces new challenges in crisis communication in terms of timely responsiveness not only to issue attention among citizens, but also social emotions that spread easily through social media.

Two articles investigate the politicized nature of public health responses by comparing state governments in the United States. Curley and colleagues (2021) compare how enforcement languages were built into the policy design of restrictive public health measures, and revealed the strong influence of partisan politics and politicians’ own interests. Focusing on stay-at-home orders, Warner and Zhang (2021) further reveal that the existence of strong social safety net protections allowed states to quickly enact and extend public health measures. Sadly, both articles found that the risks of COVID-19 prevalence were an insignificant determinant for adopting necessary public health measures by US state governments.

Liu and colleagues (2021) adopt a multi-level governance theory to compare how subnational policy responses were coordinated in China and the US. Through systematic content analysis of press briefing transcripts, they find that both countries adopted a hybrid form of vertical and horizontal coordination in COVID-19 responses, despite substantial differences in the level of autonomy of provincial/state governments. Their direct comparison between democratic and authoritarian contexts show that effective crisis responses require a balance between national leadership with local autonomy and societal engagement.

Going beyond the state-centered approach, Yan and colleagues (2021) bring in cultural factors to understanding the variance in COVID-19 policy responses across a sample of
31 countries. Using the fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis method, they are able to identify the nuanced intersection of national cultural orientation with formal institutional factors in determining the level of stringency of public health measures that countries adopted while facing different uncertainties and risks in the early stage of COVID-19.

Sudhipongpracha and Pocharoen (2021) compare how community health workers responded to COVID-19 in complex and uncertain environments in Thailand and Kenya. Adopting an interpretive approach supported with semi-structured interviews, their analysis reveals how decentralized (Kenya) or centralized (Thailand) public health systems shaped the traditions, dilemmas, and narratives as community health workers dealt with the pandemic in their communities. Their analysis sheds light on the unique roles of community workers connecting government and citizen actions in successful mitigation of the pandemic in developing countries.

In the Comparative Statistics & Analytics Section, Goyal and Howlett (2021) adopt a text mining approach to quantitatively capture the patterns of policy mix in the COVID-19 policy measures. Their topic modeling analysis of a large dataset of policy texts reveals the “standard” features of global policy mix but allows further cross-country comparison of the balance of policy mix. Chen and colleagues’ (2021) presents one of the first systematic analyses of fiscal policy responses to COVID-19. Based on the IMF Policy Tracker of 170 countries, they compare how the amount of fiscal spending, policy targets, and policy tools differ across countries with different pandemic incidence, political systems, and economic and fiscal conditions.

In the Policy Insights & Innovation Section, Mattei and Delpino (2021) compare how Italy and Spain, two Southern European countries, dealt with the challenges of coordinating crisis response in decentralized public health systems. Their analysis draws an important lesson about updating preparedness plans as well as strengthening coordination across levels of governments (echoing the argument raised by Liu et al. 2021). Nemec (2021) provides rare insights into how Central and Eastern European countries responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, which attests to the importance of rapidly enacting public health measures and motivating citizen compliance in controlling the COVID-19 outbreaks, as has been found in other countries.

Conclusions

Responses to the combined challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic have been an ongoing Sisyphean test to all governments for over a year. The challenges were daunting particularly in the early phase of the pandemic, when there was limited knowledge about the source of the coronavirus, the ways and speed of its transmission, or the severity of the disease. Although vaccines are now available, it will take at least another year before the world can feel a sense of normality. Public policy is both a field of study and of practice. The test of the scope of this collection of scholarship lies in the extent to which the included articles contribute to both practical lesson drawing and scholarly development in the field of comparative policy analysis.

First, through structured comparisons across similar or contrasting contexts, this collection of articles offers timely lesson drawing for better responses in this ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and better preparedness for future crises, highlighting several common themes and
lessons that can be learned. For instance, comparison across divergent regional and political contexts, including China, the US, Italy, and Spain (Liu et al. 2021; Mattei and Delpino 2021) revealed the importance of coordination between national and subnational governments in crisis responses. Managing a major crisis with transboundary spillovers requires a coherent national strategy as well as institutionalized mechanisms of coordination and support across levels of government, territorial jurisdictions, and state and non-state sectors. Comparison across subnational units in the same country (Warner and Zhang 2021) revealed that social safety nets should be considered as critical parts of the “resilient sociotechnical system” (Comfort 2012a, p. 110) to reduce the risks and devastation of public health crises. Additionally, though crisis responses tend to stem from government agencies, a comparison between Kenya and Thailand (Sudhipongpracha and Poocharoen 2021) showed that a well-funded and organized sector of community workers constitute a critical component of a society’s capacity and resilience in a time of crisis.

Second, as the global village was hit by the same triggering event of COVID-19 at a relatively similar time, this collection of articles presents an early effort to draw on this naturally occurring experiment to advance the existing theory-based public policy scholarship by answering the selected questions raised in the beginning section of this introduction. For instance, Béland and colleagues (2021) applied Kingdon’s multiple streams theory, developed in non-crisis situations, to compare policy agenda setting during COVID-19 among different federal countries while Dai and colleagues (2021) extended the agenda-setting theory from democratic contexts to authoritarian regimes. These studies revealed unique dynamics in which policy agendas emerge and evolve during extreme crisis situations and in the era of social media.

Multiple articles also investigated partisan politics, intergovernmental relationships, and state capacity, factors that had been found important under normal situations and, similarly, shaped crisis policy responses across countries and regions (Curley et al. 2021; Liu et al. 2021; Mattei and Delpino 2021; Warner and Zhang 2021; Yan et al. 2021). But COVID-19 revealed the limitation of decentralized federalism in responding to large-scale disasters (Liu et al. 2021; Mattei and Delpino 2021), while also elevating the importance of culture, social norms, and community-layer organizations in the adoption and implementation of crisis policy responses (Sudhipongpracha and Poocharoen 2021; Yan et al. 2021). These early analyses create the foundation for continuous accumulation of knowledge on topics such as policy agenda setting during crisis responses, intra-crisis policy learning and diffusion, the role of culture in policy making under uncertainties, quasi-bureaucratic behavior in crisis responses.

Furthermore, this collection showcases the methodological pluralism in the field of comparative public policy studies, ranging from big-data analytic techniques and qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to analytic narratives from an interpretive approach, in addition to more traditional methods such as content analysis, comparative case study, and statistical regression. The innovative application of these methodologies in comparative public policy analysis opens up new venues for policy scholars to capture the nuances of patterns and dynamics of policy making and implementation contingent upon economic, political, and cultural contexts.

Finally, because we convened the special issue over the summer and autumn of 2020, to be published in spring 2021, the research presented here is primarily focused on earlier policy responses, when vaccines were not yet on the horizon, and limited to the questions that can be investigated in a socially distanced context. Whereas the COVID-19 surge
since autumn 2020 adds to the urgency of publishing these early findings, we are keenly aware that many more questions require further deliberation and investigation in the months and years to come (Dunlop et al. 2020; Weible et al. 2020), and that any new developments related to this global pandemic crisis, will occupy the front and center of the research agendas of comparative policy scholars.

The special issue editors thank the reviewers of each article in this special issue for their collaboration in providing strict, thorough, and constructive reviews in record time (triggering the first JCPA Award for the Best Reviewer granted in 2020). We appreciate the authors’ special contributions, which we trust will advance further dialogues among the readers of this JCPA Special Issue on the topics raised.

Notes

1. According to the World Health Organization, until 11 March 2021, exactly one year after the WHO had declared COVID-19 a pandemic, the world had recorded more than 117.3 million confirmed COVID-19 cases and over 2.6 million lives lost, a trend that showed no sign of ending in the near future (https://covid19.who.int). Across the world, the pandemic also disrupted all aspects of the economy and society, with schools and businesses closed down, events and travels canceled, and people locked down in homes, which have caused tremendous economic, social, and psychological impacts across the globe.

2. “WHO Director-General’s opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19, March 11, 2020,” https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19—11-march-2020

3. Because of the overwhelming interest we received and the added perspective and contribution to the scholarship, we tried to accommodate as many studies as we possibly can in one special issue. To do so, we had to request shorter manuscripts than is the norm for regular-issue research articles, though shorter articles are known to be a heavier lifting exercise because of the extra degree of synthesis and precision required. Notwithstanding, the blind review process has been as scrupulous as normally required for all regular-issue articles submitted to the JCPA. To this end, we owe a great deal to the gracious support of all the anonymous reviewers who contributed their time and expertise to the manuscripts in record time.

4. While the latter two are standing sections in the JCPA, as a norm they are only published once a year, respectively, in different issues of the JCPA annual volume and each section is comprised of only one to two articles.

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