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SECTION INTRODUCTION/INTRODUCTION DE SECTION

Introduction to the COVID-19 Series

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How should political scientists communicate findings that are relevant to public debate or policy in the midst of a major crisis? One option, the op-ed, allows for rapid publication and broad readership but rarely permits detailed data analysis. Another option, the refereed article, allows for rigorous and refereed research, but academic publishing timelines often mean that a year or more will pass between submission and publication. Many other alternatives, such as blogs and preprints, face the same trade-off between rapid dissemination and rigorous review.

The *CJPS/RCSP* COVID-19 research note series was an extended experiment in providing a new publication avenue for political scientists. The goal of the series was to provide scholars with an opportunity to quickly communicate relevant research findings while still permitting rigorous data analysis and peer review. Submissions to the COVID-19 series suggest that many political scientists were eager to embrace the opportunity: in just two months, we received 95 English-language submissions.[1] Of these submissions, 24 were accepted for publication and are printed in the pages below. These notes speak not only to the diverse interests of the political science community but also to the wide-ranging effects of the pandemic itself.

One theme addressed by many of the COVID-19 notes is the *institutional* context and consequences of the pandemic. On federalism, for example, Béland et al. (2020) describe the prospects for the pandemic to serve as a critical juncture in Canadian fiscal federalism; Hanniman (2020) also addresses this theme. Paquet and Schertzer (2020) argue that the concept of "complex intergovernmental problems" helps us understand the challenges of intergovernmental policy making on COVID-19. Parliamentary institutions also received considerable attention; McDougall (2020) describes "continuity of constitutional government," Malloy (2020) traces parliament's multiple roles and purposes, and Rayment and VandenBeukel (2020) extend Malloy's analysis with data on federal and provincial legislatures. Koop et al. (2020) provide an interesting assessment of similar issues from the perspective of individual MPs themselves. Other institutional dimensions of the pandemic are treated in De Silva's (2020) analysis of human rights commissions, Macfarlane's (2020) discussion of constitutional limits on COVID-19 policies, and Puddister and Small's (2020) comparative analysis of courts.

Political behaviour is a second recurring theme. One important discussion concerns the effects of partisanship on pandemic-related behaviour and attitudes.

Merkley et al. (2020) marshal an impressive array of data to demonstrate that both Canadian political elites and the general public were remarkably *un*-polarized in their perceptions of the severity of the pandemic and the need for social distancing. Pickup et al. (2020) find similarly muted effects of partisanship on behaviour, but much stronger effects on government performance evaluations. A closely related set of notes focuses more specifically on compliance with public health restrictions; these include van der Linden and Savoie (2020) and Brouard et al. (2020). Other behavioural and attitudinal studies include Ryan Briggs's (2020) estimates of local back-to-work expectations; Joanne Miller's (2020a, 2020b) analyses of COVID-19 conspiracy theories; Laura French Bourgeois et al. (2020) on COVID-19 behaviour and civic duty; and Matt Motta et al.'s (2020) study of right-wing media consumption and public health beliefs. Finally, pandemic framing and framing effects were explored at the individual level by Sevi et al. (2020) and in Canadian media outputs by Poirier et al. (2020).

Public policy is a final recurring theme in the COVID-19 research notes. Armstrong and Lucas (2020) use data from a survey of municipal politicians to build a measure of the aggressiveness of municipal policy responses to COVID-19. Chouinard and Normand (2020) compare minority language policies for pandemic-related government communication. Pelc (2020) explores trade policy amidst a pandemic. Moreover, many of the institutional and behavioural notes discussed above—from Béland et al. (2020) and Hanniman (2020) on fiscal federalism to the studies of public health compliance (van der Linden and Savoie 2020 and Brouard et al. 2020)—also address pressing public policy issues.

Many of the research notes in the COVID-19 series have generated considerable public attention from social media, traditional media, and policy makers. Moreover, the series itself, along with similar series at other journals, has sparked a larger discussion about the value—and potential dangers—of rapid-review publications in political science (Fowler 2020). Given this larger conversation, it may be valuable to offer a few more general reflections on the series and the future of rapid-review publications as a genre of social science communication.

What should journal editors keep in mind when considering similar series? First, I believe the most important risk to avoid is what might be called the *abridged article*—a manuscript that attempts to address a complex question, or employs an extremely intricate empirical strategy, without the space required to make its claims persuasively. For any rapid-review manuscript, editors and reviewers should ask themselves if they would prefer to see the article's findings published immediately or instead in a more extended version, say, 12 months from now. In many cases, the latter option will be preferable; some findings simply do not fit the short note format. These are not easy decisions, and they often require that interesting and ambitious manuscripts be rejected. But these decisions are vital to the success of a short note series. Editors who remain focused on avoiding abridged articles, and who remind their reviewers to do the same, will help to alleviate the worry that short notes encourage authors to squeeze what should be an extended manuscript into the cramped confines of a short note.

Second, it is important that journals communicate that their rapid-review publications are a distinct publication type. One obvious way to do so is with length: at *CJPS/RCSP*, we insisted that COVID-19 notes be no more than 2,000 words in

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length, which is radically shorter than our standard research notes and articles. Providing a specific name or branding for the rapid-review series may also be helpful. I was consistently impressed by the detail and care with which our reviewers assessed the short notes, and I remain skeptical that four- to six-week reviewer deadlines necessarily produce a more thoroughgoing assessment of a manuscript. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the possibility of error and oversight increases when manuscripts are being written and reviewed so quickly. For this reason, journals should alert their readers to the differences between a rapid-review note and other refereed publications.

Finally, journal editors should think creatively about the review process for rapid-review series. Unlike the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the events that might lend themselves to rapid-review series—elections, supreme court decisions, and so on—can be anticipated in advance. For these events, editors might consider a pre-submission process, in which authors submit proposals prior to the event itself. These proposals could be pre-reviewed, allowing reviewers to focus their entire attention on the clarity and rigour of the analysis during the time constrained rapid-review post-event phase. These pre-reviewed short notes could provide new opportunities for political scientists to explore modes of analysis that can be a challenge in other refereed genres, such as replication studies or multi-team analyses; consider, for instance, what we might learn from a series of four or five simultaneous notes, all focused on a single question, each written by a separate set of authors. A short-note format could lend itself well to these experiments, and the resulting analyses would be valuable not only for rapid scientific communication, but also for teaching our students about the variety of ways that particular questions can be conceptualized, measured, and modelled.

In general, then, rapid-review publication series are not an ideal venue for political scientists to challenge well-established theories (or to develop new ones), to construct intricate causal identification strategies, or to introduce unfamiliar methods into the discipline. Instead, they offer an opportunity for more modest but nevertheless valuable contributions, many of which will bring established theories and methods to bear on current events or explore how well our established expectations hold up in the context of a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. Some editorial teams will decide that nontraditional publication timelines and formats fit well with their journal's mission and readership, while others will not. The discipline, in my view, will benefit from the resulting variety and innovation.

I thus remain optimistic about the potential for political scientists to use rapid-review publication series to contribute to public discussion and policy making, while also offering a level of rigour that is difficult to provide in non-refereed venues. My experience with the COVID-19 series confirmed my expectation that many political scientists are capable of producing research of exceptional quality on tight timelines—and that many reviewers are willing to provide thorough feedback on short manuscripts in just a few days. The research notes in the pages that follow reveal the impressive range of subjects that political scientists were able to explore and the quality of work they were able to produce, even amidst the constraints of pandemic. I hope to see more publications like these, in the pages of this and other political science journals, in the years to come.

Note

1 *CJPS/RCSP* also received five French-language submissions to the series, which were overseen by the French-language Co-Editor, Mélanie Bourque.

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