Strategies for Governing

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Reinventing Public Administration for a Dangerous Century

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The idea of the state is the conscience of administration.
—Woodrow Wilson, 1887

The formation of states must be an experimental process. . . . Since conditions of action and of inquiry and knowledge are always changing, the experiment must always be retried; the State must always be rediscovered.
—John Dewey, 1927

The loss of the stable state means that our society and all of its processes are in continuing processes of transformation. We cannot expect new stable states that will endure even for our own lifetimes. We must learn to understand, guide, influence and manage these transformations.
—Donald Schön, 1971

Strategy should be thought of as glue that holds together the purposeful activities of state.
—Colin S. Gray, 2015

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Acknowledgments

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This book is dedicated to my mother, Nancy Roberts, and my father, James Roberts, who passed away in 2018.

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Introduction

Time for a New Approach

This is a book about public administration and what its aims should be. It is intended for researchers in the field, practitioners in public service, and students preparing to become researchers or practitioners, but it will also interest readers concerned about building secure and thriving societies.

My argument is straightforward: In the United States, the field of public administration was launched almost a century ago by people with bold aspirations. They were not interested only in the efficiency of government offices; they wanted a thorough overhaul of the creaking American state so that it could manage the pressures of modern-day life. Unfortunately, this expansive view of the field's purpose has been lost. Over the last four decades in particular, the focus within the field has been mainly on smaller problems of management within the public sector. This narrowing of focus might have made sense in the United States and a few other advanced democracies in the waning decades of the twentieth century, but it does not make sense today. As we shall see, many people have recently protested this shrinking of

ambitions. It is time for a change of direction. We need to recover an expansive view of the field, and I propose a way to do so.

I proceed from the premise that it is impossible to talk about public administration without also talking about the larger challenge of governing a state. Woodrow Wilson, often seen as a founder of American public administration, also made this claim in a famous 1887 essay. Before we can say how the state should be administered, Wilson insisted, we have to talk about the things that the state must do.[1] We can turn Wilson's proposition around as well: before we consider what the state ought to do, we must know what it is actually capable of doing. In other words, the overall approach to governing determines administrative priorities, while practicalities of administration constrain our choices about the overall approach to governing.

My argument has a sense of urgency as well. We must recover the capacity to talk about the fundamentals of government, because the fundamentals matter immensely. Right now, there are billions of people on this planet who suffer terribly because governments cannot perform basic functions properly. People live in fear because governments cannot protect their homes from war and crime. They live in poverty because governments cannot create the conditions for trade and commerce to thrive. They live in pain because governments cannot stop the spread of disease. And they live in ignorance because governments do not provide opportunities for education. The expectations that we hold of our leaders can be stated simply: They should protect us from foreign enemies, maintain internal order, increase prosperity, improve well-being, and provide justice. Even in the twenty-first century, most governments on this planet fail to do this.

In defense of leaders, it might be said that our expectations are easily stated but not so easily fulfilled. Governing is hard work. Leaders of most states struggle just to understand what is going on inside and outside their country's borders. Then they must determine the relative importance of national goals, given that resources are scarce and goals are often incompatible. Leaders must next decide, under conditions of great uncertainty, which policies are likely to achieve their priorities. Leaders struggle to execute these policies too. Institutions are hard to build and run effectively. It is not easy to find soldiers, bureaucrats, policemen, and judges who are competent and willing to follow instructions. And even well-considered plans go awry because of an unexpected change of circumstances.

The challenge of governing was described by the Florentine diplomat Niccolò Machiavelli a half millennium ago. Machiavelli warned the rulers of Italian city-states such as his native Florence that their work was fraught with danger. Sometimes the threat was posed by other city-states, and sometimes it arose within the city walls because people were restless and hard to please. A clever leader sought advice on how to build institutions that would bolster his authority both inside and outside the city walls. But even strong institutions could be toppled by the tempest of public affairs. They had to be renovated constantly to keep up with changing conditions, and this was very hard to do. States that did not constantly renew themselves, Machiavelli warned, were likely to collapse.[2]

Some commentators have suggested that Machiavelli lived in unusually precarious times. In some ways, though, the rulers of sixteenth-century Florence had it easy. Florence was merely a city-state: its walls contained only four square miles of territory and sixty thousand people. Today the average state has more than two hundred thousand square miles and more than thirty million people. Compared to Florence in 1500, China has a million times as much land and twenty-three thousand times as many people. The institutional apparatus required by a state like China is more vast and complex than anything Machiavelli could have imagined.

There are additional complications for today's rulers. Machiavelli warned about renewing institutions to keep up with the times, but the world in which he lived was relatively stable. In important ways, it was not much different when he died in 1527 than when he'd been born sixty years earlier. By comparison, the pace of change today—social, economic, technological—is blistering. The planet's current population of seven billion is also more restless: urbanized, literate, wired, and mobile. And they have higher expectations of their rulers. Standards for security and order, public services, and protection of human rights are more demanding today than they were in the sixteenth century.

The leaders of modern-day states have a difficult assignment. They must devise a strategy for leading their countries toward security, order, prosperity, and justice. Next, they must design and build institutions that translate their strategy into practice. And then they must deal with the vicissitudes of time and chance, adapting strategies and institutions in response to altered circumstances and unexpected events. To do this well, leaders need advice

about the machinery of government—what it is capable of doing, how it should be designed and constructed, how it ought to be run, and how it can be disassembled and reconstructed. Researchers who work in the academic discipline of public administration should be expert in providing this sort of advice. One of their most important functions is helping leaders to devise strategies for governing that are effective, durable, and normatively defensible.

This was certainly the view of the people who founded the public administration field, even if they did not express it in exactly these words.

The Founders' Bold View of the Field

The academic discipline known as public administration is about one hundred years old in the United States. People sometimes say that it is older, pointing to Wilson's 1887 essay, but that is not quite right. The first self-styled school of public administration was established in 1922, and the first textbook in public administration, written by Leonard White of the University of Chicago, was published in 1926. Wilson's work did not get much attention until the 1930s, when professors of public administration invented a history for their new field, which included a contribution from a well-regarded then-recent president.

The first generation of scholars and practitioners in public administration were tied to a political movement in American politics known as progressivism, which coalesced in the 1890s and gained strength over the next two decades. American society was convulsed during these years by the emergence of big industries and cities, stark inequality and labor unrest, a surge in immigration, extraordinary technological advances, and shifts in the international balance of power. Americans had great hopes for their country. But many also worried that events could spiral out of control. Institutions designed for a simpler time did not seem sufficient for new realities. "The government of the part of the world in which we live," Luther Gulick warned, "is in many respects three generations behind our necessities."[3] Gulick was one of the leading figures in American public administration in the early twentieth century. He believed that progress required a complete reconstruction of the old order. The writer Walter Lippmann called this "the fitting of government to the facts of the modern world."[4]

The progressive movement faltered in the 1920s, as the United States enjoyed a moment of peace and prosperity. But it regained strength in the 1930s and 1940s as the global economy crashed, the European peace of 1919 collapsed, and the Cold War with the Soviet Union began. American democracy was tested severely in competition with fascist and communist rivals, and basic survival hinged on an overhaul of the "antique machinery" of American government.[5]

The discipline of public administration was invented to help with this overhaul. Academics in the new field defined their work broadly. They viewed themselves as architects of a renewed American state. Charles Merriam, another leader of the new field, summarized its main concerns crisply in 1944: "(1) external security, (2) internal order, (3) justice, (4) general welfare, and (5) freedom."[6] Researchers looked at the overall structure of the executive branch as well as the management of individual offices within it; military as well as civilian agencies; and legislatures and courts. They believed themselves to be engaged in a project "of continual creation, an unceasing invention of forms to meet constantly changing needs."[7] This project was thought to require a "historically conditioned sensitivity . . . an awareness of the ever-changing, inter-relating forces and factors comprising [a government's] environment and shaping its existence."[8] John Gaus described this as an "ecological approach" to research. Any scheme of government, Gaus insisted, had to account for "the elements of a place—soils, climate, location, for example—[and] the people who live there—their numbers and age and knowledge, and the ways . . . by which they get their living . . . [and] physical technology, social technology, wishes and ideas, catastrophe, and personality."[9]

The leaders of this new discipline were acutely aware of what would happen if government did not respond adequately to "the necessities of change."[10] The result would be economic and social chaos, subjugation to foreign powers, and the end of the great American experiment in self-rule. "The stakes are beyond price," Leonard White warned in the 1939 edition of his influential textbook on public administration, even before the outbreak of World War II. If democratic government failed in the United States, "an autocratic alternative may await the opportunity to seize power."[11]

Rise of the Public Management Approach

All that was eighty years ago. Several generations of scholars have worked in the field of public administration since then, and the boundaries and priorities of the field have changed significantly. For the last forty years, the tendency has been to focus more narrowly on problems of management within public agencies. This is sometimes called the "public management approach." There are associations and conferences exclusively dedicated to research on public management, leading journals that specialize in the field, and universities that offer degrees. Young scholars might be tempted to regard these institutions as permanent fixtures, but almost all of this apparatus has been built since the 1980s. And now the public management approach is so popular that it seems to have pushed public administration aside entirely.[12] "The discipline of public administration is in crisis," one observer lamented in the 1990s. "Courses and programs as well as whole institutes and schools are adapting, changing labels from 'public administration' to 'public management.'"[13] The trend has intensified since then.

The public management approach differs from classical public administration (as it is sometimes known) in important ways. It focuses mainly on the middle- or meso-level of government—agencies, agency networks, and programs. Its main concern is the ability of managers within agencies and programs to achieve objectives set by political overseers.[14] For example, one popular textbook describes public management as "the formal and informal processes of guiding human interaction toward public organizational objectives. The units of analysis are processes of interaction between managers and workers and the effects of management behavior on workers and work outcomes."[15] The emphasis is on efficiency—that is, on improving "the value for money achieved by public services," particularly in the delivery of education, healthcare, welfare, and other social services, as well as environmental protection and other forms of domestic regulation.[16] Less attention is paid to national security, diplomacy, and policing, and to the judicial and legislative branches of government.

Public management research has been dominated by scholars in the United States and a few other Western democracies, and this approach might make sense as a response to the distinctive social and economic conditions that prevailed in those countries after the 1970s. In the aftermath of World

War II, Western governments began providing more benefits to citizens, such as pensions, income support for the poor and disabled, healthcare, and subsidized college education. Many scholars called this the era of the *welfare state*. (The glossary defines this concept and other types of states mentioned later.) This was also the era of the *regulatory state*, as governments imposed more controls on economic and social affairs—for example, to limit pollution or prevent discrimination. The size and cost of government increased substantially, especially after the 1960s.More people paid income taxes than ever before.

By the 1970s, policymakers in Western governments began to see a backlash against big government. Many ambitious programs launched in the previous decade failed because their promoters had overestimated the difficulty of making them work or had misunderstood how the people would behave in response. The rate of economic growth also declined, and so did tax revenues, making it harder to pay for these new programs. Many citizens suffering because of the economic slowdown balked at higher taxes. Liberals who did not want to abandon these programs entirely had to find ways of repairing their defects and improving their efficiency. To survive the conservative assault, government had to "do more with less."[17] As Owen Hughes has observed, "governments were faced with declining real revenue [and] political demands to maintain services at the same levels. In these circumstances, the only avenue was to improve productivity."[18] This was the main problem that the public management approach was intended to solve.[19]

Ignoring the Big Picture

The public management approach was a rational response to the problems confronting leaders in a particular set of countries at a particular moment in history. But circumstances change, so that well-established ways of thinking about the world are no longer fit for the times. In recent years, the public management approach has been subject to assault from three directions.

Some criticism has come from scholars in the small number of developed countries that fostered the public management approach. A few complain about scholarly neglect of the security sector of government: national defense, intelligence and counterintelligence, and policing and counterterrorism.[20] This neglect is especially odd in the American context, given that most people

in federal government work in the security sector. Some have even characterized the United States as a *national security state* or *garrison state*. Neglect of the security sector makes a little more sense in western Europe, where national defense does not have the importance that it did in the early twentieth century.[21] One explanation for this neglect may be that security functions were not immediately relevant to the crisis confronting western governments in the late twentieth century; social programs and regulation, not defense spending, were the lightning rods for public discontent. But conditions have changed in the last twenty years. We are now more focused on security problems: terrorism, the revival of tensions between great powers, failed interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and controversies over urban policing and the treatment of minorities. Public management research has had little to say about many of these problems.

The public management approach has also been criticized for its preoccupation with the meso-level of government. It has focused on agencies within government but not on the design and performance of government overall. The approach is said to have overlooked the "big questions" about public administration.[22] Brint Milward, one of the early advocates of public management, has criticized it for ignoring "basic questions about the capacity and purpose of the state."[23] Similarly, Robert Durant and David Rosenbloom have lamented the neglect of "'big questions' such as the political economy of administrative reform and its evolution over time."[24]"Big questions need to be addressed," another writer agrees, "to find new ways to govern peacefully, reduce tensions, and uncover solutions to the problems that bedevil societies in the fast-changing landscape of the twenty-first century."[25]

Other critics of public management warn that that researchers must attend to "the big picture," as Christopher Pollitt has called it: "the surrounding architecture of politics, economics, technology, demography and the natural environment which, however indirectly or slowly, pushes and shapes the actions of public authorities."[26] This big picture is constantly changing: there are "megatrends" or "large forces" that threaten to undermine social and economic well-being.[27] Pollitt emphasized three megatrends—technological change, climate change, and demographic change—but there are others as well.[28] Governmental capacities must be adapted to address the threats that emerge from such large-scale transformations. "The biggest challenge of governance," Donald Kettl has observed, "is adapting the institutions and processes of government to new problems it faces. . . . [This challenge] is ageless

and universal."[29] In the short term, failure to adapt can lead to a decline in public trust of government, and in the long term, it might lead to a collapse of the state itself. "Nothing that gets out of sync with its environment lasts long," Kettl has warned. "That goes for governments just as much as dinosaurs."[30]

The fear of many scholars is that Western governments today are failing to adapt. This is sometimes expressed as a concern about the "dysfunctionality" of government in the face of new challenges.[31] Writers have warned about the ossification of the American government and the unsustainability of the American state as it is presently configured.[32] "Government at all levels," William Galston has written, "has become increasingly sclerotic and ever more misaligned with realities."[33] Francis Fukuyama has even suggested that the American state is decaying, a condition that arises when "institutions prove unable to adapt."[34] The collapse of trust in public institutions is taken as a symptom of this failure to adjust.[35]

Of course, this problem is not new. It is exactly the problem identified by scholars of public administration in the Progressive Era. As we have seen, those scholars attempted to address this problem by thinking broadly about the overall design of government and about the capacities needed within government to enable leaders to respond intelligently to changing circumstances. The complaint today is that the problem of adaptation is not regarded as a high priority within the field of public management. Indeed, it is not really identified as a problem at all. There is a substantial amount of research on organizational change *within* agencies or programs—again, research focused on the meso-level of government—but little on the adaptation of government as a whole.[36] The field does not take the long view, trying to identify long-term dynamics.[37] It responds to events rather than anticipating them.[38]

Western Parochialism

A certain bundle of institutional innovations became popular among Western leaders as they tried to make governments work better and cost less. Some sold off state-owned enterprises such as airlines or utility companies. Many hired private contractors to run prisons and schools and to provide other public services. Managers within government were "empowered" by loosening

internal controls that had been adopted decades earlier to control corruption and patronage. Performance-measurement systems were introduced to create stronger incentives for public servants to perform well. Working conditions in the public sector were "normalized" to private-sector standards by weakening unions and other safeguards against maltreatment. Many public-sector workers were fired as government agencies were streamlined and right-sized. Governments adopted new information technologies to improve service and reduce staff.

This bundle of reforms was sometimes described as a "new paradigm" for public management, or simply as new public management (NPM).[39] Scholarly research of public management often focused on the implementation and assessment of NPM-style innovations. These reforms became so popular in the 1990s that people began to talk about a "global public management revolution" and a "global paradigm" for reforming government.[40] In 1999, Vice President Al Gore invited leaders from around the world to participate in a global forum on reinventing government, held at the State Department headquarters in Washington, DC. The purpose of the forum, according to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, was to promote the "cause of efficiency and democracy . . . around the world."[41]

There was a strong impulse at the end of the twentieth century to emphasize how countries were converging on a single way of governing. The Soviet Union had collapsed only a few years earlier, and the model of a tightly planned economy had been discredited. Francis Fukuyama celebrated the "universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."[42] Powerful organizations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank pushed poor countries to shrink government and expand free markets. Their reform formula came to be known as the Washington Consensus.[43] NPM and the Washington Consensus were tightly linked ideas: in a sense, NPM gave a more detailed plan of how an efficient, market-friendly government ought to be organized, and it seemed to be the one best way to run any country. Public management scholars helped to advance this view, perhaps unwittingly, by encouraging a global conversation on improving efficiency through NPM-style reforms.[44]

But many people were skeptical about this story of worldwide convergence. Even in the Western world, scholars questioned whether all governments were pursuing NPM-style reforms with equal enthusiasm.[45] And sharper criticism came from academics in non-Western countries. In east and

southeast Asia, for example, scholars challenged the idea that the public management approach was applicable to their countries either as a framework for research or a program for reform. Some charged the public management movement with ethnocentrism and parochialism.[46] Asian academics pointed out that the journals and conferences that were focused on public management were dominated by researchers from a handful of wealthy, stable democracies in the West.[47]"The epistemic dominance of the western academic community," Shamsul Haque of the National University of Singapore observed in 2013, "is being increasingly questioned by critics with regard to the relevance and use of such knowledge in the Asian context."[48]

One way of questioning the relevance of the Western approach has been to highlight the distinctive needs of Asian societies. For example, Western leaders in the years after 1980 were preoccupied with reducing government intervention in mature economies. But many countries in east and southeast Asia were at a different stage of development in the 1980s and 1990s: they had poorer economies that seemed to need more guidance from government. They were inclined to follow the model of Japan—a *developmental state*—which became prosperous because of government planning, support to key industries, and protectionist trade policies.[49] Some Asian scholars accused the West of hypocrisy, because their countries were being discouraged from adopting interventionist policies that the West had relied upon in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[50]

Leaders in south and southeast Asia also need to maintain public support, just as Western leaders do. But some Asian academics have a different view about how this need should be addressed. In the West, public anger has been interpreted as a response to the rapid growth of the public sector. Citizens seem to be frustrated by out-of-control spending and regulation.[51] Consequently, the goal has been to restore trust by making government leaner and more disciplined. However, circumstances are different in several Asian countries. In some, there simply is no general crisis of legitimacy: in India and China, for example, large majorities express support for government.[52] And where distrust is a problem, it might be the result of too little government rather than too much. In this context, the goal is to bolster trust by expanding the supply of basic services such as policing, transportation, water and sewage, electricity, education, and healthcare.[53]

In some Asian countries, attitudes about the need for a traditional civil service differ as well. In the West, the drive for austerity often meant

abandoning the old ideal of the civil service as a high-status, lifelong vocation.[54] Some Western governments even began recruiting private-sector executives directly into top-level public-sector jobs. (The United Kingdom hired a television executive to run its prison service.) In some Asian nations, however, the national civil service plays an important role in unifying diverse peoples and bolstering the authority of central government.[55] Dismantling the civil service in this context seems unnecessary and even dangerous. Similarly, reducing internal controls within the civil service might make sense in the West, where problems of corruption and nepotism have abated over decades, but not necessarily in some Asian countries, where the need for such controls is still clear.[56]

Rather than stressing the distinctive needs of their countries, some Asian critics have emphasized the mismatch between Western-style reforms and socioeconomic conditions. For example, Tobin Im and Alfred Tat-Kei Ho have warned that imported reforms "are often not compatible with the inherent political, social, and cultural institutions" of non-Western countries.[57] Similarly, Gerald Caiden and Pachampet Sundaram have counseled reformers to take stock of the "shifting combination of history, culture, politics, economics, sociology, ideology and values in each country."[58] Other scholars have emphasized the importance of "unique country-specific contextual factors . . . [such as] political history, party politics, macroeconomic considerations, state tradition . . . and the state of civil society."[59] Western-style reform may also be stymied by the absence of supporting institutions, such as a robust rule-of-law system, that are taken for granted in the West.[60]

A third way of critiquing Western-style public management reforms is to emphasize their incompatibility with the way that leaders in Asian countries think about national strategies. From this point of view, it is not needs or conditions themselves that matter; what really matters is the leaders' perception of those needs and conditions, their judgment about the most critical national objectives, and the plans they have formulated to pursue those objectives. As Anthony Cheung puts it, reform is "mediated by . . . the strategies of the governing elites" in East Asia.[61] Cheung emphasizes that the renovation of administrative systems is just one part of a larger plan for addressing political and economic problems, and he says Western management reforms will be imported and properly implemented only if they fit with that larger plan.[62] Similarly, Tobin Im observes that imported reforms have succeeded in South Korea only when they were consistent with the "govern-

ing philosophy" of leaders.[63] And in China, according to Lan Xue and Kaibin Zhong, "the vision and judgment of the political leadership is crucial" in determining whether imported reforms will be implemented.[64]

One way or another, many Asian scholars are arguing that the public management approach simply does not fit the realities of governance in their countries. And we can see that the Asian critique of the public management approach parallels the critique made by commentators in the West itself. Asian scholars who call attention to distinctive needs, conditions, or governing philosophies are insisting that it is impossible to think about management reforms without attending in some way to "big questions" and the "big picture," to use the vocabulary of Western scholars. The overarching concern in Asia is the renovation of government to meet the requirements of societies that are evolving rapidly. Conversation around this question requires an explicit acknowledgement of the fundamental objectives of government—such as maintaining national cohesion, promoting growth, and improving the well-being of citizens—as well as a broad understanding of national conditions. The public management approach does not encourage this sort of high-level analysis.[65]

Scholars in the East and West are essentially making the same critique of the public management approach: both camps suggest the need to recover the broad approach of public administration scholars from the first half of the twentieth century—an approach that deliberately examines the aims of state action and the ways a state must be designed to further those aims, in a particular place and moment in history.

Neglect of Fragile States

There is a third camp of researchers who, rather than criticizing the public management approach, have mainly ignored it. These researchers are focused on improving governance in *fragile states*. This term came into scholarly usage in the 1990s, referring to countries whose governments "have weak capacity to carry out basic functions of governing a population and its territory" and whose claim to authority may be actively resisted by powerful groups within society.[66] (In practice, the division between stable and fragile states is almost the same as that between developed and developing countries.[67])The aim of reformers in fragile states is to build the fundamentals of

governmental capacity and legitimacy. The public management approach has little to say about this, largely because these fundamentals are taken for granted in the developed West.

The project that must be undertaken in fragile states is sometimes referred to as peacebuilding or statebuilding. One of its basic goals is to establish order within national borders, which requires the development of police and security forces that can be relied on to follow commands and use force responsibly. Legislatures must also be established to adopt laws that are regarded as legitimate by powerful societal factions. Then independent courts must be set up to apply those laws fairly. In addition, fragile states lack bureaucracies capable of providing essential services. Governments also need the capacity to monitor and control basic aspects of economic activity, such as cross-border trade, and they must build a sense of common identity and loyalty within the population.[68]

Academic interest in statebuilding coalesced in the 1990s, driven by a desire to reestablish order in war-torn countries in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was given impetus in the early 2000s as the United States tried to rebuild states that were identified as bases for terrorism.(In other words, statebuilding is also an instrument of American foreign policy.)The field of inquiry is now well-established. Graduate degrees and research centers dedicated to peacebuilding and statebuilding have been launched, and a vast amount of scholarly material has been produced.[69] The scholarly community works in concert with a network of national development agencies, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations that support projects to improve public institutions in struggling countries.[70]

Clearly, this enterprise is engaged with public administration problems, but it is entirely disconnected from the academic community that specializes in public management. Statebuilders are interested in aspects of government that seem to be well-established in Western democracies and are consequently overlooked by Western scholars. There may be problems of weakening trust in some Western countries, but none are afflicted with armed rebellions. By and large, leaders in the West can rely on the loyalty of their people. Internal peace and order has been achieved: there are no "ungoverned spaces" within the national borders of Western states. Institutions for making and enforcing laws are also consolidated, and governments are able to monitor economic activity and collect taxes. The public management

approach can focus on middle-level problems such as efficiency and effectiveness precisely because all this infrastructure already exists. Public managers in developed countries may safely assume that they will have money to spend, that employees will put their professional obligations ahead of tribal loyalties, that workers will not be killed when they visit field offices, and that agency orders will be enforced by the courts. Bureaucrats in fragile states do not take any of this for granted.

In other words, the public management approach has yet another blind spot: it is not good at thinking about the problems of fragile states. If there were only a few fragile states in the world, this might not be a significant defect. But several nongovernmental organizations have developed measures of state fragility, all of which show that fragility, not stability, is the prevailing condition in most of the world.[71] The Fund for Peace has found that only 54 of the 178 states included in its Fragile States Index can be regarded as stable. The rest suffer from some degree of fragility. Sixty-six of these fragile states were judged to be at severe risk for social, economic, and political turmoil,[72] and nine of the ten most populous countries are fragile according to this index. Overall, there are more people living in fragile states than there are in developed countries like the United States.[73] And even developed countries may not be safe: in 2017, the Fund for Peace perceived a worrisome decline in social and political cohesion in the United States and other advanced democracies.[74]

The way of thinking that prevails in statebuilding literature would be appreciated by Western and Asian critics of the public management approach and by Progressive Era scholars in public administration. That literature focuses on big questions. By necessity, it is concerned with identifying functions essential to state survival.[75] The literature is also attentive to the big picture; that is, the ways in possibilities for governmental reform are constrained by "historical, political, and economic specificities."[76] And above all, statebuilding literature is suffused with an awareness of danger; the risks and costs of state failure are fully appreciated. Western scholars used to think this way too. As Leonard White said in 1939, "The stakes are beyond price." White and his colleagues did not talk about "fragile states," but they understood the concept. A state that cannot perform essential functions "is sick," Charles Merriam warned in 1945, "perhaps unto death."[77] This was the malady that the field of public administration was invented to remedy.

Need for a Macro-Level Approach

The public management approach was invented in response to a crisis of governance in a handful of affluent, stable Western democracies in the waning years of the twentieth century. An attempt was then made to use the approach as a template for research and practice around the world. But challenges of governance have mutated in Western democracies, making the public management approach no longer entirely fit for those countries. The template has proved to have limited usefulness for most other countries as well, largely because their leaders face different challenges and have different ideas about how to move their countries forward.

We are left, therefore, with a problem. If we continue to rely on the public management approach, we will overlook critical questions about governance in the twenty-first century. We need a new approach for thinking about public administration that accommodates new conditions in Western democracies and enables a global conversation in which the circumstances of non-Western states are given appropriate attention. We need to recover the capacity to do the sort of work that American scholars in public administration had in mind when they launched the enterprise almost a century ago. My aim is to show how we might do this.

To be clear, I am not arguing for abandonment of the public management approach. Rather, my purpose is to complement this approach with another that is more suited to looking at big questions and the big picture. We can make an analogy to other scholarly disciplines. In the field of economics, there is a generally accepted distinction between research on bigger questions about the national economy (macroeconomics) and research on smaller questions about the activity of firms and households (microeconomics). In political science, scholars make a similar distinction between high-level research on political regimes and more grounded research on the political behavior of individuals. In the study of history, meanwhile, a distinction is made between research on the long-term development of social structures and the short-term unfolding of events. We could go on. Many scholarly fields recognize the need for tools that allow them to address big questions as well as small questions about human activity. However, public administration lacks a comparable facility. We have refined our ability to engage in meso-level

Table 1 Levels of analysis in public administration

Macro-level	Study of the governance strategies that are devised by leaders to advance critical national interests and the ways in which these strategies influence the overall architecture of the state.
Meso-level	Study of the design, consolidation, administration, and reform of specific institutions–that is, laws, organizations, programs and practices–within the state.
Micro-level	Study of the attitudes and behavior of officials within the state apparatus and of people who are subject to their authority.[1]

[1] I have modified the definition commonly used by proponents of behavioral public administration, which refers to the attitudes and behavior of "citizens, employees and managers." There are many more ways of categorizing people inside and outside the state apparatus.

research, but we lack—or rather, have abandoned—the capacity to engage in macro-level research.

I have already noted many scholars in the East and West who share the belief that we need to move beyond meso-level research by working at a higher level of analysis.[78] But there are scholars of public administration arguing for research at a lower level of analysis as well. They propose a "behavioral approach to public administration" that takes a "micro-level perspective" on the behavior of citizens, employees, and managers within the public sector. "By micro-level," Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen, Sebastian Jilke, Asmus Leth Olsen, and Lars Tummers have explained, "we mean that the unit of analysis focuses on psychological processes within or between individuals."[79] It is important to emphasize that there is no tension between calls for micro- and macro-level research.[80] A well-developed field should acknowledge three distinct levels of analysis—micro, meso, and macro—and have the capacity to pursue rigorous scholarship at each level (See Table 1).[81]

In this book, I assemble a conceptual toolkit for engaging in macro-level research within the field of public administration. At the center of the proposed approach is a concern with the invention and execution of *strategies for governing*. I will give a brief sketch of the approach here. We begin, as did most early scholars in public administration, by recognizing the state as the main building block of political order in the modern world. States have leaders, and leaders are concerned with a limited set of goals. Leaders develop opinions about the relative importance of these goals and the best ways

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to achieve them, given their perception of their countries' circumstances. In other words, they invent a strategy for governing that incorporates judgments about priorities and tactics. Next, leaders design and build institutions to implement these strategies. Leaders operate in a world of great uncertainty and turbulence, and they often realize that strategies are misguided or have become outmoded. Consequently, strategies and institutions must be renovated continually.

The world of practice is never as neat and orderly as the preceding paragraph might imply, however. There are many constraints, including variations in the competence of leaders, that make it tremendously difficult to formulate coherent strategies and put them into operation. I examine these constraints throughout this book, especially in chapters 9 through 11.Perhaps it would be better to say that all leaders struggle to behave strategically. Even the least competent of leaders has some ideas about priorities and methods, which are the essential elements of strategy. Similarly, there is a limit to what leaders can do by themselves: all must rely on institutions to give expression to their strategies.

All of this institutional groundwork—designing, building, consolidating, administering, renovating—falls squarely within the domain of public administration. Leaders choose strategies for governing, but their choices must be informed by advice about the architecture of government: how it ought to be designed and what load it can carry. Scholars in public administration should be skilled in providing this advice.

In the following chapters, I elaborate on the concepts and propositions that are essential to this new approach. It may seem odd to lay out these concepts and propositions so directly. One of the conceits of much contemporary research in public administration is that we are ruthlessly empirical: we simply describe the world as it is rather than imposing notions of how it ought to be. Flatly asserting concepts and propositions, as I appear to do here, seems decidedly unempirical. But there is no difference between my approach and that taken by advocates of public management research forty years ago. They, too, began by flatly asserting a new way of viewing the world of public administration.[82] To assemble their conceptual toolkit, they often appropriated ideas from other disciplines that suited their needs.[83] That is, they engaged in an exercise of intellectual bricolage. And at first, they were often criticized for fuzzy theorizing. However, there was no way around this criticism. Even-

tually, public management scholars would generate a substantial body of methodologically rigorous research. But the unavoidable and messy first step was to describe the metes and bounds of the territory they wished to explore and to gather tools that seemed useful for exploration.

We must repeat this exercise today. The conceptual apparatus built in the 1980s was useful in addressing the main challenges of that era, which were associated with the crisis of the welfare and regulatory state. However, new challenges require new tools. In some ways, I simply recover ideas that were familiar to the first generation of scholars in public administration. I also borrow ideas from other disciplines—law, political science, sociology, and history—in which scholars address similar questions. Sometimes I have adapted and simplified those ideas so that they are better suited to our requirements. At a few points, I also introduce new ideas to mortar together those that have been revived, borrowed, and adapted. I do not make an exhaustive review of all the scholarly literature that might be connected to the proposed approach. That would be an impossible task, and the final product would be indigestible. Thus, the goal pursued in part 1 is to give a broad overview of a new approach.

A theme throughout this book is the difficulty of crafting governance strategies that are effective, durable, and normatively defensible. In part 2, I experiment with a few essays on the challenges that confront leaders as they invent and execute strategies. I do not provide neat solutions for these challenges, because there are no such solutions; rather, there are only messy and temporary responses to prevailing conditions. Similarly, part 3 briefly considers how this new approach will affect the way we think about research, teaching, and practice in public administration. This question also arose forty years ago: inventing the public management approach meant overhauling programs of research, graduate courses, and understandings about how practitioners should approach their daily work.[84] Again, my observations are not intended to be definitive. Rather, the purpose is to suggest the direction in which our conversation might proceed.

In summary, this is a preliminary work. Undoubtedly it contains conceptual errors, false starts, and tangents. The same was true of scholarship in public management at its beginning forty years ago. It will take time to refine ideas, eliminate digressions, and prove the usefulness of the framework. Still, the imperfections in this book should not distract us from the

larger point: The field of public administration has narrowed its ambitions in the last four decades; it has surrendered too many important questions to scholars in other disciplines; and it must find some way of recovering its former aspirations. The approach outlined here may be helpful in doing this.

PART I

Key Ideas

Chapter 1

Summary of Propositions

This is a summary of propositions that are emphasized within the proposed macro-level approach to public administration. These propositions are examined in the following chapters.

1. Today, and for the foreseeable future, the fundamental unit of political organization is the state.
2. Every state is a constituent of an international system of states.
3. Every state asserts the exclusive authority to regulate life within a defined territory.
4. Every state has leaders; that is, a relatively small group of people who have substantial influence over the ordering of state goals and the means by which those goals are pursued.
5. Generally, leaders try to
   a. maintain and improve their own positions within the state apparatus;
   b. increase power and legitimacy within the state system;

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c. increase power and legitimacy within the state's own territory; and
d. increase national prosperity.

6. In addition, leaders ought to advance human rights for the population that is subject to their authority.
7. Conversely, leaders may construe as threats or problems any developments that jeopardize the pursuit of the above goals.
8. The behavior of leaders is guided by governance strategies that describe priorities—that is, the ordering of goals—and the means by which those priorities will be pursued.
9. In general, these aspects of the governing environment must be taken into account as leaders set priorities and decide how those priorities will be pursued:
   a. The distribution of power within the state system.
   b. The composition, distribution, and movement of the governed population.
   c. Patterns of economic activity.
   d. The geography and climate of the governed territory.
   e. The inventory of social and physical technologies.
10. Leaders implement governance strategies by designing, consolidating, administering, and renovating institutions—that is, laws, organizations, programs, and practices. Every state consists of a complex of institutions that expresses a strategy for governing.
11. Crafting and implementing governance strategies is difficult for these reasons:
    a. Goals are not always compatible, so advancing one goal sometimes means compromising another.
    b. There is uncertainty about which policies are most likely to advance goals.
    c. The existing body of institutions, laws, and practices must be accommodated.
    d. The environment for which the strategy is designed is turbulent, so priorities and methods frequently need to be reconsidered.
    e. The analytic capacity of leaders and executive agencies is strained by the complexity of strategy-making.

12. Governance strategies are varied, fragile, and ephemeral. They are designed to accommodate specific conditions, and they must be adjusted frequently as conditions change. This means that institutions, laws, and practices must also be renovated frequently.
13. There is an unavoidable conflict between the need to consolidate institutions, laws, and practices, and the need to preserve adaptability.
14. The proper timeframe for studying the evolution of governance strategies and the institutions, laws, and practices that express such strategies is at least generational. Shorter timeframes create an illusion of robustness and stability.
15. The U.S. experience in crafting and implementing governance strategies is not exceptional.
16. Scholars and practitioners in the field of public administration should be experts in the overall design, construction, administration, and renovation of those institutions that constitute a state. They should use this expertise to help leaders craft governing strategies that are effective, durable, and normatively defensible.