THESIS

The Perfect Democratic Experiment?

Analyzing the Intersection of Mutual Aid Organizing and Experimentalist Governance

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

ABSTRACT:

The COVID-19 pandemic, a turbulent crisis — characterized by dramatic, inconsistent and uncertain events — presented a significant governance challenge to the United States. In the absence of a coordinated, competent response from the federal government to the health, economic and social crises posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, communities throughout the country began engaging in coordinated mutual aid organizing to meet each other's most urgent, fundamental needs. By offering a robust overview on prominent theories of governance and analyzing specific case studies, this thesis argues that both the *architecture* and *principles* of the vast mutual aid networks constructed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic meet the basic criteria of an experimentalist governance, which broadly refers to the concept of decentralizing decision-making to localities in order to facilitate "a virtuous feedback loop" between policy design and policy implementation" based on real-time attempts to solve shared problems. Although mutual aid networks have exceptional and unique qualities that, at first glance, seem absolved of traditional governance, my analysis suggests that democratic experiments need not be legitimated by state actors to provide valuable qualitative insights and strategies on how to respond to future turbulent crises.

INTRODUCTION:

"God, I wish I could just offer to go in for them and have them tell me what they want," Simone Policano, a native New Yorker, recalls thinking on her commute in early March of 2020 upon seeing droves of elderly individuals going in and out of her local supermarket.[1] Policano took to Facebook, asking her colleagues, "does anybody know of a way that a young, healthy able-bodied person could volunteer to deliver groceries to people who are more at risk to COVID?" No one in her immediate circle was aware of such a service, but many were interested in creating one.[2] She soon got connected with a friend-of-a-friend with a knack for digital design who created a website to streamline volunteer intake. Within 96 hours, over 1,200 people across all five boroughs indicated they would be willing to volunteer to deliver groceries to elderly, immunocompromised and sick individuals whilst in lockdown.[3]

Dubbing themselves the Invisible Hands — a nod to their contactless delivery method — volunteers quickly printed fliers translated in six languages, organized a remote call center and created an online request form to match individuals in need with those in their neighborhood

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[1] Anderson, Brian, and Simone Policano. "Invisible Hands: Mutual Aid in a Pandemic." *City Journal* , Nov. 2020, www.city-journal.org/invisible-hands-nonprofit. Accessed Mar. 2021.

[2] Anderson, Brian, and Simone Policano. "Invisible Hands: Mutual Aid in a Pandemic." *City Journal* , Nov. 2020, www.city-journal.org/invisible-hands-nonprofit. Accessed Mar. 2021.

[3] Tolentino, Jia, et al. "What Mutual Aid Can Do During a Pandemic." *The New Yorker*, 2020, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/05/18/what-mutual-aid-can-do-during-a-pandemic.

willing to deliver groceries. Within a week, the group was delivering groceries to hundreds of homes each day. Within three weeks, New York City's very own 3-1-1 helpline was referring people in need of food to Invisible Hands. Within a month, the model created by the group had spread to New Jersey, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles.[4]

Mutual aid networks, much like the Invisible Hands of New York City, have proliferated during the COVID-19 pandemic.[5] In Minnesota "COVIDSitters," made up of clinically-trained medical students, provided childcare for frontline workers in a country which has failed to offer affordable childcare options for even the most essential of workers.[6] [7] Sex workers in Las Vegas, whose profession is already hyper-criminalized, benefitted from a GoFundMe that raised over $10,000 in two weeks.[8] Sculptors and painters in New York City with a surplus of N95 masks dubbed themselves the "Mask Crusaders" as they assembled a stockpile of personal protective equipment for healthcare workers in March to supplement the lack of resources provided by the state and federal government[9] [10] "Zoomers to Boomers," a network created by young people in over thirty cities across the country, coordinated food delivery to elderly and immunocompromised individuals who were told to stay home by health authorities but not offered sustenance in exchange for their isolation.[11] From neighborhood fliers to Slack channels,

[4] Anderson, Brian, and Simone Policano. "Invisible Hands: Mutual Aid in a Pandemic." *City Journal* , Nov. 2020, www.city-journal.org/invisible-hands-nonprofit. Accessed Mar. 2021.
[5] "Mutual-Aid Groups Spread in Covid-Stricken America." *The Economist*, The Economist Newspaper, www.economist.com/united-states/2020/12/19/mutual-aid-groups-spread-in-covid-stricken-america.
[6] "Lending a Hand to Heroes." *University of Minnesota*, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, 27 Mar. 2020, twin-cities.umn.edu/news-events/lending-hand-heroes.
[7] *MN CovidSitters*, 2020, www.mncovidsitters.org/.
[8] Jack Herrera. "How Sex Workers Are Using Mutual Aid to Respond to the Coronavirus". *Newstex Blogs The Nation Blogs,* April 20, 2020
[9] *Mask Crusaders*, 2020, maskcrusaders.org/.
[10] https://mmheadlines.org/2020/05/mask-crusaders-the-force-behind-critical-ppe-conservation-efforts/
[11] DeVine, Blake. "Zoomers to Boomers Rapidly Expanding Nationwide." *NewsChannel 3-12*, 12 Apr. 2020, keyt.com/health/2020/04/11/zoomers-to-boomers-rapidly-expanding-nationwide/.

communities across the United States began to experiment with creative solutions to respond to the emerging health, economic, and social crises posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mutual aid networks are characterized by a voluntary, informal, and reciprocal exchange of resources and services for common benefit. Mutual aid networks strive to meet a community's most urgent, immediate needs, usually stemming from a shared understanding that the formal systems and structures in place will be unable to meet those needs.[12] Their expansion results from a void created by the inability of other systems to meet these needs. Historically, mutual aid networks have flourished in our nation's most marginalized, disenfranchised and underserved communities.[13] With the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, such government neglect was no longer relegated to our countries most vulnerable, marginalized and underserved populations. As hospitals overflowed and school doors shuttered, there was not a whisper of society that did not initially feel the ramifications of the federal government's inability to respond to this deadly, emerging virus. It was now doctors, teachers, lawyers and judges who experienced the cruel ineptitude of a federal government unable to meet its citizens' most basic, fundamental needs. The consequences of the lack of access to testing, personal protective equipment, and economic relief continue to be severe. While it is self-evident that the most disenfranchised among us felt the brunt of this incompetence, the magnitude of this crisis forced millions of Americans — for the first time — to engage in mutual aid efforts to supplement, or even supplant, the gap left behind from a negligent and ill-prepared federal government.

The widespread effectiveness of mutual aid networks to deliver public services to communities across the country, in and of itself, merits investigation. Yet, as a student of political science, I am particularly concerned with what insights those who wish to *govern* can draw from

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[12] Spade, Dean. *What Is Mutual Aid?* 2020, bigdoorbrigade.com/what-is-mutual-aid/.
[13] H, Katie (27 April 2020). "From Mutual Aid To Dual Power: How Do We Build A New World In The Shell Of The Old?"

the architecture, processes and outcomes of mutual aid networks. Can mutual aid systems — characterized by a non-hierarchical organization that engages in context-specific, recursive problem-solving — be considered governance? Are these systems merely one of many strategies that can be invoked in the process of governing through turbulence, or can it be argued, that they are indeed a form of governance? If the latter is true, what theory of governance is best suited to understand mutual aid networks? Does the spontaneous, informal structure of mutual aid systems betray the ability to govern? Does the lack of empirical evidence on mutual aid systems hinder its ability to be studied as a legitimate form of governance?

     Answering these questions is more than an academic exercise. It is painfully evident that complex, turbulent and wicked problems will continue to disrupt society and strain traditional modes of public management.[14] As climate change intensifies, so too will the emergence of new infectious diseases, deadly natural disasters, food and housing insecurity, streams of refugees, land management challenges, and so on. Economic inequality, hyper-partisanship amongst leaders, violent domestic terror attacks, social unrest, financial crises and the fragmentation of political and social life will continue to challenge traditional forms of public administration in new and unforeseen ways. As Chris Ansell notes, in the face of these problems "it is not enough for the public sector to activate a predefined emergency management plan, call in the bureaucratic troops to deal with the crisis, and let them do their professional work supervised by policy experts and a handful of executive political and administrative decision makers united in some form of adhocracy. Turbulent problems call for cross-boundary collaboration, public innovation, and, perhaps most importantly, the development of robust governance strategies that

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[14]"Wicked problems" are characterized by "unclear problem definitions, complex casualties, conflicting goals and lack of standard solutions." Christopher Ansell, Eva Sørensen & Jacob Torfing (2020) The COVID-19 pandemic as a game changer for public administration and leadership? The need for robust governance responses to turbulent problems, Public Management Review, DOI: 10.1080/14719037.2020.1820272

facilitate and support adaptive and flexible adjustment and entrepreneurial exploration and the exploitation of emerging options and opportunities."[15] Mutual aid systems, this thesis stipulates, may be an essential component in the development of such robust governance strategies. To paraphrase John Braithwaite's foreword in the *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, a political science that clings to a preoccupation with government, institutions, and predefined policy proposals risks irrelevance in understanding moments of political transition.[16]

Mutual aid systems, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, meet the fundamental description of governance as the "process of steering society and the economy through collective actions and in accordance with common goals."[17] Mutual aid systems are formed spontaneously out of a need to reach shared objectives — examples from COVID-19 include addressing food insecurity, providing affordable childcare or the distribution of personal protective equipment. Through collective action, systems organize to quickly deliver these agreed upon public services. As a result, mutual aid systems fundamentally "steer" neighborhoods, communities, and cities towards relief. The success of these systems can be attributed to their ability to rapidly mobilize, adapt and invoke local knowledge.[18]

 This process mirrors, at least in part, several theories of governance. *Networked governance,* first introduced in the 1990s, refers to the process of interdependent, self-regulating actors in the public and private sector aiding and directing the creation of policy. These "actors" include nonprofit organizations, trade unions, private corporations and governmental agencies.[19] Likewise, *collaborative governance,* a somewhat more institutionalized version of this process,

[15] Christopher Ansell, Eva Sørensen & Jacob Torfing (2020) The COVID-19 pandemic as a game changer for public administration and leadership? The need for robust governance responses to turbulent problems, Public Management Review, DOI: 10.1080/14719037.2020.1820272
[16] Levi-Faur, David. *Oxford Handbook of Governance*. Vol. 2, Oxford Univ. Press, 2014.
[17] Torfing, Jacob. *Handbook on Theories of Governance*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016.
[18]Adélie Chevée (2021) Mutual Aid in north London during the Covid-19 pandemic, Social Movement Studies, DOI: 10.1080/14742837.2021.1890574
[19] Levi-Faur, David. *Oxford Handbook of Governance*. Vol. 2, Oxford Univ. Press, 2014.

envisions "public agencies directly [engaging] non-state stakeholders in a collective

decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to

make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets."[20] One could envision

local mutual aid groups serving as stakeholders in either forms of collaborative or networked

governance, however, that undermines the autonomous nature innate to mutual aid groups.

Another form of governance which is perhaps more suitable to apply to mutual aid systems can

be found in theories of *experimentalist governance.* Experimentalism broadly refers to the

process of decentralizing decision making to enable localities to utilize community knowledge to

iteratively and reflexively *experiment* with solutions that address common challenges.[21] A key

component of this framework is the act of learning by difference. Networked sets of localities

seek to address similar problems through different, localized and context-specific aims. They

share information and best practices with each other in order to find the most effective solutions

to common problems. Communities are both the *creators* and *recipients* of immediate and

reflexatory policy solutions, a notable characteristic of mutual aid systems.

    This thesis stipulates that the vast mutual aid systems constructed to address the

challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis meet the functional requirements of an experimentalist

governance. By viewing mutual aid systems through this structural lens, we can gain valuable

insights into how to apply this framework to future turbulent crises.

    The plan for this thesis is as follows: Section I will provide a broad overview of the

debates surrounding the reconceptualization of governance, Section II will briefly define and

analyze several prominent theories of governance including networked governance,

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[20] Ansell, Chris, and Alison Gash. "Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory,* vol. 18, no. 4, 2007, pp. 543–571., doi:10.1093/jopart/mum032.
[21] Ansell, Chris. (2012). What is a "Democratic Experiment"? Contemporary Pragmatism, 9(2), 159–180. https://doi.org/10.1163/18758185-90000235

metagovernance, collaborative governance, and experimentalist governance. Section III will

define and contrast the architecture, process, goals of mutual aid systems with existing theories

of governance to discern *if* and *how* mutual aid systems can be understood as governance.

Section IV will present a case study of mutual aid organizing at the onset of the COVID-19

pandemic as evidence of mutual aid systems meeting the criteria of experimentalist governance.

Finally, I will end by analyzing the implications of recognizing mutual aid organizing as

democratic experiments and how a further investigation into these networks will help

governments prepare for future turbulent crises.

LITERATURE

Governance

The term "governance" is a bit of an enigma. Its definitions are numerous, hotly

contested, and often contradictory — this led one political scientist to compare it to Humpty

Dumpty's quip, "when I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean —neither more nor

less."[22] Colloquially, governance is understood as synonymous with "government," and the

formal political institutions of the state which direct, guide and regulate society. Prior to the

1980s, most political scientists acceded to this view — that governance was no more than "a

general exercise of authority" with "authority" referring to institutions of the state. However, by

the 1980s, academic discourse surrounding the term "governance" experienced a

transformation.[23] Globalization, changing democratic expectations, the fragmentation of social

life, and an acceleration of the increasingly "turbulent" problems that characterized the turn of

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[22] Rhodes, R.A.W. "Understanding Governance: Ten Years On." *Organization Studies*, vol. 28, no. 8, 2007, pp. 1243–1264., doi:10.1177/0170840607076586.
[23] Levi-Faur, David. *Oxford Handbook of Governance*. Vol. 2, Oxford Univ. Press, 2014.

the century led scholars of public administration to recognize that even the most effective of

bureaucratic agencies could not govern alone.[24] The growing complexities of public

administration in a modern, interconnected and highly chaotic world revealed that traditional

conceptions of governance were unnecessarily narrow, if not wholly obsolete. By the 1990s, this

changing discourse led William Boyer, a prominent American political scientist, to proclaim

"clearly, we are moving beyond governments to governance."[25]

A handful of particularly influential works helped frame discourse on governance from

1990 onwards. Rod Rhode's "Policy Networks: A British Perspective" (1990) and "The New

Governance: Governing without Government" (1996),Woody Powell's "Neither Markets nor

Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization" (1990) and Gary Stoker's "Governance as Theory:

Five Propositions" (1998) serve as prime examples. Each piece begins with the assumption that

increasingly complex problems demand more robust solutions than the state *alone* can provide.

As Chris Ansell summarizes:

> Public bureaucracy is a child of the industrial age and historically organized like a mass
> production factory to routinely deliver standardized public services to citizens in fields
> such as health, education, social welfare, transport, and security ... Since the 1970s,
> however, there has been mounting criticism of the inability of public bureaucracy to solve
> complex or so-called 'wicked problems' characterized by unclear problem definitions,
> complex casualties, conflicting goals and lack of standard solutions. In response, a
> growing number of governance scholars have argued that complex problems are best
> solved through multi-actor collaborations in networks and partnerships that help mobilize
> valuable resources, spur innovation and build common ownership over joint solutions.[26]

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[24] Levi-Faur, David, and Jacob Torfing . *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford Univ. Press, 2014, pp. Chapter 7.

[25] Lynn, Laurence E. *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, by David Levi-Faur, Oxford Univ. Press, 2014, pp. Chapter 4.

[26] Ansell, Chris, et al. "The COVID-19 Pandemic as a Game Changer for Public Administration and Leadership? The Need for Robust Governance Responses to Turbulent Problems." *Taylor & Francis*, Oct. 2020, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14719037.2020.1820272.

The problematization of traditional conceptions of democratic government in the post-modern world was widespread.[27] In the study of international relations, economics and climate change, interest in new theories of governance grew out of a need to address collective action and common pool resource problems.[28] Within development studies, traditional conceptions of hierarchical, democratic government failed to provide solutions capable of meeting development goals that necessitated partnership with weak or corrupt states.[29] Public administrators held out hope that new forms of governance would offer a more streamlined approach to policy implementation and delivery. Among scholars of democratic theory, governance arose out of growing discourse that sought to foster "political input from citizens and private stakeholders" within solutions to complex, turbulent problems.[30]

Understandably, such interdisciplinary interest in new strategies of governing produced numerous, varied and sometimes contradictory views of what "new governance" looked like in practice. It is within this context that terms like "networked governance", "metagovernance", "corporate governance", "collaborative governance", and "experimentalist governance," arose. Amongst efforts to redefine governance, two divergent paths appeared. One path viewed government and non-governmental actors as peers in governing — governance *with* government. Another path viewed non-governmental actors in civil society as the primary, if not sole, captains of governing — governance *without* government. Yet, as a baseline, new conceptions of governance saw a need to transition away from purely hierarchical bureaucratic systems to more deliberative, collaborative and reflexive strategies that include stakeholders in the private *and*

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[27] Levi-Faur, David. *Oxford Handbook of Governance*. Vol. 2, Oxford Univ. Press, 2014.

[28] Torfing, Jacob, and Christopher Ansell. *Handbook on Theories of Governance*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016.

[29] Torfing, Jacob, and Christopher Ansell. *Handbook on Theories of Governance*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016.

[30] Torfing, Jacob, and Christopher Ansell. *Handbook on Theories of Governance*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016.

public sector. Stoker summarizes this as "the development of governing styles in which boundaries between and within public and private sectors become blurred."[31]

Armed with a rudimentary understanding of the context in which debates on governance arose, we can now strive to construct a workable definition of the concept of governance. In 1993, Kooiman defined governance as "the creation of a structure or an order which cannot be externally imposed but is the result of the interaction of a multiplicity of governing and each other influencing actors."[32] Three decades later, in the *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, David Levi-Faur stipulated governance was more than a process but an "interdisciplinary research agenda" that studied the "efficiency and legitimacy in the context of hybridization of modes of control that allow the production of fragmented and multidimensional order *within* the state, *by* the state, *withou*t the state, and *beyond* the state."[33] While this definition captures the true complexity and diversity of thought inherent to theories of governance, I worry it is unnecessarily convoluted. Perhaps of more concern, this definition notably fails to address *what* is being governed. The *Handbook on Theories of Governance* comes closest, asserting governance is an "interactive process through which society and the economy are steered towards collectively negotiated objectives."[34] This definition tells us *what* is being governed, *how* and to what *objective.* To paraphrase Ansell and Torfing, the central assertion of this insight is that no actor — government or otherwise — has the capacity to govern effectively alone.

[31] Stoker, G. (1998), Governance as theory: five propositions. International Social Science Journal, 50: 17-28. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2451.00106

[32] Kooiman, J.; Van Vliet, M., 1993. 'Governance and Public Management'. In K. Eliassen and J. Kooiman (eds), *Managing Public Organisations* (2nd edn), London: Sage.

[33] Levi-Faur, David. *Oxford Handbook of Governance*. Vol. 2, Oxford Univ. Press, 2014.

[34] Torfing, Jacob, and Christopher Ansell. *Handbook on Theories of Governance.* Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016.

Consistent interaction between and amongst governing actors, (whether in the form of governments or non-governmental participants) is required to produce desirable outcomes.[35]

MODES OF GOVERNANCE

Network Governance

Network governance is a foundational theoretical concept in the study of governance.[36] If "governance" was born out of a need for more deliberative, collaborative modes of delivering public services, then the theory of "network governance" was its first attempt at walking. Broadly speaking, network governance refers to the process of interdependent, self-regulating actors in the public and private sector aiding and directing the creation of policy.[37] These "actors" refer to firms, non-profits, unions, professional organizations, and civil groups. Jacob Torfing, a pioneer in the study of governance networks, expands this definition by stipulating there are five key components innate to governance networks:

- A relatively stable horizontal articulation of *interdependent*, but operationally *autonomous* actors

- who interact through *negotiations* that involved bargaining, deliberation and intense power struggles

- which take place within a *relatively institutionalized framework* of contingently articulated rules, norms, knowledge and social imaginaries

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[35] Torfing, Jacob, and Christopher Ansell. *Handbook on Theories of Governance.* Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016.

[36] Keast , Robyn. "Network Governance." *Handbook on Theories of Governance*, edited by Jacob Torfing and Christopher Ansell, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016.

[37] Levi-Faur, David, and Jacob Torfing . "Governance Networks." *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford University Press, 2014.

- that is *self-regulating* within limits set by external agencies and

- which contribute to the production of public purpose in the broad sense of visions, ideas, plans and regulation.[38] [39]

Governance networks are formed when previously separate actors recognize their mutual dependence on one another to achieve governing goals. Actors with otherwise unrelated interests interact to pool information, share resources and exchange solutions to shared problems. Networks achieve shared goals through negotiations that can be based in consensus-building deliberation or interest-based bargaining. These negotiations tend to become more institutionalized over time, as networks create their own norms, rules, and agreed upon operations strategies.[40] The recurrence of this process allows networks to be somewhat self-regulating — decisions are made within the network, not imposed upon by hierarchical command systems. The culmination of these components is a network which "contributes to the production of public purpose in the broad sense of visions, ideas, plans and regulations." The articulation of these key components can take many forms. Governance networks can be short-lived or relatively enduring, spontaneous or premeditated, collaborate with state or without the state, sector-specific or multi-disciplined, loosely organized or heavily institutionalized. Furthermore, networked relationships which *function* as governance networks can be labeled as something entirely different. Advocacy coalitions, think tanks, corporatism, strategic organizational alliances, and so on, each met the functional requirements of a governance

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[38] Sørensen, Eva, and Jacob Torfing. "The Democratic Anchorage of Governance Networks." *Wiley Online Library*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 15 Aug. 2005, onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2005.00129.x.
[39] Røiseland, Asbjørn. "NETWORK GOVERNANCE AND POLICY CHANGE." *European Consortium for Political Research* , 2007, ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/2cdfcf88-3794-4206-bcde-270918339139.pdf.
[40] Levi-Faur, David, and Jacob Torfing . "Governance Networks." *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford University Press, 2014.

network long before the term "network governance" entered the academic lexicon.[41] Networked

relationships became *governance network*s in the context of the creation of public policy.[42] The

idea of networked relationships steering societal outcomes is not new in the slightest. What is

new, however, is a growing body of scholars who take seriously the idea of governance networks

supplementing or even *supplanting* the role of governments themselves.

The attraction of governance networks is at least three-fold. Governance networks foster

consensus-building and thus reduce the risk of implementation resistance. Scholars of public

management have long stipulated that when relevant actors are involved in the decision-making

process of policy creation, they will "develop a joint sense of responsibility and ownership for

the decisions, which will oblige them to support rather than hamper their implementation."[43]

Second, governance networks are theorized to have greater adaptability and potential for

proactive governance than hierarchical bureaucratic systems. Governance networks aggregate

information, knowledge and resources amongst and between actors. This process allows a

manifold of actors to identify potential policy concerns and opportunities at an early stage,

creating a reflexive, rather than retroactive, response. Finally, governance networks are an

attractive form of public management because participants are bound by interpersonal, rather

than contractual, agreements. Thompson contrasts this form of engagement to other governance

strategies, noting "if it is price coordination that is the central coordinating mechanism of the

market and administrative orders that of hierarchy, then it is trust and cooperation that centrally

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[41] Sørensen, Eva, and Jacob Torfing. "The Democratic Anchorage of Governance Networks." *Wiley Online Library*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 15 Aug. 2005, onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2005.00129.x.

[42] Røiseland, Asbjørn. "NETWORK GOVERNANCE AND POLICY CHANGE." *European Consortium for Political Research* , 2007, ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/2cdfcf88-3794-4206-bcde-270918339139.pdf.

[43] Sørensen, Eva, and Jacob Torfing. "The Democratic Anchorage of Governance Networks." *Wiley Online Library*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 15 Aug. 2005, onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2005.00129.x.

articulates networks."[44] In other words, the driving factor in the formation of governance

networks is the recognition of a *mutual dependence* between actors; that coordinating to reach a

common goal will be more efficient than operating siloed from one another. However, within this

interaction, actors retain their operational autonomy as participation in the network is entirely

voluntary. The characteristics as outlined above make governance networks a particularly

efficient form of public management to address "conditions of uncertainty, complexity and

crisis."[45]

In practice, the theoretical framework of networked governance has been applied to case

studies at the local, national and international level. Adegboyega Ojo and Sehl Mellouli's 2018

article on the deployment of governance networks reviewed six unique case studies on the

efficacy of governance networks responding to societal challenges in diverse conditions ranging

from a public-private network in Ethiopia concerned with the implementation of a Unified

Billing System (UBS), strategies to increase communication between stakeholders in the

governance of Nigeria's Millennium Development Program and efforts to foster citizen

engagement through mobile-based crowd sourcing following South Korea's 2015 Development

Goals. [46] [47] An investigation of each of these cases suggests governance networks are still by and

large *steered by the government,* and thus have yet to fulfill the "self-regulating" component of

networked governance. Despite agreements between non-governmental actors and governmental

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[44] Thompson, Grahame F. "Hierarchies, Markets, and Networks: A Preliminary Comparison." *Between Hierarchies and Markets*, 2003, pp. 21–52., doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198775270.003.0002.

[45] Keast , Robyn. "Network Governance." *Handbook on Theories of Governance*, edited by Jacob Torfing and Christopher Ansell, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016.

[46] Ojo, Adegboyega, and Sehl Mellouli. "Deploying Governance Networks for Societal Challenges." *Government Information Quarterly*, JAI, 23 Apr. 2016, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0740624X16300314#bb0040.

[47] Jacob Torfing & Eva Sørensen (2014) The European debate on governance networks: Towards a new and viable paradigm?, Policy and Society, 33:4, 329-344, DOI: 10.1016/j.polsoc.2014.10.003

actors that participants should be viewed and operate like peers, the distribution of power still lands heavily in favor of government entities. Further, Adegboyega and Mellouli found it was incumbent upon government entities to establish trust, communication and social-ties with non-government groups. As Adegboyega and Mellouli write, governments must "initiate and clearly demonstrate deep commitments in such partnerships or collaboration for the arrangement to be effective. In fact, participants stressed from experience that third-party initiated Governance Networks arrangements are very risky."[48] Of the six case studies examined, none were examples of governance networks truly *supplanting* the role of government or even operating *without* government. This suggests a concerning gap between literature on governance networks and evidence of their efficacy in practice.

The preceding paragraph suggests that despite its advantages, governance networks, much like markets and bureaucratic systems, are prone to failure and not suitable for all conditions.[49] Truly "self-regulating" governance networks risk stalemate, loss of oversight, conflicting and incongruent goals and asymmetric resource deployment. Likewise, the creation of governing norms, rules, and practices within networks can hinder transparency to those outside of the decision-making process. Transparency and accountability concerns became particularly poignant in instances involving heightened participation from governmental groups, as the lines between public and private actors are fundamentally blurred. These concerns culminate in the broad question, "what are the democratic implications of governance networks?" To scholars of democratic theory, the answer is clear.[50] Governance networks

[48] Ojo, Adegboyega, and Sehl Mellouli. "Deploying Governance Networks for Societal Challenges." *Government Information Quarterly*, JAI, 23 Apr. 2016, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0740624X16300314#bb0040 .

[49] Levi-Faur, David, and Jacob Torfing . "Governance Networks." *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford University Press, 2014.

[50] "Prospects for Governance ." *Democratic Governance*, by James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, The Free Press, 1995.

"undermine liberal democracy because they undermine representative democracy." The argument follows that while governance networks swell the scope of public deliberation, they hinter democratic representation in the public policy process. When poorly managed, governance networks prove ineffective and corrupt. The solution to these challenges, as argued by many proponents of governance networks, is to bring back some form of "government" to provide formal network management.[51] Recently, this process has been defined as "metagovernance," or the "governance of governance."[52]

Metagovernance

Metagovernance is defined as "deliberate attempts to facilitate, manage and direct interactive governance arenas without undermining their capacity for self-regulation."[53] Proponents of metagovernance do not believe that interactive governance strategies, such as governance networks, are inherently ineffective or undemocratic. However, they suggest, the impact of these modes of governance depend heavily on social context, political conditions and institutional design. Metagovernance serves a vital role in mitigating the negative impact of these variables. Whereas so-called first-wave governance theorists were interested in describing how the proliferation of markets and networks function as a means to deliver public services, second-wave theorists attempted to assess the normative and political impact of these governance strategies in order to improve their performance.[54] It was within this context that conceptions of metagovernance arose as a theory to facilitate civil-centered, deliberative forms of governance

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[51] Stoker, Gerry. "Governance as Theory: Five Propositions." *International Social Science Journal*, vol. 50, no. 155, 1998, pp. 17–28., doi:10.1111/1468-2451.00106.

[52] Levi-Faur, David, and Jacob Torfing . "Governance Networks." *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford University Press, 2014.

[53] Levi-Faur, David, and Jacob Torfing . "Governance Networks." *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford University Press, 2014.

[54] Levi-Faur, David, and R.A.W. Rhodes . *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford University Press, 2014.

while ensuring networks do not become needlessly aimless, undemocratic and ineffective.

Metagovernance, it has been argued, provides a crucial link between "governments" to

"governance."[55]

Conceptions of what constitutes metagovernance, much like conceptions of network

governance, are extraordinarily varied and vague. Metagovernance first appeared in public

administration and political science literature in the late 1990s.[56] Bob Jessop and Jan Kooiman

were among the first to use the concept. Kooiman approaches metagovernance from a highly

theoretical and arguably impractical perspective, claiming that metagovernance occurs when

"values, norms and principles are discussed, formulated and applied in governing processes."[57]

In other words, Kooiman sees metagovernance as the third-order process of creating normative

expectations for governing, which in theory, should produce more high-functioning governance

networks. In contrast, Jessop, a scholar in critical state theory, sees metagovernance as "the

involvement of the state in strategically organizing the context and ground rules for governance."

Jessop's perspective stresses the role of the state to *choose* and *direct* which specific forms of

governance are best suited for what contexts. In this theory, metagovernance would play a crucial

role in managing and employing different governance strategies. His definition moves closer to

providing a tangible theory of what metagovernance looks like in practice. However, on their

own, both conceptions are unnecessarily abstract. A third perspective was offered in the early

2000s by Klijn and Koppenjan, who understand metagovernance from a "managerial

[55] SØRENSEN, EVA, and JACOB TORFING. "MAKING GOVERNANCE NETWORKS EFFECTIVE AND DEMOCRATIC THROUGH METAGOVERNANCE." *Public Administration*, vol. 87, no. 2, 2009, pp. 234–258., doi:10.1111/j.1467-9299.2009.01753.x.

[56] Jonna Gjaltema, Robbert Biesbroek & Katrien Termeer (2020) From government to governance…to meta-governance: a systematic literature review, Public Management Review, 22:12, 1760-1780, DOI: 10.1080/14719037.2019.1648697

[57] OOIMAN, JAN, and SVEIN JENTOFT. "Meta-Governance: Values, Norms and Principles, and the Making of Hard Choices." *Public Administration*, vol. 87, no. 4, Dec. 2009, pp. 818–836. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9299.2009.01780.x.

perspective" and see the metagovernors as those who create a "'situationally optimal mixture"

for networks to govern. In other words, Klijin and Koppenjan are concerned with how

"metagovernors" can oversee and facilitate complex forms of interactive governance to ensure

their efficacy. Eva Sørensen and Jacob Torfing combine the evolution of these insights to define

metagovernance as a reflexive, higher order governance involving: "(1) the production and

dissemination of hegemonic norms and ideas about how to govern and be governed; (2) political,

normative and context-dependent choices among different mechanisms of governance, or among

different combinations of governance mechanisms; and (3) the strategic development of

particular institutional forms of governance in order to prevent dysfunctions and advance

goals."[58]

Sørensen and Torfing note that public authorities are particularly well suited to serve as

metagovernors. A statistical review of nearly 80 articles on metagovernance conducted by

Gjaltema, Biesbroek, et. al backs this claim, finding that the vast majority of authors envision

public meta-governors, although some have stipulated this role could be filled by external

consultants, private managers, anonymous facilitators, etc.[59] However, public actors are

particularly well suited to facilitate metagovernance given their access to state resources, formal

authority and legitimacy. Scholars have noted that effective metagovernors must meet the

so-called NATO criteria of (N) nodality, in reference to a central actor with strong and weak ties

to other actos; (A) authority, in reference to a knowledgeable and well respected actor; (T)

treasure, in reference to access to resources; and (O) organization, or the capacity to monitor and

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[58] SØRENSEN, EVA, and JACOB TORFING. "MAKING GOVERNANCE NETWORKS EFFECTIVE AND DEMOCRATIC THROUGH METAGOVERNANCE." *Public Administration*, vol. 87, no. 2, 2009, pp. 234–258., doi:10.1111/j.1467-9299.2009.01753.x.

[59] Jonna Gjaltema, Robbert Biesbroek & Katrien Termeer (2020) From government to governance…to meta-governance: a systematic literature review, Public Management Review, 22:12, 1760-1780, DOI: 10.1080/14719037.2019.1648697

manage performance of other actors.[60] The "central position, democratic legitimacy and economic and organizational resources of public authorities seem to make them particularly suited for exercising metagovernance."[61]

Public metagovernors could also provide a "democratic anchorage" to interactive forms of governance.[62] As noted in the previous section, despite the potential for networked governance to provide a more innovative, reflexive and deliberative strategies to deliver public services, they also pose serious implications for democratic representation. A transformation in the role of democratically elected politicians could mitigate these concerns. Sørensen envisions a transition in the role of elected officials from the traditional archetype of representative democracy in which "people authorize politicians to exercise sovereign rule" who in turn craft policy which is "implemented by an administrative apparatus organized as a bureaucratic top-down system of hierarchical rule." Instead, democratically elected politicians could assume the role of metagovernors, in which they give considerable autonomy to governance networks to engage in the delivery of public goods while still playing a key role in the management of networks. Sørensen and Torfing note "politicians and public managers who are already overburdened are likely to embrace this kind of metagovernance, since it permits them to 'let go of the reins without losing control.'"[63] In other words, politicians would delegate responsibility of public governance to networks eager to contribute.

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[60] Levi-Faur, David, and Jacob Torfing . "Governance Networks." *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, Oxford University Press, 2014

[61] Ansell, Christopher K., and Jacob Torfing. *Handbook on Theories of Governance*. Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2017.

[62] Sørensen, Eva. "Metagovernance." *The American Review of Public Administration*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2006, pp. 98–114., doi:10.1177/0275074005282584.

[63] SØRENSEN, EVA, and JACOB TORFING. "MAKING GOVERNANCE NETWORKS EFFECTIVE AND DEMOCRATIC THROUGH METAGOVERNANCE." *Public Administration*, vol. 87, no. 2, 2009, pp. 234–258., doi:10.1111/j.1467-9299.2009.01753.x.

Elected politicians serving as metagovernors can employ a variety of tools in their efforts to steer governance networks. Sørensen and Torfing outline four functions metagovernors can fill to enhance the efficacy of networked governance which mix between a 'hands-off' and 'hands-on' approach:

1) *Network design* that endeavours to determine the scope, character, composition and institutional procedures of networks.

2) *Network framing* that seeks to define the political goals, fiscal conditions, legal basis, and discursive storyline of networks.

3) *Network management* that attempts to reduce tensions, resolve conflicts, empower particular actors, and lower the transaction costs by providing different kinds of material and immaterial inputs and resources.

4) *Network participation* that aims to influence the policy agenda, the range of feasible options, the decision-making premises, and the negotiated outputs and outcomes.[64]

The first metagovernance strategy, network design, ensures governance networks are structured around clearly defined objectives and composed of actors prepared and capable of meeting those goals. This component helps promote transparency and accountability, as metagovernors must ensure public actors who are *not* involved in the network are aware of the network's broad policy goals. The second strategy focuses on facilitation of resources, best-practices and information between actors. When necessary, a metagovernor should provide increased fiscal or material resources. The third strategy involves the facilitation of interaction and dialogue within the network to ensure networks retain their deliberative, consensus-building characteristics. Finally, the last strategy metagovernors can employ is participating in the network themselves in the event that a more 'hands-on' approach is needed to ensure the production of public services.

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[64] Sørensen, E. , and J.Torfing . 2005. "The Democratic Anchorage of Governance Networks." *Scandinavian Political Studies*28 (3): 195–218. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9477.2005.00129.x

Metagovernance provides an enticing alternative between the binaries of "governance" or "governments." It allows collaborative and truly innovative actors to undertake much of the role of governing — crafting policy, proving public service, and operating somewhat autonomously — while the state retains its authority and democratic legitimacy.

Experimentalist Governance

Experimentalist governance, frequently referred to as "democratic experimentalism," has emerged as a promising response to the rise of increasingly volatile, uncertain problems that overwhelm the capacity of traditional hierarchical governance. This so-called "experimentalist" form of governance establishes a deliberately provisional framework for action that seeks to create "a virtuous feedback loop between policy design and policy implementation." In its most developed form, experimentalist governance involves a multi-level structure of stakeholders engaging in an interactive cycle of benchmarking, simultaneous engineering, and learning by monitoring. This process, as identified by political scientists Michael Dorf and Charles Sabel (2008) involves four key characteristics: (1) framework goals and measures established through joint deliberation between member states; (2) lower-level units with the autonomy to address these framework goals and measures as they see fit; (3) regular reporting by lower-level units on their progress in meeting framework goals and measures; and (4) periodic revision of framework goals and measures.[65] This practice seeks "to democratize public decision-making from within" by empowering localities to utilize their community knowledge to *experiment* solutions that address their individual circumstances.[66]

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[65] Sabel, C.F., and J. Zeitlin (2008). 'Learning from Difference: The New Architecture of Experimentalist Governance in the EU', *European Law Journal*, 14:3, 271–327.10.1111/j.1468-0386.2008.00415.x
[66] Dorf, Michael C., and Charles F. Sabel. "A Constitution of Democratic Experimentalism." *Columbia Law Review*, vol. 98, no. 2, 1998, p. 267., doi:10.2307/1123411.

Democratic experimentalism finds its theoretical underpinnings in American pragmatism, and as such, fulfills John Dewey's commitment to fabilism, recursive, experience-based learning and sociability.[67] In a sense, Dewey foreshadowed this theoretical framework in his critique of the inflexible nature of American government, noting, "policies and proposals for social action [should] be treated as working hypotheses, not as programs to be rigidly adhered to and executed. They will be experimental in the sense that they will be entertained subject to constant and well-equipped observation of the consequences they entail when acted upon, and subject to ready and flexible revision in the light of observed consequences."[68] Democratic experimentalism, at least in part, fulfills these aspirations by promoting recursive learning between networked sets of localities who information and best practices with one another from their experience in implementing context-specific policy to meet broad framework goals.

Advocates of democratic experimentalism believe it will increase the "efficiency of public administration by encouraging mutual learning among its parts and heighten its accountability through participation of citizens in the decisions that affect them."[69] Yet attempts to identify democratic experimentalism, much like networked governance and metagovernance, in practice are fraught with inconsistencies and ambiguities. One central challenge, as political scientist Chris Ansell notes, is that a democratic "experiment," "carries with it the intellectual baggage associated with the concept of an 'experiment.'"[70] How can an "experiment" and "experimentalism" — language which is derived from the controlled, methodological

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[67] Sabel, Charles. "Dewey, Democracy, and Democratic Experimentalism." *Contemporary Pragmatism*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2012, pp. 35–55., doi:10.1163/18758185-90000229.

[68] Charles F. Sabel & William H. Simon, Democratic Experimentalism, SEARCHING FOR CONTEMPORARY LEGAL THOUGHT, JUSTIN DESAUTELS-STEIN & CHRISTOPHER TOMLINS, EDS., CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2017; COLUMBIA PUBLIC LAW RESEARCH PAPER NO. 14-549 (2017).

[69] Ansell, Chris. (2012). What is a "Democratic Experiment"? Contemporary Pragmatism, 9(2), 159–180. https://doi.org/10.1163/18758185-90000235

[70] Ansell, Chris. (2012). What is a "Democratic Experiment"? Contemporary Pragmatism, 9(2), 159–180. https://doi.org/10.1163/18758185-90000235

environment of a laboratory — hold up against the adjective "democratic"? Ansell wonders, "can a technique designed to isolate the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable be said to be 'democratic'?" He argues that if we are to take the concept of democratic experimentalism seriously, as a legitimate, innovative form of interactive governance, we must confront the nuance of this language.

Ansell suggests we have two options. The first, as advocated for by psychologist David Campbell in his article *Reforms as Experiments*, sees the gold standard of policy experimentation as randomized, controlled trials with specific evaluation criteria to track the broad aims of a given program.[71] Campbell argues that although such control is difficult to implement with absolute success in the social world, trials still might achieve "quasi-experimental designs" and produce invaluable information on the efficacy of a given policy. Campbell notes that most social policies — and certainly the ones that get passed — are introduced by "advocates as though they [are] certain to be successful… reformers and administrators achieve their precarious permission to innovate by overpromising the certain efficacy of their new programs. This traps them so that they cannot afford to risk learning that the programs were not effective"[72] The hope of seeing social reforms as controlled experiments, is that it mitigates the risk of the passage of innovative, experimental policy because stakeholders can rest assured that it will be evaluated scientifically with rigid standards. Critiques of Campbell's framework note such an approach would severely limit what can truly be considered a 'democratic experiment' as such inflexible control and methodological standards of evaluation are rarely afforded in the social world.

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[71] Campbell, Donald T. "Reforms as Experiments - Donald T. Campbell, 1971." *SAGE Journals*, 1 Jan. 1971, journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/107808747100700202.

[72] Campbell, Donald T. "Reforms as Experiments - Donald T. Campbell, 1971." *SAGE Journals*, 1 Jan. 1971, journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/107808747100700202.

Ansell, on the other hand, suggests that if we are to avoid the unrealistic constraints that come with holding democratic experiments to the gold standard of randomized controlled trials but still maintain the validation and legitimacy offered by Campbell, an alternative framework is found in design science.[73] Design science begins with the assumption that given the unpredictability of the social world; practitioners will never be able to fully isolate the effect of single variables. Instead, design science "presumes that the experiment will interact with the totality of the setting in which the experiment is conducted. The focus of a design experiment is not to definitively accept or reject a hypothesis, but rather to iteratively refine the intervention (design-redesign cycles). Research questions are updated as the intervention unfolds (as opposed to each intervention being a single test)." Design experiments do not seek to prove with certainty a specific hypothesis — that a policy will or will not work — but rather introduce a policy into a real world situation and reflexively observe and identify variables of interest. Ansell notes that while design science lacks the methical validation of a randomized trial, it emphasizes variation as many different localities attempt to solve a common problem through differing means. As Ansell puts it, design science "emphasizes the generation of 'variation' by giving local units the power to experiment. Variation produces 'difference.' Then, through comparison of 'best practices,' different units can adopt the best practices of other units." Ansell understands the downfalls of moving away from the hypothesis testing that comes with randomized, controlled trials as suggested by Campbell. Still, under the umbrella of design science, democratic experiments are not unnecessarily limited by those that can only be legitimized by a scientific procedure:

> Clearly, this approach to experimentation loses the powerful mode of verification
> associated with controlled experimentation (and for this reason, some might argue that it

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[73] Ansell, Chris. (2012). What is a "Democratic Experiment"? Contemporary Pragmatism, 9(2), 159–180. https://doi.org/10.1163/18758185-90000235

is not experimental at all). But it gains in at least two ways. First, it drops the pretense of being able to fully control social variables. Second, design experiments break down the barriers between researchers and research subjects, opening up wider opportunities for a "democratic" experimentalism.[74]

The experimentalist architecture can be found across a variety of sectoral and institutional

settings throughout the European Union and in the United States. Sabel and Zeitlin have found

experimentalist architecture is particularly well illustrated in regulatory initiatives in the EU.[75]

The EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) is an apt example of this. Adopted in 2000, the

WFD replaced "seven detailed prescriptive directives" regarding water safety with one broad,

overarching framework of "good water status." The EU then encouraged member states to

involve "all interested parties" in the creation of policy to meet this objective. This process

empowered localities to employ context-specific solutions while sharing information and best

practices with other member states. In exchange for this autonomy, the EU required member

states to regularly submit status reports. Likewise, the EU Commision then provided its own

progress report which highlighted successful implementation efforts. Experimentalist

architecture can also be observed in the management of private multinational corporations,

whose existence in the turbulence of the global market often betrays 'command-and-control'

regulation. Another application of the theory of democratic experimentalism can be found in

Michael C. Dorf fascinating, albeit indistinct, essay, Could the Occupy Movement Become the

Realization of Democratic Experimentalism's Aspiration for Pragmatic Politics? (2011). This

piece stipulates that despite criticism that the Occupy Movement lacked a substantive agenda,

Occupy is "best understood as a democracy movement that aims to substitute empowered citizen

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[74] Ansell, Chris. (2012). What is a "Democratic Experiment"? Contemporary Pragmatism, 9(2), 159–180. https://doi.org/10.1163/18758185-90000235

[75] Sabel, Charles and Zeitlin, Jonathan (2011), 'Experimentalist Governance', GR:EEN Working Paper, No.9www.greenfp7.eu/papers/workingpapers

decision making for elite rule."[76] From this perspective, the Occupy Movement may be a realization of the institutions of democratic experimentalism — in which representative democracy creates circumstances that empower direct deliberation and policy creation at the local level. Dorf's piece provides a fascinating example of the application of the *theory* and *principles* of democratic experimentalism to existing social movements.

Democratic experimentalism provides the foundational framework for policy to be created through a recursive process of goal-setting, information pooling, mutual monitoring, and revision-based learning. This cycle provides an exciting approach to governance which seems particularly well suited to address instances of "strategic uncertainty" that demand a rapid mobilization of resources, localism, and adaptability. Furthermore, democratic experimentalism provides the framework to study both successful and unsuccessful attempts at delivering public goods "experiments" with valuable qualitative insights. This characteristic is in sharp contrast with traditional hierarchical modes of governance, but also in contrast with the modes of governance discussed previously. The integration of the notion of "experiment" in the social sciences provides an interesting opportunity to conceptualize new, more interactive forms of public governance without sacrificing the delivery of public services. Ansell notes that "a social laboratory is not necessarily a place where randomized, controlled experiments are run, but rather a place where many ideas are tried out."[77]

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[76] Dorf, Michael C., Could the Occupy Movement Become the Realization of Democratic Experimentalism's Aspiration for Pragmatic Politics? (December 1, 2012). Contemporary Pragmatism Vol. 9, No. 2 (December 2012), 263 271, Cornell Legal Studies Research Paper No. 13-75, Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2237569

[77] Ansell, Chris. (2012). What is a "Democratic Experiment"? Contemporary Pragmatism, 9(2), 159–180. https://doi.org/10.1163/18758185-90000235

MUTUAL AID ORGANIZING: A FORM OF GOVERNANCE?

The preceding sections have outlined a growing body of scholarship which understands governance and the delivery of public goods as a multidimensional, deliberative and reflexive process that, perhaps most importantly, does not need to be defined or legitimized by the state. However, notably understudied, if not entirely overlooked, in theories of governance is the role of the informal, often spontaneous, grassroots organizing efforts which strive to supplement social, economic and health needs in communities left disenfranchised by the state and formal relief processes. A poignant example of this oversight is the lack of political science and public administration literature on mutual aid systems — a form of grassroots organizing that is characterized by horizontal, non-market oriented and reciprocal exchanges of goods and services — as a *process* or *component* of governance.

This section seeks to define mutual aid systems and contextualize them within existing theories of governance. First I will identify and describe the defining characteristics of mutual aid systems. I will then provide a brief overview of mutual aid organizing in the era of COVID-19 and of the history of mutual aid organizations in the United States. Finally, I will compare, contrast and analyze the architecture, processes and outcomes of mutual aid systems with existing theories of governance to discern *if* and *how* mutual aid systems can be understood as governance.

What is Mutual Aid?

"Mutual aid" is broadly understood as the cooperation and coordination between and amongst individuals who engage in mutually beneficial behavior. "Mutual aid organizing" is an

expansion of this definition to encompass groups of individuals or communities who engage in a networked, voluntary and reciprocal exchange of resources and services for mutual benefit. From an organizational-ecology perspective, mutual aid organizing can be defined as "an organization whose purpose is not primarily to distribute earnings to its members but to assist, benefit, or protect them in some common matters or objectives." [78]

Mutual aid groups are bound by the values of trust, reciprocity and solidarity. Groups are formed spontaneously to fulfill members' immediate, urgent unmet needs. These needs can range from social support, sustenance, childcare, medical treatment, monetary relief and so on. There is often a shared understanding amongst members that the formal systems and structures in place will be unable to meet those needs. In this sense, mutual aid organizing is therefore also a form of *political dissent.*[79] It is a recognition that for a variety of reasons, current governmental structures will not deliver a community's normative expectations of public services. Mutual aid systems are distinguished from charity and non-profit organizations in that their structure is horizontal, not top-down. The recipients of mutual aid organizing are also the creators; and their roles are interchangeable. Another distinguishing factor between mutual-aid systems and organizations in the non-profit industrial complex is their conditions for distributing aid. Charities often direct their aid to only certain groups of people (i.e., parents and children, sober people, documented citizens, non-felons, etc.) Whereas mutual aid is not contingent on a person's status, but an understanding that it is meant to be reciprocal.

Mutual Aid & COVID-19: An Overview

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[78] "Mutual Aid Association." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, 2019, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mutual%20aid%20association.

[79] Spade, Dean. "Solidarity Not Charity." *Social Text*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2020, pp. 131–151., doi:10.1215/01642472-7971139.

The COVID-19 pandemic incited a surge of community organizing. In early March of 2020, when much was uncertain and everything was upside down, mutual aid groups began self organzing across the country. The Town Hall Project, a digital action network, created the Mutual Aid Hub to track collective action efforts aimed at combating the compounding health, economic, and social crises posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. At its inception in March 2020, it counted 50 mutual aid groups in a handful of states across the country. By the end of May 2020, this number swelled to over 800 groups in 49 states.[80] A year out from the first wave of lockdowns, there are now well over a 1000 documented mutual aid groups.[81] These groups engage in a variety of activities, ranging from grocery shopping and collecting medication to emotional support and social interaction. These groups operate as a "hyperlocal infrastructure of care" in their delivery of public services like childcare, personal protective equipment, monetary relief and social support.[82]

The impact of mutual aid networks is difficult to quantify. If you were to ask those at the frontlines of mutual aid organizing, there is little doubt they will say their work was an ''absolutely essential' contribution to getting the most vulnerable through this crisis."[83] A key success of mutual aid systems has been the coordination of the delivery of goods like groceries, medication, and social interaction to individuals who would otherwise have risked their health in leaving their homes. This practice undoubtedly played a pivotal role in not only slowing the

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[80] Fernando, Christine. "Mutual Aid Networks Find Roots in Communities of Color." *AP NEWS*, Associated Press, 21 Jan. 2021, apnews.com/article/immigration-coronavirus-pandemic-7b1d14f25ab717c2a29ceafd40364b6e.
[81] Town Hall Project. *Mutual Aid Hub*, 2020, www.mutualaidhub.org/.

[82] Kavada, Anastasia. "Creating a Hyperlocal Infrastructure of Care: COVID-19 Mutual Aid Groups." *OpenDemocracy*, 12 June 2020, www.opendemocracy.net/en/openmovements/creating-hyperlocal-infrastructure-care-covid-19-mutual-aid-groups/.
[83] Tiratelli, Luca, and Simon Kaye. "COMMUNITIES vs. CORONAVIRUS The Rise of Mutual Aid." *New Local* , 2020, www.newlocal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Communities-vs-Coronavirus_New-Local.pdf.

spread of COVID-19 but reducing the risk of an unmanageable strain on our healthcare systems.[84] To what *extent* mutual aid systems slowed the spread of COVID-19 and lowered death rates has not yet been studied extensively. However, another key success of mutual aid organizing during the COVID-19 era, and perhaps a more quantifiable impact, has been a growing interest in community organizing and collective action. Empirical data provided by search engines show that the term "mutual aid" saw a 67% increase from the onset of the pandemic in the US during the first week of March to the week of March 15, 2020. The search "mutual aid near me" saw an 86% growth from March 8th to March 15th. The demonstrated growing interest in collective action, mutual aid and community organizing suggest individuals at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic were interested in engaging in direct deliberation, resource mobilization and the delivery of public goods.

A Brief History of Mutual Aid

The term "mutual aid" was first introduced by 19th century Russian sociologist Peter Kropotkin in his collection of essays focused on the biological imperatives for cooperation.[85] Kropotkin pointed to examples of mutual aid in stretches of history — free cities in Europe, medieval guilds, 19th century labor unions, as well as examples embedded in the animal kingdom — as evidence that cooperation is "more natural and usual than competition among both animals and human beings." [86] His work ran counter to Darwin's well-recognized theory of natural selection which focused on the need for species to compete in order to advance.[87]

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[84] Tiratelli, Luca, and Simon Kaye. "COMMUNITIES vs. CORONAVIRUS The Rise of Mutual Aid." *New Local* , 2020, www.newlocal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Communities-vs-Coronavirus_New-Local.pdf.
[85] Kropotkin P (1902/2012) Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution. Dover Publications. Mineola, New York.
[86] Gerhardt, Tina. "COVID-19, the Climate Crisis, and Mutual Aid." *Progressive.org*, 19 Dec. 2020, progressive.org/dispatches/covid-climate-crisis-mutual-aid-gerhardt-201219/.
[87] Darwin, Charles, and Leonard Kebler. *On the origin of species by means of natural selection, or, The preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life.* London: J. Murray, 1859.

Kropotkin did not dismiss the role of competition in evolution, but found cooperation was a neglected area of study. Kropotkin proposed that economic systems organized around reciprocal exchanges of goods, rather than private enterprises, would best develop the well-being of society.

Beyond the bounds of text, widespread mutual aid organizing, commonly referred to as "benevolent societies" or "fraternal orders," were recorded in practice as early as the 18th century. Such groups supplemented the gaps left by the central government amongst disenfranchised individuals. The Free African Society founded in Philadelphia in 1787 was comprised of formerly enslaved Black men who pooled their resources to care for the sick, widowed, orphaned and poor amongst themselves.[88] The need for reciprocal, mutual organizing arose as many formerly enslaved Black Americans traveled North to escape to terror of Jim Crow, only to find themselves shut out of workplaces, quality education, adequate housing and social services. The largely segregated white churches of the North prevented many Black Americans from accessing relief from established charity groups.[89] The Free African Society sought to provide aid in the form of financial assistance for burials of loved ones, housing, food and sustenance, childcare and security.[90] During the deadly Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793 the group extended its services beyond its membership to support the wider city by serving as nurses and undertakers. Membership believed offering aid at a time when the local and federal government was unable to would further underscore the groups' primary mission of "establish[ing] a universal sense of community and engage in humanitarian acts that went beyond their primary group." In this endeavour the Free African Society also advocated for the

[88] Says:, Jake, and African Methodist Episcopal Church: Dedicated to a Mission | Information Wanted says: "Free African Society." *Social Welfare History Project*, 16 May 2018, socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/eras/colonial-postrev/free-african-society/.
[89] Brown, Tamara L., et al. *African American Fraternities and Sororities: the Legacy and the Vision*. University Press of Kentucky, 2012.
[90] Brown, Tamara L., et al. *African American Fraternities and Sororities: the Legacy and the Vision*. University Press of Kentucky, 2012.

creation of similar groups throughout New England, which helped create a network of reciprocal relief for Black Americans at a time when the central government and traditional avenues of charity refused to offer support.

Mutual aid systems also provided immediate relief to the droves German, Irish, and French immigrants arriving in America in the late 19th and early 20th century. The Shamrock Friendly Association was created in New York as a reciprocal network of relief after an influx of Irish immigrants in 1816 made economic opportunities, adequate housing, and healthcare scarce.[91] The Shamrock Friendly Association provided financial relief to immigrants without work and utilized the city newspaper to find employment opportunities for those in need.[92] Similar to the Free African Society, the New Orleans Die Deutsche Gesellschaft or "German Society ," founded in 1856 utilized a reciprocal exchange of time and resources to support its community with sick benefits, funeral expenses and offer companionship to membership.[93]

Out West, mutual aid societies flourished in Utah [94] and California, providing a network of support for Chinese, Japanese and Italian immigrants. [95] Some of the benevolent societies that developed in Salt Lake City included the Chinese Bing Kung Tong, the Italian Società' Di

[91]Clarke Historical Library. "Clarke Historical Library." *Immigrant Benevolent Societies and Fraternal Orders | Central Michigan University*, 2014.www.cmich.edu/library/clarke/ResearchResources/Michigan_Material_Local/Beaver_Island_Helen_Collar_Papers/Subject_Cards/EmigrationandImmigrantLife/Pages/Immigrant-Benevolent-Societies-and-Fraternal-Orders.aspx.

[92] Clarke Historical Library. "Clarke Historical Library." *Immigrant Benevolent Societies and Fraternal Orders | Central Michigan University*, 2014.https://www.cmich.edu/library/clarke/ResearchResources/Michigan_Material_Local/Beaver_Island_Helen_Collar_Papers/Subject_Cards/EmigrationandImmigrantLife/Pages/Immigrant-Benevolent-Societies-and-Fraternal-Orders.aspx

[93] Williams Research Center. "19th Century Immigration, Benevolent Organizations, and Churches." *The Historic New Orleans Collection*, 2018, www.hnoc.org/research/19th-century-immigration-benevolent-organizations-and-churches.

[94] Clark , Cassandra, and Brad Westwood. "Benevolent and Mutual Aid Societies, Fraternal Orders, and Labor Unions and Salt Lake City's West Side." *Utah Department of Heritage & Arts*, 8 Dec. 2020, heritage.utah.gov/benevolent-and-mutual-aid-societies-fraternal-orders-and-labor-unions-and-salt-lake-citys-west-side/.

[95] Webb, Shawncey. "Immigrant Aid Organizations." *Immigration to the United States*, 2020, immigrationtounitedstates.org/583-immigrant-aid-organizations.html.

Beneficenza, Stella D'America (Star of America), and Fratellanza Minatori (Miners

Brotherhood). Each network offered survival services that were otherwise unavailable to

working class immigrants. Services included "food when needed, clothing, temporary housing,

English and civic lessons, injury/medical care, unemployment assistance and widows' and

orphan's benefits." Some mutual aid organizations in California began offering health and life

insurance to their members while others were able to offer loans for members to buy houses,

vehicles and pay for education.[96]

Contemporary Mutual Aid Systems

Recent widespread interest in mutual aid groups has been in context of organizing around

political or social goals. However, the academic study of mutual aid groups experienced a rapid

increase as a result of mutual aid groups in the form of self-help and member-designed support

groups created to address personal stigmatizing conditions, ranging from chronic illnesses,

physical disabilities and behavioral/mental health conditions. In the late 1960s and early '70s,

increasing rationing of healthcare coupled with a growing privatization of human services led to

an "unprecedented expansion in the field of community-based health and human services."

Medical co-ops, halfway houses, rape crisis clinics, and community drug detox centers became

widespread. Such growth prompted mainstream medical journals to devout copious resources to

the study of self-help and mutual aid groups, particularly as a component in the treatment of

addiction and alcoholism. Notably, this growing interest in the effectiveness of mutual aid groups

to support individuals with stigmatizing conditions prompted the federal government to devout

funding to research programs designed to evaluate the advantages of mutual aid groups. In 1987,

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[96] Webb, Shawncey. "Immigrant Aid Organizations." *Immigration to the United States*, 2020, immigrationtounitedstates.org/583-immigrant-aid-organizations.html.

the Surgeon General held a workshop on self-help and mutual aid groups to promote federal and

state agencies to employ the values of trust and support innate within their organizations.

In the 60s, mutual aid networks had also become a key component of social movements.

This phenomena was most famously embodied by the Black Panther Party's survival programs.[97]

The Party found that it could not achieve its goals of "organizing and serving Black and

oppressed communities to liberation" if its members' most fundamental survival needs were

going unmet. Huey P. Newton noted that the Party's mission necessitated such programs if it

were to be successful:

> All these programs satisfy the deep needs of the community but they are not solutions to
> our problems. That is why we call them survival programs, meaning survival pending
> revolution. We say that the survival program of the Black Panther Party is like the
> survival kit of a sailor stranded on a raft. It helps him to sustain himself until he can get
> completely out of that situation. So the survival programs are not answers or solutions,
> but they will help us to organize the community around a true analysis and understanding
> of their situation. When consciousness and understanding is raised to a high level then the
> community will seize the time and deliver themselves from the boot of their oppressors.[98]

The Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program, instituted in 1968, was the first of over

sixty survival programs developed between 1969 and 1982.[99] [100] Drawing on the Black Panther's

realization that they would be unable to advance their goals of liberation if their very

membership were struggling to survive, the Oakland chapter sought to address hunger and

poverty in schoolchildren. Understanding that this need was not being met by the federal or local

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[97] Abron, J. (2005). "Serving the People": The Survival Programs of the Black Panther Party. In The
Black Panther party (reconsidered) (pp. 177–191). Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press.

[98] Newton, Huey P. "The Black Panther Party Service to the People Programs." Edited by David Hilliard,
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA, University of New Mexico Press,
2008,
caringlabor.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/hilliard-ed-the-black-panther-party-service-to-the-people-progra
ms.pdf.

[99] Pien, Diane. *Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast Program (1969-1980)* •, 23 July 2020,
www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/black-panther-partys-free-breakfast-program-1969-1980/.

[100]"A Huey P. Newton Story - Actions - Survival Programs." *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, 2002,
www.pbs.org/hueypnewton/actions/actions_survival.html.

government, the Party sought to provide a free hot, nutritionally balanced meal for school

children in Oakland each morning before class. The Party enlisted community grocers to donate

bulk foods and recruited local dieticians to strategize the most efficient way to serve healthy

breakfasts at a low cost. Parents of children receiving this benefit staffed the kitchen once a

week, assuming their own work schedule allowed them to do so. The program fed hundreds of

Oakland school children each morning. By the end of the year, the Oakland chapter produced

meticulous guidelines on how to replicate the program at chapters nationwide. Two years after

the program's inception, the Black Panther Party was feeding more than 20,000 children in over

36 cities. Other programs included the Intercommunal Youth Institute, later renamed the Oakland

Community School, which was created as a direct response to the Oakland public school system

that nearly twenty years after *Brown v. The Board of Education* continued to perpetuate that

segregated and unequal education for Black children.[101] The People's Medical Care Center,

initially started in Chicago but eventually spread to thirteen different cities, coupled with the

People's Free Ambulance sought to address lack of access to medical care in Black

communities.[102]

Inspired by the organizing tactics of the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, a group

based in Chicago organized around liberation and self determination for Puerto Rican Amerians,

also began engaging in mutual aid to provide survival resources to their community.[103] The group

coordinated similar relief as those of mutual aid groups noted previously, including

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[101] Huggins , Erika. "'The Liberation Schools, the Children's House, the Intercommunal Youth Institute and the Oakland Community School.'" *Caring Labor: an Archive*, 8 Nov. 2010, caringlabor.wordpress.com/2010/07/30/ericka-huggins-the-liberation-schools-the-children%E2%80%99s-house-the-intercommunal-youth-institute-and-the-oakland-community-school/.

[102] Bassett, Mary T. "Beyond Berets: The Black Panthers as Health Activists." *American journal of public health* vol. 106,10 (2016): 1741-3. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2016.303412

[103] Ortega-Aponte, Elias. "The Young Lords and the People's Church: Social Movement Theory, Telling of Brown Power Movements Impact on Latino/a Religious History." *Perspectivas Online*, 8 Apr. 2017, perspectivasonline.com/downloads/the-young-lords-and-the-peoples-church-social-movement-theory-telling-of-brown-power-movements-impact-on-latinoa-religious-history/.

neighborhood street clean-ups, free breakfast for children, clothing donations, walking children to and from school, health care and civic education. By the end of the 1970's, the Young Lords had mutual aid projects in nearly a dozen different cities.

One of their more notable "serve the people" programs sought to address inadequate healthcare in New York City. In the summer of 1970, the Young Lords of New York City initiated the Lincoln Hospital Offensive, which involved a take over of the only major hospital in the Bronx that served the predominantly Puerto Rican population.[104] Lincoln Hospital was known to have toxic levels of lead in the walls. The hospital routinely turned patients away and appeared more preoccupied with training its medical students and testing new equipment than it was treating patients. The Young Lords submitted hundreds of complaints against Lincoln Hospital to the city, but both the hospital and city failed to address these concerns. In response, the Young Lords initiated a twenty-four hour take over of the hospital, as nearly a hundred members entered the building unauthorized through doors and windows. They hoped to use the hospital's underutilized resources by providing tuberculosis and lead poisoning screening services to members of the community. Eventually, police officers escorted the Young Lords from the building, but the group secured the Mayor's attention who promised to construct a new hospital in service of the Bronx. [105]

Challenges in Studying Mutual Aid Systems

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[104] Grossman, Ron. "The Young Lords: How a Street Gang Turned to Community Activism." *Chicagotribune.com*, 8 July 2018, www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-perspec-flash-young-lords-jose-cha-cha-jimenez-0708-20180626-story.html.
[105] Grossman, Ron. "The Young Lords: How a Street Gang Turned to Community Activism." *Chicagotribune.com*, 8 July 2018, www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-perspec-flash-young-lords-jose-cha-cha-jimenez-0708-20180626-story.html.

Mutual aid systems have played a substantial role in supporting marginalized, vulnerable and stigmatized individuals by promoting the values of trust, reciprocity and solidarity. However, empirical data on the growth, disbandment and impact of mutual aid systems has been, thus far, a rarity, particularly amongst scholars of public administration and political science. The study of mutual aid is most prominent in two divergent literatures. On one end, scholars of social work and psychology view self-grown mutual aid groups as a valuable tool to treat mental health challenges, including substance abuse issues and chronic illnesses.[106] It is within this field that there have been the most empirical studies tracking the proliferation, membership and outcomes of mutual aid groups. However, these studies tend to focus on national self-help and mutual aid groups that address chronic or stigmatizing conditions such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Chronic Pain Anonymous, GriefShare, etc.[107] On the other hand, mutual aid organizing has been widely studied from a theoretical perspective in anarchist and radical geography literatures. The study of anarchism involves a diverse set of thinkers and political activists. As baseline, anarchists are anti-authoritarian and anti-hierarchy. As a result, many anarchist scholars advocate for "self-organization outside of the state and explicitly seek to cultivate *autonomy* – directly democratic self-management at a local level."[108] The implementation of democratic self-management often involves "direct action, mutual aid, and prefiguration." As a result, mutual aid organizing is also widely studied as an anarchist response to capitalism and authority.[109]

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[106] Archibald, Matthew E. "An Organizational Ecology of National Self-Help/Mutual-Aid Organizations - Matthew E. Archibald, 2007." *SAGE Journals*, 2007, journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0899764006297666.

[107] Litwicki, Tom. "A Conceptual Review of the Integration of Professional Practices Within Mutual-Aid Organizations." *Taylor & Francis*, 2014, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1556035X.2014.943553.

[108] Woodcock, G. (Ed.). (1977). The Anarchist Reader. Sussex: Harvester Press.

[109] Parson, S. (2014). Breaking Bread, Sharing Soup, and Smashing the State: Food Not Bombs and Anarchist Critiques of the Neoliberal Charity State. Theory in Action, 7(4), 33–51. https://doi.org/10.3798/tia.1937-0237.14026

One of the central challenges in studying mutual aid groups is the nature of their spontaneous growth and decline. Mutual aid organizations are often formed reflexively to address specific and urgent, often short-term, needs. Shortly after reaching these objectives, or recognizing they will be unable to reach these objectives on their own, mutual aid groups often do one of two things: disband or institutionalize. Disbandment occurs as a result of a stalemate, internal tensions, lack of direction, etc. Institutionalization often occurs when mutual aid groups realize they could better reach their goals by accessing resources in the nonprofit industry or public sector. The act of institutionalizing presents a challenge in the qualitative study of mutual aid groups — at what point do mutual aid groups lose their defining characteristic as a non-hierarchical, reciprocal, informal organization? The realignment of mutual aid systems from that of informal, grassroots groups to more institutionalized organizations is an area for future study, especially as it pertains to the ability of these groups (informal or institutionalized) to deliver public services rapidly.

ANALYSIS : MUTUAL AID ORGANIZING AS GOVERNANCE?

Having identified the central concepts of both governance and mutual aid organizing, I will now suggest that mutual aid systems at the onset of COVID-19 met the functional and principal requirements of experimentalist governance. Applying this theoretical lens to the numerous informal, spontaneous, yet highly effective collective action initiatives throughout the pandemic provides a case study on the efficacy of both mutual aid organizing and the principles of democratic experimentalism. I will illustrate this claim by analyzing a case study of a mutual aid group in Minnesota organizing to provide accessible childcare for frontline workers. My analysis suggests this example meets both the principle and basic structural criteria innate to democratic experimentalism as defined by scholars of experimentalist governance.

Criteria for Experimentalist Governance

It is helpful to once again define both the principles and architectural framework of experimentalist governance before applying this lens to relevant case studies. Experimentalist governance involves a recursive process of goal-setting, simultaneous implementation, and revision based on learning from alternative implementation strategies applied in different contexts. Sabel and Zeitlin (2008) expanded upon this broad process to define four key characteristics of an experimentalist architecture.[110] First, broad, provisional framework goals and metrics for measuring success are established through joint deliberation between localities, relevant stakeholders and a "central" unit. Framework goals are deliberately broad, such as "clean water," "sustainable manufacturing," "low unemployment," or "quality education." Second, localities are given great autonomy to achieve these objectives as they see fit, with context-specific solutions. Third, localities participate in "peer review" in which "results are compared with those of others employing different means to the same ends." If upon comparison localities are not making sufficient progress, they are expected to engage in corrective measures, "informed by the experience of their peers." Fourth, stakeholders revise goals, metrics and decision-making procedures as needed in response to problems or changing conditions. The cycle then repeats. In sum, this architecture can be defined as: (1) framework goals and measures established through joint deliberation; (2) localities with autonomy to address these framework goals and measures as they see fit; (3) regular reporting by lower-level units on progress; and (4) periodic revision of framework goals and measures. As discussed previously, this process facilitates a "a virtuous feedback loop between policy design and policy implementation" through the institutionalized act of self-correction, learning from experience, and deliberation.

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[110] Sabel, C.F., and J. Zeitlin (2008). 'Learning from Difference: The New Architecture of Experimentalist Governance in the EU', *European Law Journal*, 14:3, 271–327.10.1111/j.1468-0386.2008.00415.x

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, this process of experimenting, learning from difference, and deliberation in the pursuit of broad framework goals was one initiated out of necessity, rather than coordinated by a central governing body. Beginning on March 15th, the Centers for Disease Control and Trump Administration announced a slew of guidelines aimed at slowing the spread of COVID-19 in the United States.[111] These guidelines included recommending physical distancing, a ban on gatherings of more than 10 people, limiting public outings and the closure of non-essential workplaces such as commercial shops, offices, and schools.[112] Local governments were loosely instructed to respond to these broad directives. However, responses varied dramatically between states and even within states between regions.[113] It is within this context that hyperlocal, context-specific solutions employed by mutual aid organizers began to replicate both the theoretical architecture and broad aim of experimentalist governance.

COVIDSitters: A Case Study

On Wednesday March 11th, the University of Minnesota Twin Cities Medical School announced all in-person instruction would be suspended for the foreseeable future. In quick succession, the state's elementary, middle and high schools shut their doors in an attempt to slow the spread of the lethal coronavirus. As health authorities urged families to stay home and ordered children to withdraw from in-person childcare, parents working at the Twin Cities Hospital were needed in-person now more than ever before. While the governor ordered day

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[111] Taylor, Derrick Bryson. "A Timeline of the Coronavirus Pandemic." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 13 Feb. 2020, www.nytimes.com/article/coronavirus-timeline.html.

[112] Jenco, Melissa. "CDC Updates Guidance on PPE for Health Care Personnel; COVID-19 Declared a Pandemic." *American Academy of Pediatrics*, 21 Apr. 2021, www.aappublications.org/news/2020/03/11/coronavirus031120.

[113] Jun, Nathan, and Mark Lance. "Anarchist Responses to a Pandemic: The COVID-19 Crisis as a Case Study in Mutual Aid." *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, vol. 30, no. 3-4, 2020, pp. 361–378., doi:10.1353/ken.2020.0019.

cares could remain open to serve frontline workers, COVID-19 exacerbated existing child care shortages throughout the state.[114] In the past four years, more than 20% of Minnesota home-based daycares had closed down.[115] A 2018 study found that Minnesota would need to see a 37% growth in child care centers to provide care for all the children who need it.[116] The closure of primary schools further compounded this issue, as K-12 schools constitute the biggest form of childcare for working mothers with children between six and twelve in the United States. In a state already plagued by rising costs of childcare, the COVID-19 crises exasperated existing challenges for parents seeking safe and accessible childcare.

Nowhere was this more onerous than for essential workers, who in addition to facing unmatched professional demands, now found themselves reporting to work without reliable childcare. The childcare centers which remained open through the pandemic came at a steep cost, both literally and metaphorically. Despite the governor's order that childcare centers were exempt from stay-at-home orders, not every childcare center opted to remain open. For frontline workers whose preferred childcare center closed, finding a new one could incur unforeseen costs and social and emotional risks.. Furthermore, frontline workers with children worried that congregated childcare settings would increase the risk their child would be exposed to COVID-19 as a result of exposure to the children of other families with essential workers.

[114]
https://www.fox9.com/news/walz-schools-to-remain-open-for-children-of-health-care-workers-emergency-responders
[115] Brianna Engelson, Londyn Robinson. "Health Professional Education Student Volunteerism amid COVID-19." *National Academy of Medicine*, 4 Aug. 2020, nam.edu/health-professional-education-student-volunteerism-amid-covid-19/.
[116] "Minnesota Department of Health: Child Care." *Minnesota Department of Health*, 2018.

By Friday, March 15th, two Twin Cities medical students recognized that the lack of access to safe, adorable child care was creating a bottleneck for frontline workers at their hospital. The students, Sara Lederman and Sruthi Shankar, recently released from their in-person classes and clinical rotations figured they could offer to babysit for hospital staff. Shankar wondered if her peers would be interested and tweeted out a Google Form gauging her followers' interest in volunteering to babysit.[117] As a result of rapid responses, Shankar and Lederman set up a Google Form to gauge interest amongst students willing to volunteer and hospital workers needing childcare. By the following Monday, 280 students had signed on as volunteers and 160 hospital workers — janitors, nurses, surgeons and administrative staff — indicated they would benefit from at-home childcare provided by the students.[118]

Dubbing themselves the COVIDSitters, the students quickly organized to match volunteers with families. Initially, Shankar screened volunteers to ensure they were either a current medical or pharmacy student. However, the group soon allowed volunteering to include undergraduate students, high school students and community members with first aid or CPR certification, or other experience working with children. Following guidelines from the Minnesota Department of Health, the COVIDSitters utilized a "pod" system when babysitting. "Pods" consisted of two to five volunteers per family, with volunteers only working in the household that they have been assigned. The pod system ensured easy contact-tracing if a

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[117] Elassar, Alaa. "Meet the Medical Students Who Launched a Program to Offer Childcare to Hospital Workers Fighting the Coronavirus Pandemic." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 23 Mar. 2020, www.cnn.com/2020/03/18/us/minnesota-students-babysitting-health-care-workers-coronavirus-trnd/index.html.

[118] Collins, Jon. "As Health Care Workers Prepare for COVID-19, Medical Students Pitch in on the Home Front." *MPR News*, MPR News, 15 Mar. 2020, www.mprnews.org/story/2020/03/15/health-care-workers-prepare-for-covid19-medical-students-pitch-in-on-homefront.

volunteer or family member were exposed to COVID-19.[119] The COVIDSitters also began to recruit volunteers willing to pet-sit, buy groceries, meal prep, and other household errands. Within a week of the governor's lockdown, the COVIDSitters launched a website to streamline volunteer recruitment and assess the community's childcare needs.

As the Minnesota COVIDSitters were gaining steam, various other mutual aid groups were simultaneously experimenting with how to provide childcare to children of single parents and frontline workers. Examples of this include Portland, Oregon's Covid Childcare Co-op Calculator (CCC), which was developed by community organizers to provide a streamlined process for generating cooperative childcare schedules based on participants' availability.[120] An explanation of this process is found on the CCCC website and summarized below:

1.) Coordinate with other caregivers you are comfortable watching your children
2.) Fill out the calendar with the days when each provider is not available.
3.) Once everyone's availability is entered, create your schedule by pressing the "Create Schedule" button.
4.) Modify your schedule however you see fit. Look out for any gap days when no one has said they're available!
5.) Share the schedule with the rest of the caregivers using the shareable link or download a copy with the "Download Schedule" button.

Other initiatives included the creation of Facebook groups to match willing babysitters with families in need, such as Salt Lake City's "COVID-19 Community Connections" Facebook group or North Carolina's "COVID-19 Childcare Aid Resource" Facebook group. Likewise, mutual aid funds to provide monetary support for parents in need emerged throughout the country.

However, given the extreme success of the Minnesota COVIDSitters — who, a year later, have helped nearly 500 families in Twin-Cities with childcare, groceries, pet sitting and

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[119] Lee, Yeji Jesse. "Medical Students around the US Are Offering to Babysit for Hospital Workers on the Frontlines of the Coronavirus Pandemic." *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 18 Mar. 2020, www.businessinsider.com/medical-students-babysit-healthcare-workers-covid-19-coronavirus-2020-3.
[120] "Covid Childcare Co-Op Calculator." *CCCC*, 2020, childcarecoop.org/.

household errands — similar groups began emulating their tactics across the nation.[121] Early into

the implementation process, the Minnesota COVIDSitters documented their organizational

structure and created a GoogleDrive of resources and best practices that individuals interested in

starting their own COVIDSitters could access upon request. Included in this GoogleDrive was a

detailed explanation of the "pod" system, tactics for community outreach, and protocols in the

event a participant tested positive for COVID-19. Just two weeks after the Minnesota

COVIDSitters launched, medical students at schools in Maine, South Dakota, Massachusetts,

New York, Washington D.C., and Texas began organizing their very own COVIDSitters.[122] By

the end of April, the tactics and organizational structure of the Minnesota COVIDSitters was

being utilized across the country, with eighteen cities organizing a COVIDSitters group for their

frontline workers.[123]

COVID Sitters as Experimentalist Architecture?

There is little doubt that the organizing efforts of the Minnesota COVIDSitters

demonstrates the principles of an experimentalist governance. The implementation of reflexive,

context-specific, hyperlocal strategies to solve shared problems — aided by the sharing of

information and best practices— provides ample evidence of the experimental, recursive

policy-making cycle that is central to experimentalist governance. Likewise, a pragmatic

interpretation of Sabel and Zeitlin's four key characteristics of experimentalist architecture

suggests that the Minnesota COVIDSitters also met the *functional* criteria of a democratic

experiment in practice.

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[121] Zia, Shafaq. "Volunteer Network Tries to Help Health Care Workers Who Have 'Helped Us'." *STAT*, 30 Mar. 2020, www.statnews.com/2020/03/31/volunteer-network-help-health-care-workers-coronavirus/.

[122] Zia, Shafaq. "Volunteer Network Tries to Help Health Care Workers Who Have 'Helped Us'." *STAT*, 30 Mar. 2020, www.statnews.com/2020/03/31/volunteer-network-help-health-care-workers-coronavirus/.
[123] "COVIDsitter Network for Healthcare Professionals - Volunteer or Request Help Here." *Medelita*, www.medelita.com/covidsitter.html.

The first articulation of an experimentalist governance is the collective pursuit of broad framework goals. In the context of mutual aid organizing, this objective was born out of necessity. As central authorities imposed far-reaching COVID-19 safety guidelines but failed to ensure their adequate implementation or prepare for the social and economic crises to follow, it fell onto neighborhoods, communities and cities to ensure their attainment. In the case of the Minnesota COVIDSitters, the broad framework goal would be "providing childcare to frontline workers." The second step in the articulation of an experimentalist governance is ensuring localities have the autonomy to devise context-specific strategies to achieve the broad framework goals. Within the context of mutual aid organizing, this discretion is all but guaranteed. Participation in mutual aid systems is entirely voluntary and strategies devised by mutual aid systems are a product of member deliberation, rather than hierarchical command. The Minnesota COVIDSitters are a clear example of this autonomy — their efforts were born out of an independent, altruistic desire to organize on behalf of the Twin-Cities community. Their strategies were also context-specific. While the Minnesota COVIDSitters initially launched as a childcare service, subsequent COVIDSitters provided additional services, such as tutoring, grocery delivery, etc., depending on the needs and resources available to that particular community.

The third step in the articulation of experimentalist governance is the act of sharing of information between local units and the act of self-correction based on learned-experience. In the case of the Minnesota COVIDSitters, this was accomplished through a number of practices. First, in the weeks following the initial wave of lockdowns, many collective action websites transformed into an aggregate of information and resources on mutual aid groups. Examples of this include the Town Hall Project's Mutual Aid Hub, the Anarchist Federation's list of mutual

aid organizations, and the Mutual Aid Wiki, community-managed website documenting the practices of over 5,000 mutual aid groups. The collection and dissemination of relevant information is a critical component of an experimentalist governance. Second, the Minnesota COVIDSitters engaged in the practice of information sharing directly by willingly providing detailed documentation of their organizing practices to others attempting to emulate their tactics. Organizers in Maine noted that this practice allowed them to rapidly mobilize, saying, ""We were able to launch and go live in 48 hours because of how much work MN Covidsitters had done in pioneering this work."[124]

Finally, the fourth step of the articulation of an experimentalist architecture is the periodic revision of framework goals and measures. While it is evident that mutual aid groups frequently revise their organizing strategies in light of new conditions (ie; mobilization during Black Lives Matter protests,) the Minnesota COVIDSitters have not yet revised their broad goal of providing childcare to frontline workers. A handful of COVIDSitters have since ceased their childcare efforts, such as the DC COVIDSitters, who noted a decline in their volunteer pool forced them to suspend operations. Likewise, certain COVIDSitters opted to provide more than just childcare, such as South Dakota COVIDSitters who provided tutoring for school children in addition to childcare and household chores. This suggests mutual aid groups are highly adaptable and able to rapidly mobilize, however, it also suggests they are simultaneously attempting to meet various objectives at once. This characteristic is distinct to mutual aid groups, and not the architecture of experimentalist governance. However, I would suggest this characteristic is indisputably compatible with the *principle* of experimentalist governance. That is, a rapid, reflexive and adaptive response to complex problems which otherwise paralyze traditionals modes of

[124] Zia, Shafaq. "Volunteer Network Tries to Help Health Care Workers Who Have 'Helped Us'." *STAT*, 30 Mar. 2020, www.statnews.com/2020/03/31/volunteer-network-help-health-care-workers-coronavirus/.

governance. It is in this sense that mutual aid groups embody an experimentalist architecture reaching broad framework goals born out of necessity, that are constantly subject to change in light of new conditions, rather than deliberation.

Opportunities for Future Study

The case of the Minnesota COVIDSitters provides an interesting opportunity to apply the principles and architecture of experimentalist governance to informal, spontaneous mutual aid networks. There is ample opportunity for further inquiry into the organizing efforts of mutual aid networks through the lens of experimentalist governance. The evolution of the Minnesota COVIDSitters was not an anomaly. "Zoomers to Boomers," a mutual aid initiative created by a group of teenagers in Santa Barbara hoping to connect with members of the Baby Boom generation in need of groceries was quickly replicated in Denver, Los Angeles, Malibu, Marin, Miami, Honolulu and Salt Lake City, Greenwich and Massachusetts.[125] A group of four women in New York City dubbed the "The Fridge Girls," created a website to coordinate the restocking of a popular community fridge in the Bronx last July and quickly became connected to a much larger network of community fridge organizers across all five boroughs.[126] The website morphed into a central organizing platform for not just the Bronx community fridge, but hundreds of community fridges in the broader New York City area. They take a no "one fridge fits all" approach in their efforts, and stress mutual learning between community fridge organizers. At the height of Black Lives Matter protests over the summer, numerous mutual aid groups played a crucial role in providing food, water and first aid supplies to protesters. One prominent example includes the "People's Bodega," which seeks to "feed the revolution" by offering masks, hand

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[125] DeVine, Blake. "Zoomers to Boomers Rapidly Expanding Nationwide." *NewsChannel 3-12*, 12 Apr. 2020, keyt.com/health/2020/04/11/zoomers-to-boomers-rapidly-expanding-nationwide/.

[126] Diana Figueroa·December 15. "The Fridge Girls Are Working Toward a Future Where #EverybodyEats." *Girls Are Awesome*, 14 Apr. 2021, girlsareawesome.com/the-fridge-girls-are-working-toward-a-future-where-everybodyeats/.

sanitizer, sustenance, first aid and social support to protesters out of a mobile van.[127] Initially

started in Queens at the height of protests condemning the murder of George Floyd, the model

was soon implemented by numerous mutual aid groups in Los Angeles, Portland and Huston.

Several mutual aid groups also coordinated bail funds for individuals arrested at protests. The

National Bail Fund Network, a mutual aid initiative created in 2016, significantly expanded its

network over the summer "in response to an increasing interest in replicating and expanding the

bail fund model across the country." The group provides a directory of community bail funds in

80 cities and compiled a comprehensive toolkit on how to start and manage new bail funds.[128]

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Mutual aid organizing during the COVID-19 pandemic was defined by the rapid,

reflexive implementation of hyperlocal, context-specific strategies to respond to widespread

unmet needs. Successful mutual aid strategies were emulated by groups across the nation, who

were aided by the pooling and dissemination of resources and best practices, as evident by the

Minnesota COVIDSitters, Zooomers to Boomers, The People's Bodega, and so on. Mutual aid

groups engaged in a reflexive revision of strategies to address changing conditions and emerging

information, such was the case with their deployment at Black Lives Matter Protests. This

process — of simultaneous implementation, mutual monitoring and revision — illustrates the

principles and *architecture* of experimentalist governance in action. Further, it suggests the

efficacy of experimentalist governance to respond to turbulent, complex, and wicked problems.

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[127] Saxena, Jaya. "'Kind Bars Are the Food of the Revolution'." *Eater*, Eater, 9 July 2020, www.eater.com/2020/7/9/21308094/peoples-bodega-traveling-food-pantry-mutual-aid-protesters-fighting-police-brutality.
[128] "National Bail Fund Network ." *Community Justice Exchange*, www.communityjusticeexchange.org/national-bail-fund-network.

To understand mutual aid systems as an articulation experimentalist governance is to fulfill a central aim of the study of governance — to conceptualize new, more interactive, deliberative and participatory strategies of governing, including strategies that need not be legitimated by the state. The widespread efficacy of mutual aid organizing to deliver essential health, social and economic services to communities throughout the country conveys that scholars of governance were correct in their assessment that traditional forms of hierarchical governance are ill-prepared, if not wholly inadequate, to respond to increasingly complex problems.

Despite great strides among scholars of political science and public administration to divorce the notion of "governing" with "governments," many still cling to a preoccupation with *institutions*. It is evident in popular theories of governance that institutions, whether in the form of nonprofits, professional unions or corporations, are envisioned to play a central role in the delivery of public goods. This thesis attempts to dislodge that notion by showcasing the efficacy of informal, non-hierarchical community organizing efforts as a strategy to respond to complex crises that paralyze not only governmental institutions, but nongovernmental institutions as well. It does not, however, attempt to argue that mutual aid networks are a suitable response to all governing challenges. It is evident that many processes of governance demand expertise, executive administration and an institution that can be held to account for action or inaction.

However, as increasingly complex, turbulent and wicked problems continue to disrupt society and strain traditional modes of public management, we *must* usurp our preoccupation with institutions in favor of strategies proven to be effective in delivering public goods in times of uncertainty. Mutual aid networks, I argue, are an essential component of these strategies. Much additional research is required to better understand the proliferation, decline, and process

of mutual aid groups. A political science that undertakes this challenges is one that recognizes moments of political transitions — and is equipped to understand the increasingly complex nature of public management in the 21st Century.

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