NASEM Forum on Microbial Threats

Science Advice and Trust in the U.S. During the Pandemic

Roger Pielke Jr.
University of Colorado Boulder

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The US is almost alone in its lack of a high level, expert advisory body on COVID-19, and this matters for policy and politics, including trust.
“These smug pilots have lost touch with regular passengers like us. Who thinks I should fly the plane?”
Four modes of science & policy

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<th>VIEW OF DEMOCRACY</th>
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Expert advice comes in different forms
(and in this talk I focus mainly on category 1 below)

1. Science advice for policy making (e.g., when and how to open schools?)
2. Data collection and dissemination (e.g., Covid-19 tracking)
3. Regulatory guidance (e.g., vaccine approval)
EScAPE: Evaluation of Science Advice in a Pandemic Emergency

EVALUATION OF SCIENCE ADVICE IN A PANDEMIC EMERGENCY

Scientific knowledge and expertise is increasingly important in support of effective decision making. In recent decades, the United States and other nations around the world have designed and put into place institutional mechanisms to better secure science advice. The Coronavirus pandemic has put these institutions to the test, offering a rare opportunity to assess their performance in the context of a global crisis. This project performs a comparative, international evaluation of mechanisms of science advice in the pandemic emergency. As the pandemic continues, the results of this research will be of potential immediate relevance to institutions that are addressing the continuing need for science advice.
20 total EScAPE case studies
Camporesi et al. 2021, EScAPE

Aarts et al. 2021, EScAPE

Sato et al. 2021, EScAPE
Blind men and the elephant?
US pandemic response planning - No Advisory Mechanism
(initially under Trump)

https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/707839.pdf
“In Japan, the Act on Special Measures for Pandemic Influenza and New Infectious Diseases Preparedness and Response, enacted in 2012, stipulates science advisory processes related to pandemic. The Act, established in response to lessons learned through the 2009 swine flu pandemic, provides the basic framework for responding to pandemics by Japanese national and local governments.”

Sato et al. 2021 EScAPE
“[O]ver the last 12 years, the United States has faced four significant emerging infectious disease threats – the H1N1 influenza pandemic, Ebola, Zika, and COVID-19. While urgency demanded rapid and unique responses to each of these threats, none resulted in the sustained improvements and investments needed in our nation’s public health infrastructure. This lack of preparation continues to present significant challenges in our ongoing fight to tackle COVID-19.”

17 March 2021
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives

“[W]hen the White House reproduced one of our charts, it confirmed our fears: The government was using our data. For months, the American government had no idea how many people were sick with COVID-19, how many were lying in hospitals, or how many had died. And the COVID Tracking Project at The Atlantic, started as a temporary volunteer effort, had become a de facto source of pandemic data for the United States.”

Meyer and Madrigal, 15 March 2021

Did US Congress lose focus on pandemic planning after H1N1 in 2010?
Attention deficit in expert advice?

Number of Documents in FACA Committee Public Records
Including the Word "Pandemic" 2001 to 2019

H1N1
Priorities in U.S. science advice?

Number of Publications of U.S. National Academy of Sciences Including the Word "Pandemic" 1995 to 2019

Number of Publications of U.S. National Academy of Sciences Including the Phrase "Climate Change" 1995 to 2019
Academic focus (in English language)?
Despite national failures, states responded

“… processes of science advice on North Carolina pandemic response performed fairly well in large part because the particular individuals involved were committed to mutual respect and data transparency. Such interpersonal dynamics are not guaranteed in government over time.”

Weinkle 2021, EScAPE
“Overall, Japan’s scientific advisory system which responded to the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic performed in an unexpected, yet respectable manner. While Japan’s preparedness for the pandemic was less than optimal, formal processes for scientific advice did work, and informal processes made it possible for the experts to contribute to their full potential.”

Sato et al. 2021, EScAPE
The power to delegitimize . . .

Trust in CDC falling

Q. How much trust do you have in the Centers for Disease Control, or CDC, to provide you with accurate information about coronavirus or COVID-19?

% Hold a "great deal" of trust in the CDC

- Democrats
- All Americans
- Republicans

March 20-23: 53% 
March 27-30: 51% 
April 3-6: 58% 
July 17-20: 44% 
Aug 21-24: 40% 
Aug 28-31: 28%

March 20-23: 46% 
March 27-30: 45% 
April 3-6: 45% 
July 17-20: 31% 
Aug 21-24: 22% 
Aug 28-31: 19%

March 20-23: 42% 
March 27-30: 40% 
April 3-6: 38% 
July 17-20: 30% 
Aug 21-24: 17% 
Aug 28-31: 16%

Source: Axios-Ipsos Coronavirus Index

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... and the power to legitimize

U.S. adults who say they trust the federal government to provide them with accurate information about COVID-19

Total: March 13, 2020 to Jan. 25, 2021

By party: Jan. 22-25, 2021

Democrats: 72%
Republicans: 30%
Independents: 48%

Data: Axios/Ipsos survey; Chart: Danielle Alber/Axios
https://www.axios.com/axios-ipsos-poll-federal-trust-covid-surges-95aeb75e-b9ad-4ccd-b5e5-3301e7c68a6f.html
Examples

• **Masks** (science mis-used as a façade in an effort to protect short supplies of PPE)
• **Boosters** (announcement of rollout preceded FDA independent recommendations, political appointees vs career officials)
• **Origins** (lack of transparency, summary IC assessment)
• **NAS** (early committee set up at request of OSTP and HHS, little-used, invisible, now apparently inactive)
The US is almost alone in its lack of a high level, expert advisory body on COVID-19, and this matters for policy and politics, including trust.
Special thanks!

- The EScAPE researchers (60+ in 17+ countries)
- **INGSA**: International Network for Government Science Advice (and especially Kristiann Allen and Peter Gluckman)
- **Dutch EScAPE Team**: Janne Aarts, Eva Gerth, Phil Macnaghten, Harro Maat, David Ludwig
- **Japan EScAPE Team**: Yasushi Sato, Hiroyuki Kano, Tomohisa Sumida, Tateo Arimoto
- **Italy EScAPE Team**: Silvia Camporesi, Federica Angeli, Giorgia Dal Fabbro
- **UK EScAPE Team**: James Wilsdon, Warren Pearce, Jack Stilgoe
- **North Carolina EScAPE lead**: Jessica Weinkle
- **EScAPE Secretariat**: Ami Nacu-Schmidt, Taylor Bartlett

Of course, I am solely responsible for all claims and statements made in this presentation!
Thank You!

- The Honest Broker Newsletter (please sign up!):
  - https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/

Contact

pielke@colorado.edu

@RogerPielkeJr