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Recent Trends in Public Administration Research

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What are the apparent research and methodological trends in PAR's content over the past decade? From the perspective of the journal's 70-year history, with its aim to "mesh" practitioner and academic knowledge creation, topical coverage since 2000 reflects striking continuity, emphasizing many of the "bread and butter" administrative issues such as planning, human resources, budgeting, and public management. A marked increase in coverage is apparent in the application of more sophisticated quantitative statistical methodology, as well as in the number of female authors, while the number of practitioner authors declined sharply. Throughout the first turbulent decade of the twenty-first century, three intellectual themes stood out: evaluations of New Public Management, connections between practitioners and academicians, and responsiveness to immediate social, economic, and political challenges. Given the constant demand for usable knowledge, scholars seem to have marginalized attention to the historical context and epistemological foundations of the study. The central challenge in the years ahead will be to effectively use research methods in response to the big questions of government and society that defy measurement.

Few decades [apart from the most recent] demanded more from government, and practitioners and academicians were challenged to respond. How has *Public Administration Review* . . . the journal dedicated to fostering academician–practitioner exchange, responded to this rapidly changing environment?

Since many [empiricists], especially the younger, do not know very much about epistemology, they tend to be quite dogmatic about the one set of canons that dominate them.

—C. Wright Mills, 1959

The past decade undoubtedly ranks among the most tumultuous in American history. The year 2000 opened with worldwide anxiety about the Y2K problem, a contested presidential election, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 that prompted ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and corporate scandals involving companies such as Enron and WorldCom. The decade also witnessed major natural disasters such as the Katrina and Rita hurricanes, and ended with the election of a president of African American descent and an unprecedented economic, financial, and regulatory crisis. (The massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is just beyond the period we consider.) As a consequence, the role and position of American government in society increased significantly with, among other things, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security in 2003. (The passage of the health care bill is just beyond our period.) Few decades demanded more from government, and practitioners and academicians were challenged to respond.

How has *Public Administration Review* (PAR), the journal dedicated to fostering academician–practitioner exchange, responded to this rapidly changing environment? What are the quantitative and qualitative trends in its publications? How effectively do its contents respond to the turbulent times and the needs of policy makers, the public, and nonprofit organizations? While PAR's content should reflect current concerns and needs in society, do its pages recognize that the journal and the study not only should be motivated by what is in the news, but also address longer-term trends in government and public administration, as well the foundations of their knowledge? Hence, what is missing in PAR?

What topics, issues, and ideas ought to receive much more attention? Do PAR articles adequately explore longer-term trends and the conceptual foundations of the study?