

Letter from the Guest Editor

The structural social and economic problems of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have worsened since the arrival of COVID-19. The pandemic highlighted the weaknesses of public social protection systems and exposed the limitations of governments in the region in managing a major health emergency.

A general atmosphere of political polarization, social discontent, democratic erosion, distrust in government, and increasing militarization added to the pandemic's old social problems and the new ones. The results have been as diverse as the resources and skills of each country to fight COVID-19. However, the global balance is a large number of infections and deaths throughout the region. Today, LAC countries face the challenge of overcoming the economic and social problems heightened by the pandemic within the post-COVID-19 “new normal.”

In such context, this special issue provided a forum to reflect on the actions taken by LAC governments in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. The authors of this volume (young scholars, almost all) explore the dilemmas, challenges, limitations, and success factors in managing the health emergency in the subcontinent. They depict an exciting series of findings and ideas that mark the beginning of promising research or suggest new analysis perspectives for future studies.

Gabriel Rojas reminds us that government transparency works best when it has specific objectives, such as helping to build trust in the public; Felipe Blanco emphasizes the problem

of ethnoracial inequality, evidenced and intensified by the pandemic; César Romero calls attention to the increase of militarization in some countries of the region, as a result of the lack of professional bureaucratic bodies to address the health emergency and its consequences. Alessandro Braga joins the discussion of remote work and its challenges for the public sector. Heidi Smith and José A. Perusquia call for methodological localism to better understand each local government's constraints on the implementation of national policies.

Suggestive approaches to analysis are also proposed. José Sánchez and Alejandra Medina invite us to reflect on public health from the perspective of the tragedy of the commons and the logic of collective action to rethink government interventions in the face of the pandemic. Additionally, Samanta Varela proposes to analyze the global governance of health from the perspective of meta-organizations, integrating the theoretical contributions of International Relations, Public Administration, regulation, and organizational studies.

In the policy briefs section, Guillermo Cejudo and Pablo de los Cobos document the importance of appropriate information to respond efficiently to a health emergency, and Everardo Chiapa analyzes a failed policy of mobility containment to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through the approaches of groupthink and blame avoidance. Finally, Alejandra Rodas-Gaiter, Daniela Reina, and Óscar Escobar share the successful experience of Palmira, Colombia, in the local management of the pandemic.

As Ricardo Bello-Gómez points out in his paper, these and other research about public management in LAC open a magnificent

opportunity to enrich comparative studies in public administration and public policies, expand our understanding of public organizations, and strengthen the theories and frameworks of our disciplines.

I am deeply grateful to Meghna Sabharwal, Chair of SICA, for inviting me to collaborate as editor of this special issue. I would also like to thank Cristina M. Stănică, Shahrin Upoma, and my colleagues of SICA and CIDE for their invaluable support in reviewing, editing, and publishing the papers in this volume. I am sure this issue will be fascinating and helpful to researchers, teachers, and public service professionals.

—*Manlio F. Castillo, Associate Professor, Public Administration Department, CIDE*