

10-Aug-2020

BMJ-2020-059589 entitled "Policymaking During Crises: How Diversity and Disagreement Can Help Manage the Politics of Expert Advice"

Dear Dr. Moore,

Thank you for sending us this paper and giving us the chance to consider your work. We sent it out for external peer review and discussed it at the Analysis manuscript committee meeting (present: Peter Doshi, Paul Simpson, Sophie Cook, Emma Rourke).

We enjoyed reading your paper. It stimulated interest and discussion amongst our editorial team. We would like to work with you to develop your article, with the aim of moving forward in the process. We do hope that you will be willing to amend it in the light of our comments and the reviewers' comments, provided below.

The reviewers' comments are at the end of this letter.

The editors' comments are listed below:

:: Editors interpreted the Venki Ramakrishnan quote in different ways. Please can you ensure the intended meaning of this is clear, including more explanation if required.

:: We felt that a more nuanced discussion was required when highlighting those specialities that were relied upon to guide public policy. The article currently lists medical (virologists and epidemiologists) and non-medical (economists, sociologists, educators) examples. What about other specialties within medicine e.g. pathologists, general practitioners / family medicine, geriatrics? The article positions virologists and epidemiologists in the driving seat - is this something that's proven true everywhere? What about in the US? Which experts are leading there?

:: One of our editors thought that Sweden might prove an interesting example to consider. It has been reported that the Swedish response was guided by the state epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell. If this is true, it might be the only country whose decisions were really decided by a scientist, rather than politicians. This is particularly interesting given the negative press that Sweden's response has received. You might wish to explore this.

:: In the example of disciplinary disagreements we thought that posing the question as 'whether or not to mandate wearing face masks' might bring in the range of disciplines in a more intuitive way than 'are face masks effective?' Many disciplines may not feel able to comment on whether masks are effective, but are more likely to have a view on whether they should be mandatory.

:: The heading Organising Principles seems to introduce jargon unnecessarily. Editors thought this would work just as well with the heading Principles.

:: With regard to the argument about transparency, we thought it might be worth acknowledging the progress that has been made. For example, while there is a strong case for publishing disagreements, at the start of the pandemic we didn't even know who was sitting on the advisory committees - something that has been the case in previous pandemics too.

:: When discussing the different types of diversity you may also wish to consider age, especially given the disparity in outcomes with covid-19 by age, and the fact that older age groups may have experience of previous pandemics e.g. 1957 and 1968 flu pandemics.

:: You briefly mention differences in tolerance of risk. Editors thought that the differing approaches of countries could be discussed in a little more depth to highlight the implications e.g. of a zero-risk type approach versus alternatives.

:: Finally, editors thought you may wish to consider the political issue around governments seeking popularity rather than necessarily following the consensus, and that they may align with other groups depending on how it fits their agenda.

We hope that you will be willing to revise your manuscript and submit it within 4-6 weeks. When submitting your revised manuscript please provide a point by point response to our comments and those of any reviewers. We also ask that you keep the revised manuscript within the word count of 1800-2000 words.

Please note that resubmitting your manuscript does not guarantee eventual acceptance, and that your revision may be sent again for review.

Please click the the link to start the resubmission process: *** PLEASE NOTE: This is a two-step process. After clicking on the link, you will be directed to a webpage to confirm. ***

https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bmj?URL_MASK=5864ae72bef4465684703e07578504e4

Alternatively, go to <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bmj> and login to your Author Center. Click on "Manuscripts with Decisions," and then click on "Create a Resubmission" located next to the manuscript number.

If accepted, your article will be published online at bmj.com, the canonical form of the journal. Please note that only a proportion of accepted analysis articles will also be published in print.

I hope you will find the comments useful. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

Emma Rourke
ERourke@bmj.com

*** PLEASE NOTE: This is a two-step process. After clicking on the link, you will be directed to a webpage to confirm. ***

https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bmj?URL_MASK=067dc8deffb347d6b2e3ceb2ec1c03dc

IMPORTANT: Your original files are available to you when you upload your revised manuscript. Please delete any redundant files before completing the submission.

****IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO INCLUDE IN A RESUBMISSION****

Instead of returning a signed licence or competing interest form, we require all authors to insert the following statements into the text version of their manuscript:

Licence for Publication

The Corresponding Author has the right to grant on behalf of all authors and does grant on behalf of all authors, an exclusive licence (or non exclusive for government employees) on a worldwide basis to the BMJ Publishing Group Ltd to permit this article (if accepted) to be published in BMJ and any other BMJ PGL products and sublicences such use and exploit all subsidiary rights, as set out in our licence (<http://group.bmj.com/products/journals/instructions-for-authors/licence-forms>).

Competing Interest

Please see our policy and the unified Competing Interests form <http://resources.bmj.com/bmj/authors/editorial-policies/competing-interests>. Please state any competing interests if they exist, or make a no competing interests declaration.

Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:

Reviewer: 1

Recommendation:

Comments:

The authors argue that scientific advice offered to political leaders should be (1) publicized, (2) come from diverse disciplinary experts, and (3) clearly articulate disagreements among experts. The case for (1) and (2) is extremely strong. The surprising part is (3). How to protect against politicians cherry-picking the opinions that suit their political agendas, if many dissents are publicized? It is more commonly thought important to publicize a consensus view to rally the public around the best scientific recommendations. The authors argue, however, that where the sciences is rapidly developing, as with the novel coronavirus, it is important to open space for policymakers to change their minds. This requires openness about existing uncertainties. The best scientific opinion at a given point in time could be mistaken. Authors make a strong case for this position, and offer institutional arrangements such as publication of minority reports and tribunals, that could bolster confidence in experts precisely by demonstrating that the scientific process is not dogmatic. This paper is strongly argued and well-supported by the cited literature.

Additional Questions:

The BMJ uses compulsory open peer review. Your name and institution will be included with your comments when they are sent to the authors. If the manuscript is accepted, your review, name and institution will be published alongside the article.

If this manuscript is rejected from **The BMJ**, it may be transferred to another BMJ journal along with your reviewer comments. If the article is selected for publication in another BMJ journal, depending on the editorial policy of the journal your review may also be published. You will be contacted for your permission before this happens.

For more information, please see our [peer review terms and conditions](https://www.bmj.com/about-bmj/resources-reviewers).

Please confirm that you understand and consent to the above terms and conditions. I consent to the publication of this review

Please enter your name: Elizabeth Anderson

Job Title: Professor of Philosophy and Women's Studies

Institution: University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Reimbursement for attending a symposium?: No

A fee for speaking?: No

A fee for organising education?: No

Funds for research?: No

Funds for a member of staff?: No

Fees for consulting?: No

Have you in the past five years been employed by an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this paper?: No

Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this paper?: No

If you have any competing interests (please see BMJ policy) please declare them here:

Reviewer: 2

Recommendation:

Comments:

This paper provides a nice contribution to the topic of the relationship between expertise and politics, which has been well-studied but not in the context of the current crisis, so it does come across as fresh. To avoid either experts being either attacked or used as a shield the authors propose recognizing diverse expertise and open disagreement, meaning diversity has to be processed and decisions reached through political processing of diversity. The point about the epistemic benefits of variety is well-recognized, and explains why for example there were so many disciplines involved in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment or Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The need for open disagreement is perhaps a bit more novel, though it isn't going to stop that disagreement being weaponised in politics, as for example when climate change deniers cherry-pick seemingly anomalous bits of evidence.

The paper stresses legitimate disagreement and uncertainty, without saying what makes disagreement legitimate – unless all disagreement is legitimate. What about manufactured disagreement on smoking/cancer and climate change by those Oreskes and Conway call 'merchants of doubt'? I'd use the concept of meta-consensus to delineate legitimate disagreement, though that might take a while in a short paper.

I think ultimately the solution to the problems the authors identify lie not just in the relationships between different kinds of experts, but in the broader kind of politics which expert advice enters. Their proposals would probably not be enough to counter the toxic politics of the United States, even as it applies narrowly to the pandemic; and in the much more measured politics of New Zealand, would probably provide mostly incremental improvement. In any case, their proposals would work better if they could be joined by political reforms or innovations to render politics more deliberative.

In short: this is an interesting contribution that should get a lot of attention. And if the authors are true to their own commitments, they should welcome disagreement with their argument.

I had to look at footnote 1 several times to realise Colvin J. Trump isn't a person.

Additional Questions:

The BMJ uses compulsory open peer review. Your name and institution will be included with your comments when they are sent to the authors. If the manuscript is accepted, your review, name and institution will be published alongside the article.

If this manuscript is rejected from *The BMJ*, it may be transferred to another BMJ journal along with your reviewer comments. If the article is selected for publication in another BMJ journal, depending on the editorial policy of the journal your review may also be published. You will be contacted for your permission before this happens.

For more information, please see our [peer review terms and conditions](https://www.bmj.com/about-bmj/resources-reviewers).

Please confirm that you understand and consent to the above terms and conditions.: I consent to the publication of this review

Please enter your name: John Dryzek

Job Title: Centenary Professor

Institution: University of Canberra

Reimbursement for attending a symposium?: No

A fee for speaking?: No

A fee for organising education?: No

Funds for research?: No

Funds for a member of staff?: No

Fees for consulting?: No

Have you in the past five years been employed by an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this paper?: No

Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this paper?: No

If you have any competing interests [please declare them here](http://www.bmj.com/about-bmj/resources-authors/forms-policies-and-checklists/declaration-competing-interests): (please see BMJ policy)

Reviewer: 3

Recommendation:

Comments:

This is a thoughtful, clear, and compelling manuscript. It is well grounded in relevant scholarly literature, and it is written in an accessible style for a broad audience. The manuscript makes a persuasive case for two simple principles for the effective political use of expert advice: include diverse perspectives, and facilitate open disagreement among experts. The authors conclude with some interesting reflections on how these principles might be institutionalized.

I have only two suggestions. First, the authors call their principle "Inclusion of Diverse Disciplinary Perspectives," but then they rightly say that "diversity is important not just with respect to subject expertise, but also with respect to social knowledge, lived experiences or 'perspectival diversity'." As examples they mention "gender, home-ownership, or wealth." These are not matters of "disciplinary diversity," but "social diversity" or what some have called "social perspectives." Additionally, given that the authors repeatedly use the Covid-19 pandemic as an example, I recommend including a comment on racial and ethnic diversity. As many people have noted, in the United States, especially but not only, the pandemic has had a highly disproportionate impact on people of color.

Second, the authors' call for publicizing expert disagreement and uncertainties, while preserving the autonomy of political decision making, has similarities to Collins and Evans's proposal for a committee of social scientists that would do just that in their book *Why Democracies Need Science*. It would be worthwhile to add a brief comment on how the authors' proposal compares to that of Collins and Evans.

Additional Questions:

The BMJ uses compulsory open peer review. Your name and institution will be included with your comments when they are sent to the authors. If the manuscript is accepted, your review, name and institution will be published alongside the article.

If this manuscript is rejected from **The BMJ**, it may be transferred to another BMJ journal along with your reviewer comments. If the article is selected for publication in another BMJ journal, depending on the editorial policy of the journal your review may also be published. You will be contacted for your permission before this happens.

For more information, please see our [peer review terms and conditions](https://www.bmj.com/about-bmj/resources-reviewers).

Please confirm that you understand and consent to the above terms and conditions. I consent to the publication of this review

Please enter your name: Mark Brown

Job Title: Professor

Institution: California State University, Sacramento

Reimbursement for attending a symposium?: No

A fee for speaking?: No

A fee for organising education?: No

Funds for research?: No

Funds for a member of staff?: No

Fees for consulting?: No

Have you in the past five years been employed by an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this paper?: No

Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this paper?: No

If you have any competing interests (please see BMJ policy) please declare them here:

Date Sent: 10-Aug-2020