
Managing the consequences of terrorism, and crisis management more generally, is a topic that has burst into both the practice and theory of public administration in recent years. The distinguished U.S. public administration scholar Naim Kapucu reviews and analyzes this growing field in his comprehensive study, Network Governance in Response to Acts of Terrorism: Comparative Analyses. Kapucu’s book addresses these important challenges from a comparative perspective. The main focus of the book is various governments’ coordinated interorganizational network response to terrorist events; maintaining high performance during a catastrophe surely ranks among the greatest challenges that public managers ever face.

Kapucu’s organizing thread, as his study travels across continents, is a series of significant recent changes in disaster and crisis management systems throughout the world. The study is rooted in detailed examinations of six well-known terrorist incidents over the past dozen years, crossing national, legal, and cultural settings. The cases include the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001; Bali, Indonesia, in 2002; Istanbul, Turkey, in 2003; Madrid, Spain, in 2004; London, United Kingdom, in 2005; and Mumbai, India, in 2008. The book provides a valuable overview of how different countries struggle with emergencies and crises by employing various collaborative decision-making strategies and a capacity-building model, emphasizing similarity across vast locational and cultural differences.

Collaborative responses to the case study attacks are examined through a theoretical framework of collaborative decision making, organizational behavior, and network governance. In the opening chapter, Kapucu introduces the book’s key concepts, focus, and methodological perspectives. The selection of cases is also discussed. The author’s combination of existing decision-making theories and practical experiences leads him to adopt a collaborative decision-making theoretical framework. This employs network analysis to understand the dynamic interaction of multiple players responding successfully to terrorist events.

Chapter 2 presents decision-making models in managing disasters. Kapucu deftly applies a range of existing decision models from the field of disaster and crisis management, focusing on the factors that influence decision making in each case study’s context. The chapter concludes with a useful taxonomy of decision making under stressful conditions.

Kapucu’s third chapter injects collaborative management concepts into existing decision-making models. Again, his theoretical approach is buttressed by exemplary practices of collaborative decision making in disaster management practice. Continuing an aptly layered approach, Kapucu focuses on interorganizational networks as central to collaborative decision-making processes; this is an increasingly well-established approach in organizational behavior literature but, to my knowledge, not previously applied to urgent crises such as terrorist attacks. Kapucu rounds out his comprehensive discussion with a focus on factors such as system, capacity, environment, and actors, which together influence collaborative decision making.

With a robust theoretical framework established, Kapucu turns at length to cases, beginning in his fourth chapter with the September 11 attacks. How does—and how should—the U.S. emergency management system respond to massive emergencies such as terrorist attacks? The author portrays the September 11 attacks as a turning point separating American emergency management into two periods. He then applies the collaborative decision-making framework...
to city, state, and federal government officials’ intersecting response networks. Post–September 11 policy changes, along with continuing challenges in the American crisis management system, are Kapucu’s chapter-ending focus.

A fifth chapter similarly utilizes the 2002 Bali bombings for a nuanced study of collaborative emergency management systems, both in the Bali example and across previous government responses to crises in Indonesia. Kapucu again applies network analysis to describe the effectiveness of collaborative efforts across national and international responding organizations.

Subsequent chapters take up emergency management systems in Turkey (in response to the 2003 Istanbul bombings), Spain (2004 Madrid train bombing), England (2005 bombing of London), and India (2008 Mumbai bombings). In all of his case analyses, Kapucu has read deeply in the relevant descriptions, and he mines these to understand the structure of collaborative decision making and emergent response networks. Across these and the two preceding case study chapters, Kapucu applies a thoughtful comparative analysis: ultimately, we see differences and similarities across emergency management systems in Europe, the United States, and South and Southeast Asia. The book offers timely lessons about individual country responses as well as the collaborative governance framework overall; by drawing together such a wide range of prominent terrorist incidents, Kapucu convincingly presents these as not independent outliers, impossible to generalize about, but rather as a species of extreme tests of (and, often, spurs to) networked governance.

In the concluding chapter, Kapucu draws together his comparative lessons about the collaborative decision-making model of international emergency management. Returning to his guiding framework—system, environment, state capacity, and agency—persuasively affirms his theoretical insights, on this reviewer’s reading. Lessons learned from each incident are discussed in light of emergency management system structure and policy responses, the nature of international collaboration, resilience, and cultural perspectives.

Given the expanding reliance on randomized control trials in organizational and policy research, Kapucu’s very subject—catastrophic terrorist events—would seem out of bounds for mainstream contemporary scholarship in public administration. No strongly reliable data sets are likely to be compiled on this subject (so it is fervently hoped!). Kapucu applies a richly textured descriptive analysis to six terrorist attacks, carried out for singular reasons in very different regions of the world across a dozen years. The book’s closing chapter both acknowledges the obvious methodological limitations of such “data” and offers an essential framework for future studies of this area.

To this end, Kapucu describes the fundamental characteristics of his data and supplies simple summaries of the relevant samples and measures, together with graphical analysis of the networks that he studies. In part because of the author’s descriptive approach, the book avoids any normative claim regarding how things should be. His short concluding section, titled “Lessons Learned,” offers common remedies for an absence of effective collaborative decision-making processes and outlines the best approaches to forming networks in response to terror events.

More specifically, Kapucu provides public administrators in crisis situations—profoundly different from everyday bureaucratic agency routines, of course—with a veritable manual on how to build administrative capacity rapidly in the face of extraordinary danger, coordinate across multiple emergency responders, restore disrupted communications technologies, and employ flexible, collaborative decision making throughout. Along with the author’s previous works, this book stands as an important line of research, on which future scholars will build in order to better comprehend this complex, understudied topic of our times.