Michael Howlett | Managing the "hollow state": procedural policy instruments and modern governance

Abstract: Modern governments face a paradox in that, theoretically, their bureaucratic capacity for action in terms of knowledge, expertise, budgets and personnel resources is high, while, at the same time, phenomena such as globalization and democratization have severely undermined their ability to directly control social outcomes. Recent works by Canadian, Dutch, American, British and French scholars have begun to describe a common set of policy instruments contemporary governments now use to indirectly steer social actors towards their preferred policy options. Unlike traditional "substantive" instruments, which directly affect the delivery of goods and services in society, these "procedural" policy instruments are intended to manage state-societal interactions in order to assure general support for government aims and initiatives. Used on an ad hoc basis in the past, these tools have become an essential feature of modern governance. This article advances the study of these procedural policy instruments by developing a taxonomy and outlining the rationale for choosing between particular instrument types.

Sommaire: Les gouvernements se trouvent aujourd'hui face à un paradoxe: d'une part, leur pouvoir d'intervention est en principe important au niveau des connaissances, de l'expertise, des budgets et du personnel; d'autre part, les phénomènes tels que la mondialisation et la démocratisation ont fortement sapé leur capacité d'influer directement sur les résultats sociaux. Des travaux récents d'auteurs canadiens, néerlandais, américains, britanniques et français amorcent la description d'un ensemble commun d'instruments directifs dont se servent actuellement les gouvernements pour orienter indirectement les intervenants sociaux vers les options politiques que les gouvernements préfèrent. À l'encontre des instruments classiques « substantifs » influant directement sur la prestation de biens et services au sein de la société, ces

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instruments « procéduraux » visent à gérer l'interaction État-société de manière à ce que les initiatives et objectifs gouvernementaux reçoivent l'appui de tous. Utilisés de manière ponctuelle dans le passé, ces outils sont devenus un éléments essentiel de la gouvernance moderne. Cet article fait progresser l'étude de ces instruments de procédure pour l'élaboration des politiques, en définissant une taxonomie et en précisant les raisons pour lesquelles un type d'instrument particulier serait préférable à un autre.

Contemporary governance takes place within a very different context from that of past decades. Government capacity in terms of human and organizational resources remains high by historical standards, but the autonomy or ability of governments to independently affect change has been eroded by such factors as the growth of powerful international actors and systems of exchange. Moreover, at the domestic level, modern societies have developed increasingly complex networks of interorganizational actors whose coordination and management are increasingly problematic. Many states have undergone a kind of "hollowing out," as various functions and activities traditionally undertaken by governments – from highway maintenance to psychiatric care – have been contracted-out or otherwise devolved to nonor quasi-governmental organizations, further deepening the network structure and character of contemporary life.²

These processes and paradoxes challenge public administrators in the new millennium.³ In coming to terms with these challenges, many governments, including Canada's, have developed a renewed interest in understanding the techniques of policy implementation. They have turned away from an exclusive reliance on a relatively limited number of traditional, more or less command-and-control oriented, "substantive" policy tools such as public enterprises, regulatory agencies, subsidies and exhortation that directly affect policy outcomes.⁴ Instead, they have increasingly come to rely on the use of a different set of "procedural" tools designed to indirectly affect outcomes through the manipulation of policy processes.⁵ Canadian public administration moved quite far down this road in the 1990s, as administrators experimented with stakeholder participation, a multitude of different types of private–public partnerships, and various other forms of "collaborative government."

Conceptual work on procedural policy instruments, however, lags behind administrative practice. This article endeavours to advance this emerging area of study by drawing on the methods and findings of studies of substantive instruments to develop a taxonomy categorizing procedural instruments; propose a spectrum that sets out the general nature of the relationship between basic categories of tools; and outline the elements of a theoretical model concerning the hypothesized rationale for governments choosing between instrument categories.

Studying policy instruments

The policy sciences have always been interested in policy processes and in the manner in which governments manipulate these processes in order to achieve their ends. In his path-breaking early works on public policy—making, for example, Harold Lasswell conceived the main instruments of politics as involving, among other things, the manipulation of symbols, signs and icons. Lasswell noted the extent to which governments could affect each stage of the policy process through such manipulations and argued that a principal task of the policy sciences must be to understand the nuances of these actions and their effects.⁷

This orientation was retained by many early students of policy-making, who tended to have a very flexible notion of the multiple means by which governments could affect, or give effect to, policy.⁸ In these early works, "policy instruments" were defined broadly so as to include a wide range of tools and techniques of governance, including both those instruments used to actually deliver goods and services and those directed at affecting policy development. By the early 1980s, however, under the urgings of Lester Salamon and others, attention began to be focused on more precisely categorizing policy instruments in order to better analyse the reasons for their use.⁹ Careful examination of instruments and instrument choices, it was argued, would not only lead to considerable insight into the factors driving the policy process and the characterization of long-term patterns of public policymaking, but would also allow practitioners to more readily draw lessons from the experiences of others with the use of particular techniques in specific circumstances.¹⁰

This new emphasis on the systematic study of policy instruments quickly generated a large academic literature and resulted in immediate application in the design of new policy initiatives in areas such as pollution prevention and professional regulation. Studies in Canada and elsewhere generated useful taxonomies and shed light on significant subjects such as the reasons behind shifts in patterns of instrument choices associated with the waves of privatization and deregulation that characterized the period. Studies in the privatization and deregulation that characterized the period.

Most of these studies, however, focused exclusively on substantive instruments that directly affected the production and delivery of goods and services in society. These included the construction and establishment of regulatory and other political and administrative agencies and enterprises, traditional financial inducements, and the "command-and-control" measures adopted by administrative agencies. Much less attention was paid to the systematic analysis of their procedural counterparts. Nevertheless, as shall be argued below, the model-building methods used in substantive instrument studies can be applied analogously to advance the study and understanding of "procedural" policy tools.

	Principal governing resource used					
	Nodality	Authority	Treasure	Organization		
Effectors	Advice Training	Regulation User charges Licences	Grants Loans Tax expendi- tures	Bureaucratic administration Public enterprises		
General Purpose of Instrument Use						
Detectors	Reporting Surveys	Census-taking Registration	Polling Consultants	Record-keeping Police reporting		

Figure 1. A Taxonomy of Substantive Policy Instruments (Cells provide examples of instruments in each category)

Source: Adapted from Christopher Hood, *The Tools of Government* (Chatham: Chatham House, 1986), pp. 124–25

Substantive policy instruments

In the case of substantive policy instruments, or those instruments intended to directly affect the nature, types, quantities and distribution of the goods and services provided in society, a great deal of conceptual progress has occurred over the past two decades. Taxonomies, for example, have been provided by many authors, one of the most well-known developed by Christopher Hood. In this scheme, instruments are grouped together according to 1) whether they rely on the use of "nodality" (or information), authority, treasure, or the organizational resources of government for their effectiveness, and 2) whether the instrument is designed to effect a change in a policy environment or detect changes in it. A taxonomy of substantive policy instruments based on Hood's schema is presented in Figure 1 above.

These taxonomies were elevated from the level of pure description and classification to a more theoretical or conceptual one through the construction of models that specified the relationship between general categories of instruments. ¹⁵ Michael Howlett and M. Ramesh, for example, developed a spectrum of substantive instruments based on Hood's taxonomy. We focused on the level of direct state involvement in the provision of goods and services as the chief criterion for distinguishing between categories of "effector" instruments. ¹⁶ This placed "voluntary" instruments that require minimal state involvement at one end of a continuum, with state-based instruments such as public enterprises placed at the opposite end. Between the two poles lies a wide range of "mixed" instruments involving varying levels of state and private provision of goods and services (see Figure 2).

Information Funding Recognition Institutional

Level of State Provision of Goods and Services

Low High
(Private) Voluntary Mixed Compulsory

Figure 2. A Spectrum of Substantive Policy Instruments

Source: M. Howlett and M. Ramesh, Studying Public Policy: Policy Cycles and Policy Subsystems (Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford University Press, Canada, 1995)

It is only a start, however, to say that a variety of substantive instrument choices exists that can alter patterns of goods and services available in society and that these choices differ in terms of the extent of state involvement in their production and delivery to the public. In order for the instrument choice perspective to say anything meaningful about policy-making, univariate spectra had to be elevated further to the theoretical level, by linking specific instrument choices to specific sets of choice-influencing variables.

In this regard, most students of substantive policy instruments have focused on two interlinked sets of independent variables: 1) the organizational ability, or capacity, of states to affect societal actors; and 2) policy subsystem complexity, or the number and types of actors governments must affect in designing and implementing their programs and policies. ¹⁷ That is, it is hypothesized that the type of instrument chosen by governments to affect the production or delivery of goods and services in society in specific empirical circumstances will depend on the intersection of state capacity and the complexity of the networks of social actors states wish to influence.

Howlett and Ramesh, again, provide an example of how these two variables, and their expected relationship to each other, can be used to generate a simple model containing a set of hypotheses regarding substantive instrument choices (see Figure 3).

In this model, for example, it is argued that subsidy or market instruments should only be used, or can only be used effectively, when a high level of state capacity and a complex policy subsystem exists – as is the case, for example, with most competitive economic situations faced by modern states. If a state faces a complex network or subsystem but has only limited capacity, on the other hand, it is expected that it will tend to utilize regulatory or information-based instruments. Direct provision and public enterprises would be expected to be used only when a state has high capacity but faces a relatively simple social or policy environment characterized by few actors and a small number of significant interorganizational relationships. Finally, when state capacity is low and the policy environment is not very

Figure 3. A Model of Substantive Instrument Choice (Cells indicate likely instrument choice)

	Level of policy subsystem complexity			
Level of state capacity				
High	High Market, or subsidy instruments	Low Direct provision instruments		
Low	Regulatory or information instruments	Voluntary, community or family-based instruments		

Source: Adapted from M. Howlett and M. Ramesh, Studying Public Policy: Policy Cycles and Policy Subsystems (Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford University Press, Canada, 1995).

complex, reliance on voluntary instruments can be effective, as was the case historically in many areas of social and health policy.¹⁸

These kinds of models do not delve into the detail of fine gradations of instrument use within each general category, nor the specific contexts of individual decisions that can result in errors being made in instrument choices. However, they suggest that although substantive instrument choices are complex, general patterns of such choices can nevertheless be discerned and explained. The development of instrument taxonomies and spectra, and the formulation of bivariate conceptual models, helped to identify these patterns and the limited number of variables responsible for them. As shall be argued below, these same methods of model-building and theory construction can also be applied to the study of procedural policy instruments, aiding the understanding of the nature of such instruments and illuminating the factors that lie behind their use.

Analysing procedural policy instruments

Existing analyses of recent administrative developments provide some clues as to where to begin the study of procedural instruments. As was suggested above, examination of the techniques and results generated in the study of substantive instruments indicates that the general methodological approach to procedural instrument study involves 1) the construction of a taxonomy that classifies such instruments based on the governing "resources" they utilize; 2) construction of a "spectrum" of procedural instruments identifying a single criterion that highlights the similarities and differences between instrument categories; and 3) the generation of a theory or model of instrument choice based on these earlier steps, in which the reasons for using any of the instruments listed in the taxonomy are hypothesized.²⁰

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A partial inventory of procedural policy instruments

Fortunately, the current generation of instrument theorists did not completely neglect procedural instruments. Several works dealing with aspects of the subject give us a broad sense of which direction to pursue in attempting to elevate this area of instrument studies to the level obtained by substantive instrument research.

In their 1988 work, for example, Hans Bressers and Pieter-Jan Klok noted the ways in which "subjective rational actors" can be influenced by manipulation of the alternatives placed before them. They observed that different instruments can affect the number of policy options developed in the policy process, or the calculations of costs and benefits of alternative courses of action made by policy actors. While some of the instruments they examined were "substantive" (for example, the use of licences to affect the cost of certain activities), most of the instruments captured by their scheme were procedural – especially those dealing with the selective creation, provision and diffusion of information to policy actors.

Research into the tools and mechanisms used in intergovernmental regulatory design by Canadian analysts and others has also identified several other such instruments, including "treaties" and a variety of "political agreements" that can affect target-group recognition of government intentions and vice versa

Similarly, in their 1990 study, Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram also focused on government's ability to alter the underlying behaviour of policy actors. In proposing their own scheme for categorizing policy instruments they argued that policy-making "almost always attempts to get people to do things that they might not otherwise do." They noted that

[i]f people are not taking actions needed to ameliorate social, economic or political problems, there are five reasons that can be addressed by policy: they may believe that law does not direct them or authorize them to take action; they may lack incentives or capacity to take the actions needed; they may disagree with the values implicit in the means or ends; or the situation may involve such high levels of uncertainty that the nature of the problem is not known, and it is unclear what people should do or how they might be motivated.²²

On the basis of this analysis, Schneider and Ingram identified five general types of instruments corresponding to these "behavioural assumptions."

These they called "authority," "incentives," "capacity-building," "symbolic and hortatory," and "learning" instruments.²³ As was the case with Bressers and Klok, this scheme included both "procedural" and "substantive" tools. While the discussion virtually ignores pure public provision of goods and services by government agencies and corporations, the "authority" and "incentive" examples cited are typical substantive instruments involving mixed provision of goods and services by a combination of private and public actors. "Capacity," "symbolic" and "learning" tools, however, are much more procedurally oriented, affecting the policy institutions and processes within which policy decisions are taken.

Taken together, the works of Bressers and Klok, Schneider and Ingram, and others, identified a large number of typical procedural policy instruments. These include education, training, institution creation, the selective provision of information, formal evaluations, hearings and institutional reform. Research into the tools and mechanisms used in intergovernmental regulatory design by Canadian analysts and others has also identified several other such instruments, including "treaties" and a variety of "political agreements" that can affect target-group recognition of government intentions and vice versa. That can affect target-group recognition of government intentions and vice versa. The control of the control of the control of the control of the played by private- or public-sector patrons in aiding the formation and activities of such groups. Still other specialized research into aspects of contemporary policy-making has highlighted the use of techniques such as provision of research funding for, and access to, investigative hearings and tribunals.

A taxonomy of procedural instruments

In order to make sense of this disparate (and partial) inventory, it is necessary to identify some means by which instruments can be categorized into general classes. As was the case with Hood's taxonomy of substantive policy instruments, classifying procedural instruments in accordance with the type of "governing resource" they rely on generates a useful preliminary taxonomy (see Figure 4).²⁸ While most researchers have focused on the manner in which these instruments have been used to enhance participation and policy-relevant knowledge, it should also be emphasized that procedural tools can also be used to negatively affect interest groups and other actor be-haviour. That is, for example, information-based procedural instruments include both the provision of information as well as its suppression and the release of misleading as well as accurate information. Deception, obfuscation, and other forms of administrative delay, similarly, are all forms of authority-based procedural instruments.²⁹ Hence, drawing a distinction between "positive" and "negative" uses of governing resources in terms of whether they encourage or discourage actor participation in policy pro420 michael howlett

	Principal governing resource used			
	Nodality	Authority	Treasure	Organization
	Education Information- provision	Labelling Treaties and political	Interest- group creation	Institutional reform Judicial review
Positive	Focus groups	agreements Advisory	Intervenor and researc	Conferences h
General purpose of instrument use		group creation	funding	
Negative	Propaganda Information suppression Denial of access	Banning groups and associations	Eliminating funding	Administrative delay and obfuscation

Figure 4. A Resource-Based Taxonomy of Procedural Policy Instruments (Cells provide examples of instruments in each category)

cesses is a useful aspect of the preliminary classification of such instruments.

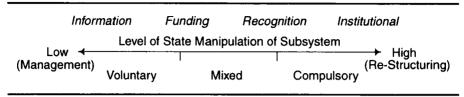
As was the case with substantive instruments, this taxonomy is useful insofar as it highlights the different basic resources used by different types of instruments and therefore allows a virtually unlimited number of instruments to be placed in a limited number of general categories. However, as was the case with substantive instruments, this taxonomy is only the first step in the construction of a testable model of procedural instrument choice.

A spectrum of procedural instruments

The second step in the development of such a model is the identification of a single dimension along which the categories of an instrument taxonomy vary. Here it should be recalled that the fundamental purpose of procedural policy instruments is to alter or manipulate the policy process. As Dutch scholars such as Erik-Hans Klijn, W.J.M. Kickert, J.F.M. Koppenjan and especially J.A. de Bruijn and E.F. ten Heuvelhof have argued, this primarily involves manipulating the links and nodes of the networks of actors involved in policy-making.³⁰ That is, procedural instruments are used to manipulate the number or nature of actors arrayed in the policy subsystems that policy-makers face. Each category of instrument uses a specific resource in order to manipulate aspects of a policy subsystem or network.

As de Bruijn and ten Heuvelhof have pointed out, a wide range of activities are possible in network manipulation, ranging from limited "network management" to more fundamental "subsystem re-structuring." Incorporating this distinction allows the procedural policy instruments found in Figure 4 to be arrayed in a single spectrum according to the level of state manipulation of subsystem membership and activities (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. A Spectrum of Procedural Policy Instruments



In this spectrum, procedural policy instruments can be seen to range from limited information suppression or release designed to mildly affect subsystem behaviour through "voluntaristic" responses from targeted actors, to group or institutional reforms designed to completely restructure existing subsystems by compulsory means.³²

The rationale for procedural instrument choice

Establishing a taxonomy and a spectrum of procedural policy instruments is the first steps towards enhancing understanding of these elements of contemporary public policy-making and administration. To construct a model of procedural instrument choice, however, the question of the rationale for tool selection also must be broached; that is, why would, or should, a government utilize one type of procedural instrument rather than another?

When a serious loss of legitimacy or trust occurs, the subject of political conflict often shifts from the actual substantive content of government actions towards a critique of the processes by which those actions are determined

While more empirical research is required to help test and construct such a theory, the evidence that does exist suggests that a government's desire to alter a policy process is intimately tied to the extent to which existing processes and procedures are considered credible by policy actors. As Peter May and his colleagues have noted in the case of intergovernmental program design, for example, governments have attempted to build cooperation and commitment among the multiple actors involved in areas such as environmental regulation in Australia and the United States, rather than prescribe penalties or utilize incentives, primarily because of the risk to future activities that conflict could bring.³³ And, as Bridget Hutter has noted

in the case of European Union program design, the question of precision and accuracy of targeting appears to have been more significant to policy-makers than, for example, have cost or administrative simplicity.³⁴

This suggests that a key feature to be modelled in understanding procedural instrument choice is the extent to which existing subsystems need to be manipulated in order to retain the political trust or legitimacy required for governments to govern. This raises to the forefront of the analysis of procedural policy instruments the relationship existing between legitimacy and governance.³⁵

As is well known, democratic states require the attainment of a minimum level of societal consensus supporting their actions. When a serious loss of legitimacy or trust occurs, the subject of political conflict often shifts from the actual substantive content of government actions towards a critique of the processes by which those actions are determined.³⁶ This can occur at either the macro, or system-wide, level or at the meso, or sectoral, level, but, in either case, in order to construct or regain legitimacy, governments resort to the use of procedural instruments to alter network configurations.

The study of policy instruments ... has generated many insights into instrument use. ... However, in the process of developing the taxonomies and models of instrument choice, many investigators have focused almost exclusively on the specific set of instruments that governments use to alter the distribution of goods and services in society. In focusing so intently on "substantive" policy instruments, sight has been lost of the need to take both the substance and process of policy-making into account when conducting instrument analyses

This discussion suggests that two key variables that can capture important aspects of procedural policy instrument choice are the extent of existing sectoral de-legitimation, which directly affects the extent of subsystem manipulation appropriate for the task of re-legitimation, and the extent of systemic de-legitimation, which affects the capacity of governments to use existing networks to continue policy deliberations.³⁷ On this basis, a model of procedural instrument choice, analogous to that previously developed for substantive instruments, can be set out (see Figure 6).

In this model, one would expect governments faced with both sectoral and trans-sectoral systemic legitimation problems to utilize "compulsory" procedural instruments such as government reorganization in order to restructure policy networks and essentially reconstruct legitimacy and trust

Figure 6. A Model of Procedural Instrument Choice (Cells indicate instrument choice)

		Level of systemic de-legitimation		
	High	High	Low	
Level of sectoral de-legitimation	rugn	Institutional manipulation	Funding manipulation	
ae-legitimation	Low	Recognition manipulation	Information manipulation	

de novo.³⁸ Governments facing low levels of both sectoral and systemic delegitimation would be expected to favour the use of more modest "voluntary" instruments such as information manipulation through the release or withholding of documents, since only minor network manipulation is required to legitimate existing policy processes.³⁹ In between would be found cases where sectoral distrust and discontent is high but systemic delegitimation low, meaning governments funds can be used to re-legitimate policy processes through, for example, the infusion of cash to create or selectively support specific interest groups.⁴⁰ Finally, where systemic de-legitimation is high but sectoral de-legitimacy is low, governments can recognize new actors or reorganize old ones through authoritative means such as the establishment of, for example, specialized quasi-independent advisory committees and inquiries that serve to distance sectoral policy processes from overall systemic legitimation concerns.⁴¹

Conclusion: policy instruments for modern governance

The study of policy instruments over the past twenty years has generated many insights into instrument use; insights that have helped academics to better understand policy processes and have helped practitioners in Canada and elsewhere design better policies. However, in the process of developing the taxonomies and models of instrument choice, many investigators have focused almost exclusively on the specific set of instruments that governments use to alter the distribution of goods and services in society. In focusing so intently on "substantive" policy instruments, sight has been lost of the need, identified by early students of public policy, to take both the substance and process of policy-making into account when conducting instrument analyses.

This has become a major problem in attempting to find solutions to the paradoxes of modern governance and find the appropriate methods and tools to steer the "hollow state." While procedural policy instruments have been used on an ad hoc basis in the past, they have become an essential component of modern governance. Because of this shift in instrument use, developing more systematic assessments, inventories, categories and models of procedural policy tools is increasingly a prerequisite both for contemporary public administration and public policy analysis. As Evert Lindquist argued several years ago in these pages, managing the hollow state requires

[n]ew analytical tools that will help (officials) to diagnose and map the external environments of public agencies, to recognize the inherent tensions and dynamics in these environments as they pertain to policy development and consensus-building, and to develop new strategies for "working" these environments in the interests both of their political masters and those of the broader communities they serve. ... If public servants are to learn from the experience of colleagues working in other sectors and levels of government, they will need a vocabulary to facilitate the dialogue. 44

In pursuing this effort, policy analysts have developed a renewed appreciation for the multiple different types of policy instruments available to governments in policy design and have begun to identify a distinct set of procedural instruments, such as government–NGO partnerships, public advisory commissions, roundtables, interest-group funding and information dissemination, which all act to guide or steer policy processes in the direction government wishes through the manipulation of policy actors and their interrelationships.⁴⁵

If the management of the hollow state is to be more than simply an ad hoc process, developing such models is an essential part of modern governance

This article has adapted techniques used in the classification and analysis of substantive policy instruments to the study of their procedural counterparts. It developed a taxonomy based on the nature of the governing resources used by such instruments and, focusing on the level of network manipulation involved in instrument use, established a continuum highlighting the significant similarities and differences found in each general category of instrument. Finally, emphasizing the manner in which instrument choices are affected by the generalizability of the legitimation problems a government faces, a model of procedural instrument choice was developed that set out several hypotheses pertaining to likely situations where use of particular instruments would occur.

Developing improved models of procedural instrument choice is of use to both analysts and practitioners in Canada and elsewhere who are interested in policy implementation and policy design in the contemporary era. Like the models of substantive tools developed in the 1970s and 1980s, this effort promises to illuminate the range of options available to public administrators and decision-makers in their efforts to meet the challenges of modern governance.

For both practitioners and theorists, more precise definition, classification, conceptualization and modelling helps to generate a fruitful future research agenda. Among other things, such research might well examine questions related to the manner in which political institutions gain and lose "political capital" and legitimacy in the course of their day-to-day activities and how this affects their ability to innovate⁴⁶ or those involving the description and improved understanding of the precise requisites for sectoral policy re-legitimation.⁴⁷ For those interested in the conceptual aspects of instrument choice, it begins the process of understanding the "dialectic of legitimacy" or the manner in which not only state actors but also societal ones must inspire trust and loyalty if policy-making processes and outcomes are to remain effective.⁴⁸

For practitioners, an improved understanding of procedural policy instruments helps to better outline the options available to governments in specific circumstances. More significantly, it provides guidelines indicating which procedural choice is appropriate in which circumstance, such as when to hold multistakeholder consultations and when not to, or when might be an appropriate time to release or withhold information. If the management of the hollow state is to be more than simply an ad hoc process, developing such models is an essential part of modern governance.

Notes

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