

Balance

by Julian Gresser and Fred Phillips

Soon 60% of the world's people will live in cities. When we live in closer proximity, it becomes more likely that my activities will interfere with your activities. Your factory smoke inhibits my stargazing. My band practice gets in the way of your sleep.

We can say that cars with even-numbered license tags can enter the central business district just on even-numbered dates. That inconveniences odd-tag owners only intermittently. But if your new apartment tower blocks my view of the lake, I'm penalized permanently.

Three challenges for balanced policy

These interactions among denizens of a city are the first kind that call for balanced policies.

In a second kind, the rules we accept as urban dwellers will become more and more foreign to those who still reside in rural areas. "Your freedom to swing your fist ends at my nose," the saying goes. The hobby of fist-swinging will remain less risky in the countryside where neighbors are not too near. The example is silly but illustrative: Urban people may welcome a ban on fist-swinging. Rural folks will rebel against it.

The third kind has to do with global activities that affect everyone on the planet, though differentially. Satellite policies benefit some providers and users but harm others. Politicians and CEOs may find it expedient to do nothing about climate change, but human survival itself is at risk.

And what about commerce itself, which is supposed to be about fair exchange? If a company thinks too much about how it can benefit customers and not enough about fair recompense, it will go bust. If it attends too much to what it can take from customers and not enough about what it can deliver to them – a situation that might sound sadly familiar – things are seriously out of balance.

Intra-urban, urban-rural, global, and commercial – all these kinds of policy questions need new balance.

Balance is urgent

Urbanization is accelerating. The urban-rural gulf in political views has become dangerous, especially in America. The Covid pandemic has stressed folks beyond their ability to cope. The results range from "air rage" to assault on the U.S. Capitol.

How can we achieve *balance* – balance in our freedom to bother our neighbors, and balance in our personal ability to formulate and evaluate the attendant policies – when the stresses are mounting and so very urgent?

Balance needs to move beyond traditional compromise. When one faction wants "1" and the other wants "3," politicians like to compromise on "2." The problem is, no one wants or needs "2."

Balance needs to move beyond well-intentioned ambivalence. "Yes, I see your side, can you see mine?" Dialog is helpful, but decisions must be made and actions taken.

The world is changing. Dealing with change requires personal resilience. Resilience cannot mean bouncing back to where we were before; the world has changed, and where we were before doesn't exist any more. Resilience means returning to the path toward our goal or our mission.

Because resilience means nothing unless there is a goal, we must have a clear idea what kind of society we want.*

These ideas may bring us toward balance.

The late Bill Cooper, editor of *Kohler's Dictionary for Accountants*, defined a *policy* as a rule that must be followed 90% of the time. Others went on to define an adaptive policy of the first kind, in which the 90% figure changes as conditions change over time – going sometimes to zero, either due to a sunset clause or to (constant monitoring and) adoption of policies that are working well in other localities. An adaptive policy of the second kind would allow the percent figure to vary by geography, culture and local conditions.❏

Former New York governor Andrew Cuomo emplaced an adaptive policy early in the pandemic, mandating masks for NYC residents but allowing personal choice in masking for “upstate” residents. Adaptive policies can be part of the balance solution.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s reconciliation commission was a great example of balance, aiming at “restorative, not retributive justice.”

The *creative third way* may be another means of achieving balance. If I insist on South! while you are firm about North!, we might (perhaps with help from a third party) find that we both actually prefer West. Or up. Or left or right.

Paying it forward may also lead to balance. Performing kind acts gives us more than a satisfied feeling. It brings us into the lives of others – the recipients of our kind actions – and exposes us to other views, perhaps revealing a “creative third way” to us, helping maintain our sense of connectedness, coherence, wholeness and creative vitality.❏❏

Policies that balance legitimate interests, and personal emotional balance that allows us to deal well with political and interpersonal challenges. Both need to be worked on at the same time.

* Phillips, F. and Angela Chao, Rethinking Resilience: Definition, context, and measure. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 2021, DOI: 10.1109/TEM.2021.3139051.

❏ F. Phillips, Hsing-Er Lin, Trudi Schifter and Nicholas Folse, “Augmented Popperian Experiments: A framework for sustainability knowledge development across contexts.” *European J. of International Management*, May 2019. DOI: 10.1504/EJIM.2020.10024697

❏❏ Julian Gresser, *Piloting Through Chaos: Wise Leadership, Effective Negotiation for the 21st Century*. Five Rings Press, 1996.