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**DISMANTLING POLICIES THROUGH (DE)MOBILIZATION OF
ANALYTICAL CAPACITY: CASES FROM BRAZIL**

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DISMANTLING POLICIES THROUGH (DE)MOBILIZATION OF ANALYTICAL CAPACITY: CASES FROM BRAZIL

Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to the debate on features that make policies more or less vulnerable to policy dismantling in Brazilian federal government. Focused in one dimension of policy capacity, namely, the analytical capacity, it proposes a framework to examine dynamics and contexts in which analytical capacity is diminished, demobilized or mobilized towards policy dismantling. Examining findings from empirical works produced by document analysis, N-large surveys and interviews with federal bureaucrats, the investigation shows different attempts and forms of (de)mobilizing analytical capacities towards policy dismantling, in environment and healthcare policy fields, and debates the role of the epistemic, institutional and political contexts in facilitating or hindering these attempts.

Keywords: policy capacity, policy dismantling, analytical capacity, Brazil.

Expressive reductions of public budget for formal science and knowledge development¹, discontinuation of state statistics such as the Population Census², deconstruction of historical information systems and institutions³, delegitimization of advice structures⁴, disregard of bureaucrats' policy advices⁵, brain drain and moral harassment⁶. These are some of the actions undertaken by the current Brazilian government which threaten the state capacity of using and producing knowledge, as well as of accumulating intelligence to address public problems.

This paper aims to shed light on the dynamics and possible implications of demobilizing one particular dimension of state capacity – which we are calling analytical capacity - in the policy dismantling and democratic backsliding processes. Understanding the analytical capacity of the state as the set of skills, resources and flows developed within public agencies in order to provide information and knowledge relevant to policymaking, this paper analyzes how this dimension of capacity can be subjected to different processes that lead to its own diminishment or its mobilization for policy dismantling.

This investigation looks at recent data and findings from empirical case studies produced for a project carried out by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (Ipea) to examine the uses and non-uses of evidence in Brazilian policies. The radiography traced by the project concluded that, in general, the Brazilian State has a reasonably high level of individual analytical capacity amongst the bureaucrats, however organizational analytical

capacity varies greatly according to policy sectors and types of organizations (Koga et al., 2020; Palotti et al., 2022). In this paper, we aim to advance in examining three additional aspects related to capacity dismantling: 1) to unpack the sub-dimensions of analytical capacity considering the Brazilian context, 2) to identify dynamics between the different dimensions of capacity (analytical, operational and political) (Glesson et al, 2011; Wu et al., 2015, 2018), and 3) to analyze strategies of (de)mobilization of the sub-dimensions of analytical capacity towards policy dismantling.

Inspired by Bauer and Knill (2012)'s analytical model on policy dismantling, we argue that policy capacities can be seen as powerful institutional conditions to policy change

(both in the direction of expansion and dismantling) available to be mobilized by the government of the day. In this paper we aim to examine whether and how the Brazilian current government mobilizes or not the analytical dimension of capacity to promote policy change (particularly, policy dismantling). We refer to the literature on the role of research and science for policy analysis and on Evidence based policymaking (EBPM) (Weiss, 1979; Ouimet et al., 2009; French, 2019; Pinheiro, 2020; Koga, Palotti, Mello and Pinheiro, 2022; Latour, 1987; Premebida, 2011) as well as on the literature of capacity (Lee and Zhang, 2016; Brambor et al., 2020; Howllet, 2015, Pattyn and Brans (2015); Wu et al., 2015; Saguin, 2022) in order to propose a framework that allows us to identify analytical capacity (de)mobilization processes and its relationship with policy change.

Concurrently with the theoretical debate, we looked at empirical data produced in Ipea's research project that offered subsidies to outline that framework which aims to be used in investigations to contribute to answering questions such as: What constitutes analytical capacity in the Brazilian state? Was it mobilized or demobilized throughout Bolsonaro' government? For what type of use and in which conditions? What are the eventual causal mechanisms between analytical capacity (de)mobilization and policy dismantling ?

Following this introduction, the paper is divided into four additional sections. The first one discusses the literature on analytical capacity and suggests a broader conceptualization taking into account the Brazilian context, the second proposes the analytical framework for detecting (de)mobilization of analytical capacity for policy dismantling, the third brings two empirical data in which that process is examined and the last section synthesizes the arguments and raises paths for future works in the field.

1. Theoretical debate on analytical capacity

1.1. Capacity concept and the analytical dimension

Notwithstanding the distinct existing concepts and uses of the term capacity - to identify and measure either outcomes derived from or inputs necessary to state formation and action (Fukuyama, 2013; Soifer & vom Hau, 2008; Centeno et al., 2017; Gomide et. al, 2017; Cingolani, 2013) - we start our proposition from a relational approach, as suggested by Lindvall and Teorell (2016), between resources and flow mechanisms that governments adopt to reach a specific policy aim. In other words, we are interested in exploring the state's structural resources and processual mechanisms of capacity (de) mobilization for developing, dismantling or maintaining policies.

With policymaking as the chosen context of analysis, we draw on a broad and empirically operationalized definition proposed by the policy literature that understands capacity as the "set of skills and resources - or competences and capabilities - necessary to perform policy functions" (Wu et al., 2018, 3). Three types of functions are usually explored in that literature - analytical, operational and political - and each of them can be examined in the individual, organizational and systemic levels.

Besides addressing the conditions and structures necessary for the bureaucracy's internal functioning (operational dimension) and the relational skills and resources for internal and external governance (political dimension), we argue that this definition is particularly useful for our discussion because it sheds light to one dimension that is less frequently discussed in Brazilian literature, the analytical function of policymaking. Moreover, that model allows us to examine the three dimensions and the three levels of capacity as the conjunction of intertwined resources that can be mobilized or demobilized by governments in order to reach a specific policy aim.

Policy analysis literature is traditionally concerned with the issue of bringing knowledge to power in order to reach more informed and better policy decisions (Lasswell and Lerner, 1951; Wildavsky, 1979). Several aspects of that statement have been discussed throughout the decades since the Policy Sciences were initially proposed by the 1950s. More recently, particularly in the last three decades, the movement of Evidence based policymaking (EBP) reignited that debate adding new or reformulating established issues of dispute on the role of knowledge and science in policymaking (Davies et al., 2000; Oliver et al., 2014; French, 2019). Some of these issues are the limits and potentialities of using scientific evidence, distinct types of knowledge and types of uses of those knowledges, knowledge assessment and hierarchy, knowledge brokerage and translation, governance of evidence, among others. We argue that these are the configurational aspects for developing and mobilizing analytical dimension of capacity.

Policy capacity literature sees analytical capacity as the set of skills, resources and flows necessary to prospect, produce and use knowledge for policymaking and decision. Policy capacity involves, for instance, individual skills to find root causes to policy problems, to design and compare solutions, to formulate proposals for policy implementation and to conduct policy evaluations. At the organization level it involves the informational and research infrastructure and governance architecture. Finally, at the system level it relates to systemic conditions such as the extent and quality of knowledge available (academic and from stakeholders), state transparency, active civil society, independent media and freedom of speech (Wu et al, 2015).

We propose, though, a more detailed depiction of that dimension of capacity, based on theoretical debates and recent empirical findings related to the subject of the role of knowledge and evidence on policymaking. We argue that other functions, particularly in non-Westminster countries, must be considered in the process chain of knowledge absorption through bureaucracy and the state.

1.2. Multiplicity of sources, context of use and chain of knowledge absorption

Investigations on research utilization points out a low level of direct use of scientific evidence by public officials and organizations in different countries (Weiss, 1979; Cherney and Head, 2015; Vesely, 2018). In Brazil, that scenario is not different when one

examines the general context of federal government (Macedo et al., 2019 Koga et al., 2020; Palotti et al., 2021).

Concurrent explanations emerged to understand what is recognized to be the paradox of knowledge utilization. Some argue that academia and public administration operates under distinct or even contradictory incentives, principles and aims which hinders research utilization by policymakers (Caplan, 1979). So, one way of addressing the issue would be to investigate brokerage initiatives that are managing to bring these two communities closer together (Mackillop et al., 2020). Others understand that instrumental utilization is not the only manner that scientific knowledge can influence or affect policymaking. They claim that different types of use, such as enlightenment, symbolic or interactional, are frequently perceived and should be better understood and explored in order to improve policy knowledge use (Weiss, 1979; Saguin, 2022).

Moreover, empirical works carried out in different decision contexts show that other types of source of knowledge are applied in policymaking. For instance, in-house knowledge was found as the most employed in micro-level decisions (Caplan, 1979) and tacit knowledge as the most used by managers with longer experience and generalist expertise (Howlett and Wellstead, 2011). Alongside with knowledge brought from personal experience, knowledge produced by the federal administration itself were found to be the preferable sources amongst the Brazilian federal bureaucrats (Koga et al., 2021; Palotti et al., 2021). However, that preference is not homogeneous in all policy sectors or policy works where other sources of knowledge - such as the ones provided by external stakeholders - were also found relevant (Koga et al., 2021; Palotti et al., 2021).

Those works reveal that in the real world of policymaking there is a multiplicity of knowledge sources and types of their use which vary according to policy context. In other words, they show fragility in the instrumental rationality view of policy analysis that search for ways of improving the direct use of scientific knowledge in policymaking and lead us to explore other approaches to develop a more comprehensive understanding of analytical policy capacity.

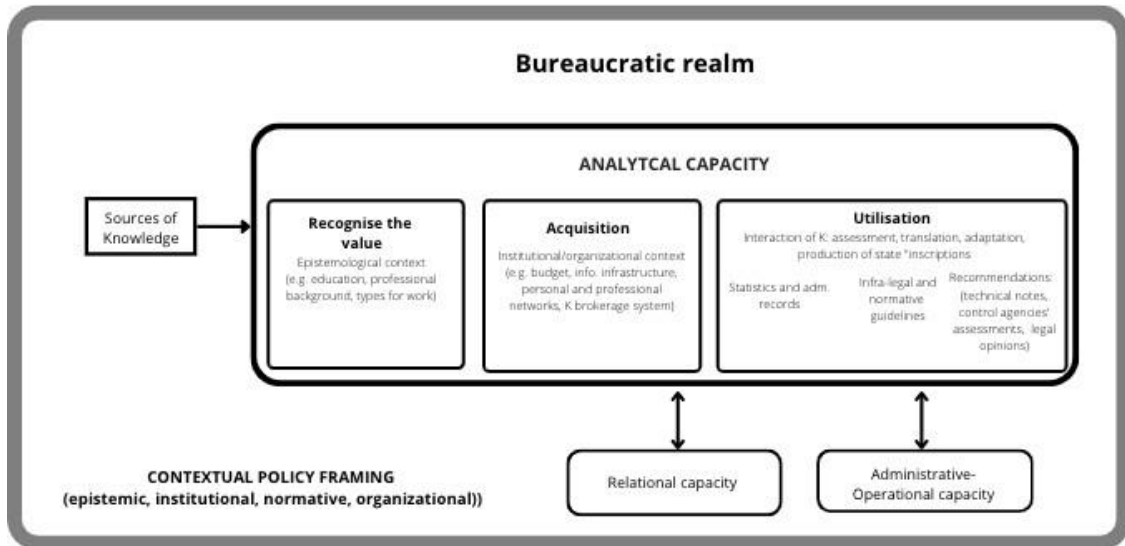
In view of that, Ouimet et al. (2009) propose that we look at the abilities and skills necessary for the knowledge absorption process in a more detailed perspective. Revising theoretical propositions of the literature on research utilization in organizations – such as rational action, organizational interest and communicative perspectives -, authors built an analytical framework that divide the absorptive process in four main stages. In the first one, the ability of bureaucrats of *recognizing the value* of knowledge takes place. It is followed by a stage of *acquisition* in which efforts are employed in order to collect and gather what was understood as relevant knowledge. Thirdly, comes the stage of *utilization* in which knowledge is received, read, understood, assessed and adapted by bureaucrats and organizations to produce policy recommendations. And finally, the last stage involves the *application* by decisionmakers of that valued, collected and adapted knowledge to reach a specific policy aim.

We argue that the initial stages of Ouimet et al. (2009)'s model indicates the main fields of skills and capabilities necessary for bureaucracy and public organizations to perform the analytical function of policymaking. The application stage in its turn involves more properly the political realm of decisionmakers. Despite the fact that, in the Brazilian case at least, either elected officials or high-level bureaucrats could occupy that position, in

this paper, we are interested and will focus on the capacities necessary to perform the specific function of policy analysis.

Starting with Ouimet et al. (2009)'s framework we propose to add elements from more recent debate of the literature and empirical works in order to break down the skills and capabilities required to perform these three micro-functions performed by bureaucracy. Figure 1 synthesizes our proposition of that detailed concept of analytical policy capacity vis-à-vis the Brazilian context of policymaking.

Figure 1 - Components and dynamics of Policy Analytical Capacity



Source: authors elaboration based on Ouimet et al. (2009) and Wu et al. (2015)

Regarding the *recognition stage*, Saguin (2022) sheds light to the cognitive constraints and triggers that lead bureaucrats to value the existing sources of knowledge differently. And these cognitive inducers or hindrances vary according to the epistemological context in which bureaucrats and organizations were formerly instructed and are embedded in the decision moment (Pinheiro, 2020; Saguin, 2022). In the individual level, educational and professional background, previous experiences and the type of policy work executed are some features related to bureaucrats' analytical capacity that conditions the choice of evidence (Koga et al., 2022). For the organizational and systemic level, the epistemological status of the policy field is a determining factor that sets the margins and limits for knowledge choice and valuation (Pinheiro, 2022).

The *acquisition* sub-function, in its turn, depends not only on the skills and capabilities held by individuals, but also on their personal and professional networks that allow them to reach the type of knowledge they value as relevant for producing recommendations. Budget and instrumental resources for getting access to those information sources are some important conditions in the organization and systemic levels of analytical (Ouimet et al., 2009; Howlett, 2015). As shown in Figure 1, the three main dimensions of policy capacity (administrative, relational and analytical) are interconnected, meaning that to develop the analytical capacity of acquiring knowledge depends also on the level of administrative and political resources available or destined to build favorable relationships or informational infrastructure. In this stage, the institutional environment seems to configure one of the main contextual frameworks for performing that analytical sub-function (Pinheiro, 2021).

A specific set of skills and capabilities that must be considered in this stage of knowledge acquisition involves what the specialized literature identifies as knowledge brokerage, intermediation and communication (Mackillop et al., 2020; Howlett, 2015; Newman and Head, 2015). Both the scientific and the practitioner communities are increasingly putting efforts to improve the understanding of what bureaucracy needs and what science has to offer. For that role, specific skills have been found necessary for both sides, such as the ability to communicate, understand the “languages” and translate them, resources to take part of influential spaces from both sides, and to build tools and communicational resources that allow them to interact in a trustful and attractive manner. Literature points out that not only individuals, but also specific institutional arrangements and specialized organizations can be prepared in order to play these roles (Sverrisson, 2001; Meyer, 2010; Faria, 2022).

The third sub-function, knowledge *application*, probably encompasses the most complex set of skills and capabilities. Our current empirical work has demonstrated, as will be depicted in the next section, that application of different sources of knowledge by the Brazilian bureaucracy is rarely a direct, linear and sequential knowledge-driven process, as suggested by the EBP's advocators. Instead, three other types of processes were identified.

Referring to Weiss (1979)'s typology of research utilization, the first dynamic that was found would be closer to what the author called the *interactive* type, characterized by the presence of multiple sources of information and interactions between politicians, practitioners, stakeholders and scientists, in which timing is defined by politics. In other words, it implicates a sinuous process that involves assessment, translation, adaptation of the different sources of knowledge that bureaucrats had formerly valued and acquired (Mackillop et al., 2020; Koga et al., 2022).

For the second and third types of processes we found inspiration in the Science and Technology studies (STS) in their concept of inscription technologies in knowledge production. Authors in the field argue that science is not only constituted by a set of theories, but by a practice of intervention on the world. From this proposition derives the relative independence of experiment in relation to theory. In that dynamic of distinction between the two aspects of science production, one type of technology is constructed, which they call literary technologies or technologies of inscription. Through inscriptions, the objects of knowledge are represented. It is the way of circulating, with a minimum of meaning, the knowledge of something through a context outside the place and moment of production (Shapin and Schaffer, 2005; Premebida, 2011).

In the state apparatus there are two main types of inscriptions which are internally produced precisely with that purpose of providing meaning and apparent objectivity, namely, official statistics and administrative registries (Porter, 1995; Scott, 2018) and laws and norms (Latour, 2019). By means of these types of inscriptions, the external environment is assimilated, synthetized, and translated to the state context. In fact, data show that those are the sources of knowledge, as well as other internal sources such as recommendations from control agencies and technical reports, that the Brazilian bureaucrats most rely on (Enap, 2018; Koga et al., 2021; Palotti et al., 2022)⁷. This

⁷ These findings are similar in other countries with the same legal system (Vesely, 2018).

suggests that external knowledge (even scientific) might have to pass through a process of validation and legitimation by means of transforming them into an internal legible inscription.

Acknowledging those sub-functions of analytical capacity in the Brazilian context, it is necessary to outline skills and structural conditions that allow them to be performed. Literature on state informational and statistical capacity is dedicated to revealing (Lee and Zhang, 2016; Brambor et al., 2020; Dargent et al, 2018) the strategic role of informational and statistical infrastructure for governments to identify and understand its population and territory as well as to intervene upon it. Recent works in the field, such as by Mello (2022) and Jannuzzi (2022) point out how those capacities were developed throughout the time in the Brazilian state and the current threats that it has been facing in the last years.

Finally, the skills and resources to produce regulations and norms has been suggested in the literature as a relevant component of policy capacity, particularly in countries ruled by the Civil law legal system, such as Brazil, in which not only constitution or laws approved by the legislative power guide state and citizens actions, but where infralegal norms are mandatory to regulate functioning and operation of state apparatus (Brans et al., 2019; Mastenbroek 2017). One may argue that the normative nature of laws and regulations in these systems challenges the logic of scientific knowledge-driven policymaking. Empirical findings show that even in contexts in which scientific knowledge more regularly informs policymaking, such in health policy, a process of norm translation and prevision is found as a way of gaining validity and legitimacy amongst bureaucracy. In view of that, legal and regulatory individual skills and organizational resources are suggested as important components of analytical capacity for allowing both the process of translation and of induction of knowledge into the state intelligence system.

In that stage of utilization, distinct forms of articulation and integration of different sources of knowledge (Kidjie, 2022) as well as the limits and possibilities inflicted by the epistemic, institutional and normative context in which public agents are embedded (Pinheiro, 2021) become more clearly exposed.

2. A framework to examine (de)mobilization of analytical capacity towards policy dismantling

3.

Starting with the broader conceptualization of analytical capacity proposed in the first section of the paper, one explores how this dimension of policy capacity performs in contexts of policy change. Notwithstanding the vast literature that examines the explanatory factors for policy change - such as advocacy coalition, policy diffusion, policy entrepreneurs and networks studies, narrative and discourse analysis, among others - (Giessen, 2011), this work proposes that we look at analytical capacity as an institutional intervenient variable that conditions state capability of changing policy.

This proposition finds support in Bauer and Knill (2014) conceptual framework to discuss the mechanisms of policy dismantling. As authors argue, policy dismantling, understood as the reductions of policy outputs, "can involve changes to these core elements of policy [policy itens and instruments] and/or it can be achieved by manipulating actors' capacities

to implement and supervise them'. Accordingly, the bureaucratic structural and institutional capacity are understood as potential mechanisms that can be demobilized in order to dismantle policies. Bauer and Knill (2014) identifies that dynamic as changes in policy formal intensity, in which requirements for reaching policy aims are not fulfilled due to the withdrawal or demobilization of necessary resources and procedures for policymaking in its original format.

In this paper, we suggest two additions to Bauer and Knill (2014)'s framework. Firstly, the detachment of analytical capacity from operational and relational dimensions, given to the fact that it seems to perform a distinct role in policy dismantling. Values, beliefs, learning, expertise, narrative and discourse framings are some possible explanatory factors for policy dismantling that have a closer relationship with analytical capacity that state holds to build its intelligence and to intervene in public policy. Secondly, we argue that capacity should also be examined as an institutional condition that can be developed, mobilized or enforced in the direction of policy dismantling as well. In the territory of the analytical capacity, some examples can be given, such as the resources and informational structures that are being activated and developed to control and restrict the appointments of civil servants or to monitor journalists, politicians, academics, artists, etc. which are in opposition to the government⁸.

Moreover, as the literature of knowledge utilization calls attention for decades, use of research and scientific knowledge does not have only the instrumental purpose of looking for the best and proven solution to solve a policy problem. As mentioned before, several other utilizations can be pointed out. We highlight two other main ones. The conceptual use, that is accumulated in longer periods and gives the general understanding of some intervention context, and the symbolic use, that consists in cherry picking the evidence which justifies a decision previously taken (Weiss, 1979). We argue that it is reasonable to assume that other sources of knowledge - such as tacit, normative, collective, etc. - follows the same logic and can be applied for these different uses.

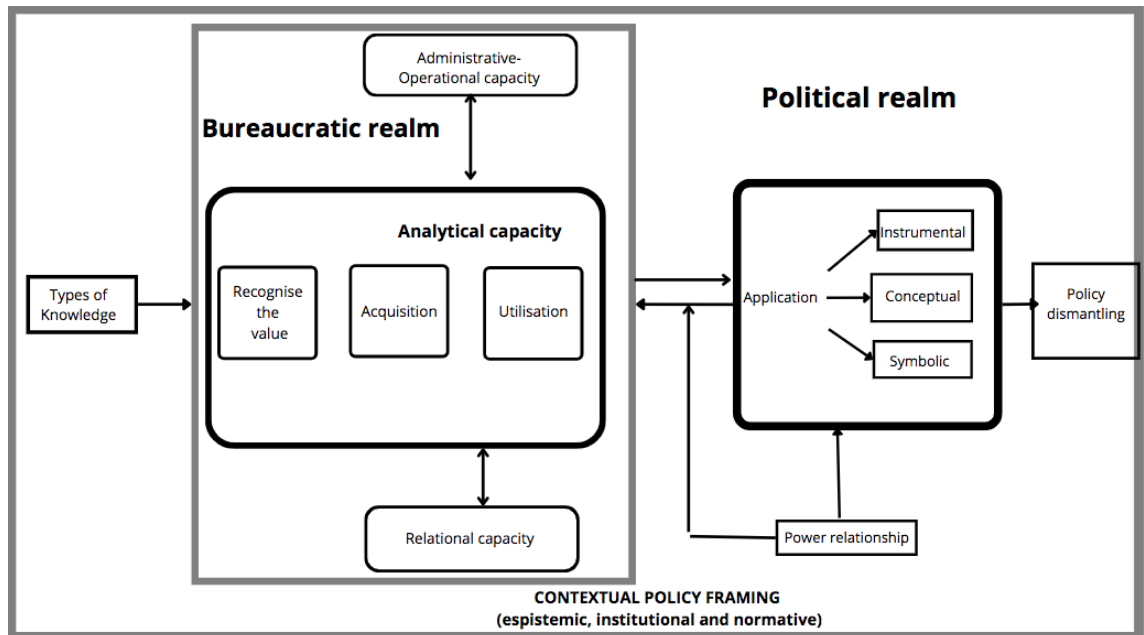
Returning to Ouimet et al. (2012) approach, we recall that the whole process of knowledge absorption ends up with the application stage. That stage does not occur in the internal realm of the bureaucratic structure, but in the wider political arena where the power relations and macro epistemic, institutional and normative structures take place. It is at that stage, though, that analytical capacity is mobilized and demobilized according to governments' intentions. And it is also at that stage that bureaucracy can feed (or not) government with analytical supply.

As shown in Figura 2, different dynamics can result from the distinct combination between government demand and bureaucratic analytical supply. Dismantling strategies can involve, for instance, the fragilization of bureaucratic capacity to perform any of the analytical sub-functions - value recognition, acquisition or utilization. It can also be configured by the mere non-activation of the whole analytical system. Or even its mobilization for active dismantling aims.

Figure 2 shows the entire proposed framework to examine the mechanism of (de)mobilization of analytical capacity for policy dismantling.

⁸ <https://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/politica/2020/12/governo-monitoramento-jornalistas-detratores/>

Figure 2 - Mechanism of analytical capacity (de)mobilization for Policy dismantling



Source: authors elaboration based on Ouimet et al. (2009), Wu et al. (2015) and Bauer and Knill (2012)

3. Empirical evidence: (de)mobilization of analytical capacity in Brazilian federal policies for the environment and health

Environment policy

The environmental policy has a robust regulatory character. The State acts in partnership with environmentalists and national and international civil society organizations. In Brazil, the definition of environmental policy is common to the three federated entities. It is up to the federal government to define guidelines that make up the minimum parameters for state and municipal legislation. There is the National Environment System (Sisnama), with a National Tripartite Commission, which does not have much regulatory protagonism (Pinheiro et al., 2022).

The changes in the formulation and implementation of public environmental policy can be understood from the division by advocacy coalitions (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999). This division by coalitions implies different appropriations of what would be the relevant knowledge for this public policy subsystem. Araújo (2022) identifies four coalitions for the Brazilian case. There are traditional developmentalists who give little value to technical-scientific knowledge; modern developmentalists, who, together with the coalition of enlightened technocrats, emphasize technical-scientific knowledge; and socio-environmentalists who seek to combine technical-scientific knowledge with traditional knowledge.

In Brazil, the environment area's institutionalization trajectory varied according to the type of political coalition prevailing in different governments after re-democratization in 1988. Araújo (2022) identifies, focusing on the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Natural Resources Renewables (Ibama), the preponderance of enlightened technocrats between 1992 and 2002 and socio-environmentalists between 2003 and 2009.

During the predominance of these advocacy coalitions, instruments were built to expand analytical capacities for implementing environmental policy. In addition to strengthening administrative capacities, as in hiring personnel through public tender, the leading role of what we can call internal sources of information (Koga et al., 2020) often involves partnerships between organizations of this subsystem.

In this sense, the Real-Time Monitoring System (Deter) was created and operated by the National Institute for Space Research (Inpe). Furthermore, the production of administrative data on deforestation was intensively used by environmental organizations, such as IBAMA and the Center for Prevention and Fight against Forest Fires (Prevfogo), whose firefighters were mobilized to intervene in fires with greater agility. These partnerships were established under governance led by the Civil House, which centralized the coordination of the Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Deforestation in the Legal Amazon (PPCDAM) (Araújo, 2022).

In the 2010s, the environmental policy faced more challenges with the approval of a new Forest Code, which reduced the need for environmental preservation on private properties and offered a pardon for illegally carried out deforestation for landowners who were using the areas for other activities. The National Congress and the Federal Executive approved these changes despite the robust scientific evidence against these measures presented in public hearings for parliamentarians. According to Donadelli (2020), institutional aspects of Brazilian presidentialism, linked to a majority coalition of "ruralists", hampered the permeability of the political system to rival coalitions that could defend solutions informed by the scientific evidence presented by experts. During this period, efforts to coordinate environmental policy were shifted from the Presidency to the Ministry of the Environment (MMA).

As of 2019, the Bolsonaro government has been promoting a large-scale change in Brazilian environmental policy. There is a marked process of destruction of environmental policy capabilities – with a progressive decrease in budget resources and suspension of public tenders, in addition to the denial of the relevance of environmental policy (Capelari et al., 2020). This deinstitutionalization of politics has been taking place under the coalition of traditional developmentalists. In that regard:

“The dominant coalition even denies the very existence of the subsystem and questions structuring elements of the country's environmental policy – for example, how it was built, the government's interaction with organizations representing civil society, among others. In this extremely conflicting situation, the concern with EBPM [Evidence based policymaking] and with learning directed to public policies loses almost all space (...).” (Araújo, 2022:737).

There is a change in the use of scientific information for analytical capabilities, with politicization and bias in government discourse. According to Capelari et al. (2020), the prevailing coalition in the area questioned the deforestation figures released by Inpe, which indicated an increase in Amazon deforestation by 30% in 2019. As a result, the president of Inpe was fired and accused of carrying out irregular contracts with environmental NGOs. Alongside this, fake news spread, such as the accusation that NGOs are responsible for the fires in the Amazon.

The description made by Capelari et al. (2020) and Araújo (2022) is corroborated by reports collected from public servants of the Ministry of the Environment⁹. In interviews, they revealed a systematic tendency to demobilize formal and informal arrangements for the use of evidence in the management of environmental policies.

In the last four years, numerous actions were carried out by the highest level of the Ministry with the objective of restricting the activities of bureaucrats and the collegiate bodies existent in the organization (whether they had the participation of external actors or not), mainly through the centralization of decision-making processes in the circle of the minister and secretaries. During this process, the analytical capabilities (at the individual and organizational levels), consolidated by the institution over more than 15 years, were severely undermined.

The bureaucrats' narration about previous administrations (2003-2018) converge to the image of a Ministry with numerous problems, though in which public servants had autonomy and space to perform their functions, including the use of analytical capabilities for the creation and evaluation of policies. The reports show that civil servants (especially the staff of environmental analysts¹⁰) routinely acted: 1) in issuing technical opinions and evaluations to support decision-making; 2) in proposing initiatives based on their professional experience and technical knowledge; 3) in the management of agendas, policies and programs in dialogue with other actors of the State and society (inside and outside of the official collegiate bodies).

In 2019, this scenario changes dramatically. Firstly, civil servants are excluded from decision-making and even policy management processes, which are now centralized at the highest hierarchical level (minister, secretaries and part of the directors). In addition, any and all communication between bureaucrats and decision-makers is now carried out only via Whatsapp, therefore nothing is recorded in the institutional email or in the electronic information system. Bureaucrats are also explicitly prohibited from contacting actors outside the Ministry (even government actors). Second, most secretariats undergo sudden restructuring in their organizational charts (without any kind of prior notice), including changes in physical spaces. Finally, bureaucrats who resist or question the Ministry's new way of functioning are isolated through moral harassment.

“The proactivity of the technical team to get involved, to articulate with other actors, to propose agendas, to propose actions, started to be frowned upon - it started to be repressed, in fact, discouraged. I particularly have a list of actions that I proposed, of materials that I prepared... And all of them, 100% of them, were paralyzed. Many of them didn't even get a response.” (Interviewee 04).

Another radical change promoted by Bolsonaro's government was the extinction of a large part of the collegiate bodies that existed in the structure of the Ministry. Until April 2019, there were 21 active collegiate bodies under the direct responsibility of the Ministry of the Environment (Brasil, 2019). Currently, there are only 9 and all of them have been reformulated with the objective of reducing the number of civil society members and guaranteeing a majority for the government.

⁹ In-depth interviews were carried out with 7 servers from different sectors of the Ministry of the Environment between March and May 2022.

¹⁰ The position of environmental analyst is part of the Career of Environment Specialist, created in 2001 with the objective of professionalizing the staff of MMA and IBAMA.

The interviews with the civil servants make it clear that the role of the collegiate bodies was central in the elaboration and management of the Ministry's agendas and policies. An important part of the sectoral plans and actions for the environment was agreed within them, either through dialogue with different actors of society and the State, or through internal negotiation with other bodies of the federal executive.

“... the existence of these collegiate bodies... gave us an obligation to always be in articulation with these ministries, institutions, states, municipalities to make things move. It was always a collectively constructed agenda. We never got there, as the Ministry of the Environment, despite coordinating (the policy)... we never got there with decisions made. We had proposals that were discussed, validated and then, built together.” (Interviewee 06).

The operation of the collegiate bodies was guaranteed through the secretariat and advice services provided by the civil servants (mainly, environmental analysts), which were responsible for both the organization and mediation of activities, as well as the necessary technical assistance. In this context, civil servants recurrently behaved as “knowledge brokers”, collecting information, data, legislation items, etc., and making them available to members in a simplified and synthetic format.

“... we participated in all the council meetings, provided technical and administrative support as well... We organized the meetings, reported the activities and prepared technical notes and opinions on the resolutions that came out from the Council.” (Interviewee 07).

The centralization of the management of sectoral policies and the extinction/neutralization of the collegiate bodies had an enormous impact, causing the demobilization of analytical capacities (in individual and organizational levels) of the Ministry of the Environment.

The technical knowledge of civil servants is no longer used to support management and decision-making processes. The production of technical opinions and notes is no longer part of their role. As noted in the report below, they are requested only for basic operational activities. In other words, the individual and collective capacity of the staff to gather, translate, synthesize and apply different types of knowledge is completely underutilized.

“...the activities that the Ministry has been dedicated do not demand so many studies, my impression is that. It's a lot, like, 'let's do it: ah, it's a joint effort that will bring some attention’. (...) It's a job... totally administrative. [...]. It was up to me to organize the event, which could be done by an administrative agent. (...) it's a wasted potential, I know I have a lot of technical potential, my colleagues all have it. And we are all involved in organizing events, which is to bring publicity for the government.” (Interviewee 02).

At the same time, the institutional space of the collegiate bodies was suppressed or neutralized, limiting both the possibilities of interaction/negotiation with different social actors, as well as the opportunities for gathering/assessing information and knowledge of all kinds. An important institutional device, directly linked to the organization's analytical capacity, is now inoperative.

“...I coordinated two collegiate bodies. I always felt very supported by my institution in my positions. Today, if I am sent to a meeting, which rarely happens, the technical team does not participate in collegiate activities anymore... basically, I would not know what I should say, what I shouldn't, because I don't have any feedback from my directors...” (Interviewee 06).

The application of the framework proposed in Figure 2 to examine the above account allows us to highlight main dynamics of the recent demobilization process of analytical capacities in the field of environmental policies.

The specialized literature and empirical investigations demonstrated that the contextual policy framing of pre-Bolsonaro's government was configured by a regulatory and interactional character. That is, it was a field of state action aimed at the regulation of public and private action. And that this regulation was mediated by an intense relational action of the bureaucracy with various policy stakeholders.

The collegiate instances functioned as regular locus of interaction between the state apparatus and these different actors. In these spaces, bureaucracy recognized the value of and had access to various sources of knowledge - scientific, from the private sector and civil society - and from these interactions it produced and maintained the state's own informational resources, such as technical notes, administrative records and infrastructure for data in the environmental area. This analytical capacity, constituted in an interactive manner, was mobilized and the bureaucracy was activated and perceived a certain degree of autonomy to interact with state and external actors to produce evaluations and support decision making.

Although different advocacy coalitions coexisted before Bolsonaro's government, with its advent, there is a strong inflection in the epistemic, institutional and normative context of the policy. We witness the strong ascendancy of the developmentalist coalition, traditionally opposed to the recognition of scientific evidences in policymaking, accompanied by relevant normative changes and weakening of the structural capacities of the state, both at the administrative, relational and analytical levels. Not only budget and personnel reduction or prohibitions to interact with stakeholders, but also the demobilization or even direct attacks to the credibility of state advisory system are taking place. By means of that, current government are centralizing its decisions and bypassing all the previously built state advisory system, moving straight to the application of different informational resources towards policy mobilization. In view of that, we argue that the environment case is an emblematic case of policy dismantling through a synchronic and progressive demobilization of state analytical capacity.

Healthcare policy

Anti-scientific stances, prevalent at the core of the Bolsonaro administration during the health crisis caused by the emergence of the new Sars-Cov-2, hindered the use of evidence-based medicine in the creation, adoption, and diffusion of guidelines to deal with the pandemic. Rhetorically, strategies deployed by political appointees within the Health Ministry were not openly critical on the use of scientific knowledge as the main guide for healthcare provision. Rather, some of the appointed officers within the Ministry's bureaucracy actively pursued the over-representation of dissonant voices - stemming from specialists from both the healthcare system and the scientific community

- in the technical bodies' decision making processes. Besides that, disclosure of recommendations was frequently hindered by delays, foot-dragging, and the harassment of uncompromising bureaucrats - mostly when they directly contradicted some aspect of President Bolsonaro's personal attitude in regard to the crisis.

This process was exemplified by the rejection of the *Guidelines for the Ambulatorial Medicative Treatment for Patients with Covid-19*. These *Guidelines* were created by a permanent advisory commission at the Health Ministry - known by the acronym *Conitec*¹¹ - that regulates the use of new technologies and provides recommendations on clinical practice for the public healthcare system in Brazil. Conitec was created in 2011, and its institutional design mirrored that of already existing international institutions - mostly from Commonwealth countries - responsible for evaluating new technologies and providing clinical guidelines to healthcare practitioners in public healthcare systems¹². Conitec integrates evidence-based protocols into decision-making processes related to the incorporation of new drugs and other inputs, and to the modification, adoption, and adaptation of clinical guidelines.

In practice, the recommendations contained in the *Guidelines* were unfavorable to the off-label utilization of a set of drugs for the premature treatment of Covid patients. Throughout the health crisis, many already existing drugs - chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine, ivermectin, and some corticosteroids, for example - were tested for their effectiveness against Covid-19. While some of them showed promise in preliminary studies, none was proved to be effective in preventing negative clinical outcomes (such as hospitalization and death). Thus, at the time the *Guidelines* were created, there was no conclusive evidence showing the effectiveness of any of the evaluated drugs - and, consequently, the analysis of existing international clinical guidelines, peer-reviewed studies and randomized controlled trials did not allow for conclusions significantly different from the ones issued. Despite that, a politically appointed secretary at the top of the Health Ministry hierarchy was able, in practice, to veto the recommendations. The secretary's position was grounded on two technical notes¹³ deeply critical of the *Guidelines*' perceived methodological shortcomings: an overemphasis on international guidelines and results from randomized controlled trials, accompanied by a disregard for evidence gathered from observational studies.

In fact, the group responsible for the formulation of the *Guidelines* employed a standard technique in evidence-based medicine that uses systematic analysis of existing international guidelines to provide healthcare professionals with up-to-date recommendations¹⁴. Following routine practice at Conitec, the report for the *Guidelines* was also built through a lengthy consultation process encompassing researchers, representatives from medical associations, and practitioners - coming from some of the most prestigious hospitals in Brazil - from medical specialties relevant to Covid-19 treatment. Due to the sensibility and visibility of the subject, a preliminary version of the report was also submitted to a public hearing - where politicians, representatives from

¹¹ Conitec is the Portuguese acronym for "National Commission for Technology Incorporation at the National Healthcare System"

¹² Such as the British NICE.

¹³ It may be relevant to stress that the technical notes had no attribution of authorship and were signed by the secretary.

¹⁴ A technique known as GRADE Adolopment

civil society, research institutions, medical associations and patients were able to voice support and reservations to the *Guidelines*.

At the public hearing, some of the tensions underlying the creation of the *Guidelines* became explicit. Critics of the preliminary version voiced their concerns, focusing mainly on the document's lack of consideration for the clinical experience of individual doctors and for studies using observational data. One of those critics mentioned that he had stopped attending meetings for the report's formulation, claiming that the chosen methodological design was purposefully biased against premature treatment. A recurrent argument was that many advancements in the medical field were made without recourse to double-blind clinical trials - and that, especially in times of emergency, decision makers should relax standards for proof of treatment effectiveness if they are willing to save lives. Some clinicians even reported their particular experiences using drug cocktails to treat non-hospitalized Covid-19 patients, claiming remarkably positive outcomes. Finally, interventions with clearly conspiratorial undertones were on display during the public hearing, with a few non-doctors - including two politicians - voicing vaccine skepticism and denouncing the role of "*big pharma*" and the "new world order" in the creation or instrumentalization of the pandemic.

Unsurprisingly, much of the methodological criticism observed at the public hearing was also featured in one of the technical notes issued to justify the decision of the secretary responsible for the non-approval of the *Guidelines*. In truth, the secretary had shown signs of favoring premature treatment: reportedly, he had invited specialists with similar views to participate in the preparation of the *Guidelines*, breaking with established practice at Conitec. Usually, the commission relies on a network of relatively stable institutional partners - mainly hospitals and universities - to distribute demands for studies, according to the areas of expertise of those partners. To bolster legitimacy, representatives of medical associations also participate in the process.

Thus, while all regular protocols were followed at Conitec, the *Guidelines* were rejected through an individual normative decision by a sitting secretary. It may seem hard to explain why the secretary, who is a doctor and a high-level (albeit politically appointed) bureaucrat, may try to reverse a decision making process that abided by standard bureaucratic procedures and current practices in evidence-based medicine. It is possible only to speculate, based on the well documented anti-scientific position adopted by Bolsonaro and his close circle during the pandemic, that the secretary either suffered with pressures from above, or was nominated in the first place due to his alignment with the President's position. Either way, the case under scrutiny permits some insights on the circumstances under which analytical capacity can be undermined.

First, Conitec represents a not entirely institutionalized initiative in integrating evidence-based protocols into decision making in the Brazilian public healthcare system. Even in regular situations, bureaucrats at Conitec constantly deal with multiple sources of outside pressures. Stressed by demands from patients and companies, the judicial system, for example, frequently issues decisions obliging public healthcare providers to adopt new and expensive treatments. These decisions are not usually based on sound technical considerations on treatment effectiveness and, equally important, are relatively carefree with the rising costs caused by the unsystematic incorporation of new technologies. In that context, Conitec has a more difficult time than it should in centralizing decisions,

prioritizing scientific expertise, and contributing to the budgetary sustainability of the public health system.

Second, due to its limited mandate as an advisory institution to the Health Ministry, there are plenty of opportunities to overrule its decisions (as was the case with the *Guidelines*). The composition of the voting body within Conitec also makes the commission vulnerable to political pressure. While the technical procedures held follow evidence-based medicine, the body responsible for evaluating and deciding on the destiny of the reports is mostly composed of politically appointed secretaries from the Health Ministry. In fact, the approval of the *Guidelines* by Conitec's was itself a close call, since some of the Ministry's secretaries coordinated and voted against the document. Were it not for the resistance of one of the Ministry representatives, the *Guidelines* would have been rejected under a much more legitimized collegiate decision. Thus, this lack of independence differentiates Conitec from similar international agencies, and - as exemplified by the case under scrutiny - is a possible source of political interference on technical decisions.

Despite these issues, bureaucrats working at Conitec have been successful in creating rules, moving evidence-based protocols and cost-effectiveness analysis to a prominent role in decision making in Brazilian public healthcare. What happened during the processing of the *Guidelines* was due to the political salience of the issue, since premature treatment of Covid was at the center of the Bolsonaro administration's negationist stance toward the health crisis. Additionally, it could even be argued that the decision making process had positive results - since, in practice, the *Guidelines* dislocated discussions on the use of ineffective drugs for Covid treatment: instead of trying to incorporate it, the government and its representatives had to make do with the blocking of a report contradictory to its preferences. In this sense, both the patients - who were not subject to the risk of unnecessarily using drugs with potential collateral effects - and the budget were to a great degree protected from harm. As such, so far as Conitec is concerned, the Bolsonaro administration was unable to replicate in full force the dismantling techniques applied in other policy areas.

Looking at the components of Figure 2, the above account showed, firstly, that Conitec is placed in a contextual framework where scientific knowledge has a higher epistemological status in comparison to other policy areas. The assessment of scientific evidence in healthcare is one of the main references for the Evidence-based Medicine and EBPM movements (Pinheiro, 2020) and its experiences created institutional and normative arrangements worldwide in order to guarantee credibility and compliance to its scientific practices and methods.

The Brazilian Conitec relied strongly on international experiences and examples in order to build, progressively in the last decade, its structural and normative resources and instruments. As detailed, the Commission operation counts with the participation of different agents from the scientific, government, patient and medical communities. Therefore, Conitec's analysts not only hold the complex capability of assessing scientific evidence but also of transiting amongst those specialized realms.

Despite the ever-present deficit of administrative capacity, Conitec's analytical and relational capacities were increasing developing until Bolsonaro's government. The case of the *Guidelines* for Covid treatment was reported in the interviews as the strongest attack experienced in Conitec's existence. Government attempted to discredit the

Commission's technical recommendation by questioning its regular and well-recognized procedures. It also tried to ignore the product of the advisory system by means of choosing its own sources of evidence for a symbolic use towards dismantling the basis of the healthcare policy.

However, differently from the environment case, the scientific grounds and epistemic status allied with a robust analytical and relational capacity of the bureaucracy in the field seemed to protect the advisory system in that point attack. However, as the interviews also highlighted a more stable and autonomous institutional arrangement is mandatory to guarantee that system from continuous or stronger attacks.

4. Final considerations

This paper aimed to shed light to the (de)mobilization of one dimension of policy capacity – namely, the analytical capacity – in processes or attempts of policy dismantling. Acknowledging the literature of policy analysis and policy change, it proposed an analytical framework that detailed the many skills and capabilities that are necessary to provide structural conditions for state to constitute its intelligence on and for policymaking. That is probably the most complex type of policy capacity and is composed by sub-dimensions that functions interlaced to the activation of other types of capacity such as administrative and relational ones.

The proposed framework acknowledges that analytical capacity does not operate in an empty state. Epistemic, institutional and political aspects constrain types of knowledge, relationships and structural resources available for government's action. As showed in the paper, analytical capacity, as one type of structural resources, can be mobilized or demobilized by governments for different purposes, but restricted to those contextual constrains. That combination of conditions can lead to different results.

Both examined cases depicted attempts from Bolsonaro's government to demobilize analytical capacities from two acknowledged advisory systems for policy dismantling. However, while the environment analytical system, historically based on a broader and diverse relational and epistemic arrangement, suffered direct attacks upon its analytical capacity and is experiencing probably the most violent process of dismantling in the country, the Conitec system in the healthcare field, managed to resist a punctual but fierce attack, maintaining its advising capacity and credibility as well as its institutional arrangements and the support of the epistemic community.

We argue that investigations of policy dismantling and policy change can benefit from acknowledging the relevance of analytical capacity in that process. This paper aimed to present one exercise of examining the various components of the processual mechanisms of analytical capacity (de)mobilization. More empirical investigations can add to this effort of exploring how analytical capacity is conformed and can be used by governments.

Finally, we also call attention to potential of analyzing causal mechanisms between analytical capacity mobilization and broader political, institutional and epistemic changes. Questions such as *What role state analytical capacity can play in the context of democratic backsliding? Can it be mobilized as a resource against anti-democratic and anti-science governments? Or can it be used to contribute to that kind of government?* could be addressed in further investigations that aim to move in that direction.

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