## *State management issues in Latin America. Assessing "patterns of mismanagement" in the Argentine national state (2007-2015)*

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**Abstract**

In this paper we use an analytical strategy to detect state management issues during phases of public policy design and implementation. With the help of an observation guide, we scour information in a number of recent relevant public policy processes in Argentina, isolating a few recurrent and path-dependency generating problems that we propose to call *patterns of mismanagement*. Although more substantive research would be necessary to ascribe causes and consequences to such patterns, we put forward some educated conjectures about their genesis and inertial effects. Even if inextricably tied to politics and political regimes, these patterns show an interesting "life of their own" that, we insist, deserves better -if possible, comparative- understanding. Such new knowledge could provide keys to design better responses to public policy problems in the developing world, as well as to understand why and how classical capacity building strategies repeatedly seem to fail.

**Introduction**

In all Latin American countries, the performances of most state agencies in all sectors and levels of government are very frequently found to produce low, insufficient or unstable impacts, relative to public and expert expectations, as well as legally and/or ethically objectionable ways and procedures. Among most political scientists in our countries, these governance problems are straightforwardly attributed to politics, as if the public policy

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process was a mechanical outcome of political arrangements and decisions. Political regimes, governments and governing coalitions, or even specific figureheads, are deemed either incapable to adequately plan the right strategies necessary to solve development management issues, or too capable to model the public policy processes according to their interests and will. Yet, little or no interest is placed on what actually happens between political arrangements, decisions and outcomes. Probably because of the obvious methodological and political difficulties facing substantial research in the field, a surprisingly low number of studies actually dig relevant evidence about what goes on in the corridors and offices of public agencies, among decision makers, cadres and clerical workers.

In this paper we propose an analytical strategy designed to detect state management issues, and to trace them, especially during phases of public policy design and implementation. Using this observation guide to scour information in a number of recent relevant public policy processes in Argentina -from the moment the state identifies an issue and addresses it with policies, until the moment there are results to be assessed- we isolate a few recurrent and path-dependency generating problems that we propose to call *patterns of mismanagement*.

"Mismanagement" in public policy is an expression frequently used, but seldom refined into concepts or tools of analysis. There are at least two explanations for this. To say a public policy is being or has been mismanaged, one needs to assess with relative precision what were the goals and benchmarks the public or state agency and its decision-makers had set. This can be partly a matter of "objective" measuring through standard indicators usually relied to in evaluation or quality assessment, such as time, cost, sustainability, accountability or so. But policy-making in polyarchies is about politics in political arenas made of parties, groups and individuals, with multiple, non-linear and changing goals, where interactions shape public policy goals in complex ways.

The second difficulty, deriving from this, is to penetrate the "black box", an expression frequently used as a metaphor of the state *qua* set of bureaucratic organizations. This means being able to gain, through research, enough insight on what happens in the actual corridors and offices of the state, avoiding mechanical inferences from, say, political speeches, party platforms, legal texts and other useful but limited sources of information.

If this is arguably difficult everywhere, in Latin America, the dynamics of political regimes and the ways and styles in which public policies are usually conducted, make this kind

of insight all the most challenging. And yet, this sort of knowledge is somewhat necessary to understand when "wrong" decisions are made; how "inadequate" practices are set, sediment into habits and coalesce into institutions; and why the combination of these tend to produce low quality equilibria in the day-to-day functioning of the regions' state agencies.

This paper presents a work in progress by the authors and a few other colleagues aimed at isolating and understanding practices and dynamics that can be labelled "mismanagement" within the public policy process. Are there regular practices that negatively affect the quantity and quality of public policies? The long-term goal is to assess their importance -their relative power as variable- when studying outputs and outcomes of public policies in developing countries. Is mismanagement, as is frequently suggested, a matter of capacities that can be developed? Is it, as others insist, a consequence of the ways politics produce public policy regimes? We put forward that relevant (though non-systematic and not yet research-normalized) evidence points at a complex combination of both into what we will propose to call *patterns* of mismanagement.

To find them, we use classic tools derived from public policy analysis, and we set a framework or "guide" in which these patterns can be isolated, identified and described. With the help of this guide, we oriented research into a number of recent public policy initiatives of the Argentine federal state. Does it make sense to look for such patterns, or are they just incremental, contingent actions that derive from every day politics and administration? The provisory results show it does. Consistently repeated practices might help to explain the nature of common problems, as well as the way they are entwined with politics and embedded into the everyday making of public policy.

These tools are not meant to replace or supersede other forms of public policy study. Institutional political analysis, impact measurement, big data mining or public opinion tracing, have been and will be extremely important to provide leverage for the assessment of governance and policy making. They might frequently point to the most relevant factors underlying causes and effects in public policy. We do think, nevertheless, that insight on the "black box", and the identification of mismanagement patterns, lies a key aspect of public policy understanding for developing countries, as well as an essential condition for any strategy aimed at rising public policy quality.


**Of good and bad management**

Before getting to our tools and to the provisory results of our work, we need make a few previous considerations about the conceptual grounds on which we built these ideas (Bertranou, 2015; Andrenacci, 2016). What is "good" management in public policy? Is there successful or failed management, linkable to performances? Can it be separately analysed from what state agencies want to accomplish, or from the characteristics of political regimes? Classical policy analysis defined "good" as timely and cost-efficient solutions to problems (Lasswell, 1951; Lindblom, 1959), although it was soon acknowledged that the very nature of problems -let alone the solutions- vary according to interests and cognitive maps (Wildavsky, 1979). Within the political regimes where policy sciences developed -democracies, or more precisely, "polyarchies" (Dahl, 1971)- a considerable variety of interests and cognitive maps are tolerated, as long as basic sets of rules are respected, essentially: the rights to do politics, to maintain free flows of information, and to avoid excessive concentration of political power. In such regimes, "good" needs to carry an acceptable degree of "common". The idea of "public value" (Moore, 1995; Benington and Moore, 2011), aimed at providing such common ground for assessment, producing some worthy debates around the possibility of establishing a standard definition of "good" in liberal democratic environments.

Other public policy students, on seemingly less ambitious criteria, directed their attention to "governance" and "state capacity", as (more or less related) ideas capable of providing frameworks to answer questions about state performances and public policy results. At least since the provoking works of Michael Mann (1997, 1998, 2012 and 2013) comparative studies aimed at resuming Max Weber's reasoning on states (1977), looking for keys to understand their success and failure as political organizations producing material and symbolic forms of power. If in Mann, infrastructural power is the effective combination of key sources of social power through political means (1997 and 2012), the question is how to get this combination, particularly when it does not seem to come out of contingency.

Some of these studies worked on the classical idea of "good government" (Rosanvallon, 2015) or "governance" (Mayntz), in at least two senses: the ways in which policies are conducted in arenas or political regimes where power is not concentrated (Bovens, t'Hart & Peters, 2001; Benz & Papadopoulos, 2006; Peters & Pierre, 2006; all drawing on numerous previous authors); or the ways in which problems affect state performance (Tobelem, 1992; Evans, 1995; Grindle, 1996; *ibidem*). Most studies in this direction tended to

look, at the same time, at institutional and operational, political and administrative dimensions of public policy, and invited to look into (though not necessarily did) the actual implementation processes (Saetren, 2005). On this issue of "public management", within a relatively abundant literature (see Lynn, 2005 y 2006; and Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004 y 2009; for general approaches), key debates tended to identify the specificity of public management, and its changes through time (Hood, 1991; Frederickson, 1996); the problems of bureaucratic organizations that are, at the same time, subjects, stake-holders and objects of public policies (Moe, 1989; Olsen, 2005 and 2008); the issue of human resources, public service and civil service (Ingraham, 2005; Derlien & Peters, 2008); or the problem of inadequacy and obsolescence of public policy tools facing rapidly changing public problems (Dror, 2001).

Closer to our interests, Bovens, t'Hart y Peters (2001) searched for patterns of success and failure, for selected European countries, in what they labelled *governance capacities*. Isolating relevant public policy fields where national and European Union collided, they traced the way in which national state agencies intervened. Interestingly, they identified significant asymmetries in the assessment of "success" and "failure" to programmatic achievements (relative to the actual problems policies supposedly attacked) and to political achievements (relative to the perceptions the public had on such "attacks"). "Success" was to be used only if the asymmetry between these two assessments was low enough. None of the factors underlying success and failure found in all areas and countries, though, were common enough to establish patterns capable of explanations in terms of causes and effects. But the very finding of factors stake-holders linked to success was, in itself, a worthy result. The factor found ranged from institutional "embeddedness" or propension to negotiation and agreement between different sectors and levels of government (as in Evans, 2005); to favourable contingency, as in "solutions finding problems" (Cohen, March & Olsen, 1989) or "windows of opportunity (Kingdon, 2010); including individual capacities in civil servants (Cohen, 1993), particularly in "political entrepreneurs" (as in Mintron & Norman, 2009); and the diffusion of ideas in *Zeitgeiste* ("spirits of the epoch") through "advocacy coalitions" (Sabatier, 1998).

Martin Painter and Jon Pierre (2015) suggested to speak of *policy capacity* as the ability to adequately combine classical elements of state capacity, political and administrative, achieving *governing capacities*. While policy capacities depend on stocks of resources moving in essentially contingent ways, governing capacities generate and

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accumulate adequate quantities and qualities of resources, controlling flows and pointing them toward desired directions, thus producing the expected outputs and outcomes (Painter & Pierre, 2015: 3-4). The effectiveness of these governing capacities can be measured through performance indicators and normative criteria, and in so doing, research can point to instruments and tools that recurrently (although not systemtically or mechanically) orient flows in successful ways, and can become key *support systems* for governments. Key support systems of these kind are merit-oriented civil services, decentralization, careful mastering of public finances, auditing and control techniques (all administrative capacities); collective decision schemes, planning and evaluation and coordination (all policy capacities); and consensus-oriented élites; political brokerage and consultation, homogeneous coercive forces, and performance-oriented bureaucracies (all state capacities).

The problem of governance and state capacities is relevant for any state, but it has become paramount for those perceived as less performant. In Latin America, studies related to the role of management processes, in public policy performance, concentrated around a handful of perspectives, namely the attribution of state weaknesses and failures to the capture of civil servants and bureaucracies by interest groups or global center-periphery power networks, deriving in their lack of autonomy (Bresser-Pereira, 1977; Oszlak y O'Donnell, 1981; Medellín Torres, 1997 and 2004); the relationships between low performances with non-democratic rule (O'Donnell, 1993); the significant lack of quality management capacities among political parties and their decision-makers (Aguilar Villanueva, 1995; Lora, 2007); or the ways "bad politics" reflect in policy design and management (Scartascini, Spiller, Stein & Tommasi, 2011).

Projecting from Colombia, Medellín Torres, in particular, suggested to pay attention to the perverse combination of high instability (states' institutional and territorial fragmentation) and low autonomy (state agencies subordinated to intense and unsolved tensions and conflicts). Governance techniques and tactics lack information and fall prey to short term political needs. Overpoliticized by the clashes for the control of the state, policies lack the linear link between problem, design, implementation and effects, and institutions cannot achieve a minimum neutrality compatible with notions of common good. Other national studies compiled by Scartascini, Spiller, Stein and Tommasi (2011) agree. According to them, the institutional ways of Latin American "political game" (non-cooperative stake-holders and how they interact in political arenas) leave very limited space for transactions

capable of brokering long term agreements, which puts important obstacles in the way policies can attack structural economic and social problems. Political regimes and the institutional fragility of laws and checks-balances schemes make this game even more complicated, producing perverse incentives and behaviours. Policies tend to present frequent patterns of instability, inflexibility, incoherence and discoordination, as well as high vulnerability to capture or co-optation from private or party interests.

In Argentina, state capacity studies -whether or not using that tag, and usually focusing on an area of policy- expanded together with the growing feeling that the country's post-authoritarian state underperforms relative to its history and to its level of development. Classically, Oscar Oszlak promoted the Argentine debate in terms of state regulation capacity (Oszlak and Felder, 2000), institutional capacity (Oszlak and Orellana, 2001) and "intra-bureaucratic" dynamics (Oszlak, 1999 y 2003). He emphasized the importance of adequate links between clear policy goals, resources and flows, rules and organization, which combination is the only way to guarantee successful patterns of behaviour in public policy processes, and how, in contrast, factors arising from technological change or political regime dynamics could adversely affect them (Oszlak, 2011).

More recently, Ernesto Stein and Mariano Tommasi insisted on what they called "vicious circles" of institutional deficits creating obstacles to development and to quality managed policies, particulary macroeconomic (Stein & Tommasi, 2006 and 2011). Guillermo Alonso, Fabián Repetto and Ana Laura Rodríguez Gustá discussed the concept of state capacity, both in origins and operationality for different Argentine policies (Alonso, 2007), a task later resumed by Bertranou (2015). Roberto Martínez Nogueira (2002 y 2010) studied these problems from the point of view of public policy coherence. He found repetitive patterns of implementation revealing "problematic knots" charged of negative consequences, among which the lak of complementarity and coordination between programs and agencies, the absence of (and explicit contempt towards) planning, and the extreme contingency of policies relative to structural public problems (Martínez Nogueira, 2010: 31). Carlos Acuña, finally, led collective efforts to discuss the links between political institutions, power relations and Argentine state performances through specific areas of public policy (Acuña, 2013; 2014a and 2014b).


**Isolating and describing "the black box"**

We extensively used the commented global, regional and local literature to find useful keys to the "black box". Using a basic stages-approach to public policy analysis (DeLeon, 2007, Estévez and Esper, 2008), we identify four simplified "moments" common to most public processes: issue, design, implementation and effects. We call them "moments" to explicitly avoid traditional perspectives on them as sequential phases or necessary steps on a coherent policy process.

In the *Issue* moment, problems of diverse kinds arise within a given political arena and become "public". For reasons that can be traced to a multitude of variables, such as the very nature of these problems, the importance of its related stake-holders, key actors and promoting coalitions, or the character and dynamics of the political regimes, some of these public problems become key public issues and some don't. When they do, they find their way to the *Design* moment. They secure a place in important government *agendas*, they are object of *decision* processes, and eventually become *plans* of action (or inaction). By "plans" we mean reasonably coherent sets of goals, baselines, critical paths and evaluation criteria that may be inferred from analysed policies. In the *Implementation* moment, these plans are put into work through the (generally adaptive) *management* of specific *resources* (money, people) within typically bounded *procedures* (laws, protocols, common practices). Finally, *Consequences* are produced, among which the evaluation literature classically finds useful the distinction between *outputs* (what was actually done) and *outcomes* (consequences of what was done).

We refer here as public policy processes to public issues that have been the object of fairly explicit decisions and plans, visibly implemented by state agencies, with identifiable results and traceable impacts. We call "black box" to what happens in the design and implementation moments, when public policies are actually *managed*: an issue is politically picked, added to the agenda, decided about, planned upon, and adaptively implemented, through various undertakings, until results are intelligible enough and impacts can be ascribed with some plausibility. In an admittedly unconventional fashion, we do not to separate design from implementation because, as we shall see, most policies are actually recast after decision-making, or decision-makers are, most of the times, the actually accountable managers of them.

In public policy processes, yellow or red lights turn on when unexpected or bad outcomes, insufficient or inadequate outputs, all become apparent to decision-makers and managers, or worse, to the public. Of course, in public policy, not everything that *looks* wrong *is* necessarily wrong. "Right" and "wrong" may arise from relatively transparent criteria, fairly external to the management process (cost, time, specific kinds of outcomes, such as environmental damage or flagrant inequity); but it may also come from criteria inherent to political decisions that might not be explicit, or may have been willingly kept opaque.

Let us assume that we can, trough research or strategic information, trace the complex political will lying behind the decision-making process, at least well enough to infer expectations. We propose to label "mismanagement" the issues and problems that, arising along the design and implementation moments, can be held accountable for wrong or unexpected outputs and/or outcomes, such as untimely agenda setting, overpoliticized choices, light or rushed decisions, erratic planning and inconsistent implementation actions, or -as it usually goes- some dreadful combination of these.

Mismanagement of public policies can fairly happen in any modern state. Is there something specific about it in developing countries? To produce possible answers to that question we turned to a handful of recent public processes in Argentina for which we have reasonable information regarding the "management moments". Of course, the nature and dynamics of what we want to know is difficult to turn into systematic evidence through research. States are heterogeneous and changing entities; policies are very different relative to areas of state intervention; public officials' practices are difficult to observe and map. The traditional approach -speeches, legal instruments, and output data- are limited proxies of what actually happens in heads, key decision-making environments (or "small tables"[3]), offices and corridors. Until we find something equivalent to the overhauling role "big data" is having in social sciences, evidence comes mostly from finding links between policy outputs and outcomes, with management observation and interviews. Combining these, we produced a first map of frequent practices that can be reasonably taken as hints of management patterns.

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[3] In Argentine political jargon, we refer to *mesa chica* (literally "small table") as a metaphor to describe the small group of people that accompany or is consulted by key officials in their decision-making moments. *Mesas chicas,* in Latin American states, usually sit decision-makers with their key collaborators, whether public officials politically allied or belonging to the same party or faction, and (very) select technical or consulting staff. In cases of co-optation by interest groups, *mesas chicas* may also include their representatives.

In our simplified policy observation guide, we identified key aspects commonly pointed at by specialized literature for each of the four moments, and designed basic assessment criteria for each of them, in the simplest possible way). Issues become the contexts of policies; and Consequences become the indicators of the successful or unsuccessful character of initiatives. We then search the Design and Implementation moments for management patterns.

**Table 1: Moments and key aspects**

| Moment 1: Issue | Moment 2: Design |
|---|---|
| Key aspect 1: "Nature" of the problem | Key aspect 1: Agendas |
| Key aspect 2: Political arenas | Key aspect 2: Negotiations |
| Key aspect 3: State agencies | Key aspect 3: Decisions |
| Key aspect 4: Advocacy coalitions | Key aspect 4: Planning |
| *Assessment: Favourable or Hostile Context* | *Assessment: Strategic or Erratic Plan* |
| Moment 3: Implementation | Moment 4: Consequences |
| Key aspect 1: Resources | Key aspect: Outputs |
| Key aspect 2: Protocols | Key aspect 2: Programmatic outcomes |
| Key aspect 3: Coordination | Key aspect 3: Political outcomes |
| Key aspect 4: Management | Key aspect 4: Organizational outcomes |
| *Assessment: Effective or Inconsistent Execution* | *Assessment: Desirable or Undesirable Effects* |

Source: Adapted from Andrenacci (2016).

**Table 2: Assessment criteria**

| Moment | Key aspects | Positive | Negative |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Issue** | | *Favourable context* | *Hostile Context* |
| | *"Nature" of the issue* | Networks of cause-effect are visible, and key variables are easy to control. | Networks of cause-effect are opaque, and key variables are difficult to control. |
| | *Political arenas* | Stake-holders are transparent, they agree on key variables and are bound to negotiate. | Stake-holders are opaque, they don't agree on key variables and are bound to polarize. |
| | *State arenas* | Agencies related to the issue are politically stable and enjoy public credibility. | Agencies related to the issue are inexistent or politically rejected. |
| | *Advocacy coalitions* | There is a coalition of stake-holders, experts and political entrepreneurs. | There is no advocacy on the issue, or the supporting coalitions' agendas are opaque / biased. |
| **Design** | | *Strategic plan* | *Erratic plan* |
| | *Agendas* | Agendas are visible or explicit, and gaps between political goals (whether party | Agendas are unclear or erratic, and gaps between political goals (whether party |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | or personal) and programmatic goals are low. | or personal) and programmatic goals are high. |
| | *Negotiations* | There is "filtering" of initiatives through formal interaction between state agencies and stake-holders, leading to explicit consensus or disagreement. | There is no "filtering" of initiatives through interaction between state agencies and stake-holders, or interactions are informal / hidden, thus consensus and disagreement are not public. |
| | *Decisions* | Decision-making processes are identifiable, decisions explicit, and decision-makers accountable. | Decision-making processes are hidden or path-dependent, decisions inexplicit or inertial, and decision-makers unaccountable. |
| | *Planning* | There is information and mechanisms to manage it, which are effectively used to to make decisions and plans more strategic. | There isn't enough information, and/or there are no mechanisms to manage it, which affects the quality of decisions and plans. |
| **Implementation** | | *Effective execution* | *Inconsistent execution* |
| | *Resources* | Financial resources are provided for and readily available. Human resources are adequately recruited, prepared, organized and retributed. | Financial resources are insufficient, unplanned or difficult to manage. Human resources are inadequately recruited, prepared, organized and retributed. |
| | *Protocols* | There are protocols that adequately regulate the combination of resources into policy flows. | Protocols to regulate the combination of resources into policy flows are non-existent, ineffective or ritual. |
| | *Coordination* | State agencies and levels of government coordinate actions, within political regimes and schemes of responsibility distribution that favour cooperation. | State agencies and levels of government do not coordinate actions, within political regimes and schemes of responsibility distribution that favour competition. |
| | *Management* | Managers' discretion is reasonable within protocols and political control, which allows them to effectively adapt to changes, attain coherence and achieve low implementation gaps. | Managers' discretion is either unlimited by inadequate or inexistent protocols, or very limited by political authority, both favouring incoherence and high implementation gaps. |
| **Consequences** | | *Desirable effects* | *Undesirable effects* |
| | *Outputs* | Policies complete their full cycle of implementation, achieving reasonable efficacy and efficiency. | Policies are not implemented, abort before their full implementation, or they are completed within |

| | | unreasonable results, time spans or costs. |
|---|---|---|
| *Programmatic outcomes* | Policies have consistent impact on the issue, relative to expectations. | Policies have insufficient, inconsistent or unexpected impacts on the issue, relative to expectations. |
| *Political outcomes* | Key decision-makers build their careers, and their political fractions / parties / coalitions acquire reputation, on policy performance-related public considerations. | Key decision-makers build their careers, and their political fractions / parties / coalitions acquire reputation, on public considerations unrelated to policy performance. |
| *Organizational outcomes* | Agencies capacities are enhanced by policy performance, rising state and political regime authority and legitimacy. | Agencies' capacity deficits become apparent, contributing to the erosion of state and political regime authority and legitimacy. |

<u>Source</u>: Adapted from Andrenacci (2016).

We then selected policy processes at the national-federal level for which we have information relative to the management-intensive moments of Design and Implementation. Evidence is reliable, as it comes from repeated direct observation, numerous interviews and many stake-holders' testimonies. The ideas of "success" and "failure", as well as the description of management processes, derive from the participants' points of view, and are not inferred from output or outcome data. Yet, sources are not systematic enough, for a number of reasons: they have been "collected", not designed with methodological protocols; they do not thoroughly and homogeneously cover all moments of all processes; and they belong to comparative levels of political and technical responsibility[4]. At this stage, the kind of information available is only good to propose educated hypotheses about management problems, on which to try the uses of our perspective and to orient further research.

**Table 3: Observed policy processes**

| **Policy processs** | **Area and/or Issue** | **Brief description and information sources** |
|---|---|---|
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[4] Research on actual management processes is scarce. To fill in the gaps, we have been providing an environment for students of public policy and development management who are actually interested in the management aspect of public policy processes, to discuss their production. As a result, a number of MD and PhD thesis followed or are following our guidelines for policy process observation. We also threw in our own previous research, as well as professional expertise from direct participation in policy processes. This "corpus", on which this paper is based, was collected in about three years (2013-2016).

| 1. Export tariffs reform | Economy | Raises and redistribution of tariffs on agricultural exports, to get a bigger portion of the sector's extraordinary income during the boom of international prices. Sources: De Anchorena (2017). |
|---|---|---|
| 2. Retail prices control | Economy | Agreement with retailers on top prices for products key to household consumption, aiming at controlling inflation. Sources: Quiroga (2015). |
| 3. Metropolitan railways system | Infrastructure | Renationalization and upscaling of metropolitan railways (national funding, managed through a newly created ministry). Sources: Barbero and Bertranou (2014) and formal interviews to participating public officials. |
| 4. Public sanitation investments | Infrastructure | Drinkable water and sewage network upscaling and expansion (national funding, co-managed with subnational governments). Sources: Informal interviews to participating public officials. |
| 5. Pensions reform | Social security | Extension of state pension coverage with schemes for informal and unstable workers. Sources: Costa, Curcio and Grushka (2014); Danani and Hintze (2014). |
| 6. Middle school quality improvement | Education | Infrastructure for public schools and capacity-building for teachers (national funding, co-managed with subnational governments). Sources: González (2014) and formal interviews to participating public officials. |
| 7. Vulnerable children family allowances | Poverty | Overhaul of conditional cash transfers to vulnerable groups from locally broker-managed workfare programs to federal administration-managed children education and health support allowances. Sources: Pautassi, Arcidiácono and Straschnoy (2013); formal and informal interviews to participating public officials. |
| 8. Regularization of informal migrants | Immigration | Creation of a nationwide program for irregular migrants' paper regularization. Sources: Bueno (2012), formal and informal interviews to participating public officials. |
| 9. Road accident prevention | Security | Creation of a National Agency for Road Security, aiming at reducing the rising toll of road accidents. Sources: Lora Grünwaldt (2014) and informal interviews to participating public officials. |
| 10. Armed Forced command and planning reform | Defence | Creation of a civilian-authorities-controlled centralized planning system for the reform of the armed forces command and a more complete subordination to civil control. Sources: Salesi (2014). |
| 11. Electoral reform | Politics | Creation of a new system of mandatory primary open elections and a state financed political publicity scheme. Sources: Participation in the process and informal interviews to participating public officials. |
| 12. Public media regulation reform | Media | New law regulating the access to radio and television broadcasting, widening social access and restricting monopolies. Sources: Younker (2012) and informal interviews to participating public officials. |
| 13. Anti-corruption strategies | Transparency | Overhaul of the federal state's anti-corruption office. Sources: Beasley (2012). |

We first assigned some very general value to the Issue and Consequences moments, in order to have a first impression on the difficulty of contexts and the success or failure of the initiatives, then we tried to match them with the information we have on the selected processes.

**Table 4a: Issue (contexts) and Consequences (effects) general value assessment**

| Contexts | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Value | ++ | + | - | - - |
| *"Nature" of the issue* | Easy | Workable | Difficult | Very Difficult |
| *Political arenas* | Consensual | Negotiable | Conflictive | Polarized |
| *State arenas* | Established / respected | Stable / legitimate | Unstable / discredited | Inexistent / rejected |
| *Advocacy coalitions* | Strong | Visible | Hidden | Inexistent |
| **Effects** | | | | |
| Value | ++ | + | - | - - |
| *Outputs* | Full completion, efficacy and efficiency | Full completion, contested efficacy and efficiency | Full completion, visible inefficacy and/or inefficiency | Aborted or incomplete |
| *Programmatic outcomes* | Celebrated impacts | Unquestioned impacts | Contested or insufficient impacts | Inconsistent or unexpected impacts |
| *Political outcomes* | Performance-related public appraisal | Performance-related public recognition | Public recognition unrelated to performance | Public ignorance or unawareness of performance |
| *Organizational outcomes* | Enhanced state and political regime authority and legitimacy | Acknowledged state and political regime authority and legitimacy | Contested state and political regime authority and legitimacy | Erosion of state and political regime authority and legitimacy |

**Table 4b: Policies, contexts and effects**

| Policies | Context | | | | Effect | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Issue* | *Arena 1* | *Arena 2* | *Advocacy* | *Output* | *Outcome 1* | *Outcome 2* | *Outcome 3* |
| *1* | + | - | ++ | - | + | -- | -- | - |
| *2* | - | - | - | - | ++ | + | - | + |
| *3* | + | - | -- | + | - | ++ | + | + |
| *4* | + | + | - | + | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| *5* | - | - | + | ++ | + | + | + | + |
| *6* | -- | -- | -- | ++ | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| *7* | + | + | - | + | ++ | + | + | + |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *8* | - | - | -- | + | - | + | + | - |
| *9* | -- | - | - | + | - | -- | - | -- |
| *10* | - | -- | -- | - | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| *11* | - | + | + | + | + | ++ | ++ | + |
| *12* | - | -- | - | ++ | + | ++ | ++ | + |
| *13* | -- | -- | -- | ++ | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| *Standard* | - | - | - | + | - | - | - | - |

At first sight, contexts tended to be difficult, and effects tended to be heterogeneous (sometimes acknowledged moderately successful, sometimes insufficient or unconvincing). Most important factors complicating contexts seem to have been the highly contested nature of cause-effects networks in the problems set high in the state agendas, and highly "intractable" political arenas. Very little political and social consensus surrounded most policies, and a relatively active and powerful set of interest groups, as well as most subnational governments, made political arenas sensitive and prone to conflict and blockades. The political and administrative cost of interventions within such hostile environments was very high.

Numerous failed previous state interventions of former governments in the same problems also seem to have made policies in most of these areas all the more difficult. Although the state underwent an important modernization in technologies, as well as a substantial effort to replenish key areas with new and better equipped human resources, old problems subsisted. Notably the multiplicity of state agencies, their superposition in scopes and mandates, and their low receptivity to public demands, tended to complicate most of the initiatives. The limited use of protocols, or their inadequacy, reduced the potential efficacy, transparency and accountability of most processes, too.

Many common negative results of these policies -thus pushing the assessment of the participants towards the impressions of failure or insufficient success- were the very contested quality of their outputs and the highly debated nature of their outcomes. On top of political arenas prone to polarization and little inclined to cooperation, in most policies observed there are undesired results that add up to political conflict, namely the numerous policies or sub-processes of these policies abandoned or aborted, compromising their efficacy; their very low efficiency, in terms of time and cost; and their very selective, temporary and/or un-sustained outcomes.

All of this reflected on what we called political and organizational outcomes. Individual political careers, whether ascending or descending, legislative or executive, showed few links with policy performance. The partial, temporary, undefined or politically contested nature of the achievements did not help in such matter. As a result, political identities over-relied on ideological statements, with significantly few empirical or reality checks. In many of the areas referred to, the state, as a set of organizations and institutions, was effectively brought back to the centre of the stage, and its capacities were notoriously enhanced. But the frequent opacity of procedures and objectionability of chosen means, or the frequent cycles of creation and abandonment of projects and programs for no visible reasons, all conspired against a capitalizing this renewed state capacity.

So now, are there identifiable management patterns shared by these processes, that might help to explain these results? Are there common practices, within the management of state agencies and processes, that could have been avoided and could have ameliorated the outputs and outcomes of these policies? We searched for traces of them among the Design and Implementation moments. Considering the methodological hindrances already mentioned, there does seem to be a few, upon which to draw hypotheses on the potential uses of the label and idea of "mismanagement".

**Table 5: Design and Implementation Patterns**

| Moment | Key aspect | Visible negative patterns |
|--------|-----------|---------------------------|
| **Design** | *Agendas* | Issues entered or exited the state agencies' agendas through highly personalized initiatives, within a notorious absence of political programmes previous to elections or authority changes. Agendas were therefore very dependent on individuals with unclear or erratic objectives, and gaps between politically personal goals and programmatic goals tended to be significant. |
| | *Negotiation* | As a consequence of a negative public perception of "lobby" and negotiation, political filtering of initiatives through interaction between state agencies and stake-holders tended to be non-systematic and/or hidden. Informal or non-representative brokers, with little or no political legitimacy, were excessively important. "Intractable" political arenas made it very difficult for key consensus to be built on policy goals or initiatives coordination. |
| | *Decisions* | Personal intuitions, interpersonal conflicts, and inter-fractional competition (within incumbent parties and coalitions) seemed to dominate the decision-making processes. Decisions were rushed, with insufficient knowledge of key variables, and under |

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| | | high strain from electoral considerations. An important number of them were actively hidden to avoid accountability, because they notoriously circumvented formal protocols and procedures. |
| | *Planning* | Agencies had insufficient, unreliable or no information at all on key aspects of their everyday tasks. Essential planning elements of policy, such as risk-assessment, cost calculation, scenarios prospective, or critical-path option choosing, were unavailable, very difficult to perform, or squarely dismissed as unimportant. Monitoring, evaluation, and their use for policy quality betterment was inexistent or it operated as lip-service rituals. State actions were difficult to "read" to the public, and citizen accountability was overall very low. |
| Implementation | *Resources* | Although resources were frequently sufficient, financing problems were frequent. Most likely causes seem to have been the way budgets were underestimated or subject to unchecked alterations, while costs were ill-planned or difficult to manage in inflationary or unstable environments. Budget changes and exchanges, additionally, were highly dependent on interpersonal conflicts and electoral periods, thus quite unstable. Although a substantial effort was made in human resources, civil service remained inadequately recruited, erratically prepared, little organized and significantly underpaid. Incentives to key officials remained political, patronage-dependent, or relied on paralegal circuits of pay. |
| | *Protocols* | The very idea of protocols and the importance of protocolization in policy flows quality received marginal interest. Administrative regulations and procedures are notoriously obsolete, and were widely unacknowledged and largely unheeded. Audit and output controls left important areas and procedures uncovered, took too long, and were not followed by legal or political action. |
| | *Coordination* | Coordination was seemingly scarce, which resulted in low relative coherence. State agencies and government levels were not forced to coordinate efforts on a systematic basis, from the policy design moment. Their cooperation relied, most usually, on personal efforts, political solidarity or transactions. Since most national policies depended on (or could be adequately delivered only by) territorial support from subnational governments, many policies became the object of political blackmail, paralegal transactions and patronage exchanges. |
| | *Management* | Managers' discretion was high, only limited by personalized political authority. Although this favoured management adaptability to complex environments, within highly politicized and personalized lines of authority, important output problems tended to remain unattended, and ultimately led to policy abortions, suspensions, or partial blockades. Output incoherence and implementation gaps were therefore both high and recurrent. Time and cost-efficiency were significantly low. Outcomes tended to be highly contested and political |

| | | consensus on structural problems and strategic policies remained elusive. |
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**It's people, stupid**

The processes observed, although limited in scope and based in information that was not thoroughly or systematically built for study cases, provide useful insights on a handful of policies deemed relevant during the governments of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernández (2007-2015). Three of them were key aspects of the macroeconomic strategies with which these governments tried to steer the country's economic tissue towards a more complex and equitable model of development. Four of them were presented by incumbents as ground breaking, and at least three were acknowledged by the political opposition as relative successes. Three of them entailed co-management between the federal and subnational levels, thus relying on intergovernmental coordination for coherence. At least three of them were politically accompanied -more or less critically- by opposition groups in Congress, thus acknowledgeable as "state policies", rather than "government policies". Most (if not all) of these policies -the institutions they enacted, and the practices they followed- were embedded in previous governments dynamics and likely to be continued in the following one.

The point of studying patterns of mismanagement is two-fold. It's about understanding why outputs and outcomes are what they are, and therefore where should a polity look for accountability. It is also about where and why negative or perverse practices "saturate" in low-quality equilibriums, and therefore what can a state do about it, and what its polity should expect. This first approach to the problem, in Argentina, suggests that previous literature had correctly identified part of these issues in the complex relationships between politics and state management. It seems to suggest, too, that conflictive political and state arenas might add up to that more than previously thought. It might also suggest that, in some cases, the very patterns of management could be responsible for some of the high costs, the unacceptable risks, the low quality of outputs or the erratic character of outcomes. It definitely suggests that we need to know more about their nature, use and resilience.

In offices and corridors of the state, as well as in political bunkers, or among state consultants, many of the patterns we characterised as "mismanagement" are accepted as

common sense, somewhat normal traits of policy-making in Argentina. Entwined as they are with politics (parties, mandates, labour unions) and institutions (civil service laws and customary practices), it is easy to see how changing such structures and dynamics, say "state reform", largely exceeds modernization of perspectives, process reengineering, or even civil service recruitment or training change, although all of this might help in specific circumstances. It probably entails the rethinking of the place bureaucratic organizations occupy within governments, and the way politics and administration interact, producing contemporary states in developing environments. Research should help.

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