

THE CONCEPT OF STATE CAPACITY AND ITS OPERATIONALIZATION IN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

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Introduction

The study of public policies is only possible through the analysis of the state, which remains as a relevant actor to enhance socioeconomic development, even in the ongoing context of changes caused by democracy¹, globalization and the fostering of markets in the public services provision. Despite that, the field of public policies analysis is still devoid of researches that depict states' internal dynamic, and that deepen the understanding about the functioning of the executive branch and public bureaucracy, (Fukuyama, 2012; Marques, 2013). In this sense, the study of state capacity pictures how actors, institutions and procedures are mobilized and combined to create public policies.

The concept of state capacity has been flourishing in the past years. Initially associated to researches about state building and economic development (Tilly, 1975; Evans et al., 1985), it has also been used in the literature about public policies and governance, embracing a variety of topics such as social inequality (Sátyro, 2014), public security (Hendrix, 2010), governmental corruption (Bersch, 2017; Praça, 2017; Taylor, 2017), among others. In spite of its multiple usage and methodological perspectives, there is still no agreement around one single definition, what makes this concept an 'essentially contested' one (Gallie, 1956).

Besides its multiple definitions, methods of observation and usage purposes, studies that try to apply the concept are accused of providing circular explanations and tautological reasoning (Kocher, 2010). Most of these problems come from the fact that state capacity is a latent phenomenon that cannot be directly observed - despite its strong intuitive appeal.

According to Goertz (2006), concepts are the heart of theory and methodology in Social Sciences since they supply the raw material for theories and constitute the basis to measure empirical phenomena. In other words, they are tools to understand the interaction between a specific phenomenon and its causes, acting as a mediator between theory and the empiricalness. Hence, a concept must bring relevant distinctions concerning the features of a determined object and theorizing about its constitutive aspects. For that author, a concept can be divided into three levels: ontological (fundamental or theoretical), constitutive (secondary or dimensional) and indicative (realistic or observable). The first one focus on what is cognitively the core of a phenomenon; the second one identify the attributes or dimensions that play a role in its self-explanations, and in the causal mechanisms; the third one operationalize mobilized varieties for the measurement of the phenomenon in

¹ A democracy tends to insert more actors at the decision table. In one hand, it has potential to boost implementation power and state relational capacities, amplifying legitimacy; on the other hand, it may cause the actions' fragmentation or incoherence.

discussion. This tripartite formation of concepts represents our foundation for analyzing the different levels of state capacity theoretical construction.

As we shall see later, in the ontological level state capacity has been associated to the existence of Weberian bureaucracies in the state administrative structure, based on specialized roles, meritocracy, formalism, hierarchy and impersonality. This minimalist definition of the concept is supported by a causality idea, in which the professionalization of the governmental bureaucracy increases state's power of action (Grin, 2012). To the extent that state's action became more complex and a variety of actors participate in public policies agenda, the concept evolved to incorporate new attributes, producing revisions to its initial formulation base.

In this paper, we present two main arguments. First, we point out that the concept is useful and operational for the research about state action, representing a conceptual variable with explanatory power. Therefore, the concept is developing constantly, incorporating new analytical dimensions, and allowing the usage in different contexts. Second, in spite of its theoretical relevance, the measure of distinctive dimensions of the concept is problematic since it can be supported by tautological reasoning. On the basis of these questions, we propose a debate about concept-measure.

To reach these goals, the paper is organized as following: the next section focus on the concept's origin and recent usage variations. Subsequently, it is discussed ways to operationalize the concept based on the constitutive and indicator levels. After that, it is presented a discussion about the possibilities of the concept-measure. Finally, the usage of the concept in recent Brazilian researches is discussed. As a closing remark, the text collects the chief arguments raised in the previous sections.

The concept's origins and its multiple applications

The concept of state capacity is marked by the literature of Social Science and political economy, embracing different levels of abstraction (CINGOLANI, 2013). The evolution of the concept starts from a high level of abstraction and then inserts more concrete levels, in which the evoked attributes are multiple and detailed, and the applicability is more restricted to a specific range of cases. According to Cingolani (2013), the concept theoretical roots is related to specific attributes of the modern state, such as the administrative centralization and the monopoly of legitimate means of coercion, that are associated to the capacity to prevent conflicts and to extract resources (Tilly, 1985). In a second phase, the concept of state capacity started to be connected to a larger set of attributes, related to Weber's bureaucratic and administrative framework, which should explain economic structural changes (Rauch e Evans, 2000; Skocpol, 1985). Nowadays, this concept's properties have been applied in the analysis of specific public policies.

The idea of state capacity dates back to the literature about state building in the modern age. The consolidation of these states is understood based on a strong interdependence on war making and coercive actions (Tilly, 1975, 1985). After this, state-centered approaches have emerged urged by the need to explain the peculiar economic transformation to the postwar world. For that perspective, the state starts to be seen as an autonomous actor with power to structure the political and social realm, being utterly important to the understanding of socioeconomic changes (Evans et al., 1985). According to this approach, autonomy refers to the state's possibility to formulate and implement policies that are not only a response to the demands of interest groups and social classes. Therefore, according to historic neo-institutionalists, there is a causality relation between state autonomy and state capacity, in which the autonomy serves for setting policies and unblocking obstacles for implementation of state goals.

The attributes and factors that produce state capacity are elaborated by these theorists from an explicit recollecting of Max Weber's works about types of domination (or authority). For Weber (1991), besides the availability of management resources, a requirement for domination is the existence of an administrative apparatus. For him, whereas the patrimonialist state inhibits economic development, as a consequence of the lack of professional qualification, arbitrariness and the personal desire of lords and employees, the typical bureaucracy of legal and rational domination is a necessary condition to the modern capitalism development. The superiority of bureaucracy organization, compared to the typical administrative framework of traditional domination is explained by plenty of features, such as the separation of means of administration for the bureaucrat, mandatory professional qualification and meritocratic recruitment. For Weber, these attributes have produced a more efficient and predictable management. Recently, several studies were developed in order to relate the 'bureaucratic quality', understood based on the attributes of the Weberian bureaucracy, to better economic performance. Inspired by the Weberian perspective, Rauch and Evans (2000) apply a quantitative analysis to explain the variation of the gross domestic product of 35 countries between the years of 1970 and 1990. They employ the "Weberianness Scale", which offers a measure of the degree to which core state agencies are featured by meritocratic recruitment and predictable, rewarding long-term careers. Skocpol and Finegold (1982) also apply the Weberian approach to study the reasons that explain the better performance of agricultural policies compared to the industrial one during the New Deal in the United States. They argue that bureaucratic autonomy and technical expertise are key features to understand different performances inside the State.

The debates about the state autonomy are also based on Weber's theory since corporative coherence demands bureaucrats to be isolated from politic and clientelistic pressures, providing a different status to these employees

surrounding society. However, even though Weber defends the existence of bureaucracy insulation, he also states, that bureaucrats must be subordinate to politicians, being merely the executor of political orders. In this sense, Skocpol (1985) stresses that autonomy is not a structural characteristic of states, since it may fluctuate as the bureaucratic organizations are influenced by internal transformations as well as by their relations with social groups and other government sectors. Likewise, if the state capacity foundation lies on the existence of a qualified bureaucracy and on the existence of adequate policy instruments, these characteristics also vary with time, among policies sectors and consonant with institutional and political arrangements of each policy sector.

Evans (1993, 1995) refined these perspectives. For him, state capacity does not only derive from state's machinery characteristics, but also from the relation between state and social structures. Thus, the author claims that the association between autonomy and state capacity should not always be understood as positive. On the contrary, connections between private sector and public bureaucracy should be established for economic structural transformations. To exemplify his statements, Evans cites the Japanese developmental state, in which there was a state bureaucracy similar to the Weberian model, and that was also supported by formal and informal relationship systems with private actors. According to Evans, these connections collaborated to the continuous negotiation and renegotiation of strategies and goals that marked governmental actions in that period, increasing the effectiveness of the state. Thus, state capacity implies the existence of organizations that can bring incentives for influencing their bureaucrats to meet collective goals and assimilate external information, amplifying state intelligence and not only independence to take decisions (autonomy). From there on, the author coins the concept of 'embedded autonomy'.

The combination between autonomy and embeddedness depends on both historical determined settings of the state's machinery and the social surrounding structure, in a relational-based manner. That is why the importance of a political and social base of support to state actions stands out (Vom Hau, 2012). This base is the result of the correlation of political forces built around the developmental project to be implemented. Besides, cohesion of purposes and convictions sharing has to exist between the politicians and the bureaucrats. The South Korean case, framed by Evans (1993) in the category of developmentalist state, exemplifies and emphasizes the importance of political and social support to the actions of the State, as well as highlights the variation in the relation between autonomy, insertion and capacities that arise from the factors of conjuncture and structure. According to the author, only after the rise to power of a group with strong ideological convictions and close personal-organizational ties between the 1960s and 1970s in South Korea did the state succeed in gaining autonomy. The same reformist convictions and

strong ties of interpersonal network united the bureaucrats involved in the coup led by Chung He, originating from the military academy.

Evans (2011) also argues that the effectiveness public policies in democratic states would demand more embeddedness. Nevertheless, it would be useless to tie the state's machinery to a set of fragmented social actors without any representativeness and interlocution of interests in the politics. Because of this, the embedded of autonomy concept is dynamic and relational. For this author, as the contemporary development concept is not restrict only to productive transformation, but also the development of human capabilities (Sen, 1999), the partnership between state and business community is not already sufficient for effective state actions, what may even be counterproductive.

Recently, scholars from public policy and administration fields have been working with the concept of state capacity. Painter and Pierre (2005) argue that the required capacities to contemporary states to formulate and implement public policies should not be the same ones that were important in the context of the years 1960 and 1970. For them, the exclusive focus on government as an aspect of the state may trigger wrong conclusions, because the state capacity points to the importance of the relationship between state and society. According to these authors, state capacity is created and supported by two modes. The first one is endogenous to the state and the system of government that may be able to formulate and implement policies. Thus, the governing capacities would be associated to the government's abilities to make decisions and define strategies to allocate resources, manage efficiently the necessary resources for the delivery of results, and mobilize society's support and approval for its actions. The second aspect of the authors' concept of state capacity is associated to the nature of State-society relations. Within this perspective, state capacity is the result of the construction of institutions that allow social participation in the state actions, with due attention to the maintenance of institutions that are not captured by parochial political interests. The State-society relationship plays a decisive role in the concept of state capacity, resulting in a greater plurality of actors and interests that are components of state action. This also endows the concept of an important relational component, to the point that the evaluation of a certain degree of state capacity necessarily involves an analysis of the specific conditions of State interaction with the political, institutional and social environment.

Wu, Ramesh and Howlett (2015) settled the concept of 'state capacity for policymaking or policy capacity developing a framework with a set of competences and resources necessities for the state to design effective policies. Within this perspective, the concept goes through new changes, based on bureaucrats' specific competences and abilities and on resources available for the accomplishment of their work. The authors elaborate a theoretical structure capable of operationalize the concept in three kinds of competences

(analytical, operational and political), involving the usage of three levels of resources (systemic, organizational and individual). Therefore, the analytical competences ensure policies to be technically solids. The operational competences allow the alignment of available resources with actions. The political competences assist the acquirement and maintenance of political support for government's actions. Likewise, the systemic level includes the support and confidence that a state organization benefit from politicians as well as from society; the organizational level includes the availability and efficiency of financial, human resources, management and information systems; the individual level involves technical and political knowledge of public administrators and political analysts.

Recently, Fukuyama (2013) associated the concept of governance to the idea of state capacity, discussing the measurement of the quality of the executive branch's administrative machinery. Capacity, for this author, is the state's ability to accomplish a goal. Fukuyama recovers Weber's concept of bureaucracy and link it to government's quality, in terms of professionalization and autonomy of bureaucracy. Even though Fukuyama's concept of governance (or state capacity) is not associated to democracy, he highlights that autonomy does not imply isolating bureaucrats from societies, and it also does not mean that bureaucrats should make decisions disaffiliated from politicians' commands. Likewise, it does not exclude tools of collaboration between State, private sector and civil society organizations in the production of public policies (resembling Evan's conceptualization of embedded autonomy). The changes of state and society in the last thirty years provided a more complex environment in terms of public policies implementation, demanding relational state capacity able to give legitimacy to state actions.

In this section, we were able to recognize some theoretical approaches about the state capacity conceptualization. The first one refers to the literature about modern states formation, which applied the concept to explain the variations in the state building process. This literature shed light on the strong interdependence among state organization, resources extraction and violence control. The following approach highlights the attributes of the Weberian bureaucratic model - such as autonomy and technical expertise. This perspective applied the concept of state capacity to explain the economic development and the social modernization of 'developmental states'. Another phase is characterized by the emphasis on society and state interactions. The applicability of the concept remains, largely, focused on the study of structural transformations and on economic development, but the capacity is not understood anymore only as State or bureaucratic autonomy. A more recent perspective is characterized by the studies about the effectivity of public policies. In this way, the properties of the concept are even more diverse, involving a set of factors related to skill and resources of the State (Wu, Ramesh and Howlett, 2015). Given this diversity of approaches, we need to

elaborate an accurate analysis about the measurement of state capacity concept. This is the objective of the next sections.

The Decomposition of the state capacity concept in dimensions

Despite the expansion of the use of the concept of state capacity, studies in this field may still offer tautological reasoning. In this sense, attempts to operationalize the concept by empirical works are likely to bring circular explanations. As Kocher (2010) wrote when exemplifying this problem in studies about fragile states:² 'Why there are so many violent insurrections in this country? Due to a low state capacity. How do I know that the state capacity is low? Due to many violent insurrections'. That means that the variables used for defining capacity (institutions, bureaucracy, and infrastructure) are the same used for determining the results of capacity (Enriquez, Centeno, 2012).

Linvall and Teorell (2016) present similar argument when they claim that part of the studies about state capacity are based on confusion between the means for reaching capacity and the ends produced by capacity. The cause of circularity in arguments comes from the general idea given to capacity without refining the attributes necessary for producing specific effects. It means a lack of identification of capacity's causal antecedent, in which the capacity's quantity explanation reflects on the result. Therefore, Kocher (2010) argues for decompose the concept into constitutive parts, in other words, into the elements or factors that influences determined events that cause the phenomenon concerned by the researcher.

Therefore, we propose the decomposition of the concept of state capacity in three levels: ontological, constitutive and indicative. The ontological level identifies the purpose of the concept; the constitutive level specifies the conceptual attributes to be analyzed; and the indicative level attaches indicators to the constitutive level for its measurement.

Based on the first two levels (ontological and constitutive), it's possible to capture the conceptual resemblance of state capacity (Collier, Mahon, 1993; Goertz, 2006). The family resemblance concept can be understood as the share of constitutive level attributes. It is common to aggregate attributes to them such

² For Kocher (2010), fragile states are characterized by the occurrence of events linked to low levels of development such as corruption, civil war, national and international terrorism, hunger and illegal and informal economy's presence. Strong states, in turn, are defined through the combination of five dimensions: territorial and administrative centralization; wealth levels and income associated with fiscal capacity; presence of a professional and autonomic bureaucracy; lack of institutional limitations and availability of active militaries.

as meritocratic recruitment of bureaucracy, autonomy level as well as resources and abilities.³

The indicator level, in turn, encloses indicators to the constitutive level, affiliating it to measurable variables. This level is important to operationalize the concept, providing an empirical foundation to its theoretical superstructure.

As an illustration, the ontological, constitutive and indicative levels of the concept can be schematized like in the figure 1, from Pires and Gomide's elaboration (2016).

FIGURE 1

Figure 1. Basic (ontological), secondary (constitutive) and indicator (realistic) levels of the state capacity concept developed by Pires and Gomide (2016)

In spite of the variety of attributes associated to the constitutive level of state capacity concept, it is important that this dimension be adjusted to the particular case, emphasizing what is relevant to be explained⁴.

This is related to the discussion about sufficient and necessary conditions (Goertz and Mahoney, 2012) for the existence of state capacity. In the Painter and Pierre's work (2005), as well as in the Wu, Howlett and Ramesh's work (2015), all constitutive level attributes are necessary, but are not individually sufficient for the provision of state capacity in a determined state or bureaucratic organization. On the other hand, the Fukuyama's concept (2013) considers that a Weberian bureaucracy with some level of autonomy are enough for the concept formation. The question to be answered is how to measure a contested concept? We will approach this point in the next topic.

Approaches to measurement the concept

Any attempt to measure the concept must deal with the fact that state capacity is a latent variable, not directly observable. A latent concept is the result of a prior theorization of its analysis. This type of concept can only be approached by observable or measurable variables, but not in a direct way. The challenge of

3 Examples of this semantic profusion are found in the Painter and Pierre's governing capacity concept (2005), in the governing concept proposed by Fukuyama (2013) and in the policy capacity by Wu, Howlett and Ramesh (2015).

4 One example is the Fukuyama's governance concept (2013), in which there is no concern with state's relational and democratic characteristics and with society, allowing the concept to fluctuate between authoritarian and democratic states as well as assessing the capacities, comprising a large set of analysis.

working with this type of concept is to set relations between observable phenomena and their causes, seeking to measure, from theories, levels of capacity - or their respective effects on public policies - for a particular State. The conceptual levels of Goertz (2006) are very well suited to an analysis of latent concepts. The ontological level and its constitutive correlative levels cannot be directly observed, being dependent on indicative level for its correct measurement.

Two types of measures have gained centrality in contemporary literature on state capacities (Holt and Manning, 2014). The first evaluates that State capacity must be measured by what the State produces in terms of results (e.g. health, education, security, taxes, etc.)⁵. The second, argues that state capacity must be measured by the analysis of Government functioning (e.g. bureaucratic autonomy, policy instruments, governance arrangements). The works of Painter and Pierre (2005), Gomide and Pires (2014) and Wu, Howlett and Ramesh (2015) are located in this second strand.

The first approach treats state capacity as products of the state action, and the concept can be captured by a proxy, which becomes representative of the variable of interest. Soifer (2012) uses this technique to build a minimum set of dimensions of state services such as, security, administration and fiscal extraction, focusing attention on mounting of indicators capable of providing elements for comparison with other cases and thus measure state capacity level of a given state.

A second approach of measuring the concept focus on state's functioning. One way in which this kind of measurement can be obtained is by using structural equations modeling technique. This technique allows estimation of multiple dependency relationships between variables, enabling measurement of latent concepts. The key point here is that researcher continues to be supported by theories to distinguish which independent variables predict each dependent variable. This theoretical justification of construction of analysis model emphasizes that this is a confirmatory method, driven by theory. This technique allows two movements: if the theory already had specified paths traveled between independent and dependent variables, the objective of the technique is a confirmation of relationship, or of theory; otherwise, if relationships are vaguely known, the goal is the discovery of these relationships (Hair, *et al*, 2009). Since it is a technique based on theoretical predictions, its functioning for measurement of the concept and its constituent and indicative levels seems to fulfill the purposes of the analysis of a latent concept. The measurement of state capacities through analysis of state functioning, can still be effected based on theoretical works such as those of Wu, Ramesh and Howlett, and Gomide e

⁵ This, as we call attention, can generate tautological explanations.

Pires, allowing researchers to use a variety of methods and approaches to the measurement of state capacities by surveys, for example.

Relevance of the concept to explain state action

The discussion hitherto presented shows the evolution and diversity of the use of state capacities' concept. Thus, the debates on the concept are characterized by diversified abstraction levels. The origin of the concept is associated with a high level of abstraction, As the levels of abstraction begin to encompass a meso approach, the dimensions of the concept become more varied and its applicability becomes more specific. Therefore, the evolution of levels of abstraction is accompanied by changes in the application and operationalization of the concept. The indicators to measure capacity has also varied, as well as the forms of measurement, which include both the emphasis on the results of the state action and the investigation of the internal processes of the state. This evolution is marked by a complement of the previous approach by new conceptual properties, and therefore, it is not marked by a denial movement but by addition. Despite this, debates on capacities face operationalization problems that are especially associated to the effects of endogeneity. Considering this, we present four steps to operationalize the concept in applied researches:

i) Establish clear boundaries between the dependent and Independent variables

As mentioned, there is a risk of incurring circularity in the use of the concept, that is, the concept being used to explain both the cause and the result of certain phenomena. Thus, a research should be sure about what is being explained, whether it is the formation of state capacity or if a certain result of public policy is the result of state capacities. Several researches that use the concept tend to measure it simultaneously, as dependent and independent variable, creating confusion in the development of a causal argument. The choice in the treatment of state capacity relates to the object and the theory with which the researcher is adopting.

II) If the research wishes to treat state capacity as a dependent variable, it must identify the antecedents that determined it

State capacity is the result of combining a series of attributes or factors that must be observed empirically through decomposition of the concept in its constitutive parts and specification of indicators, according to the theory used. For example, Geddes (1994) analyzed the construction of state capacity in Latin American countries during the twentieth century. For this, the author used as an explanatory variable for the establishment of state capacity the insulation of bureaucratic bodies within the state against political groups holding private interests. Insulation is treated as a constitutive attribute of state capacity, being

operationalized at its indicative level by the presence of meritocratic contests for the selection of bureaucrats.

III) If the research seeks to identify the effects of state capacity on a given result, the factors that influence state action must be identified

From this perspective, state capacity is analyzed as an explanatory variable, i.e., having an independent effect on a certain outcome of public action. In this approach, one must identify the factors (attributes, arrangements, instruments) that influenced state action, mobilizing the constituent and indicative levels of the concept, and, if possible, establish its causal nexus. Evans and Rauch (1999), for example, analyzed the effect of the "Weberian" degree of the public bureaucracy of selected countries on economic growth, finding a significant correlation between the "Weberian" scale score and the Total GDP growth per capita in analyzed period. Thus, state capacity, operationalized at its constituent and indicative level, served as an explanatory variable for the result of interest, the economic growth.

IV) Define indicators aligned with the ontology of the concept, providing empirical elements for its measurement

The researches mobilized in the triggered examples provides a good roadmap for the alignment between the ontology of the concept and the empirical elements of its measurement. These works establish important theoretical discussions, giving the concept a theoretical body capable of being deployed at different levels, even treating state capacity variable in a distinct way. Another concern should be the conceptual alignment with the method chosen for the research. The methodology must be aligned with ontology (Hall, 2004). A good conceptual definition, supported by the existing literature, as well as the mobilization of the attributes at the constitutive level, provide the research effective means of alignment among ontological and indicative levels.

The use of the concept in Brazilian research

In this section, four papers written by Brazilian researchers are reviewed. The reviews are motivated by the debate previously presented, highlighting how each paper operationalize the concept. In Brazilian research, the use of the concept is still marked by a strong influence of the literature that associates state capacities to the existence of Weberian bureaucracy.⁶ However, recently, some authors have questioned the validity of the Weberian concept as a sufficient factor for understanding the policy capacity of the Brazilian state.

⁶ Thus, for Sikkink (1991), the success of some developmental policies implemented in Brazil is associated with the presence of bureaucracies specialized, meritocratic and insulated of the political game. In the same line, Geddes (1994) argued that bureaucracies, central for developmental agenda, were the subject of a training process based on autonomy and professionalization.

Bersch, Praça and Taylor (2017) apply to the Brazilian case the classic debate about the separation between bureaucracy and politics (Loureiro, Olivieri and Martes, 2010), using for that purpose data of more than 326 thousand Brazilian civil servants. More specifically, they analyze the effects of autonomy, "Weberian" scale and partisan dominance over corruption. The authors argue that, if on one hand, the political appointments for the occupation of the public office arise as a solution to ensure that the priorities of the bureaucrats (agents) would be linked to the preferences of the principals (politicians), on the other hand, it could present perverse effects. This would occur because the incentives and the logic of action of the bureaucrats would be altered, distancing the civil servant from the typical neutrality of the ideal "Weberian" bureaucrat, approximating him to political-partisan interests. At the indicative level, capacity is measured by indicators concerning the presence of specialists, career longevity, average wages and the presence of servants requested from other organs. Through the analysis of relationship between the measured variables, the authors corroborate the classical literature about the heterogeneity of Brazilian bureaucracies, suggesting the existence of "Islands of Excellence". However, such argument is nuanced in identifying that heterogeneity is not limited to existence of organs that concentrate low or high levels of capacity and autonomy. That is, they identified situations in which bureaucracies have capacity, but not autonomy and vice versa. The conclusion is that low capacity, low autonomy and high partisan domination are associated with higher indexes of corruption, and these relations are statistically significant. Analyzed in combination with partisan domination, bureaucratic capacity would emerge as an intervening variable: partisan domination, by adversely affecting bureaucratic ability by diverting organizational incentive structures and corporate coherence, would eventually influence corruption indirectly, intensifying it. Authors also conclude that, in contexts of high bureaucratic autonomy, partisan domination would have a positive effect on corruption levels, since a single party holds greater authority over administrative structure by not competing with other parties for resources and influence on the organ.

In "Modernization of the State and the construction of bureaucratic capacity for the implementation of Federalized Policies", Souza (2017) investigates the construction of state capacities in contemporary Brazil. Despite recognizing conceptual dispute surrounding the idea of capacities, the author follows Skocpol (1985) conceptualization by relating state capacity to implementation of political objectives. Souza understands capacities on its meritocratic recruitment and professionalization dimensions, measured by indicators of the evolution of the number of competitive civil service members and the proportion of servants in graduate schooling, in period between 1995 and 2010. The concept was used as a variable dependent on governmental options and choices. For the author, there would be a strong relationship between political context and state capacity. Thus, different political parties cast the strengthening of bureaucracy

in distinct positions in political priorities: while the priority agenda of controlling inflation, during the PSDB government in the 1990 decade, represented an obstacle to the reconstruction of federal bureaucracy, the period of economic growth, characteristic of the PT government was a positive factor for bureaucratic re-composition of state personnel.

Sátyro, Cunha and Campos (2016) also follow the perspective of state capacities and weberianism, situating themselves in the approaches that investigates bureaucratic quality. Starting from classical studies - such as Evans and Rauch (1999) and Skocpol (1985) - authors apply the concept of capacity in the analysis of state action effectiveness and sectorial policy. Thus, in studying social assistance area in contemporary Brazil, authors work with the hypothesis that "municipalities with better bureaucratic capacity, in terms of existence of a bureaucratic apparatus (with weberian characteristics), would tend to be more capable of executing available resources for social assistance"(p. 288). The authors define state capacity as the ability to deploy decisions and achieve goals desired by state. In the case studied, state capacity would be related to implementation and management of social assistance services. At the indicative level, Weberian bureaucracy indicators were built based on SUAS census data from 2010 to 2014, the 2013 Annual Social Information Report (Rais) and the 2012 Research on Municipalities of IBGE (Munic). These data presented information about the bureaucracy profile related to formal education and employment stability. State capacity was analyzed as independent variable and seized from the development index of the Social Assistance Reference Centre (IDCras) and the decentralized management index of the Single Social Assistance System (IGD-ITS). Together, these indicators demonstrate municipalities ability to execute federal resources available in municipal funds and to offer basic social protection services. Authors conclude that, in social assistance area, a positive relationship between bureaucratic profile and implementation capacity was not found, since Northeast municipalities - which present the worst indicators related to the quality of their bureaucracy - are the ones that presented the highest rates of service offerings. Thus, the study reveals that in certain contexts and public policy areas, the weberian degree of bureaucracy to explain state capacities was insufficient. This corroborates the assertion that capacity is different from performance (painter, Pierre, 2005; Fukuyama, 2013).

By investigating the conditions that make the Brazilian Federal Executive Power capable of producing public policies, Pires and Gomide (2016) align themselves with the latest perspectives of state capacities, combining bureaucratic-administrative dimension with the political-relational perspective for contemporary Brazil. Authors apply the concept to investigate recent "developmental" agenda execution, analyzing eight federal programs implemented in the period from 2003 to 2013. The authors decomposed the concept of state capacity in two dimensions, technical-administrative and

political-relational, measuring them by means of six indicators (three for each dimension): Presence of professionalized bureaucracies, functioning of government coordination mechanisms, existence of procedures for monitoring the implementation of the policy, institutionalized interaction between bureaucratic actors and the political system; existence of institutionalized mechanisms of social participation; presence of inspection of control agencies (Cf. Figure 1, above). The presence or absence of such attributes, resources and instruments were used to assess the level of technical-administrative and political-relational capacities provided by the implementation arrangements for each program studied. In turn, capacity levels of each constitutive dimension of concept were associated with observed results (delivery of services and process innovation) by means of a qualitative-comparative analysis (QCA). The findings indicated that presence of professionalized bureaucracies and functioning of governmental coordination mechanisms are associated with delivery of products and services (outputs)⁷. Similarly, interactions of state bureaucracies with political agents and the existence of civil society participation channels tend to broaden the potential for learning and innovation in the studied cases.⁸

Conclusion

This text discussed the origin and variations in state capacity concept use in recent literature. It was argued that the concept is useful for analysis of state in action, being endowed with ample constitutive fluidity and varied applicability. The concept has been going through constant improvements and being used in different levels of abstraction, being associated with "bureaucratic quality", with strong Weberian influence, to explain processes of structural transformation, and expanding itself to incorporate other constitutive dimensions (e.g. political and relational) and new attributes (such as existence of instruments or support systems for use in public actions) to analyze specific public policies.

Despite innovations produced, some authors still assume the necessity of rigid separation between political and administrative spheres, as if Weber himself had not been concerned about the emergence of the "Republic of officials" in a context in which bureaucracy would become frequently self-referred or "introverted" (Loureiro, Abrucio and Pacheco, 2010). Fukuyama himself (2013) argues that an appropriate degree of autonomy does not mean isolating

⁷² By way of illustration, in the case of the Family Allowance Program (PBF), the presence of intra-governmental coordination instruments and monitoring strategies, as the example of *Cadastro Único* (Single Record), triggered by the Ministry of Social Development, has produced a large number of inclusion of beneficiaries, in addition to intense focus.

⁸ For example, in the case of the national program of access to technical education and employment (Pronatec), the high levels of state capacity, enabled by predictions of arrangement of intense participation of local, regional and national levels, have led to revisions and initial design improvements as regards to the inclusion of specific audiences - as disabled and family agriculture workers.

bureaucrats from their societies or that they can make decisions in a detached manner in relation to the commands of politicians. Therefore, relationship between bureaucratic autonomy and state capacity is not linear. If bureaucrats need to be protected from short-term interest groups, they must be simultaneously subordinate to larger objectives, deliberated in the political sphere. Similarly, the effectiveness of state's action is conditioned to sociopolitical environment. Without a political and social basis of support around collective goals, state loses capacity (and legitimacy) to implement its policies. The incorporation of these characteristics allows a greater understanding of factors that enhance and constrain state capacity and its respective power to implement policies. With the proliferation of uses, contexts and indicators associated to the concept, one must consider its bindings with the sociopolitical environment with which the state interacts. Sometimes, part of the literature confers a treatment to the concept as if the operation of state capacities were established in a vacuum. Similarly, part of the studies on the topic treats the concept in a static form, associating it with stock of resources and not explaining how they are triggered to produce state action. Similarly, looking at the Brazilian political-institutional environment post re-democratization, the relations between the Republican powers - executive, legislative and judiciary -, the articulation between federated entities, the emergence of control systems to public action, and the creation of institutional channels of social participation in public policies elaboration alter state capacities substantially. Networks and interactions between multiple actors located in civil society, pervade state capacities. Therefore, capacities are the result of legitimate state actions promotion, guiding the creation of instruments and mechanisms, capable of mobilizing, articulating and reconciling diverse interests around public policies.

Our second argument sought to analyze the measurement of different dimensions of the concept, because it is a widely disseminated concept used by various areas of Social Sciences, limitations and problems in its use are inherent. Some analyses are accused of providing tautological explanations, confusing capacity causes with their respective results or vice versa. At this point, we argue that this problem comes from the generic treatment that is given to the concept, without further elaboration on what factors are needed to produce specific effects. To deal with such difficulty, we show that researcher must clearly delimit the dependent and independent variables and operationalize the concept appropriately, decomposing their dimensions adequately to their research problem, and Identifying indicators aligned to constitution of the concept for its correct measurement (Goertz, 2006).

Another common challenge in the field is to overcome the production of static analysis, quite common in the approach of "bureaucratic quality" or "policy capacity", in which there is an association of state capacities to stock variables within the state. As the study of Sátyro, Cunha and Campos (2016) have well revealed, the presence of certain state attributes is not always triggered in

practice and translated into effective action. In this sense, it is necessary to clarify how these resources and skills are mobilized and transformed into state action, that is, by capturing the dynamics of capacity functioning within the state and in their relationship with society.

Finally, it was found that the use of the concept in Brazil is a field under construction. Even today, part of the research on this topic highlights the importance of the ideal type of Weber's bureaucracy, emphasizing the importance of merit, professionalization and autonomy for strengthening state capacities. However, new research has broadened the use of the concept by adding other dimensions and explanatory factors.

Finally, it can be asserted that the concept of state capacity is still alive and well, useful for scientific research. The articles reviewed for this text allow for the finding of advances of research in the field, especially in Brazil, where the dominance and sufficiency of Weberian perspective begins to be questioned. We hope that the discussion presented in this text contributes to the consolidation and development of studies on the subject--especially in Brazil, where effective state action is required to promote development and combat the historical social inequalities that we experience.

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