

Policy change in socially embedded local policy processes in Brazil, 1988-2020

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Policy transformation is a classic theme in policy analysis since incrementalism. More recent policy models emphasized the role of actors, coalitions, leadership, and ideas in agenda-setting, the impacts of the circulation of policy frameworks and solutions, and the different mechanisms of gradual institutional change that accumulate in policy trajectories.

Without rejecting those explanations, we suggest that oscillating and incremental trajectories of change also produce policy change during policy implementation, triggered by governance patterns associated with political competition, partisan politics, the embeddedness of policymakers and advocates in policy communities, and multilevel governance effects.

This theorizing is built from the recent trajectories of social assistance and housing policies in São Paulo. Although with sectoral specificities, both trajectories followed incremental processes of expansion and diversification. These cases show that cumulative positive public policy change may happen even in the face of institutional conditions that the literature considers far from ideal – an extremely fragmented party system, decentralized federalism, and weak bureaucracies and State capacities. Competitive partisan politics reinforced the creation and reanimation of policy innovations under multilevel regulation. In contrast, networks of bureaucrats and civil society activists within the relevant policy communities enabled policy replication and reanimation by entering and exiting local administrations depending on their ideological colors.

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Introduction

This article departs from the trajectories of social assistance and housing policies in São Paulo, Brazil, to sustain that policy transformation may occur systematically during policy implementation even under unfavorable institutional conditions. This was driven by governance patterns that combine political competition, partisan politics, and interactions between the State and civil society actors within policy communities.

Policy transformation has been a classic theme in policy analysis since incrementalism (Lindblom, 1959). More recent policy models emphasized the role of actors, coalitions leadership, and ideas in agenda setting (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Kingdom, 1984) of the circulation and the impact of policy paradigms, frameworks and solutions (Hall, 1993; Campbell, 2002; Bélan, 2019,), and of different mechanisms of gradual institutional change (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010) that accumulate positively and negatively in policy trajectories (Faletti and Mahoney 2015).

Without rejecting those explanations, we want to suggest that policy change is also produced by oscillating and incremental policy implementation, under the effects of political swings in the control of the executive, the influences of multilevel governance, and especially the joint embeddedness of policy makers/bureaucrats and policy advocates/activists in policy communities. The analyzed policies show that these processes may happen even in the face of institutional conditions that the literature considers far from ideal for policy production – extremely fragmented party system, decentralized federalism, weak bureaucracies, and low State capacities. Nevertheless, the combination of democratic political competition, multilevel regulations, and networks of connections between public agencies and civil society organizations produced policy transformation during implementation, accumulating change in the direction of wider, more inclusive, and consensual policies. Therefore, civil society actors' importance in these policies does not come from their presence in open mobilizations or participatory fora, as some authors usually highlight in Brazil and Latin America. Instead, it is associated with the multiple connections between State agents and diverse civil society actors within policy arenas, a feature usually considered a sign of institutional weakness.

We explore these processes by analyzing two policy sectors at the local level in Brazil – social assistance and housing – in the city of São Paulo from the return to democracy in the late 1980s until 2020. Local institutions alone cannot explain progressive change since São Paulo leans towards political conservatism and has many

political parties with low ideological identities, low technical capacities, weak bureaucratic careers, and poor (although increasing) policy institutionalization. However, the city also experienced strong political competition in the period, with several political shifts in the control of the executive. Additionally, policy reform since the return to democracy in Brazil created specific conditions of embeddedness between State sectors and civil society actors that generated positive results not accounted for by the literature. A substantial part of policy staff was composed of non-State actors, who migrated in and out of State agencies following electoral swings. Innovative policy solutions and capacities traveled with them, remaining latent during hostile administrations within the policy community in social movements, academic institutions, and other municipal governments. This gave rise to oscillating and slow but incremental and cumulative redistributive policy production processes, called elsewhere as “the politics of incremental progressivism” (Marques, 2021a), referring to urban policies.

The comparison between our two policy sectors is illuminating since their governance structures are quite different. Social assistance is highly regulated by the federal government, although with local discretion considering the intense variation of the social problems targeted by the policy. Social housing, differently, is developed concurrently by all government levels with low federal regulation. As we will see, however, both policy sectors present similar patterns of embeddedness, and both produce cumulative policy change. Additionally, the two policies imply very different activities and products to be delivered. While social assistance policy involves the construction of a network of offices and bureaucracies that must deliver services, housing policies aim to produce a good (that is also an asset), construct works, and develop juridical activities in order to reduce precarity and ensure tenure. Therefore, the existence of similar trajectories in policies this different suggests the presence of quite general processes.

The article comprises three sections, including this introduction and the conclusion. The next section discusses the literature and constructs the main concepts mobilized by the article, discussing from governance patterns and policy change to partisan politics and civil social embeddedness. The section ends with a short summary of some general information about Brazil and São Paulo. The second and the third sections present the trajectories of the two policies. Finally, the fourth section compares the main differences and similarities between the two policy sectors.

1. Building our analytical model

The idea of policy production as a dynamic process altered incrementally by multiple actors in “successive limited comparisons” (Lindblom, 1979) is at the heart of policy analysis. This became even more central since the explanations of policy agendas in the 1980s and 1990s. Highlighting policy phases before or up to policy formulation, policy change was explained by the dynamic integration of interests and ideas in the Advocacy coalition model (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993) or by the agency of leadership over intermingled trajectories of politics, policy solutions, and socially constructed problems in the multiple streams framework (Kingdom, 1984). The later analysis centered the explanations of change on the dynamic impacts of policy frameworks and ideas and the circulation of policy solutions in decision-making and agenda-setting (Campbell, 2002; Bélan, 2019). At the same time, historical neoinstitutionalism has been facing the challenge of better understanding institutional construction and change, mobilizing long-term increasing returns processes (Pierson, 2004), mechanisms and agents of gradual institutional change (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010) or policy trajectories that include actors and processes that reinforce or resist change through time (Faletti and Mahoney 2015).

Without disregarding these advances, we want to include a different set of conceptual elements in the “toolbox of explanations” of policy change. It is centered on policy implementation, happens under institutional conditions that do not induce policy change, does not include change-driven entrepreneurs, and has a much stronger presence of both partisan politics and civil society actors embedded within the policy process.

An analytical integrator of the analysis is the concept of governance (Pierre, 1994; Le Galès, 2020), understood as the heterogeneous sets of actors (State and not-State), processes, and institutions of different government levels behind the policy process. We depart from the assumption that public policy production is a political process that does not necessarily derive from well-crafted institutional arrangements, the harmonious coordination of the multiple actors involved, the production of public values, or policy efficiency. Instead, we argue for an analytical approach open to contingency, in which the supply of public policies occurs through the role not only of State actors but also of civil society and private actors. Therefore, governance processes are guided by asymmetries, unequal power resources among actors, and the dynamic co-construction of capacities throughout historical processes and political disputes. These disputes are

mediated by political projects and visions of producing public policies held by the relevant actors, including politicians (and political parties), different sectors of the bureaucracy, private actors, civil society organizations, and social movements.

This complex ecology of actors interacts within the State and inside the relevant public policy communities (Atkinson and Coleman, 1992), mobilizing formal and informal relationships (Marques, 2012). Policy communities are not considered as unified collective actors but as historically constructed spaces of interaction of agents whose activities and practices are relevant within the sector (Marques, 2012). They are sectorally specific environments structured by networks of relations and where actors (State and non-State) and projects circulate and are discussed and disputed. Among these actors are politicians that occupy policy positions, bureaucrats/technicians of the sectors, policy advocates, academics, and activists. Many of these actors are hybrids, occupying several positions and identities (or ‘hats’ in the native denomination) simultaneously or through time. Therefore, social movement activists, academics, and policy advocates occupy many institutional policy positions, and bureaucrats/technicians may oscillate between more technical jobs and leading decision-making positions. In some cases, this creates a distinctive career for technical-politicians, similar to what Schneider (1991) called “técnicos políticos” in Brazil and Centeno (1994) “burocratas políticos” in Mexico, while in others gives rise to bureaucrat-activists (Abbers, 2020). In these cases, careers start in technical positions but transit to high-level decision-making positions that are hard to define in pure Weberian terms.

Obviously, change may go in different policy directions substantively. These are associated with different ideas circulating in a policy sector/community and are also connected with the political projects defended by different political parties in what is usually called partisan politics. Partisan politics sustains that political parties matter for policies, and parties will try to implement diverse policies compatible with their program once in office. This reasoning received empirical support from studies about the historical formation of Welfare states in Europe (Esping-Anderson, 1990) and the effects of left-wing policies on inequality decline during the “Pink tide” in Latin America after 2000 (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011; Huber and Stephens, 2013).

This would suggest overall processes of policy divergence, with strikingly different policies in left and right-wing administrations, if we do not consider the inertial effects of bureaucracies and institutions. We think that although partisan politics matters, it must be integrated with the effects of political competition over policies. We mean the

reasoning brought to the debate by median voter theory. This theory sustains that when the average voter is poorer than the median voter, all parties will have incentives to promote policies for the poor (Meltzer and Richard, 1981). Although this model implies perfect information about policies by politicians and voters and knowledge of the latter about their relative position, the argument makes sense. It becomes stronger if nuanced and combined with partisan politics – left-wing administrations are prone to progressive/redistributive policies, while right-wing ones oppose them. But once progressive/redistributive policies are in place, right-wing parties will refrain from dismantling them (especially if they are highly visible).

Another key aspect involves the actors involved in policy production. Although State actors are invested with specific authority and capabilities, processes frequently unfold in less hierarchical command/control modes, in networks with substantial room for contingency, framed by existing institutions and permeated by public policy instruments (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2007). Understanding these processes depends on investigating several forms of interaction and embeddedness of State and non-State actors, in line with historical institutionalism claims (Skocpol, 1992).

In the case of Brazilian social assistance, service provision has historically happened outside the State, and the capacity-building processes are recent, whether for the direct provision of services and benefits or regulating indirect provision through CSOs (Bichir, Brettas and Canato, 2017). This pattern is distinct from social housing. The policy's historical legacy since the 1930s was concentrated on one policy product – State-produced new housing units for financed sale – being diversified only recently. This diversification happened with a progressive loss of local governments' capacities and an increasing reliance on private-sector contractors in housing production and policy management.

However, in both cases, policy trajectories accumulated new solutions that face existing challenges, as recognized in the relevant policy community debates and defended by some political projects. Since social inequalities are at the core of these two policy sectors, progressive policy change usually involves programs that improve quality of life and enhance opportunities. The role of the interactions and complex interdependences between civil society and the State built since the return of democracy in Brazil is at the center of the production of policy innovations. The country has addressed this through

Comentado [em1]: Essa é a primeira vez que aparecem CSOs. Seria bom colocar aqui uma nota explicando que tipo de CSOs são essas. Ou mais radicalmente explicar no texto e não usar a expressão CSOs, mas Non-State service providers ou outro nome que os diferencie de organizações sociais no sentido dos debates sobre sociedade civil. Isso é uma denominação nativa derivada da normatividade (Bresser?), mas para o estrangeiros, vai conectar com Cohen e Arato, participação e outras coisas do gênero. O ideal seria explicar e chamar de outro nome. Que não é difícil de substituir no texto.

innovative theoretical lenses and based on empirical and comparative analyses of various policies (Marques, 2012; Lavallo and Szwako, 2015; Abers, Serafim and Tatagiba, 2014).

Another analytical dimension to be mentioned is multilevel governance. Benchmarks and decisions defined at international, national, and regional levels create normative frameworks, institutions, and instruments for financing, regulation, and coordination of actors that can induce, influence, and restrict local decision-making autonomy (Sellers et al., 2020; Tortola, 2017; Kazepov and Barberis, 2013; Bichir, Brettas and Canato, 2017). From this article's point of view, social assistance in Brazil follows what called "local autonomy centrally framed" policies (Kazepov and Barberis, 2013) - nationally defined macro-parameters that define strategies for coordination and prioritization of local agendas (municipal, in Brazil), but does not eliminate the relevance of local governance processes (Bichir, Brettas, and Canato, 2017). Housing policies, on the other hand, are marked by more sporadic federal regulations and investments, allowing a broader variety of local disputes (Marques, 2021a).

Finally, it is also relevant to present some basic information about Brazil e São Paulo before we enter the discussion of our two policies. Brazil experienced a long military dictatorship in 1964 and ended after a long transitional period, concluded with the promulgation of a new federal Constitution in 1988. The return to governor elections happened in 1982, but for mayors of large cities and State capitals only in 1985. Local governments follow a Mayor-Council electoral model, in which Mayors and council members are elected in separate but simultaneous elections for four-year terms since the 1988 Constitution.

Since Brazil is a federation of three constitutionalized tiers, local governments (municipalities) are responsible for the delivery of several policies, although none of our two policies is a single municipal obligation. Still, social assistance is embedded in a national federalized system that allocates several activities locally, while social housing lacks a federalized system.

This article covers the mayors of São Paulo from the late 1980s to 2020, during the present democratic period. The period housed strong electoral competition in São Paulo, with alternations between the left and the right - between 1988 and 2000 - and the left and the center-right between 2004 onward (Limongi and Mesquita, 2012)³. In this

³ About the classification of political parties by ideology in Brazil and São Paulo see Samuels and Zucco (2018), Power and Rodrigues-Silveira (2019) and Limongi and Mesquita, 2012

period, nine mayors occupied the city hall, belonging to the right (2), center-right (4), and left (3) wing parties. The local council was always strongly fragmented (with 16 parties in 2022) but always with a strong predominance of center-right forces (Marques, 2021a).

2. Social assistance

The 1988 Constitution played an essential role in the disentangling rights to one's position in the labor market in the Brazilian social protection system. In addition, the Constitution recognized social assistance as a universal public policy under public and State responsibility (Jaccoud, Bichir, and Mesquita, 2017), breaking the historical association of the policy with charity and fragmented actions, low State accountability, and unsystematic activities carried out by philanthropic entities (Yazbek, 2004). Decentralization was already happening in the 1990s, with a national social assistance law of 1993 (LOAS). Still, until the 2000s, most of the decision-making power continued to be concentrated in philanthropic entities and third-sector organizations, with little State regulation of services (Arretche, 2012).

Brazil's first conditional cash transfer programs began in the 1990s, firstly in municipalities and later in small-scale federal programs. The Bolsa Família Program unified the existing fragmented national programs in 2003. This program became massive by establishing national service parameters and the service centers that should face the multiple demands of risk and vulnerability populations.

Since the 2000s, significant changes have occurred (Jaccoud, Bichir, and Mesquita, 2017; Bichir and Gutierrez, 2019), with the creation of the national system (SUAS) in 2005, among other provisions that defined general norms^[1] and instruments to induce sub-national adherence. As a result, policy decision-making remains concentrated at the central level, but the municipal level makes policy with transferred federal funds. Additionally, local governments must count on arenas of participation and social oversight.

In the current policy's vertical governance, municipal governments are in charge of implementing basic and special social security services, depending on their administrative level (Jaccoud, Bichir, and Mesquita, 2017). Service provision involves several actors with different patterns of interaction between State actors and civil society organizations. As Bichir and Gutierrez (2019) discussed, creating a "social assistance network" involving the direct and indirect provision of services has been the object of

disputes throughout formulating and implementing the SUAS. However, indirect provision seems to be associated with lower performance (Bichir and Simoni Jr, 2021).

In São Paulo, the situation at the beginning of our period, in the late 1980s, was marked by the previous legacy of fragmented actions, high dependency on CSOs, and low State presence in service provision and regulation (Amâncio, 2008; Yazbek, 2004). A year after the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, Luiza Erundina's (PT, 1989-1992, left) administration began, prioritizing the implementation of social assistance in dialogue with the constitutional guidelines, creating new programs and services managed directly by the public administration. A working group was also created linked to the municipal Secretariat of social assistance to establish a dialogue with CSOs and build minimum parameters for service provision (Amâncio, 2008).

This working group carried out a study on the provision of services through OSCs and identified: 1) great dispersion of services in small organizations; 2) services provided adequately, but with a delegation of actions that the public sector itself should carry out; 3) absence of articulation between municipal, state and federal levels; 4) relevance of organizations in the construction of the policy; 5) absence of clarity in the attributions for the State and CSOs in the documents that regulated partnerships. Interestingly, the mayor herself was a social worker. The Social Assistance Secretariat was occupied by two social services academics during the administration, with technical-political profiles close to the social assistance policy community. During this administration, there was an expansion of the direct service provision network – particularly the number of directly administered daycare centers⁴ – and the indirect network, in particular, to carry out actions with specific publics, such as children, the elderly, and the homeless. Finally, it is also worth noting the effort to expand the bureaucracy of the Secretariat (Lara, 2020).

The first national sector regulation was established in the 1990s but had no effect at the municipal level. In addition to its weak inductive power, it encountered right-wing governments strongly resistant to the sector's transformation. The governments of Maluf (PPR/PPB/PP, 1993 to 1996, right) and Pitta (PPB/PTB, 1997 to 2000, right), both from the same political group, represented political and administrative continuity. They

⁴ Since the Law of Directives and Bases for Education (LDB, 1996), Brazil started a long transition of daycare centers from social assistance to education, with great variation by municipality. This transfer stimulated a reorganization of social assistance identity.

maintained the tradition of appointing mostly politicians as the secretaries of this portfolio and their wives for social assistance representative councils and funds, besides keeping actions guided by an emergency logic and not by continuous actions and prevention of risks and vulnerabilities (Yazbek, 2004). São Paulo was the last capital city to conform to national law. Some of the instruments and institutional spaces advocated in the organization of the policy were vetoed – such as the municipal social fund – or altered to reduce civil society’s scope for action, such as the alteration to the joint composition of the municipal council (Yazbek, 2004). In short, in these two administrations, social assistance was a secondary policy, still organized according to the logic of charity and philanthropy, focusing on emergency actions. Actions were institutionally fragmented and focused on fostering existing agreements with CSOs, which grew significantly during this period.

During the second PT municipal administration in São Paulo – the Marta Suplicy government (2001-2004, PT, left) – the institutional structuring of the assistance began. It was articulated with national parameters, although with local translations and specificities, considering the complexity of the offered services and the diversified network of civil society of the metropolis (Bichir, Brettas and Canato, 2017). In addition to initiating the operation of key national system pillars, such as the council and the municipal social assistance fund, this government opted for mobilizing actors from the policy community to the top decision-making level of the Secretariat. The Social Assistance secretary was a professor at the city’s main school of social work and a municipal councilor at the time. This secretary profile made it possible to build connections with top-level national decision-makers – since she was an entrepreneur of ideas in the social work professional community and had strong political influence in the PT (Bichir and Gutierrez, 2019) – while also disputing the local budgetary space dependent on amendments defined by legislators.

As discussed in Bichir, Brettas, and Canato (2017), it is from this administration onwards that important processes of co-production of this policy began, organized in complex patterns of multilevel governance: from the vertical point of view, there is an alignment between national and local parameters, with due adaptations; from the horizontal point of view, negotiations with civil society actors responsible for the provision of services are accentuated, with the municipal council as the main arena of dispute and as a result the definition of municipal parameters for regulating agreements

between the State and civil entities. It is also worth mentioning that some pioneering experiences tested in this administration were later incorporated as principles of the national social assistance policy (Bichir and Gutierrez, 2019). On the other hand, this municipal administration suffered from the institutional fragmentation of cash transfer programs and other welfare benefits and services among several Secretariats.

Full adherence to the national system occurred in 2005, during a center-right administration. José Serra (2005-2006, PSDB, center-right) was mayor just for one year, followed by his deputy mayor Gilberto Kassab (2006-2012, then DEM but currently PSD, also center-right). At the end of the government, Kassab managed to be reelected, so these two administrations are considered one. As already mentioned, the local electoral opposition between the left and the center-right replaced one between the left and the right. As discussed in Bichir, Brettas, and Canato (2017), this period of contradictory movements combined articulation with national guidelines with the search for local brands via implementing locally created programs. This movement indicates that there was room for local credit-claiming associated with political-programmatic visions, even during the validity of national macro-parameters. It is also interesting to note while Serra appointed two politicians to the Social Assistance Secretariat, Kassab opted to connect the municipal policy to the social assistance policy community, even though from an opposing part of the field than one of the PT administrations. The person who held the policy had already occupied the top position at the end of the Pitta governments and disputed the local translation of national regulations, criticizing, for example, the defense of the centrality of the State in service provision, which the previous PT administration championed. Belonging to the policy community proved important for constructing norms and regulations, particularly on the CSOs under contract. The resources – political capital, knowledge of norms, transit in the field – mobilized by the secretary were central (Bichir, Brettas, and Canato, 2017).

On the other hand, from the CSOs point of view, this administration is classified by actors in the field as more “open to dialogue.” At the same time, the previous PT emphasis is sometimes characterized as the confrontation with these organizations. This administration also saw the expansion of public assistance facilities in line with national guidelines.

The Fernando Haddad administration (2013-2016, PT, left) maintained the trend of appointing secretaries with a technical-political profile. However, the municipal

secretary was not part of the social assistance community. She was a lawyer with a technical profile, and her appointment was part of a broader political articulation since her father was the vice-president of the republic inside the same political coalition. Her profile, which was at the same time technical and distant from the field, brought both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the secretary tried to propose innovations and agendas without worrying about the “legacy” and the interdictions and opportunities represented by the regulation of the area. On the other hand, the information asymmetry between the secretary, the mid-level bureaucracy of the municipal Secretariat, and the CSOs themselves unbalanced some of the disputes, particularly those related to the regulation of CSOs activities and supervision. Nevertheless, this administration represented a potential window of opportunity for developing social assistance in São Paulo, since, for the first time, the municipal and federal levels were political aligned, and, at least at the national level, assistance policy gained greater centrality on the agenda with the visibility of the Bolsa Família Program (Bichir, Brettas and Canato, 2017).

The following administrations were of great instability at the top of the Secretariat. João Dória (PSDB, 2017-2018, center-right) left the mayor’s office after a year to run for the State government, and his deputy mayor Bruno Covas (PSDB, 2018-2020, center-right), took over the management of the city hall. These administrations were characterized by a moment of great political instability in the policy (Lara, 2020). Six different secretaries were in charge of this Secretariat in less than two years. It is worth noting that, at the national level, there was a freeze on social spending with the enactment of a constitutional amendment that established a mandatory spending cap, resulting in major cuts in the municipal social assistance budget. Another major federal institutional change came with a new federal regulatory framework for civil society organizations in all policy areas. Implementing this new regulation has been conflictive and permeated by the daily difficulties of operationalizing the new guidelines (Lara, 2020). Among the main difficulties signaled was the lack of spaces for dialogue and training and the difficult applicability of the law to social assistance, the frequent change of instruments of partnerships, low investment for the effective operationalization of the new regulatory framework, the increase in the duties and the amount of work of the partnership manager and service manager positions.

3. Social housing

Social housing policies remained rather small and localized until the military coup of 1964. By that time, Brazil already hosted large-scale precarious housing solutions – tenements, favelas, and irregular settlements. While the first is associated with high-density collective houses, favelas are self-constructed houses over occupied land, and irregular settlements also involve self-constructed houses on plots bought from private companies which failed to complete project approval.

The military governments would substantially expand policies, but exclusively on constructing new housing units for financed sale in peripheral projects, with very low quality and precarious infrastructure access. The existence of one single product left the cities with no policies designed to face the existing precarity. State governments remained restricted to implementing federal programs; municipalities had almost no role in decision-making or implementation (Valença and Bonates, 2010).

After the decline of the military regime in the early 1980s, the first years of democracy saw a substantial diversification of housing policies by municipal governments. The new policy solutions included in-situ favela upgrading, settlement regularization, self-help coop production, tenement reforms, and special land-use zoning to provide well-located social housing. These innovations circulated intensely in the 1990s among municipal administrations through a network of activists and practitioners (Marques, 2021b).

This new policy agenda reached the federal government after creating the Ministry of Cities in 2003. From its creation until the intense political and economic crisis that culminated with a highly disputable impeachment of the president in 2016, the Ministry created many new programs and actions for planning, regulation, and social participation in urban policies - housing, sanitation, solid waste, urban mobility, and planning. The federal government also returned to the scene of public investments, with major inversions in new housing construction and in-situ favela upgrading and settlement regulation. However, after 2016, the federal presence faded away, leaving municipalities once again alone to decide and provide housing policies (Marques, 2021b).

Housing policies in São Paulo in the mid-80s were almost entirely devoted to constructing new housing projects for financed sales produced by a municipal housing company, subordinated to the Housing Secretariat. The Erundina administration (1989-1992, PT, left-wing) contributed strongly to changing this. The government created four innovative programs that added to the continuity of traditional housing construction. First,

it started a strong program of situ slum upgrading, providing complete infrastructure with minimal possible evictions, followed by the process of land regularization. Second, settlement regularization completed infrastructure and titled land in those settlements. Third, in close connections with social movements, self-help cooperative housing production pioneered transferring financial resources to housing cooperatives, who hired technical assistance, defined projects, and constructed themselves (Bonduki, 2019). Finally, central region tenements started to be renovated.

Tenement regularization was quite experimental, but the administration advanced strongly with slum upgrading, settlement regularization, and self-help cooperative housing construction. A major multisectoral environmental program around a large watershed was formulated in partnership with the State government and obtained financial support from the InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB). Still, it would start implementation in the next administration. A technical-politician with strong ties to the policy community occupied the Housing Secretariat and many other important active participants of the local policy community. The secretary was an academic who would become one of the key policy entrepreneurs on housing and urban policies since the 1980s.

Housing production was important, but the administration's achievement was the establishment of several policy innovations in terms of new policy products, procedures, normalizations, and training of technical and administrative staff appropriated for the new programs. These were achieved with bureaucrats and technicians from the housing agencies, with many activists, practitioners, and academics who joined the government in appointed positions and in private companies hired to help policy management. In addition, many small architectural and engineering firms specialized in participatory programs bloomed. In a nutshell, the government created State capacities and private capacities that potentialize the public production of alternative policies (Marques, Pulhez e Pagin, 2021).

The 1992 election produced a sharp shift in the control of the local executive with the election of Paulo Maluf (1993-1996, PP, right-wing). Most existing programs were shut down or dismantled, and housing policies returned to the traditional production of housing units for sale. A private developer, an outsider to the social housing community, became the secretary, and almost all the individuals responsible for policy creation and implementation were fired and replaced. These individuals returned to their

civil society organizations and universities, went to other municipal administrations, or became advisors of local representatives, preserving the knowledge produced by and around the innovative programs of the previous administration. This administration concentrated on a new program of unit construction within favelas, replacing the in-situ favela upgrading program. The initiative built small buildings, almost exclusively in the most visible parts of the favelas, facing large avenues, leaving the rest of the favela as it were but hidden from the eye of passersby. The environmental program supported by IDB took over only after intense external pressures from the involved agencies. Settlements works and regularization almost completely stopped, and there were no actions regarding tenements or cooperative self-help construction.

The following government belonged to the same political group – Celso Pitta (1997-2000, PP, right-wing), and the housing sector was headed by the same developer, who continued the same policy. He would be later replaced by an architect who would become the most important technical-politician of local right and center-right administrations. Previous housing construction programs within favelas continued, although with even lower production. The main effort of this government' was on settlement regularization, but just with physical works.

The 2000 election produced another major political shift producing the return of the left to the local executive, with Marta Suplicy (2001-2004, PT, left-wing). This administration had as Housing secretary a politician with ties to the housing community – a councilman strongly connected with housing social movements. Most technicians, activists, and intellectuals who created and managed Erundina's policies in the early 90s returned. The agenda that combined “in-situ favela upgrading-settlement regularization-self-help coop construction” also strengthened the traditional construction of new units for financed sale (Saraiva, 2022). Tenement renovation was reinstated but once again on a low scale, although associated with the first program of social rent in renovated buildings in the central region. The administration also approved several important planning instruments, including a new Master Plan and Zoning Law (the first since 1972). These planning instruments were integrated with social housing initiatives, establishing special zones of social interest (Marques, Pulhez e Pagin, 2021).

The 2004 election marked another electoral shift, with the victory of the center-right for the first time. However, after one year in office, the mayor José Serra (2005, PSDB, center-right) resigned to run for State Governor, replaced by his deputy mayor,

Gilberto Kassab (2006-2012). The mayor appointed an outsider linked to the real estate sector for the Housing Secretariat. In a later appointment, the technical-politician who had already occupied this position in the Pitta administration became secretary again. As already mentioned, this architect has ties within the housing community, but with an opposing group than those occupied by activists and academics linked to PT, who tend to be predominant. Similar to the previous transition from a left-wing administration, most practitioners, academics, and activists left their posts, replaced by others with quite different profiles. These governments coincided with the peak of federal investments in cities both in favela upgrading and housing construction, so local production was strongly influenced by the federal agenda, with emphasis on favela upgrading and on new housing construction, including self-help, although peripherally. It is fair to say that the presence of these programs is also because some policy solutions seem to have established themselves gradually in time, while others continued to oscillate (Marques 2021).

2012 brought a new ideological shift, with a third victory of the left with Fernando Haddad (2013-2016, PT, left). This time, however, the political composition of the government coalition gave control of the housing Secretariat to right-wing councilors. As a result, another outsider (and private developer) — led housing policies for a substantial part of the administration. In the last third of the term, the control of the policy returned to another technical-politician with strong ties to the left-wing part of the policy community.⁵ Once again, many members of the network of left-wing practitioners returned to the most important institutional positions. Planning policies and instruments returned strongly to the government's agenda, and the administration approved a new Master Plan and a new Zoning Law integrated with social housing production proposals (Santoro, 2019). Therefore, the left's policy agenda returned to the government, although under pressure, since the end of this government coincided with the major economic and political crisis that ended up with the highly contested impeachment of president.

The 2016 election produced a new shift, with a new defeat of the left-wing incumbent mayor, this time by João Doria (2017, PSDB, center-right) in the election's first round. Similar to the previous PSDB administration (2005) the mayor stayed just one year in office, resigning to run for State governor. His deputy mayor Bruno Covas (2018-2021, PSDB, center-right), replaced him, completed his term, and was reelected in 2020.

⁵ It was again an architectural professor, but the interesting biographical detail is that his PhD had been advised by the housing secretary of the Erundina administration.

He would, however, die of cancer in the first months of the second term. As in similar transitions, the individuals involved in the policy left the administration to their original organizations of the policy community, being replaced by individuals who had already occupied key positions in center-right governments (Serra and Kassab governments) and the right-wing administrations of the 90s. As a result, the Housing Secretariat experienced a very strong instability, with four secretaries, two technical-politicians linked to the mayor's party but with thin connections to the policy community, and two complete outsiders – politicians from other cities with links to evangelical churches. Policies expressed this instability, with relatively weak performance.

4. Comparing socially embedded policy change

These cases have important specificities associated with their policy legacies and the kind of service/product delivered. While in social assistance, the policy involves structuring offices and bureaucracies to deliver services, in the case of housing, the policy is centered on the production of a good (and asset) and on construction and juridical activities that help to reduce precarity and ensure tenure.

Social assistance in São Paulo was strongly based on the interaction between State actors and civil society organizations (CSOs), conditioned by national rules and defined by political choices at the municipal level. Since the 1990s, there have been important processes of State capacity building (Bichir, Brettas, and Canato, 2017), as well as CSOs professionalization and specialization – for segments of the population or city territories. National rules conditioned governance patterns, but local disputes and interactions define them.

Even left-wing governments that defended direct service provision faced challenges in transforming the history of indirect provision, resulting in an immense service-provision capacity concentration and territorial capillarity in the hands of CSOs. Similarly, center-right governments that took office after national regulations for this policy are also induced to follow national regulations with their local colors, especially when techno-politicians belonging to this policy community occupied the top of the Secretariat.

The focus on regulating the modes of indirect provision was mainly present in left-wing administrations and some center-right governments, following nationally defined general parameters and specified according to municipal offerings.

Symmetrically, the bargaining power of CSOs tended to increase greatly not only in right and center-right governments but also when the secretary was aligned with the perspective of non-State public provision. The central dispute became the definition of the public policy instruments (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2007) to regulate indirect services provision, stronger in left-wing administrations.

In the case of social housing policies, the most traditional product is the construction of new units for financed sale. With time, housing policies also include several other programs such as favela upgrading, settlement regularization, cooperative self-construction, tenement renovation, etc. Therefore, the most important “game in town” involved the diversification of policy solutions and the expansion of policy production, pushed by differences in party preferences and political competition between governments.

As in the case of social assistance, innovations were produced mainly in left-wing administrations, aiming at developing different programs to fit different housing needs. This trajectory involved a conflictual and slow but continuous process of ‘incremental progressivism’ that did not solve the large-scale housing problems of the city but expanded and diversified State actions in the field (Marques, 2021a). Right and center-right administrations reduced the rhythm of these programs and rarely even halted them. These programs, however, did not die during unfriendly or hostile administrations because policy solutions, technical expertise, and personnel migrated to civil society organizations to be reinstalled in the next left-wing government. With time, some policies established themselves in the policy space, while others oscillated between administrations. Therefore, in the case of social housing, policy agendas followed a clearer political-ideological cleavage, operated by individuals chosen to occupy the Secretariat and its technical staff. As we saw, the most important institutional positions were occupied by politicians and technical-politicians, some strongly embedded in the policy community. Activists and academics regularly migrated between the policy community and State agencies. Unlike Social Assistance, multi-level governance mechanisms only influenced housing policies in specific moments.

Regardless of these policy specificities, common processes led to the development of several policy shifts and innovations in both sectors. First, innovations and changes arose from social embeddedness and capacity building in specific political conjunctures, particularly in left-wing governments. These were usually not intentionally

constructed but resulted from historical interaction and tie construction processes in professional, political, and academic environments. Additionally, sharing projects and visions on the direction of these policies encouraged the mobilization of actors from these fields to occupy key decision-making positions.

In social assistance and housing, we observed actors sharing projects and disputing their translation into concrete policy designs. Their greater or lesser success depended on forms of access to formal and informal decision-making spaces and their embeddedness in public policy communities. Technical-political actors with ties to the policy community managed to build more capacities, although directions varied according to the government's political project. Left-wing governments advocated direct provision and greater regulation over CSOs provision in social assistance. In housing, left-wing governments diversified and expanded social housing programs. The role of entrepreneurs was not irrelevant but small. Their capacity to innovate depended on their embeddedness in the relevant policy communities, enabling the mobilization of the technical knowledge and "working force" to produce new policies, including non-State organizations of several sorts – from private companies to social assistance CSOs and small architectural firms. The density of policy communities also influences the possible flows of ideas, solutions, and personal and technical repertoire. Interestingly enough, what is usually considered a sign of low institutionalization may be a potential source of policy innovation and long-term accumulation of positive policy change.

Conclusion

São Paulo is an interesting case to analyze policy change precisely because of its political complexity, prominent role within Brazilian municipalities, and political and institutional features. From the political point of view, as we have seen, there was a predominance of center-right governments, although with the periodical interruption of left-wing administrations. Its institutions and political leaders, at least considering the most common interpretations, also do not suggest a good environment for positive policy change – a fragmented multi-party system with low ideological identities, personalistic political careers, low technical capacities, and weak careers at the local agencies, and not yet consolidated public policies. In this sense, the São Paulo administration is a strong test for positive policy change.

In substantive terms, the analyzed policy sectors presented trajectories of greater regulation and greater variability of services in social assistance, and greater variability of products and production formats in social housing. Left-wing governments, particularly, implemented innovations in the provision of new housing products (social housing) or the definition of new parameters for regulating indirect supply (social assistance). While right and center-right administrations sometimes reduced the rhythm of these programs or even stopped them, the shifts of political control over the executive brought policies back on even larger scales. These oscillating trajectories were enabled by the maintenance of ideas, projects, and technicians latent in civil society during unfriendly governments (Marques, 2021a) or due to the initialization of rules that are not easily reversible, many coming from national macro-regulations. The existence of specific forms of embeddedness between the State and dense civil society and mechanisms of multilevel governance help explain policy resilience.

The dynamics of multilevel governance and the presence of high political competition seemed central. In both policy sectors, policy change was also explained by disputes between programmatic and political projects over time, constructed not only within parties or public policy communities but in the complex interactions between State and non-State actors in formal and informal arenas.

The profile of key decision-makers also matters beyond the generic idea of leadership or the identification of stakeholders: technical-political actors, connected or not to policy communities, can help consolidate certain policy designs. Eventually, these actors acted as entrepreneurs, taking advantage of/creating windows of opportunity that have to do with local disputes and sometimes seizing opportunities with civil society and supra-local dynamics.

We agree with the literature on the importance of contextual and contingent factors in public policy production. However, from the standpoint of policy trajectories in São Paulo, the formal construction of governance arrangements and the adequate timing for decision-making or leadership characteristics do not seem crucial. Therefore, we argue that political party preferences, the interactions between relevant actors in the State and civil society, and multilevel processes seemed to be key to defining how politics happens, sometimes unintendedly. From this perspective, it seems more important to understand the fits (and misfits) that may eventually lead to policy change, considering the political processes that surround (and are constituted by) policy production.

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