

Building and dismantling organisational capacity and bureaucratic identity: an analysis of Ibama's civil service examinations (1989 – 2022)

Construção e desmantelamento de capacidade organizacional e identidade burocrática: análise dos concursos públicos do Ibama (1989 – 2022)

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates how the recruitment procedures for the selection of environmental inspectors in Ibama, Brazil's leading federal environmental agency, have varied since the institution's creation in 1989 until 2022. To explain the identified changes, the study considers the organisation's accumulated experience and political context. It draws on 44 semi-structured interviews and analyses the content of all five examination booklets (*caderno de questões*) and their corresponding calls (*editais*) for the position of environmental analyst organised during Ibama's history, with a focus on the subtopic "Regulation, Control, and Environmental Inspection". For interpreting this data, I mainly used qualitative content analysis. I coded the data based on the following categories: eligibility requirements, regional allocation criteria, programmatic content, general structure of the exam, individual motivation to become an Ibama servant, impact of public exams on inspection activities, and impact of the political context on inspection activities. Exam booklets went through an additional quantitative analysis on the number of references to "deforestation", "Amazon", and "inspection". My findings suggest that Ibama's examinations between 2002 and 2013 reflect an incremental process of specialisation and technicalisation. This process enhanced the agency's capacity to inspect deforestation and strengthened its identity around the ideal of environmental stewardship. In an attempt to fracture Ibama's capacity and identity, the 2021 examination prompted a deliberate shift in selected candidates' profiles.

Keywords: Recruitment examinations. Organisational capacity. Bureaucratic identity. Deforestation inspection. Policy dismantling.

RESUMO

O artigo investiga de que maneira as inflexões nos concursos públicos para admissão de agentes ambientais federais do Ibama, o maior órgão ambiental federal brasileiro, variaram de acordo com a

experiência acumulada pela organização e o contexto político desde a criação da instituição em 1989 até 2022. Foram realizadas 44 entrevistas semiestruturadas e analisados os conteúdos de todos os cinco cadernos de questões e editais de concurso público para o cargo de analista ambiental organizados na história do Ibama, com foco na subárea “Regulação, Controle e Fiscalização Ambiental”. A análise de conteúdo, primordialmente qualitativa, foi estruturada em torno das seguintes categorias: condições de elegibilidade, critérios para distribuição regional de vagas, conteúdo programático, estrutura geral do certame, motivação individual para ingresso na carreira e impactos dos concursos públicos e do contexto político nas atividades de fiscalização. Os cadernos de questões foram adicionalmente submetidos a análise quantitativa quanto ao número de referências aos termos “desmatamento”, “Amazônia” e “fiscalização”. Os achados sugerem que enquanto os concursos de 2002 a 2013 refletem um processo incremental de especialização e tecnicização que aprimorou a capacidade do órgão de fiscalizar o desmatamento e fortaleceu a identidade dos servidores em torno do ideal de proteção ambiental, o concurso de 2021 representou uma tentativa deliberada de alterar o perfil dos candidatos selecionados, com o propósito de fraturar a capacidade e identidade do Ibama.

Palavras-chave: Concurso público. Capacidade organizacional. Identidade burocrática. Fiscalização do desmatamento. Desmantelamento de políticas públicas.

1 INTRODUCTION

Recruitment procedures of civil servants are fundamental tools in the repertoire of instruments available to elected politicians and their cabinets to influence the articulation, upholding, and monitoring of socio-environmental policies. The rules and methods for hiring employees directly impact the profile of selected candidates and can imprint long-term consequences on government agencies' organisational capacity and identity in several fields, including environmental policymaking.

Political appointments or approval in public examinations are the only two ways to be admitted into the Brazilian environmental bureaucracy. However, whereas the appointment of ministers, directors, and secretaries almost instantaneously becomes a hot topic in the media, manoeuvres that seek to change an agency through examinations hardly make headlines. Hidden amidst pages of technical jargon in lengthy public announcements, changes in eligibility criteria or programmatic content can easily go unnoticed. While the recent process of militarisation of environmental agencies through the appointment of police and army officers to leadership positions is documented in the literature (ARAÚJO, 2020, p. 3; MENEZES; BARBOSA JR., 2021, p. 237), the impact of Jair Bolsonaro's administration (2019-2022) on the recruitment of new environmental inspectors through public examinations has not yet received scholarly attention.

This article focuses on Ibama, acronym for *Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis* (Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources), a federal environmental agency with multiple competencies, such as environmental licensing and inspections. Importantly, this agency has also been increasingly recognised for its central role in anti-deforestation operations in the Amazon region. I analyse changes made in Ibama's recruitment procedures since the agency's creation in 1989 until 2022, inquiring how such changes reflect the organisation's accumulated experience and the political context in which it is embedded. This study draws on semi-structured interviews and assesses the content of all examination booklets (*caderno de questões*) and their corresponding calls (*editais*) used in tests for selecting Ibama's environmental analysts.

The article contributes to the literature in two ways. First, at a theoretical level, it connects concepts traditionally employed in organisational studies to insights from the subfield of policy dismantling. Second, this study offers the first empirical analysis of the transformations in Ibama's recruitment procedures, covering a 33-year time span that allows for comparison between different governments during Brazil's New Republic. My findings also contribute to the broader literature on policy

dismantling by revealing how authoritarian governments can use public examinations to fracture bureaucratic identity and dismantle agencies from within.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The early origins of policy dismantling as an academic subfield go back to the experience of deregulation and welfare retrenchment in Europe and the United States in the 1970s and 1980s (JORDAN *et al.*, 2013, p. 796-800) in the wake of neoliberal reforms prescribed by the Washington Consensus. At that point, scholars reflected on the strategies used by governments to conciliate cuts in social spending with a vote-seeking logic (BONOLI, 2012, p. 102). In this initial approach, explicitly focused on the Global North political landscape, dismantling would thus be a type of policy change seeking to reduce “traditional social democratic pro-welfare policies, [...] because of the overall context of permanent austerity” (BONOLI, 2012, p. 105).

Later attempts to render the concept applicable to different political realities, usually accompanied by calls for “a more general theory of policy change” (BAUER; KNILL, 2014, p. 42) and “more solid comparisons across countries” (JORDAN *et al.*, 2013, p. 797), resorted to quantitative approaches that presuppose the possibility of establishing a *measurement scale* of change. Along this line, Bauer and Knill (2014, p. 33-34) propose a distinction between policy density and policy intensity. Another typology by Bauer and Knill (2014, p. 39-40) situates dismantling in contexts of liberal democratic backsliding and suggests that authoritarian leaders can either side-line, use or ignore bureaucrats (BAUER *et al.*, 2021, p. 8).

The call for comparison and generalisation has been answered. Empirical cases from the Global South have increasingly been interpreted under the rubrics of dismantling in a literature strand that has attached new meanings to the concept. For example, Grisa and Niedeke (2021, p. 257-259) connect the dismantling of the Mercosur Specialized Meeting on Family Farming with the end of Brazilian leadership in the Brasília Consensus, “whose bases were the promotion of macroeconomic stability, raising the minimum wage, income transfer programs and social inclusion.” They emphasise how a focus on costs and benefits must be complemented with an account of the “ideas and norms that guide interpretations about the nature and configuration of public problems.” Similarly, Sabourin *et al.* (2020, p. 62-63) underscore how the perception of costs and benefits varies across jurisdictions, as the dismantling of family farming policies in Brazil occurred in a context of political changes “linked to the extra-national interests of international financial capitalism”.

Within Brazilian environmental policy, scholars and non-governmental organisations have shed light on different methods and consequences of dismantling. Reports by the Climate Observatory (2021, 2022) and Fonseca *et al.* (2022) describe how, via nearly two thousand executive orders, Bolsonaro’s government weakened legislation, restricted participatory forums, subordinated environmental agencies to the Armed Forces, centralised decision-making, and reduced budget for environmental policies. Scantimburgo (2020) registered successive administrative reshufflings whereby agencies responsible for water and forestry policies were transferred from the Ministry of Environment to other ministries. Barcelos (2020) compiled legislative proposals to reform environmental licensing rules, showing how these draft bills endorsed by Bolsonaro’s coalition seek to implement a self-regulatory model that can amplify environmental damage. Fearnside (2019) documented several normative changes at the legislative and administrative levels during the first year of Bolsonaro’s term, concluding that even though he stepped back on the promise to abolish the Ministry of the Environment, he achieved the same effect by other means, in particular by appointing loyalists to top-level positions in environmental agencies.

A parallel venue of theoretical development in Brazil has connected dismantling to the emergent notion of “institutional harassment”. Stressing how the tryptic “side-line, use and ignore” is insufficient to grasp the Brazilian case, Aguiar (2022, p. 56) argues that, under the administration of Jair Bolsonaro, “[civil servants] are not only shunned or frowned upon but many are treated as enemies who should be eliminated”. Institutional harassment, therefore, has been understood as “practices directed toward the deconstruction of the state”, with clearly defined goals: “to disorganise the state – redirecting it for and by the market; delegitimising public policies under the Constitution of 1988; and disqualifying the servants” (SILVA *et al.*, 2022, p. 122). The imposed atmosphere of fear, collectively experienced by government workers across different areas and careers, is a useful heuristic tool to distinguish between democratic policy change and authoritarian policy dismantling (SILVA, 2022). This text draws on this debate and pivots upon the distinction between organisation and order to flesh out the tension.

2.2 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: DISMANTLING, CONSTITUTIONAL HARDBALL AND PUBLIC SERVICE BARGAINS IN RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

Organisation and order relate to each other not so much in the quantitative terms evoked by the synecdoche of part and whole but rather in a more metonymical way, as substituting one word for another brings forth an addition of meaning. *To order* more immediately recalls setting a configuration, while *to organise* evokes the idea of arranging something under this configuration. Organisational changes under times of political continuity seek to realise the standing order; organisational transformations in moments of political disruption seek to subvert the standing order and replace it with another. However, the lines separating continuity from disruption and realisation from subversion are rarely unambiguous.

Two consecrated concepts that make sense of this ambiguity are “constitutional hardball” and “public service bargains”. The first was coined by Mark Tushnet (2004) and later popularised outside the legal domain by Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p. 109-112)¹. In Tushnet’s (2004, p. 523) initial formulation, constitutional hardball designates “political claims and practices – legislative and executive initiatives – that are without much question within the bounds of existing constitutional doctrine and practice but that are nonetheless in some tension with existing pre-constitutional understandings”. Pre-constitutional understandings consist in “the presuppositions accepted by all politically significant actors” about “the nation’s fundamental institutional arrangements – the relations between President and Congress, the mechanisms by which politicians organise support among the public, and the principles that politicians take to guide the development of public policy”.

During periods of ordinary politics, pre-constitutional understandings are taken for granted; during periods of subversion, they are brought into question by political actors who want to replace them with others, thus extending their positions “on the meaning of the Constitution” over a much longer period than their own terms (TUSHNET, 2004, p. 532). If politicians’ attempt to gain permanent control over components of government fails, that does not de-characterise the initiative as constitutional hardball. In Tushnet’s (2004, p. 544) account, the practice depends on whether political actors believe they are in a position to shift from one constitutional order to another and not on whether this belief turns out to be true or not.

The author mentions changes in civil service regulations that aim “to eliminate partisan influence on the lower levels of the executive bureaucracy so that lower-level bureaucrats are in fact committed to a particular partisan program” as explicit examples of constitutional hardball (TUSHNET, 2004, p. 530). Considering the relevance of recruitment procedures for the construction of organisational capacity and the forging of bureaucratic identity, changes in public exams for the selection of civil servants which purport radical shifts in the profile of approved candidates without evidence that these shifts are motivated by policy concerns about the agency’s performance can be deemed as an attempt to transfigure shared pre-constitutional understandings of what the agency’s purpose ought to be about.

Another way of articulating the oblique relation between order and organisation in policy dismantling vis-à-vis policy change is through the contrasting notion of public service bargains, proposed by Hood and Lodge (2006). The authors argue that workers and politicians exchange competence and loyalty for reward and responsibility at any governmental agency's core. They call these arrangements *public service bargains*, meaning any agreement, explicit or implicit, written or unwritten, expressed in convention, formal law or a mixture of both, which "can be understood as the product of some sort of equilibrium" between the forces or interests of servants and elected politicians (HOOD; LODGE, 2006, p. 12).

The existence of such negotiations does not imply bureaucratic insulation from politics. On the contrary, any autonomy conquered by servants is always relative, provisional and contingent. The concept of public service bargains indicates that, under conditions of continuity, politicians will strive to agree with bureaucrats on the principles and conditions of policy development. An adjustment of interests (even if conflictual), rather than a unilateral offence to ascertain full control, is the outcome of the brush between political actors and civil servants.

During periods of ordinary politics, public service exams are usually considered valuable bargaining chips that politically appointed officials can rely on to placate the discontentment of bureaucracies with what is often framed as chronic understaffing. Likewise, when there is fierce competition for a limited budget, announcing new positions for a certain agency is typically framed as a concession by the government and a victory for bureaucracy. At times of disruption of the established order, however, new hires cease to be employed as negotiable resources in a continuous reciprocal relationship and begin to be used unilaterally by political actors as a means (not necessarily successful) to gain control over the organisation by undermining its capacity and erasing its identity.

We understand capacity as the complex apparatus of tools governmental agencies use to intervene in reality, encompassing four basic instruments: Authority, nodality, treasure, and knowledge (HOOD; MARGETTS, 2007). Authority corresponds to a set of rules that concurs with the agency's purpose; nodality refers to channels through which an agency can obtain or send information; treasure denotes any material resources such as budget, infrastructure, or access to alternative funding. Most importantly for this piece, knowledge means "the possession of a stock of people with whatever skills they may have" (HOOD; MARGETTS, 2007, p. 5-6). It includes the variable repertoire of practices and abilities shared by the agency's staff in the form of technical know-how (LINDAHL, 2018, p. 52-53).

Bureaucratic identity, in turn, can be understood as the set of common interests and values in which the agency's staff members are socialised (LINDAHL, 2018, p. 52-53). This set of interests and values has "differentiating and enabling properties", as it "demarcate[s] bureaucracies from one another and from other organisations in their policy domain", as well as fosters "cohesion, coordination, and commitment" among the agency's participants (CARPENTER, 2001, p. 27). Identity can also be broken into four elements: Schemes, assumptions, events, and individual background. In a nutshell, schemes refer to symbols that agents deem ideal, either positively or negatively; assumptions mean the underlying presuppositions and frames of thought informing the use of schemes; events account for the landmarks that chronicle the organisation's history, as narrated by the agents themselves. Individual background, most relevant to this contribution, relates to staff members' socioeconomic origin, as well as their educational and professional trajectory. This encompasses the skills and knowledge individually held by each organisation member.

In Brazil, bureaucratic recruitment through standardised exams has long been considered an antidote against the patrimonialistic and clientelistic practice of political appointments that favour kinship and personal ties (GRAHAM, 1968, p. 26), a mechanism to elevate meritocracy of effort and talent above the "aristocracy of blood" and the "plutocracy of money" (FONTAINHA *et al.*, 2016, p. 674). Assumedly guided by the principles of formality, objectivity and neutrality, exams would safeguard the bureaucracy against patronage and arbitrary dismissals, cushioning the impact of "pure politics" on

the structure of bureaucracy and allowing for the emergence of “islands of bureaucratic excellence” (KLÜGER, 2015a, p. 106). Such islands would be agencies with a guaranteed space for technique, understood as the performance of specialised, though never neutral, skills (KLÜGER, 2015b, p. 78).

Critical accounts of the Brazilian exam system denounce how its current model became “absolutely self-referenced” and detached from society’s needs (FONTAINHA *et al.*, 2015, p. 682), driving a million-dollar coaching industry of preparatory courses that reproduce socioeconomic inequalities (MEDEIROS, 2021, p. 314). This model fails to include the public service as a component of the *ethos* of candidates for public positions (MAIA, 2019, p. 216). Candidates value job security and higher salaries compared to wage jobs in the private sector as the main representations of privileges attached to public positions. They often have a vague notion of the activities they will perform, but they enter exams with encyclopedic knowledge about the positions’ remuneration, workload, and benefits. They often perceive the activity as a burden to be borne, a “necessary evil” to secure personal achievements, expressed as maintenance or elevation of individual and family consumption standards (MAIA, 2019, p. 216).

In such a scenario, the legitimacy of examinations as a superior recruitment method in Brazil would historically rest upon two pillars (FONTAINHA *et al.*, 2015, p. 673): A “republican ideology”, which sees political appointments as an aristocratic remnant, and a logic of “school meritocracy”, which privileges evaluation methods similar to those used in schools instead of evaluation methods that simulate future work routines. This logic also leads to inviting professors instead of professionals to exam committees and to providing professional training only after the exam instead of including training as a phase in the selection process itself.

The validity of these critiques concerning elite careers such as diplomacy or magistracy is beyond doubt. Their applicability to middle-level positions also seems unquestionable in the cases of bureaucratic identities, which relate only loosely to agencies’ core activities, such as tax auditors and retirement analysts, to mention examples analysed in the literature cited above. However, to what extent these criticisms hold water regarding Ibama’s selection processes is still an open question.

3 DATA COLLECTION AND SYSTEMATISATION

Exams for recruiting new Ibama staff members happened only five times in the agency’s history: 2002, 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2021, all organised by committees affiliated with UnB/Cespe. Committees were composed of anonymous experts with academic but not necessarily professional experience in environmental policy. My dataset comprises all exam booklets used for the admission of Ibama environmental analysts and their corresponding public announcements. Content analysis was restricted to the subfield “Regulation, Control, and Environmental Inspection”. Due to this study’s focus on anti-deforestation policies, I intentionally omitted licensing activities. This methodological choice is justified because there is a strong distinction between staff members assigned to inspection and those working with licensing. From October 2021 to May 2022, I conducted 44 semi-structured interviews with current or former Ibama employees and executive leaders, tenured servants and politically appointed officials of other agencies, federal prosecutors, NGO representatives, and agribusiness actors. All interviews were fully anonymised to ensure confidentiality. Finally, I collected data on Ibama’s internal training courses during archival research conducted in Ibama’s central library in Brasília in April 2022.

The selection of interviewees followed a non-probabilistic sampling. This was mainly motivated by the difficulty in accessing the nucleus of agents responsible for inspection operations in the Amazon, considering the overall atmosphere of fear that prevailed in federal agencies during Bolsonaro’s government. In such a scenario, more probabilistic approaches, such as sending standardised forms to the servants’ internal mailing lists – as done by Albertini (2013) – were not a possibility. Reaching the

agents was only possible through what Klüger (2017) calls “weak links”: indications by acquaintances located in the periphery of the researcher’s social network. Only two former servants were approached per email.

When analysing public announcements, I sought to identify qualitative changes in (i) eligibility requirements; (ii) criteria for regional allocation of approved candidates; (iii) programmatic content; and (iv) general structure of the exam (e.g. thematic areas and sub-areas, number of objective and discursive questions, presence or absence of quotas to minority groups). Exam booklets first went through a quantitative analysis on the number of questions mentioning the words “deforestation”, “Amazon”, and “inspection”. A second analysis sought to identify qualitative evolutionary patterns in the content and skills required by exam questions. Interviews provided information about (i) individual motivation to apply for a career in Ibama; (ii) perception of intergenerational differences in the social and technical profile of approved candidates; (iii) impact of public exams on the agency’s activities; and (iv) impact of the political context on the agency’s activities. Pedagogical plans and handouts used in training new servants were also qualitatively analysed. Data extracted from these documents concerned the structure and syllabus of internal training courses, including workload, learning modules, reading materials, and interactive exercises.

In April 2022, I requested data on the socioeconomic characteristics of environmental inspectors (such as gender, race, and educational level) under the Information Access Act to Ibama’s Citizen Information Service. The institution pointed to available databases that lack the requested information, containing only the longitudinal total number of servants. As my current data on the average socioeconomic profile of approved candidates is restricted to the sample of respondents, I draw limited conclusions regarding the servants’ trajectory of social mobility and motivation to apply for the career. Further research based on quantitative databases can complement the findings presented in this study.

In the next section, I present and discuss data on the changes made in Ibama’s recruitment procedures since the agency’s creation in 1989 until 2022, inquiring how such changes reflect both the organisation’s accumulated experience and the political context in which it is embedded. The analysis is divided into four historical moments: a first period that goes from Ibama’s foundation until its first public exam (1989-2001); a second period characterised by the organisation of four public exams (2002-2013); a third period in which Ibama conducted no exams (2014-2018); and a fourth period marked by the organisation of one exam (2019-2022).

4 DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 AN AMBIGUOUS INHERITANCE (1989 – 2001)

Ibama, acronym for *Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis* (Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources), was created in 1989. The motivation for the creation of Ibama can be primarily attributed to an international “post-Stockholm pressure” and the need of the Brazilian government to create a good image during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Unced) that was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. In the words of an interviewee: “When Brazil got the authorisation to host the UN Conference in 92, the first thing that must have occurred was ‘look, everyone is coming here, and we don’t have environmental agencies’! They rushed, put together what we had, and created Ibama in 1989” (Interview 1). “What we had” meant the four agencies that were fused to form Ibama: the Special Secretariat for the Environment (Sema), the Agency for Fisheries Development (Sudepe), the Agency for Rubber (Sudhevea), and the Brazilian Institute of Forest Development (IBDF).

The opening of 2,000 new positions was authorised along with the founding of Ibama (Interview 17). Nevertheless, the agency's first examination only occurred in 2002. Until then, its staff was comprised of the staff inherited from the four merged agencies, who had been hired mostly, if not completely, through political appointment. The entry process into public service at that time was, as one agent put it, "very fragile". Some of Ibama's first environmental technicians had been hired initially as security guards at IBDF and changed functions after the merger (Interview 29). Others worked in federal agencies unrelated to environmental policy and were recommended by acquaintances to positions in Ibama. This was the case of one respondent, who left a public job in strategic planning for a post in Ibama on a "friend's invitation" in 1992, motivated by a desire to break out of the inertia that pervaded his previous professional environment and the "prospective of developing interesting work" (Interview 2).

These older servants are often described by Ibama staff members of more recent cohorts as lacking formal training, but endowed with valuable practical abilities, such as identifying types of wood based on appearance, smell and texture (RAJÃO; VURDUBAKIS, 2013, p. 10) and discovering signs of illegal boating activities from traces left on riverbanks (Interview 2). This prevalence of analogical skills among the servants mirrored the low degree of technological development with which Ibama operated at the time. Orbital data had low resolution and a one-year time lag; infrastructure was precarious; inspection was centered on volume and physical presence; and operations lacked strategic planning, media communication plans, and intelligence support (Interview 2). Throughout the agency's first decade, its efforts to halt the destruction of the Amazon forest remained highly ineffective. In 1995, deforestation reached the historical peak of 29,059 km² (Interview 18).

4.2 FIRST FOUR PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS (2002, 2005, 2009, AND 2013): INCREMENTAL SPECIALISATION AND TECHNICALISATION

In Fernando Henrique Cardoso's last year in office (2002), a public announcement opened 610 positions for Ibama environmental analysts. Recruitment procedures amounted to two exams. The first had 20 "true or false" questions on topics of "basic knowledge" (Portuguese language, basic administrative law, math and informatics). The second exam had 20 objective "true or false" questions on topics of "specific knowledge", encompassing notions of ecology, geology, chemistry, biology, geography/cartography, hydrology, limnology, meteorology/climatology, natural resources management, policy instruments, national and international environmental regulations). The announcement did not include a recommended reading list. It mentioned that a mandatory training course would be held for all approved candidates to introduce them to the agency's activities, but the course was not part of the selection process itself.

The newly filled positions were distributed across Ibama offices located in all Brazilian regions. According to their classification, the approved candidates could choose their preferred work location. Five per cent of the vacancies were reserved for people with disabilities. There was no affirmative action provision regarding race, class or gender. A college degree in any area was a mandatory requirement, but advanced academic titles (M. Sc., Ph. D. etc.) did not count extra points. The programmatic content of "specific knowledge" topics was not yet broken into subfields.

In the 2002 exam booklet, seven questions referred to "Amazon," three used the word "deforestation," and two mentioned "inspection." None of them, though, specifically addressed deforestation inspection. The issue of deforestation was framed generically with a more economic emphasis, as in the question reproduced below, which required the candidate to evaluate statements in connection with a text and a graph about the extractive economy model of Alfredo Homma, a Brazilian environmental economist:

About the subject matter of the text and the figure above, please evaluate the following items.

- I. Public policy that creates subsidies - such as a subsidy for rubber – could displace the stretch of the graphic to the left.
- II. When the relative prices of extractive products are higher than those of agricultural products, there is a tendency to increase deforestation and to abandon extractivism.
- III. The figure shows that the ability to increase supply reaches its limits due to the stocks available and the increasing cost of extraction (with the increase of the collection area).
- IV. Extractivism can be carried out in areas of Legal Reserve in the form of sustainable forest management.

Candidates approved in the first exam participated in a 320-hour training course, whose expenses were partially covered by the registration fees paid by exam applicants. 60% of the course workload was designed as distance learning and 40% as in-person activities. Its pedagogical proposal was divided into six modules of 60 hours each. Modules I to IV were grouped as “propaedeutic” and addressed topics such as environmental history, onto-epistemological foundations of the environmental crisis, characteristics of Brazilian ecosystems, environmental policy instruments, and principles of public administration. Reading materials favoured but were not limited to texts produced by the agency’s own staff and those resulting from research funded by Ibama. They included legal norms, editions of the journal *The Ecologist*, a manifesto by Via Campesina, and academic book chapters. Modules V and VI were praxis-oriented and encompassed case studies, simulations, and field exercises related to conservation unit licensing, inspection, or management.

The arrival of the first staff members approved through the 2002 exam was, and still is, widely regarded as a watershed event in Ibama’s history. Even old-school workers inherited from previous agencies celebrate the boom of creativity that emerged from that “generational clash.” Newcomers are described as “young”, lacking “professional and fieldwork experience” but possessing “updated academic and theoretical knowledge” (Interviews 1 and 2). This first cohort included former United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) consultants who had experience with Ibama’s previous projects (Interview 18). The 2002 entrants quickly climbed up to leadership positions within Ibama, as Lula’s government preferred to rely on “fresh blood” to structure new offices and initiatives (Interview 1). Two interviewees pointed to the media coverage due to the 1992 Unced and its impact on the national imaginary as factors that motivated them to take Ibama’s 2002 exam (Interviews 1 and 2).

Three years later, a second exam was organised to fill another 610 vacancies. The number of objective questions on topics of “basic knowledge” and “specific knowledge” increased to respectively 50 and 70. A written essay was included. The topics of specific knowledge were subdivided into six main areas (1- regulation, control, inspection, licensing and audit; 2- monitoring; 3- environmental quality; 4- forest and fishery resources; 5- ecosystem conservation; and 6- environmental education). Although the training course was no longer mentioned in the exam announcement, it continued to be carried out and underwent significant improvements. The part devoted to inspection that was previously only a 60-hour module turned into a 400-hour semi-immersive course. The main purpose of this change was to transmit Ibama’s “doctrinal elements” more coherently and to create “Esprit de corps” (Interview 8).

In the 2005 exam, the allocation logic of positions changed to a “regionalised system” to reduce geographic turnover, as first-cohort candidates from the Center-South assigned to the Amazon massively requested transfers to their places of origin after a short time of service (Interview 17). Positions were now distributed to all 27 Brazilian states according to the six thematic areas: before the exam, the candidates had to indicate to which state they were applying.

In the 2005 exam booklet for area 1, three questions referred to “Amazon,” two to “deforestation,” and three to “inspection.” The essay required the candidate to explain, in 30 lines, the sequential phases of a study on the impact of a small hydroelectric power plant on terrestrial biodiversity conservation. Both the essay and the questions of specific knowledge emphasised the activity of licensing, as in the question below, which was contextualised in the booklet by a text and a map:

Based on the information above, judge the following items.

95 When elaborating the term of reference in an environmental impact study, the licensing agency may include the need to assess the project's impact on the conservation of regional biodiversity.

96 The map can be used to predict a future scenario, considering the highway as a new trafficking route and the spatial reordering of the traffic chain, with the emergence of new harvesting sites.

97 Concerning landscape, the highway articulates new spatial relationships and is a vector of dynamisation of environmental impacts, especially deforestation.

99 If the undertaking tampered with cartographic data to favour a projection of desirable scenarios and trends, once the license was granted the licensing agency could not suspend it, even if it detected fraud and assessed that this procedure was relevant for the conclusions of the study, in compliance with the provisions of Conama Resolution No. 237/1997.

Interviewees noticed no significant difference between the profile of the 2002 cohort and the 2005 cohort, except for a reduction in former UNDP consultants. The second batch of approved candidates would have, thus, even less experience than the first (Interview 18), a characteristic that was not framed as negative. Of all Ibama servants I interviewed, four had entered the agency in the 2005 exam. When asked about the motivations that led them to apply for the environmental analyst career, three alluded to family influences (childhood in rural setting, uprising in an Amazonian extractivist community, involvement of older siblings with social land movements) that nurtured in them a particular connection with nature. Unlike the others, the fourth interviewee did not attribute his motivation for working in Ibama to family experiences; his sensitivity to environmental protection and the desire to engage with it professionally was rather mediated by photojournalistic works about the Amazon. One of them also referred to the momentum generated by the 1992 Unced as a factor contributing to the decision to enter Ibama.

The third examination was held in 2009 when 225 new positions were offered. Already signalling internal specialisation, this announcement subdivided area 1 into 1.1 (licensing and audit) and 1.2 (regulation, control and inspection). The regional system for the allocation of positions was maintained. The booklet for area 1.2 included seven questions with references to the word “Amazon,” six to “deforestation”, and five to “inspection.” Besides the increased frequency of deforestation in the questions of specific knowledge, it is clear that the exam's approach to the topic became, on the one hand, more focused on inspection instruments and tactics and, on the other hand, politically oriented more to the South region. Consider the question below, which was preceded by statements on the Amazon's geopolitical strategic relevance made by the renowned scholar Bertha Becker and colonel Paulo Esteves, at the time the spokesperson of Sistema de Vigilância da Amazônia (Sivam), a military project aimed at defending Brazilian sovereignty in the region:

Having as reference the text above and based on public policies formulated to the Amazon, judge the items below.

81 The presence of the State in the Amazon can be more effective by means of better instrumentalisation, supported by digital cartography and remote sensing, to integrate deforestation monitoring systems and approval of forest management plans.

82 Harvesting managed timber means cutting, at a single time, trees as small as 10 cm in diameter and setting up multiple trails for dragging logs, an activity that does not require planning.

83 From a geopolitical point of view, the Amazon should be thought of on a South American scale, being paramount in the formulation of joint development strategies between the region's countries.

84 Despite holding 63.7% of the total Amazon area, Brazil should recognise and consider its fragile position in some aspects in relation to the other countries of the Amazon region.

85 The presence of the State in the Amazon region can materialise, for example, by identifying the origin of the energy supply of steel mills.

Interviewees did not identify differences in profile between the 2009 cohort and its predecessors, except for one praising mention of the enhanced “digital literacy” of the newcomers, who, after entering the agency, learned much faster to master geoprocessing tools (Interview 6). Two interviewees entered Ibama through the 2009 exam. One mentioned family ethic lessons about caring for the collective as a decisive factor in shaping his understanding of the environment and directing his career choices towards Ibama. The other enriched his answer with a personal experience that illuminates the emergence of a virtuous circle between recruitment and performance in Ibama. He grew up inside a conservation unit in a house next to Ibama’s operational base. This allowed him to observe the servants’ daily activity and their impact on the region. Observation gradually gave place to admiration as he watched the agents working late, in far from optimal conditions, and really changing the behaviour of economic actors considered powerful in the region.

My house was behind Ibama. At that time, I already found it awesome to see those Ibama people coming, with their cars full of mud, full of game, things they had seized, weapons, fishing nets, and hunting traps. I found that job awesome. I saw them arrive at dawn and wondered: are these guys working until now? I found it pretty cool. A job that has no routine, no fixed working hours. I was looking at those who would later become my future colleagues, watching them work, seeing how they moved every day. I started to have a great admiration. I used to live inside a national forest and realised how important their work was. People had a real fear of doing something wrong because Ibama could punish them or do something. Even the [large mining] company that operated there had this fear. Then I saw that Ibama’s work had results. And I started to admire this profession (Interview 17) greatly.

One can notice, therefore, that in 2009 a positive feedback effect had already been triggered by Ibama’s first exams. With better technical qualifications and a profile more committed to environmental protection, the servants recruited in the first two exams managed to promote positive changes in the agency’s performance and deliver results that started to be perceived by society. Ibama’s increased prestige, in turn, aroused the interest of more young people to work at the agency. This led to subsequent announcements to attract candidates with profiles even more aligned with Ibama and made exams even more competitive, reinforcing the virtuous circle within the agency.

The next exam occurred during Dilma Rousseff’s term. It was announced at the end of 2012, a few months before the protests of June 2013 plunged the country into a spiral of political instability. The announcement offered 108 positions, whose allocation would now occur according to Ibama’s “need and convenience”, though the candidates still had to define a specific area beforehand. The subdivision of areas also reflected the transfer of Ibama’s jurisdiction over conservation units to ICMBio, a new agency created in 2007: Area 1.2 became area 2, and areas 4, 5, and 6 were removed from the announcement. Topics on basic knowledge started to include ethics in public service and deeper notions of constitutional and administrative law.

In the booklet for area 2, “Amazon” was mentioned in two questions, “inspection” in six, and “deforestation” in two, plus the essay. The approach to deforestation was now more focused on

inspection, and it required specific knowledge about Ibama's geomonitoring tools. To answer the questions correctly and write a satisfactory essay, candidates should have acquaintance with orbital data produced by satellite systems operated by the National Institute for Space Research (Inpe), to the point of being able to discern advantages and disadvantages in their technical configurations.

The annual deforestation monitoring system of the National Institute for Space Research (Inpe) uses images from the Landsat satellite to map deforested areas in the Legal Amazon. About this mapping, judge the following items.

106 There would be a greater probability of obtaining more images without cloud cover if images from the RAPIDEYE satellite were used.

107 If TERRA MODIS satellite images were used, deforestation monitoring in this region would be more detailed.

108 Brazil's official system that annually maps and quantifies burnt areas in the entire national territory is based on the analysis of NOAA AVHRR satellite images.

109 It is possible to distinguish fire severity in satellite images.

110 Knowing that an area with forest fire emits a maximum amount of electromagnetic radiation in the wavelength (λ) of around $3 \mu\text{m}$, it is correct to conclude that images obtained in this λ will show areas with fire in light tones.

Write an essay addressing the following: possible additional difficulties presented by the Cerrado biome in relation to the monitoring of deforestation in the Legal Amazon; advantages and disadvantages of using images from the RapidEye satellite instead of images from the Landsat satellite; procedures and steps related to checking the accuracy of the mapping.

Ten years separate the fourth cohort of Ibama's workers from the first. However, the interviewees still could not identify substantial differences in the entrants' average profile, except for an increased number of graduates in social sciences (Interview 17), a fact framed positively. One respondent who entered the 2013 exam attributed his motivation to join the agency to sensitivity to environmental protection cultivated from childhood memories of weekends spent in the countryside. He also saw working in Ibama as a way to conciliate an interest in academic knowledge with practical action (Interview 41).

Ibama workers' interpretation of how recruitment processes from 2002 to 2013 unfolded is undoubtedly one of incrementalism and continuity. A large majority of approved candidates graduated from public universities in courses such as biology, geography, engineering, and agronomy, a small part of them in law. They stem predominantly from middle and upper-middle classes, having attended private high and elementary schools. There are, however, cases in which approval in Ibama's exams represented not simply stability and reproduction of family consumption standards but true upward socioeconomic mobility. Especially in the cohorts of 2009 and 2013, one can find, for instance, sons and daughters of journeymen and seamstresses who had access to public universities due to the democratisation of higher education carried out under Lula and Dilma Rousseff's administrations but who still had to juggle their studies with full-time jobs (as chauffeurs, for example) and had little or no income to pay for preparatory courses (Interview 17).

Comparing the examinations of 2002, 2005, 2009 and 2013, we can observe two major changes in the set of skills measured as meritorious in Ibama's recruitment process. First, there was a gradual increase in the number of questions addressing deforestation inspection and a progressive shift of focus from licensing to monitoring, which reflects specialisation in Ibama's capacity and identity.

Second, the emphasis given in exams to remote sensing and interpretation of orbital data mirrored the process of technicalisation of deforestation detection experienced by the agency (NAVARRO, 2016, p. 24). Both transformations indicate strong responsiveness between Ibama's recruitment channels and the incremental knowledge built by the agency. In 2012, deforestation in the Amazon reached the lowest historical rate, 4,571 km², partially due to the implementation of an integrated inspection strategy by Ibama (MELLO; ARTAXO, 2017, p. 126).

4.3 CRISIS, BUT NOT PARALYSIS: A TURBULENT YET CREATIVE INTERLUDE WITHOUT EXAMINATIONS (2014 – 2018)

During the first half of Dilma Rousseff's second term (2015 - August 2016) and the two years of Michel Temer's interim government (September 2016 - 2018), Ibama conducted no exams for admitting new staff members. In 2017, Ibama's budget suffered severe cuts resulting from a constitutional amendment that imposed spending caps and budget cuts, which hit social and environmental policies more intensively (MENEZES; BARBOSA JR., 2021). When a window of opportunity for the authorisation of an extra budget to recruit new workers was skillfully opened by Ibama's presidency, a lack of coordination within the Ministry of Environment nullified the efforts of Ibama's leaders to organise a new selection announcement.

This was, I think, our greatest defeat. We tried [to organise] an emergency examination to [hire] 800 people. We got approval from the Ministry of Planning in all instances. All that was missing was the minister's signature. However, then the Ministry of the Environment itself started asking for 800 positions for ICMBio. So, they did not give them to us... I was very upset at the time because Ibama had a much more serious personnel deficiency. [...] There was maladjustment (Interview 8).

Notwithstanding budget cuts and the consequent depletion of the agency's workforce, Ibama continued to plan and execute anti-deforestation operations in the Amazon region regularly. There was no paralysis in Ibama's core competencies; on the contrary, it was in this period that the agency went through major innovations in its *modus operandi*: The destruction of equipment caught being used in environmental wrongdoings during inspections began to be published in the media to amplify deterrence; alternative funding from the Amazon Fund was secured to finance the lease of trucks and helicopters used in inspections; a new mode of enforcement, the indirect conversion of fines, was created; and operations started targeting financial institutions and upstream/downstream supply chain actors involved in deforestation. Under the leadership of a competent president, Ibama was partially spared from the widespread slowdown of environmental policies imposed by Temer's austerity model.

4.4 RADICAL PROFILE SHIFTS: THE ATTEMPT TO FRACTURE IBAMA'S TENURED BUREAUCRACY (2019 – 2022)

Pressured by national and international public opinion to respond to increasing deforestation in the Amazon – in April 2022, there were only around 250 inspection agents for the whole country, down from around 1,300 in 2010 (Interview 9); – Jair Bolsonaro's team made a new examination announcement. This provided the government not only an easy argument against domestic and foreign critique but also, and most significantly, a unique opportunity to make a long-term strike on the agency's most solid core, its tenured staff.

For the first time, the exam's eligibility criteria for environmental specialists did not include the requirement of a university degree: for 432 of the 528 positions offered, a high school certificate sufficed. The immediate reason for this is deemed to be purely financial, as positions with lower requirements are paid half the salary of positions with higher requirements. Hiring more people while disbursing less also allowed the government to frame the recruitment procedure positively, as a "result

delivered” to society. All positions for holders of college degrees were assigned to Brasília, while the high school level positions were distributed among the states. The regionalised allocation system was adopted once again. For the first time, 20% of the vacancies were reserved for black candidates; it is important to stress that this advancement was due to a law promulgated in 2014 by Rousseff.

Area 2 was renamed “Environmental recovery, monitoring and sustainable use of biodiversity, control and inspection” in an attempt to dissolve its previous emphasis on enforcement and deterrence into milder notions of “recovery” and “sustainable use”. The most astonishing change, however, was the inclusion of notions of criminal law in the programmatic content of specific knowledge topics. This happened despite Ibama having no criminal enforcement role; its whole sphere of action lies at the administrative level. In the college-level exam booklet, while there was no reference to “Amazon”, only one to “inspection”, and none to deforestation, no less than 30 questions were about criminal law.

Questions that require nothing more than memorising and repeating maxims, doctrines and formulas of criminal law are traditionally asked in examinations for police positions in Brazil. The complete disconnection of this type of exercise with the analytical skills needed for the adequate execution of anti-deforestation operations is blatant. Consider, for instance, the question below, which was part of the 2021 Ibama exam. Besides addressing an issue unrelated to environmental policy – abortion –, it simply demanded the memorisation of hypotheses of qualified criminal immunity:

In relation to unlawfulness and its justification causes, judge the following items.

103 Consider that a criminally liable woman has induced an abortion, being objectively characterised, at the time of her conduct, by the conditions of the state of necessity, which were totally unknown to her. In this hypothetical situation, the lack of subjective elements of justification leads to the conduct's illicit nature and the woman's punishment for the corresponding crime.

104 Unlike the state of necessity in which those in need can act against an unrelated third party, in self-defence, the victim must direct their defensive behaviour against the aggressor.

105 Self-defense is admitted against those who practice physical or moral aggression, even if a cause of exclusion from culpability covers the aggressor.

Questions like this require no deep understanding of the multifactorial causes and effects of environmental destruction and no command of the diverse repertoire of policy instruments available to environmental agents. The essay entailed a similar cultural screening, as all the candidate had to do was to copy down the opinion of the Federal Supreme Court on the statute of limitations of environmental damage:

Five years have passed since the occurrence of environmental damage; public power was inert to inspect it. There is an internal divergence between units in Ibama: one understands the statute of limitations expired; the other understands there is no statute of limitations for environmental damage. Considering the hypothetical situation above, write a dissertation explaining, in a justified manner, which of the cited units of Ibama is right, according to the understanding of the Federal Supreme Court on the subject.

The two major differences identified between the fifth exam and the previous ones – waiving the college degree and overemphasising the loosely related topic of criminal law – impacted the profile of approved candidates and their interaction with the agency. The consequence of withdrawing the need for a university degree was not a massive entry of high school graduates but a distortion between the approved candidates' qualifications and their positions. Experience with previous examinations for administrative positions in Ibama demonstrates that most of the candidates approved for the high school level are overqualified; they often have college degrees, even master's and PhD titles. Their turnover rates, thus, are the highest in the institution: Discouraged by the mismatch between low pay

and high qualification, many servants apply and are approved in exams for more attractive careers. This labour exodus hinders a more effective allocation of resources for recruiting and training new cadres. Huge salary disparities for exercising the same activities and possessing equivalent academic qualifications also tend to generate resentment between workers, hampering the formation of institutional solidarity ties (Interview 17).

The second change in the exam – a shift of focus from deforestation inspection and satellite-based technology to criminal law – resulted in an unprecedented increase in the number of lawyers approved to roughly 50% of the new positions. This precluded the selection of candidates with more environmentally-oriented educational and professional backgrounds. Moreover, many of the approved lawyers had no particular interest in environmental protection but were actually preparing themselves to become police officers (Interview 17). The table below summarises the main changes identified in Ibama’s recruitment exams (Table 1).

Table 1 | Changes in Ibama’s recruitment exams

	2002	2005	2009	2013	2021
Quantity of positions initially offered	610	610	225	108	528
Minimum educational level required	College degree	College degree	College degree	College degree	High school (for most positions)
Allocation system	According to ranking; selected candidates can choose preferred work location	Candidates must indicate work location prior to the exam	Candidates must indicate work location prior to the exam	According to Ibama’s “need and convenience”; candidates must indicate work location prior to exam	According to Ibama’s “need and convenience”; candidates must indicate work location prior to exam
Essay topic	No essay required	Explain phases of a licensing study on the impact of a hydroelectric plant on terrestrial biodiversity	Dissertate on the negotiated allocation of water under the framework of the national water policy	Explain advantages and disadvantages of determined satellite-based systems to monitor deforestation	Write the opinion of the Federal Supreme Court on the status of limitation of environmental damage
Questions on “deforestation”	3	2	6	2	0
Questions on “Amazon”	7	3	7	2	0
Questions on “inspection”	2	3	5	6	1
Approach to deforestation	No particular focus on inspection or licensing	Focus on licensing	Focus on inspection; Politically more South-oriented	Focus on inspection and satellite-based technology	No mention of deforestation; Emphasis on criminal law

Source: author based on exam booklets, public announcements, and interview transcripts.

5 CONCLUSIONS

During times of policy continuity, organisational transformations aim at the realisation of the standing order. Ibama's exams in 2002, 2005, 2009, and 2013 were characterised by incremental specialisation and technicalisation, which sought to enhance the agency's capacity to inspect deforestation and strengthen its identity around the ideal of environmental stewardship. Bargains between politicians and bureaucrats over budgets have always played a decisive role in the frequency of exams and the number of positions offered. That notwithstanding, one could say that, in hindsight – for pre-constitutional understandings cannot but be retrospectively enunciated – there was a shared, taken-for-granted consensus around the idea that environmental agencies should recruit candidates whose professional and educational profile reveals a calling to engage in environmental protection.

In contexts of policy dismantling, organisational transformations seek to subvert the standing order and replace it with a new order. Bolsonaro's administration seized the opportunity, on the one hand, to fulfil Ibama's cadres with newcomers they thought most likely to embrace the *bolsonarista* anti-environmental agenda and, on the other, to create conditions for internal instability and grievances among the staff. The premeditated and radical shift in the profile of selected candidates – from biologists and sociologists to lawyers and would-be police officers – can be deemed as an attempt to subvert shared pre-constitutional understandings of what the agency's purpose ought to be about: Not a specialised technical institution dedicated to the protection of the environment, but a “green” version of the police, a falsified version of the agency so that it may deceive national and international public opinion and proceed with the dismantling of the anti-deforestation policies carried out by Bolsonaro's government. The future of Ibama's capacity and identity depends on how successful its more experienced staff will be in gradually socialising the 2021 cohort in Ibama's ideals of environmental protection and stewardship, a challenge in which internal training courses play a key role.

NOTE

1| The idea of connecting constitutional hardball and authoritarian policy dismantling emerged in discussions during the 3rd International Workshops on Public Policy in the panel “Policy and capacity dismantling in the context of democratic backsliding”, which took place in 2022 in Budapest. On this connection see also Silva and Gomide (forthcoming).

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