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Expansion of the National Council for
Scientific and Technological Research
(CONICET)*

Fabiana Bekerman

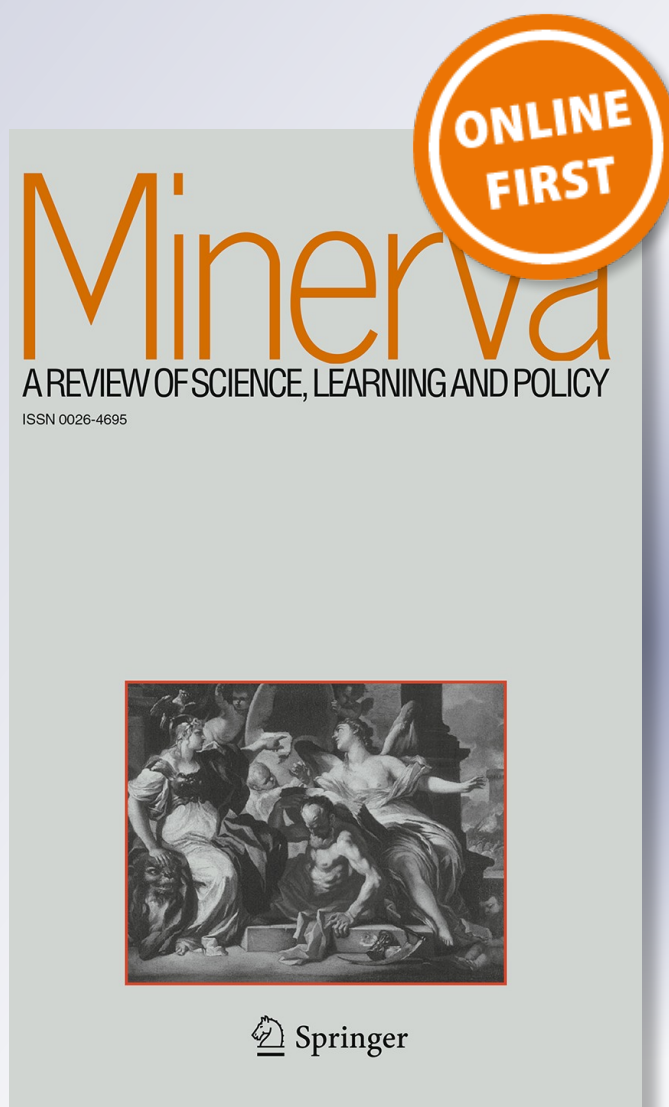
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The Scientific Field During Argentina's Latest Military Dictatorship (1976–1983): Contraction of Public Universities and Expansion of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Research (CONICET)

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Abstract This study looks at some of the traits that characterized Argentina's scientific and university policies under the military regime that spanned from 1976 through 1983. To this end, it delves into a rarely explored empirical observation: financial resource transfers from national universities to the National Scientific and Technological Research Council (CONICET, for its Spanish acronym) during that period. The intention is to show how, by reallocating funds geared to Science and Technology, CONICET was made to expand and decentralize to the detriment of universities. This was the primary tool used by the military regime to thwart higher education's research development, bolstering research efforts at other realms. Thus, CONICET grew in budget, number of researchers, and staff size, creating new research institutes, while national universities struggled with reduced funding and were forced to shut down their institutes and programs. As a result, CONICET virtually concentrated all scientific research, foregoing the knowledge accumulated at universities, which drove a wedge between both institutions. This military approach to science and technology policy-making is discussed, bearing in mind the notion of dependence—both in terms of the state's intervention in the inner workings of the scientific-university field as well as regarding the role played by international financial support in scientific research development.

Keywords Scientific field · National Council for Scientific and Technological Research · National universities · Military dictatorship

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Introduction

Military coups have been typically associated with academic heteronomy in Latin America as a result of external interventions in universities and scientific fields. In fact, these interventions have led to severe changes in academic rules, faculty expelling and deinstitutionalization. This study focuses on Argentina's case, where authoritarian interventions proved institutionally selective and very different across disciplines. Current literature works argue that, during the last Argentine military regime (1976–83), scientific knowledge production became scarce and barren (Romero 1996; UNESCO-PNUD 1981; Perez Lindo 1985; Mignone 1998). Reinforced by the collective memory of terrorism, the scientific world has been described as being in a sort of hiatus at the time, navigating a void that halted public science development.

However, our research has revealed that, after completing a “disciplinary purge,” the de-facto government established different scientific policies for public universities¹ and for decentralized research institutions like CONICET. Indeed, as result of military interventions, many public universities suffered stringent budget cuts, were forced to shut down their research centers and to drop some academic programs, and saw a sharp decrease in their student enrolment rates due to mandatory admission exams. While, by the 1970s, scientific research was virtually non-existent at many universities and poor at most, universities had largely benefited from a regional updating process initiated in the 1950s. As a result, university enrolment had climbed; new universities had been created in the provinces; the number of female students had risen; social sciences were booming at the expense of other, more traditional disciplines, like law and medicine, and new teaching methods, initiatives and services (research, extension courses, career orientation, etc.) were introduced (UNESCO-PNUD 1981). These processes came to an end with or were halted by the 1976 military coup. Conversely, CONICET thrived with progressive, substantial budget increases, creating new institutes, recruiting new staff members and researchers, and decentralizing their enhanced scientific infrastructure. This growth proved uneven among the different disciplines, bolstering traditionally dominant areas, like medical sciences, expanding into new fields, like exact sciences and technology, and reshaping some disciplinary dynamics, as was the case of social sciences, which adopted a number of unique traits during this period.

This study shows how the military government's intervention in Argentina's public university system drove a large number of scientists to either leave the country or join private research centers and institutes (Pagano 2004; Vessuri 1992; Thompson 1994). As a result, “...several university institutes were closed, and research activities were channelled through CONICET, which created new institutes to replace the former” (Perel, Raíces & Perel 2006: 138). Gregorio Weinberg (1987) claimed that, to accomplish this goal, the government reallocated funds from

¹ In Argentina, national or public (state-run) universities encompass most of the undergraduate population, are funded by the federal state, and are tuition-free. Students pay for books, supplies and materials.

national universities to CONICET. He noted, “Deliberate budget reductions for university scientific research implied the removal, dismissal or expulsion of dozens of highly qualified researchers ... Thus, together with CONICET, a whole new constellation of institutes emerged, gathering most human resources devoted to research, many of whom had previously interacted with the academic world” (Weinberg 1987: 18–19).

Hence, while the university realm was undermined (teachers and students were expelled; entire programs were shut down; curricula were changed, and research centers were closed), CONICET embarked on a growth and expansion process (with increased budget, new recruits and institutes). This policy hinged on the transfer of budgetary allocations from universities to CONICET. As a result, it is safe to say that CONICET's expansion came at the expense of universities, with both CONICET's rise and universities' contraction being part of one and the same goal: reorienting Argentina's scientific research away from universities and into CONICET's sole purview. This study intends to show how the national budget allotted to science and technology grew during this period, as CONICET invested in funding new research institutes beyond university scope, focusing in the hinterlands, away from the nation's capital. The number of researchers, scholarship grantees and research assistants also rose significantly. Thus, Argentina's scientific system expanded and became decentralized, bolstering CONICET but jeopardizing public universities.

With a better understanding of Argentina's university policy under its latest military regime, this study seeks to prove that the events unfolding at CONICET and at the national universities during this period were strongly connected. After discussing the notion of autonomy as it related to scientific fields' institutionalization and differentiation processes, this paper will show the flexible boundaries that separated scientific and university fields at this time, highlighting the institutional expansion that ensued in order to analyze its effect on the scientific *illusio* of the different disciplines.

Public Spending on Scientific Research During Argentina's Latest Military Regime

In Argentina, the state's funding for scientific research at public institutions is allocated by the ‘Technical and Scientific Budget Program.’² This ‘program’ supports a number of research institutions, including Public Universities (UN, for its acronym in Spanish), the National Atomic Energy Commission (CNEA), the National Industrial Technology Institute (INTI), the National Institute for Agricultural Technology (INTA), the National Council for Scientific and Technological Research (CONICET), and the Armed Forces' Research and Development Military System (SMID), among others.

² This ‘Budget Program’ [*Finalidad Ciencia y Técnica*] includes ‘all the activities aimed at the acquisition of new knowledge or research into knowledge applications, including research and development, technology transfers, graduate programs for research training, as well as science and technology promotion activities’ (SECYT 1981: 113).

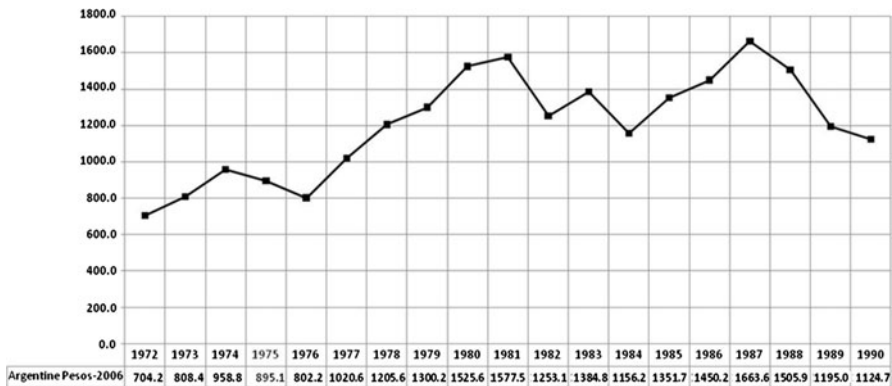


Fig. 1 Science and technical budget execution in 1972–1990 (in 2006 Argentine Pesos). *Source:* Elaborated by the author, based on data from Argentina’s Ministry of Economy and Production, Economy Secretariat, National Budget Office (2007), and *Presupuesto de la Administración Nacional. Gastos por Finalidad-Función y Naturaleza del gasto, 1965–2006*. Buenos Aires

Contrary to what common sense would suggest, Fig. 1 shows that, since the military coup, this program experienced ongoing, progressive budgetary increases that peaked in 1981, growing 96.6 percent between 1976 and 1981. As the military regime came to an end, program funds dropped in 1982, rising once again when democracy was restored—only to take a sharp downturn well into the first democratic government. In short, program figures show that investments in scientific development played a relevant role during the last military dictatorship in Argentina.

As noted earlier, this budget plan distributes funds among several institutions. However, during the period analyzed here, funding distribution was not consistent across scientific fields. On the contrary, several institutions saw marked increases in their budgets, whereas many others suffered dramatic reductions. Public universities’ share dropped steadily, particularly since 1976, to barely reach 6.1 percent by 1983. The same negative trend affected institutions like INTA and INTI, while the Ministry of Defence, CNEA and CONICET benefited with a budget increase that rose from 18.1 percent in 1974 to 27.3 percent in 1983, peaking at 31.5 percent in 1981 (Gertel 1989: 10). CONICET’s budgetary increases seem particularly noteworthy, as its operations were unrelated to military objectives.

Based on budget figures, it is clear that, starting in 1976, state funds were redirected from public universities to CONICET. During the military government, “...as in previous authoritarian regimes, scientific and technical activities were streamlined in environments that lacked universities’ typical autonomy or freedom...” (Oteiza 1992: 32). This fact inevitably contributed to unbalancing the Science and Technology Complex to the detriment of universities. Based on data provided by CONICET’s 1985 News Bulletin, Fig. 2 shows the sharp decrease in public universities’ budget and the simultaneous surge of CONICET’s funding between 1975 and 1976, as noted earlier.³ In 1976–1983, CONICET received, on

³ The data included in this chart does not fully match the data included in Figure 1, as both sets come from different sources. However, both reflect the same trend.

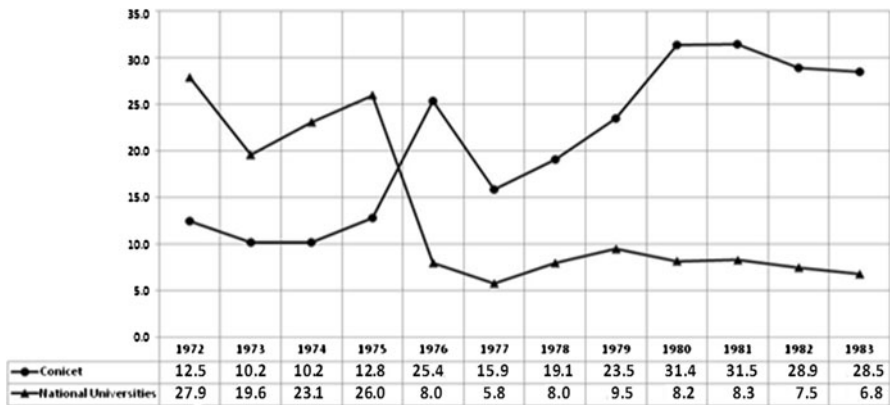


Fig. 2 Science and technical purpose—percentages allocated to CONICET and Public Universities in 1972–1983 (as % of overall budget). *Source:* Elaborated by the author, based on data from CONICET's (1985) News Bulletin: 5–7

average, a quarter of the total Expenses for Science and Technology allocation (25.5 percent), while universities suffered an abrupt funding drop in 1976, with their budget share remaining at 14.2 percent over the rest of the military regime years. This trend has prevailed until the present.

The Military Regime's Boldest Bet: CONICET

CONICET experienced a sevenfold global growth between 1970 and 1981 (CONICET 1982: 44), but its expansion was not only economic. CONICET's institutional model promoted the creation of more than one hundred institutes under its purview, favoring its direct relationship with researchers and doing away with any mediation from university institutions. "While many of these research clusters were established by means of agreements with public universities, in some cases and depending on the realm of knowledge, their operating rationale identified them more with CONICET than with their respective universities, thus isolating them from the impoverished university fabric of the time" (CONICET 2006: 101).

CONICET's expansion may be traced through several data. The number of science and technology researchers grew by 85 percent in 1976–82, while the number of professional research assistants grew by 231 percent. The number of local scholarship recipients grew by about 506 percent, and international scholarship grantees by 807 percent (CONICET 1983: 14–15).⁴ Additionally, the number of research institutes reporting to CONICET rose to over 100 in 1983 (Fig. 3).

⁴ This information is based on CONICET's *Informe de Actividades 1976–1982*, published in early 1983. In order to validate this data, which could have been biased in order to bolster CONICET's image at a politically delicate time, two metrics have been selected—namely, number of researchers and number of local scholarship recipients per year. Then, a detailed review of all CONICET Board Resolutions was conducted in order to corroborate the data. This procedure showed that the overall figures published CONICET were accurate, as they matched actual facts.

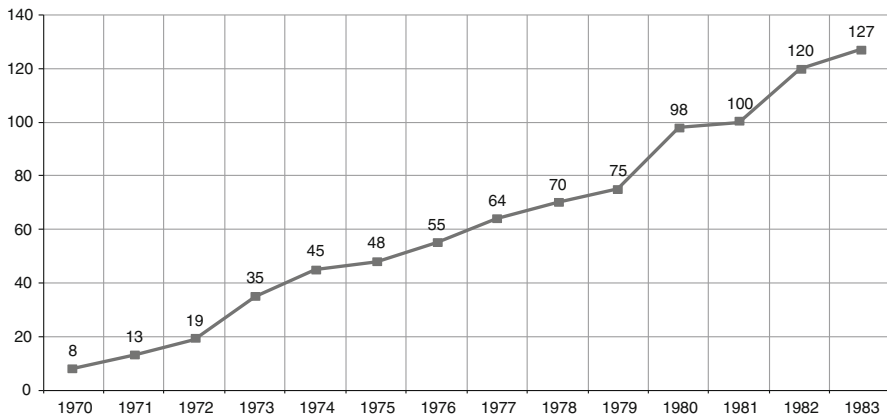


Fig. 3 Number of CONICET's institutes in 1970–1983. *Source:* Elaborated by the author, based on data from CONICET (1983: 64)

Institute creation policies favored Argentina's hinterlands. Decentralizing the domestic scientific system was not a novel goal; in fact, since the 1940s, a number of government documents pointed to that pursuit. Nonetheless, starting in the mid-1960s, this intent gradually became a reality, gathering momentum with the 1976 coup. In 1969, CONICET's Board signed off on the creation of Ushuaia's Southern Scientific Research Centre (CADIC, for its Spanish acronym). In 1971, Bernardo Houssay, CONICET chairman at the time, entered into an agreement with *Universidad Nacional del Sur* (Southern National University) to build a new research center reporting to CONICET in Bahía Blanca (Bohdziewicz 2004). Argentina's Science and Technology Department had expressed its intention to decentralize the metropolitan and Pampean areas in several documents, including Act Nbr. 19039 in 1971, which established that one of the Department's goals was to "geographically decentralise scientific and technical research in order to contribute to national integration." This Act also set a specific target: "... by 1975, no less than 50 % of overall investments in science and technology will go to programmes conducted outside the metropolitan and Pampean areas" (cited in CONICET 1980: 4).

However, two developments during the military regime furthered this decentralization process: CONICET's Regional Scientific Research Centre Creation Programme, launched in 1976⁵ to build regional centers in the hinterlands, and a loan granted by the American Development Bank (IDB) in 1979, providing a sizable financial contribution. CONICET received 64 percent of this US\$-42-million loan and used these funds to create four Regional Centres in provinces other than Buenos Aires, purposefully excluding institutes based in the nation's capital and the Metropolitan Region. As a result of this decentralization process,⁶ Argentina's

⁵ As per CONICET's Resolution Nbr. 217, dated November 25, 1976.

⁶ In addition, CONICET also took other decentralizing steps, including a 42-percent salary bonus for researchers willing to settle down outside the metropolitan area, coverage of moving expenses, and rental payments for up to 36 months (CONICET 1978: 21).

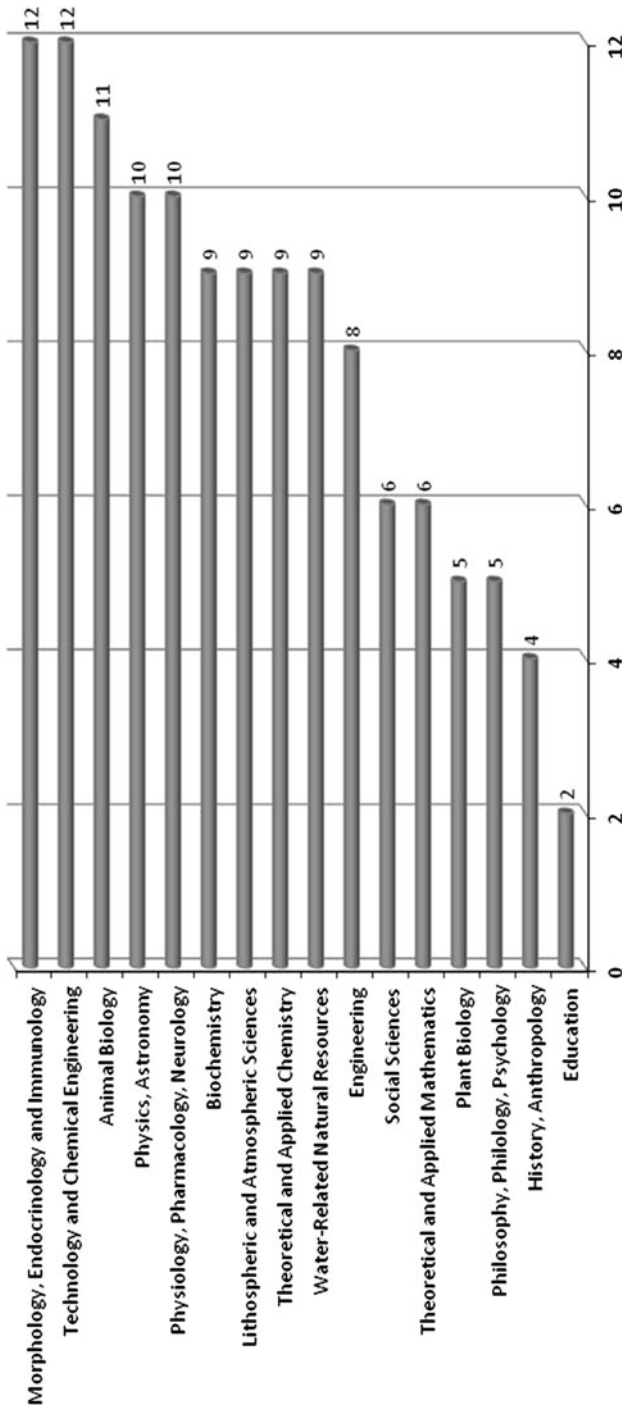


Fig. 4 Number of CONICET institutes specializing in each scientific field in 1983. *Source:* Elaborated by the author, based on data from CONICET (1983)

scientific system map changed remarkably: the share of researchers based in the hinterlands rose from 17 percent in 1971 to 29 percent in 1981 (CONICET 1980: 7), while the share of research institutes outside Buenos Aires climbed from 15 percent to 30 percent in the same period (CONICET 1983: 66).

This institutional expansion process was not evenly spread across scientific disciplines. Medical sciences, historically dominant at CONICET, continued to prevail but were somewhat displaced by a strong thrust to exact, natural and technological sciences. Albeit with a growing share (as these sciences became more institutionalized and professionalized in academia), institutes specializing in social sciences remained on the sidelines. Figure 4 shows that, in 1983, 46 percent of all existing institutes dealt with exact and natural sciences (including animal and plant biology, lithosphere and atmosphere sciences, chemistry, water-related natural resources, astronomy, and mathematics), followed by 24 percent of institutes devoted to medical sciences (including morphology, endocrinology, and immunology; physiology, pharmacology, neurology, and biochemistry), and 16 percent focusing on technological sciences and engineering (engineering, technology, and chemical engineering). Last came the institutes specializing in social and human sciences (including philosophy, philology, psychology, social sciences, history, anthropology, and education), with a 13 percent share.

The destination of grants awarded by CONICET during this period also provides some interesting insights to gain a better understanding of the differences separating scientific disciplines. CONICET's leadership awarded grants to institute heads, who used these funds at their discretion. As a result, our empirical review⁷ revealed that some grants were used to fund research projects in several disciplines, while others went to support the purchase of equipment for regional centers and to pay for research trips, etc. Hence, grants were not categorized according to a standard criterion; rather, they were grouped into a number of purposes that depicted some specific trends (see Fig. 5). The medical sciences' area prevailed, with its projects accounting for a little over 30 percent of all grants. This category should also include a 3 percent of grants used to support projects on Chagas disease (and the National Programme for Endemic Diseases), which are part of the medical research area, though they have been isolated to illustrate their relevance. Also relevant, with a 16-percent share, were grants used to fund engineering and architecture projects associated with technology development. With a 14-percent share of all grants awarded, travelling expenses for Argentine researchers attending scientific events abroad ranked third. One percent of this share went to foreign researchers visiting Argentina, and 3 percent was used to fund scientific events held in Argentina. A 10-percent share was used to buy bibliography and publications, which might be attributed to the need to equip regional centers and new institutes created during this period. In fact, 1 percent of CONICET's grants was used for scientific journals' memberships and subscriptions, while 4 percent was spent on regional centers' and institutes' installation, equipment and operating costs. Exact and natural sciences

⁷ CONICET's resolutions issued in 1976–1983 were reviewed one by one to isolate those dealing with grants. According to our review, CONICET awarded 9,982 grants during this period.

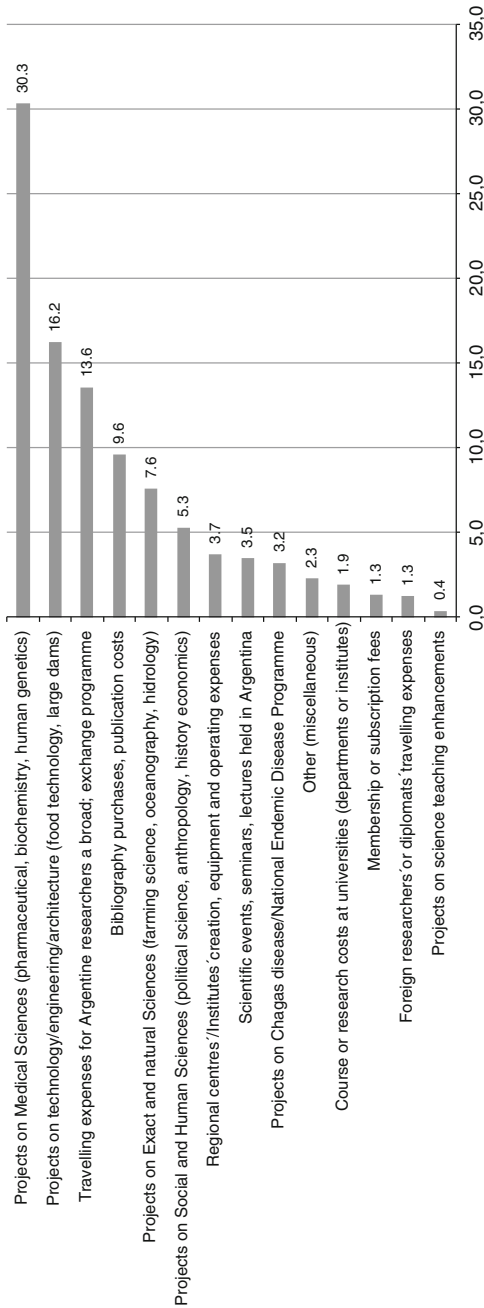


Fig. 5 Grants awarded by CONICET in 1976–1983 (in %). *Source:* Elaborated by the author, based on data from CONICET's resolutions in 1976–1983

accounted for 8 percent of grants, while social and human sciences' projects received 5 percent of grants.

The processes mentioned earlier, such as institute creation and decentralization as well as uneven discipline development, gradually set up a new relational scheme in Argentina's scientific field, which may be characterized by the coexistence of four groups of institutes following different hierarchy rationales.⁸ The first group featured a number of institutes—created before the military coup and affiliated to metropolitan universities—that focused on medical sciences and were chaired by agents with a vast scientific and academic capital, added to great institutional clout, who had been appointed before the military intervention. These institutes may be characterized as *acclaimed or older*. The second group consisted of institutes created early on during the military regime, between 1976 and 1979. These institutes concentrated on natural sciences and had no affiliation to universities (most reported to CONICET and to private foundations). Their heads were not appointed by the military government, and, while they did not have as much scientific prestige as the chairs in the previous group, they did boast equal or greater institutional leverage. These institutes were *imposed* and promoted by the military regime. CONICET's institutional power largely rested on these two groups during this period, and these institutes, with their respective disciplines, garnered the most resources (grants and budget allocations).

The third group encompassed institutes created as a result of policy efforts to expand scientific development into the hinterlands and ties to universities outside the metropolitan area. These recently created institutes (1980–1983) were *newcomers* in the field, as their heads were young agents with consolidating careers in the exact and technological sciences' realm, which had been traditionally neglected by CONICET but were gathering momentum, largely as a result of a new IDB loan. Finally, the fourth group included institutes created in the military regime's early years (1976–1979) that were associated with private foundations or government agencies, or reported directly to CONICET, but held no ties whatsoever to public universities and concentrated mostly on social and human sciences. Their heads enjoyed lesser scientific prestige than the other chairs and had no institutional power capital, despite having been appointed by the military regime. Among these heads, some belonged to the military; one served as a government official during the military regime; others were suspected of using foundations to embezzle public funds, and some had a long track record at Catholic or military institutions with no scientific standing. These institutes may be characterized as *transplanted*, as they clearly illustrated a foreign operating rationale forced upon the scientific field,

⁸ This is a brief account of a more profound analysis on Argentina's scientific field during the military regime made by the author for her doctoral thesis, *La estructura del campo científico argentino: reconfiguraciones, desplazamientos y transferencias producidas durante la última dictadura militar*. For her thesis, the author used a complex methodological tool called Multiple Correspondence Analysis to relate multiple variables associated with both institutes and heads. Some partial conclusions have been published in: Bekerman, Fabiana. 2013. Science during Argentina's military dictatorship (1976–1983): The contraction of the higher education system and the expansion of CONICET. In *The politics of academic autonomy in Latin America*, ed. Beigel, Fernanda, pp. 227–247. ISBN 978-1-4094-3186-2. London: Ashgate.

explicitly reflecting the characteristics adopted by these disciplines during this period of time.

This analysis strengthens the hypothesis that an implicit goal underlay the military regime's decentralizing policy intended to transfer resources to the hinterlands, expanding scientific operations into areas where university research was virtually nonexistent or scarce, at best. At the same time, this policy took CONICET's development away from the more politicized and conflictive universities located in the metropolitan area.

Public Universities' Contraction

A few days after the coup, a law (Act number 21.276) was enacted to rule public universities, allowing the national government to meddle in academic and university life. Its Article 7 banned "all indoctrination, propaganda, or proselytism activities or political demonstrations by political, union, teacher or student groups on university grounds." Also, its Article 12 stated that "any activity that strays away from National Reorganization Process purpose and core objectives was completely incompatible with university education, teaching and learning aims." Indeed, the military regime's university transformation plan hinged on strict political and ideological control, but it also intended to reduce the entire system, funnelling enrolment and research to areas outside the university. This policy had begun even before the coup d'état—more precisely, with Oscar Ivanissevich's appointment as Minister of Culture and Education on August 14, 1974—but worsened since 1976. All university curricula were changed, especially in disciplines identified as areas of 'subversive penetration,' such as social sciences, notably including psychology, sociology and anthropology. Some programs were eliminated altogether, including cinematography at *Universidad Nacional de La Plata*, teaching training courses in humanities, mathematics, physics and chemistry at *Universidad Nacional del Sur*, and psychology at *Universidad Nacional de La Plata*, *Universidad Nacional de Tucumán*, and *Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata*. Faculty and students went missing or were murdered, while the number of massive layoffs grew: "In May 1976 alone, over 100 professors were laid off at *Universidad Nacional del Litoral*, and 300 teaching and non-faculty professionals were laid off at *Universidad Mediterránea*. Most of these faculty members were banned from teaching in any field" (Buchbinder 2005: 208). The impact on the educational and cultural world was evident: 40 percent of the military regime's victims ('disappeared people') were students, professionals, teachers and journalists (CONADEP 1984: 177).

Reduced budgeted allocations for university research became a constant feature during the military regime. Figure 6 plots state funding for universities in 1974–83, showing how allocations started to decline in 1974 and recorded a sharp drop in 1975–76, from Ar\$ 319.3 million to Ar\$ 167.8 million. From then on, university funding began to recover slowly, but, even when more funds were assigned to

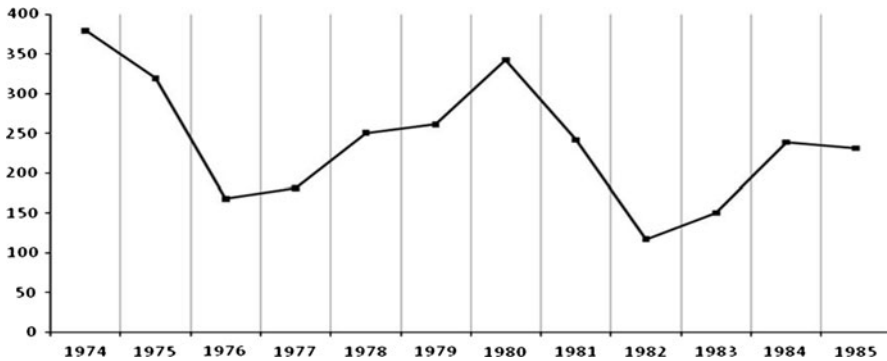


Fig. 6 State funding for public universities in 1974–1985 (in 2006 Ar\$ millions). *Source:* Elaborated by the author, based on data from *Universidades Nacionales. Reseña Estadística*, Working paper, National Department of University Affairs, University Documentation and Information Sector, 1986

universities (1980–81),⁹ it did not exceed the budget received in 1974, before the educational policy shift.

As noted earlier, budget cuts came hand in hand with a policy to reduce enrolment. In September 1976, the first military regime Education Minister, Ricardo Bruera, claimed that Argentina’s university system was oversized as compared to primary and secondary education, arguing that it was necessary to ‘reverse the pyramid’ (Buchbinder 2005: 209). In 1977, admission exams and tuition fees were instituted, reducing the number of vacancies available to 23.7 percent as compared to 1976 and discouraging enrolment in heavily-populated universities (Pallma 1977: 68–9). Also meant to cut down enrolment, tuition fees were enforced by Act Nbr. 22,207, Article 39, and Decree Nbr. 279, Article 3, which read, “Higher education services will be subject to tuition fees at public universities” (*Boletín Oficial* 1980). As a result, between 1975 and 1982, enrolment declined at an annual rate of 4.5 percent, reducing the number of new enrolments to levels recorded a decade earlier. Figure 7 shows the trend followed by new student enrolment at public universities across the country.

Academic enrolment dropped sharply in 1977, when the number of students enrolled fell from 90,000 to below 45,000. Far from random, this drop hit heavily-populated universities the hardest, including “*Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Universidad Nacional Córdoba*, bringing about a loss of nearly one third to half of their students” (Ferrari 2005: 303). This policy halted a process that, started in Latin America in 1950, had modernized higher education, translating into several phenomena, including university enrolment growth and feminisation, the creation of universities in the hinterlands, and social sciences’ boom. Indeed, social sciences had thrived in Argentina and across Latin America over two decades before they were removed from university and

⁹ This budget recovery unfolded during the so-called “normalisation” period. By then, the “disciplinary purge” had taken place; faculty members had been replaced; academic curricula and study plans had been revised; academic enrolment had already decreased, and a new Organic Law of Universities had been passed (Act Nbr. 22.207).

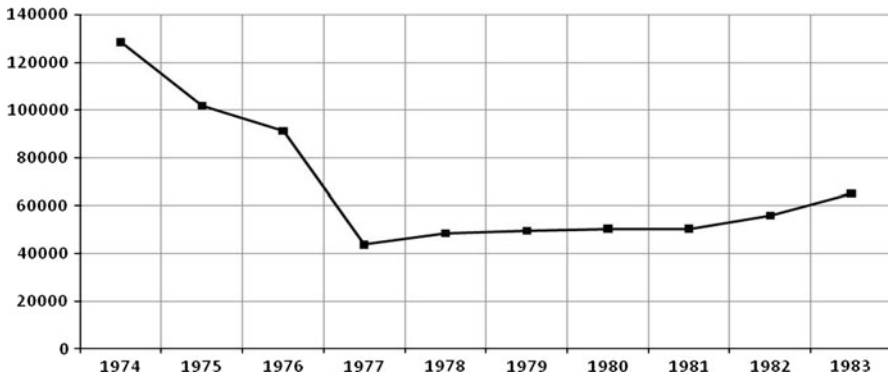


Fig. 7 Enrolment of New Students in National Universities, 1974–83. In Absolute Values. *Source:* Elaborated by the author, based on data from *Universidades Nacionales. Reseña Estadística*, Working paper, National Department of University Affairs, University Documentation and Information Sector, 1986

CONICET scope during this period. As indicated in the 1981 UNESCO ranking, “Social sciences, which had topped rankings in two countries, (...) seized ten leading positions by 1975, displacing medical sciences. (...) In areas akin, humanities have doubled (two in 1950 and four in 1975) their position at the top, while education moves from one to four. It is safe to conclude that Latin American universities have come to stand out on account of social sciences’ clear enrolment dominance, along with humanities and educational sciences” (UNESCO-PNUD 1981: 37).

While public universities were besieged by a financial drought and the expulsion of dozens of highly qualified researchers, hundreds of new research jobs opened up in a constellation of institutes managed by CONICET. As a result, universities suffered what G. Weinberg calls “intellectual downsizing,” as researchers and research efforts were concentrated by CONICET. As Weinberg noted, “This downsizing particularly harms basic sciences, but it is probably even more detrimental to social and human sciences. Consequently, the most affected aspect is education, while critical thinking—grossly and visibly jeopardised by censorship, expunged bibliographies, and blacklisting of banned scholars, among others—is harassed until horizons narrow down, leading to what could be mercifully described as cultural and educational ‘provincialism,’ which implies theoretical isolation” (Weinberg 1987: 21).

In short, policies intended to strengthen CONICET undermined universities’ institutional character, causing a severe setback in the contents and quality of education and scientific research, as well as a reduction in faculty and student enrolment. Thus, “universities, alienated from the national scientific sector, lost the financial support required to continue their research and quaternary education efforts, such as graduate research programmes. During this period, the emphasis was limited to professional training—actively controlled by university system leadership at the National University Chancellors’ Council, with heads appointed by the

military regime, which amounted to a loss of the most elementary autonomy” (Oteiza 1992: 294–5).

Final Considerations

The analysis of empiric data reveals a causal relationship between CONICET’s growth and the drought plaguing public universities at this time. Both institutions underwent a unique process in opposing directions, with structural consequences for the scientific and academic system that persist at present.

The grants for Science and Technology allocated to CONICET grew steadily throughout the period, despite the profound “purge” that unfolded at both institutions, characterized by ideological persecution, arbitrary layoffs and depositions, closing and/or relocation of academic programs and institutes, etc. Both facts clearly indicate that the military regime viewed scientific and technological areas as critically important. This concern was also illustrated by Science and Technology Secretariat’s move from the Ministry of Education’s purview to report directly to the Presidency in 1981 (as per Act Nbr. 22,520, known as “the Cabinet Law”).

While public universities were devastated, especially the most politicized ones in the metropolitan area, such as *Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires* and *Universidad Nacional de la Plata*, CONICET underwent a significant decentralization and expansion process. This paper has analyzed the military regime’s financial policy intended to deprive higher education institutions of their resources for research development, favoring CONICET with Technical and Scientific Budget Programme grants that had gone to universities earlier. In fact, the military leadership sought to weaken universities, while selectively driving other areas. The choice of CONICET as the public domain for privileged research may be attributed to the regime’s need to dismantle universities’ political foundations. Indeed, educational and scientific policies as well as the need for absolute power were much more difficult to enforce at universities, as, unlike CONICET, they were more autonomous and politicized—so much so that universities were viewed as a favorable environment for the ‘subversive virus’ to spread, seizing students’ minds, recruiting new activists, and influencing the development of a leading elite (Novaro & Palermo 2003: 116). The decentralization process driven by CONICET’s intervention (coupled with the creation of centers and institutes in the provinces, as well as incentives for researchers to settle in the hinterlands) may have been associated with the military regime’s need to decompress political activity in metropolitan areas.

This would also explain the number and location of institutes created during this period. Most new centers were founded in provinces other than Buenos Aires, while institutes created in the metropolitan area did not fall under university purview, reporting to CONICET as a result of agreements with private foundations or government agencies. As a result of these processes, a great distance separated universities from CONICET. This institutional gap was produced by growing research resource allocations to institutions that did not belong to universities and

favored the multiplication and consolidation of CONICET-run institutes (Oteiza 1992: 49; CONICET 2006: 101). Thus, CONICET concentrated virtually all research efforts and failed to benefit from the vast knowledge accumulated by universities. Research and teaching realms were decimated and subjected to a process of faculty reorientation, disciplining and exodus.

At CONICET, the military regime marked the beginning of a period characterized by rifts and continuities. Researchers were expelled by means of unjustified layoffs and terminations, while strong ideological controls were set up, and funds were managed discretionally. However, some disciplines enjoyed institutional and symbolic continuity. For example, the medical sciences' area maintained its scientific rules, and its academic *illusio* continued to rule its practices. The same heads had chaired these institutes before the coup, not only remaining in office after the intervention but also holding more advisory and executive positions at CONICET. In other words, they strengthened their institutional leverage capital. Many new institutes and new hires in this period belonged to medical sciences, and these disciplines also stood out in grant distribution. These groups coexisted with others that followed different rationales—for instance, natural sciences' heads appointed as advisors or chairs by the military regime, who, despite their lower scientific capital, wielded equal or more institutional power. At the same time, a group of “newcomers” from emerging disciplines, like exact and technological sciences, were strongly supported throughout this period, particularly as a result of the decentralization process and the IDB-CONICET program. Finally, some agents were appointed by the military regime to hold leadership positions at institutes and commissions devoted to social sciences, but their scientific capital was low, despite their long track records at Catholic and military institutions. Hence, the new social sciences institutes created during this period were largely managed by and staffed with individuals who did not come from the scientific field and acted accordingly.

At public universities, the opposite scenario unfolded. The intervention was widespread, and every academic program was affected. Both faculty and students from all disciplines fled, as universities, academic programs and research institutes all shrank. For the military regime, higher education was a field that had to be restructured with a radical, intrinsic transformation. Indeed, the absolute loss of university autonomy, construed as the state's interference in university affairs, proved evident. In a nutshell, the military regime set out to enforce a scientific policy that reshaped the research landscape, closing down university research development pathways and concentrating research efforts at CONICET. The key tool used to accomplish this goal was the Science and Technology Budget, transferring allocations from universities to CONICET. Thus, while universities' share dwindled, CONICET embarked on an expansion process based on the creation and decentralization of research institutes, effectively building a new scientific scheme that selectively promoted some disciplines over others.

This research study and its initial findings outlined here have confirmed that the discussion of a field's autonomy or heteronomy calls for a clarification of both notions as well as an analysis based on specific, empirical scenarios. Thus, this study did not set out to blindly and forcibly adjust these concepts to the reality studied; rather, the intent here was to explore CONICET's institutional, financial and

academic autonomy or lack thereof as a result of the intervention that followed Argentina's 1976 military coup.

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