

# Understanding policy change through bricolage: The case of Chile's renewable energy policy

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## Funding information

Center for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies, COES, Grant/Award Number: grant number CONICYT/FONDAP/15130009

## Abstract

Chile is a country where path dependency made energy policy change extremely difficult by international standards. However, the country has recently become a renewable energy poster child thanks to a gradual process of policy change. How was this possible? This article contributes to discussions about policy change driven by ideas and to explaining the puzzling case of Chilean energy policy change. It does so by discussing the mechanism of bricolage—the recombination of old and new ideas by policy entrepreneurs—and its capacity to produce policy change in contexts of high path dependency. The article develops the political manifestations and consequences of bricolage and problematizes how actors continue to contest and change ideas' meaning after they have been institutionalized, a key question when analyzing processes of bricolage. The analysis is based on an array of data sources including interviews with key actors, newspaper notes, and legislative proceedings.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Chile's energy policy has gone through a gradual yet significant process of change in the last two decades, making the country an example case of transition to renewable energy. In 2018, the country was ranked the most attractive emerging market for clean energy investment among 103 developing countries (BloombergNEF, 2018). This process, however, was unthinkable two decades ago, as energy policy suffered from a high path-dependency and status quo-bias that went well beyond the same aspects of the energy sectors of other countries undergoing gradual energy transitions. How can we explain the remarkable energy policy change that made Chile a renewable energy poster child? This article aims to answer this question and in so doing, contributing to the literature on ideational policy change. Concretely, we refine the theoretical aspects of bricolage as a mechanism of ideational policy change and show its usefulness in explaining policy change in a context of strong path dependency, as

exemplified by the Chilean case. The data come from interviews with key actors, a review of press releases, and of legislative discussions, and are analyzed using inductive discourse analysis.

For over three decades now, diverse social science disciplines have placed ideas among the key factors influencing policy change. Bricolage is one among a handful of change mechanisms that have been identified, and yet, scholars complain that bricolage has received surprisingly little attention in comparison to other ideational policy change mechanisms (Carstensen, 2011). More generally, there is a consensus about the need to further develop and test ideational mechanisms to understand how exactly ideas influence policy change (Berman, 2013; Campbell, 2004; Jacobs, 2014; Metha, 2010). In addition to explaining the Chilean case, this article contributes to the literature by further developing the mechanism of bricolage. First, we refine the theoretical work around bricolage by highlighting the coalitional dynamics that it makes possible. In addition, we confront the extended notion that the institutionalization of ideas signals the culmination of a policy change process (Berman, 2013; Blyth, 2002). Drawing on theories of gradual institutional change (Streeck & Thelen, 2005), we reveal the importance of studying the continued struggle those actors involved in the process maintain regarding the meanings of ideas, even once they are institutionalized. We argue that this is particularly salient in the case of bricolage. Finally, we identify where bricolage is more likely to influence policy change, namely, in policy settings characterized by high path-dependency. In this context, Chile serves as a “least-likely case” for energy policy change, particularly through ideas, to show the functioning of bricolage as a mechanism of policy change. Least-likely cases serve to submit a hypothesis to a hard test, since the case offers conditions that make the confirmation of a hypothesis difficult (Rohlfing, 2012). Therefore, showing bricolage as the causal mechanism leading to the observed pattern of policy change in Chile provides important support for our theoretical claims.

The article proceeds as follows. First, we address the literature on ideas and policy change, concentrating on the added value of the mechanism of bricolage, and developing its theoretical attributes. Second, we describe Chilean energy policy as a least-likely case for policy change, comparing it to other countries experiencing energy policy transformations. Third, we explain the process of energy policy change in Chile through the lens of bricolage. Fourth, we show and discuss how, after the institutionalization of these ideas, contestation was opened again during policy implementation. In the Conclusions section, we highlight the duality of bricolage as a mechanism of policy change, serving both to advance policy change and to mask conflicts that may unravel once the new policy is institutionalized.

## 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 | Ideas, policy change, and bricolage

Ideas are constitutive of “the most basic meaning systems that make individual or collective action possible” (Hall, 1997, pp. 184–185). Theorists situate ideas at different levels and depths, from public philosophies and normative values, to economic theories and collective action frames (Schmidt, 2008, 2011). What is important in terms of policy change, is that ideas exert an influence over actors' motivations and strategies, which is distinguishable from that exerted by other factors such as interests or institutions.

The scholarship on policy change driven by ideas identifies different mechanisms by which ideas can drive these processes. Most literature focuses on what Carstensen and Schmidt (2016) call “power through ideas.” This occurs when ideas illuminate new aspects of the world, empowering those agents that hold them, and causing policymakers to change their beliefs accordingly. Common mechanisms include *persuasion* (Majone, 1989; Schmidt, 2008, 2011) and *policy learning*, the latter being conceptualized as paradigmatic change (Hall, 1993) or as learning through advocacy coalitions

(Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). These ideational mechanisms typically entail the replacement of one set of ideas with another, and therefore, also a replacement of the political actors supporting the previous ideas with others that maintain novel ones.

Bricolage presents a different mechanism altogether. Campbell conceives bricolage as an “innovative recombination of elements that constitutes a new way of configuring organizations, social movements, institutions, and other forms of social activity” (2005, p. 56).<sup>1</sup> Bricolage partly preserves older institutional forms, yet at the same time introduces new elements and recombines them. Thus, bricolage is not a transformational mechanism producing completely new policies, nor is it an adaptive or path-dependent mechanism conducive to policy continuity. It is evolutionary in the sense that it changes certain elements while keeping others in place. One important aspect of bricolage is the role of “interpretive” entrepreneurs (Campbell, 2010, p. 105) or “bricoleurs” (Carstensen, 2011) who can be individual or collective actors. They have the role of identifying, selecting, and communicating certain ideas among the many existing options, *translating* them, and accommodating them to the logic of specific policy fields (Campbell, 2004, 2005).

The literature on policy change through bricolage has so far emphasized the cognitive aspects of bricolage, that is, the capacity of recombined ideas to present novel ways of understanding and making sense of the world. However, its political consequences have remained less developed. For one, the role of the “bricoleur” is not just “interpretive” but also “political,” as it has the power of selecting some ideas and hiding others. Carstensen (2011, pp. 157–158) underscores that in doing this, the bricoleur is highly attentive to the “political viability of ideas,” that is, “the bricoleur focuses on putting ideas together that may create the support necessary for them to get through the political process.” In other words, bricoleurs present a recombination of ideas and policy orientations that are attractive to new and old actors, and in this sense, the cognitive recombination made possible through bricolage also makes possible new coalitions of relevant actors. This cognitive and political recombination implies the existence of a core set of common interpretations and support, as well as differences—and conflicts—rooted in the various actors’ specific interpretations of those ideas. Parsons calls this the “multivocality” of ideas, that is, “an idea’s capacity to be understood in multiple ways, combining shared and unshared interpretations” (Parsons, 2016, p. 11). In other words, the recombination presented by the bricoleur “may not be logically compatible but rather answer political and cultural logics” (Carstensen, 2011, p. 147).

Thanks to this, bricolage allows policy change within contexts of high status quo bias: where new ideas and actors cannot replace old ones—as is the case with persuasion and policy learning—a successful strategy to render ideas politically viable is to blend them with existing ones. Now, this very blending of old and new ideas and actors makes the process of bricolage potentially more conflictive. In practice, the degree to which bricolage leads more toward the continuity of the old or the novelty of the new depends on which ideas and actors carry more weight in a specific political process, and how divergences over the interpretation of “the new” are solved after the process of policy change has ended. We discuss this in turn.

## 2.2 | Bricolage and policy institutionalization

Most ideational approaches to policy change, explicitly or implicitly, posit that the institutionalization of new—or recombined—ideas in new policies marks the end of a successful process of ideational change. For example, Sheri Berman argues: “It is only by becoming institutionalized that ideas gain the ability to influence political life in an independent fashion” (2013, p. 230). As new ideas are institutionalized, they “become so accepted that their very existence may be forgotten, even as they may come to structure peoples’ thoughts about the economy, polity, and society” (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016, p. 12).

This understanding of change through ideas suggests a high degree of homogeneity in the way institutions are interpreted, and runs contrary to the view that the various actors can interpret institutions and change their meaning without changing their formal codification (Campbell, 2010; Streeck & Thelen, 2005).<sup>2</sup> Institutional rules can never fully specify all possible situations and usages of each individual rule, and therefore ambiguities are created, which are key to the success of ideational processes of policy change. As Carstensen and Schmidt argue, “Vagueness or ambiguity makes for discursive success, as different parties to the discussion can interpret the ideas differently” (2016, p. 7). Thus, even after ideas are institutionalized in specific policies and rules, the ambiguity contained in them “provide[s] space for political contestation over how rules should be interpreted and applied” (Streeck & Thelen, 2005, p. 26). In this case, because bricolage implies a recombination of the old *and* new and not a replacement of the old *by* the new, new struggles over the meaning of institutionalized ideas are more likely to emerge, potentially initiating a new process of change, as new interpretations of the rule are accepted.

### 3 | CHILE: A LEAST-LIKELY CASE OF ENERGY POLICY CHANGE

We have depicted Chile as a least-likely case for energy policy change due to the high path-dependency and status quo bias of its energy policy. This stemmed from three sources: high market concentration and lack of state intervention; the hegemony of neoclassical economics in policy debates; and the weakness of the environmental movement. These constraints set Chile apart from other countries where one of these constraints was missing, and therefore, the policy scenario was more open to policy change. We discuss this in turn.

The high market concentration and lack of state intervention in Chile reduced the potential for change coming from state policy and/or new challengers to incumbents, as occurred in the process of energy policy change in Germany (Jacobsson & Lauber, 2006). During the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990), Chile established the first electricity reform based on market deregulation in the world (Pollit, 2004). With the help of electric engineers and economists trained at the University of Chicago—the so-called “Chicago boys”—military authorities privatized state monopolies, created separate markets for electricity generation, transmission, and distribution, and established an electricity generation and distribution system based on the principle of economic competition between private providers seeking to reduce their marginal costs. The state was relegated to a mere regulatory role, and in practice, the country's energy policy became that of allowing private companies to decide policy following price signals. In this context, the state had few instruments to actually alter the functioning of the sector, let alone to subsidize new energy sources and market players.

This situation generated a high market concentration, increasing business power to influence policy and discouraging market entry. At the end of the 1990s, three actors dominated 93% of electricity generation and 25% of electricity transmission (Díaz, Galetovic, & Soto, 2000, p. 157; BCN, 2004 p. 153). It is documented that electric companies were actively involved in campaign donations across the political spectrum, and that there were active revolving doors between politicians and company positions (Matamala, 2016). For example, the minister of economy in 2001 to 2006—then in charge of energy issues—was a former executive of the AES Gener Group, one of the three big market players. In other words, highly constrained state intervention and high market concentration increased incumbent businesses' power, generating little space to favor new businesses and/or technologies challenging existing ones, as was the case in Germany.

Secondly, the hegemony of neoclassical economics in the country along with a strong technocratic policymaking process reduced the potential for change coming from policy learning and paradigm

change, as has been documented in the cases of Denmark, France, and the UK (Kern, Kuzemko, & Mitchell, 2014; Szarka, 2006). The principles of free markets and low regulation established during the Pinochet dictatorship were reinforced since re-democratization in 1990 due to the strengthening of a technocratic policymaking style and the increasing domination of policy debates by economists trained in neoclassical economics (Montecinos, 1997; Silva, 2010). This was especially so in domains of high technical specificity like energy, and contributed to significantly erode partisan policy differences (Murillo, 2009). Authorities subordinated public policy and regulation of the sector to the goal of improving the functioning of markets, and any attempt to promote other objectives was condemned by policymakers as arbitrary. As one policymaker explained to us: “There was a common definition, and that was that Chile would not subsidize the development of the energy sector ... This premise, of technological neutrality ... implied that technologies had to compete on their own merit” (Interview 5). In fact, one of the arguments wielded by representatives of energy companies, policymakers, and energy experts to prevent subsidies for the development of renewables was that this would trump the free functioning of markets and, even more, that this breached Article 19 of the Chilean Constitution forbidding the state from establishing arbitrary differences between groups (see discussion in BCN, 2004). In other words, strong ideological hegemony reduced spaces for contestation from alternative policy paradigms.

Finally, the weakness of the environmental movement reduced the capacity of outsiders to influence authorities toward converting to renewables, as in the case of the United States (Sine & Lee, 2009; Vezirgiannidou, 2013). In fact, during this period, social and, particularly, environmental movements were exceptionally weak in Chile, and therefore had extreme difficulties reaching policymakers with their demands for subsidizing clean energy sources. As one author recalls, after leading a number of unsuccessful battles against the installation of large dams in indigenous lands in the south of the country, at the beginning of the 2000s Chile's environmental activists found “meaningful opportunities for influence to be scarce” (Risley, 2014, p. 426).

In sum, despite the fact that the energy sector tends to be highly path-dependent and marred by market concentration and incumbent business power, the path dependence and status quo bias of the Chilean case was exceptional by international standards. Two further considerations strengthen our focus on bricolage to explain the Chilean case. First, as we show below, the gradual and incremental reform path followed amidst recurrent crises is at odds with an explanation of policy change based on punctuated equilibrium and critical junctures (Blyth, 2002).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, although a reformist spirit took the country in the early 2010s and substantial reforms were promoted in a number of policy domains (e.g., pensions, health, education), due to the abovementioned characteristics, energy policy was perhaps the least likely to witness substantial changes, yet ended up experiencing more transformative changes (see Maillet & Rozas Bugueño, 2019).

We argue that the remarkable process of energy policy change in Chile can be explained through the lens of bricolage. Concretely, bricolage allows an understanding of how subordinated actors with scarce power resources and channels of influence successfully incorporated their policy preferences into the energy policy process by skillfully articulating their ideas with those wielded by more powerful actors. One expert explicitly referred to this as a process of translating environmental concerns into the language of dominant actors (Interview 7).

## 4 | METHODS, DATA, AND ANALYSIS

We designed our research strategy to: (a) grasp the discursive struggle surrounding energy policy in Chile, (b) identify the key actors influencing the policy process, and (c) identify relevant moments in which different ideas were mobilized to support different policy reforms.

As a first step, we identified key actors in the Chilean energy sector and conducted in-depth interviews with them, to reconstruct their discourses on energy policy. Discourse consists of “the interactive processes by and through which ideas are generated and communicated” (Schmidt, 2011, p. 107), and refers “not only to structure (what is said, or where and how) but also to agency (who said what to whom)” (Schmidt, 2008, p. 305). Discourse is key for analyzing ideas-based policy change because it implies a focus on the processes by which ideas are constructed rather than on ideas as already existing constructions that actors take as their banners (Carstensen, 2011; Schmidt, 2008, 2011). In this sense, reconstructing the discourses through which energy policy was constructed, discussed, and enacted, as well as the context that acted as the catalyst for discourse creation, becomes essential to understanding the process of policy change (Mathieu, 2002; Menahem & Gilad, 2016).

Four types of actors were interviewed: environmental activists, energy experts (working for the private sector, as advisors to legislators, and in the state bureaucracy), private sector executives, and parliamentarians (Appendix Table A1). During the in depth-interviews, we asked the interviewee to reconstruct and justify their argumentations during the policy process they were involved in. We coded the interviews using the Atlas.ti software and conducted a qualitative inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006) to identify different discourses. We then confronted and enriched these discourses with secondary sources including press notes, where we could see these discourses in context. Finally, we put the discourses into historical perspective with the aid of other (semi-structured) interviews and secondary literature about the process of energy and environmental policy change in the country.

In a second step, we analyzed how these discourses interacted in key policy processes from 2000 to 2015. To do this, we first identified key legislative processes related to energy policy reform. We broke these down into two periods: 2000–2010, which starts with the first mentions of renewable energy in Chilean energy policy and ends with the establishment of the Ministry of Energy. As we will argue below, this moment marked the institutionalization of renewable energy concerns in Chilean energy policy. We examined legislation proceedings, press articles surrounding each legislative period, and conducted additional interviews. Next, we reviewed press notes corresponding to the period and analyzed legislative discussions to assess the definitional and political struggles at stake (discourse formation), the relations between actors, and the mesh of different types of arguments (discourse in movement—convincing activities; Durnova, Fischer, & Zittoun, 2016). Finally, we analyzed how the discourses and the underlying controversies resurfaced during implementation (2010–2015), leading to conflictive interpretations of the legislation. In total, we conducted 20 interviews, analyzed 96 press articles and more than 2,500 pages of legislative debates.

## 5 | RESULTS: EXPLAINING THE CHANGE IN CHILEAN ENERGY POLICY

In this section, we show the results of our analysis of the Chilean energy process and the influence of bricolage.

### 5.1 | Four discourses on energy policy

We identified four main discourses related to energy policy in Chile: (a) economic efficiency, (b) supply security, (c) environmental protection, and (d) local development, decentralization, and democratization. These discourses emerged in different political contexts and played different roles in energy policy debates, not only by providing arguments for and against distinct and concrete policy alternatives, but also drawing political support for them. We present below the discourses



identified, highlighting, for each, the context in which they emerged, their meaning for energy policy change, and the main actors propagating them.

The economic efficiency discourse was enshrined in the energy sector during the Pinochet dictatorship. In 1982, Chile's military government elaborated the General Law for Electric Services which became the framework of a privatized and deregulated energy sector, based on "self-regulation of the sector's enterprises" (Rozas in Madariaga & Gladina, 2018, p. 397). This novel energy reform—novel due to the scope of application of market mechanisms—emerged thanks to a combination of benchmarking best practices from around the world by electric engineers close to the regime, and the elaboration of new methods and their connection to an overall market-confirming mechanism by Chicago University-trained economists (Pollit, 2004). The meaning of efficiency was close to a standard neoclassical economics textbook definition: price signals should coordinate the production and distribution of electricity, as well as the necessary investments needed to keep in line with electricity demand. Shared by privatized energy sector businesses, right-wing parliamentarians, liberal think tanks, and experts in electricity regulation, as well as government officials, the idea was that the state should only undertake those actions that were necessary for the correct functioning of the market; any intervention was thus unacceptable. For example, in 2004, the CEO of AES Gener—one of the big players in the market—rejected the idea of establishing a state-controlled technical committee to anticipate and enforce investments under the pretense of it leading to "centralized planning" (BCN, 2004, p. 19).

The supply security discourse emerged in the first half of the 2000s mostly among policymakers from the Ministry of Economy—then in charge of energy issues—and was influenced by the geopolitical and natural resource-context of Chile. Historically, Chile's lack of fossil fuels led the country to concentrate on its abundant hydroelectric potential and the construction of large dams. However, in 1998–1999, an acute energy crisis produced by unexpectedly strong droughts led the government and electricity generation companies to increase the share of fossil fuels. An agreement with neighboring, gas-rich Argentina kept prices down and eased constraints on the procurement of these scarce materials for some years. However, amidst the Argentine financial crisis of 2001–2002, Argentine authorities reduced exports of gas to Chile, rapidly jeopardizing the energy market. The gas crisis illustrated the risk of being dependent on the supply of primary energies and state officials saw the need for the state to take on a more important role in securing them (Madariaga & Gladina, 2018). The idea was that, within the limits of the efficiency framework written into the country's legislation, Chile needed a state-oriented policy to guarantee energy supply and increase energy autonomy. According to a policymaker at the Ministry of Energy, "In the last decade this second objective [supply security] was much more important than the environmental issue from the point of view of energy policy—all the more so after the crisis we had of gas supplied from Argentina, when energy dependency became not just a theoretical problem, but a practical one" (Interview 5).

The environmental protection discourse is associated with Chile's small but vibrant—if disparate—community of environmental civil society organizations (Carruthers, 2001; Schaeffer, 2016). Some of these organizations originated in the struggle against the Pinochet dictatorship in the 1980s, have a strong political trajectory, and connect their environmental concerns to a criticism of Chile's neoliberal and "extractivist" development model based on the mass exploitation and exportation of natural resources. Other organizations were created after democracy was reestablished in 1990, through campaigns against the establishment of large hydroelectric plants that would violate unique scenery and indigenous lands, especially in the Bio-Bio region. These organizations contributed to diffuse environmental concerns and provided expertise on matters such as energy, glaciers, water access, biodiversity, and so forth gradually acquiring influence in public opinion and among policymakers. Some local movements emerged from the opposition to specific investment projects in their local territory—especially projects related to

energy—sometimes successfully linking their claims with national and international advocacy networks. Social movements have gained notoriety and influence in the last decade in Chile, pushing authorities to revoke construction permits for a number of iconic projects, like the Hidroaysén megadam in southern Chile in 2014, thanks to a national and international mobilization campaign called Patagonia Without Dams (Schaeffer, 2016). The main idea uniting these actors is the conviction that one of the ways to protect the environment and local communities is through renewable energies. They perceive the energy policy debate as the opportunity to use their expertise to push further claims on environmental protection.

Finally, the local development, decentralization, and democracy discourse grew in association with the general idea of using energy policy to promote the development of local communities (distant from the capital, Santiago), and giving local actors higher decision-making power over their territories. This discourse differs from the others, as it not only promotes ideas related to energy policy, but it also aims at changing the policy process itself. Although the distinction between centralization and decentralization has always polarized Chilean politics, it has taken on a new significance with the deployment of local environmental protests in the last decade, many of them connected with energy issues (Penaglia, Valenzuela, & Basaure, 2015). This discourse was developed mainly by NGOs and local communities, but also by Congressional representatives of provinces far from the capital, and it varies according to the actor that espouses it. While parliamentarians see the development of renewable energies and the reduction of conflicts over large-scale energy projects as opportunities for political gains, local communities, activists, and NGOs associate this discourse with the participation of local populations in decisions affecting their lives and territories. Moreover, although there is a consensus among these actors regarding the need to democratize political decisions, views on democratization and participation also differ. For parliamentarians and NGOs dedicated to social dialogue, decentralization, and democratization mean greater political powers (and financial resources) for local authorities, and greater involvement of citizens in the political decisions affecting them. For local communities and environmental NGOs, the idea of participation entails the right of local communities to directly participate in the energy policy process as well as democratizing political decisions at the local level. A local activist participating in the Patagonia Without Dams campaign expressed this sentiment in the following way: “When we talk about regionalism we don't refer to local chauvinism, but to the legitimate right that the ones who live in a territory can participate in the decisions that affect them directly (...). We believe in regionalism as a deepening of democracy” (Interview 19). Renewable energies are thus perceived as an opportunity for greater democratization, although the meaning of democratization is in itself a contested one (Alvial-Palavicino & Ureta, 2017).

These four discourses were used diversely and wielded as support for different energy policy proposals from 2000 to 2015. As we will show below, the recombination of the ideas on economic efficiency prevalent in Chilean energy policy with the new discourses on environmental protection, supply security, and local development-cum-democratization, allowed for renewable energies to be increasingly considered and included in legislation. This also allowed old and new actors to meet and collaborate. Policymakers saw the need to increase supply security as energy generation became unstable, and after significant energy crises jeopardized political support. Politicians understood the energy policy process increasingly as a way to respond to citizen claims for an environment free of contamination and for more participation in political decisions in local communities. New actors like renewable energy entrepreneurs followed the tradition of the economic efficiency discourse but also used environmental protection arguments to push forward their case for promoting renewables. Crucially, outsider actors such as environmental NGOs successfully blended their environmental claims with an energy security perspective and, increasingly, with that of economic efficiency, with the aim of increasing their legitimacy as valid interlocutors in policy



debates. In what follows, we show how this bricolage of new and old ideas and actors helps explain the process of policy change in a situation where high status quo-bias existed, as in Chile.

## 5.2 | Bricoleurs and bricolage: Ideas in context

In this subsection, we focus on three moments leading to the incorporation of renewable energies into Chilean legislation: the energy policy reforms of 2004–2005 and 2008, and the creation of the Ministry of Energy in 2010. The bricolage mechanism is identified in each as the key to understanding legislation changes. Our analysis of legislation debates shows that the four discourses were used to support actors' argument in different moments, and the interviews demonstrate that they were also the result of the diverse interactions between key institutional entrepreneurs. Parliamentarians interacted significantly with actors outside Congress, mostly environmental NGOs, and were also influenced by these NGOs' interests and ideas. Some environmental NGOs such as Chile Sustentable, the Instituto de Ecología Política and Terram, among others, spread their expertise on environmental issues and energy matters among parliamentarians and local social movements. Energy advisers working for parliamentarians acted like a bridge during legislation debates, successfully linking environmental concerns with ones of economic efficiency. Another key actor was the renewable energy business sector, gathered in their association, Chilean Association of Renewable Energies business association (ACERA), composed of Chilean and foreign renewable energy companies willing to invest in Chile. Traditionally closer to the “economic efficiency” discourse and favoring minimal state intervention, they echoed the discourse of environmental NGOs and parliamentarians to favor the development of renewables.

### 5.2.1 | Incorporating renewable energies into energy policy (2004–2005)

The *Ley Corta* (Short Law) 1 and 2 incorporated renewable energy policies into Chilean legislation for the first time. The context of the 1998–1999 energy crisis was understood, by actors espousing the efficiency discourse, to be the result of a lack of transparency in the market which made it difficult for actors to accurately read price signals. Therefore, the *Ley Corta* 1 aimed at complementing the market by allowing investments that were “economically efficient and necessary for the functioning of the system” (BCN, 2004, pp. 14–15). However, during the parallel discussion of its sister law, *Ley Corta* 2, the need to increase energy security in the midst of the Argentine gas crisis became crucial, and the idea that the state should intervene became unavoidable. As the minister of economy argued during legislative discussion, “In our opinion, the market is incapable of solving the problems that... have been brought to the country and to our diplomacy by the supply of gas from Argentina” (BCN, 2005, p. 79).

Environmental NGOs used this scenario to blend their environmental protection discourse with a supply security one. During 2003–2004, they successfully allied with a group of parliamentarians with environmental and local development concerns, creating an alternative draft law to promote renewable energies.<sup>4</sup> One deputy justified his support for this law in the following terms: “[I]n provinces of northern Chile, we need a strong motivation to utilize renewable sources of energy, which, thanks to their characteristics, increase the chances of regional development” (Mora, 2004, p. 33). As the government's proposal advanced in Congress, parliamentarians allied with environmentalists presented their renewable energy promotion bill for consideration.

A close scrutiny of the legislative proceedings of these two *Leyes Corta* (1 and 2) reveals that there was no mention whatsoever of renewable energies in the initial draft bills elaborated by the

government. During the period of discussion, however, the leaders of environmental NGOs and their parliamentary allies used the new energy security discourse brought about by the Argentine gas crisis to strengthen their advocacy of renewable energies. The draft bill they wrote stated that “[T]o face in the short run the problems of energy dependency and vulnerability that the country suffers from, and to secure the reliability of supply, we must accelerate the process of diversification of the energy matrix, and [ensure] that this diversification takes place mainly through the incorporation of non-conventional renewable sources (ERNC), which are national, clean, and renewable.” (Aedo & Larraín, 2004, p. 9). This framing opened a space for negotiation with the government, which needed to secure parliamentary approval for its own draft bill proposal. In exchange for this, in subsequent versions of the Ley Corta 1 and 2 the government supported the incorporation of two elements in the environmentalists' draft bill: the elimination of entry barriers for renewables (through an exemption from transmission tolls) and the establishment of a 5% quota for renewables in the new energy auction system. Actors behind the hegemonic economic efficiency discourse objected that the cost of the exemption would fall on the big market players, and that the quota distorted the market competition mechanism. In spite of this, the indications related to renewable energies were successfully passed in the respective laws. Hence, although subordinated to the hegemonic economic efficiency discourse, two new discourses, on supply security and environmental protection, were incorporated into the new legislation. The preamble of Ley Corta 2 of 2005 stated it bluntly: “Chilean energy policy seeks high levels of supply security, under strict conditions of economic efficiency and respect for sustainable development” (BCN, 2005, p. 3).

The two Leyes Cortas demonstrate how a subordinated discourse (here, environmental protection) progressively came to influence the policy process, even though it did not feature in the policy agenda and was rejected by powerful actors, mostly energy sector incumbents. Through the recombination of the environmental protection discourse, along with the local development-cum-democratization and the energy security discourses, environmental NGOs secured support for renewable energy promotion among parliamentarians and from the Executive, managing to incorporate renewable energies for the first time into the energy policy mix, even if still on the margins of the dominant economic efficiency discourse.

### 5.2.2 | Renewable energy quotas (2008)

After Ley Corta 1 and 2, environmental NGOs, allied parliamentarians, and renewable energy businesses (ACERA), desired to further push the renewables agenda forward. In this context, allied parliamentarians presented two successive draft bills in 2006 that established incentives to reduce renewables' high cost of commercialization (through a renewable energy fund) and a mandatory quota of 20% renewable energy in electricity generation by 2020. To justify this, these actors wielded the same discourses that had been successfully employed in 2004–2005, combining environmental protection, supply security and local development-cum-democratization. This was not, however, sufficient to generate policy change this time around. The government did not back the bills, and, in response, drafted its own bill which advanced the establishment of fines for noncompliance but maintained the existing 5% quota. Right-wing parliamentarians, supported by influential liberal think tanks—like Libertad y Desarrollo—and industry incumbents, rejected the introduction of fines that would make the 5% quota mandatory, on the grounds that it trumped market signals and that it would lead to making energy prices artificially more expensive, presenting “a negative example that could extend to other sectors of the economy” (BCN, 2008, p. 22). This shows how ingrained was the

efficiency discourse among experts and market incumbents, and how they repeat the same discourse in different policy processes to oppose policy instruments favoring renewable energy.

Within this context, however, renewable energy businesses—newcomers to the concentrated energy market—and their associated experts put forward a different understanding of efficiency. The idea was that renewable energy sources were increasingly more price competitive, that the cost of energy in Chile was increasing rapidly, and that opening the oligopolistic Chilean energy sector to these new technologies and new actors would reduce prices. From this perspective, the Chilean energy market was no longer efficient, and renewables offered better ways of incorporating competition and decreasing prices in the long run. In fact, it was expected that international business groups interested in investing in clean energy would soon penetrate the national market, therefore significantly increasing competition in an otherwise highly concentrated sector (Interview 12).

Environmental organizations echoed these considerations and incorporated efficiency in their own discourse; they understood it as a broader issue involving the environmental costs of conventional energies' externalities. They argued that producing highly polluting and socially invasive energy (like that coming from fossil fuels or large hydroelectric plants) in remote places could not possibly be conceived as "efficient." As an environmental activist from the Instituto de Ecología Política expressed, linking the environmental discourse with energy efficiency was "strategic" as "nobody is against an efficient use of resources" (Interview 15). In this way, and similar to the legislative process in 2004–2005, environmental concerns entered the energy policy process through their blending with other discourses, in this case, an alternative energy efficiency discourse redefined and supported by the newcomer market actors and their energy experts, as well as environmental NGOs and their allied parliamentarians. This facilitated arguments in favor of the new renewable energy promotion bill in parliament, as it could be presented as a politically viable justification for supporting renewables, while not jeopardizing the still-hegemonic economic efficiency discourse. The reasoning employed by the Chamber speaker in his address to the Senate during the bill's discussion, is telling. After stressing the importance of renewables for reasons of environmental and local development, he reasoned that: "This is an equilibrated initiative, which opens the door to renewable energies, granting them some advantages but forcing them to be competitive with conventional energies (...). Our electric system is based on the principle of incorporating the most competitive project, and this should be the one offering the lowest price (...). This project guarantees this economic principle" (BCN, 2008, p. 39).

The law was finally passed in 2008. It established a quota, to be met by 2025, of 10% mandatory renewable generation, as well as fines for noncompliance. As we showed, the combination of energy efficiency with environmental protection provisions, as a result of the interaction between environmental NGOs, their allied parliamentarians, and renewable businesses organized in ACERA, was key to making the new legislation politically viable.

### 5.2.3 | The Ministry of Energy and the institutionalization of renewable energy

In 2010, the creation of the Ministry of Energy represented a crucial step toward policy change and a greener energy matrix in Chile. All the discourses deployed throughout the decade in the discussion of energy policy can be found at the core of this new institution. As we shall see, it represented the institutionalization of these discourses and the success of the *bricolage* process, whereby renewable energies became key to Chile's energy policy.

Until 2009, the institutions in charge of energy policy in Chile were fragmented. The National Energy Commission was in charge of regulation, the Superintendence of Electricity and Fuels was in charge of oversight, and the Ministry of Mining and the Ministry of the Economy shared political responsibilities. There was no integral vision for the sector, and the multiplicity of competences made coordination difficult. In this context, the continued lack of a ministerial entity in charge of the sector was a reflection of the still-dominant idea that energy policy should be a function of the decisions of private actors in a competitive market.

As we showed above, the development of renewable energy policy throughout the decade brought different discourses to the fore: supply security, environmental protection, and new ways of conceiving efficiency. The first two shared the requirement that the State take a more relevant role in the country's energy policy, often running contrary to pure market efficiency mechanisms. The creation of the Ministry of Energy was a step toward the institutionalization of these discourses, and in particular, the strengthening of the state. The Executive's message in the draft bill argues that the new ministry was needed precisely to foster the objectives of "security of energy supply, the contribution of energy to the increase in economic competitiveness, and the integration of environmental objectives" (BCN, 2009, p. 6).

Actors associated with the hegemonic efficiency discourse were hesitant as to whether to support the law or not. Although representatives of electric generation companies welcomed the creation of the Ministry—albeit only if it became a technical institution and did not just "increase red tape" (BCN, 2009, p. 37)—an expert from the liberal Libertad y Desarrollo think tank argued that "the creation of a Ministry (...) implies increasing the size of the State, without any certainty that this will solve the current problems more efficiently than by reinforcing existing state agencies" (BCN, 2009, p. 43).

However, the new law was successfully passed. Article 5 of the law clearly shows how ideas used in the past to justify and create allies for the development of renewable energies were converted into the different component parts of the new ministry. It states that: "For the purpose of establishing the internal structure, the following functional areas, among others, shall be considered: energy market, renewable energies, energy efficiency, environment and sustainable development, rural and social electrification, energy studies and development" (BCN, 2009, pp. 496–497). This implied not only tempering the dominant economic efficiency discourse with new ones, but also incorporating the concerns of a range of actors that were now represented in the new structure. Following the literature on policy change, this moment can be regarded as the institutionalization of the process of bricolage that allowed the gradual modification of energy policy in Chile during the 2000s, incorporating the promotion of renewable energies as a goal of the state.

Now, although the creation of the Ministry of Energy was a crucial step in the institutionalization of a new energy policy in Chile, concrete initiatives in the following years did not develop in a straightforward manner. We argue that this was because the ambiguities and tensions contained in the four discourses—something we identified as typical of bricolage processes of policy change—resurfaced after they were institutionalized.

### 5.3 | Implementation meets contestation

Concluding the study of policy change once new discourses have been institutionalized is problematic. As the Chilean case shows, while the new Ministry of Energy inaugurated in 2010 incorporated all the discourses that had been part of the energy policy discussions in the last decade, the actual translation of these institutionalized discourses into policy proved contentious. The two administrations that followed the creation of the Ministry of Energy, that of right-wing Sebastián Piñera and left-wing Michelle Bachelet, had to deal with the resurrection of conflict over the meaning of energy policy, albeit with different results.

The right-wing government of Sebastián Piñera (2010–2014) was highly erratic in its energy policy and had little success in advancing new legislation. During this administration, energy-related social

conflicts and social movements exploded, halting energy-related investment projects and aggravating an ongoing energy crisis. This situation crystallized two opposing models of energy policy. The first, espoused by the government, industry incumbents and their experts, was reflected in the policy recommendations of the government-mandated Advisory Commission for Energy Development (CADE). CADE promoted the installation of large-scale energy projects to solve energy security issues and bet on large hydropower and the exploration of nuclear energy to solve the environmental question. In other words, it subordinated the development of renewable energies, seeing them as just one among many ways of attaining the policy goals contained in the Ministry of Energy's mandate (Madariaga & Gladina, 2018).

By contrast, environmental NGOs, allied parliamentarians, and renewable energy businesses expressed their views through the composition of a parallel commission and policy recommendation: the Citizen-Parliamentary-Technical Commission (CCTP). CCTP opposed the exploration of nuclear alternatives and favored the development of small-scale renewable energy projects and higher citizen participation in the energy policy process. The fact that two opposite initiatives such as CADE and CCTP competed to transform themselves into the new energy policy guidelines only one year after the inauguration of the Ministry of Energy demonstrates the limits of policy change through the bricolage mechanism: the same discourses debated during the previous decade and institutionalized in the creation of the ministry, were now in conflict again at the moment of implementing the new rules.

The Piñera government was unable to control the policy agenda and could not establish a clear energy policy. In total, five different persons occupied the position of minister of energy, more than one per year, which is a reflection of the energy crisis at the level of state institutions and of the lack of a straightforward policy mandate. A new government took office in 2014 with the urgent need to solve the mounting energy crisis and appease environmental social movements. It devised a strategy to produce the first state-directed, long-term energy policy framework in 50 years, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders: the process known as *Energía 2050*. The minister of energy gathered a diversity of actors, from both the public and private sectors, including academics and civil society organizations, to build the future energy policy. *Energía 2050* included technical boards where all actors could participate and debate, as well as regional boards where local communities participated in cataloging specific territorial needs. In December 2015, President Michelle Bachelet signed the *Energía 2050* policy document as a presidential decree. According to the document, the objectives of energy policy in Chile are to generate an energy sector that is reliable, sustainable, inclusive, and competitive. The document included an explicit goal that 70% of electricity should come from renewable sources by 2050 and incorporates citizen participation as a key element of energy policy.

However, the process was plagued with conflicts, which resulted from the amalgamation of different discourses and interpretations of them. One of these conflicts dealt with the very definition of renewable energy sources. While environmentalists insisted on the Chilean definition of “nonconventional” renewable energies—incorporated in *Ley Corta 1*—that excluded large hydropower projects, government officials and electric companies successfully fought to include large hydropower as a renewable energy source, and therefore included it in the 70% goal. While renewable energy businesses sided at first with environmentalists, they ended adopting the latter view. In fact, in early 2018, their association, ACERA, changed its statutes to explicitly include large hydropower companies among their affiliates.

Most conflicts that arose through *Energía 2050* were related with the nature of participative mechanisms (see Alvial-Palavicino & Ureta, 2017). This divided actors that had hitherto been part of a common overall discourse in the promotion of renewable energies—most notably, the renewable energy business sector and environmental organizations (Madariaga & Allain, 2018). Renewable energy businesses and policy experts championed *Energía 2050* as an innovative and inclusive process, underscoring the process of consultation with diverse actors. ACERA's members, for example,

felt that they were successfully “heard” by the government (Interview 2). Accordingly, they consolidated their relationship with government and parliamentarians during Energia 2050. However, according to environmental NGOs and social movement activists, the participative mechanism was insufficient and instrumental. They criticized the consultative methods for reducing their capacity to be proactive, and the deliberative methods based on consensus-making for leaving conflicting views aside, especially those on local development and local participation. One environmental activist expressed to us her frustration with the process thusly: “The energy policy requested a lot of work for us, and not all the positions held by organizations were considered. So, our participation was very symbolic. They [the government] were just wasting our time, and at the end did not consider our issues in their conclusions. So, we backed off from the energy policy; our participation did not make sense anymore” (Interview 14). In the end, environmental organizations walked out of the process, thus debilitating the final consensus. Reflecting on the process and how energy issues have become politicized again, one policy expert told us: “If I look at this process from the political perspective, this is only the start. This is not the end of it” (Interview 3).

## 6 | CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In this article, we aimed at explaining the puzzling case of energy policy change in Chile and in so doing, contributing to the literature on ideational policy change. We explained how the mechanism of bricolage serves to advance policy change in highly path-dependent and status-quo biased contexts, highlighting the process whereby “bricoleurs” recombine different discourses, how this recombination brings together new actor coalitions, and how this results in policy change.

The Chilean case served as a least-likely case for ideas-based policy change to analyze the relevance of bricolage as a mechanism of change. We argued that at the onset of the period analyzed, Chile had none of the conditions that allowed energy policy change in other countries where similar experiences were studied: state intervention and the incorporation of new market actors in Germany (Jacobsson & Lauber, 2006), competing policy ideas that could enter the policy process through policy learning and paradigm change in Denmark, France, and the UK (Kern et al., 2014; Szarka, 2006), or a strong environmental movement able to influence the policy process through its framing of the issue in the United States (Sine & Lee, 2009; Vezirgiannidou, 2013). We argued that in this political context, bricolage was the only way for actors interested in the promotion of renewable energies to pursue their policy preferences. Bricolage was a powerful tool for subordinated actors, especially environmental organizations, to incorporate their ideas into policy, even when their discourses had not previously been included in the agenda. This depended crucially on the skills of key entrepreneurs able to recombine existing ideas in novel ways, and therefore garnering the support of more powerful actors and policymakers.

In this conclusion, we highlight two features of bricolage developed in this article and that will deserve greater attention in future research: its political consequences, and the spaces it leaves for further change after institutionalization. We argued that *bricolage* is not just a more or less efficient recombination of old and new ideas offering new policy alternatives; importantly, it also entails a recombination of political forces that can foster those ideas throughout the policy process. While incorporating new ideas and recombining them with old ones, bricoleurs also unite the new and old actors that carry those ideas, therefore widening the political support for the new policies. In this sense, bricolage serves as a “coalition magnet” (Béland & Cox, 2016). As we showed in the Chilean case, the ability of institutional entrepreneurs to combine new and old ideas in different ways and to exploit the ambiguities contained in different discourses on energy policy was key to the development of renewable energy policy. Notably, their capacity to blend their environmental protection discourse with the local development-cum-democratization prevalent among parliamentarians from



distant provinces, the supply security discourse prevalent among executive authorities, and the hegemonic economic efficiency discourse, was key to the creation of political alliances between parliamentarians, NGOs, and the renewable energy business sector.

Thus conceived, the process of bricolage is a double-edged sword. While subordinated actors can imbue public policy with their discourses, the ambiguity and multivocality of discourse thus recombined generates further conflicts over the precise interpretation of ideas. We showed that this is exactly what happened in Chile with the debates on democratization and decentralization and with the very definition of renewable energies after renewable energy policies had been institutionalized in the structure of the new Ministry of Energy. In other words, public policy building is a continuous process, which does not end when new ideas are institutionalized, as suggested by existing literature on ideational change. On the contrary, the implementation process is still a crucial turning point for the debate on the *nature* and *degree* of change. Even after institutionalization, change continues: the implementation phase opens new possibilities to affect how institutionalized ideas are materialized in actual policies and practices. This invites a broader reflection on method: if the changes introduced in new policies and institutions are susceptible to further change—or even reversal—how do we know when a change has really taken effect? At what stage of the policy process should we stop researching? Further investigation on ideational policy change should address these pressing questions.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank comments by Antoine Maillet and participants at the “States of Energy” (Santiago, 2017) and RISE (Cartagena, 2017) conferences. Both authors acknowledge research support from the Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies (grant number CONICYT/FONDAP/15130009).

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Bricolage is used in several fields of study to denote a process of pragmatic recombination, resourceful improvisation, and learning thereof, including organizational sociology and innovation studies (see Baker & Nelson, 2005; Hendry & Harborne, 2011; Voss, Smith, & Grin, 2009). Here we hew more closely to the discussions in sociological and historical institutionalism, which focus specifically on policy change.
- <sup>2</sup> There are several literatures that have theorized the relation between rules and discretion. Among the more famous ones in policy studies are those analyzing “street-level” bureaucrats. Here we follow theories of institutional and policy change which focus on the degree of discretion in the interpretation and enforcement of rules as sources of policy change (Campbell, 2010; Streeck & Thelen, 2005).
- <sup>3</sup> As we will argue below, the social mobilizations of 2011 that helped reject large polluting projects should be understood as a link—indeed an important one—in a longer process of gradual energy policy change. We analyze the significance of these protests for energy policy change in Chile in Madariaga & Allain (2018).
- <sup>4</sup> For a detailed description of the parties involved, see Madariaga and Allain (2018).

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**How to cite this article:** Allain M, Madariaga A. Understanding policy change through bricolage: The case of Chile's renewable energy policy. *Governance*. 2020;33:675–692. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12453>

## APPENDIX

**TABLE A1** List of interviews

<i>N</i>	Description
1	Former board president, Chilean Association of Renewable Energies business association (ACERA)
2	Former executive director, ACERA
3	Energy expert, former collaborator, Ministry of Energy
4	Energy expert participating in Energia 2050
5	Energy expert, independent
6	Energy expert, Ministry of Energy
7	Energy expert, German cooperation agency (GIZ)
8	Energy expert participating in Energia 2050
9	Energy expert participating in Energia 2050
10	Public policy expert participating in Energia 2050
11	Environmental expert, economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
12	Political advisor and energy expert, former collaborator of ACERA
13	Former member of parliament, Party for Democracy (PPD)
14	Environmental activist, Terram
15	Environmental activist, Political ecology institute
16	Environmental activist, Ecosistemas
17	Former environmental activist, Chile Sustentable
18	Political advisor and former environmental activist, Chile Sustentable
19	Local environmental activist, Patagonia without dams
20	Local environmental activist, Patagonia without dams

Source: Authors' elaboration.