How Can We Study Depoliticisation (and Politicisation)? A Theoretical Review on Contemporary Conceptual Framework

เราจะศึกษาการลดทอนความเป็นการเมือง (และการทำให้เป็นการเมือง) ได้อย่างไร: บททบทวนทางทฤษฎีว่าด้วยกรอบแนวคิดร่วมสมัย

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Abstract

Nowadays, lawyers, economists, scientists and other 'experts' are put in charge of recommending and implementing policy decisions which seem less 'political' and distant from people. This is somehow seen as a strategy of the government to shift responsibility in public policy away from the state to unelected authorities, creating a 'non-political', less-conflicted policy. Such strategy can be understood as a part of 'depoliticisation'.

Academically, depoliticisation is a broad and ambiguous concept which means different things to different people. This article aims to review and elaborate how we can study depoliticisation through some major contemporary frameworks. It also suggests that we cannot speak of depoliticisation without considering politicisation as they are dialectical. Hay's model and related frameworks, which are counted as one the most systematic approach to the study of depoliticisation, are particularly discussed. Besides, depoliticisation is a concept with many perspectives and dimensions. This article lastly calls for a look at depoliticisation as a multi-level concept.

Keywords: depoliticisation, politicisation, politics, multi-level concept

บทคัดย่อ

ทุกวันนี้ กลุ่มคน เช่น นักกฎหมาย นักเศรษฐศาสตร์ นักวิทยาศาสตร์ และ 'ผู้เชี่ยวชาญ' ในด้านต่างๆ เป็นผู้ที่ได้รับมอบหมายให้ออกแบบนโยบายรวมถึงนำนโยบาย ไปปฏิบัติ โดยนโยบายเหล่านี้ เป็นนโยบายที่มีลักษณะของความเป็นการเมืองน้อยและที่มา ไม่เชื่อมโยงกับประชาชน วิธีการของรัฐบาลในการกำหนดนโยบายเช่นนี้มองได้ว่าเป็น ความพยายามในการผลักความรับผิดชอบออกจากรัฐไปสู่กลุ่มองค์กรที่ไม่ได้มาจากการ เลือกตั้ง ที่จะสร้างนโยบายที่ปราศจากการเมืองและความขัดแย้ง กลยุทธ์เช่นนี้เป็นส่วน หนึ่งของ 'การลดทอนความเป็นการเมือง'

ในวงวิชาการ การลดทอนความเป็นการเมือง เป็นแนวคิดที่กว้างและกำกวมซึ่ง สามารถมีความหมายแตกต่างกันไปตามแต่ผู้ให้นิยาม บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ ทบทวนและแสดงให้เห็นถึงวิธีการศึกษาการลดทอนความเป็นการเมืองผ่านกรอบแนวคิด วิเคราะห์ร่วมสมัยที่สำคัญบางประการ บทความชิ้นนี้ยังเสนอว่าเราไม่อาจศึกษาการ ลดทอนความเป็นการเมืองโดยละเลยการพิจารณาการทำให้เป็นการเมืองไปได้ เนื่องจาก ทั้งสองแนวคิดนี้มีลักษณะในเชิงวิภาษวิธีอันสัมพันธ์กัน ตัวแบบทางทฤษฎีที่นำมากล่าวถึง ในบทความนี้ ได้แก่ ตัวแบบของเฮ และ กรอบวิเคราะห์ที่เกี่ยวข้อง ซึ่งได้รับการยอมรับว่า เป็นแนวการวิเคราะห์ที่เป็นระบบที่สุดชัดหนึ่งต่อการศึกษาการลดทอนความเป็นการเมือง นอกจากนี้ การลดทอนความเป็นการเมืองยังเป็นแนวคิดที่มีหลายมิติหลายมุมมองในส่วน สุดท้ายของบทความนี้จึงเรียกร้องให้เรามองการลดทอนความเป็นการเมืองในฐานะเป็น แนวคิดพหุระดับ

คำสำคัญ: การลดทอนความเป็นการเมือง, การทำให้เป็นการเมือง, การเมือง, แนวคิดพหุ ระดับ

Introduction

How do governments shift responsibility for public policy away from the state to unelected authorities, creating a 'non-political' policy? How does such action lead to an 'anti-politics' situation where the public become disengaged in policies? These kinds of questions reflect a contemporary phenomenon in society where lawyers, economists, scientists and other 'experts' are put in charge of recommending and implementing policy decisions which seem less 'political' and distant from people. These changing modes of policy-making and politics is known as 'depoliticisation'.

Despite being 'the oldest task of politics' (Ranciere, 1995: 19), depoliticisation is a broad and ambiguous concept which means different things to different people. Research in depoliticisation has advanced in recent years because new empirical data has shown the complicated ways in which this process works, how it is resisted and contextually moderated by non-state actors, policy areas, and the institutional and cultural environment. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate that much of empirical interest has not been matched by conceptual precision (Flinders & Wood, 2014; Fawcett &d Marsh, 2014). The study of depoliticisation arguably remains being a less developed field in political analysis. Burnham (2014) notes that *"its usage has varied from simple notions of depoliticisation as the 'absence of politics' or 'quangoism' to more complex understandings of depoliticisation as a process whereby state managers may seek to place at one remove the politically contested character of governing and in so doing paradoxically enhance political control"*(p.189). Globally, depoliticisation has formed a, if not *the*, central part to justify the emergence of technical committees and delegation of responsibilities to an amount of arm's-length bodies—organisations financed by a governmental or public source but operates independently of it—across a number of policy areas (Mishra, 2011). Depoliticisation is usually seen promoted as a way of circumventing conventional politics.

This article aims to review and elaborate how we can study depoliticisation through some major contemporary frameworks. It also suggests that we cannot speak of depoliticisation without considering politicisation as they are dialectical. Hay's model and related frameworks are particularly discussed. Besides, depoliticisation is a concept with many perspectives and dimensions. This article finally discusses the concept of depoliticisation as a multi-level concept which is arguably useful for empirical research.

Depoliticisation and Politicisation

In a broad sense, depoliticisation and politicisation are commonly about *"a rebalancing or a shift in the nature of governance relationships that involves not only the displacement of decisions from politicians, but the exercise of power by many non-state actors as well"* (Wood & Flinders, 2014: 154). Depoliticisation, as the dominant model of statecraft in the 21st century, refers to *"the denial of political contingency and the transfer of functions away from elected politicians"* (Flinders & Wood, 2014: 135). It commonly associates with the denial of formal politics.

In contrast, politicisation in the general sense is the realisation that established social norms, social practices and social relations are contingent rather than sacrosanct; by this, citizens, individually and collectively, have political agency by means of which alternatives can be explored and implemented. This recognition of contingency in social practices and relations and the power of collective political agency have been the igniting spark of emancipatory-progressive movements (visible in the form of 'participatory discourse' in development) and politicisation has been their key strategy (Blühdorn, 2007: 313).

According to Himmelstrand (1962), depoliticisation refers to *"a transformation of political ideologies into a set of more or less distinct administrative technologies based on a widespread consensus as to what kind of goals one should try to attain"* (p.83). In a depoliticised community, ideological differences are deemphasised, or even wiped out. One way to study depoliticisation in this sense is to carefully look at the debate in a community of interest, that is, an increasing degree of depoliticisation can be observed through whether the issues with 'purely factual, technical or economical implications' have become more frequent in the debate at the cost of references to values prominent in ideologies (Himmelstrand, 1962: .84). Obsessing with the purely factual, technical and economic issue reflects one aspect of depoliticisation—a decreasing saliency of manifest ideological statements. The other aspects of depoliticisation are the development of ideological consensus and the impact of ideology in practical politics is becoming weaker (see Himmelstrand, 1962). From this point, depoliticisation should be regarded as a 'sensitising concept', rather than a definitive concept, suggesting directions along which to look (Blumer, 1954). Depoliticisation provides us a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical occurrences without rigid specifications of their attributes.

For Some, depoliticisation is considered as a form of statecraft or governing strategy. Burnham (2001) states that depoliticisation is

"the process of placing at one remove the political character of decision-making. State managers retain arm's-length control over crucial economic and social processes whilst simultaneously benefiting from the distancing effects of depoliticisation. As a form of politics it seeks to change market expectations regarding the effectiveness and credibility of policy-making in addition to shielding the government from the consequences of unpopular policies. Moreover, it is a process cloaked in the language of inclusiveness, democratisation and empowerment" (p.128-129).

Seeing depoliticisation in this way highlights three important things. First, the political character of decision making has been placed at one remove but is not absent. Second, as a governing strategy, it can enhance political control while giving the appearance of having transferred elements of that control. Finally, by transferring responsibility for policy, depoliticisation is a process which benefits politicians in office by establishing distance between them and difficult supporters/opponents through arm's-length management or invoking the language of external constraints (Burnham, 2014: 195).

Mishra (2011) argues that *"from a public policy point of view, then, depoliticisation means the reduction of direct influence of politicians, either through institutional delegation or the minimisation of discretion"* (p.158). Depoliticisation can also mean the narrowing of the boundaries of democratic politics with the emergence of technocratic post-democratic forms of governance (Flinders & Wood, 2014).[1]

Mostly agreed, the foremost sources and effects of contemporary depoliticisation are economic globalisation/global corporate power, the dominance of neoliberal thinking and the rise of consensus-orientated and technocratic governance (Beveridge, 2016). According to Flinders (2008), a set of six common themes revolve around the study of depoliticisation:

1. the role and power of a dominant rationality;

2. shifts in political reasoning and conceptions of legitimacy;

3. the process of placing at one remove the political character of decision-making;

4. the reallocation of functions and responsibilities to independent bodies or panels of experts;

5. the exclusion of politics through the adoption of 'rational' practices; and

6. political exhaustion, which feeds loss of confidence and a resignation to fate (Flinders, 2008: 238).

Through synthesise these core themes leads Flinders (2008) to define depoliticisation as *"the range of tools, mechanisms and institutions through which politicians can attempt to move to an indirect governing relationship and/or seek to persuade the demos that they can no longer be reasonably held responsible for a certain issue, policy field, or specific decision"* (p.238).

Among the contested emphases and meanings of the concept of depoliticisation, they share a common concern of the concept, that is, depoliticisation can essentially refers to the denial, not removal, of politics and the transfer of functions away from central government and/or elected politicians (Flinders & Wood, 2014). Even so, such understanding is quite narrow and limited, especially for analytical value. To be sensible, the concept of depoliticisation should not suggest that a given issue, people, institution or process is any less political or less politics (Burnham, 2001, 2014; Hay, 2014; Mishra, 2011); it is instead highlighting a transformation vis-a-vis the 'arena' or processes through which decisions are either taken or avoided (Flinders, 2008). It is transferred to a less obviously politicised arena (Wood & Flinders, 2014). A definition of depoliticisation as the removal/evacuation of the political is rather naive (Burnham, 2014). In this sense, the issue becomes no less political in its impact on society. Similarly, Hay (2014) stresses that depoliticisation

> *"is not really about an end to politics or an absence of politics or even some kind of quantitative reduction in the amount of politics present. Depoliticisation is not about less politics, but about a displaced and submerged politics–a politics occurring elsewhere, typically beyond sites and arenas in which it is visible to non-participants and hence amenable to public–perhaps even democratic–scrutiny"* (p.302).

Depoliticisation should not be seen as only in physical transformation of government or the move away from the domain of 'politics'. Depoliticisation can be much more about society as well. Depoliticisation of key decision-making can be seen as a vital element in bringing power closer to the people (Flinders, 2008).[2]

'Politics' and the Strategic Group

To begin with, there is a need to specify exactly what kind of politics is disregarded in a depoliticised from of development and social projects. The broader 'the political' and 'politics' are defined, the broader the concept of depoliticisation.

In relation to the scope and purpose of the study, this work argues that granting is inherently political; it is about resource distribution. This

echoes the definition of politics as a matter of 'who gets what, when, and how' (Lasswell, 1936). Politics, in a broad sense and perhaps in its ideal usage, is a sphere of public deliberation and collective decision making for common good. It is about the mediation of social power, and the strategic action related to such mediation; as put by Mollinga and Bolding (2004), it is *"the process through which the social relations of power are constituted, negotiated, reproduced, transformed or otherwise shaped"* (p.6). Similarly, Leftwich (1996) defines politics as comprising *"all the activities of conflict, cooperation and negotiation involved in the use, production and distribution of resources, whether material or ideal, whether at local, national or international levels, or whether in private or public domains"* (p.6).

Beveridge (2016) suggests to classify 'politics' into three 'lens' vis-a-vis the study of depoliticisation: politics as statecraft and the institutions of government, politics as choice and contingency, and politics as the apparatus of order and consensus versus 'political' moments of antagonism (p.2). Here, the first and second lens are particularly relevant. Moreover, Hay (2007) identifies 12 different senses of the term 'politics' that, in turn, shapes the different ways in which an action or issue could be defined as 'political'. Against this background of the definitions of politics, hence, all social and development projects are unavoidably political, not managerial or administrative in the current technicist sense; *"for at any point in any developmental sequence what is crucially at stake is how resources are to be used and distributed in new ways and the inevitable disputes arising from calculations by individuals and groups as to who will win and who will lose as a result"* (Leftwich, 1996: 6). It is difficult, if not impossible, for people to change the way of using resources without changing the relations they have with one another (Stretton, 1976).

In fact, depoliticisation remakes rather than annihilates the politics/political (Beveridge & Koch, 2016). The boundaries of the political, stated Beveridge (2016), cannot be wholly fixed in essential terms and become a matter of empirical work rather than a priori definition; the study should open to accommodate multiple ontologies of the politics/political (p.10). As Jessop (2014) argues, the study of depoliticisation and politicisation require *"specific reference points in past and present political spacetime against which to establish its occurrence. This means that politics and, a fortiori, politicisation [and depoliticisation] are polyvalent, context-dependent concepts"* (p.207).

In the discussion of depoliticisation, one particularly important actor in the process is called 'strategic groups' which are formed when new resources become available as a result of social change, and that such groups endeavour to acquire these resources in the long term (Evers & Gerke, 2009). In politics, some groups stand to win at the cost of the others. Development and social projects carry resources to be used and allocated in the public sphere which necessarily involves conflict, cooperation and negotiations

among the actors; strategic groups thus emerge out of such situation. Resources in the projects given by funders would be appropriated by a group that is able to or prefer to implement a strategy of securing resources in the long term and attempts to build social, political and economic environment towards this goal. To secure the resources made available by the project, strategic groups are likely to employ a certain strategy, that is, depoliticisation (Mishra, 2011).

Contemporary Frameworks to the Study of Depoliticisation and Politicisation

Studies of depoliticisation often conceptualise it as a function of government; however, depoliticisation in fact can occur outside of formal governmental arenas and should not be considered merely as a form of state-craft. More importantly, depoliticisation and politicisation are not mutually exclusive; they are dialectical and relational (see Strange, 2014; Wood & Flinders, 2014; Wood, 2016). For instance, putatively depoliticised technocratic or managerial decisions are, in fact, highly political and should be subject to contestation and debate (Fawcett & Marsh, 2014: 172-173). It is too simply to speak of either depoliticisation or politicisation.[3]

Systemically, Hay (2007) proposes a way to investigate depoliticisation along with politicisation through departmentalise the realm of the political into three arenas: the governmental arena; the public but nongovernmental arena; and the private arena (see Figure 1).
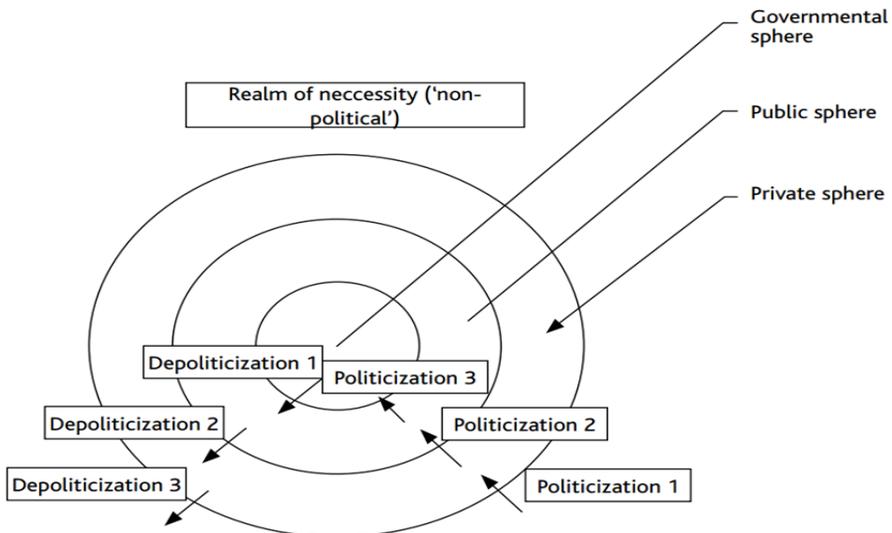

Figure 1. Politicisation and depoliticisation at three arenas
Source: Hay (2007: 80)

For Hay (2007), politics is a realm of contingency and deliberation which is distinct from the realm of necessity where the capacity for human agency is absent and it is fate and nature that fight it out for supremacy. This model identifies forms of both politicisation and depoliticisation as mirror-image developments across a spectrum of public governance (Wood & Flinders, 2014). By this, issues and institutions can be depoliticised and politicised in one of the three ways as shown in the table 1 below.

Type	Politicisation	Depoliticisation
1	Promotion from the realm of necessity to the private sphere	Demotion from governmental to the public sphere
2	Promotion from the private sphere to the public sphere	Demotion from the public to the private sphere
3	Promotion from public sphere to the governmental sphere	Demotion from the private sphere to the realm of necessity

Table 1. The three types of politicisation and depoliticisation

Simply put, issues and institutions are politicised when they become the subject of public deliberation and decision making where previously they were not. It is believed that the most basic form of politicisation is type 1 involving the extension of the realm of contingency and deliberation on the issues or institutions which were earlier assigned to the realm of fate and necessity. In other words, depoliticisation type 1 is *"associated with the extension of the capacity for human influence and deliberation"* (Hay, 2007: 81). For instance, when people recognise the capacity of human influence in the matters which were earlier the preserve of natural processes, politicisation occurs. In this sense, the development of science, which give means to human to observe the natural processes so that the changes are no longer in the realm of fate but considered as significant issues for public deliberation and decision making, has a politicising effect. Further politicisation (type 2) happens when issues or institutions which were earlier confined to the private sphere become identified as issues of collective rather than individual or private, or subject to the deliberation by the masses or the public. The most common example of this type is the consciousness-raising activities which make the public aware of a certain issue or institution or attempt to lift such issue into the public domain.

Subsequently, politicisation type 3 occurs when issues or institutions are promoted from the public but nongovernmental sphere into the arena of direct governmental deliberation. In other words, this type of politicisation refers to the moment or process when the issues or institutions that enjoyed a certain degree of popularity in the non-governmental public discourse are

taken up and incorporated in the governmental policies and becomes part of the formal political agenda. Here, issues are become the focus of legislative debates, new laws, the responsibility of government departments and similarly 'governmental' processes.

On the contrary, depoliticisation is a process in which political issues, people and institutions are become less and less political, if not, non-political. It seems that, in the Hay's model, depoliticisation operates in the reverse order to politicisation.

Depoliticisation type 1 refers to *"the effective demotion of issues (institutions) previously subject to formal political scrutiny, deliberation and accountability to the public yet non-governmental sphere"* (Hay, 2007: 82). It is a move towards a complex range of extra-governmental organisations and semi-independent bodies (collectively known as the sphere of 'delegated' or 'distributed public' governance). In this type, two major forms of depoliticisation can be specified: (1) the displacement of responsibility from governmental to public or quasi-public authorities; and (2) the off-loading of areas of formal political responsibility to the market, principally through privatisation. This depoliticisation somehow creates a considerable benefit for government, especially when there are controversial issues and the government does not want to take all of the responsibility; depoliticisation allows government to effectively pass such responsibility to public or quasi-public bodies and to official who can present them as purely technical matters. Government and politicians here are insulated from the pressure to answer for the consequences of policies (Hay, 2007).

Depoliticisation type 1 implies significant changes in governance. First, there is an evident loss of the policy-making capacity of the politicians and the government in a depoliticised area as the responsibility is demoted to a quasi-public body or the public. Government becomes to perform 'facilitating' role and moves the issue from the core political realm to the non-governmental public sphere. Second, at the same time, this brings society and the public to hold responsibility of a depoliticised issue, thereby becoming an issue of corporate or collective societal responsibility. Arguably, depoliticisation here is thus all about moving 'responsibility'. Third, it also implies that quasi-autonomous public bodies or the delegated agencies do not interfere in the autonomy of the government at all; they are not the same with government despite being one of the public organisation of the state. This is why there are cases in which central government and politicians are hostile to a quasi-autonomous public body.

Further depoliticisation (type 2) happens *"when issues previously politicised within the public sphere but not currently the subject of formal political deliberation are dis-placed to the private realm—becoming matters for domestic deliberation and consumer*

choice" (Hay, 2007: 85). The responsibility of a depoliticised issue does now lie with consumers or ordinary people, not government or business. Then, the transfer of responsibility from the realm of deliberation (political realm) to that of necessity and fate is seen as depoliticisation type 3. This type implies a non-negotiable fatalism and a denial of the capacity for deliberation, decision-making and human agency.

As Jenkins (2011) summarises:

"a strategy of politicisation, in its broadest sense, entails exposing and questioning what is taken for granted, or perceived to be necessary, permanent, invariable, morally or politically obligatory and essential" (p.159) while *"a strategy of depoliticisation entails forming necessities, permanence, immobility, closure and fatalism and concealing/negating or removing contingency"* (p.160).

This model does not suggest that the issues, people and decisions are genuinely devoid of politics as the very syntactic meaning of the word 'de-politicisation' seems to denote. Instead, *"the processes and procedures that are commonly referred to under the rubric of depoliticisation might therefore be more accurately described as 'arena shifting'"* (Flinders, 2008: 238), principally towards a non-elected political arena.

Accordingly, by developing Hay's model, Wood and Flinders (2014) distinguish three faces of depoliticisation: governmental, societal, and discursive (see Table 2). They also point out that

"depoliticisation is a dynamic and fluid process in which forms of the various 'faces' are rarely independent or distinct, but tend to exist in a Janus-faced manner whereby the transfer of a function away from ministers (that is, governmental depoliticisation) is fuelled, or at the very least facilitated, by a broader process of societal depoliticisation (delegation of decision making goes hand in hand with the decline of issues as salient matters in societal debate)" (Wood & Flinders, 2014: 161).

First, by adapting a state-centric or institutionalist approach, 'governmental depoliticisation' is focused on the removal of politicians from the direct control of an extensive area of functions and the expansion of technocratic forms of governance. This depoliticisation is argued to dominate the literature (Wood & Flinders, 2014) and considered as a common tactic used by governments (Fawcett & Marsh, 2014). It is sometimes called the first generation of the depoliticisation studies (Wood, 2016). Governmental depoliticisation has three types of tools. The first tool is known as 'the politics of ABC'—that is, agencies, boards and commissions—and the creation of quasi-autonomous public organisations through which the explicit political character of decision making is placed 'at one remove' (Burnham, 2001).

The second tool involves 'binding the hands' of politicians through the establishment of new rules and regulations which are drafted to confine and constrain their discretion. The last but not least tool is particularly initiated by politicians as they abuse 'the problem of many hands'—the diffusion of responsibility across a range of interdependent actors (see Thompson, 1980)—as a way of blurring the accountability space and distancing their own personal responsibility from the depoliticised issue or institution. Governmental depoliticisation can be viewed as a mode of statecraft: a governing strategy whereby an institutional arrangement is constructed that attempts to deflect blame away from government for policy failure (Kettell, 2008).

Fawcett and Marsh (2014) argue that governmental depoliticisation is significantly underpinned by the development of governance, particularly network governance, and raises immediate questions about how governments govern, particularly given the shift towards more market and networked based approaches. Governmental depoliticisation conveys a kind of 'institutional depoliticisation' (Flinders & Buller, 2006; Flinders, 2008) focusing on structures.[4] For Flinders (2008), although privatisation—the change where the state absolves itself completely of responsibility for a specific policy field or sector—is seen as the purest form of such depoliticisation, in effect, the most common variant is the formation of a quasi-autonomous public organisation to insulate decision-making from political influence.

The second face is referred as 'societal depoliticisation'. Here, the underlying assumption is that depoliticisation should not be defined and discussed in a narrow way as a 'form of statecraft' or a 'strategy for governing'; instead it is far more than mere strategies of government. Depoliticisation and delegation *"should be regarded as phenomena which are relevant at all levels of advanced modern society"* (Blühdorn, 2007: 314). Mishra (2011) points that *"the delegation of authority at each step involves a redistribution of power and sometimes involves the inclusion of new actors that are significant in locating the mechanisms of depoliticisation"* (p.158). This societal depoliticisation captures both state and civil society actors. It is not only focused on the role and capacity of politicians and political institutions but also on those of social actors and institutions to sustain political apathy or deny the existence of choice in relation to certain issues. For Flinders (2012), it seems that social institutions play a part in promoting a 'bad faith model of politics' as part of a strategy for the promotion of *sectional* rather than public interests. The focus now is not on the state like previous governmental depoliticisation but on *the existence (or not) of social [or public] deliberation across and between the various 'spheres of contingency' (governmental, public and private) that acknowledge the existence of choice"* (Wood & Flinders, 2014: 159). As a process, it seems that societal depoliticisation has not 'hollowed out' the state, but the nature and quality of public debate. Once depoliticised, the existence of

choices concerning a certain issue here are no longer debated (Harder, 1996) or there is very little public debate about major issues or options. This face is also seen to relate to civic decline and political disengagement in general. Additionally, societal depoliticisation pays a lot of attention to core business, efficiency, and best practice which is inclined to depoliticise many of the values and principles that originally informed the organisation (Blühdorn, 2007; Gaynor, 2011). A depoliticised polity is thus a 'choice-less democracy' in which the only questions revolve around who to choose to manage a predestined project (Wood & Flinders, 2014; see also Ferguson, 1990; Harriss, 2001).

The third face is called 'discursive depoliticisation' in which the key attention is on ideas and language, unlike the previous faces which are keen on institutions, arenas or actors. This face aims to introduce a decentred approach which cuts across conventional boundaries of the public/private. To put it simply, discursive depoliticisation happens

> *"when the debate surrounding an issue becomes technocratic, managerial, or disciplined towards a single goal, and hence changed in content. (A process of discursive politicisation would therefore involve the promotion of a topic as a public issue where competing interpretations exist as choices.) The promotion of an issue, but alongside a single interpretation and the denial of choice would, therefore, create a form of depoliticisation from this discursive perspective"* (Wood & Flinders, 2014: 161).

This discursive depoliticisation is achieved by establishing a discursive environment where a complex policy issue is simplified. Wood and Flinders (2014) also define the term 'politicisation' in this face as a radical act of recognising 'the political' implying the possibility which society could be constituted differently. In this sense, depoliticisation is thus an act of ignoring 'the political', denial of the capacity of political agency for control through 'speech acts'. And the most common languages used to obscure or deny the subjectivity and contestability of political debates or decisions, which to some extent can change the nature of democratic governance, are the technical or managerialist language and terminology (Jenkins, 2011) as well as the scientific discourse and the 'expertise' or scientifically determined solutions (Habermas, 1970).[5]

This links to what Bauman (1999) suggested—that is, the 'framing' of issues, typically by language, could serve to limit or even delete certain options by making any opposition appear almost 'irrational' (see also Rogers 2009a, 2009b; Kerr et al., 2011)—and the preference-shaping depoliticisation (Flinders

& Buller, 2006) which will be discussed below. For the second and, especially, third faces, depoliticisation is not only defined in terms of state strategies of governance, but as rhetorical strategies utilised by diverse social actors to either open up or close down the appearance of an issue as being 'political'. This is called the second generation of depoliticisation studies (Wood, 2016).

Table 2. Three faces of depoliticisation

Source: adapted from Wood and Flinders (2014: 157)

Face	Focus	Act	Example	Main Actors	Key Argument
Governmental	The state	Delegation of elected politicians from direct control	The hiving off of functions to arm's-length agencies, boards and commissions	Politicians	The transfer of issues from the governmental sphere to the public sphere through the 'delegation' of those issues by politicians to arm's-length bodies, judicial structures or technocratic rule-based systems that limit discretion
Societal	Public deliberation	Privatisation of the issue or function from the (collective) public sphere to the (individualised) private sphere	An important political issue is displaced from the media news-cycle	Politicians and citizens	The transition of issues from the public sphere to the private sphere and focuses on the existence of choice, capacity deliberation and the shift towards individualised responses to collective social challenges
Discursive	Political agency	Denial of the capacity for control through 'speech acts'	Need to cut fiscal deficit presented as 'common sense'	Anyone	The transfer of issues from the private realm to the 'realm of necessity' in which 'things just happen' and contingency is absent. It therefore focuses on the role of language and ideas to depoliticise certain issues and through this define them as little more as elements of fate

This 'three-face' model of depoliticisation is self-claimed to be a 'more sophisticated organising perspective on depoliticisation (Wood & Flinders, 2014).[6] It suggests the expansive approach to look at depoliticisation, extending beyond the merely governmental face arguably predominant in the governance literature. However, Fawcett and Marsh (2014) suspect that this model tends to see politicians and politics, as, at least, a large part of the problem which leads to the notion of the demonisation of politics and politicians. This is particularly evident in the governmental face. Depoliticisation is a largely positive development which curtails governments and politicians from exercising excessive power; politicians are self-interested actors who seek re-election and strategic actors who want to avoid blame or complicit actors who do not stand up and 'take on' big business. They further contend that the societal and discursive faces are inclined to see depoliticisation as a rather bad thing—the quantity and quality of political participation and political debate is reduced leading to lower levels of civic engagement and reduced democratic input into the political process, which may, ultimately, threaten the state and its democratic legitimacy in the case of the societal face, and the existence of a dominant discourse/narrative restricts choice and again impoverishes political debates and political inputs in the case of the discursive face (Fawcett & Marsh, 2014: 176).

Therefore, there are dimensions and perspectives in the concept of depoliticisation and politicisation. It seems that while Hay's model and the followers' ones illustrate the successive politicisation and depoliticisation of issues and institutions, others stress locations or sites of depoliticisation and politicisation. According to Blühdorn (2007; see also Mishra, 2011), depoliticisation and politicisation can also be identified in three locations or sites: issues, people, and institutions or organisations. This is summarised in the table below.

Table 3. The politicisation and depoliticisation of issues, people, and institutions or organisations

Source: adapted from Blühdorn (2007) and Mishra (2011)

	Politicisation	Depoliticisation
Issues	Politicisation of issues refers to when previously non-negotiable issues become negotiable and decidable. In other words, these issues are dragged from non-political spheres such as religion, tradition, nature or intangible political authorities into the arena of public contestation and scrutiny, where value pluralism gives rise to alternative scenarios, where decisions have to be justified and democratically legitimated.	Depoliticisation of issues implies that the issues are relocated from the arenas of democratic contestation and decision into the arenas which are governed by—at least supposedly unambiguous and non-negotiable scientific 'facts' and codes rather than contestable social values. Scientific laboratories, economic markets, expert committees or international regimes are the prominent examples of such supposedly apolitical arenas.

	Politicisation	Depoliticisation
People	Politicisation of people refers to when citizens or groups of citizens who have previously been uninterested in politics and excluded from it become engaged in political debates and turn into political actors. The examples are the inclusion of women, and lower castes into the mainstream politics.	The depoliticisation of people means that citizens who have previously been interested and engaged in public affairs withdraw from political arenas and retreat into the non-political pursuit of their personal affairs and well-being. The examples are the emergence of individualism, mistrust of political organisations and activities, consumerist social order and disappearance of community life due to personalised sources of entertainment.
Institutions/ organisa- tions	Politicisation of social organisations and institutions refers to the process in which previously nonpolitical organisations such as nature conservation societies, religious associations, sports clubs, nonprofit institutions, charities, universities or even courts of justice embrace, and more or less openly promote, specific political agendas.	Depoliticisation of institutions and social organisations signifies that bodies ranging from environmental organisations, micro-credit societies, water user associations, charities, retail cooperatives to youth volunteers discard their ideological commitments and political agendas and focus on their 'core business' or the 'task at hand'. Typically, professionalisation, managerial best practice and the pursuit of economic efficiency are counted as the principles guiding the transformation of social institutions. In politics, depoliticisation of social organisations and institutions is seen as a mechanism by which the state comes into the public view or presents itself in a technical role (Mishra 2011: 162), arguably as a rational actor with a narrow focus on how to improve economic effectiveness and efficiency; non-economic and political factors are overlooked, and the complex political, social and cultural landscape in which the state functions is grossly oversimplified (Bryld, 2000: 703).

Mishra (2011) interestingly summarised that:

> *"an extremely depoliticised outlook would hold that legal and political decisions are complicated matters which should be left to experts, whereas the extremely politicised outlook would argue that everyone affected by legal and political decisions should discuss them till there is a complete agreement about them. While the second outlook is unacceptable on practical grounds, the first is on principle unacceptable. The challenge is to find a synthetic amalgamation of the two views for a more desirable form of development"* (p.163).
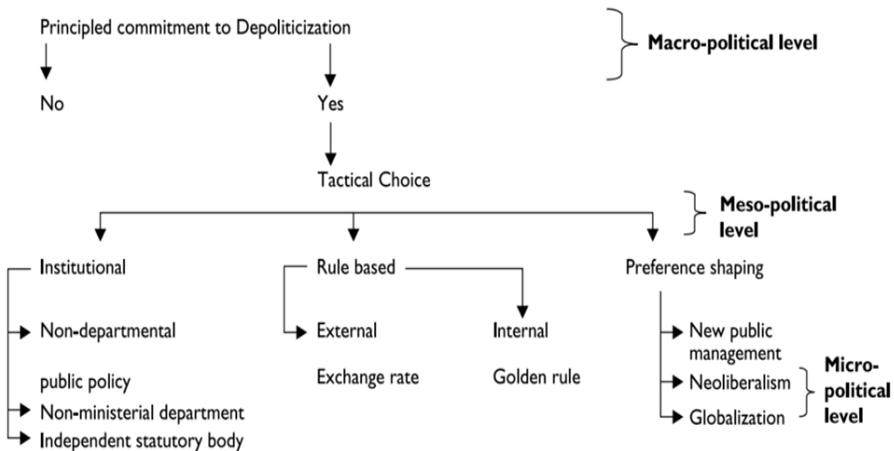
Tactics of depoliticisation

Flinders and Buller (2006; see also Flinders, 2008) contend that depoliticisation is possibly consisted of three elements: principle, tactic, and form. First, at the central of any depoliticisation tactic is a recognition that the *principle* of depoliticisation is appropriate for governments to pursue through the policy making process. This principle is also known as *macro-political level* of depoliticisation. Once the principal of depoliticisation has been adopted in a particular policy area, a choice has to be made concerning the most appropriate tactic, or mixture of tactics, to employ. This leads to the second element, that is, *meso-political level* of depoliticisation or *tactic* [7] used to reach the goal of the *principle* at any one moment. The tactics can be vary across spatio-temporal dimension although the recognition of the principle remains unchanging. Third, the former two elements will be supported by a car tool or *form*. This is *micro-political level* of depoliticisation. For them, the micro-level policy supports are *"the most transient part of a depoliticisation tactic, 'pulled in' to operationalise a particular technique and then discontinued in the event of implementation failure"* (Flinders & Buller, 2006: 298).

As depoliticisation has three level elements, lower levels changes are not likely to involve higher levels changes. Specifically, changes in tools (micro-level) and tactics (meso-level) are not likely to involve those in principles (macro-level). As aforementioned, principles committed to depoliticisation may remain while tools and tactics are adopted to operationalise the principle. Similarly, the replacement of a certain tool supporting depoliticisation is not necessarily equated with a change in the tactic more generally (Flinders, 2008; cf Hall, 1993).

Such division of a range of 'principles, tactics and tools' subsequently leads to the typical identification of three tactics vis-à-vis depoliticisation (see Figure 2): institutional, rule-based, and preference-shaping (see Flinders & Buller, 2006; Flinders, 2008).[8] This framework has then been applied many studies across a range of policy areas (e.g. Harriss, 2001; Feldman, 2003; Kettell, 2008; Rogers, 2009a; 2009b; Mishra, 2011; Maman & Rosenheck, 2011; Waghmore, 2012; Beveridge, 2012; Bloodgood & Tremblay-Boire, 2016).

Figure 2. Depoliticisation choices at three levels
Source: Flinders and Buller (2006: 299)

Here, two among three tactics—institutional and preference-shaping, which are often employed in development governance (Mishra, 2011)—are particularly needed further described.[9] Focusing on structures, institutional depoliticisation involves a designation and a creation of structures, institutions or organisations, which operate outside the total control and responsibility of politicians and central government. In other words, it looks at the delegation and reorganisation of the governance apparatus, and it is seen as possibly the most frequently employed tactic (Flinders & Buller, 2006; Mishra, 2011). The underlying doctrine of this depoliticisation is a formalised principal–agent relationship, which suggests that the principle (or minister) sets broad policy parameters while the agent (chief executive) can enjoy day-to-day managerial and specialist freedom within the broad framework set by ministers (Buller & Flinders, 2005). In other words, institutional depoliticisation *"is designed to release the agent (and its sphere of responsibility) to some extent from short-term political considerations—vote seeking, populist, short term pressures—to which elected politicians are subject"* (Buller & Flinders, 2005, p.298-299). Nevertheless, it can be argued that ministers can enjoy substantial powers in relation to the delegated agencies over issues such as appointments, policy frameworks and investment. This reminds us a distinction between an organisation's theoretical autonomy and the autonomy it can enjoy in practice (Mishra, 2011). As aforementioned, privatisation is an ideal form of such depoliticisation yet its common manifestation is the formation of a quasi-autonomous public organisation, also known as quango. Importantly, in the context of governance, depoliticisation should arguably not be considered as necessarily part of the 'hollowing out' or elimination of the state but be more accurately comprehended as an aspect of the transformation of the state (see Pierre & Peters, 2000; Peters & Pierre, 2016).

In relation to Hay's model of depoliticisation, institutional depoliticisation often entails a two-tier strategy in which many issues are demoted from the public to the private sphere (depoliticisation type 2) alongside a process of depoliticisation type 1 in which ministerial powers are transferred from the governmental sphere to independent regulatory bodies operating within the public sector but beyond direct political direction (Flinders, 2008: 252). To put it in institutionalist terms, this mirrors a degree of continuity and change—a continuity for a preference for institutional depoliticisation and delegation, and a change for the tools employed to govern at a distance (Flinders, 2008).

This institutional depoliticisation resonates the depoliticisation of social organisations and institutions (Blühdorn, 2007), which is a mechanism by which the state presents itself in a technical role, as a rational actor with a narrow focus on how to improve economic effectiveness and efficiency (Mishra, 2011). One way to observe this depoliticisation is to consider whether the institutional apparatus act as tools to delegate responsibility away from the political sphere of deliberation and contestation to a technical apolitical sphere. Sometimes in democratic governance, this raises a question regarding the degree of 'inclusiveness' of the delegated agency. Inclusion and exclusion is not a simple bipolar; inclusion in many cases represents an issue of co-option and control, such as the question of how the included have become included in on whose terms, and does not mean that people are not excluded (Mishra, 2011).

On the other hand, preference-shaping depoliticisation *"involves the invocation of preference shaping through recourse to ideological, religious, ritualistic, discursive, or rhetorical claims in order to justify a political position that a certain issue or function does, or should, lie beyond the scope of politics or the capacity for state control"* (Flinders, 2008, p.255). Preference-shaping depoliticisation has benefits as, argued Flinders and Buller (2006), it involves investing no structural (institutional depoliticisation) or legal (rule-based depoliticisation) capital. It is used to justify a refusal to intervene or regulate a particular issue. In effect, this tactic usually entails the creation of *"a position in which the availability of a political choice is denied in favour of either an insistence that a certain issue is beyond the domain of political control, or that a single rational and technically correct solution to a specific problem exists"* (Flinders & Buller, 2006, p.308). In other words, it constructs a new 'reality' in which the role of politics, here notably represented by politicians, and decision-making are presented as having been drawn by external forces or broad societal factors. The success of this politicisation arguably depends on normative beliefs which might be influential although the empirical evidence on which they are based is contested. Ultimately, this kind of depoliticisation aims to refine and alter public expectations about the state capacity and the responsibilities of politicians (Flinders & Buller, 2006). The situation of preference-shaping depoliticisation can be confirmed when the importance of

rhetorical or ideological strategies are emphasised leading the public to believe that depoliticisation has occurred because of such strategies and other constraints (see Burnham, 2001).

Preference-shaping depoliticisation goes along well with the depoliticisation of issues, people and institutions (Blühdorn, 2007). In development projects, it can be located by subjecting the issues, institutions and actors engaged in the project to a three-arena analysis (Hay's model) of depoliticisation. Here, one can specifically look at whether *"there exists a preference for specific issues and institutions in the discursive construction of the debates in governance that correspond to their shifting from the elected political realm to the non-elected apolitical realm"* (Mishra, 2011: 165). In short, discourse is the unit of analysis as one need to make the implicit values and ideologies in discourses explicit. By discourse, it means any dialogue, language and conversation. Preference of policy makers, institutions, and strategic groups can be seen in a form of language used in policy making and information sharing. In development context, for instance, the 'scientific discourse', which sees development as a rational, technical and scientific process, is often dominant and then indicative of a depoliticised form of development (Mishra, 2011: 165).

There is an attempt to link these tactics to the concept of the three faces of power given by Luke (2005). According to Flinders (2008), 'decision-making' power resonates with institutional depoliticisation as decision-making capacities are transferred to quasi-autonomous or independent public organisations. In contrast, 'non-decision-making' power reflect a kind of rule-based depoliticisation in which politicians consent to abide by set of frameworks and relinquish their discretion. The last face of power or 'radical view' is similar to preference-shaping depoliticisation in which it involves power being retained and controlled through processes of thought control.

Flinders and Buller (2006) also warn against a strictly separate examination tactics of depoliticisation which risks over-simplifying the complexity of modern governance at work because a mixture or amalgam of tactics are possible to be identified within any sector at any time. They also note that *"a government may pursue a number of different depoliticisation tactics at any one time; with the preference-shaping tactic providing a macro-political context or rationale; the rule-based tactic operating at the meso-political level and within a certain policy area; and, the institutional tool operating at the micro-political level and in response to specific incidents or demands"* (Flinders & Buller, 2006: 310). These tactics hence should not be seen as mutually exclusive; they are interdependent.

Postscript: Towards a Multi-level Concept of Depoliticisation

Wood (2016) starkly contends that deciding over *"the choice between 'broad' and 'narrow' conceptions of (de)politicisation is a false one. Depoliticisation and politicisation, it is argued, are deep, multilevel concepts that can have both 'broad' and 'narrow' resonance at an abstract theoretical level, a 'mid-range' conceptual level and a*

'micro' empirical level" (p.522). Likewise, Foster et al. (2014) suggest that one should not *"exaggerate the differences between governmental depoliticisation scholars and those who use a more expansive definition of the term. Often the work (and emphases) of both overlap and complement each other significantly"* (p.229). Consequently, Wood (2016) suggests us to look at depoliticisation as a 'multilevel' concept which *"can be applied in multiple contexts, and can have both a deep critical theoretical and even philosophical meaning, but also refers quite legitimately to concrete acts that can be usefully measured in empirical research"* (p.527). Namely, multilevel concept of depoliticisation can be applied in macro-level philosophical/theoretical critique, mid-range analytical framework building and microlevel empirical process tracing; each level of analysis generates key questions that can be resolved at that level, yet problems can also, and should, involve analysis at other levels. It is important to note that, in reality, studies of depoliticisation tend to operate across several levels.

At the macro, or theoretical, level of analysis, depoliticisation is broadly defined as strategies, processes and discourses producing an imaginary separation of the economic from the political. This level highlights the idea that neoliberal policies, discourses and institutions tend to hide or cloak the contestable or contingent nature of the ideas they institute, intentionally or unintentionally.

At the meso level, depoliticisation is defined rather as a set of tactics, tools and processes that place at one remove the political character of decision-making and lessen the capacity for collective agency. This level aims to advance 'middle-range' conceptual and analytical frameworks grouping the form of depoliticisation processes and their drivers, namely the conditions under which depoliticisation and politicisation occur, and how they impact upon the evolving structural and ideational conditions of particular political phenomena. The studies trying to analyse 'changes' in institutions (such as the shift to delegated governance, ideas (such as the institutionalisation of policy paradigms), and behavioural patterns (such as declining levels of political participation) exemplify clear conceptual and definitional criteria for demarcating what counts as a 'depoliticising' or 'politicising' tactic or technique (see Flinders & Buller, 2006; Hay, 2007; Flinders, 2008; Kuzemko, 2013).

Last but not least, the 'micro' (empirical) level is focused on operationalising depoliticisation by concretely investigating its dynamics in detailed process tracing and hypothesis testing. Here, depoliticisation is defined at a more empirical level as the reduction of direct ministerial coordination or the withdrawal or decline of political debate around a specific policy issue. Studies at this level can, for instance, be to methodologically determine how 'successful' certain state strategies of depoliticisation can be (Kettell, 2008).

Each level has its own weaknesses. Sometimes, there are problems which can only be answered theoretically or conceptually and vice versa. Wood (2016) warns that:

> *"detailed empirical analysis of (de)politicisation dynamics runs the risk (often experienced in 'empiricist' political science) of ignoring why this analysis matters for improving our understanding of anti-politics as a broader societal problem. These problems are more abstract in nature, and so while 'micro' level empirical analysis can offer evidence and critique for the 'higher' levels, it must also necessarily learn from and to some extent be guided by the problematique identified by the conceptual and theoretical literature"* (p.530).

Overall, this article theoretically reviews and shows ways to define and study depoliticisation and politicisation. The concepts are contested and there are many different ways to approach the concepts. What discussing here are regarded as systematic and opening a new way to study depoliticisation around the world. One challenge of the study of depoliticisation is whether depoliticisation or politicisation does actually occur and, if so, how it does. This is a matter of empirical investigation based on a rich, multi-level theoretical basis.

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Notes

[1] There is a close link between depoliticisation and governance. Many scholars assert that depoliticisation is one of the most interesting emergent concepts for analysing contemporary patterns of governance (Marsh, 2011; Foster et al., 2014; Flinders & Wood, 2014). Frequently, governance is introduced as *"a depoliticised and managerial process in which policy decisions can be reached through networked and collaborative interactions between rational and consensus-seeking policy experts"* (Fawcett & Marsh, 2014: 171; Torfing et al., 2012).

[2] However, Hay (2014) notes that *"depoliticisation of decision-making processes may, paradoxically, serve to enhance political control – in that a politics conducted largely behind closed doors is less encumbered by external pressures and influences and more autonomous as a consequence"* (p.302-303).

[3] Academically, most of the depoliticisation literature, according to Fawcett and Marsh (2014), is deeply politicist; the notion of 'politics' is shaped, or even determined, by structural inequalities. Acts of depoliticisation are affected by the structural context within which these decisions are taken (Fawcett & Marsh, 2014: 178).

[4] It is important to note that governmental depoliticisation does not occupy all aspect of institutional depoliticisation. Indeed, institutional depoliticisation can be more than only depoliticisation Type 1 (see Flinders, 2008).

[5] For example, the rise of 'medicalisation' (Haines, 1979)—redefinition of social problems as the purview of doctors rather than politicians—allows social issues such as drunkenness to be framed not as a social problem but as an *illness* or *addiction* which can be treated through the use of scientifically mandated medical treatments. Here, social problems are demoted to an element of 'life politics' which make the problems to be treated on an individual rather than collective basis. Consequently, alternative collective ways of dealing with the issue as a social problem (by using taxation, legislation, regulation, and so on) are prevented or

unattended (see also Adams, 1998; Edkins, 2002; Howell, 2007; Conrad, 2007). 'Scientisation' of policy or problem (see Habermas, 1970; Marcussen, 2006) is based on the similar argument as well. When an institution or issue is 'apolitical' or 'scientised', it transcends formal politics and is viewed as little more than a scientific exercise in complex economic modelling (see also Watson, 2002; Timmermans & Scholten, 2006; Hoppe, 2009; Roberts, 2010; Kinchy, 2010; Beveridge, 2012; Abolafia, 2012).

[6] Wood and Flinders (2014) claim that their model *is aware of the dialectical and iterative relationships between context, agency and structure; one that is sensitive to the existence of gradations and parallel processes of both politicisation and depoliticisation; and one that offers the capacity to more fully understand the relationship between depoliticisation, governance and the state"* (p.156). Nevertheless, it is then criticised by Hay (2014) regarding such as the 'complexity' of the model, the conflation of elements in the three faces, and the explanatory power of discursive depoliticisation. Similarly, Fawcett and Marsh (2014) see this model as having a narrow conception of 'politics' which is underpinned by, and shapes, the demonisation of politicians, and focusing too mush on the input, rather than the output, side of politics.

[7] Flinders and Buller (2006) explain the use of the term 'tactic' over 'strategy' as *"it suggests a less rational and more instrumental approach"* (p.298).

[8] Despite being 'the most comprehensive analytical framework' in the field, this tactics conception has not gone uncriticised. For example, Wood and Flinders (2014) criticise Flinders and Buller's influential work that *"it set in train a form of intellectual path-dependency that over-emphasised a governmental state-centric approach, but under-emphasised the less visible but arguably more important discursive and societal dimensions of depoliticisation"* (p.152; see also Jenkins, 2011).

[9] The tactic of politicisation or rule-based depoliticisation, in short, refers to *"the adaptation of a policy that builds explicit rules into the decision-making process that constraint the need for political discretion"* (Flinders, 2008, p.253). This type of depoliticisation is often found in relation to monetary policy in which, once established, policy implementation will be reduced to the 'technical' task of monitoring and sometimes adjusting these targets with little, if not absent of, political negotiation (see Flinders & Buller, 2006).

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