



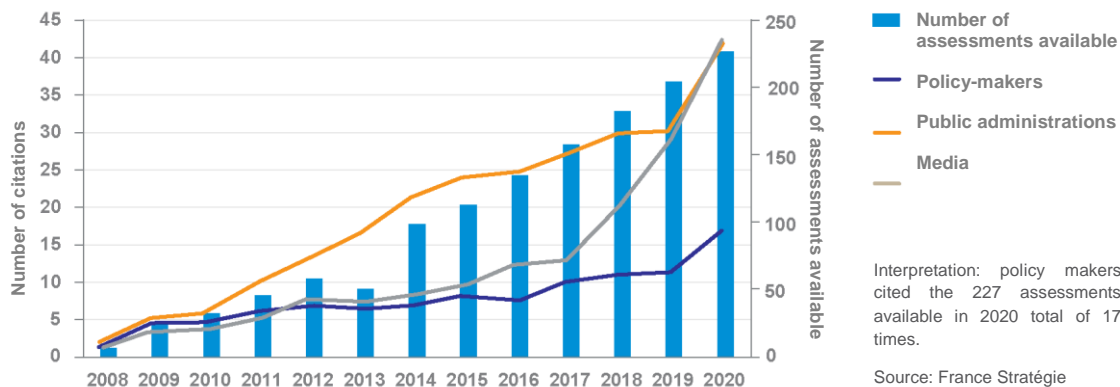
Who uses academic assessments of public policies?

In terms of academic assessments of the impact of public policies, France is catching up with more advanced countries¹. But are these assessments used more in public policy debates as a result? To explore this question, here we consider exclusively quantitative and causal assessments published in peer-reviewed academic journals and addressing the evaluative criterion of impact on an *ex-post* basis. Based on a sample of 227 assessments, this analysis identifies nearly 8,300 citations over the 2008-2020 period².

The first observation is that the overwhelming majority of citations are made by researchers (94%). Public policy makers, administrations and the media make little use of public policy assessments: 60 assessments in our sample were never even mentioned by these stakeholders over the period under review. Secondly, on an aggregate basis, citations increase rapidly between 2012 and 2020, from 230 citations in 2012 to almost 1,700 in 2020. The increase in fact occurs faster than the increase in the number of assessments available: each available assessment is cited 3.9 times in 2012, compared to 7.4 times in 2020. For public policy makers, public administrations and the media combined, the number of citations increased by a factor of 3.6 between 2012 and 2020. The number of citations remains stable, however, when corrected for the volume effect (0.4 citations per available assessment).

The “economy” as a topic is assessed frequently (30 times) and its assessments are among the most cited, with more than 50 citations on average per assessment. In contrast, topics such as “security and police” and “culture” are seldom assessed and are among the least cited (between 0 and 6 citations per assessment). Furthermore, the few assessments available on the topics of “family” and “environment” (6 assessments each) are more frequently cited than the multiple assessments on the topic of “labour”, with an average of 53, 42 and 35 citations observed, respectively, per assessment. For all topics combined, assessments are more often cited by these stakeholders if they are written in French, published by researchers coming from a public administration, or if they provide extensive (and not necessarily conclusive) results coupled with sufficiently broad recommendations. Confirmed by interviews with researchers and French National Assembly committees, these stylised facts have the potential to inspire best practices in evaluators keen on contributing to public debate.

Number of citations made annually 2008-2020



1. Bono P.-H. *et al.* (2018), “*Vingt ans d’évaluations d’impact en France et à l’étranger. Analyse quantitative de la production scientifique.*” (Twenty years of impact assessments in France and abroad. Quantitative analysis of scientific works), Working Paper No. 2018-06, France Stratégie, December.

2. For detailed information on methods and results, see Baïz A., Guyot M., Lewandowski M. and Suty A. (2022), “*Quelles évaluations des politiques publiques pour quelles utilisations ?*,” (What public policy assessments are conducted for what purposes?), Report, France Stratégie, June. For a study based on a broader definition of the assessment, see the second analysis paper derived from this report: Baïz A., Guyot M., Lewandowski M. and Suty A. (2022), “*Quelles évaluations sont mobilisées avant et après le vote d’une loi ?*”, (What assessments are conducted before and after a law is passed?), *Analysis Paper*, No. 110, France Stratégie, June.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Multiple institutional reports³ speak of obstacles to the use of evaluative studies by policy makers and in public debate. These obstacles concern the potential users of assessments (e.g. lack of cultural integration), the assessments themselves (e.g. lack of clarity), and obviously the unavailability of assessments at the appropriate times. The recommendations in these reports attempt to address these issues.

Academic literature has also focused on the theoretical utility and practical uses of assessments in the conduct of public policy⁴, of which there are many. Accordingly, an assessment can be used by administrations to improve the conduct of a given public policy (instrumental use); it can be used by researchers or citizens to obtain knowledge and better understand the ins and outs of government intervention (conceptual or cognitive use); it can also be used by public policy-makers seeking to justify their decisions (persuasive or even symbolic use). In particular, assessments can prove useful through the knowledge they produce, for example by providing information on the costs of government intervention. Assessments can also be useful through the assessment process itself. It can, for example, involve several stakeholders and thus facilitate the implementation of its findings. In addition, assessments can also be misused, due to poor understanding of the issues, political expediency or even bad faith. They can also be completely overlooked.

Taking an empirical approach, a few publications address the use of assessments through case studies. Very few offer a more systematic analysis based on broad samples. The meta-analysis performed by KPMG and Quadrant Conseil in 2017 on the use of 65 assessments related to the Modernisation of Government Intervention, is one of the rare available examples⁵. All of these publications tend to underscore the low actual use of assessments in the policy-making process. This document seeks to verify this finding on the basis of all impact assessments published in academic journals between 2008 and 2020.

Multiple indicators can be developed through an unprecedented textual analysis. From that basis, a statistical analysis can be performed by examining both the use of impact assessments and their characteristics. In addition to the textual analysis, around 100 meetings and interviews were conducted with evaluators and parliamentary committees in order to refine the assumptions and support the statistical analyses.

A SAMPLE OF 227 ACADEMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENTS PUBLISHED BETWEEN 2008 AND 2020

Using the EconLit database, impact assessments are identified by the same keywords (*random experiment, matching, etc.*) as the 2018 bibliometric study. Assessments should meet four criteria: (a) relate to French public policies; (b) examine the impact criterion *ex-post*; (c) be based on counterfactual reasoning (randomised trials, matching, regression discontinuity, differences-in-differences, etc.); (d) be published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal. In order to obtain an exhaustive and accurate sample, a series of human checks were carried out: articles were reviewed, questions submitted to their authors, and alternative search engines used. These various corrections resulted in a total of 227 assessments.

Potential assessment users: policy makers, administrations, media and researchers

Use of the 227 assessments was measured through the number of citations, distinguished by the type of stakeholder likely to make them:

- **Citations by public policy-makers** (government and Parliament), used in briefings, press releases or reports commissioned by the government. For example, the assessment by Cochard *et al.* (2008)⁶ is cited by *Report No. 159 prepared for the Finance Committee on the draft Amended Finance Act (2014-2015)* by Albéric de Montgolfier, submitted on 10 December 2014 to the Senate Presidency.

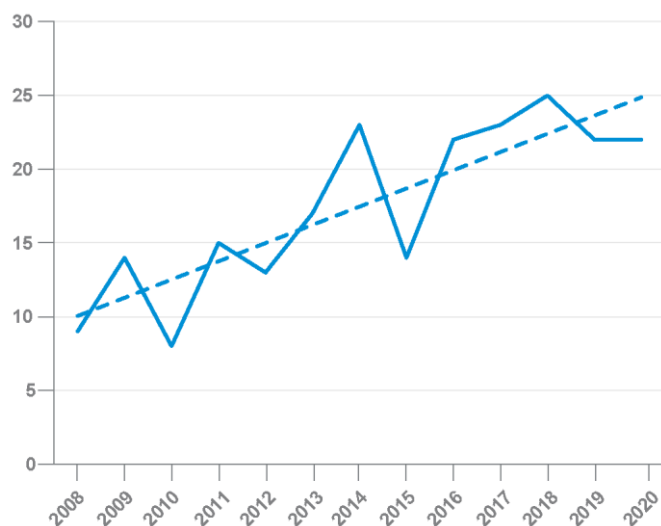
3. See in particular: Cese (2015), "[Voies possibles d'une promotion de la culture de l'évaluation](#)" (Potential ways to promote an assessment culture), French National Assembly (2018), [Rapport d'information du CEC sur l'évaluation des dispositifs d'évaluation des politiques publiques](#) (CEC briefing on the assessment of public policy assessment mechanisms), Public Policy assessment and Oversight Committee; Desplatz R. and Lacouette-Fougère C. (2019), "[L'évaluation des politiques publiques en France](#)" (Assessment of public policies in France), Working Paper No. 2019-13, France Stratégie, December; or: French Council of State (2020), [Conduire et partager l'évaluation des politiques publiques](#) (Conducting and sharing public policy assessments), 2020 annual survey, Paris, La documentation française.
4. Two meta-analyses are worth mentioning in particular: Delarue J. *et al.* (2009), "[Les évaluations sont-elles utiles ?](#)" (Are assessments useful?), Methodology Papers Series, Agence Française de Développement, January; and, more recently, T. Delahais *et al.* (2022), [Évaluation : Fondements, controverses, perspectives](#) (Foundations, controversies, prospects), anthology, Sciences Po.
5. SGMAP (2017), "Évaluation de la démarche globale d'évaluation des politiques publiques menée dans le cadre de la modernisation de l'action publique" (Assessment of the global approach to the assessment of public policies carried out for the purpose of modernising government intervention), a report prepared by KPMG and Quadrant Conseil, February.
6. Cochard M., Junod-Mesqui B., Arnaud F. and Vermare S. (2008), "[Les effets incitatifs de la prime pour l'emploi : une évaluation difficile](#)" (Incentive effects of the employment allowance: a challenging assessment), *Économie et Statistique*, No. 412, October, pg. 57-80.



- Citations by public administrations or institutions.** Citations have been identified in the publications of executive bodies (INSEE, ministerial statistical departments⁷, DITP, etc.), public institutions (Pôle emploi, Ademe, AFD, etc.) and international organisations (OECD, UN, WTO, WHO, etc.). For example, the assessment by Behaghel *et al.* (2014)⁸ is cited in the Court of Auditors' report *Pôle emploi à l'épreuve du chômage de masse* (Unemployment Office confronted with mass unemployment) (July 2015).
- Citations by researchers among themselves.** For example, the assessment by Gurgand *et al.* (2017)⁹ is cited 63 times in research publications, including the article by Beuchert *et al.* (2018)¹⁰.
- Citations in the media** (press, transcribed radio programmes, etc.). For example, the assessment by Lequien *et al.* (2012)¹¹ is quoted in the article "Le congé parental nuit plus au salaire qu'à la carrière des femmes" (Parental leave hurts women's wages more than their careers), *Capital* (July 2012).

Presentation of the sample with regard to factors liable to promote the use of impact assessments

Chart 1 - Change in the number of impact assessments



Interpretation: in 2014, 23 impact assessments were published.

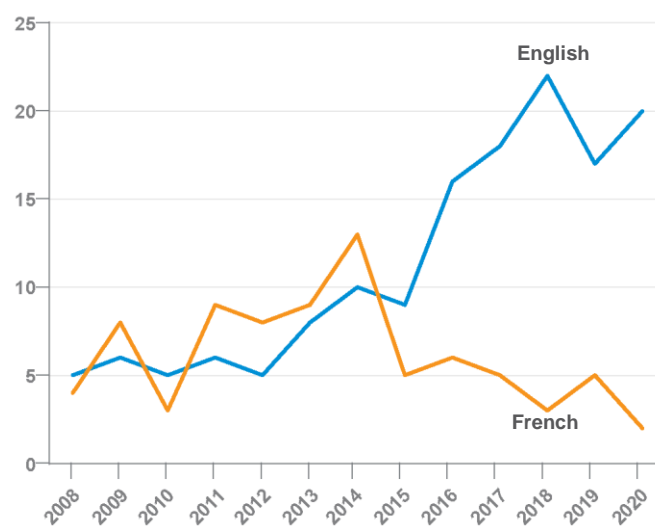
Source: France Stratégie

- Topic of policy subject to assessment:** in the sample, some topics¹² are more often subject to assessment.

Having observed that citations of assessments tend to vary, in general and depending on the stakeholder likely to cite them, the characteristics of the most cited assessments were compared with those of the least cited. Although this comparison stems more a calculation of correlations than a causal demonstration, it serves to outline a set of best practices that evaluators could draw on to ensure that their work is perceived as more useful and ultimately more widely used in public debate. Based on interviews and academic literature, eight assessment characteristics were selected as being likely to promote the use of impact assessments:

- Year of publication:** in the sample, the number of assessments published annually trends upward over the 2008-2020 period, from an average of 9 assessments in 2008 to almost 25 in 2020.
- Language of publication:** in the sample under review, most assessments are written in English. Of the 227 assessments in the sample, 147 are written in English and 80 in French. The percentage of assessments written in French fell significantly after 2014. These trends are likely attributable to the higher number of English-language academic journals, and their prestige in the academic world.

Chart 2 - Language of published assessments



Interpretation: in 2020, two assessments were published in French and twenty in English.

Source: France Stratégie

Of these, 22 also include a qualitative analysis (interview, survey, field observation, etc.), i.e. about 10%

7. If a Ministry (or an administration in general) cites an academic article in a report expressly commissioned by the government, the citation will be classified under "policymakers"; the report is more likely to appear as the direct result of a political decision.
 8. Behaghel L., Crépon B. and Gurgand M. (2014), "Private and public provision of counselling to job seekers: Evidence from a large controlled experiment", *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, vol. 6 (4), October, pg. 142-174.
 9. Behaghel L., de Chaisemartin C. and Gurgand M. (2017), "Ready for boarding? The effects of a boarding school for disadvantaged students", *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, vol. 9(1), January, pg. 140-164.
 10. Beuchert L., Humlum M. K., Nielsen H. S. and Smith N. (2018), "The short-term effects of school consolidation on student achievement: Evidence of disruption?", *Economics of Education Review*, 65, pg. 31-47.
 11. Lequien L. (2012), "The impact of parental leave duration on later wages", *Annales d'Économie et de Statistique*, No. 107-108, July-December, pg. 267-285.
 12. Based on the JEL (*Journal of Economic Literature*) classification, twenty topics are identified, each corresponding to a field of public policy: justice; economy; labour;

70% of the sample under review cover 4 topics, i.e. 159 out of a total of 227 assessments. The topics in question are: labour (61 assessments), education (38), social and healthcare issues (31) and the economy (29). Other topics are less often subject to assessment, such as policies related to research, security and police, culture and the environment, with less than 6 assessments for each of these topics.

- **Type of assessor:** in the sample, five types of assessment producers are identified. The following breakdown can be made in the sample of 227 assessments: (a) 26% of sample assessments are produced by a single university or research centre¹³; 41% by a combination of multiple universities or research centres¹⁴; 11% by one or more public administrations¹⁵; 21% by a combination of public administrations with universities or research centres¹⁶; and 1% by other stakeholders¹⁷.
- **Whether or not qualitative analysis was used:** in the sample, all 227 assessments seek to assess the impact of a given public policy using quantitative methods.

of the sample¹⁸. A large majority of the impact assessments identified (over 90%) are therefore based exclusively on quantitative methods.

- **Whether or not randomised trial methods were used:** 7% of the sample use a randomised trial method, which consisted in randomly selecting a control group versus a test group¹⁹. The other assessments rely on other quantitative counterfactual methods (regression discontinuity, modelling, matching, differences-in-differences, etc.).
- **Conclusive nature of assessment results:** by noting the significance of statistical results, a distinction is made in the sample between conclusive assessments (57% of the sample²⁰), conditionally conclusive assessments (12%²¹) and inconclusive assessments (30%²²).
- **Presence or absence of recommendations:** in the sample, 59% of the assessments make no recommendations; 8% make specific recommendations²³; and 33% propose general guidelines²⁴.

society; police and security issues; social and healthcare issues; culture; transport; environment; public authorities; education; civil service; housing and urban planning; family; agriculture; sports; business; energy; tourism; and research.

13. See for example Paty *et al.* (2020), where the authors are all from Université Lyon 2. Ly T. and Paty S. (2020), "Local taxation and tax base mobility: Evidence from France", *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, vol. 82, May.
14. See for example Cahu *et al.* (2010), where the authors are from Sciences Po, German research centre IZA, and Bocconi University in Italy. Cahu P., Demmou L. and Massé E. (2010), "L'impact macroéconomique de la réforme 2008 du crédit d'impôt recherche," (Macroeconomic impact of the 2008 research tax credit reform), *Revue économique*, vol. 61(2), March, pp. 313-339.
15. See for example Aeberhardt *et al.* (2009), where the authors are from INSEE at the date of publication. Aeberhardt R. and Sraer D. (2009), "Allègements de cotisations patronales et dynamique salariale" (Reductions in employer social security contributions and wage momentum), *Économie et Statistique*, No. 429-430, January, pp. 177-189.
16. See for example Carloni *et al.* (2019), where the authors are from the University of California and the US Congressional Budget Office. Benzarti Y. and Carloni D. (2019), "Who really benefits from consumption tax cuts? Evidence from a large VAT reform in France", *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, vol. 11(1), February, pp. 38-63.
17. See for example Goupille-Lebret *et al.* (2016), where the authors are from PSE and insurance company Axa. Goupille-Lebret J. and Infante A. (2016), "Impact des droits de succession sur le comportement d'accumulation du patrimoine" (Impact of inheritance tax on accumulation of wealth behaviour), *Revue française d'économie*, vol. 31(1), July, pp. 187-206.
18. See for example the assessment by Bourdon *et al.* (2014), which conducts telephone surveys aimed at determining the situation of apprentices affected by public policy and their reasons for leaving their company. Bourdon J., Guegnard C. and Michot C. (2014), "La sécurisation des parcours des apprentis à l'épreuve du choix politique" (Likelihood of retaining apprentices in light of public policy), *Formation Emploi - Revue française de sciences sociales*, No. 126, April-June, pp. 79-98.
19. Under this method, a test group and a control group are randomly defined, thus limiting selection bias in estimating the impact of government intervention. See for example the assessment by Behaghel *et al.* (2015), which covers the trial of anonymous CVs. The assessment is cited 109 times, including one citation by policy-makers, one by a public administration and two press articles (an article in *Capital* and an op-ed in *Libération*), the rest being citations by researchers. Behaghel L., Crépon B. and Le Barbanchon T. (2015), "Unintended effects of anonymous résumés", *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, vol. 7(3), July, pp. 1-27.
20. See for example the assessment by Bressoux *et al.* (2009), on teacher training: "The effect of class size is shown to be significant and negative: a smaller class size improves student achievement". Bressoux P., Kramarz F. and Prost C. (2009), "Teachers' training, class size and students' outcomes: Learning from administrative forecasting mistakes", *The Economic Journal*, vol. 119(536), February, pp. 540-561.
21. See for example Moschion's (2012) assessment of pre-school education: "Cet impact est significativement négatif pour les mères diplômées au maximum du baccalauréat et non significatif pour les mères plus diplômées" (This impact is significantly negative for mothers with no higher than a high school diploma and not significant for mothers with higher-level degrees). Moschion J. (2012), "Concilier vie familiale et vie professionnelle. L'effet de la préscolarisation" (Reconciling family and work. The impact of pre-school education), *Economic Review*, vol. 63(2), January, pp. 187-214.
22. See for example the assessment by Bunel *et al.* (2009), on the reduction of social security contributions in 2003: "Au total, son effet sur l'emploi total s'avère ambigu, qu'il soit mesuré en effectif ou en équivalent temps plein. Elle a cependant contribué à la hausse des rémunérations dans les deux catégories d'entreprises. (Overall, impact on total employment is ambiguous, whether measured in terms of work force or full-time equivalents. It has nevertheless contributed to the increase in pay for both categories of companies)." Bunel M., Gilles F. and L'Horty Y. (2009), "Les effets des allègements de cotisations sociales sur l'emploi et les salaires: une évaluation de la réforme de 2003" (Impacts of reductions in social security contributions on employment and wages: an assessment of the 2003 reform), *Économie et Statistique/Economics and Statistics*, No. 429-430, December, pp. 77-105.
23. See for example the assessment by Vaillant *et al.* (2011), on tobacco prices: "To this end, tax policy on RYO tobacco should equal the price per gram of cigarettes; currently, one gram of cigarette is worth €0.265 while one gram of RYO tobacco is €0.13." Vaillant N.G., Ben lakhdar C. and Lebrun T. (2011), "On the way of tobacco quitting: A VAR approach", *Economics Bulletin*, vol. 31 (4), pp. 3253-3258.
24. See for example the assessment by Bono *et al.* (2019), on the Scellier scheme: "Notre conclusion principale est donc que la politique de règlement d'urbanisme doit accompagner, voire précéder, tout dispositif incitatif à la construction de logements locatifs" (Our main finding is therefore that urban planning regulations must accompany, or even precede, any incentive to build rental housing). Bono P.-H. and Trannoy A. (2019), "L'impact du dispositif Scellier sur les prix des terrains à bâtir" (Impact of the Scellier scheme on housing construction prices), *Économie, et Statistique/Economics and Statistics*, No. 507-508, pp. 93-116.



ACADEMIC ASSESSMENTS ARE NOT WIDELY CITED OUTSIDE OF THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY, ALTHOUGH CITINGS ARE ON THE RISE

On an aggregate basis, the textual analysis found a total of 8,294 citations for all 227 impact assessments between 2008 and 2020. This total corresponds to an average of about 37 citations per assessment. Almost 94% of the citations were made by researchers among themselves. In other words, only 6% of the total number of citations are made by public policy makers, public administrations and the media. Of these 218 evaluations cited at least once by researchers, 20% were cited at least 50 times.

In contrast, other stakeholders (policy makers, public administrations and the media) make far fewer citations. In particular, public policy-makers cite only 72 of the 227 assessments (or about 32%) and their citations correspond to only 1.2% of the total citations. Consequently, on average, each assessment is cited 0.45 times by public policy-makers for all 227 assessments. Public administrations cite assessments slightly more often than policy-makers, citing each assessment on average 1.1 times. On average, the media cites each assessment 0.7 times. Only 20% of assessments are cited at least once by all stakeholders.

Table 1 - Number of citations of academic assessments

	By policy makers	By public administrations	By researchers	By the media	Total	Total (excluding researchers)
Number of citations	102	255	7,774	163	8,294	520
Percentage of total citations	1.2%	3.1%	94%	1.9%	100%	6.0%
Average number of citations by...	0.45	1.1	34	0.7	37	2.3
Number of assessments cited at least once	72	149	218	90	223	167

Interpretation: for all 227 assessments, policy-makers made a total of 102 citations, i.e. 1.2% of the total 8,294 citations, and 0.45 citations per assessment. They cite 72 of 227 assessments. For the last column in particular, 167 assessments are cited by at least one of the following types of stakeholders: policy-makers, public administrations or the media.

Source: France Stratégie

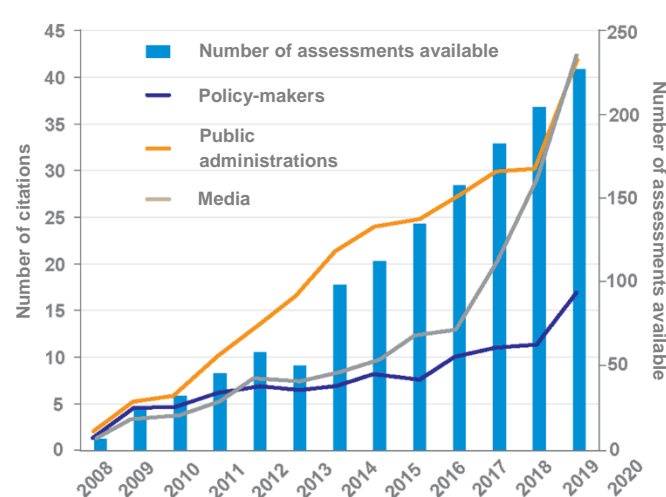
The assessment by Bressoux *et al.* (2009)²⁵, which looked at the impact of teacher training and classroom size on student achievement, is one such assessment cited by all types of stakeholders (policy makers, public administrations, researchers and the media).

By crossing-checking the number of citations with assessment characteristics, a number of stylized facts emerge.

Year of publication

The oldest assessments are the most cited (71 citations for a 2008 assessment versus 12 citations for a 2020 assessment). This trend is primarily due to the fact that more recent assessments have had less time to be cited. When estimating the number of citations made each year, for all assessments produced between 2008 and the year in question, a very strong upward trend is apparent. Thus, almost 1,700 citations were made in 2020, compared to about 50 in 2008. This uptrend can be automatically attributed to the growing number of available assessments (9 in 2008 and 227 in 2020). When corrected for this volume effect, an uptrend can still be observed, but to a lesser extent: in 2012, there were 3.9 citations per available assessment, compared to almost 7.4 per available assessment in 2020²⁶. The same observation can be made for citations by policy-makers, public administrations and the media: between 2012 and 2020, based on assessments available each year, the annual number of citations by these stakeholders combined increases from 28 to more than one hundred, i.e. a 3.6-fold increase.

Number of citations made annually, 2008-2020



Interpretation: in 2020, policy-makers made 17 citations out of 227 available assessments.

Source: France Stratégie

25. Bressoux P., Kramarz F. and Prost C. (2009), "Teachers' training, class size and students' outcomes: learning from administrative forecasting mistakes", *The Economic Journal*, vol. 119(536), March, pp. 540-561.

26. It should be noted that this is a minority of the actual total number of citations, as assessments published before 2008 may also have been cited between 2008 and 2020 but are not counted here. This minority already gives an accurate order of magnitude, as the number of impact assessments is relatively low before 2008 (less than 15% of the number between 2008 and 2020).

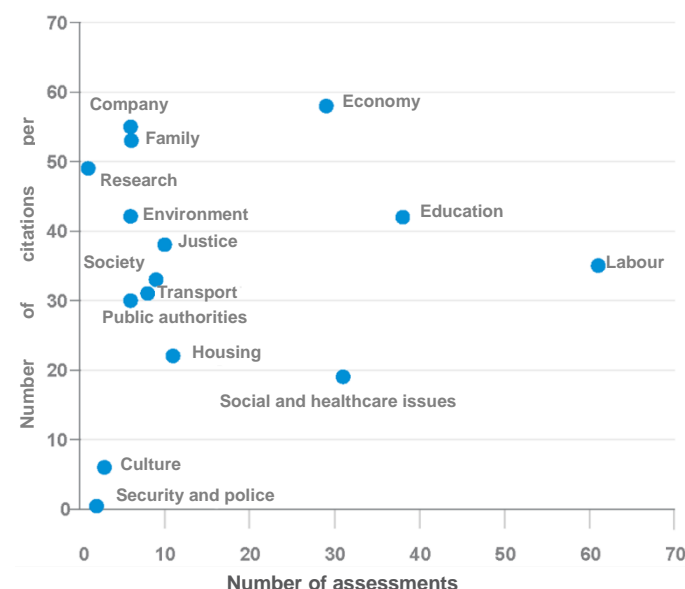
When corrected for the volume effect, however, the number of citations per available assessment holds relatively steady at around 0.4 over the period under consideration.

The increasing production of assessments thus appears to be accompanied by the increasing use of assessments. In addition, the time between the publication date and the citation date is generally between two and seven years, with an average of four and a half years.

Language of article

Public policy-makers and public administrations cite more assessments written in French (0.64 and 1.51 citations per assessment, respectively) as opposed to English (0.35 and 0.91, respectively). The opposite can be seen in the media, and especially among researchers, which cite English assessments four times more often than French assessments. The English language may be associated with more prestigious academic journals (such as the *American Economic Journal*), meaning that articles written in English may hold greater resonance with researchers. In addition, researchers successfully publishing articles in prestigious Anglo-Saxon journals are likely to enjoy a reputation that makes it easier to cite their work in the media.

Chart 4 - Number of assessments and number of citations per assessment, by topic



Interpretation: each of the 61 assessments covering “Labour” was cited on average 35 times (policy-makers, public administrations, researchers and media combined).

Source: France Stratégie

Conclusive nature of assessment results

While it is understandable that lacklustre assessments are used less often due to their lack of clarity, it is surprising that the most conclusive assessments are the least cited (2.1 citations excluding citations among researchers), and that conditionally conclusive assessments are the most cited (2.7 citations excluding citations among researchers). There are two explanations for these findings. First, conditionally

Assessment topic

The “economy” is both one of the most often assessed and most cited topics, with more than 50 citations per assessment. In contrast, topics such as “security and police” and “culture” are relatively seldom assessed, and their assessments are the least cited (between 0 and 6 citations per assessment). In addition, although it is by far the most often assessed (61 assessments), “labour” as an assessment topic is not very often cited: each assessment on this topic is cited on average 35 times, which is close to the overall average of 37.

Type of assessor

Excluding citations by researchers, it appears that assessments conducted by public administrations, alone or in collaboration with researchers, are the most cited. These assessments, which make up 32% of the sample, are each cited more than three times on average. Assessments produced by multiple universities or research centres (41% of the sample) are each cited on average 2.2 times; and only 1.3 times for assessments produced by researchers from the same university or research centre (26% of the sample).

Whether or not qualitative analysis is used

Although use of a qualitative method would appear in principle to favour the use of the assessment in public debates (greater clarity and extensiveness of results, involvement of stakeholders, etc.), this is not what emerges from our analysis. For policy-makers and public administrations combined, the number of citations is indeed very close (around 2) whether or not a qualitative method is used. Only researchers seem to prefer strictly quantitative assessments (35 citations per assessment compared to 30 citations for assessments including a qualitative method). This may be because strictly quantitative assessments are published in more prestigious journals.

Use (or not) of a randomised trial method

Distinguishing the sixteen assessments based on randomised trials from the other assessments shows that the former are popular with policy-makers and researchers. Policy-makers cite such assessments almost 50% more and researchers almost three times more. In addition to their statistical qualities and clarity, such assessments intrinsically correspond to policies in which random trials and assessments are of great interest in themselves.

Presence or absence of recommendations

While most researchers interviewed felt that the formulation of recommendations fell outside the scope of assessment, recommendations appear to be appreciated by policy-makers for their operational utility. Overall, it appears that assessments containing specific recommendations are the most overlooked, while those containing general recommendations are most often cited. This is particularly



conclusive assessments, by definition, have significant and non-significant results, depending on the context and the variables selected. Such assessments are thus inherently more extensive and more varied, which is conducive to discussions in the public sector and among researchers. The case of the CICE (competitiveness and employment tax credit) assessment is emblematic: while its results are conditionally conclusive, they address various impacts (wages, employment, competitiveness, etc.) in a sensitive political context. Moreover, conditionally conclusive assessments, and all the more so inconclusive assessments, can be interpreted more openly, either to defend a policy or to challenge it. The *cherry-picking* bias, which consists in choosing assessments and results that are in line with a given set of interests and prejudices, could therefore also work against assessments that are overly conclusive.

true for public policy-makers (0.37 citations per assessment for assessments containing specific recommendations, compared to 0.57 for assessments containing general recommendations), and especially for researchers (20 versus 48 citations). At best, assessment containing specific recommendations are cited as often as assessments without recommendations. Policy-makers may be put off by the idea of being dictated to through overly specific recommendations. Researchers may also shy away from assessments that make specific recommendations because they feel that the assessment has become too political or not academic enough; this interpretation is supported by the interviews conducted.

Table 2 - Summary of the average number of citations based on assessment characteristics

Assessment characteristics	Percentage of assessments cited by all stakeholders	Average number of citations per assessment (excluding researcher citations)	Average number of researcher citations per assessment	Sample size
LANGUAGE				
English	14%	2.0	47	147
French	23%	2.9	11	80
TYPE OF ASSESSOR				
Public administration	28%	3.8	24	25
Same academic institution	7%	1.3	20	58
Combination public administration - academic institution	21%	2.9	44	48
Multiple academic institutions	19%		41	94
Other	0%	0.5	20	2
QUALITATIVE METHOD (IN ADDITION TO QUANTITATIVE METHOD)				
No	25%	2.3	35	205
Yes	17%	2.5	30	22
RANDOM TRIAL METHOD				
No	7%	2.3	30	211
Yes	17%	2.6	90	16
CONCLUSIVE RESULTS				
Yes	17%	2.1	32	130
Conditionally	18%	2.7	42	28
No	17%	2.6	36	69
RECOMMENDATIONS				
No	14%	2.1	29	134
General guidelines	23%	2.6	48	74
Explicit recommendations	16%	2.1	20	19
GENERAL SAMPLE	17%	2.3	34	227

Interpretation: with regard to the "language of assessment", 14% of the 147 assessments written in English are cited at least once by all stakeholders (policy-makers, public administrations, media, researchers); excluding the citations made by researchers among themselves, they are each cited 2.0 times on average by the other stakeholders (policy-makers, public administrations and media combined); they are each cited 47 times by researchers

Source: France Stratégie

CONCLUSION: CONTRIBUTIONS AND PROSPECTS

Ultimately, impact assessments published in peer-reviewed academic journals are increasingly cited in public debates, whether by policy-makers, public administrations, the media or researchers themselves. They tend to be cited more often - and in particular by policy-makers and public administrations - if they are written in French, produced by administrations (or in collaboration with them), or if they formulate extensive (and not necessarily conclusive) results and sufficiently broad recommendations. Across the board, assessments produced by joint assessment committees, involving public administrations and other stakeholders (researchers, civil society, etc.), are significantly more frequently cited. Assessors could draw on these correlations to strengthen the use of their work in public debates. Despite this dynamic, the total number of citations - excluding those made by researchers among themselves - remains low overall by public policy-makers, public administrations and the media.

In addition, this study points to several developments. It would be interesting to conduct case studies aimed at examining the implicit uses of assessments (not through formal citations), or their misuses (distorted citation of results). These studies could also look at other assessment characteristics (length, authors' reputation, formulation of their evaluative questions, etc.) or external factors that may or may not favour the use of assessments (level of assessment culture in a press department or institution, political sensitivity of an issue, etc.) In addition, it may be useful to test alternative time periods in order to assess time effects (e.g. time taken to publish an assessment), which can influence the results of the analysis. Similarly, other statistical categories (e.g. list of topics addressed in public policy fields) can be tested to further capture potential structure effects²⁷.

Last but not least, it should be noted that the sample of assessments considered here refers to a restrictive understanding of public policy assessment. Other types of assessments exist: they may be published outside of peer-reviewed academic journals; they may be produced by administrations, members of parliament or private-sector firms; they may address evaluative criteria other than impact (implementation, cost, etc.); and they may be based on methods other than quantitative and causal methods. The use of these assessments, in the broad sense of the term, is the subject of the second analysis paper²⁸ derived from the same report²⁹.

Key words: public policy assessment, citations, public debate, public policy makers, public administrations, researchers, media.

27. These various potential biases, mentioned in the report, have been partially tested.

28. Baiz A. *et al.* (2022), "Quelles évaluations sont mobilisées avant et après le vote d'une loi ?" *Analysis Paper*, No. 110, France Stratégie, June; Baiz A. *et al.* (2022), *Quelles évaluations des politiques publiques pour quelles utilisations ?*, Report, France Stratégie, June.

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