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Interest in science is growing in Brazil – 04/08/2022 – Sou Ciência

Despite the surge in denial and the president's attacks on scientists, Brazilians have faith in science, especially that of universities and public institutions. More than that, they trust, defend and are interested in knowing more.

This is according to a survey conducted by SoU_Ciência in collaboration with Instituto Ideia Big Data, based on updated and unpublished data that we publish on our website. The opinion poll shows that we are dealing with a new 'political topic' in which the population has great confidence: the 'public scientist' is almost a new national hero. Fortunately, a non-messianic, evidence-based hero. But much remains to be done for true translation and 'scientific literacy' in Brazil and for deepening the debate on different areas, methods and purposes of scientific work – not always consensus.

The current situation shows that the clash between denial and science does not occur strictly in the field of knowledge, but also in the field of politics, where the right to life is at stake. It is in this context that science has also consolidated itself as a political subject and one of the main social forces of opposition. In other words, science is not limited to labs and specialists, and is recognized by Brazilian society as a public good, part of citizenship.

In conducting the research, we continued with a historical series produced by the Ministry of Science and Technology (MCTI) and the Center for Management of Strategic Studies (CGEE) on the perception of science and technology in Brazil. However, the series had run its last roundup in 2019 and lacked data pointing to the country's current context. We've updated the results for 5 relevant questions based on answers from 1,200 people. At the end of January, a data collection took place across the country, which has already been partially published in an article in Folha de S.Paulo.

Respondents were asked about their interest in eight topics (politics, health, environment, arts and culture, science and technology, sports, economics and religion), and the results indicate that the areas of interest that grew the most in 2019 and 2022 were science and politics, while interest in religion declined.

This measurement is not arbitrary. The federal government's role in the pandemic has led to a "politicization of science" and public visibility of debates and conflicting views, with the government and some doctors being "chloroquiners" on the one hand, and the rest of the world on the other. scientists and proponents of the Unified Health System (SUS) based on evidence.

The main topics are health (87%) and the environment (86%), followed by science and technology (82%) and economics (80%). These are important topics not only for the moment of the pandemic, but also because they are areas under heavy attack by the federal government, referencing the economic and social crisis, austerity in resources, erratic policies and even the facilitation of destruction. of the environment.

When asked which professions Brazilians trust most as a source of information, the growth of scientists from public institutions has been impressive – undoubtedly the result of the work to fight covid-19. In 2019, scientists were linked with religious and behind doctors and journalists. In 2015 they were in fourth place. But in 2022 they will reach 41.6% of the preference of Brazilians, a spectacular growth of 253% compared to 16.4% in 2019.

It is interesting to note that the direct "competitor" of the scientist in the other studies, the religious leader, fell into popular preference. After reaching its peak in 2015 as a possible "reliable source of information" (first chosen by 19.5% of Brazilians), it fell to 1/3 of its previous prestige in 2022, just 6.5%.

Trust in politicians remains on the ground, at less than 1%. This means that the aforementioned revival of Brazilians in politics does not mean an increase in the prestige of politicians, but a possible politicization of society.

Despite the rating, only 26% of respondents said they knew the name of a scientist. The number may seem low, but it is almost 4 times higher than in 2019, when only 7% knew the name of a Brazilian scientist.

This shows us that both scientists need to continue their efforts to translate science to the general public, and that more government policies for inclusion and encouragement are needed. To know and appreciate science, one must have curiosity on the one hand and access on the other. In addition, it is essential to carry out a series of dissemination actions and SoU_Ciência also has the mission to contribute to this.

Asked the same question about research institutions, the result was equally impressive. In 2019, only 9.4% of Brazilians knew what to call a Brazilian research institution. In 2022, that number rose to 42.2%, that is, it increased more than 4 times. The highlight was the Butantan Institute in first place and Fiocruz in second place.

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The research shows that, despite the human and political tragedy we are experiencing, the pandemic has left a positive balance: science and its professionals are recognized, valued and are more than ever on Brazil's political agenda. Indispensable elements to build a future with development and progress in all areas.

After the Covid-19 pandemic, the challenge will be to ensure that the "pro-science wave" does not recede, but takes us to a new level in the relationship with knowledge, with the increase in the discernment of Brazilian society. May this awakening usher in new and favorable times of sustainable development with social justice, with greater health and education for the whole population.

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