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The construction of urgency discourse around mega-projects: the Israeli case
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The construction of urgency discourse around mega-projects: the Israeli case

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Abstract

Various studies have pointed to urgency in decision-making as a major catalyst for policy change. Urgency evokes a crisis frame in which emotions and cognitive and institutional biases are more likely to be mobilised in support of the policy preferences of powerful actors. As a result, decision-makers tend to be driven by emotions and opportunity, often with detrimental results for the quality of the planning process. Although urgency has such a profound influence on the quality of decision-making, little is known about how, when, and by whom urgency is constructed in the planning process of public infrastructure. By means of a discourse analysis, this study traces the timing, motives and ways actors discursively construct a sense of urgency in decision-making on the building of terminals for the reception and treatment of the natural gas that was recently found off the coast of Israel. The results of this study indicate that mostly government regulators, but also private sector actors, deliberately constructed an urgency discourse at critical moments during the planning process. By framing the planning process as urgent, regulators manipulatively presented the policy issue as a crisis, during which unorthodox planning practices were legitimised while the consideration of alternative planning solutions was precluded. Thus, urgency framing is a means of controlling both the discourse and the agenda – and therefore an exercise in power-maintenance – by entrenched interest groups.

Keywords Mega-Projects; Infrastructure; Planning; Urgency; Crisis; Discourse; Framing

Introduction

The McKinsey Global Institute (Dobbs et al. 2013) forecasts a 60% increase in infrastructure expenditure in the coming two decades, mainly to be delivered as mega-projects. The propensity to favour mega-projects (Priemus 2008) aggravates the discordance between mega-project planning and the values of economic efficiency, truth-telling and proper democratic process (Flyvbjerg 2012). Project viability figures and benefit forecasts are over-optimistic on a structural basis (Bruzelius et al. 2002), leading to a situation where "cost overruns and benefit shortfalls are inherent to mega-projects" (Flyvbjerg 2012: 174). Mega-project planning tends to function as a vehicle for less democratic and more elite-driven priorities (Swyngedouw et al. 2002). For this reason and because they are often substantially financed by public funds, mega-projects have become an object of major concern and resentment for the general public (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003).

Despite their poor performance records, mega-projects are known to cast "a powerful magnetic spell on ambitious politicians" (Priemus 2010: 1023) who attempt to win social and political support by presenting a more optimistic image of mega-project planning than reality justifies (Bruzelius et al. 2002). The contention around mega-projects often implies that both project proponents and opponents try to exercise power by "imposing a particular frame or discourse onto the discussion" (Hajer and Versteeg 2005: 177). Because the dominant discourse "provides a bias both in conceptualising the problem at hand as well as the solution that can be conceived for those problems" (Hajer and Versteeg 2005: 179), it is of paramount importance for those wishing to influence decision-making to dominate the discourse regarding the problem in order to create support for their preferred policy (Lakoff 2010).

A common framing mode is urgency. By framing the issue as urgent, a bias geared toward action in decision-making is mobilised (De Jong 2008). Urgency framing is employed in an attempt to coax decision-makers to go ahead with the project. It is instrumental in mobilising support for the solution preferred by the actors who dominate the discourse and is often exploited to justify the exclusion of actors who promote alternatives to the proposed mega-project from participating in the decision-making process. Although various studies touch on the subject of urgency (e.g., Garb 2004; Huijs 2011; Majoor 2011; Sánchez and Broudehoux 2013), no study has yet been undertaken on urgency as a deliberate discursive strategy to increase the likelihood of project realisation. Given the immense risks and uncertainties associated with large-scale infrastructure project planning and the potentially disastrous effect of urgency on the decision-making process (cf. Maor 2012, 2014), the function of

urgency in the policy process critically requires scrutinising. This study seeks to fill that void by analysing how urgency discourse is portrayed by actors who partake in the policy process, when during this process the use of urgency discourse is triggered, and how urgency is institutionalised as an integral part of the policy process. For that intended purpose this study scrutinises the minutes of National Outline Plan 37/H (henceforth NOP 37/H) on natural gas reception and treatment terminals, a proposed energy infrastructure mega-project for the transportation, reception, treatment and distribution of the vast reserves of natural gas that were recently found off the coast of Israel.

In the following section, the literature on the cognitive, discursive and institutional aspects of urgency is reviewed and concluded with an outline of the hypotheses. Then the case study is presented, followed by the data and methods for empirical analysis, and the results of this research. The final section opens with a discussion of the results and concludes with the theoretical and practical implications of the results.

The cognitive effect of urgency

Decision-making is a complex cognitive process that critically involves the processing of large amounts of information in a limited period of time, regarding various issues that demand attention (Ariely and Zakay 2001). The time and attention of the decision-maker are scarce resources for which many issues compete (True et al. 1999). Presenting an issue as a crisis or emergency demanding urgent action may help to gain recognition and attention for the issue (Zahariadis 2003). Urgency is then instrumental in prioritising the issue at hand and justifies disproportionate allocation of time and resources to its solution (Ariely and Zakay 2001; Lipsky and Smith 1989). The premise that the issue may be exacerbated by inaction urges the decision-maker to act expeditiously. As a result, issue prioritisation and choice and agenda-setting take place under stress conditions (Zahariadis 2003).

However, when confronted with urgency, the cognitive ability of the decision-maker to detect biases and assume a critical attitude to the decision-making process becomes compromised (Maor 2014). Deadlines for example increase the likelihood of error and limit the creative ability of the decision-maker to deal with changing circumstances (Carpenter and Grimmer 2009). Information that does not correspond with the ideologies and pre-existing biases of the decision-maker is less likely to be processed and is at times even outright rejected (Ariely and Zakay 2001). Existing biases markedly limit the scope of possible alternative consideration (Hoeffler et al. 2006). Thus decision-making under time-stress tends to be characterised by bolstering preferred solutions and discarding viable alternatives (Ariely and Zakay 2001). As a result, decision-makers are not driven by rationality, but by emotions and opportunity instead (Lorenzoni and Benson 2014; Maor 2014). The emotional responses to time-stress often promote risk-taking behaviour in the decision-making process (Tversky and Kahneman 1981). Urgency directly affects the emotional state of the decision-maker, effecting change in the very process by which decisions are made (Maule et al. 2000). This would suggest that through the changed behaviour of the decision-maker, urgency can permeate the policy process and may become institutionalised in the policy that is ultimately adopted. However, this angle is largely overlooked by existing studies. Most studies that deal with urgency tend to focus on the effects of urgency and time-pressure on the cognitive capacity for decision-making at the level of the individual (cf. Ariely and Zakay 2001; Maule et al. 2000; Tversky and Kahneman 1981). Yet no study is explicitly concerned with the ramifications of urgency on an institutional level.

The institutionalisation of urgency

The cognitive limitations of the decision-maker render the policy process inherently resistant to policy change. Only the information that represents the interests of those in power is considered (Cobb and Elder 1971). Agenda-setting and the policy process are therefore expressions of the mobilised biases of decision-makers (Schattschneider 1960), which become ingrained in institutional standards, norms and operational practices (True et al. 1999). Given these premises, the theory of punctuated equilibrium posits that the political system generates friction and is inherently conservative (Jones and Baumgartner 2012). As a mechanism of maintaining the institutional status quo, friction serves to constrain policy action and provide institutional stability in a complex environment. Only when the urgency of the problem has become such that the institutional status quo does no longer suffice, and immediate response is needed, the political system will overcome friction. This implies that policy-making oscillates between underreacting and overreacting to external signals (Jones and Baumgartner 2012) that may be triggered by urgency.

The literature on policy change points towards the use of discursive devices that connect the policy ideas of the actors involved in the decision-making process with policy action (Fischer and Forester 1993; Hajer 1995). A perceived sense of urgency in the policy process is articulated and communicated to other actors in the policy process and to the public in order to set the agenda and drive policy change. In the literature on climate change policy for example, it has been marked that metaphors such as "apocalyptic" (Foust and O'Shannon Murphy 2009), "catastrophic", "rapid", "urgent" and "irreversible" (Risbey 2008) are used as rhetorical strategies to frame the issue as being in urgent need of affirmative policy action. Argumentative and persuasive rhetoric is another linguistic mechanism through which urgency can be portrayed in the policy process. For instance, crisis rhetoric is employed to instil a sense of urgency in various policy processes, driving the UK government to adopt ambitious policies regarding climate change (Lorenzoni and Benson 2014), driving comprehensive education policy reforms in the EU (Nordin 2014), generating public consensus for major urban intervention in Rio de Janeiro (Sánchez and Broudehoux 2013), and advancing an investment agenda in the development of the Barcelona Forum (Majoor 2011). Framing is yet another linguistic mechanism that provides a lens through which reality is interpreted, organised, and communicated (Fischer and Forester 1993). Frames on policy issues are realised in the policy actions of the actors involved, and manifest in the discourse, metaphors and narratives used to describe the issue (Rein and Schön 1993).

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Policy change can be conceptualised as the mobilisation of cognitive and institutional mechanisms which can result in the generation of "new sets of rules, values and practices" (Lorenzoni and Benson 2014: 12). Institutional measures that facilitate strong emotional responses of decision-makers to crisis-events often come at excessive social costs (Maor 2012). Streamlining the policy process is one such mechanism that can be triggered by urgency. For example, the sense of urgency that accompanied the perceived crisis of Israel's lag in road infrastructure development triggered government regulators to facilitate the development of the Trans-Israel Highway by steering it smoothly through bureaucracy (Garb 2004). Other institutional mechanisms used in the context of urgency include the exclusion of actors from participating in the decision-making process and the lack of consideration of alternatives. For example, during the decision-making process on the Olympic City in Rio de Janeiro excessive measures aimed at meeting deadlines were authorised, such as the exclusion of local and environmental groups and the acceleration of the decision-making process (Sánchez and Broudehoux 2013). Likewise, in response to the perceived urgency of the development of the floodplain of the Yamuna River in Delhi, excessive instruments of policy process streamlining, such as the suspension of legal, procedural and regulatory practices, were institutionalised as a practice of planning (Follmann 2015). Securitisation can provide yet another institutional mechanism. In the policy process on the exportation of natural gas in Israel, urgency was mobilised to justify excessive and non-democratic institutional measures to prevent alleged existential threats from materialising (Fischhendler and Nathan 2014).

The effect of urgency thus is not only cognitive, but also institutional: attention and agenda-setting are functions of bias, opportunity and emotions, which causes urgency to permeate the decision-making process and the policy system itself (Maor 2014). A strong sense of urgency can develop when the issue at hand is felt to be in a state of crisis or when such emotions can be evoked (De Jong 2008). In other words, urgency is a function of crisis-like events. The urgency that develops as result of a crisis creates momentum to overcome friction, driving decision-makers to act swiftly. Communicating and maintaining a sense of urgency during the policy process, whether artificial or the lasting result of a crisis, is therefore pivotal for decision-makers who pursue policy change. Nevertheless, it remains unclear how decision-makers communicate and maintain a sense of urgency that succeeds to materialise in policy change. Although various studies touch upon institutional mechanisms that can be triggered by urgency (e.g., Garb 2004; Lipsky and Smith 1989; Fischhendler and Nathan 2014; Follmann 2015; Sánchez and Broudehoux 2013), as of yet no study investigates the role of urgency in facilitating the policy process.

Urgency as a discursive construct

Policy can be conceptualised as the institutionalised expressions of the policy ideas, preferences, ideologies and cognitive biases of decision-makers. These expressions are constructed at the level of the discourse through which they are expressed (Schmidt 2011). Discourse as the "ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena" (Hajer 2006: 67) thus fulfils the function of generating a shared understanding of the policy issue (Lorenzoni and Benson 2014). Whether or not the policy issue is perceived as a problem depends on how it is described and framed (Fischer and Forester 1993). As a result, the way in which different actors make sense of the problem and give meaning to it defines how it is perceived in the policy process (Dryzek 1997). Therefore, discourse can be used to dominate and reinforce the position of dominant social groups (McFarlane and Rutherford 2008; Schmidt 2011). In the case of infrastructure, the nexus between the discursive and material dimensions of infrastructure policy reflects the balance of social power relations. Actors who define the problem and its subsequent solutions in terms other than the dominant discourse often find themselves excluded from the decision-making process (Bruzelius et al. 2002).

Urgency may play a central role in the discursive manipulation of the policy process. Urgency discourse is exploited to tie together government and private actors in a discourse coalition that shapes a shared perception of reality (Rafey and Sovacool 2011: 1143) and dominates the discursive space of the political realm in order to create support for the industry and government preferred policy (Hajer 1995). In the case of the Trans-Israel Highway, urgency discourse was a catalyst in framing the policy process itself as a crisis, driving the push for additional road infrastructure from the discursive space toward rapid project implementation (Garb 2004). In other words, urgency discourse capitalises on the reduction of the cognitive ability of the decision-maker to detect biases and assume a critical attitude to the decision-making process. By mobilising biases, the use of urgency discourse increases the likelihood of implementation of the policy preferred by the most powerful actors. Crises thus appear to be socially constructed by dominant actors who have the capacity to discursively mobilise the crisis to reinforce their interests (McFarlane and Rutherford 2008).

Many studies demonstrate the effects of discursively constructed crises on the policy process, but little research has explained the role of urgency discourse specifically in artificially creating these crises. This study proposes a novel motivation for rapid policy change, namely that urgency discourse drives

rapid policy change by discursively creating artificial crises. In the decision-making processes on urban mega-projects such as the Barcelona Forum (Majoor 2011) and the Olympic City in Rio de Janeiro (Sánchez and Broudehoux 2013), as well as on large-scale infrastructure projects (e.g., Flyvjberg 2012; Garb 2004; Giglioli and Swyngedouw 2008), examples are found where urgency discourse and an appeal to the severity of the problem are used to accelerate the decision-making process and to justify the exclusion of various less powerful actors from participating in the proper democratic process. The role of urgency discourse herein is touched upon, but not given the prominence this study expects urgency plays in the policy process.

Study Hypotheses

This study combines the cognitive, institutional and discursive aspects of urgency into a single holistic approach toward its role in driving policy change. This study expects that a sense of urgency not only develops as a result of crisis-driven policy change, but that urgency discourse is also employed strategically and manipulatively to portray any policy issue in a crisis frame to mobilise biases toward action in the policy process.

Therefore, this study presents the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 A range of linguistic and institutional mechanisms will be used in the name of urgency to justify and facilitate excessive and unorthodox decision-making practices.

Hypothesis 2 The more an actor frames the policy issue as urgent, the more he is likely to propose institutional measures that facilitate urgency and the less likely he is to maintain a critical outlook on the policy process.

Hypothesis 3 The use of urgency discourse is not random in time. Urgency statements will be triggered by contextual events in order to reinforce the urgency frame of the policy process.

Hypothesis 4 Urgency discourse will be more used by actors when the policy plan is about to materialise. In the early procedural context of agenda-setting and later during the decision-making stages a large increase in urgency statements is expected as opposed to the use of urgency discourse during the less decisive stages in the policy process.

Hypothesis 5 The more extensive the vested interest of the actor in the timely finalisation of the policy plan, the more urgency statements will occur in the venues where that actor is strongly represented.

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Case study

The Israeli energy sector

Historically, Israel has been considered low on indigenous energy resources and therefore highly dependent on foreign fossil fuel imports to meet the energy demands of its growing economy and population. Despite the efforts to find oil and gas, Israel proved to be dry of fossil fuel reserves (Bahgat 2005). Because of the hostile relations with resource-rich countries in the region, Israel has been forced to import oil and natural gas from distant oil and gas producing countries such as Mexico, Russia and Norway (Bahgat 2005). This along with the fact that, with the recent exception of Egypt, Israel's energy infrastructure system has never been integrated with that of neighbouring states, has contributed to Israel's image as an "energy island" (Shaffer 2011). Due to population growth, rising living standards and climate change, demands for electricity are projected to double in the coming two decades. These factors increasingly stress the ability to meet electricity demands, especially during peak consumption (Ministry of National Infrastructures, Energy and Water Resources 2015). This implies that even a minor malfunction in the electrical grid can cause the system to collapse, an event which already happened once in 2002 and cost the Israeli economy NIS 700 million (State Comptroller 2009). As a result, a sense of urgency to diversify energy resources and to reduce Israel's dependency on foreign energy resources characterises Israeli energy policy (Shaffer 2011). Israel's position as a net energy resource importer did not notably change until the discoveries of several offshore natural gas reserves in 2009 and 2010 transformed Israel's energy position completely. In 2009, the Tamar gas field was discovered, which contains about 283 Billion Cubic Metres (henceforth BCM) of natural gas. A year later in 2010, the Leviathan gas field, containing around 530 BCM of natural gas, was discovered (Stern 2013). Combined with several smaller gas fields, approximately 950 BCM of natural gas were discovered between 2009 and 2012 in Israeli waters, an amount that "can provide by 2020 up to 73% of Israel's energy supply for the next 50 years, if not exported" (Fischhendler and Nathan 2014: 155). In 2009, the Government of Israel started to plan the urgent development of the necessary infrastructure to connect the newly discovered Tamar gas field to the Israeli grid, before existing gas reserves would deplete in 2013 (Shaffer 2011). In anticipation of acute and severe resource scarcity, the urgency to exploit the newly found gas reserves escalated.

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National Outline Plan 37/H

After the discovery of the Tamar gas field off the coast of the port city of Haifa in 2009, it was deemed necessary to develop an additional gas treatment terminal, north of the two existing gas terminals near Ashkelon and Ashdod respectively (State Comptroller 2013). For this purpose, the Ministry of National Infrastructures, Energy and Water Resources was tasked to prepare a national outline plan for the construction of the necessary infrastructure for the transportation, reception, treatment and distribution of the newly discovered reserves of natural gas, one of the largest infrastructure mega-projects ever undertaken in Israel. This mega-project involved the building of offshore reception and treatment platforms, onshore reception and treatment terminals for additional treatment and the necessary pipeline infrastructure to connect the offshore gas fields to the national grid. Citing lack of expertise and a strong sense of urgency to bring the Tamar gas field online in 2013, at the time the Yam Tethys gas field was expected to deplete, Noble Energy, an American private company, was appointed by the National Planning and Building Council to prepare NOP 37/H. This was contrary to Israeli planning laws which assign planning responsibilities to the government and its planning institutions, and not to private entities who have a vested interest in the outcome of the planning process (State Comptroller 2013). In August 2010, a year after the planning process commenced, the High Court of Justice (2010) ruled this decision unlawful and ordered the planning process to be started anew, despite the urgent need for local energy resources. Moreover, the controversy surrounding the decision on alternative sites for the gas terminals prompted civil society actors to turn to the courts, further delaying the planning process by at least another year (State Comptroller 2013). Government regulators pushed for full onshore gas terminals, arguing that these could be realised much faster and at a price lower by at least NIS 6 billion than full offshore gas terminals (Natural Gas Authority 2013). Environmental and local groups vehemently opposed this option and pushed for full offshore gas terminals (State Comptroller 2013). The involvement of a major stakeholder in the preparation of the policy plan did not only backfire legally, it also caused considerable financial damage to the Israeli economy. As a direct result of the restart of the planning process which delayed the preparations for operationalisation of the Tamar gas field, and because of an acute local energy scarcity, energy prices in Israel sharply increased by 32% between the years 2011 and 2013, leading to estimated damages of around NIS 20 billion to the Israeli economy (Barkat 2013; Gutman 2013). The planning process has been ongoing for five years since it was restarted in 2010. Although the government has approved NOP 37/H, its implementation still awaits the final rulings of the High Court of Justice (Ministry of Interior 2015).

Methodology

Research database

On 23 October 2014, the Israeli Government decided to validate NOP 37/H. From spring 2009 until the end of 2014, NOP 37/H was discussed in different venues and at various levels of decision-making. This study views policy-making in an institutional setting as an interactive and dynamic process of the generation and communication of policy ideas and their transformation into policy action (cf. Schmidt 2011). Only those venues where the policy plan was negotiated in an institutional setting were deemed relevant, thus excluding, for example, the media as a relevant venue. Therefore, this study examines the official protocols of hearings of the governmental and political committees involved in formulating the policy plan. The protocols on NOP 37/H comprise the policy discussions that took place in different political and planning venues. The discussions in the national venue are documented in the official protocols of the National Planning and Building Council and the Editors Committee. The discussions that took place in the designated venue are recorded in the official protocols of the Committee for the Protection of the Coastal Environment and the Subcommittee on Principle Planning Matters. In the regional venue, discussions are recorded in the protocols of various Regional Planning and Building Councils. In the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, the issue was discussed during plenary sessions and by parliamentary committees.

Table 1 outlines the database, which comprises 117 protocols that were found relevant for the purpose of this study.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE] **Table 1 Overview of Dataset**

Coding urgency

For each protocol, language that ascribes a shortened perception of time and a sense of crisis to the policy process was identified as an indicator of urgency. Every instance where an actor related to the crisis or emergency aspect of the policy issue was designated as an urgency statement. Policy issues are portrayed as urgent through the use of linguistic mechanisms. Therefore it was established whether the policy issue was framed as urgent rhetorically or through the use of metaphors. For all statements that instil a sense of urgency and crisis, the linguistic mechanisms used to portray urgency were documented. Altogether 108 urgency statements were found.

For every urgency statement, the venue where the statement was made and the actor who made the

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statement were documented. Most urgency statements were found in the protocols of the national venue, in contrast to the regional venue that accounts for a mere 4 urgency statements (see table 1). Actors were divided into groups that represent government regulators, private entities, national politicians, local politicians and civil society, which is made up of local groups and environmental groups. Each category represents an interest group directly involved with the policy process of NOP 37/H.

In addition to urgency statements, critical responses to urgency were also coded for each protocol where NOP 37/H was discussed. A critical response to urgency was designated as any response that relates negatively to the perceived urgency of the planning process. This implies that cases of critical responses to urgency may be found in protocols where no urgency statements were made. A total of 34 critical responses were found in the protocols of the national venue, closely followed by parliament which accounts for 30 critical responses. The least number of critical responses to urgency were recorded in the designated venue, where only 3 were found. For the purpose of determining the intensity of urgency raised in the venue, the ratio of the number of critical responses to urgency to the number of urgency statements was calculated. A ratio larger than 1 indicates a more critical venue (see table 1). Thus it was determined which venues were more encouraging of urgency and which venues were more critical of urgency.

For each urgency statement, a referent object was identified as the policy issue which the actor relates to as urgent. The referent object is based on the Copenhagen School's speech-act approach to security analysis which identifies referent objects as "things that are seen to be existentially threatened or that have a legitimate claim to survival" (Buzan et al. 1998: 36). In this study, referent objects were categorised more broadly to apply specifically to urgency. Policy issues perceived to be threatened or compromised when they are not dealt with in an urgent manner include the economic development of Israel, the prolonged dependency on foreign energy imports, the affordability of energy, the availability of energy, and the environment. Multiple referent objects may be referred to in the context of a single urgency statement. Similarly, urgency statements may be found where no referent object was referred to. These cases and those in which it was not clear which policy issue was considered to be under threat if not dealt with urgently were categorised as unclear.

Since urgency may be driven by crisis-like events (see De Jong 2008), urgency statements were also coded in relation to the contextual events that triggered them. Contextual events were categorised as

events external to the policy process or as internal events that provide context within the policy cycle. Internal events were designated by identifying during which stage of the policy cycle urgency was raised for each protocol. The internal events documented in this study coincide with the stages of agenda-setting and decision-making on policy alternatives in the policy cycle (see Howlett and Ramesh 2003). External events that triggered and legitimised the use of urgency discourse are resource scarcity and events where government regulators were summoned to parliament in order to explain and clarify controversial decisions. It was thus determined at what moment during the policy process and to what purpose an actor chose to raise urgency, and in which context urgency was most triggered.

The literature has indicated that crises often have detrimental effects on the policy process. Therefore, all cases in which extreme policy suggestions were stressed or justified in the name of urgency were documented. For each urgency statement, it was determined whether during the policy discussion an institutional measure was proposed to deal with the urgent policy matter within the context of that statement, and which actor proposed it. Institutional measures that were proposed in reaction to urgency, such as the exclusion of actors from participating in the policy process, the facilitation of urgency by streamlining the planning procedure and the suppression of alternative sites for establishing the gas terminals, were documented.

In order to identify whether urgency triggered a critical response, it was established for every urgency statement whether a critical response was attached to it. Every instance of criticism of proposed institutional measures was associated with the actor raising it, and with the venue where the critical response was recorded. Subsequently, the ratio of the number of proposed institutional measures to the number of criticisms of institutional measures was calculated per actor group and per venue for each category of institutional measures. In this manner it was possible to determine for each actor group which institutional measure was proposed most to facilitate urgency, and which was criticised most often. In a similar fashion, it could be determined in which venues urgency was facilitated more, and which venues were more critical. In order to avoid division by zero in cases where no observations were made, ratios were calculated by n(institutional measure proposed)+1 / n(criticism of institutional measure)+1. A ratio above 1 indicates that the facilitation of urgency was encouraged (see table 2 and 3). This approach served to determine whether the institutional measures proposed in response to urgency were indeed negative as hypothesised.

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Results

The institutionalisation of urgency: locale and criticism

The ratio of the average number of critical responses per protocol to the average number of urgency statements per protocol in table 1 shows an inverse relation between urgency discourse and critical discourse. Certain venues seem to encourage the use of urgency discourse whereas others do not. For example, the designated venue and the national venue were found to encourage the use of urgency discourse, in contrast to the regional venue which appeared to embolden a more critical attitude to urgency. Parliament seems more tolerant, both of the use of urgency discourse and of the expression of criticism of urgency.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE] **Table 2 Urgency and Criticism by Venue**

Table 2 shows the breakdown of urgency statements into referent objects as a function of the venue where the urgency statement was made, the distribution of the institutional measures that were proposed to facilitate urgency, and the distribution of the criticism of those institutional measures. From the distribution of referent objects that justified the use of urgency discourse, energy availability clearly is the greatest concern in all venues. However, regarding the other referent objects, differences in distribution between the venues can be discerned. Environmental concerns, for example, were referred to in all venues but only stood out in the designated venue where these concerns accounted for 26% of referent objects. In parliament, both foreign dependency and economic development account for 16% of referent objects in contrast, for example, to the designated and national venues, where those referent objects were of very minor concern.

In many cases where urgency was raised, institutional measures were proposed to suppress alternative sites for the gas terminal, to exclude other actors, and to facilitate urgency by streamlining the procedure. In all venues, except for the regional venue, streamlining the planning procedure was most often proposed in order to facilitate urgency. There seems to be a direct one-to-one relationship between the number of urgency statements and the number of proposals of institutional measures. For example, in the national venue a total of 60 urgency statements were made and 63 institutional measures were proposed. Similarly in the designated venue, 16 urgency statements were recorded against 15 proposals of institutional measures. Parliament, however, seems to be an exception. Most of the institutional measures were proposed in the national venue, to which actors responded with ample criticisms of institutional measures, in contrast to the regional venue where hardly any urgency

statements were made, and subsequently very few proposals for institutional measures and criticisms thereof were found. When taking into account the ratio of proposed institutional measures to their criticism, parliament evidently is the most critical venue whereas the national and designated venues are the least critical. This suggests that urgency was more prominent in the national venue, allowing for the proposal of institutional measures whilst suppressing criticism, in contrast to parliament for example where criticism was very prominent.

The portrayal of urgency

Each actor constructed urgency differently and in accordance with the interests of the actor group. Urgency was predominantly constructed by presenting urgency as a rhetorical and argumentative linguistic mechanism that connects the rationale for urgency with the preferred course of action. The majority of urgency statements were causal in that they presented the policy issue in terms that express haste or crisis, followed by the rationale and then the solution. The rationale for urgency and the solution coincide with the referent object and institutional measure, respectively.

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE] **Table 3 Urgency and Criticism by Actor**

Table 3 presents the breakdown of urgency statements into referent objects as a function of the actor group which raised them. Table 3 reveals a polarity between regulators and private entities who account for the majority of urgency statements and proposals for institutional measures, and civil society, national and local politicians, who account for the bulk of critical responses to proposed institutional measures. Actors frame the discourse around urgency in a different manner. For regulators and private entities, energy availability was the greatest concern. For civil society and local politicians, the main justification for raising urgency was environmental concerns. Regulators are the only actor group that referred to a wide range of referent objects. Most notably affordability and foreign dependency were of significant concern to regulators alone. Economic development, on the other hand, was of minor concern to regulators, but of significant concern to private entities, civil society and national politicians. Moreover, regulators accounted for the vast majority of unclear referent objects, which may suggest that they used urgency discourse more as a rhetorical device to gain attention, than to express a genuine concern.

Actors who raised urgency often also more frequently proposed institutional measures. With 77 proposals, regulators proposed the most institutional measures by far. They are followed by private entities with 9 proposals, civil society and local politicians who both proposed 3 institutional measures

and national politicians who proposed just 2 institutional measures. Except for private entities, all actor groups mostly proposed to facilitate urgency by streamlining the planning procedure. Private entities, however, most frequently proposed to suppress alternative sites for gas terminals, which may reflect their vested interest in a specific site over other possible sites.

When taking into account the number of times institutional measures are criticised, an inverse relation between the number of proposals of institutional measures and the number of critical reactions to institutional measures can be discerned. National politicians, local politicians and civil society hardly proposed institutional measures, but they criticised them respectively 34, 33 and 23 times, whereas regulators and private entities who proposed most of the institutional measures hardly voiced any criticism. It seems that a critical attitude toward the policy process is justified by a lack of use of urgency discourse. This explains why civil society and national politicians, for example, were at liberty to criticise the facilitation of urgency. Local politicians seemed more balanced as they voiced significant criticism of the exclusion of actors and lack of problem analysis as well. Most of their criticism, however, was aimed at the suppression of alternatives, which may be explained by the fact that the planning committee sought to construct the gas terminal in their constituencies.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE] **Figure 1 Urgency Statements by Regulators**

Since regulators constitute a broad actor group that includes various ministries with different responsibilities, further focus upon this actor group may reveal nuances within government regarding the uses of urgency discourse. Figure 1 examines in greater detail the breakdown of urgency statements into referent objects by the regulator. Regulators account for 82 of 108 urgency statements. Only those regulators that made 3 or more urgency statements are included in this figure.

Figure 1 clearly shows that the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Interior are responsible for most cases of urgency, whereas the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Environmental Protection hardly make use of this framing strategy. It is striking that both the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Interior rationalise raising urgency by referring to an array of referent objects whereas the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Finance not only raise significantly less urgency, but also refer to fewer referent objects. Unsurprisingly, the concerns of the ministries seem to coincide with their ministerial responsibilities. The Ministry of Environmental Protection refers more to environmental concerns whereas the Ministry of Finance refers relatively often to affordability.

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The timing of urgency

Urgency was not raised randomly, but surfaced at various deliberate and sensitive moments during the planning process.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE] **Figure 2 Triggers for Urgency**

Figure 2 presents the contextual events that trigger the use of urgency discourse. Out of a total of 108 urgency statements, 47 were triggered by an external event, 54 by an internal event and only 7 urgency statements were not attached to a trigger. External events are divided into two major categories. Resource scarcity triggered 35 urgency statements, parliamentary debates provided the context for 8 urgency statement and 4 urgency statements were triggered in the context of both parliamentary debates and resource scarcity. Internal events break down into the categories of agenda-setting and deciding on alternatives, triggering 23 and 31 urgency statements respectively.

Resource scarcity is referred to the most, accounting for 35% of contextual events in total. Resource scarcity includes the anticipated scarcity of natural gas as a result of the depletion of existing operational gas fields, and the acute natural gas scarcity following the stop in the supply of Egyptian gas. The second major trigger for urgency is the internal contextual event of decision-making on alternative sites for gas terminals. Deciding on alternatives includes the hotly contested decisions on the location of the gas terminal which generated a lively debate in all venues on the benefits of an offshore gas platform as opposed to onshore gas treatment facilities. The third major trigger for urgency is agenda-setting. When in 2009 it was decided that the first draft of the policy plan should be finished within one year, several urgency statements were triggered. Eventually urgency was used in this particular case as an argument to coax the Ministry of Environmental Protection into accepting a non-binding report on the environmental impact of the policy plan instead of a binding document by means of an environmental impact assessment.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE] **Figure 3 Timeline of Events**

Figure 3 presents urgency statements as a function of the timing of the contextual events that triggered them. The oscillation of urgency intensity as reflected by the peaks and lows of urgency statement frequency suggest that contextual events vary from time to time in the degree to which they trigger urgency. The transitory connection of contextual events to urgency is evident. Urgency peaks coincide with major external events and important internal decisions in the planning process. For example, the internal contextual events of deciding on alternatives triggered much urgency discourse as illustrated

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by the peaks of mid-2009, the first quarter of 2010 and the first half of 2012. Another example is the acute resource scarcity following the definite stop of supply of Egyptian gas, which resulted in an upsurge in urgency at the end of 2011 in the wake of a long period of repeated attacks on the gas pipeline in the Sinai Peninsula.

Discussion

Many studies have suggested that poor planning of mega-projects has detrimental results in terms of cost overruns and benefit shortfalls (e.g., Altshuler and Luberoff 2003; Flyvbjerg et al. 2003). The root cause of this recurrent bias in the evaluation of mega-project planning is neither technical nor economical, but instead derives from conflicting political ideas, institutional biases and ideologies (McFarlane and Rutherford 2008). As a result of these biases, mega-projects are often highly contested around the mobilisation of support by framing the policy issue as a crisis (Jhagroe and Frantzeskaki 2015).

Framing has an emotional dimension which greatly influences the way in which information is processed and dealt with (Gross 2014). Events become associated with emotions that affect the way in which one interprets and responds to those events. As a result, emotions directly help shape reality (Nabi 2003). The emotional dimension of framing thus plays an influential role in guiding policy preferences and decision-making (see Lu and Schuldt 2015; Roeser 2012; Smith and Leiserowitz 2014). Ultimately, framing is about legitimising a course of action that coincides with the perception of reality of the decision-maker (Rein and Schön 1993).

One way to trigger emotional reactions in decision-making is by framing resource scarcities (see e.g., Giglioni and Swyngedouw 2008; Ioris 2012; Mehta 2001), and development agendas (see e.g., Garb 2004; Follmann 2015; Majoor 2011), as crises demanding urgent policy action. Crises can be used by government to recklessly enact significant policy measures without adhering to proper practices of problem analysis and oversight (Higgs 2010). However, when, how, and by whom urgency is constructed in the policy process, and how urgency facilitates mobilising support for a policy, remain unattested. This study contributes to our understanding of how urgency shapes the policy process, and through hastily decisions becomes institutionalised in the implementation of the adopted policy. The institutionalisation of planning practices has been suggested time and again in various studies (e.g., Fischhendler and Nathan 2014; Sánchez and Broudehoux 2013), yet this study demonstrates the motives by which these practices are discursively constructed in the policy process.

The results of this study indicate that the policy discussions concerning the infrastructure mega-project for the exploitation of Israeli gas reserves were highly saturated with urgency discourse, which contributed to a sense of crisis in the policy process and justified the facilitation of urgency by means of institutional measures. A sense of crisis was found to be conveyed mainly through rhetoric that

ascribes a shortened perception of time to the policy process and a few metaphorical phrases that depict the policy process as urgent. The policy process was presented as urgent by framing the policy in conjunction with referent objects that are seen as threatened by a lack of urgent action. Actors discursively mobilised emotions by anchoring urgency in different ideologies, concerns and legitimising factors. This study found that the manner in which urgency discourse was portrayed was a function of the actor and the type of venue where urgency was raised. For example, in the designated planning venues, urgency discourse was legitimised more by environmental concerns whereas in parliament, urgency was anchored considerably in concerns for Israel's economic development and dependency on foreign energy imports. This suggests that emotions and biases are mobilised strategically by portraying urgency in ways that appeal to the target audience.

Urgency was facilitated by proposing institutional measures aimed at streamlining the policy process and suppressing the time consuming exploration of alternative policy solutions (see table 3). The discursive construction of urgency in the policy process mostly took place in the venues where regulators were strongly represented. This seems to agree with hypothesis 5 that urgency discourse is more likely to be found in the venues where actors who are keen on the speedy finalisation of the planning process are strongly represented. The national and designated planning venues proved to be most receptive to this discursive framing strategy, whereas political venues were more critical of urgency and urgency-driven institutional measures (see table 2). Urgency thus seems to be a discursive strategy to temporarily present the policy issue as a crisis demanding a unified response. However, the role of urgency in facilitating a unified response during decisive stages of the policy cycle is limited. Figure 3 reveals that sharp increases in urgency use are accompanied by large increases in critical responses to urgency. Table 3 shows that the use of urgency discourse and criticism thereof are usually not voiced by the same actors, which was already suggested in hypothesis 2. Actors who raise more urgency tend to voice less criticism and vice versa. Once the policy issue is framed as urgent, the legislature and judiciary may curb that ambition, which is reflected in the high count of critical responses to urgency by various national and local politicians, as well as in the success of legal action against improper planning practices. For example, legal action by local politicians resulted in the court-ordered restart of the planning process of NOP 37/H in 2010 (see High Court of Justice 2010).

The results of this study confirm hypothesis 3 that posits that most uses of urgency discourse are triggered by contextual events. Given Israel's position as an energy island, resource scarcity unsurprisingly triggered the majority of references to the perceived urgent nature of developing

indigenous gas reserves (see figure 2). This observation supports other studies that recognise resource scarcity as a primary context for crisis-driven decision-making (e.g., Fischhendler and Nathan 2014; Giglioni and Swyngedouw 2008; Ioris 2012; Mehta 2001). The study also found that urgency is not used randomly throughout the policy cycle. The results reveal that urgency was a pervasive motive during the early stage of agenda-setting and the later stage of decision-making in the policy cycle (see figures 2 and 3). This may indicate that urgency discourse is employed strategically at decisive moments during the policy process to inhibit the choice of other solutions by delegitimising criticism in name of the urgency of the matter, which supports hypothesis 4.

The reason for urgency framing is therefore to manipulate the policy process by presenting a limited and exclusive view of the policy, which weakens the position of those actors who oppose the proposed policy solution (De Jong 2008). This supports the notion that in the policy cycle, almost every problem that is presented as demanding policy action by the government, is characterised by "a surprising degree of agreement on its gravity and on the limited number of options open for resolving it" (Howlett and Ramesh 2003: 16). Urgency may thus be a strategic discursive tool that is used to effectuate an artificial crisis in which multiple and opposing policy views are less tolerated. As a result, the interests of powerful actors are advanced whilst those of lesser actors are marginalised. Likewise, this study found that powerful regulators and private entities pushed for timely policy change and employed urgency discourse disproportionately more than the actors defending the status quo (see table 3). The use of urgency discourse thus primarily favours the interests of the powerful and seems to function as a vehicle to advance elite-driven priorities.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to assess the role of urgency in mega-project planning. Mega-projects are known to be highly controversial and rarely provide a solution to the problems they are intended to solve. Planning scholars have repeatedly stressed that successful mega-project planning demands adequate problem analysis and deliberate postponement of a commitment to a policy alternative in order to guarantee planning flexibility up to the stage of project implementation (see Flyvbjerg et al. 2003; Hertogh et al. 2008; Priemus 2008, 2010). Yet time and again, mega-projects fail to deliver their anticipated outcome. A possible explanation may be associated with the prevalence of urgency discourse during the planning process. This framing mode contradicts proper planning practices, empowering certain actors to advance their interests whilst denying others the possibility to partake in the planning process or promote their preferred planning alternatives. No study, however, has explained why, how, and when actors construct urgency in the planning process. Therefore, this study critically scrutinises the practice of urgency framing whilst discerning how a variety of actors strategically employ urgency discourse, mobilising cognitive, emotional and institutional biases to advance partisan interests. At the basis of this study is the assumption that a perception of reality is constructed through the language that is used to describe it. Thus the intent of the study was not to determine whether or not urgency is genuine. It is only concerned with the mobilisation of urgency toward a policy goal. Accordingly, this study examines when and in what manner the planning process for development of the newly discovered gas reserves became urgent due to its discursive portrayal by various entrenched interest groups.

The analysis of the protocols shows that urgency was raised deliberately at various decisive moments during the policy process. Urgency was legitimised by referring to a range of different referent objects, indicating that urgency was employed strategically as a discursive tool to portray the policy in a crisis frame that resonates with the target audience. This framing process was primarily conveyed through rhetoric that associates haste and panic with the policy process. In the context of perceived resource scarcity, this found fertile ground in the national planning venues where regulators responsible for the realisation of the project were strongly represented. Once the policy process was framed as a crisis, a sense of urgency drove decision-makers to adopt institutional measures that aimed at facilitating urgency, but were discordant with proper planning practices. This may indicate that urgency compromises effective policy-making by advancing elite priorities through excessive institutional measures whilst marginalising the voice of critical actors. However, further investigation is needed,

especially research that correlates the use of urgency discourse with actual policy action and legislation, which may motivate the ability of urgency to drive policy change.

In the context of Israel's position as an energy island in a hostile environment, one may question the applicability of the results of this study to other cases that may be characterised by a less volatile regional context and the availability of natural resources. Yet even in Israel, urgency was not raised randomly, nor was it a motive that was present during the whole planning process. Peaks in the use of urgency discourse coincided with prominent events that had profound influence on the policy process. Moreover, critical responses to urgency were widely found in various planning and political venues. For example, in such countries as Brazil (Sánchez and Broudehoux 2013), Spain (Majoor 2011) and the Netherlands (Huijs 2011; Jhagroe and Frantzeskaki 2015), urgency is known to have played a decisive role in the planning of infrastructure and urban mega-projects. Urgency is thus not an exclusively Israeli phenomenon rooted in Israel's unique characteristics, but instead seems of a more general nature. However, comparative research into the role of urgency in different planning processes may be needed to deepen our understanding of urgency in general.

The findings of this study stress the need to examine the role of urgency in policy areas other than infrastructure mega-projects. Mega-projects are known to be extraordinary projects in terms of conflicting interests and detrimental impacts of poor planning because of their sheer size and scope (Flyvbjerg et al. 2003). It may be that the effect of urgency is similarly inflated in relation to mega-project planning. Nonetheless, the study highlights that urgency is not an objective quality of decision-making, but rather an evolving social concept discursively constructed by actors who seek to justify the facilitation of the policy process through extraordinary institutional planning measures.

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Figure1

Figure2

Context (n=101)

- ■ Resource Scarcity (n=35)
- ‖ Resource Scarcity and Parliamentary Debate (n=4)
- ▩ Parliamentary Debate (n=8)
- ≡ Agenda Setting (n=23)
- ▦ Deciding on Alternatives (n=31)
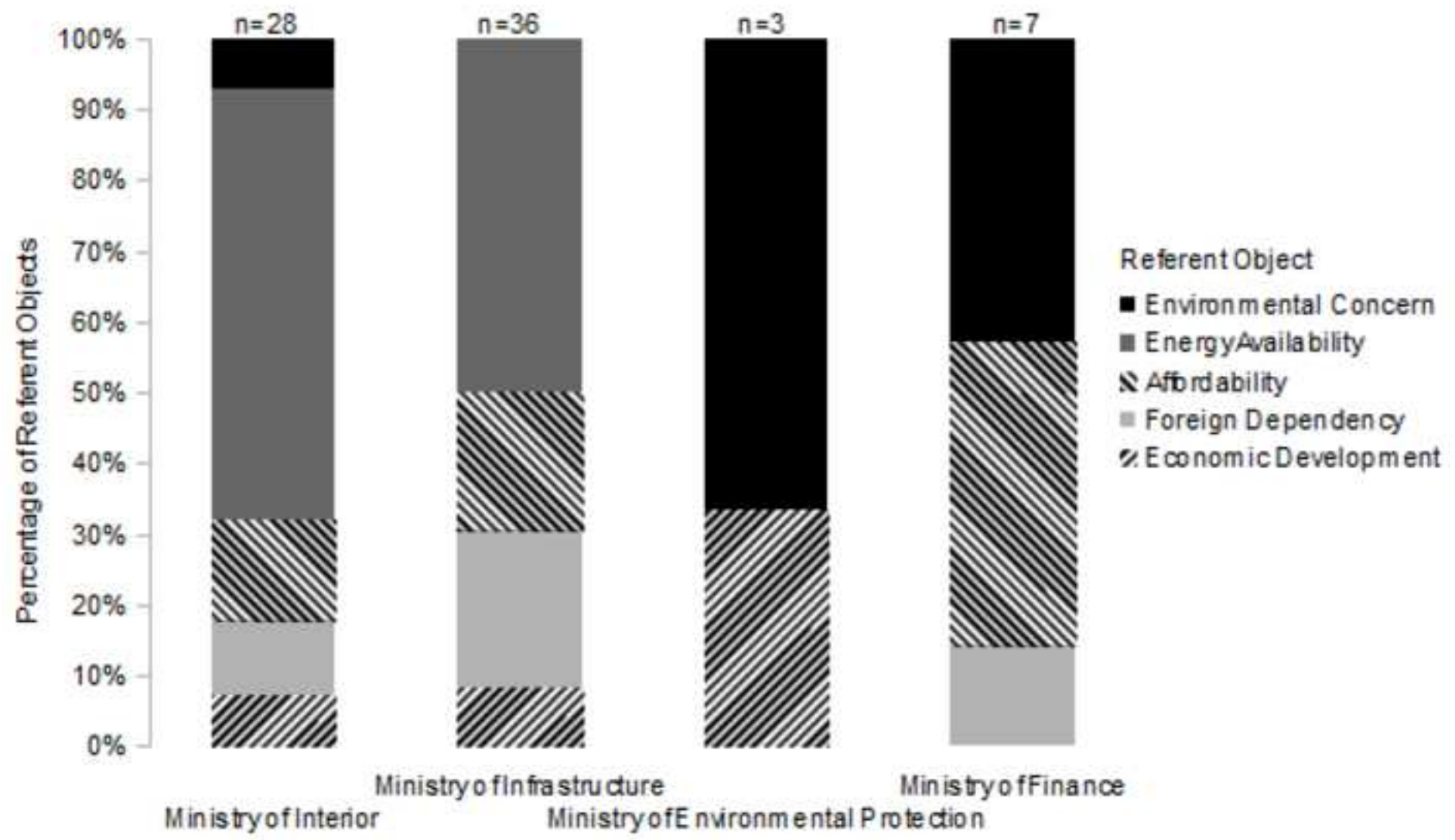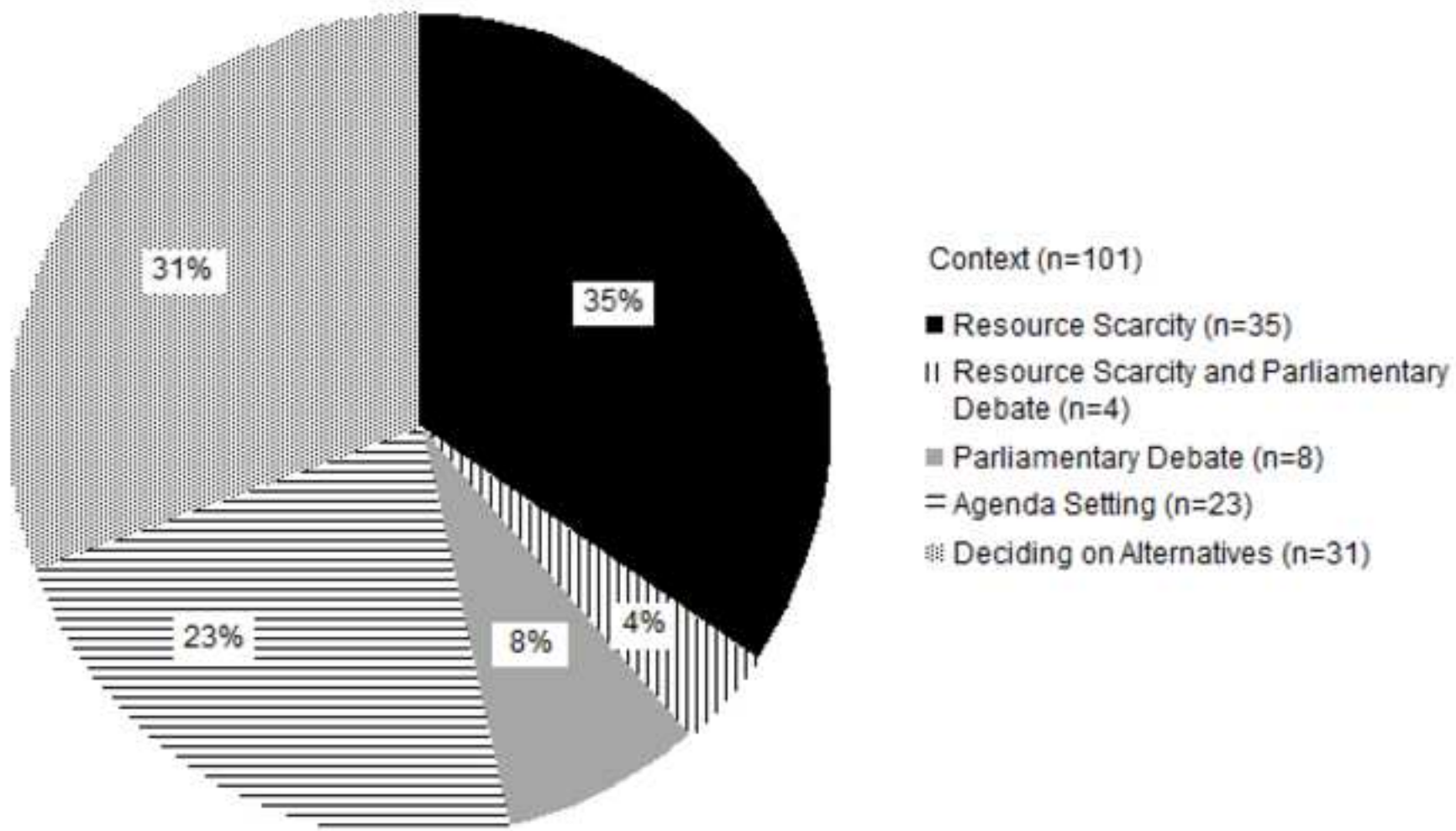
Figure3
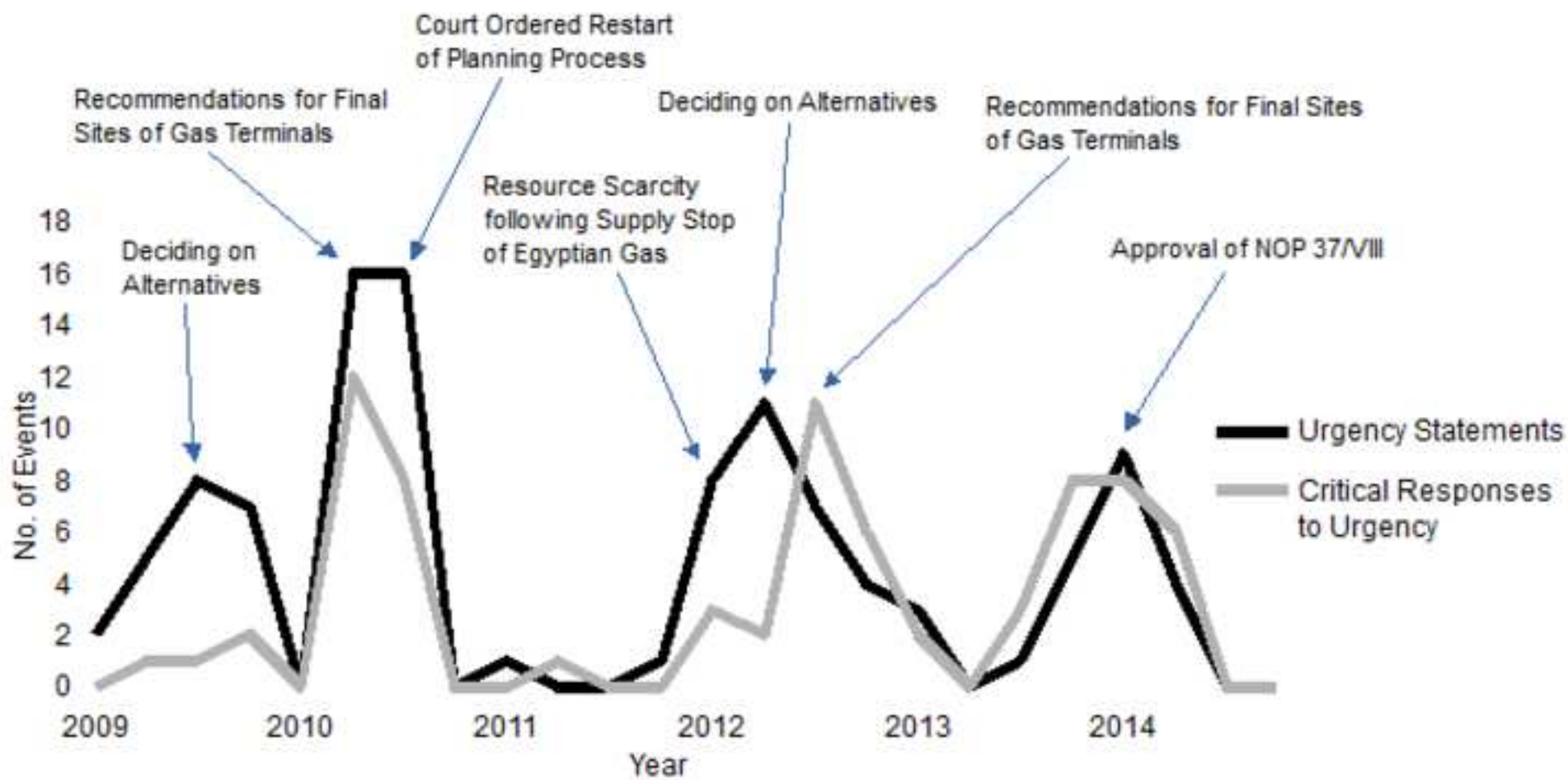
Tables

Table 1 Overview of Dataset

Venue	Timespan	# of Protocols	# of Urgency Statements	# of Critical Responses to Urgency	Ratio of Critical Responses to Urgency to Urgency Statements
National	2009-2014	35	60	34	0.6
Designated	2009-2013	8	16	3	0.2
Regional	2009-2014	44	4	7	1.8
Parliament	2009-2014	30	28	30	1.1
Total		**117**	**108**	**74**	

Table 2 Urgency and Criticism by Venue

Venue	Total Urgency Statements	Urgency Referent Object	n	%	Institutional Measures Proposed	n	%	Criticism of Institutional Measure	n	%	Ratio of Institutional Measure Proposed to Criticism of Institutional Measure
National	60	Unclear	23	32	Suppression of Alternatives	23	37	Suppression of Alternatives	14	31	1.6
		Economic Development	4	6	Streamline of Procedure	39	62	Streamline of Procedure	24	53	1.6
		Foreign Dependency	5	7	Exclusion of Actor	1	2	Exclusion of Actor	3	7	0.5
		Affordability	9	13				Lack of Problem Analysis	4	9	0.2
		Energy Availability	24	34							
		Environmental Concern	6	8							
Designated	16	Unclear	5	26	Suppression of Alternatives	5	33	Suppression of Alternatives	2	33	2.0
		Economic Development	1	5	Streamline of Procedure	10	67	Streamline of Procedure	3	50	2.8
		Foreign Dependency	0	0	Exclusion of Actor	0	0	Exclusion of Actor	0	0	1.0
		Affordability	2	11				Lack of Problem Analysis	1	17	0.5
		Energy Availability	6	32							
		Environmental Concern	5	26							
Regional	3	Unclear	1	20	Suppression of Alternatives	2	67	Suppression of Alternatives	2	33	1.0
		Economic Development	0	0	Streamline of Procedure	1	33	Streamline of Procedure	3	50	0.5
		Foreign Dependency	1	20	Exclusion of Actor	0	0	Exclusion of Actor	1	17	0.5
		Affordability	0	0				Lack of Problem Analysis	0	0	1.0
		Energy Availability	2	40							
		Environmental Concern	1	20							
Parliament	28	Unclear	1	3	Suppression of Alternatives	5	38	Suppression of Alternatives	16	37	0.4
		Economic Development	6	16	Streamline of Procedure	8	62	Streamline of Procedure	21	49	0.4
		Foreign Dependency	6	16	Exclusion of Actor	0	0	Exclusion of Actor	2	5	0.3
		Affordability	4	11				Lack of Problem Analysis	4	9	0.2
		Energy Availability	16	42							
		Environmental Concern	5	13							

Table 3 Urgency and Criticism by Actor

Actor	Total Urgency Statements	Urgency Referent Object	n	%	Institutional Measures Proposed	n	%	Criticism of Institutional Measure	n	%	Ratio of Institutional Measure Proposed to Criticism of Institutional Measure
Regulators	82	Unclear	27	27	Suppression of Alternatives	25	32	Suppression of Alternatives	1	11	13.0
		Economic Development	6	6	Streamline of Procedure	51	66	Streamline of Procedure	7	78	6.5
		Foreign Dependency	12	12	Exclusion of Actor	1	1	Exclusion of Actor	0	0	2.0
		Affordability	14	14				Lack of Problem Analysis	1	11	0.5
		Energy Availability	35	35							
		Environmental Concern	7								
Private Entities	14	Unclear	1	7	Suppression of Alternatives	6		Suppression of Alternatives	0	0	7.0
		Economic Development	3	21	Streamline of Procedure	3		Streamline of Procedure	0	0	4.0
		Foreign Dependency	0	0	Exclusion of Actor	0		Exclusion of Actor	0	0	1.0
		Affordability	0	0				Lack of Problem Analysis	1	100	0.5
		Energy Availability	8	57							
		Environmental Concern	2	14							
Civil Society	6	Unclear	0	0	Suppression of Alternatives	2		Suppression of Alternatives	7	30	0.4
		Economic Development	1	10	Streamline of Procedure	1		Streamline of Procedure	15	65	0.1
		Foreign Dependency	0	0	Exclusion of Actor	0		Exclusion of Actor	1	4	0.5
		Affordability	0	0				Lack of Problem Analysis	0	0	1.0
		Energy Availability	3	30							
		Environmental Concern	6	60							
Local Politicians	3	Unclear	1	20	Suppression of Alternatives	2		Suppression of Alternatives	13	39	0.2
		Economic Development	0	0	Streamline of Procedure	1		Streamline of Procedure	11	33	0.2
		Foreign Dependency	0	0	Exclusion of Actor	0		Exclusion of Actor	4	12	0.2
		Affordability	1	20				Lack of Problem Analysis	5	15	0.2
		Energy Availability	1	20							
		Environmental Concern	2	40							
National Politicians	3	Unclear	1	33	Suppression of Alternatives	0		Suppression of Alternatives	13	38	0.1
		Economic Development	1	33	Streamline of Procedure	2		Streamline of Procedure	18	53	0.2
		Foreign Dependency	0	0	Exclusion of Actor	0		Exclusion of Actor	1	3	0.5

Affordability	0	0		Lack of Problem Analysis	2	6	0.3
Energy Availability	1	33					
Environmental Concern	0	0					