

# **Unravelling Stakeholder Engagement in Megaprojects: A Political Opportunity Structure Perspective in Turbulent Times**

## **Abstract**

Infrastructure projects are often tied to political agendas leading to community skepticism and opposition. This study explores how changes in the political system influenced engagement between project opposers and project promoters. Using a qualitative research approach and a case study strategy, archival data related to the prematurely terminated Bisri Dam megaproject in Lebanon were collected and analyzed. Results show that deepened division among political parties (configuration of power) and a wider distribution of power among project opposers (formal institutional structure) intensified opposition, leading to project cancellation. This study highlights the importance of considering a broad political perspective in project stakeholder management to improve megaproject outcomes from a socially sustainable standpoint.

**Keywords:** Megaprojects; community stakeholders; stakeholder behavior; stakeholder engagement; political opportunity structure.

## 1. Introduction

Megaprojects are increasingly being proposed and implemented in many countries as they serve as tools for enhancing economic and social benefits (De Nito *et al.*, 2024; Mitoula and Papavasileiou, 2023), as well as refining the political image of governments (Zaman *et al.*, 2021; Tarazona Vento, 2024). However, the social system of megaprojects is ‘not trouble-free’ (Asante Boadi *et al.*, 2019) due to the challenges in balancing the conflicting demands of heterogenous stakeholders (Biesenthal *et al.*, 2018), and the ability of megaprojects to displace local communities and disrupt local environments (Di Maddaloni *et al.*, 2025) . As such, the project stakeholders have been broadly categorized into two heterogenous groups: the promoters who are interested and advocate for the successful completion of a project (Ninan *et al.*, 2019) and opposers who resist and might actively disrupt project implementation (Williams *et al.*, 2015; Aaltonen *et al.*, 2008). The engagement behavior between these two groups has been associated with the changes in the macro political system that can be leveraged to favor one group over the other, which might define the project’s outcome through either termination or completion.

An important driver for community stakeholder unrest is the political climate in which megaprojects are embedded, which constitutes, for example, weak institutional conditions, political party agendas, state corruption, and the nature of the political system (Çıdık *et al.*, 2024; Matinheikki *et al.*, 2019; Lehtinen *et al.*, 2022; Ninan and Sergeeva, 2022). These factors should be explored more thoroughly to understand how they influence community stakeholders' behavior towards projects (Buice, 2022). Megaprojects are and have been political arenas with governments seeing such developments as a facade for enhancing their political, economic, and social image (Liu *et al.*, 2016; Zaman *et al.*, 2021) or as significant symbols for politicians to be elected or re-elected (Tarazona Vento, 2024). Many scholars still argue that projectized business firms are better

understood as a ‘political coalition’ rather than a setting in which rational economic principles are deployed (March, 2007; Pullen et al., 2017) and therefore, understanding the structures and practices of ‘high’ politics exhibited at the government level offers a valuable lens for understanding the behaviors and power struggles at the workplace, especially between project promoters and opposers.

To advance the knowledge of project management from a political lens, research has modestly progressed along several streams. For instance, several studies explored how the nature of macro-political factors (e.g., state politics; political engagement) impact megaproject success (Jemine *et al.*, 2020; Vento, 2017; Matinheikki *et al.*, 2019; Çıdık *et al.*, 2024). Other studies adopted a narrower perspective, focusing on organizational politics (e.g., political bias, manipulation of project manager, accountability) and its role in project operations and performance (McGivern *et al.*, 2018; Weissenberger-Eibl and Teufel, 2011; Revellino and Mouritsen, 2017). Although useful, this line of research has not delved into how the dynamic manifestation and interplay of ongoing changes in the political system might influence the behavior of project promoters and opposers across the lifecycle of megaprojects. To further elaborate, project opposers are generally resembled by those stakeholders that are considered ‘secondary’ (Jiang et al., 2019; Clarkson, 1995) or ‘less important’ (Eskerod and Vaagaasar, 2014), such as local communities that have managed in many cases to cause project delays and cost escalations (Nguyen *et al.*, 2019; Coppens *et al.*, 2018). Community stakeholders, who are the core groups of project opposers, might leverage specific changes in the political system (e.g., change of government, chaos in parliament elections, change of political leaders) to strengthen their opposition against project promoters that are generally resembled by the project organization - Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR), certain political parties in government, and other groups that benefit from the project.

Therefore, in order to examine the interplay between project promoters and opposers in turbulent times, this study introduces political opportunity structure (POS) theory in project studies which refers to institutional arrangements, resource configurations, and policies that may influence the mobilization and strategies of groups with special interests (Hadden and Jasny, 2019; Prakash and Gugerty, 2010). POS theory entails two fundamental concepts that are utilized and expanded in this study, which are configuration of power - whether politicians are united in the face of social movements opposing political-oriented decisions; and formal institutional structure - the degree of openness of a political system in accepting social movements in political decision-making (Young and Ear, 2021; Tarrow, 1989; Eisinger, 1973). Both POS and stakeholder behavior become significant in shaping project outcomes amidst political turbulence. Stakeholder behavior refers to the observations and reactions that stakeholders exhibit to interact and engage with other stakeholders and the focal organization, and encompasses either cooperation, accountability, and communication (Kabahinda and Mwesigwa, 2023) or coalition, litigation, and boycotting when their interest and roles are threatened (Nguyen Long et al., 2019). Therefore, the research question this study aims to answer is: *How does political opportunity shape the engagement between project promoters and opposers amidst political turbulence, ultimately leading to project cancellation?*

In light of the above discussion, we mobilize POS theory within the political landscape of Lebanon. The context of the study was deemed to be relevant because Lebanon has experienced, in recent years, political turbulence as a result of corruption accusations, the largest financial crisis ever recorded in the country, and a mass unprecedented uprising that occurred on 17 October 2019 that disrupted the ruling political class (Fares *et al.*, 2022). In particular, this study chose the prematurely terminated Bisri Dam project that was ought to be implemented in the Bisri Valley to tackle water scarcity issues in the Greater Beirut and the Mount Lebanon areas. To shed light on

how political turbulence shaped project outcomes, we uncover the POS and the engagement behavior of clashing parties through a longitudinal case study and documents analysis. By doing so, this study showcases how POS provide opportunities for social movement developments, demonstrating how project opposers, which constitute a heterogenous groups of community stakeholders and opposing political parties, are able to capitalize on gaps, opportunities, or changes in the configurations of a turbulent political system to oppose project promoters that resemble certain government entities and project organization groups.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Stakeholders' Engagement and Opposition Behavior Towards Megaprojects*

Megaprojects are characterized by complex processes and a diverse set of stakeholders with different interests and objectives that hinder collaborative efforts towards project completion (Chi *et al.*, 2022). While the promoters support its completion, the protesters might disrupt its implementation by engaging in well-organized opposition in attempt to increase their legitimacy over the project (Ninan and Sergeeva, 2021). Besides opposition, low reputation and mistrust among civil society challenge both private and public major construction developments (Ruijter *et al.*, 2021). While megaprojects are important tools to foster modernization and urban development (Vento, 2017), they can pose serious threats to stakeholders in their proximity due to their closeness to the organization's operations (Di Maddaloni *et al.*, 2025). These threats are not only structural, but can be social, cultural, political, and ecological, resulting in fierce resistance from local communities (Cuganesan and Floris, 2020; Nguyen *et al.*, 2019; van Den Ende and van Marrewijk, 2019).

The last decades have witnessed an increasing prevalence of community empowerment and resistance against megaprojects due to their potential threat on society and agriculture. This

resistive approach has commonly been known as ‘Not In My Backyard’ (NIMBY) syndrome (Dear, 1992), which resembles the resentment and defensive attitude of community groups against undesirable developments in their locality (e.g. Dakota Access Pipeline in the USA). Other movements have been noticed, such as boycotting activities to the Turin-Lyon High-Speed Rail, the cancellation of the Melbourne East West Link in Australia, the delays caused to the HS2 in England or to the Trans Adriatic Pipeline. Other projects never came into existence due to local community resistance, such as the extension of the Stockholm rail, and the construction of a New Mexico City airport. Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything (BANANA) or Citizens Against Virtually Everything (CAVE) evoke intense collective oppositions often by communities who don’t want something in their community which could depreciate property values, cause land acquisition and displacement or even loss of sense of place, cohesion, and identity (Minnaert, 2012). Therefore, megaprojects usually involve large-scale acquisitions, resources, and natural habitat exploitation that can potentially cause biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, and community displacement, thus widening the margin of vulnerable groups (Kenney-Lazar and Ishikawa, 2019). The concept of displacement is not only limited to physical relocation but also the wider socio-environmental impacts, therefore, the complexity of the displacement problems represents an integral component in calculating costs and benefits and the implementation of the measures designed to curb negative effects upon both human and natural communities (Di Maddaloni et al., 2025).

As such, when looking at megaprojects facing turbulent times because of resistance from secondary external groups, it is well known that stakeholder opposition behaviors include communication, boycott, lobbying, coalition and litigation (Nguyen Long *et al.*, 2019). It is also known that organization responses are mainly driven by reactive mechanisms aimed at containing

any possible detrimental consequences to pre-determined project targets, thus leading stakeholders to be instrumentally classified based on their ability and willingness to promote or oppose organization objectives (Di Maddaloni and Davis, 2018). Such classifications (e.g., proponents/opponents, actively/passively involved, fiduciary/non-fiduciary) have highlighted how scholarly effort has been in favor of the development of tools that analyze stakeholders either based on their attributes (e.g. power, legitimacy, urgency, proximity, influence, interest) (Asante Boadi *et al.*, 2019) or the structure of their relationships and the network position they occupy (Wu *et al.*, 2020; Fares *et al.*, 2021), overlooking the tensions between different stakeholders, especially between project decision-makers and local communities that in most cases exhibit competing interests. Community stakeholders are shown to be able to reduce project performance, causing delays and cost overruns (Turner and Xue, 2018), and damaging an organization's image (i.e., reputation damage) (Di Maddaloni and Derakhshan, 2023). Despite the two-way engagement between a project organization and its stakeholders portrayed by mainstream research, little is known regarding the macro political conditions under which such engagement behavior occurs. Therefore, more research is needed on how the engagement behavior of project promoters and opposers are shaped (Lehtinen *et al.*, 2019), and how this behavior is fostered within a turbulent political landscape which might lead to detrimental project outcomes such as premature cancellation.

## *2.2 Megaproject Cancellation*

Megaprojects are often challenged in the design and feasibility study phases where project cancellation is mostly experienced (Lee *et al.*, 2017), in contrast to the construction and closeout phases that experience low rates of project incompleteness (Cornelio *et al.*, 2021). However, megaprojects, especially in developing countries, often fail due to weak institutional conditions

and corruption (Williams, 2017), lack of government or public support (Cornelio *et al.*, 2023), or social resistance (Witz *et al.*, 2021). Williams (2017) described project noncompletion as the outcome of a dynamically inconsistent collective choice process among political actors facing commitment problems in contexts of limited resources. As such, if the key decision-maker is changed during project execution, there is the risk of reverse-escalation of commitment which can lead to unfinished megaprojects (Cornelio *et al.*, 2021). Among the different political reasons for megaprojects being terminated are lack of political support and leadership (Damoah *et al.*, 2018), political uncertainty or instability (Eja and Ramegowda, 2020), political interference (Dim and Ezeabasili, 2015), and political polarization (Cornelio *et al.*, 2021). For example, during political polarization, politicians might first express their support during the early project phases to be later withdrawn due to heightened partisanship and conflicting political agendas, thereby, leading projects to be prematurely terminated due to an exacerbated political issue. By analyzing 30 unfinished infrastructure megaprojects, Cornelio *et al.* (2023) identified six determinants of megaproject termination: socio-political, environmental, financial distress, regulatory, force majeure, and technological. The case of Xiaonanhai Dam sets an example of political influence, whereby the project was politically motivated to foster the city's rapid industrialization, to be then confronted with strong community opposition leading to project termination as marine life and ecology became endangered (Cornelio *et al.*, 2023). Similarly, environmental concerns related to Yeongwol Dam project triggered opposition movement that resulted in an intense conflict between the residents and the government that was only settled through project termination (Lee *et al.*, 2017). Considering cancelled projects as the context for promoters-opposers confrontation, we utilize one of Cornelio's (2023) six determinants of megaprojects cancellation – the macro socio-political lens resembled by POS and engagement behavior of various stakeholders - to provide a

more robust theorization that integrates stakeholder engagement behavior, political dynamisms, and megaprojects.

### *2.3 Political Opportunity Structure Theory*

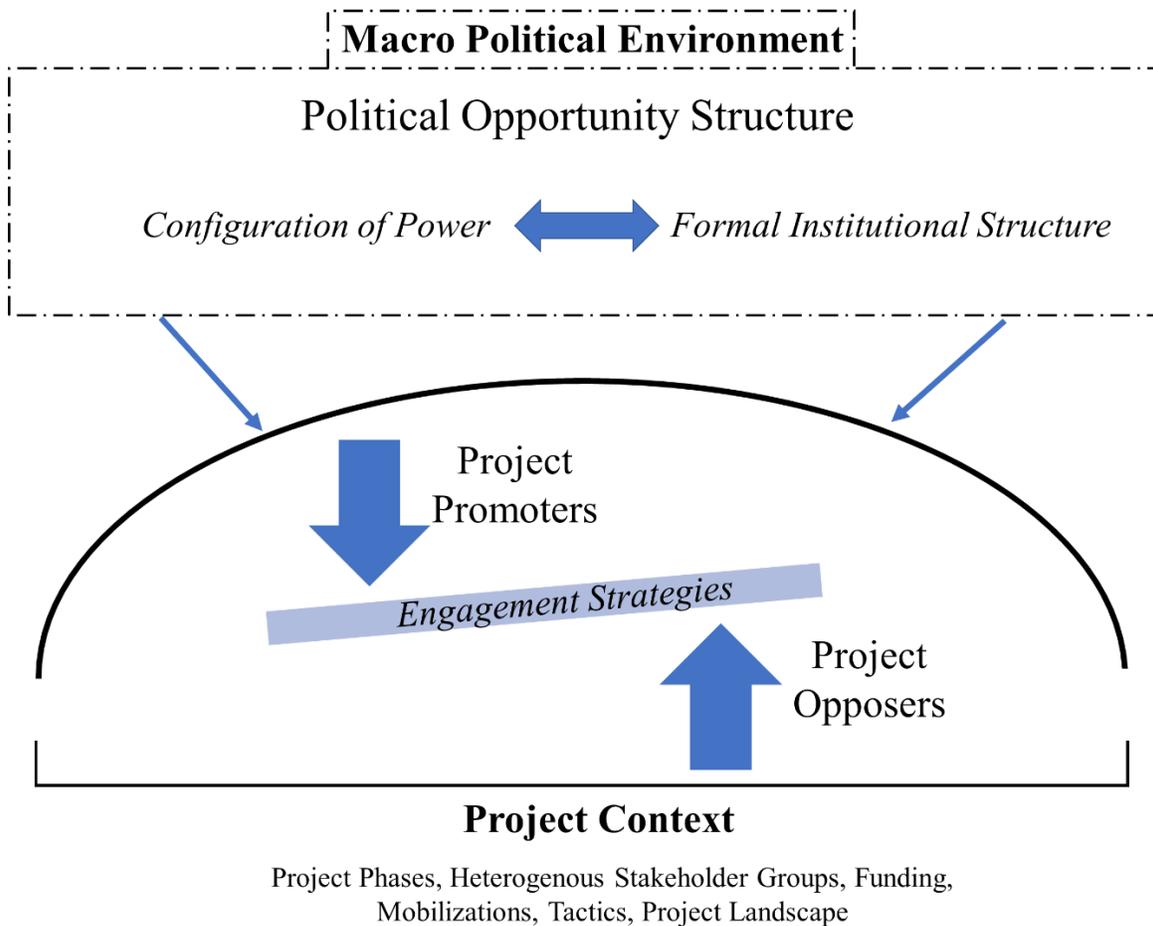
The relevance of adopting a political lens for megaproject science lies in the realm that management and organizational science cannot be excluded from politics (O’Doherty and De Cock, 2024), whether politics being conceived as a micro or macro realm (Buchanan and Badham, 2020). As argued, “Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn’t mean politics won’t take an interest in you” – as recited in Pericles’ famous funeral oration (Mynott, 2013; pp. 34–46). In contrast to ‘micro’ politics that manifest between managers competing for resources and leveraging worker relationships, this study adopts the ‘macro’ politics lens where political mechanisms at the societal and governmental levels (resembled by POS) are exposed to understand the influence exerted on stakeholder engagement behavior within a specific project context. This relationship between macro politics and project engagement behavior is valid and is resembled by the notion that an individual’s or a group’s life conditions, experiences, and behavior, are going to be shaped by a higher-order range of forces enacted through politics. Therefore, project management science is a discipline already inescapably entangled in politics (O’Doherty and De Cock, 2024; Çıdık *et al.*, 2024),

The origins of political opportunity structure (POS) date back to the 1970s when Eisinger (1973) introduced the term ‘structure of political opportunities’ in an attempt to explain social movement research from a political science lens after sociology research excluded the influence of the political factors on how societal groups behave. Opportunity structures refer to institutional

arrangements, resource configurations, and policies that may influence the mobilization and strategies of groups with special interests (Hadden and Jasny, 2019; Prakash and Gugerty, 2010). As such, the POS considers that the changes and the possible vulnerability of the political system in terms of division of the elites, the decline of repression, the increase in political pluralism, and the strengthening of political participation offers opportunities for opposition groups to manifest themselves and gain momentum in the power dynamics (Tarrow, 1989).

As part of the theoretical constructs of POS, authors reached a consensus on fundamental elements that constitute the theory, such as ‘formal institutional structure’ and ‘configuration of power’ (Rucht, 1996; Tarrow, 2022; Brockett, 1991; Kriesi *et al.*, 1992). Formal institutional structures can exhibit a high degree of openness where political power and decisions are shared among various parties, thus empowering social movements and their accessibility to the political system or can have low openness where political power is in the hands of closely knitted groups that continuously oppress social movements (Della Porta and Diani, 2006; Mitlin, 2006). Configuration of power explains the level of unity in political governance, where states that follow an exclusion strategy will tend to be more united in the face of conflicting social movements. In contrast, a pluralistic state that embraces heterogeneity and diversity follows an inclusion strategy (embracing conflicting demands and interests of diverse opponents) (Kriesi *et al.*, 1992; Tarrow, 1994). Despite this segregation, Della Porta and Diani (2006, p. 207) argue that these state categorizations are limited in explaining how social groups maneuver, where in reality, social movements can break traditional state boundaries and find potential allies and opponents across all government levels (elite policy-makers, party members and civic society). Therefore, a state, collectively being ‘black or white’ in their attitude towards political and social uprising is not common, as some political groups and their branches can, at some times, promote or oppose certain social

movements, where this can be in favor of or against the vast majority of political voices (Xie and Van Der Heijden, 2010). According to Kitschelt (1986), the influence capability of social movements depends on the ability of social movements to establish connections with political parties, also called the political input structure, as well as the capacity of a political system to implement policies that are in favor of social movements (Kitschelt, 1986). Despite POS being a useful tool for understanding social movements, its contribution might be limited by its potential to become a fudge factor for all events and circumstances rather than a comprehensive explanation of the political environment (Gamson and Meyer, 1996). Thus, it cannot serve alone as a framework to study social actors' engagement and should be updated to incorporate multilayered opportunity structures, agency, and new forms of governance (Giugni, 2011). While POS clarifies political dynamics at the macro level, its integration with engagement behavior can present a more comprehensive lens to study our research question.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

To summarize, the POS dimensions that will be examined in this paper are configuration of power and formal institutional structures. Configuration of power explains the level of unity in political governance, where politicians can be strongly or weakly united in the face of conflicting social movements. (Xie and Van Der Heijden, 2010). A formal institutional structure can be opened where political power and decisions are shared among various parties, thus empowering social movements and their accessibility to the political system; whereas a less opened institutional structure refers to the continuous oppression of social movements (Xie and Van Der Heijden, 2010).

#### 2.4 POS and Megaprojects

Megaprojects impact politics, the economy, and public life (Chi *et al.*, 2022). Public policy intensely affects the performance of public megaprojects in which public actors play a key role, so projects are likely to be affected by corruption where the public sector could act as the client, the owner, or even the main contractor, leading sometimes to project failure (Locatelli *et al.*, 2017)

Project management literature has seen a modest rise in capturing the role of politics in megaprojects. For instance, some research considers that the success of megaprojects is influenced by certain political factors such as confidence in local government, clarity of project vision and goal, and compatibility with long-term government plans (Abdul-kareem, 2020), while others found that communities' engagement is shaped by institutional and political context, such as community size, and the openness of political systems (Kriesi and Baglioni, 2003). Other studies have shown that a stable legal, financial, and political environment is essential for successful planning and project implementation (Rothengatter, 2019). Given their size, most megaprojects were found to be driven by the 'politics of aspiration' and their symbolic role in shaping future development rather than just their material outcomes (Müller-Mahn *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, understanding the performance of megaprojects should embrace political elements and turbulence considerations, thus allowing a more comprehensive approach considering megaprojects' evolving concerns from various actors (Revellino and Mouritsen, 2017). Meyer (2004) illustrates how political factors impact the opposition of community stakeholders by explaining that as political power weakens relative to the opposition's power, the community stakeholders may feel a

collective sense of symbolic efficacy and a greater capacity to enact significant change within the context. This opens significant opportunities for movements to recruit and mobilize members, to develop certain alliances, to employ explicit political tactics and strategies, and to advance specific claims according to the context (Meyer, 2004). Despite the modest use of political lens in megaprojects (Çıdık *et al.*, 2024), exploiting POS in its various dimensions is still scarce in project management and stakeholder engagement studies. Understanding community stakeholders' behavior towards megaprojects requires exploiting the different dimensions of POS as Tarrow (1994, p.85) described political opportunities as “dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure”. Little is still known about how POS influence the interplay between project opposers (mainly represented by community stakeholders) and project promoters amidst dynamic changes in political structural factors during turbulent times.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Case Selection*

Our empirical focus is on the prematurely terminated ‘Bisri Dam’ megaproject, a \$1.2 billion planned water supply augmentation project that is the largest in Lebanon, where the execution works have started in May 2019 before being officially forced to stop in June 2024. The project was considered to be the most appropriate solution to provide water to Beirut and Mount Lebanon (BeirutToday, 2019), as reported by the Lebanese government and the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR): The project is part of the Greater Beirut Water Supply Augmentation project aimed to provide economically efficient solutions to the severe shortages in public supply of water in the Greater Beirut area (Moughalian *et al.*, 2019).

The CDR is a public body created by the government in 1976 to lead the enormous task of reconstructing Lebanon after the civil war and up to date (Kranz, 2019), and is considered the project organization responsible for implementing and overseeing the Bisri Dam project. In contrast to traditional administrative governing entities, the CDR is a self-governing autonomous institution with exclusive mandates to select, plan, and construct public (mega) projects under the governance of the cabinet chaired by the prime minister. Despite the CDR being a government-affiliated institution, it is important to note that it operates in autonomy in regards to project management practices and administrative and functional responsibilities, and therefore, may not be directly responsible for a number of out-scope decisions taken by the government, such as employing the armed forces in the valley and interrogating a number of project opposer groups.

We chose this context for three reasons. First, as in the case of mega construction projects, several economic, technical, environmental, and health and safety uncertainties surround the implementation of the Bisri Dam project, aimed to be implemented in Bisri Valley, the only valley in Mount Lebanon to have an expansive agriculture, as well as over 50 archeological sites (Mawad, 2020). The main hazards of the megaproject include the possible environmental impact to the valley, which is characterized by having a large numbers of bean stocks, pines and citrus trees that surround the Roman ruins. Therefore, the tangible impact of the construction megaprojects through large-scale heavy works, elevated public concerns regarding the loss of biodiversity of the affected area.

Second, the project has not been carried out without strong opposition inside and outside the government. The first organized movement that pointed fingers towards the project was the ‘Lebanon Eco Movement’ in 2017, accusing CDR and the government of destructive impacts to biodiversity and cultural aspects of the valley (Ayoub and Maroun, 2020). The community

movement grew in number and impact into the name of ‘Save the Bisri Valley’ as a campaign that operated on the national level. The Bisri Valley is a protected site by a decision of the Ministry of Environment in 1997 and considered a major landscape for its touristic value (Ayoub and Maroun, 2020). According to community activists, around 150,000 woodland trees will be cut because the dam (BeirutToday, 2019). The “environmental genocide”, as described by local communities, could even take up to 500,000 trees (Moughalian *et al.*, 2019). T In total, around 570 hectares of agricultural land, natural vegetation and pine woodland will be expropriated and inundated, including 150 hectares of agricultural land, 82 hectares of pine woodland, and 131 hectares of natural vegetation. Nonetheless, from a geological perspective, researchers at the American University of Beirut have demonstrated that the valley is at the center of fault lines and regular seismic activity which makes the dam extremely dangerous, rising health and safety concerns (Ayoub and Maroun, 2020).

Third, the opposition between project opposers and project promoters occurred in a time when Lebanon was undergoing political turbulence, which according to many stakeholders (e.g., politicians, communities, media), has triggered the incidents and events related to the Bisri Dam project. Since the 17 October uprising targeted the ruling political classes, the Bisri Dam project also faced its share of scrutiny and challenges given that it is perceived as a microcosm of the government and the CDR., where the prior being formed by the main ruling political parties, unanimously approved the construction of the project. Therefore, the political landscape makes the Bisri Dam case unique for exploring the purpose of the study.

### *3.2 Research Approach*

To uncover the dynamics through which POS shape the engagement behavior between project opposers and project promoters amidst political turbulence, we relied primarily on press

coverage and public available data. Given the complexity of the study context, which involves various interacting social actors (such as communities, politicians, and the World Bank), qualitative research and a case study strategy were used (Yin, 2018). As part of this approach, secondary data was utilized, and content analysis was applied to examine the abundance of events reflecting participants' behaviors and attitudes as expressed in text format (Gond et al., 2016). Therefore, an abductive reasoning and theory elaboration approach was adopted by applying a general theory of politics to help explain our inferences (Walton, 2014). While an initial deductive step was performed with the aim of interpreting and categorizing the data based on the main constructs in literature (political opportunity structures, megaproject termination, engagement behavior); a second inductive step was conducted to identify emerging engagement behaviors and events not discussed by previous literature.

Our investigation employs a longitudinal case study design to examine how variations in the political climate and stakeholder behavior occurred over time. A single case study design allows for the acquisition of rich data and provides an in-depth analysis derived from a contested megaproject in Beirut, Lebanon. This, in turn, facilitates the investigation of real-life phenomena through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions while also promoting theoretical reflection (Bell et al., 2022). By addressing the specific issues “on the ground” in the case example, and moving from particular insights to broader knowledge, we ensured sufficient attention was given to deriving lessons that are not merely idiosyncratic to the phenomenon itself. Serving as revealing case, the episodes recorded in the Bisri megaproject in Beirut help to show how political turbulence can trigger different stakeholders’ engagement behaviors. As such, our revelatory case does not seek statistical generalization but rather aims to

build theory from cases (Eisenhardt, 1989) and to consider whether the lessons learned may be transferable to broader or different contexts.

The initial deductive stage helped tracing key project events that led to the observable changes in the political system influencing the engagement between opposing community stakeholders and project promoters. An inductive, exploratory stage then followed this longitudinal analysis to uncover the underlying reasons behind project premature termination. Specifically, the inductive stage helped shed light on how stakeholder engagement behavior was shaped by the political climate, which deepened divisions among political parties and community stakeholders, ultimately intensifying opposition.

### *3.3 Data Collection and Analysis*

Archival data were collected, involving materials from different publicly available sources, counting for 70 online articles, documents, and videos (see Appendix 1). The historical data included archival information, communities' copies of letters, government official reports, documentaries, online videos, and quality daily local, national, and international newspapers. Sources in original language (Arabic) were translated into English by one of the authors. Archival research is suitable and powerful to reveal insights when events have already occurred (Yin, 2018). We used these insights to evaluate the case study, highlighting the general events in particular order to uncover the “dynamics of phenomena” (Maclean et al., 2016, pp. 612–613). In doing this, we highlight the extent to which historical specificity matters (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gillett & Tennent, 2017). Following Gond *et al.* (2016, p.336), several criteria guided our selection of media: (1) availability in an electronic format for the purpose of systematic content analysis, (2) inclusion of city-based, national, and international newspapers and documentaries, (3) a balanced representation of different political orientations in Lebanon, and (4) a focus on historical data to

track the interplay of engagement from two perspectives: project opposers and project promoters unfolded over the project lifecycle.

This archival analysis helped to satisfactorily track any significant evolution over time. The in-depth use of already published documents enhanced the longitudinal elements and richness of the study. With respect to research boundary conditions, while the data track the progress of the project and engagement between communities and project promoters, it is noticed that most of the extracted data fall between years 2018 and 2021. In fact, this period results to be the one that had witnessed the highest activity between project opposers and promoters, resulting in many reports, online videos, and newspaper articles to be released on the topic. To make sense of our longitudinal dataset, we used a ‘temporal bracketing’ technique (Langley, 1999) to isolate distinct periods within the megaproject and its turbulent phases. We constructed a chronicle of key events as for Gond *et al.* (2016), using the facts gleaned from newspapers reports and secondary data. This enabled us to identify the main turning points of the megaproject engagement behaviors.

All data were imported into ATLAS.ti for coding. Categories were inductively derived from the data rather than being predetermined. Through the analysis process, data was read very carefully and key aspects that related to the purpose of the research noted. Analytical categories were identified and defined to ensure that they were exhaustive, mutually exclusive, independent and developed from a single classification.

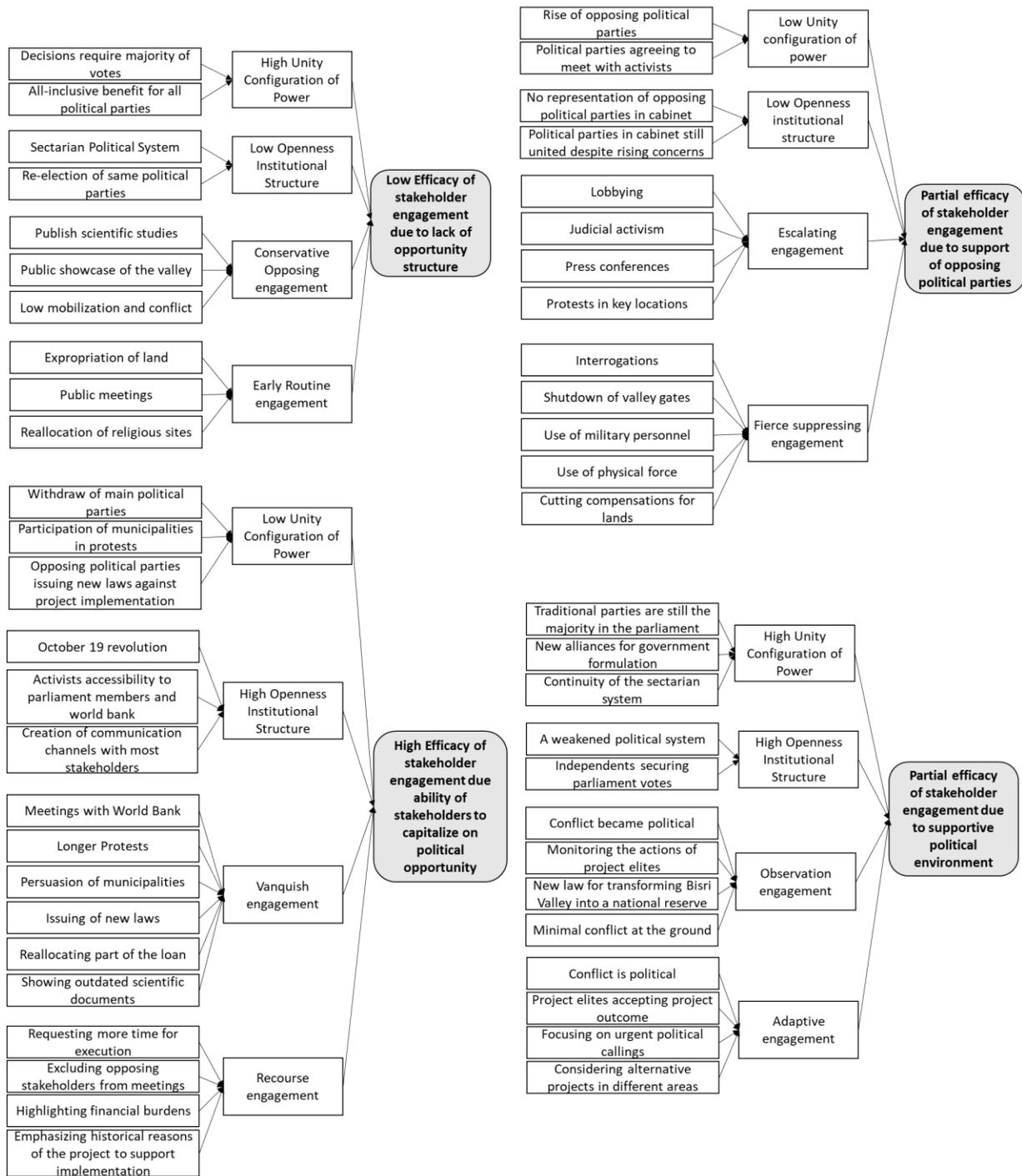
To conduct a systematic content analysis of the all 70 archival components, we followed a sequential process as outlined by Collis and Hussey (2009). This process involved sampling, devising analytical categories, defining the unit of analysis, conducting coding, and undertaking analysis. Inspired by the abductive approach, we ensured to extract all relevant secondary data related to the Bisri Dam project. Most of the archival data was in the form of news reports available

online and YouTube videos published by local and international news agencies (e.g. Aljazeera, Aljadeed, France25) and political groups (e.g. OTV, MMfiDawla). Data saturation was achieved at 47 archival components. The first step was to perform initial systemic coding based on a number of predefined categories/components that wished to be recorded and analyzed, and involved the dimensions of POS theory (degree of openness of formal institutional structure; degree of unity of configuration of power), project opposers engagement, and project promoters engagement, as these represent the main variables explored in the study.

For project opposers engagement during a less opened institutional structure and united configuration of power (considered at the planning phase of the project), the words, codes, and synonyms included, for example, ‘publish scientific studies’, ‘public showcase of the valley’, and ‘low mobilization and conflict’, all grouped as conservative opposing engagement (see Appendix 2<sup>1</sup> and Figure 1). In this phase, codes related to project promoters’ actions and behavior included ‘expropriation of land’, ‘public meetings’, and ‘reallocation of religious sites’, all grouped under normal routine engagement (See Appendix 2 and Figure 2). Regarding POS, codes that referred to the unity of the configuration of power were ‘decisions require majority of votes’ and ‘all-inclusive benefit for all parties’, while for less opened institutional structure included ‘sectarian political system’ and ‘re-election of same political parties’ (see Appendix 3 and Figure 2).

---

<sup>1</sup>Despite Appendix 2 and 3 representing the coding process this study operationalized the same process for the rest of the components but has not included it in the manuscript. Appendix 2 and 3 act as a model for the rest of the coding and analysis process.



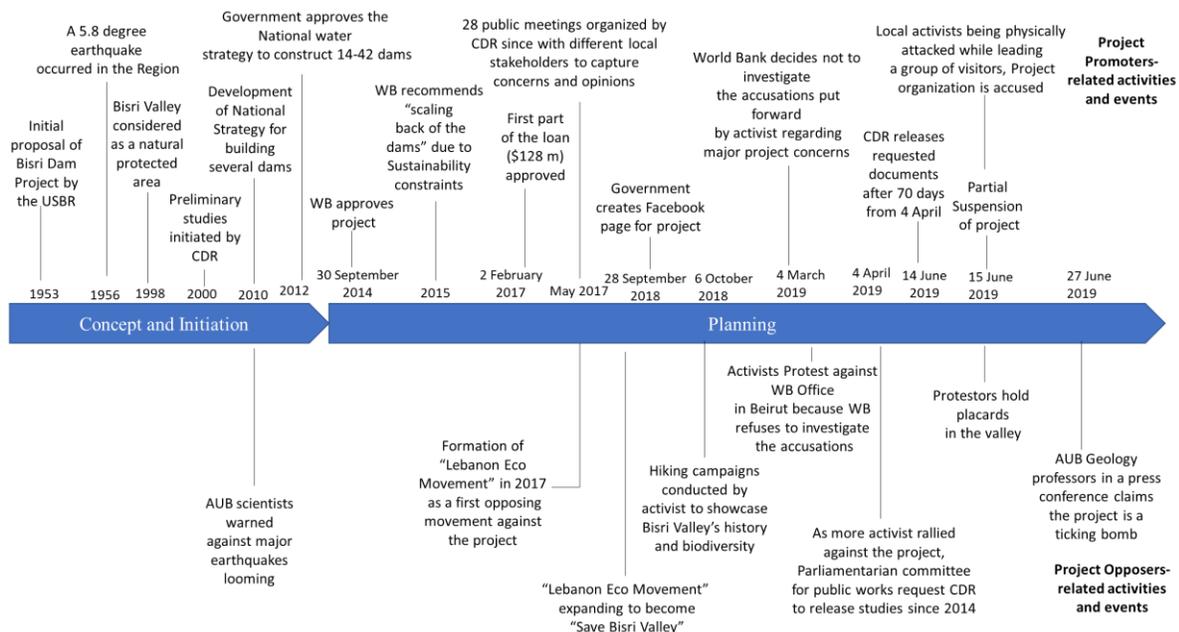
**Figure 2.** Coding structure for political opportunity structure and engagement

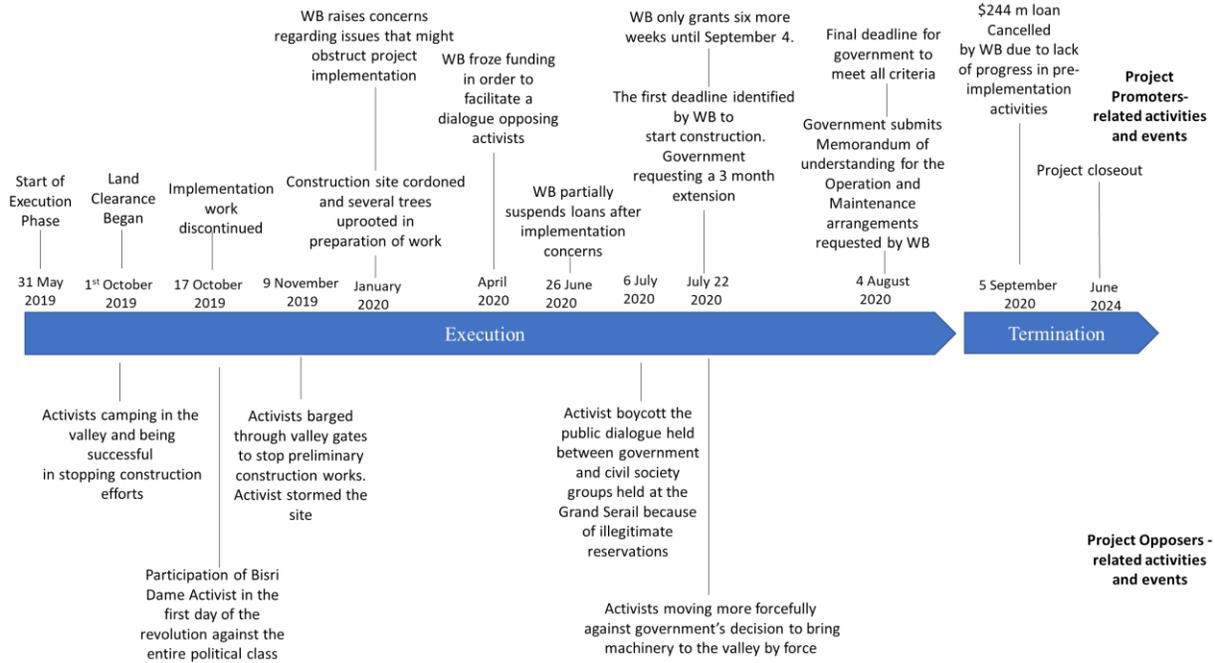
The last stage was to integrate second-order categories into more meaningful compelling categories that combine the main constructs explored: (1) Low Efficacy of stakeholder engagement

due to lack of political opportunity; (2) Partial efficacy of stakeholder engagement due to support of opposing political parties; (3) High Efficacy of stakeholder engagement due to ability of stakeholders to capitalize on political opportunity; (4) Partial efficacy of stakeholder engagement due to supportive political environment. Efficacy is defined as the capacity to enact significant change within a specific context (Meyer, 2004). The data structure for the four emerged categories are presented in Figure 2.

#### 4. Findings

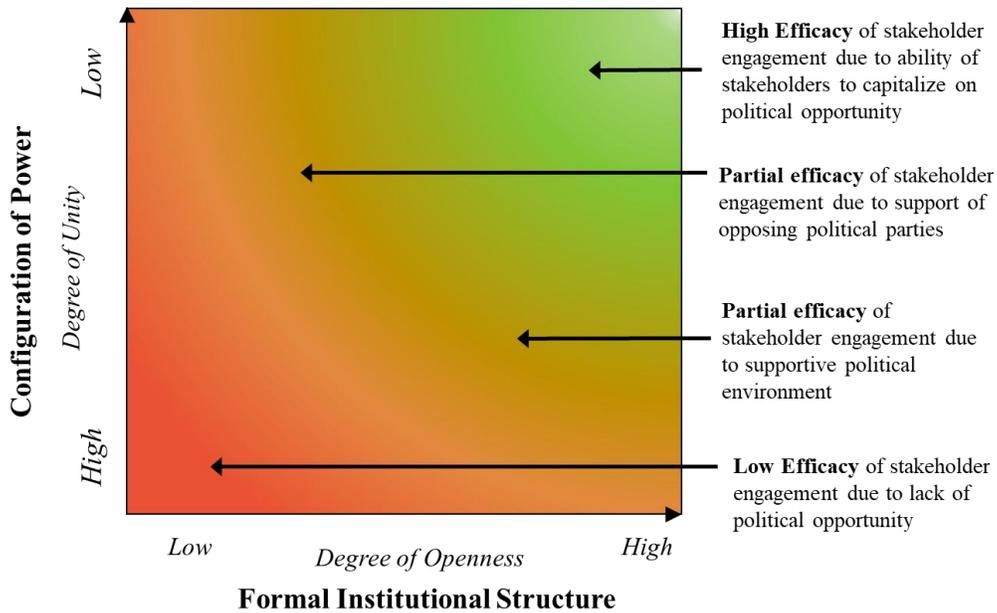
This section discusses the results yielded from our data analysis that demonstrate the engagement interplay of project promoters and opposers behaviors associated with different POS. These structures resemble the juxtaposition of two POS dimensions: configuration of power (degree of unity) and formal institutional structure degree of openness). Figure 3 shows a historical map of main events occurred from project concept and initiation to termination, illustrating the interplay of engagement and main events between project promoters and opposers across different project phases.





**Figure 3:** The interplay of engagement and events between project promoters and opposers across different project phases.

Our content analysis was guided by the research question “*How does political opportunity shape the engagement between project promoters and opposers amidst political turbulence, ultimately leading to project cancellation?*”. The findings from the content analysis led to the development of the configuration of power - formal institutional structure typology (Figure 4) that juxtaposes the POS dimensions leading to four emerging categories of the study. The efficacy of stakeholder engagement behavior at different political opportunities are presented. Efficacy is defined as the capacity of project opposers to enact significant change within a specific context.



**Figure 4:** A POS perspective on the efficacy of stakeholder engagement strategies

**Formal Institutional Structure:** Degree of openness where political power is shared among various parties, empowering social movement and their accessibility to the political system.

**Configuration of Power:** The level of unity in political governance, where states that follow an exclusion strategy will tend to be more united in the face of conflicting social movements.

In Figure 4, we depict a POS perspective on the efficacy of stakeholder engagement strategies taking place on a continuum from a red identity zone in the lower left corner that illustrates low efficacy if stakeholder engagement, through a yellow zone of partial efficacy, to a green zone across the top right corner that illustrates a high efficacy of project opposers' engagement behavior. To further elaborate, when the configuration of power of the project promoters is united with a less opened formal institutional structure, project opposers engagement tend to have a low efficacy as it would be hard to persuade the promoters due to their strong unity. As the configuration of power becomes less united, project opposers become more effective in their engagement as they

can benefit from the relationship gaps in the project promoters' network, thereby, lobbying with promoters that have contradicting views with the ruling parties. The engagement efficacy of project opposers is the highest when the formal institutional structure is highly opened and the configuration of power is less united. In this phenomenon, project opposers have a strong bargaining power due to their ability to exercise their political rights and be present in governance with the support of other political leaders that have withdrawn their allegiance from the ruling body.

#### *4.1 Low Openness Institutional Structure – High Unity Configuration of Power*

In October 17, 2019, Lebanon witnessed the first-of-its-kind mass uprising that sought the removal of the entire political regime that has been governing the country for the last 30 years, and which, according to many opposers, is blamed for state corruption and financial crises. Citizens from different geographic regions, age, religion, and other demographic factors protested in the majority of cities. Prior to this date, Lebanon followed (and still follows to a large extent) a democratic political system based on sectarianism, where the electoral system, decision-makers, organizations, and societies are treated and divided according to religious sects. Prior to the October uprising, the configuration of power in Lebanese politics could be described as united, where decisions are enacted upon securing the majority of the cabinet's votes, where each minister in the cabinet representing a political party. The openness of the formal institutional structure is low when the democratic system is described as not much more than a façade, and where the same ruling political classes, in majority, are elected again whenever the state institution deems required, that is through temporary alliances that often disintegrate as soon as the election outcomes are finalized. Accordingly, this structure diminishes potential social movements to secure parliament and government seats. Even though many disputes existed between different ruling political

classes segregated by religious and political agendas, collectively, they formed a blockage to any new uprising political powers that might shake the political regime. A researcher at the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies summarized the aforementioned ideas:

*The Lebanese parliament finally agreed to hold elections in 2018—nine years after the previous ones. The new electoral law and the new system, however, led to little changes in political representation, with voters in 2018 reiterating their support for the main established political parties.*

This era represents the years 2019 and backwards, where the efficacy of project opposers' engagement was low due to the absence of significant political opportunities. The data shows that little opposition to the dam project was noticed and little interest about alternative projects, such as using underground natural reserves, was discussed. As one project opposer stated “both government officials and much of the wider population think it is common sense that dams are good, that you cannot get water without dams.” The founder of Save the Bisri Valley campaign expressed this clearly (AliAhmad, 2020):

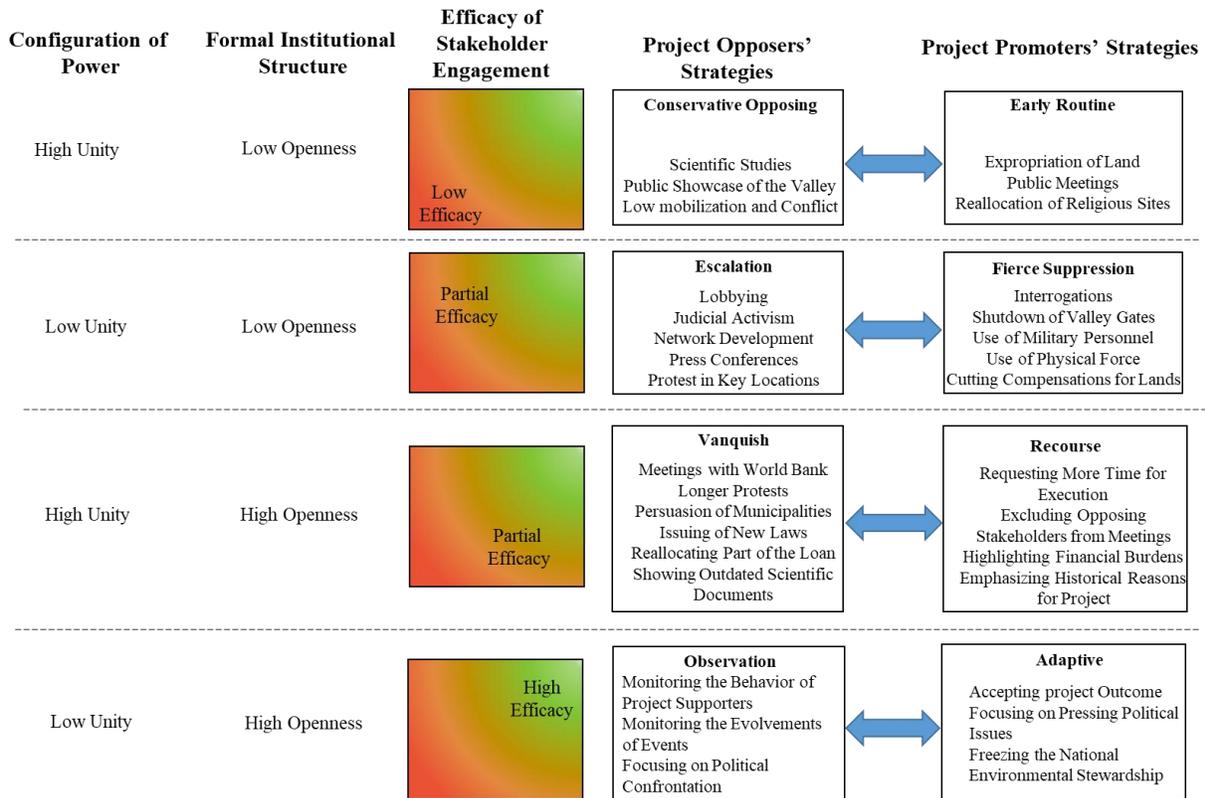
*“One of the reasons for why the political parties were united is because politicians were using the Bisri Dam project to allocate contracts to companies connected to them or owned by them. There is direct financial benefit and a symbolic one of advertising themselves as achievers. There is almost an unanimity in the state on this dam, and no one cares about the people in the valley, their safety, this country, or its threatened nature.”*

A community stakeholder as documented in a news report stated (BeirutToday, 2019):

*“The project is backed by most political parties that benefit from the project. Therefore, there is a consensus among the political class around the Bisri Dam because*

*this is one of the biggest projects in government right now. There is a huge benefit, considering that the country is run by contractors”*

Due to the absence of political opportunities as a result of a united configuration of power and a low opened institutional structure, the findings show that the engagement behavior and strategies of the project promoters (government-affiliated stakeholders and project organization) can be described as ‘normal routine behavior’, or in other words, ‘business as usual’ (see Figure 5). These strategies mainly involved: expropriating the lands of farmers and local citizens, offering compensations for the expropriation, evaluating the impact of alternative projects, performing public meetings with various stakeholders, and showing and gaining public support by locals in the valley. However, this phase was not without the early rise of confronting strategies such as creating social media pages that distort the image of other online pages that are against the project, and offering to reallocate religious sites after this being a major concern for the local citizens, as these sites were considered sacred and should remain intact. At this stage, the engagement behavior of the project promoters is more of a controlled reaction and less confrontational in nature, as the political parties and the CDR were united (high unity configuration of power) with hardly any chance for project opposers to penetrate the political system (low openness of formal institutional structure). On the other hand, opposing behavior of opposers were on the rise, but were considered ‘conservative’ with low mobilization and conflict as compared to other engagement behaviors implemented at consequent times. This conservative engagement behavior evolved around providing scientific evidence regarding the detrimental effects of the project on the environment and the possibility of stirring an earthquake, conducting environmental sport campaigns that showcase the environmental heritage of the valley. This phase also witnessed the development of the first formal political opposition group.



**Figure 5:** Engagement Interplay Across Different Political Opportunity Structures (Summary of Findings)

#### 4.2 Low Openness Institutional Structure – Low Unity Configuration of Power

The Lebanese government and the World Bank agreed to start project execution on 31 May, 2019. The year 2019 witnessed a slight twirl in political support for the project, with more political groups, mostly not in governance, expressed their obstruction towards the construction the dam. For instance, independent politicians (e.g., leaders of the MMfiDawla party) argued that most environmental projects in Lebanon, including the Bisri Dam, are driven by hidden political objectives. They added that the national environmental stewardship strategy is at the heart of Lebanese politics instead of being an independent entity - in the sense that the way the project has

been managed, with the engagement of both promoters and opposers, is at the center of political science (Kranz, 2019):

*“Azar, a local member of the parliament, has become one of the campaign’s few allies in parliament. He told Al Jazeera that he has been pushing for an investigation into the project. Paula Yacoubian, an anti-establishment deputy and staunch environmentalist, also voiced criticism last month.”*

Early signs of a configuration of power division were also noted in March 2019, as project opposers contacted independent parliament members to organize a meeting with other parliament members who supported the construction of the Bisri Dam. The meeting was successful where they agreed to publish all studies related to the project as requested initially by the World Bank. In parallel to the rising voices of independent politicians, voices of concern started to be heard inside the cabinet, but no significant disintegration of political unanimity towards the project was recorded. Accordingly, and since these events occurred before the 17 October uprising, the openness of the formal institutional structure was still considered low with no significant confrontations between the main political parties in the cabinet. However, main political parties such as the “Progressive Socialist Party” that have a strong presence in the Shouf region where the project ought to be constructed have withdrawn their support for the dam, but their opposition was modest before the construction phase. The role of the “Progressive Socialist Party” is considered significant they are represented by numerous local municipalities. The head of the environment committee at a NGO supports the aforementioned argument (Chehayeb, 2020):

*“We welcomed the withdrawal decision by the Progressive Socialist Party and local municipalities, but we she wished that their withdrawal had been made before construction*

*began. Perhaps this was a political decision, but regardless of the reason for this decision, we hope the rest of the municipalities will follow suit.”*

Given that configuration of power in year 2019 has changed from united to a partial division, it was observed that project opposers had capitalized on emerging political opportunities by escalating their confrontation with project promoters. More precisely, the project opposers have lobbied with lawyers to request from the public prosecution discrimination (highest judicial body in the country) to investigate whether environmental attorney generals were doing their job in protecting the environment. In addition, it was the first attempt from project opposers to establish ties with parliament members to release the scientific studies that validate the implementation of the project, with strong affirmations that validation did not exist. Other engagement behaviors included conducting wider protests in front of the World Bank headquarters, publicly accusing the World Bank of recklessness and ties with politicians, conducting press conferences with university professors, independent politicians, and lawyers, intensifying the confrontations in the valley, launching petitions, and inviting international media agencies to secretly collect footages of private security team in the valley. On the opposite pole, the promoters were more forceful in their opposition where community stakeholders were summoned for interrogations by the police, community stakeholders facing the prospect of losing their job due to the threat of termination, shutting down all gates that lead to the valley, excessive use of military personnel, threatening to not pay full compensation for the expropriated lands, and threat of treason charges against community stakeholders. The founder of Save The Bisri Valley Campaign shared his concern (LegalAgenda, 2019):

*“Several people were called for investigation simply because they critiqued online Facebook posts about moving historical monuments in the valley to a museum. People being investigated were considerably threatened and were asked about whether there are parties behind their movements”*

*“Security forces, private security companies, and the Lebanese army outnumber campaigners when they come out to protest. Present of excess numbers of military personnel (1 to 4). A protest of 25 people would be faced with 100 personnel including security forces, private security companies, and the Lebanese army which outnumber campaigners”*

#### *4.3 High Openness Institutional Structure – Low Unity Configuration of Power (17 October uprising)*

It was not until the 17 October, 2019 uprising that the formal institutional structure opened due to the ultimate withdrawal of main political parties that previously supported the project, mainly including the Progressive Socialist Party and the Lebanese Forces Party. A core member in the Progressive Socialist Party stated that the *“17 October movement has influenced them to change their idea about the project and to stop supporting it”* (AlJadeedNews, 2020a).

A declaration from a local community activist surmised this clearly (Sawma, 2020):

*“Attention has now turned towards the “Progressive Socialist Party”. They have recently announced its clear rejection to the dam project and also declared their support to the activists who are defending the valley. There is no doubt that these difficult days are the appropriate opportunity for that party to express its situation clearly, either continue to oppose it or also eventually joining the promoters of the dam”*

All construction activities have stopped in the valley since 17 October, 2019, and protestors have saved the Bisri Valley from the dam project, as claimed by the project opposers. Project opposers during the protest also suggested alternative projects that can be implemented to provide drinking water to Beirut. With the withdrawal of the “Progressive Socialist Party” and the “Lebanese Forces Party”, 15 municipalities suddenly participated in the protests, as reported by one of the national newspaper (AlJadeedNews, 2020b):

*“Many activists of different ages, representing 15 municipalities in Bisri Valley, have conducted a sudden protest in the valley, tying themselves to the trees to support a decision that four main municipalities have taken, that is to cancel the licenses given to the project organization to build the dam. This initiative is said to have been influenced by the Progressive Socialist Part, where many activists supported this decision after the progressive socialist party was one of the supporters of the Bisri Project.”*

The popular slogan of the Lebanese uprising was “all of them means all of them”, which represents the resentment towards the entire political regime. This first-of-its-kind protests about corruption in Lebanon has given new life to activism against the controversial structure planned for the valley. The uprising accelerated the decision to stop the Bisri Project and has raised worldwide attention towards the corrupted nature of the Dam and its detrimental effects, as described by a journalist. One of the leading activists stated (Chehayeb, 2020):

*“But the campaign did not make national headlines until October 2019, when a popular movement kicked off in Lebanon, seeking the removal of an entire political class, which is blamed for state corruption and misrule that led to the worst financial crisis since its 15-*

*year civil war. This project is the epitome of sectarian power and profit-sharing – and the power of large corporations and their affiliations with political parties.”*

The openness of the formal institutional structure and the disunity in the power of configuration after October 17 has empowered project opposers to leverage on the fragile state of the promoters, as they were less united and penetrated, to engage in a vanquish manner to eliminate any counter-defense state opposition backed by political and national support. The vanquish behavior included storming the construction site and transforming the site into a base filled with tents, meeting with the World Bank to show the number of missing scientific documents and those that exist are outdated, boycotting public dialogues held between the government and civic society groups, opposing parliament members issuing a new law that transforms the valley into an environment reserve, and getting more government officials that work in water reserves to expose the dangers of the project and the water to be supplied from surrounding locations.

As the project was close to being terminated, the engagement of the promoters can be considered as ‘recourse’- a ‘last-ditch effort’ to gain as much as support as possible and to prevent the cancellation of the project. As a modest attempt, the government requested to extend the deadline of execution as community stakeholders were storming the valley and where they prevented construction machines to enter. The World Bank requested a more all-inclusive stakeholder town-hall that includes the community stakeholders; however, invitations were only sent through emails, and opposing stakeholders were excluded from the meetings deliberately as the latter boycotted the meetings, as reported by project opposer groups. The promoter moved towards what can be described as more tranquil actions, such as highlighting dangerous financial consequences if the project ought to be terminated while emphasizing on historical justifications that support project

implementation - the project is not a new strategic initiative and should be implemented as it dates back to 1953, and is agreed upon by different governments, and because “a lot of money and time have been spent on this project”, as reported by the head of the CDR.

#### *4.4 High Openness Institutional Structure – High Unity Configuration of Power (Post-17 October uprising)*

In the post-17 October era, the formal institutional structure remained opened as it is unusual for it to reclose given the impact that the uprising had which weakened the impediments of the previous political system. This era witnessed parliament election in May 2022, where the so called ‘independents’, for the first time, won 15 parliament seats out of 128 (11.7%), after securing only one seat in 2018 elections. The independents officially represented the communities that are not associated with any existing political group, where this community has been considered the main actor in the Bisri Dam community protest and in the 17 October uprising. A reported for Aljazeera has stated (Chehayeb, 2020):

*“As Lebanon’s election frenzy cools down, the country has awoken to a new chapter in its dizzying political history. Shifts in the balance of power in the country’s 128-seat parliament...have occurred. Lawmakers who for many decades were constant variables in Lebanon’s political equation were unseated. Unfamiliar faces, inspired by the country’s 2019 uprising, were elected and might now breathe new life into an often-comatose political system”*

After the elections, the configuration of power shifted from being less united to highly united again, where traditional parties, despite their political rivalry, still had the majority of parliament seats (99 seats), segregated into two rival camps. This means that the traditional political parties

continued to be the main actors dictating legislative and political outcomes (Gharizi, 2022). Moving forward, the traditional political parties set out to reclaim their shattered political reputation left by the uprising by partially re-uniting at certain political levels, in particular during the formation of the new government that is mandatory after any election, as necessitated by the Lebanese constitution. A member of the United States Institute of Peace news agency stated (Gharizi, 2022):

*The post-election political dynamics are unlikely to differ from pre-poll politics. Berri (previous speaker of parliament) is the leading candidate to once again be speaker of parliament. Cabinet formation is likely to be an interminable process. Traditional parties, especially rival Christian ones, will determine the presidency. And the quick passing of an economic recovery plan and implementation of key reforms to unlock IMF funding are improbable.*

At that time, the Bisri Dam project remained discontinued after 2020 after the World Bank officially cancelled the fund on September 5, 2020, stating that the government had failed to address three objectives: finalizing the Ecological Compensation Plan that assesses biodiversity and ecosystem corrosion; recruiting a contractor for to start construction no later than September 4, 2020; and completing the preparations for operations and maintenance (GGF, 2020); which were all not achieved due to the delays caused by the protests. The years following 2020 witnessed minimal to no confrontation between project opposers and promoters in the construction site, where the confrontation transitioned from a ground-level conflict (i.e., closing roads, protesting in front of the parliament and key locations, etc.) to the political arena composed of parliament, the cabinet, the ministries, and other state bodies. Both parties entered what we consider ‘operation calm

waters' phase where stability and calmness have been restored, at least on the ground. However, project opposers have stated that they are still on the watch and are mainly “observing” project promoters – meticulously tracking the involvements and tailoring their behavior according to that of the project promoters’. A leading local community opposer reported to a main political newspaper in the country (An-Nahar newspaper) that:

*“Although the project is currently not in action and has stopped, at last for now, the case isn’t closed, and the struggle is still ongoing. The campaign is working even harder and more seriously on the issue in hopes of saving the valley and closing this case permanently”*

Despite project termination that occurred previously, the project opposers engagement can be described as being partially effective in the context of an open formal institutional structure and a united configuration of power, as political parties have reestablished, to a heightened level, their partial unity and can confront the project opposers at different future events. Project opposers still need to security a majority of parliament approval to pass a law that transforms the Bisri Valley into a national reserve, thereby, completely ruling out any future opportunities to implement the Bisri Project. Even though the formal institutional structure is opened; this outcome is still being challenged by the united configuration of power.

Project promoters have accepted the outcome of the project and had put the national environmental stewardship strategy (i.e., plan to build several dams across the country) on hold. Following this phase, Lebanon has experienced a multitude of severe crises such as the Beirut-Port explosion, banking and economic crisis, Ponzi scheme, and political instability, that all have stripped the appropriate contextual considerations that are conducive for the project, which involve adequate funding from the World Bank, political stability, community stakeholder support, the presence of

a diversified cabinet, which have all been missing since 2021. As a result, the project promoters have adapted by accepting the outcome of the Bisri project and have redirected their attention to more urgent political issues such as electing a new president for the country, forming a new cabinet, and resolving the banking and economic crisis. Despite these events, the project promoters have not abandoned the national environmental stewardship strategy; instead, they are holding out for political and economic conditions to be resolved to pursue their vision, perhaps at different geographic locations.

## **5. Discussion**

Project management literature has long described megaprojects as being ‘political’ that often lead to confrontation between various stakeholder groups, most notably the project organization and the community who often disagree on the project’s objectives, legitimacy, and community impact. To the best of our knowledge, perhaps there might have been modest attempts that have followed this study’s scope, however, we have not found concrete evidence that accommodates the role of political configurations in shaping the engagement behavior between opposing stakeholders who capitalize on gaps, opportunities, or changes in a turbulent political system to challenge each other. This study is among the first attempts to significantly bridge the main constructs of stakeholder engagement (micro/project-level) and politics (macro/institutional level) that have largely developed in isolation. To further elaborate, the findings demonstrate that engagement behavior, whether initiated from project opposers or promoters, may not strictly be as the conceptualization offered by traditional literature suggests - a reactive response to decisions that positively or negatively shape their interest, roles, and power. Rather, this study reveals engagement behavior as politically instituted and an adaptive reactive process that evolves in response to the changes in the political configurations.

The integration of both domains advances theory by suggesting that engagement efficacy cannot be understood without understanding how configuration of power shapes the unity of political actors that can be leveraged by community stakeholders to establish new relationships and reconfigure political networks. In addition, engagement efficacy can be understood by how formal institutional structure can provide an opportunity for community stakeholders to access the political system and shape decision-making. Thus, engagement behavior and efficacy become a reflection of the political field, where the intensity of the engagement strategy increases (e.g., from press conferences to protests) and the capacity to enact significant change within a specific context (efficacy) mirror the disintegration of political parties and the accessibility of political power. For example, when the formal institutional structure became more opened with a less united configuration of power, the project opposers became more powerful in exerting their demands in efforts to terminate the project, whereas the engagement of project promoters became weakened as they attempted to recourse and adapt to the prevailing events. This study also introduced the dynamic approach for stakeholder engagement which has been illustrated by the evolvement of the choice of engagement strategy used by both parties. For example, when project opposers escalated their engagement using through lobbying, judicial activism, and protests, project promoters, in return, fiercely encountered the opposers' escalation by conducting interrogations, using military forces, and shutting down the valley gates, for this fierce engagement to then cool down as events unfolded (i.e., use of observation and adaptation strategies when the project was terminated). The engagement behavior of one party and its evolvement was dependent on that of the other, where this lens has been underexplored in current literature.

### *5.1. Theoretical Implications*

This study widens project stakeholder management theorization by going beyond the traditional unidirectional approach that views stakeholder engagement as one-sided: either community stakeholders engaging project promoters for stakeholders' concerns to be more acknowledged, or project promoters engaging community stakeholders for a wider inclusion in decision-making processes (Alvarez *et al.*, 2020; Baaij and Reinmoeller, 2018; Fares, 2023), and to mitigate any foreseen uprisings that might affect project performance (Coppens *et al.*, 2018; Ninan and Sergeeva, 2021). Accordingly, this study adopts a bidirectional perspective that is considered relatively new and much needed in stakeholder management studies (Aaltonen *et al.*, 2024). From this perspective, the foci of analysis is on the engagement interplay between two parties (project opposers and promoters) that are considered, in many cases, hostile whenever a project is considered controversial (Lehtinen *et al.*, 2022). As shown by the empirical findings, the engagement behavior of both parties vary across different political circumstances, where this observed phenomenon is not merely coincidental; but suggest meaningful patterns that can be related to paradoxical theorization that considers opposing parties, despite being independent, complementary where the existence and behavior of one entity is shaped by that of the other (Schad *et al.*, 2016).

While there have been scholarly attempts to connect project studies with political theorization (Pinto, 2000; Jemine *et al.*, 2020; Vento, 2017; Matinheikki *et al.*, 2019; Çıdık *et al.*, 2024; McGivern *et al.*, 2018; Revellino and Mouritsen, 2017), this study extends the theoretical scope of stakeholder management by empirically utilizing POS theory and its key dimensions (configuration of power, formal institutional structure), thereby, bringing up different interesting insights into how the behavior of various project stakeholders is shaped by different political modalities. In this context, the empirical findings, first, deepen the theoretical premises of POS

theory by showing that its main dimensions (configuration of power, formal institutional structure), rather than being considered independent constructs, interact and can be juxtaposed to provide more nuanced insights into the behavior of actors embedded within a political setting. That being said, the second contribution lies in the development of a new political – stakeholder engagement typology that juxtaposes the unity of configuration of power with the openness of formal institutional structure, thereby moving beyond traditional classification methods where stakeholders are categorized based on their attributes (e.g. power, legitimacy, urgency, proximity, influence, interest) (Asante Boadi *et al.*, 2019) or the structure of their relationships and the network position they occupy (Wu *et al.*, 2020; Fares *et al.*, 2021), and other methods where stakeholders are classified on their willingness to promote or oppose organization objectives (e.g., proponents/opponents, actively/passively involved, fiduciary/non-fiduciary). This implies that modelling stakeholder engagement behavior would be incomplete without the consideration of higher political factors. The third contribution lies in extending the current repository of stakeholder engagement behavior that focused mainly on the strategies of communication, boycott, lobbying, coalition and litigation to oppose the project organization (Nguyen Long *et al.*, 2019) to suggest four new project opposers’ engagement behaviors (conservative opposing, escalating, vanquishing, observation) and four project promoters’ engagement behaviors (early routine, fierce suppressing, recourse, adaptive) and their duo interaction (e.g., escalation versus fierce suppression; vanquish versus recourse).

## *5.2 Managerial Implications*

The overall trajectory of the findings points towards one clear observation, which is that all the engagement exercised by any party were defensive, hostile, and lacked attempts for any type of resolutions, which all led to project termination. This outcome is in favor of the project

opposers that demanded, since the beginning, the project not be implemented. After years of project planning and a substantial amount of the budget spent, the project promoters have neither gained any benefit nor have contributed to the community. Therefore, to gain at least some kind of advantage in project environments that are hostile to the project organization, policy makers and project managers are required to deviate from the 'instrumental approach to stakeholder management' that favors economic benefits to primary stakeholders (suppliers, contractors, shareholders) and adopts the view of 'management-of-stakeholders' – effectively engaging stakeholders as providers of resources and as means to an end. Project managers are required to compromise and consider the 'management-for-stakeholder' approach that calls for a more holistic stakeholder inclusion in strategic decision-making to ensure a smoother ride towards project acceptance and completion (Eskerod *et al.*, 2015). With the rise of sustainable projects that balance social, economic, and environmental interests, and with project termination being the most estimated outcome of fierce opposition between balanced powers, the 'management-for-stakeholder' approach can serve as a rational and ethical endeavor to ensure fairness, transparency, and sustainable development through the participation of all stakeholders throughout the project life cycle (Di Maddaloni and Derakhshan, 2019). Therefore, paying attention and attending to stakeholder interests and concerns should help project managers increase positive impact and reduce negative outcomes. The findings of this study can inform project managers of possible behavior, attitudes and strategies that project opposers apply for their voice to be heard and for their interest to be considered in a project's strategic objectives. The findings should not aim to increase rivalry between different project stakeholders, but rather to help find a common ground for a win-win situation where the interests and goals of all stakeholders can be achieved, thereby, mitigation the risks that results from hostility and confrontation.

From a POS perspective, implications extend to project teams that specifically operate in politically charged climates or who are directly or indirectly influenced by political parties, such as the CDR which is a government entity being the main project organization responsible for implementing the Bisri Dam project. Project teams, particularly when their objectives align with that of political parties, are invited to perceive the political landscape as dynamic rather than fixed, where alliances and oppositions shift with emerging political opportunities and benefits (i.e., today's political allies becoming tomorrow's adversaries), as demonstrated in this study where two main political parties (Progressive Socialist Party and The Lebanese Forces Party) shifted from promoters to opposers following the 17 October uprising. In order for project teams to proactively mitigate uprising risks, political opportunity structures should be continuously scanned to detect early changes in, for example, configurations of power (unity of political parties) where new affiliations can be conducted with emerging actors (e.g., neutral actors) to avoid political confrontations and neutralize perceptions of sectarianism. In this context, project teams are invited to carefully design their engagement framework to include: 1) inclusive communication forums for project transparency, co-value creation, and participatory redesign, 2) new paradigm perspective that reframes opposition as a diagnostic tool for identifying governance and operational biases, 3) contingency and de-escalation pathways to promote adaptive capacities and reduce drastic decisions that build tension and community unrest, and 4) institutional learning culture that reports stakeholder feedback, prevents repetitions, and recommends initiatives for promoting continuous engagement excellence and project transparency. Table 1 presents further heuristic implications to be considered by practitioners operating in a similar context, and involve early scanning of POS dimensions, engagement triggers, de-escalation pathways, contingency plan, and reflective learning.

For political groups that are visibly involved in steering mega projects, the case calls for reducing publicized political sponsorship and politically enforced decisions that disrupt a project’s social legitimacy and credibility. Hence, political groups should be aware that their participation can both empower or jeopardize project implementation, and therefore, are required to maintain an arm’s length between effective operational decision-making and corporate social responsibility and sustainability practices. Lastly, due to the latest geo-political turbulences, tighter budgets, and growing governments pressure in delivering megaprojects more efficiently, these findings enrich our understanding of how engagement behavior in megaprojects might be shaped and manifested in turbulent times. As such, providing a toolbox that serves project organizations to consider in which way project opposers can engage with project promoters, either to oppose projects or, more favorable, to reduce tensions and improve project outcome from a more social sustainable perspective.

<b>Heuristic Dimensions</b>	<b>Observable Indicator</b>	<b>Recommended Response</b>	<b>Illustrative Rationale</b>
<b>Early Scanning of POS dimensions</b>	Signs of fragmentations in the political system such as increased or decreased political division and access to power	Early assessment of configuration of power unity and formal institutional openness	Predict early shifts and opportunities that might be proactively leveraged for greater efficacy or to ensure stakeholder inclusion
<b>Engagement Escalation Triggers</b>	Use of military personal and exclusion of community stakeholders by project promoters; judicial activism and aggressive protests from project opposers	Prohibit the use of force and establish common grounds by eliminating one-sided initiatives and activating inclusive discussions	Reduces conflict and polarization and enhances mutual benefits and project viability.
<b>De-escalation Pathways</b>	Mutual outreach, operational deadlocks, and balance of power	Ensure the longevity of collaboration and mutual understanding through governance frameworks	Promote adaptive capacity and accountability and minimize the emergence of drastic decisions that can renew opposition and prevent project completion.

<b>Heuristic Dimensions</b>	<b>Observable Indicator</b>	<b>Recommended Response</b>	<b>Illustrative Rationale</b>
<b>Contingency Planning</b>	Proactive risk management processes and availability of system modularity, scenario planning strategies, and escalation procedures	Implement alternative sustainable projects conjointly with new governance frameworks (e.g., joint steering committees)	Increases adaptability and legitimacy of governance systems and operational frameworks while ensuring social and environmental sustainability
<b>Reflective Learning</b>	Post-event project change or cancellation, and/or changes in political configuration and decision-making	Document lessons learned for a proper governance framework and preventive project failure measures	Create an institutional culture for reframing conflict as insights for governance and operational improvements and ensure continuous engagement and project transparency

**Table 1. Heuristic Practical Implications**

## 6. Conclusions

The objective of this study was to explore how different POS, resembled by formal institutional structure and configuration of power, shaped the engagement behavior between two opposing parties (the project opposers where community stakeholders are a major part of, and project promoters that resemble certain government entities and project organization groups) and how this led to project termination.

This study illustrates that the efficacy of project opposers' behavior, more notably the choice of engagement behavior of opposing parties, are shaped by the extent of formal institutional structure and configuration of power. For example, as the formal institutional structure became more opened for new project opposers to join the political establishment, and as the configuration of power became less united with an increased division of project promoters, project execution efforts have hindered with project opposers escalating their engagement with project promoters. To further elaborate, the engagement behavior of project opposers was least effective in the period before the 17 October uprising where the macro political environment was static and where the ruling

political class dominated the political establishment and any subsequent decisions concerning community projects. In this period, the formal institutional structure was less opened for project opposers to access the political system, and where most political parties were still united in their support of the project. As such, project opposers were limited in their options and where conservative in their engagement; in return, project opposers, seeing no significant threat, engaged with early routine practices. However, movement opportunities have increased as soon as the configuration of power became less united: meetings between independent parliament members and community stakeholders, rising voices of independent politicians inside the cabinet, and the withdrawal of several main political parties (Progressive Socialist Party, The Lebanese Forces Party) and the municipalities that they influenced. Project opposers took advantage of ‘cracks’ in the system, and with the support of certain political parties, intensified their confrontation through lobbying, judicial activism and network development. As a response, it can be argued that the political promoters became threatened as seen by their engagement behavior, and aimed to suppress the threat by engaging fiercely: calling community stakeholders for interrogations and shutting all gates that lead to the project site.

Moving forward, as the political establishment became shaken by the 17 October uprising, the formal institutional structure became more opened for project opposers to be represented in the parliament alongside other independent politicians and political parties that left the political establishment (at least in the context of the Bisri Dam); thereby, leading to further divisions in political governance that led to ministerial resignations from the cabinet. With the formal institutional structure becoming more opened with a less united configuration of power, the project opposers became more powerful in exerting their demands as they engaged in a vanquish manner in efforts to terminate the project, while the project promoters aimed to recourse in an attempt to

repair their profile towards the public and the funding institutions. The association between POS and engagement behavior is further evidenced in the post-17 October uprising, where project opposers were able to secure a substantial number of parliament seats (maintaining the openness of the formal institutional structure) which resulted in transforming the opposition from a ground-level conflict to the political arena after project termination. Traditional political parties, in return, aimed to reclaim their shattered political power through potential political alliances that could be partially seen at certain government levels, thereby, shifting the configuration of power from low unity to high unity again as a new government has been formed exclusive to the independents.

Certain limitations inherent to the study design and implementation should be considered in the interpretation of the study's conclusions and related methodological observations. First, due to the nature of the study, the richness of already available documentation although trustworthy and credible did not provide insights on the lived experiences and feelings of both communities and project promoters engaging in turbulent political times. As such, future studies could overcome the problem of archival silence (Decker, 2013) through the collection of primary data such as interviews. Second, the secondary data might be subject to source bias as certain sources might have hidden political agendas and might support certain stakeholder groups and diminish others, where this can be mitigated through a holistic heterogenous perspective that equally captures the perception of various stakeholder groups. The researchers approached the archival data with caution, aiming to limit subjectivity in data interpretation and adopt a natural standpoint. Third, the investigation that took place through over 70 sources was based in one country only (Lebanon). This suggests a need for comparison with other geographical and institutional settings (developed vs developing conditions) and industries to enhance the robustness of the illustrated results as the influence of the institutional/country context might provide additional illuminating insights.

Despite these limitations, it is believed that the quality of the proposed results based on a longitudinal analysis of secondary data is reliable and useful. This study opens avenues for future research along the political-stakeholder axis, encouraging to explore how changes in the macro environment, such as new legal and environmental frameworks, offer new theorizations on how stakeholders behave in various contexts.

'Declarations of interest: none'.

## References

- Aaltonen, K., & Kujala, J. (2010). A project lifecycle perspective on stakeholder influence strategies in global projects. *Scandinavian journal of management*, 26(4), 381-397
- Aaltonen, K. (2013). The establishment of legitimacy: the case of international projects. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 6(1), pp.13-35.
- Aaltonen, K., Derakhshan, R., Di Maddaloni, F. and Turner, R. (2024). Stakeholder engagement: Theoretical and methodological directions for project scholarship. *International Journal of Project Management*, 42(7), p.102649.
- Aaltonen, K., Jaakko, K., & Tuomas, O. (2008). Stakeholder salience in global projects. *International journal of project management*, 26(5), 509-516.
- Abdul-Kareem H. I. (2020), "Factors that Influence the Megaprojects in Iraq", *IOP conference series. Materials Science and Engineering*, Vol. 870 No. 1, pp. 12067.
- Aliahmad T. (2020), *Bisri: Lebanon's dam of contention* [Online]. Arab News. Available: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1729886/middle-east>.
- Aljadeednews. (2020a), *The loan from the World Bank can be used for electricity project* [Online]. Al Jadeed News: Al Jadeed News. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRqoRm6mevw&list=PL0bUFz2GQLabMwddcdYIEAwd499pCA6hY&index=21>.
- Aljadeednews. (2020b), *Protest in Bisri Valley to support the decision of the municipalities* [Online]. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wuHhknxCWo&list=PL0bUFz2GQLabMwddcdYIEAwd499pCA6hY&index=23>.
- Alvarez S. A., Young S. L. and Woolley J. L. (2020), "Creating the world's deadliest catch: The process of enrolling stakeholders in an uncertain endeavor", *Business & Society*, Vol. 59 No. 2, pp. 287-321.
- Asante Boadi E., He Z., Bosompem J., Say J. and Boadi E. K. (2019), "Let the talk count: Attributes of stakeholder engagement, trust, perceive environmental protection and CSR", *Sage Open*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 2158244019825920.
- Ayoub J. and Maroun C. (2020), *Stopping the Bisri Dam: From Local to National Contestation* [Online]. Available: <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/stopping-the-bisri-dam-from-local-to-national-contestation/>.
- Baaij M. and Reinmoeller P. (2018), *Engaging Critical Stakeholders to Support the Strategy Processes. Mapping a Winning Strategy: Developing and Executing a Successful Strategy in Turbulent Markets*. Emerald Publishing Limited, pp.
- Beiruttoday. (2019), *The Bisri Dam Project in Lebanon is a "Ticking Atomic Bomb"* [Online]. Available: <https://beirut-today.com/2019/07/16/bisri-dam/>.
- Bell E., Bryman A. and Harley B. (2022), *Business research methods*, Oxford university press.
- Biesenthal, C., Clegg, S., Mahalingam, A. and Sankaran, S., 2018. Applying institutional theories to managing megaprojects. *International journal of project management*, 36(1), pp.43-54.
- Brockett C. D. (1991), "The structure of political opportunities and peasant mobilization in Central America", *Comparative politics*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 253-274.
- Buice M. (2022), "Division at Home, Unity Abroad? The Impact of Local and International Dynamics on Political Opportunity Structure in the Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Secure Highway Conflict", *Alternatives: global, local, political*, Vol. 47 No. 3, pp. 135-155.
- Buchanan, David, & Badham, Richard (2020). *Power, politics, and organizational change*. London: Sage.
- Burke, Kenneth (1945/1969). *A grammar of motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

- Chehayeb K. (2020), Lebanon's Bisri Valley Dam faces uncertain future after funding halt. *Middle East Eye*.
- Chi M., Chong H.-Y. and Xu Y. (2022), "The effects of shared vision on value co-creation in megaprojects: A multigroup analysis between clients and main contractors", *International journal of project management*, Vol. 40 No. 3, pp. 218-234.
- Çıdık M. S., Garfias Royo M., Mulligan J., K'oyoo A. O. and Parikh P. (2024), "Political ecology perspective for a new way of understanding stakeholders and value in infrastructure projects", *International journal of project management*, Vol. 42 No. 2, pp. 102565.
- Clarkson M. E. (1995), "A stakeholder framework for analyzing and evaluating corporate social performance", *Academy of management review*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 92-117.
- Collis J. and Hussey R. (2009), *Business research: A practical guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students*, Palgrave macmillan.
- Coppens T., Van Dooren W. and Thijssen P. (2018), "Public opposition and the neighborhood effect: How social interaction explains protest against a large infrastructure project", *Land use policy*, Vol. 79 No., pp. 633-640.
- Cornelio J. R. J., Sainati T. and Locatelli G. (2021), "What does it take to kill a megaproject? The reverse escalation of commitment", *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 39 No. 7, pp. 774-787.
- Cornelio J. R. J., Sainati T. and Locatelli G. (2023), "Digging in the megaproject's graveyard: Why do megaprojects die, and how to check their health?", *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 41 No. 6, pp. 102501.
- Cuganesan S. and Floris M. (2020), "Investigating perspective taking when infrastructure megaproject teams engage local communities: Navigating tensions and balancing perspectives", *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 153-164.
- Damoah I. S., Akwei C. A., Amoako I. O. and Botchie D. (2018), "Corruption as a source of government project failure in developing countries: Evidence from Ghana", *Project Management Journal*, Vol. 49 No. 3, pp. 17-33.
- De Nito E., Caccialanza A., Canonico P. and Favari E. (2024), "Analyzing the role of social value in megaprojects: toward a new performance framework", *Measuring business excellence*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 243-254.
- Dear M. (1992), "Understanding and overcoming the NIMBY syndrome", *Journal of the American planning association*, Vol. 58 No. 3, pp. 288-300.
- Della Porta D. and Diani M. (2006), *Social movements: an introduction*, Blackwell Publishing: Malden, Mass.
- Di Maddaloni F. and Davis K. (2018), "Project manager's perception of the local communities' stakeholder in megaprojects. An empirical investigation in the UK", *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 36 No. 3, pp. 542-565.
- Di Maddaloni F. and Derakhshan R. (2019), "A leap from negative to positive bond. A step towards project sustainability", *Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 41.
- Di Maddaloni F. and Derakhshan R. (2023), "Stakeholders' perception of organization: an attribution and fairness perspective", *International journal of managing projects in business*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 27-49.
- Di Maddaloni F. and Sabini L. (2022), "Very important, yet very neglected: Where do local communities stand when examining social sustainability in major construction projects?", *International journal of project management*, Vol. 40 No. 7, pp. 778-797.
- Di Maddaloni, F., Meira, L.H., de Andrade, M.O., de Melo, I.R., Castro, A. and Locatelli, G. (2025). The dark legacy of megaprojects: A case of local disengagement, missed opportunities, and social value dissipation. *International Journal of Project Management*, 43(1), p.102676.
- Dim N. U. and Ezeabasili A. C. C. (2015), "Strategic Supply Chain Framework as an Effective Approach to Procurement of Public Construction Projects in Nigeria", *International Journal of Management and Sustainability*, Vol. 4 No., pp. 163-172.

- O'Doherty, D., & De Cock, C. (2024), "Politics in Organization Studies: Multi-disciplinary traditions and interstitial positions", *Organization Studies*, 45(5), pp. 745-766.
- Eisinger P. K. (1973), "The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities", *The American political science review*, Vol. 67 No. 1, pp. 11-28.
- Eja K. and Ramegowda M. (2020), "Government project failure in developing countries: A review with particular reference to Nigeria", *Global Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 19 No., pp. 35-47.
- Eskerod P., Huemann M. and Ringhofer C. (2015), "Stakeholder inclusiveness: Enriching project management with general stakeholder theory", *Project Management Journal*, Vol. 46 No. 6, pp. 42-53.
- Eskerod P. and Vaagaasar A. L. (2014), "Stakeholder management strategies and practices during a project course", *Project Management Journal*, Vol. 45 No. 5, pp. 71-85.
- Fares J. (2023), "A multi-level typology for stakeholder influence: A systematic literature review using the structural approach", *European Management Journal*, Vol. No., pp.
- Fares J., Chung K. S. K. and Abbasi A. (2021), "Stakeholder theory and management: Understanding longitudinal collaboration networks", *Plos one*, Vol. 16 No. 10, pp.
- Fares J., Sadaka S. and El Hokayem J. (2022), "Exploring entrepreneurship resilience capabilities during Armageddon: a qualitative study", *International journal of entrepreneurial behaviour & research*, Vol. 28 No. 7, pp. 1868-1898.
- Flam H. and Doerr N. (2015), Visuals and emotions in social movements. *Methods of exploring emotions*. Routledge, pp. 229-239.
- Gamson W. A. (Year) Published. "Reflections on" The Strategy of Social Protest". *Sociological Forum*, 1989. JSTOR, 455-467.
- Gamson W. A. and Meyer D. S. (1996), *Framing political opportunity*.
- Ggf G. G. F. (2020), *Victory in Lebanon: Bisri Valley Dam Canceled* [Online]. Available: <https://www.greengrants.org/2020/09/14/save-bisri/>.
- Gharizi O. (2022), Lebanon's Vote and the Prospect of Long-awaited Political Reform. *United States Institute of Peace (USIP)*.
- Giugni M. (2011), Political opportunity: Still a useful concept? *Contention and trust in cities and states*. Springer, pp. 271-283.
- Gond J. P., Barin Cruz L., Raufflet E. and Charron M. (2016), "To frack or not to frack? The interaction of justification and power in a sustainability controversy", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 53 No. 3, pp. 330-363.
- Hadden J. and Jasny L. (2019), "The Power of Peers: How Transnational Advocacy Networks Shape NGO Strategies on Climate Change", *British journal of political science*, Vol. 49 No. 2, pp. 637-659.
- Jemine G., Dubois C. and Pichault F. (2020), "When the Gallic Village Strikes Back: The Politics Behind 'New Ways of Working' Projects", *Journal of change management*, Vol. 20 No. 2, pp. 146-170.
- Jenkins J. C. and Perrow C. (1977), "Insurgency of the powerless: Farm worker movements (1946-1972)", *American sociological review*, Vol. No., pp. 249-268.
- Jiang Y., Xu R. and Chai J. (Year) Published. "How to Meet Secondary Stakeholders' Need: Finding Strategic Approach through Corporate Foundations". *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 2019. Academy of Management Briarcliff Manor, NY 10510, 17359.
- Kabahinda, E. and Mwesigwa, R. (2023), "Trust mediates the relationship between stakeholder behavior and stakeholder Management of Public Private Partnership Projects in Uganda", *Public Organization Review*, Vol 23 No.1, pp. 245-263.
- Kenney-Lazar M. and Ishikawa N. (2019), "Mega-Plantations in Southeast Asia: Landscapes of Displacement", *Environment and Society*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 63-82.
- Kitschelt H. P. (1986), "Political opportunity structures and political protest: Anti-nuclear movements in four democracies", *British journal of political science*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 57-85.

- Kranz M. (2019), *Lebanese dam project stirs earthquake fears, environment concerns* [Online]. AlJazeera. Available: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/8/7/lebanese-dam-project-stirs-earthquake-fears-environment-concerns>.
- Kriesi H. and Baglioni S. (2003), "Putting local associations into their context. Preliminary results from a Swiss study of local associations", *Swiss Political Science Review*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 1-34.
- Kriesi H., Koopmans R., Duyvendak J. W. and Giugni M. G. (1992), "New social movements and political opportunities in Western Europe", *European journal of political research*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 219-244.
- Lee C., Won J. W., Jang W., Jung W., Han S. H. and Kwak Y. H. (2017), "Social conflict management framework for project viability: Case studies from Korean megaprojects", *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 35 No. 8, pp. 1683-1696.
- Legalagenda (2019), Conference about silencing the opposition voices.
- Lehtinen J., Aaltonen K. and Rajala R. (2019), "Stakeholder management in complex product systems: Practices and rationales for engagement and disengagement", *Industrial marketing management*, Vol. 79 No., pp. 58-70.
- Lehtinen J., Locatelli G., Sainati T., Artto K. and Evans B. (2022), "The grand challenge: Effective anti-corruption measures in projects", *International journal of project management*, Vol. 40 No. 4, pp. 347-361.
- Liu Z.-Z., Zhu Z.-W., Wang H.-J. and Huang J. (2016), "Handling social risks in government-driven mega project: An empirical case study from West China", *International journal of project management*, Vol. 34 No. 2, pp. 202-218.
- Locatelli G., Mariani G., Sainati T. and Greco M. (2017), "Corruption in public projects and megaprojects: There is an elephant in the room!", *International journal of project management*, Vol. 35 No. 3, pp. 252-268.
- Macindoe H. and Beaton E. (2019), "Friends or foes? How managerial perceptions of the political opportunity structure shape nonprofit advocacy", *Public Performance & Management Review*, Vol. 42 No. 1, pp. 59-89.
- Matinheikki J., Aaltonen K. and Walker D. (2019), "Politics, public servants, and profits: Institutional complexity and temporary hybridization in a public infrastructure alliance project", *International journal of project management*, Vol. 37 No. 2, pp. 298-317.
- March, James G. (2007). The study of organizations and organizing since 1945. *Organization Studies*, 28, 9-19.
- Mawad D. (2020), *World Bank-funded dam in Lebanon mirrors governance crisis* [Online]. The Washington Post. Available: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/world-bank-funded-dam-in-lebanon-mirrors-governance-crisis/2020/09/02/9dfdf642-ece3-11ea-bd08-1b10132b458f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/world-bank-funded-dam-in-lebanon-mirrors-governance-crisis/2020/09/02/9dfdf642-ece3-11ea-bd08-1b10132b458f_story.html).
- Mcgovern G., Dopson S., Ferlie E., Fischer M., Fitzgerald L., Ledger J. and Bennett C. (2018), "The Silent Politics of Temporal Work: A Case Study of a Management Consultancy Project to Redesign Public Health Care", *Organization studies*, Vol. 39 No. 8, pp. 1007-1030.
- Meyer D. S. (2004), "Protest and political opportunities", *Annu. Rev. Sociol.*, Vol. 30 No., pp. 125-145.
- Minnaert L. (2012), "An Olympic legacy for all? The non-infrastructure outcomes of the Olympic Games for socially excluded groups (Atlanta 1996-Beijing 2008)", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 361-370.
- Mitlin D. (2006), "The Role of Collective Action and Urban Social Movements in Reducing Chronic Urban Poverty", *SSRN Electronic Journal*, Vol. No., pp.
- Mitoula R. and Papavasileiou A. (2023), "Mega infrastructure projects and their contribution to sustainable development: the case of the Athens Metro", *Economic change and restructuring*, Vol. 56 No. 3, pp. 1943-1969.
- Moughalian C., Institute A. and Institute A. (2019), *Bisri Dam, Lebanon* [Online]. Global Atlas of Environmental Justice. Available: <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/bisri-dam>.

- Müller-Mahn D., Mkutu K. and Kioko E. (2021), "Megaprojects—mega failures? The politics of aspiration and the transformation of rural Kenya", *The European Journal of Development Research*, Vol. 33 No., pp. 1069-1090.
- Mynott, Jeremy (Ed.) (2013). *Thucydides: The war of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nguyen Long L. A., Foster M. and Arnold G. (2019), "The impact of stakeholder engagement on local policy decision making", *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 52 No. 4, pp. 549-571.
- Nguyen T. H. D., Chileshe N., Rameezdeen R. and Wood A. (2019), "External stakeholder strategic actions in projects: A multi-case study", *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 176-191.
- Ninan, J., Mahalingam, A., & Clegg, S. (2019). External stakeholder management strategies and resources in megaprojects: An organizational power perspective. *Project Management Journal*, 50(6), 625-640.
- Ninan J. and Sergeeva N. (2021), "Labyrinth of labels: Narrative constructions of promoters and protesters in megaprojects", *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 39 No. 5, pp. 496-506.
- Ninan J. and Sergeeva N. (2022), "Mobilizing Megaproject Narratives for External Stakeholders: A Study of Narrative Instruments and Processes", *Project management journal*, Vol. 53 No. 5, pp. 520-540.
- Pinto J. K. (2000), "Understanding the role of politics in successful project management", *International journal of project management*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 85-91.
- Piven F. F. and Cloward R. (1978), *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*, Vintage.
- Prakash A. and Gugerty M. K. (2010), *Advocacy Organizations and Collective Action*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Pullen, Alison, Rhodes, Carl, & Thanem, Torkild (2017). Affective politics in gendered organizations: Affirmative notes on becoming-woman. *Organization*, 24, 105–123.
- Revellino S. and Mouritsen J. (2017), "Knotting the net: From 'design by deception' to an object oriented politics", *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 35 No. 3, pp. 296-306.
- Rothengatter W. (2019), "Megaprojects in transportation networks", *Transport Policy*, Vol. 75 No., pp. A1-A15.
- Rowley T. J. and Moldoveanu M. (2003), "When Will Stakeholder Groups Act? An Interest- and Identity-Based Model of Stakeholder Group Mobilization", *The academy of management review*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 204-219.
- Rucht D. (1996), *The impact of national contexts on social movement structures: A cross-movement and cross-national comparison*.
- Ruijter H., Van Marrewijk A., Veenswijk M. and Merkus S. (2021), "'Filling the mattress': Trust development in the governance of infrastructure megaprojects", *International journal of project management*, Vol. 39 No. 4, pp. 351-364.
- Sawma P. (2020), Lebanon: Will the Bisri Dam Pass Over the Bodies of Protestors? *Alarabiya - Daraj*.
- Schad J., Lewis M. W., Raisch S. and Smith W. K. (2016), "Paradox Research in Management Science: Looking Back to Move Forward", *The Academy of Management Annals*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 5-64.
- Tarazona Vento A. (2024), "Megaprojects in austerity times: Populism, politicisation, and the breaking of the neoliberal consensus", *Urban studies (Edinburgh, Scotland)*, Vol. No., pp.
- Tarrow S. (1989), "Struggle, politics, and reform: collective action, social movements, and cycles of protest. Western Societies Program", *Occasional paper*, Vol. 21 No. 1993, pp. 69-90.
- Tarrow S. (1994), "Social movements in Europe: movement society or Europeanization of conflict?", No., pp.
- Tarrow S. (2022), *Power in movement*, Cambridge university press.

- Turner J. R. and Xue Y. (2018), "On the success of megaprojects", *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 783-805.
- Van Den Ende L. and Van Marrewijk A. (2019), "Teargas, taboo and transformation: A neo-institutional study of community resistance and the struggle to legitimize subway projects in Amsterdam 1960–2018", *International journal of project management*, Vol. 37 No. 2, pp. 331-346.
- Vento A. T. (2017), "Mega-project meltdown: Post-politics, neoliberal urban regeneration and Valencia's fiscal crisis", *Urban studies (Edinburgh, Scotland)*, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 68-84.
- Weissenberger-Eibl M. A. and Teufel B. (2011), "Organizational politics in new product development project selection: A review of the current literature", *European journal of innovation management*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 51-73.
- Williams M. (2017), "The Political Economy of Unfinished Development Projects: Corruption, Clientelism, or Collective Choice?", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 111 No., pp. 1-19.
- Williams, N. L., Ferdinand, N., & Pasian, B. (2015). Online stakeholder interactions in the early stage of a megaproject. *Project Management Journal*, 46(6), 92-110.
- Witz P., Stingl V., Wied M. and Oehmen J. (2021), "Asymmetric legitimacy perception across megaproject stakeholders: The case of the Fehmarnbelt Fixed Link", *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 39 No. 4, pp. 377-393.
- Wu W., He F., Zhuang T. and Yi Y. (2020), "Stakeholder Analysis and Social Network Analysis in the Decision-Making of Industrial Land Redevelopment in China: The Case of Shanghai", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol. 17 No. 24, pp. 9206.
- Xie L. and Van Der Heijden H.-A. (2010), "Environmental movements and political opportunities: The case of China", *Social movement studies*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 51-68.
- Yin, R.K., 2018. *Case study research and applications* (Vol. 6). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Young S. and Ear S. (2021), "Transnational Political Economic Structures: Explaining Transnational Environmental Movements Against Dams in the Lower Mekong Region", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. No., pp.
- Zaman U., Florez-Perez L., Khwaja M. G., Abbasi S. and Qureshi M. G. (2021), "Exploring the critical nexus between authoritarian leadership, project team member's silence and multi-dimensional success in a state-owned mega construction project", *International journal of project management*, Vol. 39 No. 8, pp. 873-886.

## Appendix 1- Archival Data

<b>Data</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Source</b>
<b>Bisri Dam, Lebanon</b>	7 Pages	Ejatlas.org
<b>Bisri Dam: Lebanon's Biodiversity will be preserved</b>	4 pages	World Bank
<b>Bisri: Lebanon's dam of contention</b>	6 pages	Business-humanrights.org
<b>Piece 1: Dam Presentation and Justification Report</b>	121 pages	Council for Development and Reconstruction
<b>Silencing the Opposition Voices</b>	3 pages	Legal Agenda
<b>Free patriotic movement protest to support Bisri Project</b>	2 pages	Al Jadeed News
<b>We said that there will be no dam so there will be no dam</b>	2 pages	Newsgate
<b>Lebanese dam projects stirs earthquake fears, environment concerns</b>	5 pages	Aljazeera
<b>Lebanon anti-graft protesters march for nature too</b>	3 pages	France24.com
<b>Lebanon: Protest Against the World Bank-Financed Bisri Dam Project</b>	2 pages	English.aawsat.com
<b>Lebanon: Public oppositions raise awareness</b>	1 page	France24.com
<b>Lebanon's Bisri Valley Dam faces uncertain future after funding halt</b>	10 pages	Middleeasteye.net
<b>Paula Yaacoubian: The hidden agendas behind the Bisri Dam and a look into alternative project</b>	2 pages	LBCI
<b>Protest in Bisri Valley to support the decision of the municipalities</b>	1 pages	Aljadeed News
<b>Minister of Energy press conference about Bisri Dam</b>	2 pages	OTV channel
<b>Save Bisri Valley – Rolland Nassour</b>	4 pages	Savethebisrivalley
<b>Seminar about Bisri Project</b>	1 page	Savethebisrivalley
<b>Lebanon – Many Dams have not been completed and are corrupted</b>	2 pages	Skynews
<b>Stopping the Bisri Dam: From Local to National Contestation</b>	9 pages	Arab-reform
<b>Tension, recklessness, destruction and violence are all signs of helplessness</b>	5 pages	MMfiDawla
<b>The 17 October Revolutionists were successful in stopping the Bisri Project</b>	1 page	SBI

<b>Raymond Ghajar Press Conference about Bisri Dam</b>	2 pages	OTV
<b>Minister of Energy defends Bisri project</b>	2 pages	OTV
<b>Government uses Facebook Platforms</b>	8 pages	Facebook
<b>Parliament member: We said there will be no dam so there will be no dam</b>	2 pages	LBCI
<b>Bisri Dam: Do people know the type of water they will drink?</b>	1 page	Elnashra
<b>Conference about silencing the opposition voices</b>	2 pages	Legal Agenda
<b>Parliament member: The loan from the World Bank can be used for electricity projects</b>	1 page	Al Jadeed News
<b>World Bank Q&amp;A: Bisri Dam Project Cancellation</b>	6 pages	World Bank Website
<b>World Bank cancels loan for controversial Lebanon dam</b>	3 pages	Reuters
<b>World Bank-funded dam in Lebanon mirrors governance crisis</b>	4 pages	The Washington Post
<b>World Bank – Cancellation of water Supply Augmentation Project</b>	2 Pages	World Bank
<b>Bisri Dam Water will be treated and will be potable</b>	3 pages	World Bank
<b>Lebanese dam project stirs earthquake fears, environment concerns</b>	4 pages	Al Jazeera
<b>Beyond Dams: Turning to Alternative Solutions For Water in Lebanon</b>	7 pages	Alrawiya
<b>The Political Economy of ‘Failure’ in The World Bank-funded Bisri Dam in Lebanon</b>	24 pages	Development and Change Journal
<b>The Bisri Dam Project in Lebanon is a “Ticking Atomic Bomb”</b>	7 pages	Beirut Today
<b>The Bisri dam project: A dam on the seismogenic Roum fault, Lebanon</b>	11 pages	Engineering Geology Journal
<b>Update of studies and technical assistance for the construction of the Bisri dam</b>	124 pages	Dam Presentation and Justification Report - Council for Development and Construction
<b>Note on earthquake safety for Bisri Dam</b>	12 pages	Council for Development and Construction
<b>Update of Studies and Technical Assistance for the Construction of the Construction of the Bisri Dam</b>	139 pages	Council for Development and Construction
<b>Greater Beirut Water Supply Augmentation Project Environment and Social Impact Assessment</b>	41 pages	Council for Development and Construction
<b>The 17 October movement and its tactics stopped the Bisri Project</b>	1 page	Al Jadeed News
<b>What happens next after the World Bank stop funds?</b>	1 page	MTV
<b>The Making of Lebanon’s October Revolution</b>	10 pages	The New Yorker

<b>Lebanon Protests Explained</b>	3 pages	Amnesty International
<b>Lebanon Uprising: Causes and Repercussions</b>	4 pages	Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies
<b>A women’s revolution within the Lebanese Revolution</b>	6 pages	Peace Insight
<b>Lebanon’s “October revolution”: An end to the civil war?</b>	5 pages	Open Democracy
<b>Lebanon’s October 2019 protests weren’t just about the ‘WhatsApp tax’</b>	3 pages	Amnesty International
<b>17 October (2019) Revolution in Lebanon: A Preliminary Analysis</b>	20 pages	New Wave of Revolutions in the MENA Region
<b>The Legacy if Lebanon’s October Revolution</b>	4 pages	Washington Institute
<b>2019 Lebanese Revolution</b>	5 pages	Social Watch
<b>Why Protesters in Lebanon Are Taking to the Streets</b>	5 pages	Foreign Policy
<b>The genealogy of social and political mobilization in Lebanon under a neoliberal sectarian regime (2009–2019)</b>	18 pages	Globalizations Journal
<b>Lebanon's unfinished revolution: Where next?</b>	4 pages	Middle East Eye
<b>Four years on from Lebanon’s 17 October revolution</b>	4 pages	The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation
<b>One year since the October 17 movement in Lebanon, what has changed?</b>	3 pages	Alarabiya news
<b>The political determinants of health and wellbeing in the Lebanese uprising</b>	2 pages	The Lancet
<b>Troubled Waters in Conflict and a Changing Climate: Transboundary Basins Across the Middle East and North Africa</b>	30 pages	Carnegie endowment
<b>Bisri Dam Project Fallout: The Nahouli Family’s Battle for Compensation Exposes Gaps with the World Bank’s Due Diligence</b>	3 pages	Arab Watch Coalition
<b>Bisri Dam Project</b>	3 pages	Bank Information Center
<b>The Bisri Dam Project: Corruption at the Core</b>	3 pages	The Pheonix Daily
<b>Climate change and corruption endanger an ancient valley in Lebanon</b>	7 pages	Los Angeles Times
<b>Bisri Dam False Promises: No Water to Convey to Beirut</b>	4 pages	The Legal Agenda
<b>Water Infrastructure in Lebanon</b>	5 pages	Fanack Water
<b>World Bank cancels undisbursed funds for Lebanon’s Bisri Dam project</b>	2 pages	Daily News Egypt
<b>Next Dam(n) Lesson for the World Bank: People Saved the Bisri Valley in Lebanon</b>	3 pages	Rivers Without Boundaries

<b>Lebanese Government Wants to Go Ahead With the Bisri Dam</b>	2 pages	Blog Baladi
<b>Damming Lebanon: Bisri Valley to be submerged</b>	5 pages	Asia Times

**Appendix 2- Coding Units for Engagement (Conservative Opposing Behavior vs Early Routine Behavior**

<b>Sub-component:</b> Project Opposers Engagement: Conservative Opposing Behavior	<b>Code</b>	Publish Scientific studies	Public Showcase of the valley	Low mobilization and conflict
	<b>Archival Content</b>	Scientific studies have shown that recycling the Qaroun water requires a lot of time and advanced tools and processes that are costly because the water is highly polluted by Cyanobacteria	The Save Bisri Valley campaign organised walking tours across the valley to showcase to citizens the region's unique biodiversity, historical sites like the Mar Moussa Church	To challenge the project, activists have pressured politicians, staged local protests, and engaged with the public. The intensity of the mobilization is considered low
<b>Sub-component:</b> Project promoters Engagement: Early Routine Behavior	<b>Code</b>	Expropriation of Land	Public Meetings	Reallocation of religious sites
	<b>Archival Content</b>	The government had expropriated the lands of the locals despite their refusal to sell the lands. It is important to say that the expropriation is not considered illegal because it falls under the public interest.	Between April 2012 and May 2017, 28 public meetings with different local stakeholders and activists were organized by the CDR, the project's implementing agency, where they shared their worries and opinions about the project.	Although the CDR has promised to relocate an old church to higher ground, a number of ancient ruins and archaeological sites could be at risk.

**Appendix 3- Coding Units for High Unity Configuration of Power and Low Openness Institutional Structure**

<b>Sub-component:</b> High Unity Configuration of Power	<b>Code</b>	Decisions require majority of votes	All-inclusive benefit for all political parties
	<b>Archival Content</b>	A majority of the votes in the cabinet is required to approve the project. Therefore, there is a consensus among the political class because this is one of the biggest projects in government right now	“All political parties present in the government benefit from this project. There is a huge benefit, considering that the country is run by contractors
<b>Sub-component:</b> less opened Institutional Structure	<b>Code</b>	Sectarian Political System	Re-election of same political parties
	<b>Archival Content</b>	This project is the epitome of sectarian power and profit-sharing – and the power of large corporations and their affiliations with political parties,”	There are little changes in political representation after the 2018 election, with voters reiterating their support for the main established political parties.

**Appendix 4 - All engagement behavior and strategies identified during data analysis which are associated with different political opportunity structures**

<b>Project Opposers' Strategies</b>	<b>Project Promoters' Strategies</b>	<b>Project Opposers' Strategies</b>	<b>Project Promoters' Strategies</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Low mobilization and conflict</li> <li>-Providing scientific evidence including publications</li> <li>-Developing the first formal political opposition group</li> <li>-Environmental sport campaigns to create awareness regarding the environmental heritage of the valley</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Creation of online pages that distort the image of other online pages that are against the project</li> <li>-Expropriation of lands</li> <li>-Offering Compensations</li> <li>-Government conducted detailed analysis of alternative projects</li> <li>-Conducted 28 public meetings with different local stakeholders</li> <li>-Offering reallocation of religious sites</li> <li>-Government protesting in the valley to support the project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-First ties to parliament members that requested the release of studies</li> <li>- Lobbying with lawyers: Press conference with lawyers requesting the public prosecution discriminatory that show what environmental attorney generals are doing to protect the environment</li> <li>-Wider Protests: moved to World Bank headquarters and CDR, privatized areas, unsafe places in the valley, wider public spaces.</li> <li>- Few municipalities firing lawsuits</li> <li>-Accusing World Bank of recklessness and ties with politicians</li> <li>-Conducting press conferences with university professors and independent politicians</li> <li>-Activists camping in the valley</li> <li>-Inviting international media agencies to secretly collect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Interrogations with activists</li> <li>-Threatening activists through their jobs</li> <li>-Entire shutdown of all gates of the valley preventing the entry of all citizens, including land owners and farmers</li> <li>-Threatening messages</li> <li>-Excessive use of military personnel</li> <li>-Use of physical force</li> <li>-Threatening to not pay full compensation</li> <li>-Entry restrictions for media agency</li> <li>-Treason accusations</li> <li>-Using religious and environmental factors on social media to attract the audience</li> </ul>

		<p>footages of private security teams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Diaspora protesting in front of World Bank offices worldwide</li> <li>-Political leaders threatening to increase opposition with the increase in force</li> <li>-Receiving 30,000 signatures via online petitions</li> <li>-Financial support from NGOs for transportation and educational sessions in local schools</li> <li>- More tours to showcase the valley</li> </ul>	
--	--	--	--

<b>Project Opposers' Strategies</b>	<b>Project Promoters' Strategies</b>	<b>Project Opposers' Strategies</b>	<b>Project Promoters' Strategies</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Monitoring the behavior of project promoters</li> <li>-Monitoring the evolvments of events</li> <li>-Focusing on political confrontation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Accepting project outcome</li> <li>-Focusing on pressing political issues</li> <li>- Freezing the national environmental stewardship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Activist welcoming the backing of more political groups</li> <li>-Meeting with World Bank to highlight that most scientific studies provided by the government are outdated</li> <li>-Longer duration protests (setting tents)</li> <li>-Activist persuading more municipalities to protest. 15 Municipalities joined.</li> <li>-Activist (including those from independent political</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Government requesting from the World Bank more time to start execution</li> <li>-Most opposing stakeholders were excluded from the meetings requested from the World Bank</li> <li>-Acknowledging activists' role in highlighting environmental concerns</li> <li>-Politicians have warned dangerous</li> </ul>

		<p>groups) stormed the construction site</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Activist boycotting public dialogues between government and civic society groups</li> <li>-Showing a lack of necessary scientific studies initially requested by previous governments and the World Bank that can be accessible by political leaders</li> <li>-Opposing parliament members issued a new law that will transform the Valley into an environmental reserve</li> <li>-Getting government officials in water reserves to talk more</li> <li>-World Bank requested government to conduct more meetings with stakeholders.</li> <li>-Activist welcoming government's decision to reallocate part of the loan</li> </ul>	<p>financial consequences if the project stopped</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Poor stakeholder inclusion only through emails</li> <li>-Creation of a platform to communicate with various stakeholders</li> <li>-Emphasizing historical reasons to implement the project</li> <li>-Requesting World Bank to allocate a part of the loan to more pressing needs</li> </ul>
--	--	--	--