

Narrative Strategies in a Nondemocratic Setting: Moscow's Urban Policy Debates

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Introduction

- The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) was developed in the institutional context of liberal democracies
- **What narrative strategies do policy actors use in a nondemocratic setting?**
- NPF provides excellent framework to study stability discourse of authoritarian governments and conflict expansion strategy of opposing actors

Public debates in an authoritarian context

- Less space for public debates → importance of internet for critical debates
- Influence of debate on policy small and indirect:
 - Decision-making confined to a small circle
 - Debates only after policy decisions are taken
 - Narratives opposing governmental policy can raise attention to problems

Narrative strategies in the NPF

- **Issue expansion/containment:** how narratives allocate costs and benefits of a policy to expand or contain the issue
- **Devil-angel shift:** narratives demonizing opponents (devil shift) or presenting oneself as hero (angel shift)
- **Causal mechanisms:** how narratives allocate blame for problems (intentional, inadvertent, mechanical, accidental)

Hypotheses

Governmental actors

Maintain stability

1. Angel shift
2. Contain issues
3. No or inadvertent causal mechanisms

Opposing actors

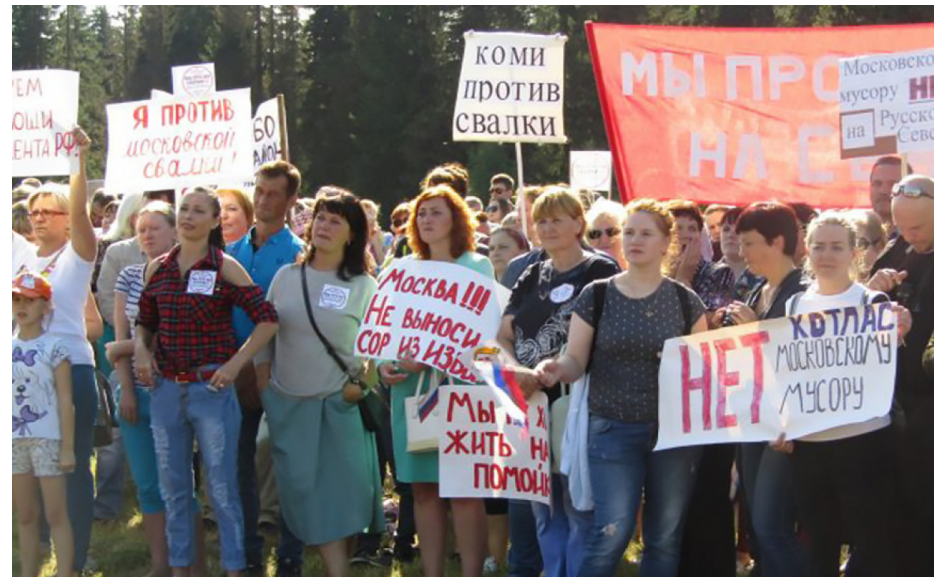
Expand conflict

1. Devil shift
2. Expand issues
3. Intentional causal mechanisms

4. a) The higher the perceived conflict in a debate the more likely actors expand conflict / b) The lower the conflict the more actors tend to maintain stability

Policy context: 3 debates

- Waste: conflict high
- Renovation: conflict low / high
- Transport: conflict low



Data and Methods

- Quantitative content analysis of 764 online texts of most relevant actors in the debates
- Coding using an NPF coding scheme with characters, costs-benefits of policies, causal mechanisms as main variables
- Data analyzed using descriptive statistics (t-tests, χ^2 , Cramer's V)
- Calculation devil-angel shift =
self as a hero – others as villains /
 \sum heroes and villains

Devil-angel shift

	Governmental	Opposing	Test Statistic
Renovation	0.92	-0.50	t= 25.40***
Transport	0.79	-0.35	t= 23.41***
Waste	0.48	-0.28	t=17.66***

Issue expansion / containment

		Government	Opposing	Test statistic	Association
		n (%)	n (%)		
Renovation	Does not discuss costs	148 (96%)	47 (53%)	$\chi^2(2) = 72.84^{***}$	Cramer V = 0.55***
	Concentrates costs	5 (3%)	5 (6%)		
	Diffuses costs	1 (1%)	36 (41%)		
	Does not discuss benefits	15 (10%)	74 (84%)	$\chi^2(2) = 138.04^{***}$	Cramer V = 0,76***
	Concentrates benefits	41 (27%)	11 (13%)		
	Diffuses benefits	98 (64%)	3 (3%)		
Transport	Does not discuss costs	139 (93%)	93 (74%)	$\chi^2(2) = 21.71^{***}$	Cramer V = 0.28***
	Concentrates costs	6 (4%)	10 (8%)		
	Diffuses costs	4 (3%)	23 (18%)		
	Does not discuss benefits	15 (10%)	56 (44%)	$\chi^2(2) = 101.96^{***}$	Cramer V = 0.61***
	Concentrates benefits	1 (1%)	31 (25%)		
	Diffuses benefits	133 (89%)	39 (31%)		
Waste	Does not discuss costs	65 (96%)	73 (41%)	$\chi^2(2) = 63.38^{***}$	Cramer V = 0.51***
	Concentrates costs	3 (4%)	9 (5%)		
	Diffuses costs	0 (0%)	97 (54%)		
	Does not discuss benefits	28 (41%)	79 (44%)	$\chi^2(2) = 50.34^{***}$	Cramer V = 0.45***
	Concentrates benefits	1 (1%)	68 (38%)		
	Diffuses benefits	39 (57%)	32 (18%)		

Causal mechanisms

		Government n (%)	Opposing n (%)	Test statistic	Association
Renovation	No causal mechanism	143 (93%)	28 (33%)	$\chi^2(2) = 127.20^{***}$	Cramer V = 0.73***
	Intentional	0 (0%)	51 (58%)		
	Inadvertent	4 (3%)	6 (7%)		
	Accidental	6 (4%)	0 (0%)		
	Mechanical	1 (1%)	3 (3%)		
Transport	No causal mechanism	135 (91%)	12 (10%)	$\chi^2(2) = 202.55^{***}$	Cramer V = 0.86***
	Intentional	0 (0%)	69 (55%)		
	Inadvertent	0 (0%)	30 (24%)		
	Accidental	1 (1%)	0 (0%)		
	Mechanical	13 (9%)	15 (12%)		
Waste	No causal mechanism	52 (77%)	15 (8%)	$\chi^2(2) = 127.34^{***}$	Cramer V = 0.72***
	Intentional	5 (7%)	128 (72%)		
	Inadvertent	8 (12%)	19 (11%)		
	Accidental	1 (2%)	0 (0%)		
	Mechanical	2 (3%)	17 (10%)		

Discussion and conclusion

- NPF hypotheses can also be confirmed in an authoritarian context
 - Differences between coalitions: Governments use narratives to maintain stability / opposing actors expand conflict
 - Differences between debates: The higher conflict, the more likely a tendency to expand conflict

Discussion and conclusion

- Differences with previous NPF studies in democratic settings:
 - Large difference between narratives of two sides in our study
- Potential influence of nongovernmental conflict expansion strategy in the waste debate: governmental narrative recognizes problem



Thanks for your attention!