

Where You Stand Depends on What You Sell

Saudi Arabia's obstructionism in the UNFCCC 2012-2018



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Abstract: (Norwegian)

Mellomstatlige forhandlinger i regi av FNs rammekonvensjon for klimaendringer representerer et svært viktig verktøy i kampen mot vår tids største utfordring. Disse forhandlingene har nå foregått over flere tiår hvor samtalen kulminerte til Parisavtalen i 2015. Tre år senere ble partene enige om føringer for hvordan Parisavtalen skal implementeres, ofte omtalt som regelboka. Globalt klimasamarbeid har de siste årene derfor oppnådd viktige milepæler på tross av skarpe uenigheter mellom landene. Noen land deltar derimot med intensjoner om å nedskalere ambisjoner og undergrave globalt samarbeid. De benytter seg av skjulte taktikker for å forsinke eller hindre progresjon gjennom avsporing fra viktige overordnede mål. Slike obstruksjonister er ofte tjent med at forhandlingene forsinkes, og i noen tilfeller også mislykkes. En ofte omtalt og kjent obstruksjonist i denne sammenheng er Saudi Arabia. De har tradisjonelt sett vært en av de sterkeste motstanderne til klimatiltak og tilstrekkelige ambisjoner. Nye utviklinger de siste årene tyder derimot på at Saudi Arabia har revidert sin klimainnstilling, hvor de nå samhandler og fremstår som en mer konstruktiv aktør i klimaregimet. Denne avhandlingen undersøker Saudi Arabias rolle som obstruksjonist i klimaforhandlinger fra 2012 til 2018. Gjennom en innholdsanalyse av foreliggende rapporter, er det forsøkt å klassifisere tilfeller av obstruksjoner med hensikt å avgjøre om Saudi Arabia har endret sin rolle som tradisjonell obstruksjonist. Avhandlingen reflekterer dermed på sentrale spørsmål og oppfatninger om mellomstatlig samarbeid, representert av henholdsvis neo-realisme og institusjonell liberalisme. Er stater villige til å samarbeide i institusjoner på tross av ulike og potensielt motstridende interesser? Og vil statlige interessene til slutt konvergere gjennom vedvarende deltakelse i institusjoner? Funnene i denne avhandlingen foreslår at Saudi Arabia er engasjert i et langt spill i klimaregimet. Obstruksjoner avledet fra rapportene avslørte tradisjonelle og vedvarende holdninger knyttet til nasjonale interesser i olje. Basert på funnene i denne avhandlingen, er det ansett som riktig at Saudi Arabia fortsatt fremstår som en systematisk obstruksjonist i klimaregimet.

Abstract: (English)

Negotiations on climate change in the United Nations represents the key tool in addressing our time greatest challenge. Countries have negotiated on climate change for decades, and the talks ultimately resulted in the Paris Agreement in 2015. In 2018, the Paris Agreement's rulebook for implementation was adopted, and the outlook for the new agreement is promising. However, some countries engage in these talks without any intentions to see them succeed. They deploy obstructionist tactics in order to delay progress and derail objectives. A common obstructionist in these negotiations is Saudi Arabia. It has traditionally been one of the most opposing parties to climate action and ambition in the climate change regime. Yet, new developments suggest that Saudi Arabia has revised their traditional climate posture and is now engaging constructively in recent negotiations. This thesis investigates Saudi Arabia's obstructionist behavior in the climate change negotiations from 2012 to 2018. A content analysis of descriptive reports from the negotiations is conducted. The thesis derives, classifies and analyzes these obstructions in order to determine if Saudi Arabia has truly changed their role as a systematic obstructionist in recent negotiations. The thesis thus reflects upon one of the fundamental questions of state behavior, represented by neo-realism and institutional liberalism. Do states willingly cooperate and ultimately submerge to institutional learning and common interests? The findings of this thesis demonstrate that Saudi Arabia is engaged in a long game in the climate change regime. Obstructions revealed long-held positions related to maintaining their national interests in oil. Based on the findings of this thesis, Saudi Arabia is still a systematic obstructionist in recent negotiations as well.

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Abbreviations

ADP	Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action
APA	Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement
CAN	Climate Action Network
COP	Conference of the Parties
CTCN	Climate Technology Centre & Network
ENB	Earth Negotiations Bulletin
GST	Global Stocktake
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
IISD	International Institute for Sustainable Development
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
LDC	Least Developed Country
LMDC	Like Minded Developing Countries
NDC	National Determined Contributions
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OPEC	Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries
PAWP	Paris Agreement Work Programme
SED	Structured Expert Dialogue
SBI	Subsidiary Body for Implementation
SBSTA	Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice
TEC	Technology Executive Committee
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

1 Introduction

“The climate change regime [...] is a defining feature on the global energy landscape; a large mountain, perhaps, but one that is shrouded in mist, and therefore too easy to ignore” (Depledge, 2015, p. 86)

Global climate change is our times greatest challenge. It is an all-encompassing challenge that occupies science, politics and economics at a global scale. The latest synthesis report from the intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC) stressed that it is a 95 percent certainty that global warming is caused by human activity. Furthermore, the report stated that emissions from fossil fuels contributed to 78 percent of the global emissions increase from 1970 to 2010 (IPCC, 2014, p. 5). Thus, our way of life in the last two centuries and the way we produce and consume energy, has contributed to an increase of global average temperatures. As for today, the global energy system is fossil fuel based, where coal, oil and natural gas are the main sources of energy (IEA, 2018). One important effort to reduce global emissions is therefore to decarbonize this energy system. These solutions demand global cooperation, as the nature of challenge is global and all-encompassing. The core of the problem resides in the atmosphere, outside the jurisdiction of any state, but at the same time affecting all states. The challenge impinges therefore not only on the choices in the lives of ordinary citizens, but on cooperation, coordination and leadership by the nations of the world.

Several challenges and disagreements at the international arena are solved through negotiations, especially in the post-war era (Downie, 2014, p. 3). From territorial disputes such as the delimitation line in the Barents Sea to global agreements such as the Law of the Sea, all found the middle ground among parties where an agreement could be reached. However, there are distinct differences between negotiations between few and many parties¹. Global intergovernmental negotiations refer to negotiations where the main parties are sovereign states and includes close to all states (Depledge, 2005, p. 6). The efforts of dealing with global climate change takes place in such settings, organized by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) established at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. These types of negotiations are far more complex than other types of negotiations. There are often cultural, historical, political, social and linguistic considerations and interests to consider in the negotiation process (Depledge, 2005, p. 2). This is evident in the way intergovernmental negotiations on climate change have been prolonged. Starting with the establishment of the UNFCCC, states have now been negotiating for decades in trying to find adequate solutions and actions to the global climate change challenge. However, building upon previous endeavors of the negotiations, 195 nation-states managed to harvest the political will to reach the Paris Agreement by consensus in 2015 (UNFCCC, 2015a).

An important task for scholars within the international relations literature is to understand how institutions, such as the UNFCCC, may facilitate for cooperation. Neo-realists argue that institutions play only a minor role in facilitating cooperation. They stress that the anarchic structure of world politics promotes self-interests and relative gains concerns for states, which is not suitable for a cooperative environment (Waltz, 1979, pp. 80, 115). Liberal institutionalists, however, would argue that since the world is increasingly more connected, issues are more “imperfectly linked” in which

¹ See for example Midgaard & Underdal, 1977.

transnationally coalitions are formed and the potential for institutions role thus increases (Keohane & Nye, 1977, p. 35). In this assumption, states are more interested in economic growth and welfare than the neo-realist assumption of power and prestige. Institutions are therefore the facilitator for such strives, providing more possibilities for growth and welfare (E. B. Haas, 1968, pp. 161-162).

Neo-realist assumptions have traditionally been dismissed with regards to environmental issues. Arguments of ill suitable empirical domain and lack of explanatory power, have made scholar to prioritize governance approaches to understand institutions role and cooperation among states (Grundig, 2006; Powell, 1991). Most importantly is the liberal institutional belief that regimes promote learning and cooperation through the diffusion of information and exchange of views (Depledge, 2008; P. Haas, 1992). However, studies have indicated the usefulness of specifying the neo-realist arguments of relative gains in order to regain explanatory power. Grundig (2006) finds that relative gains concerns explain the variations in how states have cooperated on economic and environmental issues. As the economic impacts are higher in cooperation concerning global warming, it may impinge on state security and invoke relative gains concerns. This impedes the prospect for cooperation as the issue at consideration have big cost-benefit implications and states are vigorously defending their national interests (Grundig, 2006, p. 798).

This thesis will explore these issues. The focus turns to situations when states have engaged in intergovernmental negotiations for a long period of time. It will explore whether state behavior changes or remains stable over the course of several years of negotiations on the same matter. It will investigate positions on key items to determine if it is possible to observe shifts or compromises once states engage in global intergovernmental institutions. This thesis amounts to these fundamental questions of state behavior on the international arena. Do states willingly cooperate and ultimately submerge to institutional learning and common interests? Or do national interests prevail and shape state behavior despite long periods of international negotiations and cooperation? To be more specific; when a state's national income is strongly connected to environmentally malign fossil fuels, how does it affect the prospect for cooperation in the global climate negotiations? Fossil fuels exporters are more often confronted with two voices, or a dilemma for that matter; secure and stable supply for consumers with fair returns, and at the same time increasing severity of the global climate challenge. A dilemma that well may be "shrouded in mist, and therefore too easy to ignore".

1.1 Research Question

Saudi Arabia is an interesting case in terms of global climate cooperation for two reasons. First, their economy is largely based on revenues from exporting oil to the world economy. As for today, adequate global mitigation targets mean substantial reductions in the global consumption of fossil fuels. Success in the climate change regime thus impedes Saudi Arabia's main source of income. Secondly, and due to this, Saudi Arabia has historically been one of the strongest opponents to ambitious climate action in the regime. They have enjoyed considerable influence in the outcomes of the negotiations by stalling progress and blocking decisions. As Joanna Depledge (2008, p. 9) pointed out, there is not much research concerned with the Saudi delegation's role throughout the history of the climate change negotiations, despite its influence on the political dynamics of the negotiations. The research question for this thesis intends to accommodate for this lack of research by exploring Saudi Arabia's obstructionist behavior in negotiations from 2012 to 2018. Thus, the research question is as follows: *How did Saudi Arabia obstruct progress in the negotiations on climate change from 2012 to 2018?*

The research question focuses on obstructionist behavior because it is considered to be the prime example of how states avoid agreements in negotiations (Wallihan, 1998). Thus, changes in obstructions will reflect if Saudi Arabia occurs more constructively or remains consistent in preserving its national oil interests. Additionally, the timeframe in consideration also represents a coherent phase of negotiations on the Paris agreement. In 2012, negotiations on the tentative

agreement were launched and scheduled to be finalized in 2015. Negotiations considering operationalization and the rules of implementation of the Paris Agreement occurred from 2016 to 2018.

The research question is intended to answer several questions. First and foremost to confirm or reject the traditional understanding of Saudi Arabia as a systematic obstructionist party to the UNFCCC. One should be cautious about pre-determining Saudi Arabia as a systematic obstructionist in recent negotiations without sufficient evidences to substantiate such claims. As negotiations has evolved, scientific evidences suggest an increasing severity of time and impact if the trajectories and the pace of warming remains the same. Saudi Arabia are also preparing for a future without oil. In 2013, the BBC reported that Saudi Arabia are pushing their youth to innovate in order to facilitate for the plan to diversify their economic dependence on oil revenues (Kalan, 2013). Additionally, many had thought that Saudi Arabia would follow the US once president Trump decided to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. Yet, representatives from the Saudi delegation were stressing that they intended to stick with the agreement and pursue efforts to increase their commitments (E. King, 2016). Some are also suggesting that Saudi Arabia's behavior has evolved in the recent years from systematic obstructionist to conditional acceptance in the climate change regime (Al-Sahiri, 2018). These circumstances indicate a potential altered Saudi posture towards climate change compared to previous attitudes covered by researchers. This assumption will be further substantiated in the following section.

The research question will shed light on both how often Saudi obstructions occurs, as well as if and how it changed during negotiations from 2012 to 2018. Additionally, a main objective will be to identify how the obstructions are distributed by investigating on which agenda in the UNFCCC Saudi Arabia most frequently deployed obstructions. These insights will serve as the foundation in order to assess one of the few theoretical propositions that proposes how state behavior changes in negotiations that protracts for years.

1.2 Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia entered the scene as a sovereign nation-state in 1932, when the al-Saud family placed the existing tribes under their control. It has since then been an absolute monarchy where power is concentrated around the al-Saud family with its 7000 princes and the sovereign king. Decision-making in Saudi Arabia occur in the form of consultative sessions with the royal elite and technocrats through informal and formal institutions. The public citizens have the opportunity to submit petitions and request the government to address issues at these sessions, but political parties and elections are to this date illegal (Karim, 2017, p. 74).

Legitimacy of power in Saudi Arabia are usually understood to rest upon two pillars. The first is the Islamic faith. Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and hosts the two holiest places in Islam, namely Mecca and Medina. The religious elites are therefore highly esteemed by the citizens, while at the same time being supervised by the state authorities (Krane, 2019). The second pillar of legitimacy is understood to be the revenues from oil sales. With an economy largely structured around fossil fuels, steady markets and fair prices are paramount to maintain budgetary obligations. Additionally, the surplus revenues from oil sales are employed to manifest the power of the royal family, by providing subsidies and handouts to the Saudi citizens (Karim, 2017, pp. 74-75).

Prior to 2015 the petroleum sector was controlled by the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, which holds the national oil company Saudi Aramco. However, in 2015 and 2016, energy governance in Saudi Arabia was restructured. Following the new King Salman's accession,

the former oil ministry was expanded to cover and replace old ministries of water and electricity as well. The new ministry, which today is called Ministry of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources, is by far the largest and most powerful ministry in Saudi Arabia. It coordinates regulations and operations with the Saudi Aramco, which has direct ties to the royal family via supreme councils chaired by the Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. The ministry also represents the country in the UNFCCC, with highly skilled and educated negotiators to protect Saudi interests (Krane, 2019, p. 11; Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington D.C, n.d.).

The new and expanded position for the Ministry of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources reflects the importance of the government to stay informed and keep control over the oil, as it upholds power and legitimacy for the al-Saud family (Nevo, 1998, p. 35). An important reason for this is the domestic economic significance of oil. In December 2018, Saudi oil accounted for 14 percent of global supply, and is estimated to possess 18 percent of global proven oil reserves. Export of fossil fuels amounts to about 50 percent of the kingdom's gross domestic product, where 70 percent of earnings stem from fossil fuel export (Bradshaw, 2014, p. 143; IEA, 2019b; OPEC, 2019). Additionally, Saudi Aramco was recently estimated to be the world's most profitable company, making the double of annual earnings from Apple, Shell and Exxon Mobile, while at the same time top the list of the most polluting company in the world (Mayer & Rajavuori, 2016; Reed, 2019).

In order to curb and reduce global emissions, global efforts and regulations targeted at carbon intensive sources of energy are needed. These efforts have traditionally been undermined by Saudi Arabia in the global climate change negotiations. They have pursued efforts to derail, delay and weaken process and outcomes in order to buy time to earn as much as possible from the global oil dependent energy system. The more they postpone, the more they earn in every year of unimpeded revenues from oil sales (Depledge, 2008; Krane, 2019). Saudi Arabia have thus more to gain by staying at the table to influence process from within, even though their interest contradicts the very purpose of the climate change regime itself. This is why Saudi Arabia is traditionally understood as an obstructionist, led by the infamous and long serving negotiator Mohamed al-Sabban, an employee of the Saudi petroleum ministry with western education in economics (Chemnick, 2018). He has been characterized as a "brilliant" and "stubborn" negotiator with excellent English skills and deep knowledge of the UNFCCC various issues and procedures (Depledge, 2008, p. 19).

1.2.1 Revised climate posture?

Several circumstances are favoring the notion of a revised climate posture by Saudi Arabia. In addition to the events attended for above, some authors are arguing that their traditional posture of an obstructionist party is changing based on their recent behavior and public signals (Al-Sahiri, 2018; Krane, 2019). Some of these are highlighted in this section in order to provide some insights of what makes recent negotiations particular important in light of Saudi Arabia's obstructionist behavior.

When negotiations on the Paris Agreement was launched in 2012, the Saudi delegation changed. The lead negotiator and famous obstructionist, al-Sabban, was replaced by Khalid Abuleif to lead the kingdom's interests in the forthcoming negotiations. Although Abuleif had been a part of the delegation since 1991, as well as an employee in the Saudi Aramco, he was seen as a more constructive person which was well respected among his ranks. At the same time, the Saudi Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources acknowledged in a speech that the consequences of global warming on humanity and industry must be dealt with, while further stating that the oil sector should take leadership in this regard (Aburawa, 2012). In 2016, a year after the signing of the Paris Agreement, Saudi Arabia delivered their climate action plans to the Convention as well. Additionally, at the front of the subsequent conference in 2016, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources, Khalid al-Falih, issued a statement: "We view the Paris Agreement as balanced and fair, and this will pave way to effective implementation [...] and Saudi Arabia are determined to see it implemented" (al-Falih, 2016).

These developments are significant in relation to previous attitudes the kingdom has shown towards the climate change regime. As the Paris Agreement was agreed upon in time, and ratified at a record speed, it serves as a sole example of how the climate change regime may have managed to soften malign postures. On the other hand, these examples only *indicate* such perceptions. Single events of constructive signals do not acquit the kingdom from the role as an obstructionist, especially not if they sustain their behavior in recent negotiations as well. A close study of Saudi Arabia's behavior would provide sufficient conditions for adequate evaluation of such perceptions.

1.3 Disposition

In the following chapter, the theoretical foundation of this thesis is presented. It starts by introducing a theoretical framework of understanding how state behavior is considered to change in negotiations that protracts. Three empirical expectations are derived from this framework which will be presented in chapter three. Furthermore, the notion of obstructionism is attended for in order to provide some clarity in how the literature assume to diagnose obstructionist behavior. Chapter three introduces the methodology of the thesis where single case studies and the logic of content analysis is presented. Additionally, the chapter concludes with some reflections of validity and reliability to present measures that were taken in order to accommodate and improve the scientific quality of the findings.

Chapter four contains the empirical analysis. It will start by highlighting important trends observed, before turning to assess Saudi Arabia's preferences in the obstructions. Theoretical implications and evaluation of empirical expectations are reserved for chapter five where broader theoretical considerations are attended for. Chapter five concludes with a discussion on obstructionism and some remarks on Saudi Arabia's position in the climate change regime. Chapter six summarizes the thesis and conclude the research question before proposing some suggestions for future research.

2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter will introduce the theoretical framework applied in this thesis. It is developed by Christian Downie in 2014 in his book “The Politics of Climate Change Negotiations”, where he adopts several theoretical perspectives in order to account for how states behave in negotiations that are considered to be protracted. At the core of his argument lies the temporal understanding of how negotiations evolve. He proposes that states move from an immature to a mature game, which is considered to explain how and when state preferences and behavior change in prolonged intergovernmental negotiations. These propositions are attended for in chapter three, where the intention is to derive a set of empirical expectations from these propositions of how and when state preferences and behavior change. One important objective will be to test the proposition that state preferences must be considered to be fluid in prolonged intergovernmental negotiations. Related to this is the understanding of obstructionist behavior, and the premises of changing such hostile behavior in negotiations. Section 2.2 introduces various literature on obstructionism as one way of behaving in negotiations. The section will highlight why and how actors behave as obstructionists. Additionally, the section will introduce some important implications in diagnosing obstructionist behavior which will be further accounted for in chapter three.

2.1 State behavior in prolonged negotiations

Building upon previous research in the governance literature, Christian Downie (2014) develops what he refers to as an “ideal framework” for explaining state behavior in prolonged international negotiations. The framework includes several elements from both liberalism and constructivism in order to explain why and how state behavior changes. Most importantly is the belief that state preferences are formed and socially constructed by several actors and networks at different levels, rather than the realist assumption of economic and security interests at the international level (Downie, 2014, p. 173). Institutions and networks are key players in this respect, facilitating for cooperation by influencing the fluid property of state preferences in negotiations that protracts. He argues that the existing literature fails to account for the temporal dimension of such negotiations, and stresses that state preferences are to be considered fluid, not fixed in this respect (Downie, 2014, p. 160).

The reason for why existing literature is inadequate in protracted negotiations, is that traditional theoretical perspectives are mostly concerned with individual negotiation outcomes. This is evident in the way Robert Putnam’s two-level game traditionally has been employed to explain state behavior around specific cases or negotiation outcomes, or how game-theoretical models are conditioned by specific cases with fixed state preferences². However, this notion does not imply that the existing literature is inappropriate. In order to analyze and understand state behavior in a fixed point in time, one has to assume that state preferences are fixed within that actual timeframe. On the other hand, when the focus of analysis lies in the realm of temporal dimensions, Downie suggests that state preferences are to be considered fluid, affected by several actors at several levels to influence state preferences, and thus behavior (Downie, 2014, p. 161).

² See for example Steven Hurst (2016) or David Milne (2011) on how the framework of two-level games are applied.

Based on these assumptions, Downie suggests the following definitions of prolonged international negotiations:

“[...] substantive international negotiations over a legally binding instrument that continue for five or more years, which begin with bargaining over a tentative agreement and conclude with bargaining over the ratification of that instrument” (Downie, 2014, p. 30).

This definition turns the attention towards different characteristics of each stage during the course of such extended negotiations. He suggests that, according to the definition, such negotiations are characterized by two phases, namely a *“bargaining phase”* and a *“ratification phase”*. The bargaining phase refers to the negotiations concerned with the framework for a tentative agreement, which initially proceeds into talks regarding the details for adoption. The ratification phase refers to the negotiations that follows after an agreement has been reached, but before it enters into force where rules for implementation are considered (Downie, 2014, p. 31). Such process-based approaches are usually referred to as *“phase-based negotiation models”* in the negotiation literature, where scholars turns the attention towards understanding how different phases of the negotiation process may predict or affect negotiation outcomes (Baber, 2018; Holmes, 1992; Madrigal, Bowman, & McClain, 2009; Zartman & Berman, 1982). While the level of detail and complexity differs among scholars, the division between pre-agreement phases and post-agreement phases, or bargaining phase and ratification phase in this respect, are both useful and applied in the literature, thus providing a parsimonious modelling of complex dynamics in intergovernmental negotiations.

In terms of how long negotiations must last to be considered prolonged, Downie explicitly states that five or more years are adequate. This is substantiated by the fact that most political and economic variations produce ripple effects in this timeframe, which most likely contributes to changes in state preferences (Downie, 2014, p. 31).

As the literature implies, the analytical gain of dividing negotiations into phases is contingent upon how each phase represent different contexts of the negotiations. The question turns therefore in to a matter of diversity between each phase. In order to provide this diversity, Downie identifies several internal and external factors that comes into play during each phase of the negotiation. These factors are based upon previous theoretical perspectives at different levels of analysis, as well as new insights from his own case study of the EU and US during the negotiation on the Kyoto Protocol. In the following, the internal and external sets are presented with additional literature in order to demonstrate relations with existing academic conceptions. Before attending to the factors, it is important to mention that these are considered to be *critical* in explaining changes in state behavior because they are expected to vary over the course of prolonged negotiations. In other words, they represent the selection of potential factors that are the most critical to include in this respect. Additionally, external factors may provide the sufficient conditions for effective influence by the internal set (Downie, 2014, p. 161).

2.1.1 Internal factors

Starting with the internal set, Downie suggests that these factors has the potential to invoke a direct shift in state behavior (p. 161). In summary, the internal set of factors comprises of the following: (i) engagement by actors, (ii) strategic choices of where and how to negotiate, (iii) linkages between networks and governments, and (iv) preferences of delegates. These factors lie closer than the external set in causal terms. They precipitate a direct shift in state behavior and are easier to detect and identify cause and effect (Downie, 2014, p. 161).

Engagement by actors

The first and most critical factor is the level of engagement by actors. Drawing upon insights from both Putnam's two-level game and Allison (1971) bureaucratic coalitions, these actors represents changes in the distribution of preferences and strength, both domestically, transnationally and international. Potential new actors or realignments of actors should be considered in this respect due to the fact that they create sufficient conditions for the emergence of new winning and veto coalitions, both domestically and internationally. As Putnam (1988) stresses, such realignments represents the dynamics of "win-sets", which is crucial for the likelihood of ratification of any international agreement (Putnam, 1988, p. 438). Given that negotiations to a large extent consists of bargaining between interests, each of these interests are occupied by stakeholders trying to defend them, using different tactics to increase political pressure. Example of such circumstances may be bureaucratic interventions of a department at the domestic level, emergence of a new powerful environmental NGO or a new coalition of states. Downie suggests that each new actor or realignment could directly precipitate a shift in state behavior, dependent on the level of engagement of such actors (Downie, 2014, p. 162)

Strategic choices of where and how to negotiate

Secondly, circumstances may suggest that it would be sufficient to change negotiation strategy and also where you negotiate. This notion is true for both state and non-state actors engaged in prolonged intergovernmental negotiations. Environmental NGO's for instance, may decide to invest time and resources on political influence at the transnational level rather than in their home country. Often because of domestic circumstances reduces their ability to make changes relative to the potential of influence at higher levels. Another example are business groups supplementing their domestic lobby by engaging at the transnational level, thereby establishing ties and alliances with other stakeholders across the globe to shape state preferences (Downie, 2014, p. 162).

Linkages between networks and governments

Third factor in the internal set is based upon the importance of domestic policy networks and transnational relations, which is well understood in the governance literature. It shares close ties with the previous factor but differs in the way that such networks are understood as either agent for the state or the other way around. At the domestic level, such networks comprises of both formal and informal linkages between governments and other actors to shape state behavior (Downie, 2014, p. 163). This relationship unfolds both domestically and transnationally by dictating policy agenda and excluding other actors in policy formations, either state to actor or actor to state (Downie, 2014, p. 163; Nye & Keohane, 1971, p. 339). The important notion here is that when such networks changes, so too will state behavior. Downie finds evidence that substantiates this claim in his own case studies. When economic agencies in the US engaged in the domestic debate of emissions target, new issues of potential economic cost were included (Downie, 2014, p. 89).

Preferences of delegation members

The fluid dynamics of prolonged negotiations means that there is potential for a change in political incentives or beliefs of delegates. Changes in government or a delegation's composition may therefore have potential impact of a country's strategy, position or cost-benefit calculations. Additionally, the constraints and pressures on delegates increases as the negotiations moves towards ratification of an agreement. This is because actors are more inclined to defend their interest, while at the same time experiencing pressures from both internal and external factors at once (Downie, 2014, p. 165).

2.1.2 External factors

The external set of factors are suggested to indirectly shift state behavior by changing the context of which the negotiations occur in. While the internal set are considered to be relevant in the earlier stages of the negotiations, the external set operates independently from the stages of the negotiations. However, while the negotiations progress and move into the ratification phase, external factors becomes more effective as cost and benefit calculations becomes tangible and stakeholders are mobilized (Downie, 2014, p. 165).

Exogenous shocks

Exogenous shocks are characterized by dramatic and sudden events that catalyzes mass public opinion to force governments to take action (Downie, 2014, p. 166). The most common pathway of this effect is through the public's interaction with the media, mobilizing political pressure by their dramatic and sensational representation of events. This is consistent with the "issue-attention cycle" by Anthony Downs who conceptualized how issues and events draws attention from the public and its sequential effect on policy support (Downs, 1972). An illustrative example of such exogenous shocks was the declining global support for nuclear energy in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 (Black, 2011). Additionally, a recent study finds that the variation in support fluctuated most in those countries with existing power plants at the time, suggesting that experience and cultural memory is important factors for the effect on public opinion (Bauer, Gylstorff, Madsen, & Mejlggaard, 2018). As prolonged negotiations are understood as to last over the course of five years or more, the probability of relevant exogenous shocks thus increases.

Epistemic communities

The term "epistemic communities" was first noted by Peter Haas (1992) in the transnational strand of the governance literature. Haas argued that technical aspects of specific problems are necessary to enable states to define their interests, form policies and ultimately coordinate international responses (P. Haas, 1992, p. 1). Haas defines epistemic communities as "a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area" (P. Haas, 1992, p. 3). The proposed effect on state behavior is that an increase of expert knowledge facilitates the diffusion of new ideas which eventually may lead to new patterns of behavior. These new patterns of behavior may accumulate to create shared understandings among policy elites, and eventually promote organizational learning (Downie, 2014, p. 166). It is understood as an external factor in this framework because the evolution of knowledge occur independently of political incentives, the stage of the negotiation, and has potential to affect several internal factors simultaneously (Downie, 2014, p. 166). Especially important here is the potential ability to influence delegates or public opinion in the prelude of negotiations. Epistemic communities in the context of climate change is represented by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). It consists of thousands of scientists across the globe with the objective to assess the science related to climate change in the effort to provide governments with the scientific information to conduct adequate policies (IPCC, 2019).

International regimes

The final factor in the external set resides at the regime-level of analysis in the governance literature and focuses on how regimes influence each other and often overlap. Following Stephen Krasner's definition, regimes are understood as "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors expectations converge in a given area of international relations" (Krasner, 1982, p. 185). This definition is consistent with how Keohane and Nye (1977) understood regimes, who also emphasized the importance of rules, norms and procedures in "governing arrangements" (Keohane & Nye, 1977, p. 19). With regards to how regimes itself can be understood to influence each other, Downie relies on the insights drawn from William Zartman's work on regime formation and consequences of regimes competing efforts to

attend the same issues (Zartman, 2003, p. 30). Whenever one regime impinges on the jurisdiction or integrity of another, usually as a regime grows, challenges arise concerning compliance and regime effectiveness of pursued goals. Others refer to interplay or strategic linkages to describe the interaction between them and highlighting different pathways of such interactions (Jinnah, 2011; Stokke, 2000). These interplays represent exogenous challenges for regimes and may shift the dynamics and conditions in under which the negotiation occur, thus have the potential to shift or influence state behavior. In a study of the interplay between global trade rules and the Kyoto climate regime, Stokke (2004) finds that trade measures of the global trade regime had the potential to positively impact participation and compliance in the climate regime (Stokke, 2004, p. 352). Additionally, Jinnah (2004) highlights the importance of understanding how linkages between regimes are managed by political actors and the potential impact such strategies represent for political outcomes (Jinnah, 2011, p. 7).

2.1.3 Immature and mature games

From the presentations above, it becomes clear that Downie's framework of understanding state behavior in prolonged intergovernmental negotiations relies on multiple theoretical accounts in the governance literature. It is a framework of several theories which suggests that multiple actors and factors are engaged when the temporal dimension is considered. Yet, full exploration of each theoretical account and mechanism involved is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the focus of attention is reserved for how and when Downie consider state behavior to change by his suggestion of two different games. This section will introduce the logics behind these games, namely *immature* and *mature* games. They relate to the phases and factors presented above to structure them temporarily in order to show how and when they are considered to impact state behavior. Additionally, the two games must be understood as a continuum, where the characteristics of each game represent theoretically ideal types of how states behave (Downie, 2014, p. 168).

Beginning with immature games, it describes the condition of states in the bargaining phase of the negotiations. This phase was characterized of bargaining over a tentative agreement, where cost-benefit calculations are intangible. As a consequence, interested actors are not yet mobilized as the outcome of the negotiations does not involve direct implications for stakeholders. Additionally, both state and non-state actors try to influence each other's cost-benefit calculations at the domestic and international level by employing different tactics of persuasion and lobby. In the early stages of the phase, external factors will not have the capacity to influence the negotiations to a large extent. Epistemic communities are immature, and consensus about the severity and solutions of the problem have not yet been established. Likewise, the exogenous shocks do not have the potential to produce the necessary momentum to catalyze mass public to influence state behavior. As negotiations progresses towards the details for adoption, the cost-benefit calculations become more tangible and interested actors are more mobilized. The pressure on each delegation thus increases, and more internal and external factors are invoked to influence states (Downie, 2014, p. 169).

Mature games refer to the condition when states are engaged in the ratification phase. Negotiations are now concerned with the implementation requirements of the legal agreement. In direct contrast to the immature game, cost-benefit calculations are now clearly defined, and stakeholders have sufficient political incentives to mobilize. The outcome of the negotiations will directly affect states, and different instances of government actors are therefore aware of the developments at the international level. Internal factors have significantly less influence compared to the effect they had in the immature game. The reason for this is that cost-benefit calculations are better defined. However, the impact of external factors is expected to be felt with full effect as states are more susceptible to the influences from non-domestic circumstances. Epistemic communities have matured and established consensus on the problem, which now engage in close interactions with state delegations. They are increasing the pressure on delegations in order to influence preferences in light of the scientific results and recommendations. Additionally, exogenous shocks will have the potential to catalyze the mass public in order to further pressure actors in the negotiations, which likely contributes to changes in state behavior (Downie, 2014, pp. 171-172).

These opposite games reflect how state behavior is considered to be influenced. An important premise is therefore that state preferences are fluid through each phase of the negotiations, from the bargaining phase to the ratification phase. This means that actors, networks and institutions have considerable opportunities to influence state behavior, and engage in “constructive management” of the negotiations process to lead states in adopting sufficient outcomes (Downie, 2014, p. 174). These propositions recognize that state behavior is determined by other factors than the structural constraints of the international system, as neo-realists would argue.

2.2 Obstructionism: nature and impact

An important part of this thesis is how obstructionism affect the negotiations, as well as how Saudi Arabia’s obstructionist behavior occurred in the climate change regime. An important objective will be to understand obstructionism as a way of behaving in light of the theoretical framework provided above. Especially as it is assumed that state preferences are fluid in prolonged negotiations, where multiple factors are suggested to impact the behavior of states. It is therefore necessary to understand how the literature understands obstructionism, as well as how they propose it affects negotiation’s dynamics.

The nature of obstructionism implies that something is obstructed in light of different objectives. In negotiations, such objectives are usually legal binding agreements. Obstructionism is often associated with the term *filibustering* in American domestic politics. It refers to the “legislative behavior intended to delay a collective decision for strategic gain”, and sets out to describe the history of obstructionism in the House and the Senate (Koger, 2010, p. 16). It thus entails the property of strategic considerations and the use of legitimate procedures to obstruct decisions and outcome.

Previous research supports this notion of exploiting legitimate procedures for strategic gain. For instance, *avoidance of bargaining* refers to “the use of negotiation for the purpose of avoiding agreement” (Wallihan, 1998, p. 257). As negotiations entails agreements, Wallihan notes that some parties participate in talks in order to see them fail. They employ different tactics which are difficult to detect in order to stall progress, “thus putting the conventions of negotiations to unconventional use [...]” (Wallihan, 1998, p. 258). Furthermore, Wallihan (1998) finds that parties are avoiding agreements differently, dependent on the initial motives for participation. He identifies two distinct ways in this respect. The first is termed *demand avoidance* and refers to how parties prefer status quo but participates in negotiation as a result of external normative demands. The second way is *opportunistic avoidance*. It reflects how parties voluntarily engage in negotiations in order to vent emotions, divert attention and buy time but where agreement is not absolutely ruled out (Wallihan, 1998, pp. 259-261).

In so far, obstructionism is understood as the strategy for delaying progress or to avoid agreement by employing obscured tactics. Both of these assumptions demonstrate the challenges of observing and diagnosing obstructionist behavior as it is disguised as constructive bargaining. This notion was further substantiated by an experimental study in 2015, where *false* negotiators appeared to be engaged in a “balancing act” between competitive and cooperative tactics. The authors found that this balancing act was a result of avoiding an agreement that would harm their interests, and at the same time maintain negotiations so as to preserve their interests (Glozman, Barak-Corren, & Yaniv, 2015, p. 674)³. This balancing act is closely related to what Wallihan (1998) termed *opportunistic avoidance*. It underlines and substantiates why and how some states are engaged in negotiations, by exploiting them so as to preserve national interests. The study also underlines the obscurity

³ The authors applied “Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement” (BATNA). For more information see Fisher and Ury (1981) “Getting to Yes: Negotiating Without Giving In”.

associated with obstructionism, as false negotiators may have interests in maintaining talks and engage constructively to achieve this.

The challenge of diagnosing obstructionism becomes more complicated as it is assumed that all parties would vigorously defend their interests and entail sufficient strategies to uphold them (Depledge, 2008). This begs the question of how to separate constructive behavior from obstructive behavior. Wallihan offers some guidance in this respect. He noted that “there are many roads to No, but few are routed there intentionally” (1998, p. 267). This intentional routing reveals itself once behavioral patterns are observed over time. Obstructionist will consistently deploy tactics which eventually leads to patterns that can be observed and analyzed in time. As negotiations on climate change have lasted for decades, Depledge (2008) revealed these tactics by investigating the behavior of Saudi Arabia in the history of climate change negotiations. She identified seven tactics that appeared to grasp the observed patterns from the obstructions, ranging from procedural delays to refusing to negotiate. It was argued that such tools will separate *systematic* obstructionist from an occasional one and was not confined to the behavior of Saudi Arabia alone. Systematic obstructionist was characterized as the sustained and aggressive use of obstructionist tactics over time, targeted at the general thrust of the negotiations process (Depledge, 2008, p. 10).

In relation to the impact of negotiation process, some characteristics are worth mentioning. In the UNFCCC, wide participation is the norm where decisions are adopted by consensus. This attribute provides suitable conditions for effective obstructions, a mechanism Arild Underdal described as “The Law of the Least Ambitious Program”. It explains how collective action in consensus regimes are limited to the terms acceptable for the least enthusiastic party (Underdal, 1980, p. 36). When systematic obstructionist is engaged in such regimes, it demonstrates the vulnerability of progress in negotiations that are protracted. Majority of parties may entail substantially meaningful agreements but obstructionists, with its different facets and intentions, can block consensus and derail talks whenever it is considered feasible to do so. Additionally, obstructionists tend to be unconcerned of domestic opprobrium, mainly due to the lack of active channels of accountability (Depledge, 2008, p. 11). As a consequence, systematic obstructionists enjoy disproportionately large veto power when (i) domestic accountability is lacking, (ii) regime at hand entails consensus decision-making, and (iii) sufficient measures presupposes wide participation by actors.

3 Method

In this chapter the design of this thesis is presented. It begins with introducing some of the main characteristics of a single case study, before presenting case studies as diagnostic tools. Furthermore, section 3.2 will present the expectations from Downie's theoretical framework. These are initially confronted with the empirical findings and discussed in detail in chapter 5. By doing so it will highlight the strength of the framework as well as underline potential flaws to better increase our understanding of state behavior in prolonged intergovernmental negotiations.

Section 3.3 contains the logics of content analysis and how the data collection and the following analysis was completed. It introduces the seven obstructionist tactics from Depledge (2008) which will serve as indicators for determining as well as classifying obstructionist behavior from Saudi Arabia in the empirical data. These are structured in the categorization schema in *table 1*. This schema serves the purpose of guiding the data collection and structure the data derived. Finally, section 3.4 introduces the strength and weaknesses of this design in terms of reliability and validity. The section will highlight important scientific implications and what measures were taken to accommodate these.

3.1 Case studies

As the focus of this thesis is to investigate how obstructionist behavior unfolds in prolonged intergovernmental negotiations, I consider case studies to be the best way to investigate this type of behavior. This would allow for deep investigation of different circumstances, as well as an exploration of theoretical applicability without exhausting the scope of this thesis. The initial purpose of the analysis is to disclose the frequency of obstructionist tactics deployed by Saudi Arabia from 2012 to 2018, how consistent and stable it appears, and which items was obstructed. Such intentions presuppose detailed investigation of the case. Case studies enable deep exploration of each specific situation within the case, which is suitable for the intentions of this study. Additionally, the structure of the UNFCCC negotiations provides limited time frames relevant for investigation in each year (i.e annual sessions and some additional working group meetings), which makes the empirical scope of each year more compatible during the timeframe considered. A similar design on several cases would be time exhaustive once theoretical exploration and testing is considered. On the basis of these circumstances, the choice of a single case study design was taken.

However, in making such decisions of research design one must be vigilant of the potential downsides and consequences of each choice. Single case studies (and small-N research) enable deep and thorough investigation, but at the expense of the ability to generalize to a wider set of similar cases and population. This occurs because the attention to each case must be reduced the more the number of included cases increase. Gerring (2017) argues that there are certain kinds of tradeoffs between case studies with small or large number of cases (i.e units), dependent upon the relative proximity the researcher obtains to each unit. While these tradeoffs are not to be discussed in detail here, the important tradeoffs related to single case studies is the advantage of disclosing internal causal mechanisms at the expense of external representation and generalization (Gerring, 2017, p. 244). Thus, in order to investigate Saudi obstructions, which is expected to be obscured, deep explorations and investigation are necessary.

In order to provide some reflections on the scientific properties of the case in this thesis, it is considered to be necessary to elaborate on the specific characteristics of cases as units of research. As the literature suggests, one must consider a case both as temporally and spatially delimited with a certain degree of theoretical relevance (Gerring, 2017, pp. 27-28; Levy, 2008). Cases as units of research consists of both idiographic and nomothetic parts (i.e theoretical implication and empirical sampling) (Gerring, 2017, p. 222). These components demonstrate how case studies should be considered in terms of scientific research. They represent units of a larger population as well as units of theoretical relevance. Gerring purposes to define case studies as “an intensive study of a single case or a small number of cases which draws on observational data and promises to shed light on a larger population of cases” (Gerring, 2017, p. 28). However, there are no consensus as to how case studies should be defined, much less the premises underlying external representation. As Gerring’s definition suggests, the premises of generalization rely on the assumption that the observational data must relate to a wider realm of similar cases. This assumption is however debated, recalling the idiographic and nomothetic parts of case studies. Yin suggests that the proper way to generalize from case studies is by conceptual or analytical generalization, while renouncing the statistical or positivistic way of external validation (Yin, 2013). Other scholars suggest that quantitative and qualitative studies share same logics of inference at the epistemological level but separates in terms of methodology. In terms of epistemology, the shared belief is that the initial purpose of case studies is to derive and test theoretical suggestions in order to modify theories in relation to the findings. The methodological difference are those rules concerning case selection and the explanatory power of causal mechanisms (George & Bennet, 2005, p. 11; Levy, 2008, p. 15).

3.1.1 Case study design

Regardless of the methodological differences, cases as units of research must answer the central question of what it is a case of, either in theoretical or empirical orders (Levy, 2008, p. 2). Since the ambition of this thesis is to disclose the obstructionist tactics deployed by Saudi Arabia over time, as well as to confront my findings to expectations derived from theory, the thesis will rely on interpreting the case as a unit of theory. As Downie’s framework applies to the behavior and preferences of state actors, it is necessary to consider Saudi Arabia as such in order to provide sufficient conditions for testing derived expectations. Blatter and Blume (2008, p. 346) also stress that selection of case in studies with such intentions *must* be theory-driven, as cases effect theories differently. Related to this is the reflections on the position of the case of Saudi Arabia on the field of theoretical applicability. In order to do so, the section starts by presenting the characteristics of this design.

Case study designs appear in various shapes and forms, conditioned by the initial purpose of the study. There exist multifarious names of different designs in the literature, ranging from casual process tracing to comparative case studies. The design in this thesis refers to what Gerring termed “diagnostic” case studies and involves how cases are considered to confirm, disconfirm or refine induced or deduced claims (Gerring, 2017, p. 99)⁴. In this thesis, such claims are deduced from theoretical propositions where the focus of analysis is Saudi Arabia’s obstructionism in the climate change regime. The previous chapters provided sufficient conditions for assessing how the case of Saudi Arabia relate to the theoretical framework suggested by Downie. Such reflections are important because they make better use of the idiographic utility of case studies. By consider the likelihood of a deduced claim being true for the case investigated, it will provide a more suitable conditions to consider theoretical implications.

Chapter one provided information on how Saudi Arabia behaved in previous negotiations, as well as the prospects for change in relation to new developments. Chapter two explored the facets of obstructionism and how it is considered to affect cooperation. As Downie’s theory intends to explain how state behavior changes in protracted negotiations, careful considerations of

⁴ Levy refers to «hypothesis-testing case studies» and Blatter and Blume refers to «congruence analysis» (Blatter & Blume, 2008; Levy, 2008).

circumstances regarding Saudi Arabia are necessary. Although recent events suggest a change in Saudi Arabia's climate posture, the economic concerns that have facilitated for Saudi obstructions remain equally important today. This means that Saudi Arabia is still reaping high revenues from unimpeded years of global oil demand. Thus, the climate change regime represents an equally severe threat to these revenues as in previous years. In addition, no concrete evidences suggest that Saudi Arabia has considerably changed its position as a systematic obstructionist, albeit some occasional events that indicate the opposite. As chapter two demonstrated, systematic obstructionists are characterized by the sustained and aggressive use of obstructionist tactics *over time*, where Saudi Arabia was proven to fall within this characteristic (Depledge, 2008, p. 10).

Based on these considerations, the case of Saudi Arabia is considered to be a tough test for the theoretical framework. It is not reasonable to assume that Saudi Arabia changes its position, nor its behavior as an obstructionist in this respect. Thus, the case considered in this thesis is assumed to be a *least likely* case in relation to the theoretical framework at hand. Such cases are characterized as *influential* cases, as their status has profound effect on the likelihood of a deduced claim being true (Gerring, 2017, p. 100; Levy, 2008, p. 12). These types of cases are important in assessing theoretical strength, smartly illustrated by the "Sinatra inference" which suggests that if a theory can make it here, it can make it anywhere. This implies that if the derived theoretical expectations hold true for the case of Saudi Arabia, which is assumed to be consistent in its use of obstructionist tactics, then the theory is considered to be considerably strengthened.

To summarize, the case design of this thesis takes the form of a diagnostic design with an influential least likely case in consideration. It sets out to confirm or disconfirm deduced expectations with the purpose to falsify or improve propositions by the theoretical framework.

3.2 Expectations from theory

This section will introduce the derived theoretical expectations for the case in consideration. In order to do so, some important elements from the theory are highlighted. The theory of state behavior in prolonged intergovernmental negotiations consists of complex relationships between various theories in the governance literature. In order to understand how state preferences changes in relation to the temporal dimension, Downie introduced the concepts of immature and mature games. Each game was linked to each phase of the negotiations, with corresponding properties that determined when and how to expect that state preferences and behavior change. The core of his argument was that state preferences must be considered fluid in negotiations that protracts. A set of internal and external factors were presented in order to demonstrate this relationship between the temporal dimension and how states are affected during time as negotiations evolve (Downie, 2014, pp. 169-171).

If the theory holds true, it is expected that the trend of Saudi obstructions decreases from negotiations in the bargaining phase to the negotiations in the ratification phase. Two important propositions sustain this expectation. The first is that states positions are considered to mature during talks in the ratification phase. After agreement is reached, external factors such as epistemic communities will have the full capacity to influence state behavior in accordance with the scientific findings. Secondly, the pressure on each delegation increases during the ratification phase. The cost of deploying obstructionist tactics thus follows this trend and increases since parties are more inclined to defend their positions. Additionally, as epistemic communities have established scientific consensus about the problem, constructive bargaining are expected to be the norm, whereas obstructionist behavior are less acceptable by parties and other stakeholders (Downie, 2014, pp. 171-172).

In relation to the first expectation, the second expectation is that the amount obstructions in the bargaining phase are higher than in the ratification phase. This does not imply that these expectations are mutually exclusive. The first expectation relates to the trend of the obstructions,

that despite fluctuations, the trend will be pointing downwards as negotiations progress. The second expectation concerns the overall amount in each phase. As negotiations in the first phase represent four years (2012-2015), and negotiations in the ratification phase comprise of only three years (2016-2018), the number of obstructions are expected to be higher in the bargaining phase. If the theory holds, the result should reflect this expectation. Otherwise it suggests that Saudi obstructionist activity increased during phases where external factors are felt with full effect, consensus about the problem has been established and parties are approaching the characteristics of a mature game. By failing this expectation, it would weaken the theory.

As the theory emphasized, existing literature fails to consider that negotiations evolve, and once temporal dimension is accounted for, state preferences are rendered fluid (Downie, 2014, p. 32). The last expectation is therefore that Saudi preferences *are* rendered fluid. This expectation will be tested by identifying agendas where the Saudi obstructions occurred. By doing so, it will indicate how systematically or sporadically Saudi Arabia obstructed progress, as well as to what extent the obstruction remained consistent on certain issues or agendas as negotiations evolved. For instance, if a large amount of the obstructions were targeted at the same issues over a long period of time, it does not support the proposition of fluid preferences.

In sum, three expectations are drawn from Downie's theoretical framework of how state preferences change in protracted negotiations. These are more clearly defined below and will guide the discussion of theoretical implications in chapter five.

Expectation 1: The trend of obstructions is pointing downwards in the ratification phase.

Expectation 2: The number of obstructions is highest in the bargaining phase.

Expectation 3: Saudi Arabia's preferences are fluid.

3.3 Content analysis

This thesis will apply content analysis in order to extract Saudi obstructions from a selection of negotiation reports in light of seven obstructionist tactics. This method is considered to be the best technique for such purposes as the initial objective of content analysis is to derive valid inferences based on concentrated rendering of contents in texts (Bratberg, 2017, p. 101). Content analysis was traditionally applied to analyze the contents of mass media in an objective and systematic manner. Related to this is the early definition by Bernard R. Berelson which defined content analysis as the "research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). This definition suggests that in content analysis, results from the *manifest* content are treated quantitatively. However, definitions have reflected the historical development and understanding of content analysis. Most importantly is the strict dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative techniques. As the divide has become more relaxed, authors suggest that it should be considered as a hybrid method, applying both quantitative and qualitative techniques to describe and analyze data from texts (Bratberg, 2017; Prior, 2014). For this reason, my thesis will apply the widely held definition by Klaus Krippendorff, with his emphasis on reliability and validity. He defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicative and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2012, p. 24).

The sampling units of content analysis are specific texts considered to be relevant for the focus of analysis (Bratberg, 2017, p. 101; White & Marsh, 2006). In this thesis, those units are objective and descriptive daily negotiation reports from meetings concerning the Paris Agreement. They amount to 171 daily reports provided by the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) reporting services. It is the flagship publication of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), and strives to provide a balanced, timely and independent reporting of the UN negotiations on environment and

development (ENB, 2019). The sampling units represent 21 individual negotiation sessions on the Paris Agreement from 2012 to 2018. All annual sessions are included, as well as the additional sessions of the working groups on the Paris Agreement⁵. This secures a coherent track of process as well as a limited selection of reports found in the publicly available archive of the ENB website. Additionally, the daily reports from ENB are constructed in a consistent manner, with a neutral language to avoid party discrimination. This is important as the initial purpose of the analysis is to derive data that are considered to be obstructions by Saudi Arabia. A biased reporting with third party interpretations would not be sufficient in this respect, as it would weaken both validity and reliability (attended for below).

In terms of drawing inferences from these reports, it is important to highlight what is common for both qualitative and quantitative techniques, as well as what separates them. Krippendorf (2012) suggests that quantitative and qualitative content analysis shares four proponents. They both sample and unitize texts in search for patterns in the data derived, they contextualize text in terms of the surrounding circumstances, and they have specific research questions in mind (Krippendorf, 2012, p. 88). However, the argument basis for proof is an important proponent that separates the techniques. Quantitative approaches rely on frequencies and the statistical test of hypotheses with the intention to generalize to a broader class of cases. Qualitative approaches rely on detailed exploration of the derived data. Interpretations is allowed and is supported by quotes and elements from the analyzed text (Krippendorf, 2012, p. 89; White & Marsh, 2006, pp. 35-36). The analysis intended for in this thesis will apply both these logics as basis for proofs. The analysis will highlight frequencies and fluctuations in the derived data to substantiate where and how Saudi obstruction occurred. Furthermore, the analysis will utilize the chronological structure of the data. It will explore the empirical circumstances surrounding Saudi Arabia's obstructions to highlight how the obstructions impacted progress, and how observations were considered as obstructions. This relates to what type of content this thesis intends to derive and analyze, generally termed as the *recording units*.

The recording units in content analysis are components of the text that will be derived and classified (Bratberg, 2017, p. 105). The intention is not to disclose implicit meaning or messages of the reports, as they objectively describe events that unfolded in the negotiations. The analysis will rather derive and classify interventions of which contains Saudi obstructions. This may present some challenges, as the recording units are not concrete and defined syntaxes or arguments. Recalling the definition from Berelson (1952) above, his definition includes only manifest content, meaning the observable and countable inventory of the text (White & Marsh, 2006). However, as chapter two demonstrated, obstructionists are often obscured as sincere bargainers which makes them challenging to detect and identify (Depledge, 2008; Glozman et al., 2015).

This obscurity is an important reason for why this thesis cannot solely rely upon standardized quantitative techniques. There is a need for disclosing and separate objections that occur as obstructions from objections raised in good faith. Additionally, it is expected that the recording units will vary in degree of certainty in relation to the applied understanding of the term obstructionism. For instance, some observations will be obvious examples of obstructions, whereas others are more obscured and less obvious. In other words, the units of obstructions are derived on the basis of its individual storyline. This consideration will utilize the chronological structure of the data and evaluate the potential observation at hand in light of seven obstructionist tactics. More information on this procedure is provided in section 3.4. With regards to the tactics applied in this thesis, they contain certain characteristics which will be helpful in guiding the extraction of the text, as well as the categorization of obstructions. In the following sections, these tactics are presented before the categorization schema is provided.

⁵ Those additional sessions are ADP meetings prior to 2015 (Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action) and APA meetings post 2015 (Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement).

3.3.1 Obstructionist tactics

The following tactics were identified by Joanna Depledge (2008). The initial purpose was to analyze how Saudi Arabia's obstructionism had manifested itself in the climate change regime. However, these tactics are not exclusively preserved for Saudi Arabia's behavior. They represent general tools for how obstructionism can be identified in negotiations such as the UNFCCC. The seven tactics identified were exemplified by Saudi obstructions from 1999 to 2008 (Depledge, 2008). These tactics will be applied as tools for deriving accounts of obstructions in the ENB reports, as well as demonstrating its contemporary relevance on the latest negotiations concerning the Paris Agreement.

Parallel progress

Parallel progress refers to how obstructionists may block or delay progress on items they care less about in order to gain leverage on more important items (Depledge, 2008, p. 22). Traditionally, the "adverse effects" agenda has been an item of great importance for the Saudi delegation, highlighting the economic impact for oil exporters adopting mitigation efforts (UNFCCC, 2019b). This tactic is expected to occur either implicitly or explicitly, dependent on how sincere the Saudi delegation appears to be in its interventions. Either way, attentive considerations to other items in the meetings are necessary to disclose and derive obstructions of this type.

Repetition and propagation

Repetition and propagation involve how issues of importance are continuously raised in order to increase salience of the issue. Depledge's findings indicate that the issue of adverse effects of mitigation efforts was continuously raised in different agenda items, as well as the repeated call for new agenda items on the matter. Viewed in isolation, the tactic may not seem as an obstructionist behavior but when frequently used, it delays progress and consumes energy at the expense of the goodwill by other parties (Depledge, 2008, p. 22). For instance, at the Bali Conference in 2007, the NGO newsletter "ECO" awarded Saudi Arabia a "fossil of the day" for its continuous insistence on adverse effects issues in the negotiations on the review of the Kyoto Protocol (ECO, 2007).

Postponement and delay

This tactic describe the more common way of obstructing progress by demanding postponement or delaying adoptions. Issues such as the IPCC, policies and measures and bunker fuels was found to be most exposed to Saudi interventions of this kind (Depledge, 2008, p. 23). However, these postponements and delays are usually framed constructively, meaning that the argument of postponing process rests upon calls for more information to secure the adoption of adequate measures. This relates to some of the general assumptions of obstructionist behavior in chapter two, where actors obscure their obstructions as sincere and legitimate concerns (Glozman et al., 2015). A broader consideration on series of events are therefore needed in order to determine obstructions of this kind. Especially important will be how the issue was treated in previous sessions.

Refusal to negotiate

In some cases, obstructionists may refuse to consider items and end negotiations before they have started. It is closely related to the previous tactic as it searches to delay progress by invoking excuses (Depledge, 2008, p. 24). However, it differs in the way that the intention is to stop talks or refuse to consider items on the grounds of procedural excuses. Such tactics were used in several situations in the empirical scope of Depledge's article, were most of the procedural excuses was related to the claim of insufficient time to consider text proposals (Depledge, 2008, p. 24). In chapter two, Wallihan termed such behavior as "opportunistic avoidance" to describe the obscured ways to avoid agreements (Wallihan, 1998, p. 261).

Holding out

Situations of “holding out” shifts the focus away from procedural excuses and applies to situations where the Saudi delegation simply refuses to join the consensus for as long as possible. This tactic shares close ties with “postponement and delay” but differs in the way that procedural circumstances are rarely used as justification. In fact, some cases illustrate that the Saudi delegation was holding out in plenary despite consensus was reached at informal sessions. This was significant as it breaches with the key norm of global negotiations where text agreements are not reopened once it reaches plenary sessions (Depledge, 2008, p. 25).

Exploiting the position of G-77 coordinator

Depledge finds evidences to suggest that the Saudi delegation has been claiming a common G-77 position where there is none. This exploitation appears on particular agenda items such as bunker fuels and policies and measures. In some cases, instead of claiming a common position, Saudi Arabia has made use of this tactic by failing to attend meetings, avoid comment on text proposals and fails in updating the rest of the G-77 on developments (Depledge, 2008, p. 25). However, this tactic will be labeled “*exploiting alliances*” in order to improve its applicability in relation to new developments in the dynamics of party groupings. As negotiations have progressed, several new alliances have occurred, where Saudi Arabia is active in both the traditional Arab Group and the new alliance of the Like Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) (UNFCCC, 2018).

Procedural blockage

The final tactic identified is termed “procedural blockage” and is one of the classic obstructionist tactics. It explores the blurred lines between lodging genuinely concerns in good faith and obstructive blockage to frustrate progress, or as the literature suggest, the division between sincere and false negotiators (Glozman et al., 2015). In most cases, procedural blockage was justified by raising demands of interpretation and translation, insisting to end meetings exactly on schedule and objections to convening in to smaller groups (Depledge, 2008, p. 26).

3.3.2 Categorization schema

Now that the obstructionist tactics are presented, the section will introduce the categorization schema. It was created *a priori*, and its intention is to structure the derived data from the ENB reports on two deduced dimensions. The first dimension is the obstructionist tactics where obstructions will be structured accordingly in relation to their characteristics in the reports. The second dimension is time, ranging from 2012 to 2018. This dimension is further divided by a ratification phase and an implementation phase, representing the division between negotiations before and after the Paris Agreement was reached. These phases are deduced from Downie’s theoretical framework and suggest when states are presumably most affected by factors and when states most likely change their behavior. More importantly, these phases will provide the foundation for the theoretical investigation that follows from the analysis. Below, the categorization schema is presented in *table 1* with clarifications of the minor adjustments made beforehand.

As suggested in *table 1*, the bargaining phase is considered to start at the 18th conference of the parties (COP18) in Qatar 2012. At the prior conference (COP17), an ad hoc working group was established to develop another legal instrument to be adopted in 2015 and implemented in 2020 (UNFCCC, 2011). However, the ad hoc working group had its first session in 2012. The next phase is labeled “implementation” phase in the categorization schema, while Downie referred to “ratification” phase (Downie, 2014, p. 31). The reason for this is that the Paris Agreement was ratified at a record speed, with more than 55 parties accounting for 55% of global greenhouse gas emissions had ratified the agreement within one year after signing. It thus provided the adequate amount of ratification in order for it to enter into force on 4 November, 2016 (UNFCCC, 2019a).

However, in order for the agreement to be implemented by parties, the rules for implementation needed further considerations, as well as how the agreement text was to be interpreted in this respect. Even though it entered into force in 2016, it is not considered to be operative until 2020 as parties still needed further guidance on how the Paris Agreement should be operationalized. Thus, the contents and dynamics of negotiations in a ratification phase are to a large extent similar to what occurred during talks after the Paris Agreement was signed and ratified. The most important difference between what Downie referred to as ratification phase, and what this thesis refers to as an implementation phase, is that parties were not able to hold their ratifications as a bargaining chip. These negotiations were set to be concluded in 2018. The label “ratification phase” are either way misleading in this respect, and the thesis will therefore apply “implementation phase” from here on.

Table 1: Categorization schema

Indicators	Bargaining Phase				Implementation Phase			Total
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	All
<i>Parallel Progress</i>								
<i>Repetition and Propagation</i>								
<i>Postponement and Delay</i>								
<i>Refusal to Negotiate</i>								
<i>Holding Out</i>								
<i>Procedural Blockage</i>								
<i>Exploiting Alliances</i>								
Total:								

3.4 Validity and reliability

As applied in this thesis, content analysis is understood to produce replicable and valid inferences from text. This section will highlight some of the strengths and weaknesses of the design in this respect by assessing validity and reliability. It will provide information on the different measures that were taken in order to accommodate for some of the weaknesses, and how these measures improve the scientific quality of the thesis. Although the thesis applies both quantitative and qualitative techniques for analysis, the research design is occupied by a single case. It thus answers to criteria for qualitative research in assessing validity and reliability.

Validity is an important quality criterion in research. It is concerned with the integrity of the inferences drawn from a study, and how valid these results are in relation to the method applied (Bryman, 2016, p. 41). Validity in qualitative research are often defined as to whether “you are observing, identifying, or ‘measuring’ what you say you are” (Mason, 2002, p. 39). This definition focuses on how the data relate to the defined concepts and tools applied. Furthermore, validity is distinguished between internal and external qualities. Internal validity focuses on causality of the studied sample, while external validity is concerned with the prospect for generalizing findings beyond the context of the research (Bryman, 2016, pp. 41-42). As this thesis is a single case study, it does not strive to infer from this sample to a population, nor is it possible to do so from a single case study. However, the strength of such designs lie in its ability to go deep in the data to explore causal mechanisms which improve the internal validity (Gerring, 2017, p. 244).

The purpose of the analysis is to identify Saudi obstructions from a selection of descriptive reports from the negotiations. The quality of validity thus relies upon how well this procedure is done in order to grasp obstructions from the reports. Chapter two demonstrated that obstructionist behavior is tricky to diagnose where it should relate to the tactic used over time. Depledge (2008) offered seven obstructionist tactics in this respect, which were applied as indicators to identify obstructions during negotiations from 2012 to 2018. Although these efforts improve the validity of the data, some interpretation is needed in terms of deciding which events are to be considered as obstructions.

As the tactics provide only limited guidance in this procedure, further considerations are necessary. These considerations are specifically how the chair and other parties responded, whether or not Saudi Arabia breached negotiation procedures or manners, and to what extent objections were constructive in relation to the objective of the meeting. Additionally, the data are structured chronologically from 2012 to 2018. This attribute provides sufficient conditions for determining which components represent cause and effect. In this way, it will be possible to determine shifts in Saudi Arabia's obstructionist behavior, and what may have caused it in relation to events that occurred prior to this shift.

Reliability is closely related to replication of the study in qualitative research. This means that same results should be possible to observe when the study is repeated using same procedures (G. King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994, p. 25). As mentioned above, content analysis' initial purpose is to produce reliable results through standardized procedures. However, in order to improve internal validity, interpretations were allowed for. This weakens the reliability of the thesis as interpretations relies upon the observer. In order to accommodate for this loss of reliability, several measures were taken. First, the design and the analysis strive to be transparent. This means that the analysis includes considerations of how units were considered as obstruction. Second, all observations of obstructionism are listed in the *Appendix*, where dates, session and a brief description of each is provided. Third, all reports included are publicly available in the archives of the ENB website. These measures ensure that all observations are traceable back to their origins and can be controlled for by other researchers.

4 Empirical analysis

In the following sections, the results of the content analysis are presented. Theoretical exploration is preserved for chapter five in order to allow for thorough assessment of the expectations when the results are present. The analysis starts by introducing the results in the categorization schema which provides the basis for further investigation of fluctuations, trends and distribution. Furthermore, the results are presented in *figure 1* which contains a graph showing how the obstructions are distributed along the timeframe and in which types of sessions they occurred in. In Section 4.1, the attention is turned towards the deviations in the observed data. Here I demonstrate considerations of why this pattern occurs, and provide plausible explanations based on chronologic evaluations related to these deviations. Section 4.2 continues by determining on which items these obstructions were deployed, how consistent this deployment occurs, and structure the data accordingly in *table 3*. Finally, in section 4.3 I will provide a summary of the results and highlights important implications of this study.

Table 2: Categorization schema with observations.

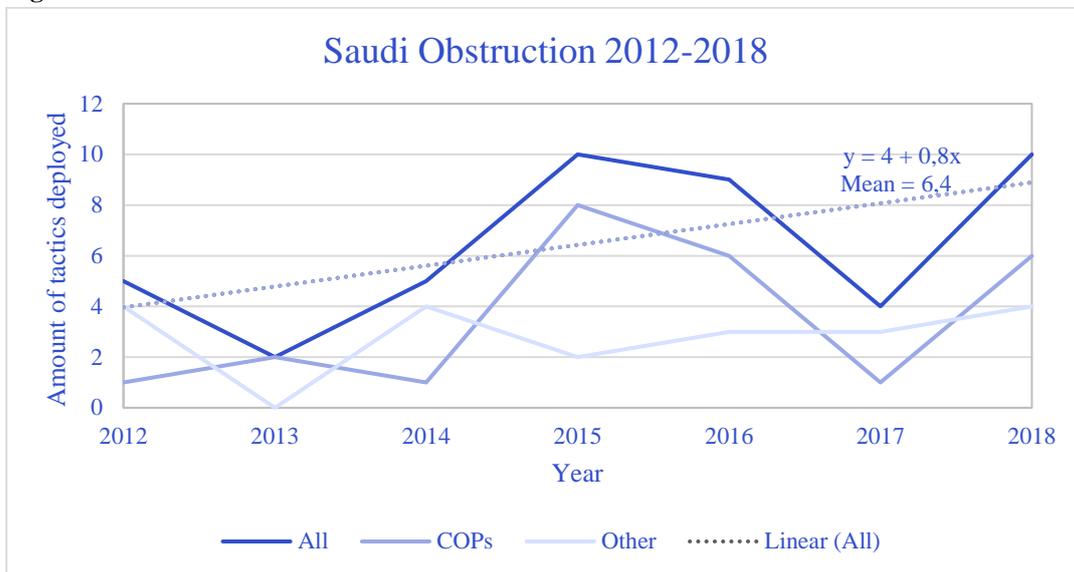
Indicators	Bargaining Phase				Implementation Phase			Total
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	
<i>Parallel Progress</i>		2	1	1	2	3	2	11
<i>Repetition and Propagation</i>	1		2		2		3	8
<i>Postponement and Delay</i>	1		1	3	4	1		10
<i>Refusal to Negotiate</i>	1							1
<i>Holding Out</i>			1	1	1		2	5
<i>Procedural Blockage</i>	2			3			3	8
<i>Exploiting Alliances</i>				2				2
Total:	22				23			45

As *table 2* demonstrates, 45 observations of obstructionism by Saudi Arabia were identified in the ENB reports, with minor changes between each phase of the negotiations. 22 accounts of obstructionism occurred in the bargaining phase, whereas 23 accounts occurred during the implementation phase. This implies that Saudi obstructionism appears to be more or less consistent throughout the negotiations concerning the Paris Agreement. Furthermore, all indicators included in the study were observed during the ENB reviews, with some variation between them. The tactic labeled “parallel progress” was the one most frequently used all together and increased during the implementation phase with a total of 11 instances, four in the bargaining phase and seven during the implementation phase. On the other hand, the tactics “exploiting alliances” and “refusal to negotiate” were the ones that was observed the least were both occurred in the bargaining phase. This trend will be accounted for in detail below.

Overall, the results in *table 2* provide the frequency and distribution of observations, which indicates a consistent deployment of obstructionist tactics over the seven years investigated. However, these results do not provide sufficient grounds to assess how Saudi Arabia obstructed progress, nor to what extent these obstructions impacted the overall progress of the negotiations. One important implication here is that the effect of each obstruction may vary to a large extent, as it depends on both the timing and the stage of the negotiations. For instance, the usage of “repetition and propagation” may slow progress and invoke frustrations, while blocking consensus by “refusing to negotiate” or “holding out” may *stop* overall progress or initiate deadlocks on certain agenda items. It is therefore necessary to take into account the substantial circumstances where each observation occurred. This is important in order to determine on which items Saudi Arabia deployed obstructionist tactics, why it was considered to be obstruction, and whether it was a stand-alone occasion or related to other obstructions. Such considerations will illustrate how severely each obstruction impacted UNFCCC progress in relation to the goal of each session and demonstrates how Saudi Arabia’s position on the matter either changes or remains stable. These considerations will be accounted for below.

Before attending to the substantial circumstances, the results in *table 2* are presented in a chart in *figure 1*. This chart will better demonstrate potential patterns in terms of increase per year and how the obstructions fluctuate⁶. The chart consists of years included on the x-axis, and the amount of tactics deployed on the y-axis. Additionally, a distinction between “COPs” and “Other” sessions are provided in order to illustrate the amount and the variation between them in relation to the overall results in *table 2*⁷. This is considered important because higher profile sessions like COPs are the supreme decision-making body of the Convention and they host high level ministerial meetings in addition to the technical negotiations. Mean and increase per year of obstructionist tactics deployed are also included to demonstrate the slight increase per year. The steepness of the slope relies solely upon the line labeled “All”.

Figure 1: Chart of the results in table 2



⁶ All of the data included are available in the *appendix* attached.

⁷ The label “COPs” includes all sessions under the annual climate change conference such as the subsidiary bodies meetings and sessions in the Kyoto Protocol and the following Paris Agreement from 2015.

This chart demonstrates three things. First, that the amount of obstructions slightly increases per year during the timeframe reviewed, second, the pattern of obstruction appears to increase towards the crucial COPs in 2015 and 2018, and third, the sudden drops of obstructions in 2013 and 2017 are prominent deviations from the observed trend. In relation to this, *figure 1* demonstrate that obstructions in COPs and other formal sessions differs to a large extent, as obstructions in COPs fluctuate more than in other sessions. Obstructions during the crucial COP21 in 2015 stand out as the amount of tactics deployed sharply increased from the previous years. Additionally, the trend suddenly dropped in 2017, before increasing again during COP24 in 2018. On the other hand, the amount of obstructionist tactics deployed during annual intersessions and additional working groups meetings occurs to be more stable, especially in the period after 2014. During talks in 2013 however, the amount appears to drop. This deviates from the trend in previous and following years. Both of these drops affected the overall trend of Saudi obstructions as *figure 1* demonstrates. This is true especially for negotiations in 2017, which occur in the middle of years with the highest amount of obstructions. Before turning to the substantial circumstances of the observations, the drops in 2013 and 2017 are attended to below.

4.1 Evaluation of patterns in 2013 and 2017

Both of these drops occurred in the middle of each phase, and do not represent crucial sessions such as the conclusion of the Paris Agreement in 2015, or the deadline for the agreement's rulebook for implementation in 2018. As noted in the ENB reports, COP23 in 2017 was often referred to as a "transition COP" without much public attention as the main work consisted of technical issues (ENB, 2017f, p. 30). However, Depledge (2008) noted that Saudi Arabia tends to be most active during low-profile COPs and other sessions, since the room for maneuver is more restricted during crucial sessions where important decisions are reserved for G77 negotiators (Depledge, 2008, p. 18). The pattern observed in *figure 1* contradicts such propositions, as Saudi Arabia tends to increase obstructionist activity during years of important decisions. A more detailed investigation is therefore needed in order to explore the context and inner working of sessions where these drops occurred.

Beginning with 2013, one crucial happening appears to be important in this respect. During the annual intersessional meeting in Bonn, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine initiated a deadlock on the first day of negotiations in the SBI by refusing to adopt the agenda unless parties adopted and discussed an additional item for decision making procedures. They referred to "deficiencies in the UNFCCC's application of UN system rules of procedures, norms and principles" while recalling the events that occurred at the previous COP in Doha 2012 where the COP/CMP President had adopted conclusions on the second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol despite Russia requested the floor beforehand (ENB, 2013a). The opposing parties defended their actions on the basis of "constant procedural problems" and highlighted some examples to illustrate the ambiguity of the decision-making procedures, as well as the effectiveness of the negotiations without an established voting procedure when consensus is unattainable (ENB, 2013b). The SBI deadlock was not resolved, and the intersessional meeting was closed without adopting the SBI agenda. Delegates seemed to understand the concerns raised by Russia but did not appreciate how the issue was raised. As Tuvalu noted at the closing plenary, the move was like "deliberately crashing a car to show that the seatbelts do not work" (ENB, 2013b, p. 5).

Saudi Arabia has been consistent in opposing the inclusion of rule 42 to the convention, which would allow for a two-thirds majority vote when consensus is unattainable (Depledge, 2008; Oberthür & Ott, 1999, p. 45). This left the convention to adopt every decision by consensus, which grants large bargaining power to each and every party to the convention, and especially strengthens the influence of obstructionist behavior (Depledge, 2008, p. 10). In light of these events, as well as the sudden drop of obstructions in 2013, a plausible explanation may be that the cost of obstructing progress was too high at the time when debates on decision making procedures reoccurred. As *figure 1* demonstrates, no obstructions were identified by Saudi Arabia at the intersessional meeting, while two instances occurred at the following COP. Additionally, according to the reports reviewed,

several delegates found Russia's concerns valid, which indicates willingness to attend the issue (ENB, 2013a). Significantly obstructing progress at that time would only fuel the debate and demonstrate that the issue needed to be resolved.

On the other hand, amendments to the decision-making procedure in the convention requires consensus to be adopted, which means that Saudi Arabia and their coalitional parties may block the suggestion as they have done previously when the issue was raised. The matter thus turns to how important Saudi Arabia value their own reputation and the need to portray themselves as a sincere bargainer on behalf of other developing countries. As Depledge (2008) demonstrates, Saudi Arabia have long linked their economic concerns of mitigation efforts to the wider concerns of the G77/China, which enabled them to label their concerns as one of the Global South (Depledge, 2008, p. 16). In this respect, Saudi Arabia would only gain if they intend to delay progress. Laying low during obstructions of this kind provides suitable conditions for portraying themselves as a constructive party.

With regards to the negotiations in 2017, the talks demonstrated that the ambiguity on certain issues in the Paris Agreement-text was now starting to create steep fronts between parties as negotiations moved towards operationalization. Especially the ambiguity concerning the historical issue of differentiation made navigating in the negotiations difficult (ENB, 2017f). The Paris Agreement had struck the compromise of a differentiation principle in light of national capabilities and circumstances, anchored in specific items such as adaptation, mitigation and finance (Rajamani, 2016). As visible in the reports, parties disagreed on how to operationalize this type of differentiation, where citations of the many interpretations flourished in the texts. One tough issue was how to consider differentiation on mitigation and NDCs, whereas the LMDC and Saudi Arabia advocated strongly for the traditional binary approach on the matter (ENB, 2017f). Additionally, finance was another item that appeared to be difficult to resolve. Throughout COP23, many developing parties and LDC's stood firm on their demands for finance with special attention to clear modalities on Paris Agreement article 9.5 (finance transparency). Especially vocal was the African Group, which refused to adopt conclusions on the matter during APA closing plenary on November 15. They requested to adjourn the plenary in order to await parties' consultations with the COP Presidency. The matter was resolved in closed sessions, and the APA closed at November 18 while issuing an additional APA session in April 2018 (ENB, 2017f, p. 16)

During the events in the negotiations in 2017, many parties felt unease in relation to the newly elected US president Donald Trump, who had expressed ominous attitudes towards the Paris Agreement and climate change in general during his election campaign (Goode, 2016). Fortunately for the negotiations at the intersessional meeting in May 2017, the decision whether the US was in or out was delayed on the second day of talks, encouraging parties to resume "business as usual" (ENB, 2017f, p. 19; Liptak, 2017). On June 1, two weeks after the May intersessional, President Trump announced in the Rose Garden that "the United States will withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord [...] but begin negotiations to reenter either the Paris Accord or a really entirely new transaction on terms that are fair to the United States" (Trump, 2017).

US intentions to withdraw from the Paris Agreement was thus a fact once formal negotiations resumed in November at COP23. This decision affected the subsequent negotiations, especially in terms of concerns from the developing country parties. Uncertainties of financial flows, and the transparency of such, needed to be operationalized. Many developing countries felt that the US withdrawal would jeopardize the initial circumstances on which the Paris Agreement was built upon. Without the US, many feared how the developed countries would react on financial flows as the bill of each developed party becomes higher without the burden sharing with the US. As the head of the African Group stated in an interview November 17: "The US' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement has had a big impact on how developed countries are behaving on finance" (Maisonave, 2017). The firm assertion of transparency in terms of finance was evident in the

intersessional meeting as well but did not represent the same level of gravity as in the following COP23, when US withdrawal was decided.

In relation to Saudi obstruction, three out of the four obstructions observed in 2017 occurred during negotiations at the intersessional meeting in May, where the Saudi delegation highlighted linkages between items and demanded same mode of advancement on all agendas (see *Appendix*). With only one observation at COP23, this session represents some of the same circumstances as the drop in 2013 where no observation of obstructionism occurred during the intersessional meeting. In other words, both drops occurred in sessions where the process was considerably frustrated by other parties' concerns. The conditions for opportunistic behavior for the Saudi delegation thus occurred in both of these sessions. In 2013, the Saudi delegation refrained from behaving obstructive as progress was slow from the onset, and the cost may have been too high in terms of reputational risks. In 2017, circumstantial prospects indicate that Saudi Arabia resumed the same opportunistic strategy, letting G77/China or the LMDC negotiate on their behalf.

To what extent these circumstances in 2013 and 2017 explains the deviation from Saudi obstruction is hard to say for certain. It may be coincidental, or that the Saudi delegation had other considerations. However, the circumstances of the dynamics in the negotiations suggests that the conditions for opportunistic behavior by Saudi Arabia occurred in both drops. It provides support for the notion that obstructionists are engaged in a "balancing act" between competitive and cooperative tactics. As mentioned in chapter two, "false" negotiators will deploy cooperative tactics in order to maintain negotiations to preserve their national interests, close resemblance to Wallihan's (1988) "opportunistic avoidance" (Glozman et al., 2015, p. 674). Saudi Arabia appears to engage in this balancing act by refraining from behaving obstructive. In light of the fluctuations of the graph in *figure 1*, such propositions thus seem reasonable.

4.2 Saudi preferences in the obstructions

As that the drops and patterns are accounted for above, the final section of the analysis turns to address the consistency of Saudi preferences. This is done by assessing the observations from the *appendix*, determine on which agenda or item the obstruction occurred in and view this in relation to other obstructions in order to assess which agenda appears to house the majority of obstructions. An elaborative section will trace process in the negotiations on each agenda identified to address how obstructions maintained Saudi Arabia's interests. As the *appendix* is structured chronologically, so too will the findings in this section appear in order to provide a coherent presentation of the findings. The results are prepared in *table 3* which includes the total amount of obstructions captured by each overarching agenda in each year, to illustrate how many of the overall observed obstructions are captured in this preparation. All the observations are labeled with dates to make them coherent with the *appendix*, where specific information of each obstruction is available. In cells where no observations occurred, the cells are labeled "none".

Table 3: Items where obstructions most frequently occurred.

	Adverse effects of response measures	Scientific foundation and guidance	Bunker Fuels	Adaptation vs mitigation	Total
2012	14 May 22 May 26 November	None	None	None	3
2013	None	None	None	14 November	1
2014	14 March 4 June	None	None	None	2
2015	9 December	2 June 10 June 2 December 3 December 3 December 3 December 4 December	None	25 October	10
2016	16 November	24 May	None	24 May 9 November 11 November 14 November	6
2017	18 May	None	15 November	8 May 11 May	4
2018	8 December	6 December 8 December	30 April 10 May 2 December 2 December	6 September 6 December	9
Total	9	11	5	10	35

*All accounts are extracted from the *appendix* where each observation in this table can be located by date and year in the *appendix*.

As *table 3* suggests, four overarching agendas are proposed in order to illustrate where Saudi obstruction most frequently occurred in this study. These are (i) adverse effect of response measures, (ii) scientific foundation and guidance, (iii) bunker fuels and (iv) adaptation vs mitigation. One important clarification here is that both response measures and bunker fuels are permanent items to the UNFCCC, while the other two are created in order to capture obstructions related to these agendas. Such considerations will be treated in detail below where an elaboration of each agenda is provided. As *table 3* demonstrates, the proposed agendas capture 35 out of 45 observations of obstructionism found in this study. They account for almost all of the obstructions observed during 2015 and 2018 when the crucial COPs convened, and all obstructions occurring in the drop 2017. Furthermore, some interesting remarks on *table 3* deserves attention before elaborating on each agenda. The first, “adverse effect of response measures”, is the one seeming most consistent during this timeframe, with observations in all years, except 2013, occurred. The second agenda, which is called “scientific foundation and guidance”, occurred most frequently during negotiations in 2015, where six observations were identified during COP21 in December. The latter two agendas, “bunker fuels” and “adaptation vs mitigation”, had the highest frequency after the ratification of the Paris Agreement, and thus occurred during negotiations concerning rules of implementation. In the following sections, a detailed account of these remarks is provided in the elaboration of each agenda. The purpose is to track process in order to assess how these obstructions maintained Saudi interests, how it affected progress of the negotiations, and how effective these obstructions appears in this respect.

4.2.1 Adverse effects of response measures

As illustrated, this agenda appeared to be the most consistent across years. It refers to obstructions related to how items of adverse effects of mitigation efforts were raised in multiple sessions, meetings and forums, often in situations where other matters were intended. As this is a cross-cutting issue, relating to mitigation, adaptation and finance, response measures occur in several places under the UNFCCC. The agenda is considered in articles 4.8 and 4.9 in the Convention, as well as article 2.3 and 3.14 under the Kyoto Protocol, and article 4.15 in the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 1992, 1998, 2015b). However, Article 4.8 of the Convention makes explicit mentions of developing countries with economies highly dependent on fossil fuels as particularly affected, where other articles refer to LDC's, small island states and developing countries in general. Hence, Article 4.8 is of particular importance in this respect. The issue has a strong foothold in the Kyoto Protocol as the articles on response measures and its adverse effects are referring to article 4.8 of the convention. In 1997, during negotiations on the Kyoto Protocol, Saudi Arabia submitted proposals on how fossil fuels exporters were affected by mitigation efforts, and that their lost revenues should be compensated for and adequately addressed in the new protocol. By threats of blocking progress, Saudi Arabia and other OPEC members succeeded in entrenching their position as developing countries 'particularly affected' by response measures as the Protocol tied the issue with article 4.8 of the Convention (Chemnick, 2018; Depledge, 2008). Since then, the issue has progressed in a joint subsidiary body contact group under SBI and SBSTA. In recent times the issue has been treated under the "forum on the impact of the implementation of response measures", established at COP17 in 2011 with a corresponding work programme towards COP19 in 2013. The objective was to improve understanding of the impact of the implementation of response measures in eight areas, including assessments, impacts and economic diversification (UNFCCC, 2019b).

In relation to the developments outlined above, the obstructions occurring under this agenda in *table 3* relates to how Saudi Arabia refused to consolidate work, opposed to tie and gather relating issues to improve efficiency of the negotiations, and at the same time, exploiting linkages with other items in the working groups. For instance, in 2012, where the forum continued talks on the work programme, Saudi Arabia opposed to move discussions on Protocol article 2.3 in to the forum on response measures, on the grounds that adverse impacts of policies and measures needed to be treated as a separate item (ENB, 2012b). At COP20 in 2014, the work programme had been concluded and discussions arose on how to treat the issue in the future. As the Paris Agreement was scheduled to conclude within a year, Saudi Arabia stated that they did not support the new agreement unless it adequately addressed response measures (ENB, 2014b). Furthermore, at the intersessional meeting in 2017, response measures was linked to all items under the Paris Agreement during the closing plenary, while underlining the link between adaptation communications and response measures (ENB, 2017e).

These events witness of a behavior insisting on the salience of this issue in the negotiations, tracing back to the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol and up until the latest events in 2018. Most illustrative of this consistency is the intervention made in 2014, where Saudi Arabia reaffirmed that they did not intend to sign a new agreement unless adverse effects of response measures were adequately addressed. This intervention resonates 17 years back when Saudi Arabia intended to block the Kyoto Protocol on the same grounds. Despite such threats, the Paris Agreement was indeed agreed upon and ratified by Saudi Arabia without references to the article in the Convention, which makes explicit mentions of fossil fuel exporters as particularly affected. Article 4, paragraph 15, in the Paris Agreement is the only article which explicitly mentions the economies most effected by the implementation of response measures, and do not underline which type of economies except for developing countries (UNFCCC, 2015b). However, Saudi Arabia considers itself as a developing country. It favors the two-sided differentiation principle between developed and developing countries as it traditionally has been treated in the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol. By labeling themselves as a developing country, their interests in attending this issue are easily obscured as sincere bargaining on behalf of the Global South, as well as sidelining their needs with the more vulnerable LDC's.

The continuous demands did not appear to affect the progress of the negotiations to a large extent, as no deadlocks, shamings or blockages occurred. One reason for this may be that the many years of negotiation on this issue have equipped the Convention and other parties with the necessary skills to navigate and facilitate compromise. As demonstrated above, adverse effect of response measures has a long history in the UNFCCC. Alongside consistent Saudi demands of adequately addressing the matter, it begs the question of how effective the tactical use of the item is as negotiations protracts. On the other hand, what Saudi Arabia meant with “adequately” address the issue in 2014 is still uncertain. Recalling the ambiguity of the Paris Agreement text however, such formulations provides opportunities for both sides to engage in negotiations without undermining or breaching the agreement’s text.

4.2.2 Scientific foundation and guidance

This overarching agenda refers to obstructions relating to scientific findings and how they should inform the negotiations. As *table 3* demonstrates, the agenda account for the vast majority of obstructions that occurred during negotiations in 2015, where six out of eight obstructions were deployed during COP21⁸. In contrast to the prior agenda, obstructions on science appeared to have greater impacts on both progress and ambition. As demonstrated below, scientific observations, research, and assessments are considered to be a key mechanism to ensure that adequate measures and policies are adopted in the climate regime. On this basis, obstructions on science both raises the cost of implementation and negatively impacts the progress and ambition level in the negotiations. Saudi obstructions are of no exception in this respect.

As *table 3* demonstrates, Saudi obstruction on science was first observed at the intersessional meeting in 2015, where two coherent instances occurred. The first on June 2nd, were Saudi Arabia and China opposed drafting substantial conclusions and paragraphs to inform the COP about the technical findings of the 2013-2015 Review on the long-term global temperature goal. They supported procedural paragraphs on the grounds that the mandate of the review did not support draft decisions of substantial matters to be forwarded to COP21. The contact group convened into informal sessions were procedural discussions about the mandate of the review were launched (ENB, 2015a). The second obstruction was observed on June 10th in the same session, where Saudi Arabia, India and China opposed non-procedural paragraphs on the final factual report of the Structured Expert Dialogue (SED) on the 2013-2015 Review. As no consensus emerged, the matter was adjourned to the next subsidiary body session (ENB, 2015b).

These obstructions are easier understood once the content of the SED report is considered. The initial purpose of the review was to provide scientific clarity on the feasibility of a 2 degrees threshold and was issued by the COP in 2012. Additionally, the COP created the SED for the Review, which would meet in four sessions to ensure the scientific integrity and inform parties about the findings (UNFCCC, 2019c). In relation to the findings of the review, the SED report stressed that the 2 degrees threshold should be considered as a “[...] defence line that needs to be stringently defended, while less warming would be preferable” (UNFCCC, 2015c, p. 18). A more ambitious climate deal was thus recommended by the scientific community, where parties called for a 1.5 degrees threshold with tougher constraints on carbon emissions. Such consideration seemed to be unacceptable for the Saudi delegation and proved to become a contested issue as Saudi Arabia cemented their role as an obstructionist at the following sessions.

At the subsequent COP21 in Paris, Saudi obstructionism made sure that consensus on a 1.5-degree threshold in the new agreement was difficult. In the ADP contact group on December 2nd, Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Arab Group opposed calls for the IPCC reports to take into account 1.5 degrees scenarios, while adding reluctance to any mentioning of degrees all together (ENB, 2015d). On December 3rd in the subsidiary bodies contact group, Saudi Arabia, on behalf of the Arab Group, maintained the position of opposing non-procedural conclusions from the 2013-2015 Review and

⁸ COP21 occurred in December 2015, thus obstructions dated in December refers to those occurring at this session.

SED report, despite that a compromise of both substantial and procedural conclusion was an endorsed option. As the SBI and SBSTA did not conclude its work, the issue was forwarded to the COP for further considerations, with parties expressing disappointment of the inability to reach substantive outcome on the review (ENB, 2015c). At the intersessional meeting in 2016, Saudi Arabia continued its campaign against the SED report. During meetings on May 24th, parties discussed how to conduct a stocktake of the implementation of the Paris Agreement, known as the global stocktake (GST). As several parties endorsed the idea that the SED report should inform work in the GST, Saudi Arabia blocked such suggestions, leaving the reference to SED in a footnote of the GST text (ENB, 2016a). The scientific foundation of the GST was further challenged at COP24 in 2018. During stocktaking plenary on December 6th, Saudi Arabia maintained their long-held position of opposing participation of non-party stakeholders to the GST. However, this time they explicitly opposed the involvement of IPCC experts, on the basis that it must be a party driven process (ENB, 2018c).

These events demonstrate the reluctance of Saudi Arabia in signing an agreement which is in line with scientific findings and recommendations. As *table 3* shows, eight observations of Saudi obstruction on science occurred during negotiations in 2015. This suggests that as negotiations progressed towards conclusion of the Paris Agreement, and as scientific evidence addressed the increasing severity of climate change, Saudi Arabia consistently and systematically targeted science in order to downplay its impact of the new agreement. Most consistent was the objective of reducing mentions and information of the SED report of the 2013–2015 Review, which advocated strongly for a more ambitious targeting of temperature threshold. Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that Saudi Arabia exploited the bargaining power of the Arab Group on this matter. Saudi Arabia often opposed 1.5 degrees thresholds and science while speaking on behalf of the Arab Group. However, during the Leaders Event in the opening of COP21, the Egyptian President stated that the new agreement should include commitments to a 1.5 degrees threshold (al-Sisi, 2015). This is in direct contrast to the alleged position of the Arab Group according to Saudi Arabia’s interventions on their behalf.

Except from the SED report and 1.5 degrees threshold, the obstructions on science suggest Saudi reluctance towards the IPCC as well. The SED report demonstrated that scientific information on 1.5 degrees needed to be improved, and most parties supported to ask the IPCC for a special report on the matter (UNFCCC, 2015c, p. 33). Even though Saudi Arabia appeared to be reluctant and questioned its added value, the COP21 invited the IPCC to provide a special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. This report was to be finished in time for COP24 in 2018, where the deadline for the rules of implementation was set. However, as the initial purpose was to welcome the report during COP24 SBSTA closing plenary on December 8th, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Russia and the US intervened. They refused to “welcome” the report to the regime and favored the milder phrase “noting” the report instead. This initiated loud dismay of the majority of parties, where one party called the move “ludicrous” since they refused to welcome a report, they themselves had issued three years earlier. As no compromise was achieved, the Chair initiated rule 16, postponing the issue to the intersessional meeting in May, 2019 (ENB, 2018b, p. 2).

In contrast to the agenda “adverse effect of response measures”, where obstructions served to increase salience, the intentional effect of obstructions on science appears to *reduce* salience and impact of scientific findings. As the scientific evidences suggested increased ambition, Saudi Arabia systematically undermined such efforts, from the conclusion of the SED report in 2015, to the inclusion of the IPCC special report in 2018. Furthermore, obstructions on science appeared to be the most “bluntly” obstructions in this study. There were seldomly any procedural excuses or obscured reasons behind many of the obstructions observed, besides questioning the mandate of the 2013–2015 Review to inform the COP.

4.2.3 Bunker fuels

Bunker fuels are addressed by SBSTA in order to reduce emissions from international aviation and maritime transport. In the regime, bunker fuels refer to the ongoing work, initiated in 1995 to measure, control and mitigate emissions from international bunker fuels. Countries dependent on fossil fuels export would thereby lose important revenues as a consequence of facilitating mitigation efforts specifically directed to these large sectors. Consequently, Saudi Arabia and other OPEC countries have historically obstructed progress on the matter, where efforts of excluding the item and undermining its relevance has been identified (Depledge, 2008, p. 24). Thus, similar to the adverse effect of response measure, bunker fuels are one of the long-held areas where Saudi Arabia devotes time and resources in order to reduce the impact on its revenues from the oil business. As demonstrated below, Saudi Arabia's objected and delayed decisions on this agenda in order to secure important revenues from oil export.

Obstructions related to bunker fuels appeared most frequently during negotiations in 2018, with two accounts observed at the intersessional meeting, and two at COP24. An additional observation was identified in 2017 during SBI plenary at COP23. However, these obstructions should be considered in relation to each other in order to understand the series of event on the item. All observations concerned issues related to improved energy efficiency of carbon intensive industries. Both the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) presented strategies and ongoing efforts on the matter. Additionally, the joint annual reports of the Technology Executive Committee (TEC) and Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN), emphasized industrial energy efficiency as key messages to be forwarded to the crucial COP24 (UNFCCC, 2017, p. 12). Below, the obstructions occurring on this item are presented to illustrate this linkage as well as the consistent opposition from Saudi Arabia on efforts to mitigate emissions from these sectors.

Beginning in 2017 during SBI plenary on November 15th, parties adopted conclusions and COP draft decisions regarding the joint annual report of the TEC and CTCN. These two bodies were established by the COP in 2010 in order to facilitate the transfer and development of climate technology and represent the "technology mechanism" of the UNFCCC (TTClear, 2019). After the adoption of the joint TEC/CTCN annual report, Saudi Arabia intervened and stated that they could not adopt such decisions after all. The Chair informed that the adoption could not be reversed, which made Saudi Arabia question the transparency of the process. Conclusions were forwarded to the COP (ENB, 2017d). At the subsequent intersessional meeting in 2018, Saudi Arabia responded to the reports from the ICAO and IMO on emission targets. Of special concern was the "Initial Strategy" of the IMO to reduce emissions by at least 50 percent within 2050 compared to 2008 levels (IMO, 2018). Saudi Arabia underlined that they did not join consensus on this strategy, and further emphasized that it was premature to put carbon restrictions on specific fuels at this stage. During SBSTA closing plenary on May 10th, parties diverged on how to welcome the reports, and the Chair initiated rule 16 to postpone the issue to the COP. He further proposed that opposing parties could meet ICAO and IMO at an informal event during COP24 to facilitate agreement, but the proposal was withdrawn as Saudi Arabia objected (ENB, 2018e, p. 11).

During COP24, parties addressed the IMO and ICAO reports at SBSTA plenary on December 2nd. Saudi Arabia reminded the plenary that no consensus was reached, and parties had thus not extended invitation to IMO and ICAO to report on their work to the SBSTA. The Chair intervened and stated that despite lack of consensus at the previous meeting, parties had issued a standing invitation at earlier sessions to let IMO and ICAO report on their work at future sessions. Once the IMO and ICAO reported on their work, Saudi Arabia interrupted and restated that parties did not extend an invitation as no consensus was reached at the intersessional meeting. Parties then convened into informal consultation in order to resolve the matter. Despite the effort, the Chair initiated rule 16 at December 8th in order to consider the issue at the intersessional meeting in May. No conclusions on bunker fuels was forwarded to the COP in 2018 (ENB, 2018b, 2018d).

The events provided above illustrates two things. First, that the obstructions from Saudi Arabia prevented the COP from adopting conclusions on bunker fuels, and secondly, that Saudi preferences on the matter has remained remarkably stable across decades of negotiations. It is hard to dismiss that the reports provided by ICAO and IMO had an intrusive cause on why Saudi Arabia initially blocked conclusions on this overarching agenda. Once both the annual report from TEC/CTCN and IMO's first initial strategy was published, systematic obstructions from Saudi Arabia was deployed. As mentioned above, in the "post-Paris" phase of climate change negotiations, industrial energy efficiency was increasingly occurring as an important mitigation effort to keep track with the global temperature goals set out by the Paris Agreement. It was one of the key messages in the TEC/CTCN report to be forwarded to the COP23, as well as the initial strategy of the IMO to substantially reduce emissions towards 2050. This implies that as negotiations progressed and the science became more informed on the severity of the situation, Saudi Arabia's oil-market interests eventually prevailed, blocking progress on bunker fuels. This notion seems strengthened once the pattern in *table 3* is considered, where no observations occurred prior to these developments.

4.2.4 Adaptation vs mitigation

This agenda intends to capture those obstructions where Saudi Arabia frequently addressed the importance of balanced progress between different items in general, and between adaptation and mitigation specifically. Furthermore, the agenda relates to those interventions where Saudi Arabia emphasized the consideration of adaptation as mitigation efforts for developing countries. The agenda thus compiles of several issues treated by the UNFCCC, including nationally determined contributions (NDCs), economic diversification, finance and the contested issue of differentiation. Depledge (2008, p. 15) refers to this compilation of issues as "the adverse effect agenda", describing Saudi Arabia's efforts to "secure its economic future in a carbon-constrained world". However, as negotiations have evolved, the structure of work after COP21 in 2015 was divided into specific *ad hoc* working groups on the Paris Agreement (APA), amounting to the Paris Agreement Work Programme (PAWP)⁹. Each of these working groups had its own item to address in order to finalize the PAWP at COP24 in 2018. Despite considerations of effectiveness, this way of structuring the work appeared to be vulnerable for obstructionist behavior. As demonstrated below, Saudi obstruction on the related issues in this item seems to converge towards an overall strategy of postponing issues and slowing progress on all of the working groups on the Paris Agreement.

Table 3 shows that eight out of ten obstruction related to this item occurred in the negotiations after the Paris agreement was reached. Four of these were observed in 2016, and two were observed in 2017 and 2018. Observations in 2016 consisted mainly of opposition to advance negotiations on specific APA agenda items on the grounds that it was premature. During the intersessional meeting in 2016, Saudi Arabia opposed focused submission on the transparency framework on such grounds (ENB, 2016a). Furthermore, at the subsequent COP22 in Marrakesh, Saudi Arabia blocked technical work on three APA items, namely on the GST (ENB, 2016d), mitigation (ENB, 2016b) and transparency, stressing it was premature and added that "progress should be balanced across all [APA] items" (ENB, 2016c). On adaptation however, Saudi Arabia called for the same technical work it had opposed in the other APA workstreams (ENB, 2016b).

During negotiations at the intersessional meeting in 2017, progress on mitigation was slowed down on May 11th as negotiations on the item seemed to advance faster than adaptation (ENB, 2017b). Prior to this obstruction, on May 8th, Saudi Arabia had underlined that balanced negotiations must be upheld in order to ensure a package in time for 2018. The Saudi delegate added that balanced progress between mitigation and adaptation was of special concern (ENB, 2017a). Interventions of such kind continued in the negotiations during 2018 as well. At the additional session in Bangkok, prior to the deadline for operationalization at COP24, Saudi Arabia responded to an intervention made by the EU, who warned against measuring progress based upon the number of iterations of

⁹ APA agenda item 3-8: mitigation (3), adaptation (4), transparency framework (5), GST (6), modalities and procedures (7) and further matters (8).

text on each item. Saudi Arabia reaffirmed that in order to assure a balanced process, two iterations of text on all agenda item was necessary (ENB, 2018a). The claims of such balanced progress were maintained during negotiations at COP24. Half way through the technical week, Saudi Arabia warned that without a balanced package, there would not be any COP decisions. They were addressing what they considered to be an emerging imbalance of progress between APA, SBI and SBSTA items (ENB, 2018c).

Some of these observations may seem constructive, as a balanced outcome was necessary in order for it to be in line with the principles of equity outlined in the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015b). However, the lack of flexibility on the matter witness of a systematic assertion of equal advancement. This ultimately slowed overall progress as contested issues on one item, blocked the entire package from moving on. In relation to this, many of the contested issues resurfaced during negotiations on the operationalization of the agreement. Recalling the ambiguity in the text of the Paris Agreement, issues like differentiation demonstrated that it was far from resolved once talks on operationalization began. Especially Saudi Arabia and the LMDC interpreted differentiation as it traditional had been applied in the UNFCCC, often referred to as “bifurcation” as it leaves no room for considerations of grades in the binary divide between developed and developing countries (ENB, 2016e, 2017c, 2018b). This interpretation was also suggested to be applied systematically in all APA agenda items, while opposing various forms of differentiation on each item which was initially agreed upon in 2015 (ENB, 2016e, p. 19; Rajamani, 2016, p. 509).

It is widely held that the various views on differentiation represents one of the more contested issue in the climate change regime, albeit that the matter enjoyed some resolution in 2015. The developed countries refrain from any propositions on differentiation that exclusively entails bifurcated approaches. While systematically proposing and demanding such bifurcation, and simultaneously demand strict equal progress on all items, it is hard to consider such behavior as constructive bargaining. Additionally, mitigation and adaptation enjoyed special attention in this respect, as Saudi Arabia refused to let negotiations on mitigation advance before agreements on text iterations in the adaptation workstream was reached. Thus, “the adverse effect agenda” of Saudi Arabia appeared to be tied together with strict calls for balanced progress. This eventually led to slowed progress as contested issues like differentiation frequently resurfaced. Especially in discussions related to mitigation and national determined contributions (NDC’s), where Saudi Arabia reaffirmed at COP24 that economic diversification should be considered as mitigating measures (ENB, 2018b).

4.2.5 Remaining observations

The previous sections were intended to structure the observations in order to determine where Saudi obstructions occurred, and how it affected the negotiations. The results showed that four overarching agendas appeared consistently in the observations, and together consisted of 35 out of 45 obstructions identified. As *table 3* demonstrates, ten additional observations are yet to be accounted for. It was not possible to determine how these obstructions served substantial matters, nor how they could be included in the four overarching agendas. However, they do share the general characteristic of being obstructions concerning procedural matters. An important clarification here is that many observations was obscured as procedural matters, but these where initially identified to serve substantial matters. Below, two events are highlighted in order to demonstrate the nature of the remaining observations not attended for.

At the intersessional meeting in Bonn, 2012, parties were requested to elect the chairs to the “ADP, the body which would facilitate the negotiations on the coming Paris Agreement. In plenary 18 May, Saudi Arabia, supported by Kuwait, Egypt, India and China, made calls for a conflict of interests towards the COP Vice President Robert Van Lierop from Suriname, on the grounds that he represented the same regional group (Latin America) as one of the nominees to the ADP chair. Saudi Arabia further stated that the Vice President should refrain from taking any part in the election, igniting loud dismay by parties for such accusations and calling them “unjustified” and “unfortunate” (ENB, 2012a). Since no consensus emerged on the issue, the ADP agenda was

postponed. The next day, the plenary reconvened since the COP president designated Sandea de Wet from South Africa to run the ADP on the president's behalf. This would meet the objections raised the day before and allow for the ADP agenda be adopted. However, Saudi Arabia intervened and stressed that the agenda for the ADP must be adopted by an elected officer and questioned how the ADP could even begin its work without a chair.

These obstructions had severe impact on the progress of the negotiations. As the reports demonstrates, these obstructions eventually lead to a deadlock in the ADP and lasted until the closing plenary on May 25th (ENB, 2012c). It is hard to determine how these obstructions served any specific position or agenda beyond the interests of slowing progress towards Paris in 2015. The same ambiguity appears to reflect the second event occurring at the ADP 2-4 session in 2014. On March 10, Saudi Arabia supported a proposition of establishing a contact groups to structure work at future ADP sessions, arguing it would allow for direct engagement with the texts. The ADP Co-Chair emphasized that he would allow the proposal, provided that text submissions and the agenda remained the same as in previous sessions. Saudi Arabia then intervened and ignited a procedural debate by problematizing the absence of method on how text development should occur, despite that the Co-Chair had emphasized same mode of work in the new contact group. Delegates were referring to such concerns as "red herring" of substantial matters since the contact group actually represented little changes in structuring the work (ENB, 2014a, p. 4 and 17).

4.3 Implications

In the following, a short summary of the findings is provided, before highlighting some important implications for this study. With regards to the findings, three key insights can be summarized from the analysis. First, the amount of obstructions appeared to increase towards the crucial meetings in 2015 and 2018, suggesting that as stakes in the negotiations were raised, so too did the number of obstructions. Second, obstructions appeared to orientate around four overarching agendas with an additional consideration of remaining observations as procedural matters. The evaluation of each of these agendas revealed that Saudi Arabia maintained their position from prior session when decisions were intended to be adopted. For instance, the SED-report was categorically blocked from reception to adoption. Additionally, all agendas appear to relate to Saudi Arabia's interests in preserving oil revenues. Third, the pattern of obstructions is considered to be stable and consistent across years, as the analysis revealed long-held positions to be prominent in recent negotiations as well. Specifically, these positions relate to the overarching agendas and were obstructed by demands for special provisions related to adaptation and response measures, blocking decisions related to bunker fuels, and reduce the saliency of scientific foundation and guidance.

The analysis demonstrated that Saudi Arabia deployed in all 45 obstructions during negotiations from 2012 to 2018. However, to what extent the number of obstructions represents the actual issue is hard to say for certain. On one hand, the analysis only includes data that is publicly available in order to ensure transparency of the study and enable systematic review of negotiations stretching for years. Accounts of closed informal sessions are seldomly publicly available and would not be applicable in order to assess obstructionist behavior over time. The analysis thus relied on accounts provided by the ENB reports in open meetings, where they allow for party names to be noted in the interventions made during talks in plenary session and open contact groups. However, open plenary meetings at COPs is the only body where decisions can be adopted in the UNFCCC. Events where parties blocked decisions or delayed adoption are thus included in the reports with party names. On the other hand, informal sessions and closed meetings are an important part of the UNFCCC process to ensure consensus among parties. In this respect, as no informal sessions or closed meetings are considered, the amount of obstructions can therefore be expected to be higher.

In relation to the empirical basis, the analysis relied upon descriptive accounts from the ENB reports, which strives to be objective and unbiased. However, loss of information occurs once such considerations are attended for. As mentioned above, the reports include recounts of events

occurring at closed sessions in their daily reports, but these do not include information on party-names of the interventions. For the purpose of this study, party-names was a necessity in order to determine whether or not potential obstructions was initiated by Saudi Arabia. These recounts were therefore not considered. As a consequence, important data on Saudi Arabia's behavior may have been left out. Furthermore, the analysis focuses on Saudi Arabia, and do not consider party coalitions such as the LMDC or the G77/China, where Saudi Arabia is a member. Evident in the reports, LMDC and Saudi Arabia aligned their position on several issues, especially concerning bifurcation and adaptation. The result may therefore not provide the totality of Saudi obstruction as these circumstances are unaccounted for. The results do provide important insights on how Saudi Arabia evolved, behaved and obstructed progress throughout negotiations on the Paris Agreement, but important data on inner workings of alliances and closed meetings are not considered.

The literature demonstrates that it is the sustained use of obstructionist tactics over time that separates systematic and occasional obstructionist behavior. Additionally, the obstructions are often intended for the general thrust of the negotiations by slowing it down using different tactics (Depledge, 2008, p. 10). In order to determine accounts of obstructionism, the analysis relied upon seven traditional tactics of Saudi obstructionism, identified by Depledge (2008). These were applied as indicators in order to structure the data and determine the nature of each observation of obstructionism (see *table 2*). However, these tactics were not mutually exclusive and depended upon contextual considerations in order to determine which type of tactic was at hand. For instance, the tactic labeled "holding out", referred to those situations where Saudi Arabia refused to join consensus (Depledge, 2008, p. 25). It was therefore necessary to track process on several issues to make sure that the obstruction at hand was correctly labeled. For instance, obstructions on the SED-report seemed to be obstructed on procedural terms, but as events evolved, these was eventually labeled as "holding out" since Saudi Arabia refused to join consensus on the matter. Additional cases of ambiguity relate to those situations where Saudi Arabia refused to consider items, on the grounds that they viewed them prematurely. Once these observations were considered in relation to other observations, they were labeled as "parallel progress" as they proved to be obstructed due to lack of advancement in other APA agenda items. Context and chronology were therefore vital in order to ensure correct labeling. However, some degree of interpretation was necessary in cases where the ambiguity could not be resolved by considerations of contextual chronology.

5 Discussion

This chapter contains the discussion related to the findings above. It will start to consider the derived expectations introduced in chapter three in order to discuss how they implicate Downie's theoretical framework. Furthermore, section 5.2 will discuss broader theoretical implication and consider the findings in relation to some of the notions posed in the introduction. The section will introduce the feasibility of specifying the argument of neo-realist assumptions of state behavior and demonstrate how the findings lend support for such propositions. Section 5.3 introduce a discussion of obstructionism and the ambiguity related to the concept. It will offer alternative perspectives on Saudi Arabia's obstructionist behavior in order to demonstrate how ambiguous obstructionism appears in relation to the perspectives adopted.

5.1 Assessment of the expectations

Chapter three presented the empirical expectations derived from theory. In the following, each expectation is evaluated and discussed in relation to the findings, followed by some general remarks on theoretical implications of the findings.

The first expectation derived from theory was: "The trend of obstructions is pointing downwards in the ratification phase". Evident in *figure 1*, the results are indicating that the opposite occurred. The number of Saudi obstructions increased toward the meetings in 2018 after a downward trend in 2016 and 2017. Isolated, this downward trend is in line with theoretical suggestions. As pressure increases on delegates, the cost of behaving obstructive increases as well since talks are progressing in a negotiation climate where consensus about the problem is established. The theory implied that parties are approaching the stage of a mature game in the ratification phase (implementation phase in this study) (Downie, 2014, pp. 171-174). This suggests that as negotiations evolve in the ratification phase, the conditions for obstructionist behavior are worsened compared to the earlier stage of the negotiations. During the ratification phase, the pressure from external factors can be supplemented with pressure from constructive management by NGO's. An important and powerful actor in this respect is the Climate Action Network (CAN), a global network of 1.300 NGO's, representing 120 countries. During COP24 in 2018, CAN awarded Saudi Arabia and its coalitional partners three "fossil of the day" in a row for opposing scientific findings from the IPCC (CAN, 2018). These awards are made public by daily newsletters which is distributed to delegates and observers on every morning during the negotiations. There is therefore a certain degree of shaming in obstructing progress in the phase where such actors can align their lobby with improved scientific findings.

Yet, the obstructions increased in 2018 as the rules of implementation was to be adopted. These findings suggest that the constructive management of interested actors and networks, as well as the influence from external factors, did not have the intended effect on Saudi Arabia's obstructionist behavior. Thus, the empirical findings in this study are not in line with the first expectation derived from theory.

The second expectation was "The number of obstructions is highest in the bargaining phase". Downie suggested that in the first phase of the negotiations, when parties engage in talks concerning a tentative agreement, cost-benefit calculations are intangible. Additionally, stakeholders are not

completely mobilized and the political stakes are much lower here than in the ratification phase (Downie, 2014, p. 169). Conditions for obstructions are therefore more favorable in this phase, as it is easier to obscure them in procedural concerns where the cost of obstructive behavior are considerably lower compared to the mature game. Furthermore, some additional circumstantial indications favor this expectation. Saudi Arabia was considered to be a systematic obstructionist prior to the launch of the negotiations on the Paris Agreement in 2012 (Depledge, 2008). This suggests that when time is accounted for, Saudi Arabia's systematic obstructionism should be more prominent in 2012 than in 2018. Additionally, the bargaining phase in this thesis contains of four years with negotiations, while the ratification phase contains three. Thus, it is more likely that the number of obstructions were higher in the ratification phase, once these circumstantial and theoretical considerations are taken into account.

As *table 2* demonstrated, the opposite occurred here as well. The number of obstructions in the bargaining phase was 22, while the implementation phase consisted of 23 instances. Although the difference is modest, separated by one instance, it contradicts both the theoretical propositions and the circumstantial indications that suggested the opposite. Related to the previous expectations, the amount of obstructions in 2018 determined much of the outcome. As the amount of obstructions had steadily reduced or remained stable in all sessions in 2016 and 2017, the amount increased again to the same level as in 2015, ultimately amounting to ten observations. As demonstrated in *figure 1*, obstructions in both COPs and other sessions increased as the process culminated to finally adopt the rulebook to operationalize the Paris Agreement. Additionally, as the number of obstructions was close to equally distributed between the phase, it lends supports to the notion of systematic obstructionism, characterized by the *sustained* and aggressive use of tactics over time (Depledge, 2008, p. 10). Thus, the empirical findings of this thesis do not support the second expectation either.

Depledge (2008) defined systematic obstructionists as the “sustained and aggressive use of obstructionist tactics over time, targeted at the general thrust of the negotiations” (p. 10). She suggests they are seeking as little progress as possible and would prefer that the negotiations do not lead to an agreement. However, the analysis demonstrated that there are indications pointing towards a balancing act, coined by Glozman et.al (2015). Additionally, the Paris Agreement and its rulebook was agreed upon within both deadlines in 2015 and 2018. If Saudi Arabia preferred no agreement, it suggests that they failed with their obstructionist campaign. On the other hand, as there are evidences to suggest that Saudi Arabia is engaging in a balancing act, they would indeed prefer agreement but one that sustained their national interests. This is an important distinction, because it alters the way obstructionists behave compared to those actively seeking the negotiations to fail. Obstructionists engaged in the balancing act are deploying both cooperative and competitive tactics in order to preserve cooperation but avoid agreement that would potentially harm their national interests. This further complicates the issue of diagnosing obstructionism, because no countries would be content with an agreement that harms their national interests. Section 5.3 will resume these points in a broader discussion on obstructionism and its ambiguity.

The third expectation turns the attention away from quantitative considerations and focus on how the obstructions occurred, and how they potentially sustained the Saudi position. The expectation was “Saudi Arabia's preferences are fluid”. In theory, this proposition rests upon the belief that state preferences are socially constructed, and thus manipulable by actors and networks engaged in the cooperative constellation (Downie, 2014, p. 174). During prolonged negotiations, state preferences will ultimately change as a consequence of these influences. This assumption also represents, to some extent, the necessary theoretical conditions needed in order to adopt the understanding of how state preferences and behavior occur in prolonged negotiations. In order to investigate these perceptions, a study was conducted on how the obstructions were distributed. The result of this procedure was summarized in *table 3*.

The findings illustrated that Saudi Arabia obstructed on issues that appear to maintain their oil interests, both domestically and internationally. As mentioned in chapter one, this is an important

reason for why Saudi Arabia has more to gain by staying at the negotiation table, rather than pursuing efforts to influence process from outside. In order to influence decision-makers and the regulation adopted towards the global energy market, the UNFCCC represents a vital institution to obtain such strives. There are two important reasons for this. The first is that the UNFCCC is a defining feature on the global energy landscape in terms of reducing demand of fossil fuels and improve the prospects for renewable energy. Secondly, all efforts to pursue such intentions relies upon scientific reviews by the IPCC. The reviews inform parties, and the world, about the status of our climate in relation to intended climate action and ambition levels. These features combined send strong signals of how our global energy future should look like, and which measures needs to be taken in order to preserve our climate in the process. This may produce ripple effects in terms of long-term investments in energy industries, as well as the competitiveness of renewable resources in the fossil based global energy system. For instance, future projections are favoring renewable sources of energy relative to fossil fuels. According to the latest report from the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), it concludes that renewable energy will be competitive in pricing, capacity and installed cost within the range of 2020 to 2022 (IRENA, 2018, p. 57). Additionally, as the analysis demonstrated, IMO launched their first climate action strategy in 2018 in order to curb emissions from the global shipping industry within 2050. In order to achieve this, a key tool was to enhance energy efficiency (IMO, 2018).

The UNFCCC thus represents an important player in terms of global energy supply and demand. For this reason, Saudi Arabia has historically participated in the regime in order to preserve their oil interests internationally, by securing demand and prevent efforts to reduce global consumption (Depledge, 2008; Krane, 2019). Domestically, they have lobbied the regime for special provisions destined for oil-dependent developing countries. These provisions are framed as adaptation needs in the form of technical and financial assistance (Depledge, 2008, p. 15).

In light of recent negotiations, this notion of Saudi Arabia's behavior appeared to be present today as well. As *table 3* illustrates, the majority of obstructions identified related to four key agendas. Adverse effects of response measures were one of these agendas. It represents the core of the special provisions demanded by Saudi Arabia in previous years of negotiations, were the analysis found that obstructions sought to increase the saliency of the issue. On the other hand, science appeared to be obstructed in order to reduce its saliency and impact. Eight obstructions appeared in 2015, close to the deadline of the Paris Agreement were Saudi Arabia refused to join consensus on a 1.5 degrees threshold. Furthermore, in 2018, Saudi Arabia followed up some of their obstructions from 2015 as they refused to adequately recognize the 1.5 degrees special report from IPCC. Obstructions deployed on bunker fuels are another key target that has been historically pursued by Saudi Arabia. The findings suggested that the initial purpose was to block efforts to promote industrial energy efficiency targeted at key carbon intensive industries. Finally, the last agenda identified where obstructions occurred most frequently was termed "adaptation vs mitigation". It referred to the way Saudi Arabia blocked or delayed progress on mitigation in order to improve talks on adaptation. It thus impinges on one of the special provisions traditionally demanded by Saudi Arabia. One important issue in this respect was that economic diversification should be considered as mitigation efforts.

Based on the findings in this thesis, Saudi Arabia's preferences appears to be consistent and pre-determined by their national interests in oil. There are not any evidences in the data to suggest that Saudi Arabia changed their position, which would lend support to the notion of fluid preferences. Their position on adaptation, response measures and bunker fuels proved to be prominent throughout negotiations from 2012 to 2018, as it has been in previous years as well. Additionally, the Saudi position towards science did not change in despite of increasing pressure from several actors, chairs and other parties. Thus, in relation to the findings of this thesis, the third expectation is not supported as Saudi Arabia remained consistent in the objections and maintained their traditional positions.

5.2 Theoretical implications

The design of this thesis was a single case study with an influential case in consideration. The case of Saudi Arabia was further considered to be a least likely case in relation to Downie's theoretical framework. This attribute suggested that if derived expectations holds true for the case, the theory is assumed to be considerably strengthened. However, no expectations enjoyed support in this study. In fact, the opposite of the first and second expectation occurred as Saudi obstructions increased late in the implementation phase in 2018. Furthermore, Saudi preferences did not appear to be fluid, as long held positions and consistent posture against science was prominent in recent negotiations as well. Thus, in relation to these findings, Downie's framework appeared to be inconclusive in terms of systematic obstructionist behavior in international negotiations.

In terms of theoretical implications, least likely cases offer less optimal basis for assessing strength and weaknesses since it was assumed in advance that it was a tough test for Downie's framework. However, two important insights can be highlighted in order to accommodate for this loss. The first is that some results appeared to directly contradict the logics in his framework. The concept of immature and mature game was useful in order to understand the condition Saudi Arabia sworn to. The results support the notion of an immature game but as negotiations evolved, Saudi Arabia appeared to sustain this immature condition instead of changing their behavior towards a mature game. Thus, Saudi Arabia's position appeared to be unaffected by the evolvement of the negotiations, which was one of the key mechanisms in order to understand state behavior in prolonged negotiations. The proposed mechanism was that as negotiations evolve, the possibility for internal and external influence increases. This notion is shared by liberalism and constructivism as well, highlighting how states are affected by other variables than the neo-realist assumption of economic and security concerns (Downie, 2014, p. 174). This insight has further implications for international relations theory, which relates to the second insight drawn from this study.

The second insight relates to broader implications in terms of international relations theory and the history of climate change negotiations. The empirical scope of this thesis only concerns the latest rounds of negotiations. It does not account for the fact that states have engaged in the UNFCCC since 1992. Saudi Arabia's previous behavior was highlighted before the baton was taken to study recent negotiations, but the continuity of the UNFCCC in relation to Saudi Arabia is yet to be addressed in theoretical terms. The negotiations considered in this thesis thus represents the culmination of 20 years of earlier efforts to address climate change. Yet, the analysis demonstrated that Saudi Arabia's position has remained remarkably stable. Despite indications of a revised climate posture, the conclusive results lend support to a persistent behavior characterized by systematic obstructionism targeted at science, bunker fuels and special provisions related to adaptation needs.

This conclusion raises multiple questions of regime effectiveness, diffusion of interests and the malignancy of energy interests itself in environmental cooperation. As mentioned in chapter one, oil is not just a commodity for Saudi Arabia. It plays an important part in how the al-Saud family's power is legitimized, as well as amounting to approximately 50 percent of the kingdom's gross domestic product (Karim, 2017, pp. 74-75; OPEC, 2019). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that climate action and ambition impinge on national security concerns in Saudi Arabia, as oil is considered to be vital for sustaining domestic order and status quo. This lends support to neo-realist assumptions of state behavior, rather than the institutional belief that regimes and actors promotes learning which eventually will soften extreme positions (Depledge, 2008, p. 29; Downie, 2014, p. 174; P. Haas, 1992, p. 3). As Grundig (2006, p. 798) argues, international relations theory would gain by specifying the empirical domain and identify the conditions under which neo-realist assumptions are valid. He finds support for his proposal that when economic costs are high enough in collaborative constellations, it eventually leads to security implications that will invoke relative gains concerns. This impedes cooperation unless economic costs are altered to the extent that it has

no security implications. By specifying the neo-realist assumption of relative gains in environmental cooperation, the empirical results in this thesis appears to support such propositions.

As intergovernmental cooperation includes nation states actors worldwide, the effort of explaining political dynamics should not dismiss neo-realist assumptions of power, security and relative gains from the explanations. For instance, an analysis of US withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, suggest that the decision was motivated by, among other things, relative gains concern towards China (Vezirgiannidou, 2008, p. 53). This notion resembles to a large extent President Trumps argumentation of withdrawing from the Paris Agreement in 2017. He stated that “The Paris Climate Accord is simply the latest example of [...] an agreement that disadvantages the United States to the exclusive benefit of other countries” (Trump, 2017). He exemplified this disadvantage with American emissions and costs relative to Chinese circumstances and how the agreement favored China more in this respect.

In terms of the saliency of relative gains concerns for Saudi Arabia, the empirical basis for thesis provides only plausible indications of such. It argues that the conditions for relative gains are met, but further investigation is necessary to confirm this notion in terms of Saudi Arabia. However, the threat imposed by a carbon-constrained world represents key challenges to the Saudi economy. If they fail to diversify their economy away from oil dependence, consequences may pose national security implications for the ruling elite. For this reason, lessons from the Arab Spring are most certainly addressed in the Saudi corridors of power. These challenges relate to the final section below in this chapter, which address some of the ambiguity and methodological difficulties in assessing obstructionist behavior.

5.3 Alternative perspective

As this thesis have demonstrated, obstructionism is a term clothed in ambiguity. Actors behaving as such are obscured as sincere bargainers, and effect negotiations to a large extent. Yet, it is a rather unstudied phenomenon compared to its disproportional influence on cooperative constellations in consensus regimes. For instance, the literature did not provide any guidelines in how to determine obstructionism, except for utilizing temporality in order to assess behavior over time (Depledge, 2008; Wallihan, 1998). Additionally, obstructionists engaged in a balancing act are *not* directly avoiding agreement, nor actively seeking as little progress as possible as Depledge (2008) suggested.

In conceptualizing obstructionism, one has to take into consideration that the term may be conditioned by the researcher’s perspectives and contextual considerations. To illustrate, it is a common belief that states are defending their national interests when they engage with each other on the international arena. This implies that disagreements and diverted views will occur. However, the goal is to find common grounds where agreements can be reached. This begs the question if Saudi Arabia can be considered as an obstructionist at all, since their main concern is to defend their national interests. Thus, it is a rational response to participate in negotiations in order to buy time and pursue efforts to secure domestic assets and vital revenues from oil sales.

In response to Depledge’s (2008) study of Saudi obstructions, Norman Swazo (2010) published an article dismissing Depledge’s findings on normative grounds. He argued that the Saudi position and behavior in the UNFCCC are both reasonable and defensible, and that in assuming Saudi Arabia is “striving for No” by obstructing progress is unfair (Swazo, 2010, p. 23). He adopted several norms of justice and defended their traditional climate posture as it is in line with both international law of equity and economic development, as well as what rational actors would do if they found themselves in Saudi Arabia’s position. The prime concern for the ruling elite is Saudi citizens, and their right to develop. When developed countries are engaged in talks in order to impede Saudi Arabia’s main source of income from oil exports, it threatens their ability to develop as well. Thus,

the claim of compensation in terms of the special provisions for oil exporting developing countries, is reasonably and understandably grounded in the UNFCCC (2010, p. 23).

Swazo's arguments are persuasive and demonstrates a normative implication in the effort of determining obstructionism. One problem, however, is that his arguments are confined to the special circumstances of Saudi Arabia alone. Saudi obstructions may not be morally permissible once you consider the issue in isolation between Saudi domestic circumstances vis-à-vis the UNFCCC. On the other hand, climate change is an all-encompassing challenge, affecting nations differently. Unfortunately, those countries that has the least capacity to adapt to a warmer planet, are those who will be affected the hardest. This is why the Paris Agreement makes explicit mentions of least developed countries as recipients of finance and technology transfer in several articles (UNFCCC, 2015b). In this way, Saudi Arabia's climate posture is upheld at the expense of LDC's vulnerability of climate change. By delaying, derailing and block issues of importance, such as the 1.5 degrees threshold in 2015, time is running out for those already experiencing the effects of climate change. In this broader, and to some extent morally perspective, Saudi Arabia's behavior is by no doubt obstructive in relation to the United Nations' laws of sustainable development for *all* nations.

With regards to the notion that obstructionists are engaged in a balancing act between cooperative and competitive tactics, the analysis demonstrated that there are important indications to suggest that it applies to the case of Saudi Arabia. The analysis found that there were conditions for opportunistic behavior in both 2013 and 2017 when the number of obstructions deviated from the trend observed. One implication of this finding is that if Saudi Arabia are engaged in a balancing act, with the sole purpose of avoiding an agreement that harms their national interests, how can it be considered as obstructionist behavior?

Mitigating climate change involves both costs and benefits. One important objective for the climate change regime is to distribute these costs and benefits as fairly as possible based on historical responsibility of global emissions. The differentiation principle serves these purposes and has been among the most contested issues in the UNFCCC history. Based on numbers from 2016, Saudi Arabia is now ranking as number ten among the world's top emitters with 19.5 metric tons of CO₂ emissions per capita. In comparison, the EU emits 6.3 metric tons of CO₂ with over twenty times the population of Saudi Arabia (IEA, 2019a, p. 20; The World Bank, 2019). In terms of historical responsibility, Saudi Arabia's share cannot be compared to the developed countries historical emissions. Yet, Saudi Arabia's oil industry is increasing their share of global emissions drastically. In the last 40 years, they have doubled the amount of emissions per capita where recent trends is pointing upwards (The World Bank, 2019).

Climate change is our time greatest challenge, where success or failure is determined by how well the nations of the world cooperates and find common grounds. Obstructive behavior undermines these efforts, unfortunately at the expense of those who will be affected the most. Engaged in a balancing act or not, Saudi Arabia has proven to be a systematic obstructionist in recent times as well. Their share of global emissions is disproportional to their domestic efforts and the willingness to find common landing grounds in the climate change regime. By blocking science, derailing talks and demand compensation the Saudi delegates are consistently pursuing national interests in a regime that entails global interests. As mentioned in chapter one, single occasions of constructive behavior do not acquit the kingdom from the role as a systematic obstructionist.

6 Conclusions

This thesis explores the assumption of obstructionism in cooperative constellations between states. It set out by posing some fundamental questions of state behavior on the international arena, impinging on dual explanations proposed by neo-realism and liberal institutionalism. Do states willingly cooperate and ultimately submerge to institutional learning and common interests? Or do national interests prevail and shape state behavior despite long periods of international negotiations and cooperation? The case of Saudi Arabia was investigated in order to shed some light on these fundamental questions. Several authors and new developments indicated that Saudi Arabia had changed their climate posture in recent times, and that the UNFCCC had been successful in softening their position as a traditional obstructionist in the regime. For these reasons, the thesis sought to answer the following research question posed in chapter one: “How did Saudi Arabia obstruct progress in the negotiations on climate change from 2012 to 2018?”.

Downie (2014) proposed a theoretical framework to understand state behavior in prolonged intergovernmental negotiations. This framework was applied in this thesis in order to test derived expectations to the empirical results. This theory stressed that state behavior is constructed, and thus susceptible to influence from different levels as negotiations evolves over years (p. 174). A content analysis of 171 ENB reports from the negotiations was conducted with the intention to extract events where Saudi Arabia obstructed progress in negotiating on the Paris Agreement. These results were categorized and structured in a categorization schema (*table 1*) and functioned as the foundation for analysis.

According to the results in this thesis, Saudi Arabia was found to be consistent and systematic in opposing efforts that would harm their national interests in oil. The total number of obstructions identified was 45 with close to equal distribution between negotiations before and after the Paris Agreement was reached. In the effort to analyze where and how Saudi Arabia obstructed progress, four overarching agendas was proposed. Two of them represented permanent agendas in the UNFCCC, where the remaining agendas were constructed in order to demonstrate how they represent issues of importance for Saudi Arabia. The findings suggest that Saudi Arabia employed obstructionist tactics differently in order to pursue their national interests. Obstructions related to adverse effects of response measures appeared to increase its saliency in the negotiations, whereas obstructions related to scientific foundation and guidance were intended to reduce the saliency. Efforts intended to reduce emissions from bunker fuels was categorically bogged down which ultimately prevented decisions in 2018. The last overarching agenda was adaptation vs. mitigation. Obstructions related to these issues were intended to equate the relevance of mitigation and adaptation. Consequently, progress on mitigation was held hostage by contested issues on adaptation.

In addition to ten obstructions related to procedural matters, all obstructions identified in the analysis appear to maintain Saudi Arabia’s oil interests. Short term, they oppose efforts to mitigate emissions from carbon-intensive industries which would reduce global oil demand. Additionally, they demand special provisions in terms of adaptation. Compensation for lost oil revenues and demands to consider economic diversification as mitigation efforts are prime examples of how Saudi Arabia avoids costs of implementing mitigating efforts. Long term, they oppose and downplay scientific assessments and reports. By sowing doubts and block implementation of key

findings it reduces the impact of science and its ripple effects on investors and companies around the world. Additionally, obstructions related to procedural concerns functions as the quagmire for effective governance and efficient progress.

For this reason, the results support neo-realist assumptions of state behavior. As expected, Downie's theoretical framework did not enjoy support in this study. Saudi Arabia's behavior did not occur to be fluid, and obstructionist patterns contradicts propositions of state evolving from an immature game to a mature game. Despite long periods of cooperation on climate change, where several actors are influencing parties, Saudi Arabia is still pursuing long-held positions related to interests in oil and employs obstructionist tactics in the process. These interests are of such importance for the Saudi economy that it most probably impinges on security implications that invokes relative gains concerns.

In concluding the research question, Saudi Arabia obstructed progress in such a way that it maintained their national interests in oil, both short term and long term. Obstructionist activity increased as negotiations progressed towards culmination in 2015 and 2018, suggesting that as stakes were raised, so too was the frequency of obstructionist tactics. The endurance of the kingdoms' climate posture in recent and previous years, support the notion that Saudi Arabia engaged in a long game in the climate regime, maintaining their role as a systematic obstructionist.

6.1 Suggestions for future research

Future studies on climate change cooperation should not completely abolish neo-realist arguments. As this thesis has shown, some actors are engaged in the regime with malign intentions in which institutional liberalism is ill equipped to explain in relation to neo-realist arguments of relative gains. Furthermore, scholars should engage more actively in conceptualizing obstructionism. As demonstrated in this thesis, the concept appeared to be clothed with ambiguity. Careful considerations and the benefit of temporal data improved the ability to diagnose and detect obstructionism in this thesis. Actors employing this type of behavior enjoys disproportional large veto power relative to those who engage constructively in cooperation constellations. Future studies would therefor benefit from deeper explorations of the concept in order to provide more sufficient tools to detect and diagnose obstructionism. These efforts may provide more adequate circumstances in order to investigate obstructionism in future studies.

7 Appendix

Chronological overview of observations

Note: all observations can be found in the ENB reports by following year and date at www.enb.iisd.org.

Year/Date	Session	Indicator	Description
2012/14.05	Intersession, Bonn	Repetition and Propagation	Blocked moving protocol article on adverse impacts to forum on response measures.
2012/18.05	Intersession, Bonn	Procedural Blockage	Made calls for conflicts of interests towards the COP vice-president when electing chairs to the ADP.
2012/19.05	Intersession, Bonn	Refusal to Negotiate	COP president designated de Wat to allow for the agenda be adopted, while pending electing chairs. Saudi Arabia refused to adopt ADP agenda without an elected chair.
2012/22.05	Intersession, Bonn	Postponement and Delay	Saudi Arabia refused to consolidate work on response measures in AWG-LCA contact group. They stressed that no such mandate is given, and that the purpose is to complete work, not consolidate and proposed spin-off groups.
2012/26.11	COP18-Doha	Procedural Blockage	Opposed closing one of the items in the forum of response measures, despite it was treated elsewhere.

2013/14.11	COP19-Warshaw	Parallel Progress	Did not want to address post-2020 issues without discussing pre-2020 finance.
2013/21.11	COP19-Warshaw	Parallel Progress	Opposed propositions to specific timeframes for domestic mitigation since no pathways was considered for climate finance.
2014/10.03	ADP 2-4	Postponement and Delay	Proposed contact groups rather than informal meetings to review text iterations. Text submissions was problematized by Saudi Arabia after consensus emerged on its proposal. Delegates referred to “Red Herring” of substantial matters.
2014/14.03	ADP 2-4	Repetition and Propagation	Reaffirmed long-held positions relating to adverse effects throughout the session when the objective was to find convergence between parties.
2014/04.06	Intersession, Bonn	Repetition and Propagation	With LMDC and Arab Group, Saudi Arabia raised the issue of adverse effects throughout the session, igniting conceptual debates on key items like INDC’s, bunker fuels, finance and mitigation, while stressing the importance of equal weight in legal terms between adaptation and mitigation.
2014/25.10	ADP 2-6	Holding Out	Bifurcation on INDC. Refused any proposition that would ease the bipolar divide. Maintained that adaptation should be considered as mitigation efforts. Reaffirmed at closing plenary.

2014/05.12	COP20-Lima	Parallel Progress	Saudi Arabia stated it would not support the new agreement unless it adequately address response measures.
2015/02.06	Intersession, Bonn	Procedural Blockage	Opposed non-procedural paragraphs on the SED-report which would inform the COP on the inadequacy of a 2-degree threshold.
2015/10.06	Intersession, Bonn	Holding Out	Together with China, Saudi Arabia refused to join consensus on how to address the findings of the SED-report, upholding the deadlock lasting throughout the session.
2015/02.12	COP21-Paris	Exploiting Alliances	Speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, Saudi Arabia opposed any mentions of “degrees” and that INDC should be consistent with a 1.5 degrees scenario. Egypt supported agreement with 1.5 degrees threshold.
2015/03.12	COP21-Paris	Procedural Blockage	Maintained position on non-procedural paragraphs on the 2013-2015 Review, despite suggestions of compromise. No conclusions on the report was forwarded.
2015/03.12	COP21-Paris	Exploiting Alliances	Speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, Saudi Arabia blocked conclusions from the SED-report on the new 1.5-degree threshold. Egypt previously stated that they endorse the new threshold and that the agreement should reflect such.

2015/03.12	COP21-Paris	Postponement and Delay	Opposed review of parties submitted climate efforts (INDC) to be undertaken in 2018.
2015/03.12	COP21-Paris	Postponement and Delay	Opposed “inviting” non-party stakeholders to climate action, accepted “welcoming”.
2015/03.12	COP21-Paris	Procedural Blockage	Opposed requesting IPCC for a special report on the impact of 1.5 degrees warming while questioning its added value.
2015/04.12	COP21-Paris	Postponement and Delay	Opposed mentions of decarbonization and carbon neutrality, while supporting stabilization of greenhouse gases.
2015/09.12	COP21-Paris	Parallel Progress	Linkage between negotiations in the ADP and the forum of adverse effect of the implementation of response measures. Progress stalled as no consensus emerged.
2016/24.05	Intersession, Bonn	Postponement and Delay	Opposed progressing to focused submission on the transparency framework stressing it was premature.
2016/24.05	Intersession, Bonn	Holding Out	Blocked suggestions that the SED-report should inform the GST.
2016/16.05	Intersession, Bonn	Repetition and Propagation	Repeatedly reaffirmed position on differentiation, suggesting bifurcation according to convention principles.
2016/09.11	COP22-Marrakesh	Postponement and Delay	Stated it was premature to decide on two phases (technical and political) in

			the GST, keeping its position from the intersessional.
2016/11.11	COP22- Marrakesh	Postponement and Delay	Regretted that conclusions was not translated into all UN languages and agreed to consider items as long as it did not set precedent.
2016/11.11	COP22- Marrakesh	Parallel Progress	Saudi Arabia considered technical work on mitigation to be premature, while advocating for the same technical progress on adaptation.
2016/12.11	COP22- Marrakesh	Postponement and Delay	Saudi Arabia would not accept a paragraph on the revised scale of financial contributions for SBSTA secretariat, which needed an additional 490 000 Euros to conduct the work mandated by parties.
2016/14.11	COP22- Marrakesh	Parallel Progress	Blocked technical work on transparency on the basis that it was premature, while reaffirming that progress should be balanced across items.
2016/16.11	COP22- Marrakesh	Repetition and Propagation	Repeated entrenched positions relating to adverse effect of response measures at the end of the COP.
2017/08.05	Intersession, Bonn	Parallel Progress	Saudi Arabia restated that balanced negotiations, especially between mitigation and adaptation, matters to ensure a package in 2018.
2017/11.05	Intersession, Bonn	Parallel Progress	Speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, Saudi Arabia underscored the need to maintain same mode of advancement on all items as the

			LMDC noted that mitigation had moved faster than adaptation.
2017/18.05	Intersession, Bonn	Parallel Progress	Restated entrenched positions at the closing plenary, while reaffirming linkages across all APA-agenda items, while adding linkages to response measures
2017/15.11	COP23-Bonn/Fiji	Postponement and Delay	In SBI plenary, parties adopted draft conclusions and draft COP decision on the joint annual report from TEC and CTCN. However, Saudi Arabia intervened after adoption and said it could not adopt such decisions after all. SBI Chair said that the issue could not be re-opened and Saudi Arabia then raised concerns over the transparency over the process.
2018/30.04	Intersession, Bonn	Procedural Blockage	In SBSTA opening plenary, Saudi Arabia responded to the reports by International Maritime Organization (IMO) and Internal Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) emission targets set to 2050. The Saudi delegation said that they did not join consensus of such strategies and underscored that it was premature to set obligations on specific fuels.
2018/05.05	Intersession, Bonn	Procedural Blockage	At the APA stocktaking plenary, Saudi Arabia opposed to Co-Chairs expectations that text proposals for the additional session before COP24 must be coherent and navigable, while stating they did not support

			changes in the work modalities for the additional session.
2018/10.05	Intersession, Bonn	Holding Out	At SBSTA closing plenary, parties could not find consensus on how to approach the IMO and ICAO reports. Rule 16 was invoked, while the Chair proposed informal consultations between interested parties and ICAO and IMO during COP24. Saudi Arabia objected.
2018/06.09	Additional session-Bangkok	Parallel Progress	During APA stocktaking plenary, parties urged to keep momentum maintained despite that some items moved a little faster than others. Saudi Arabia maintained that two iterations on all agenda items was necessary to assure a balanced process.
2018/02.12	COP24-Katowice	Procedural Blockage	In SBSTA plenary during considerations of bunker fuels, Saudi Arabia recalled that no consensus was reached on how the report from ICAO and IMO should inform the SBSTA. The Chair responded that parties had issued a standing invitation and the issue must be addressed regardless.
2018/02.12	COP24-Katowice	Repetition and Propagation	During statements from ICAO and IMO to the SBSTA, Saudi Arabia intervened and restated that no consensus was reached.
2018/06.12	COP24-Katowice	Parallel Progress	Speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, Saudi Arabia addressed the emerging imbalance in progress

			between APA, SBI and SBSTA items, warning that without a balanced package there would not be any COP decisions.
2018/06.12	COP24-Katowice	Holding Out	During APA stocktaking plenary, Saudi Arabia opposed that non-party stakeholders should be included in the GST, including IPCC experts. They further underlined that economic diversification must be considered as mitigating efforts.
2018/08.12	COP24-Katowice	Procedural Blockage	Saudi Arabia, with Russia, Kuwait and the US opposed “welcoming” the IPCC 1.5 degrees special report previously issued by parties. They preferred “take note of the report”. No consensus was reached, and the SBSTA Chair Watkinson invoked rule 16, postponing the issue to the annual intersessional meeting in Bonn.
2018/08.12	COP24-Katowice	Repetition and Propagation	During the last day of the technical week, Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Arab Group restated entrenched positions explicitly noting bifurcation, economic diversification as mitigation efforts and that response measures are not sufficiently reflected in the text.

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