

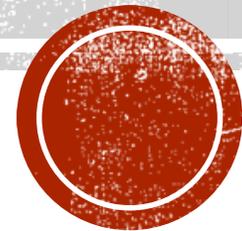
# **WASTE-TO-ENERGY IN THE NEWS: 2006-2015**

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# RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Investigate the portrayal of WtE incineration and gasification projects in Ontario newspapers over the last decade - content and discourse analysis
- Identify dominant discursive framings or 'storylines' and the 'discourse coalitions' that have emerged to promote and impede WtE as a MSW management option
- Contribute to understandings of how contestations over socio-technical change in municipal waste systems work to shape and limit the scope of transitions.



## Rationale for Media Study

- A publicly visible site for the negotiation of conflicts over waste governance
- An important actor in the construction of public discourses - decides who can authoritatively speak about WtE

## Methodology & Theoretical Approach

- Keyword search in Factiva database
- Coding and counting using QSR NVivo software
- Iterative, grounded theory approach to coding and identifying discursive framings (Strauss & Glaser)
- Follow Hajer's (1995) theory of environmental discourse:
  - Environmental issues a continuous discursive struggle over definition and meaning of environmental problems
  - Discourses condensed into 'storylines' that highlight and shape knowledge, mold interests and values, position actors and arguments – *an important form of agency*



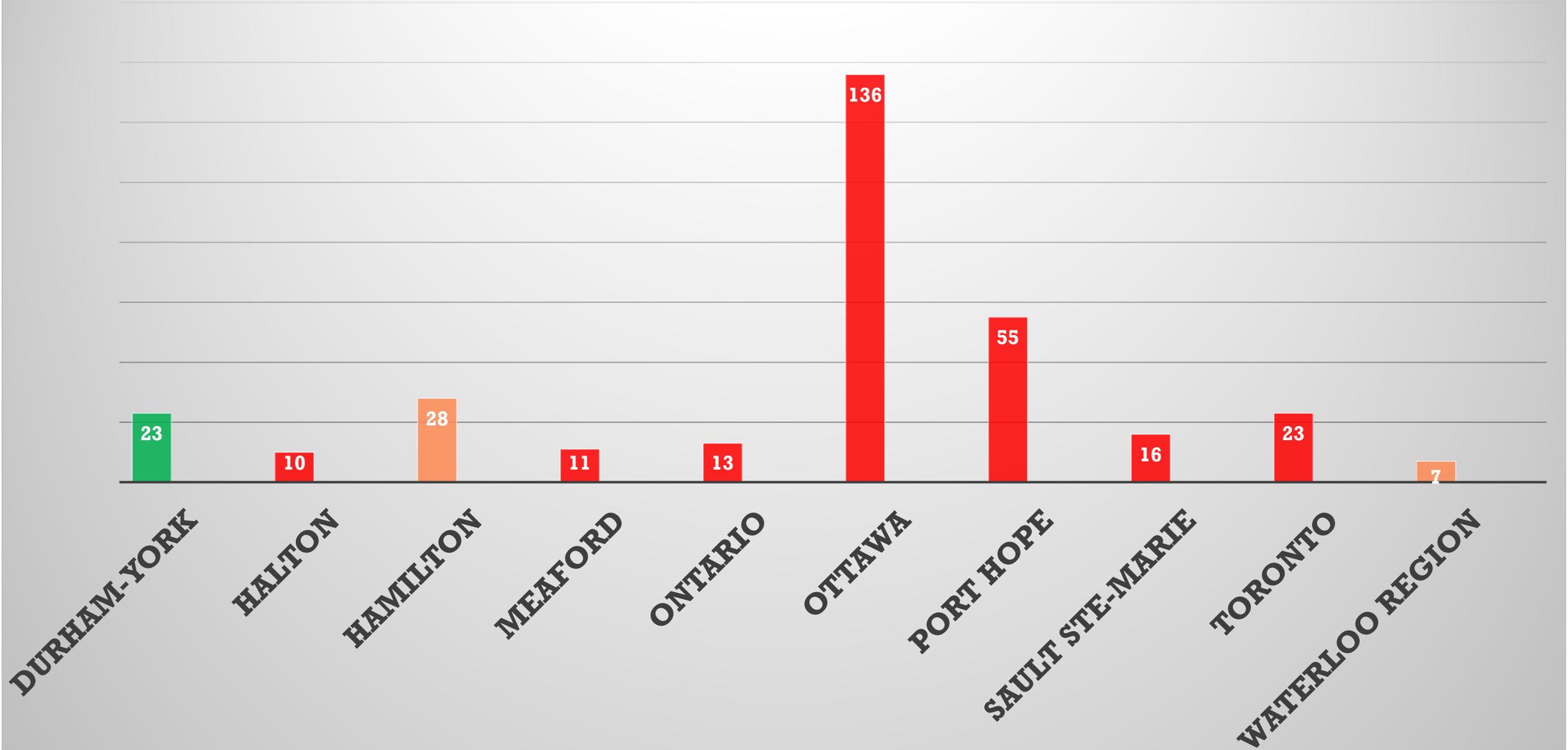
# BACKGROUND: ONTARIO

- **1980-90s:** Waste incineration very controversial due to environmental and health effects e.g. SWARU
- **1992-1995:** Brief moratorium on incineration
- **2008:** ON Gov. direct OPA to support WtE through PPAs
- **2011:** End of landfilling agreement with Michigan
- **2015:** Durham-York facility comes into operation, first development in 20 years

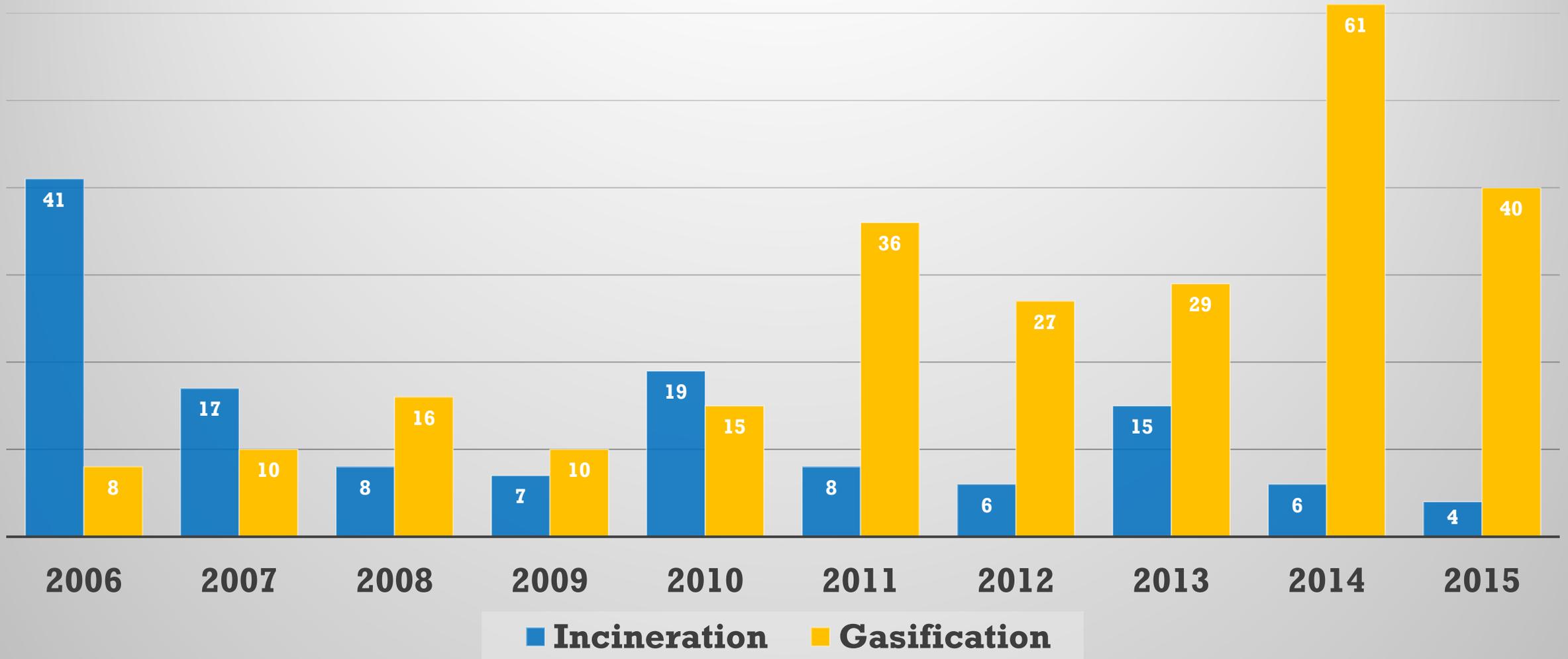


JURISDICTION	TYPE	PROPOSED	OUTCOME
DURHAM-YORK	Incineration	2007	Operational (2015)
HAMILTON	Gasification	Oct 2008	Ongoing proposal
WATERLOO REGION	Incineration	Jun 2013	Ongoing exploration
PORT HOPE	Gasification	2010	Rejected May 2015
SAULT STE-MARIE	Gasification	Oct 2011	Cancelled Dec 2015
OTTAWA	Gasification	Late 2005	Cancelled Feb 2015
PEEL REGION	Incineration	Mar 2013	Rejected Jan 2016
MEAFORD	Gasification	Nov 2011	Rejected Apr 2012
HAMILTON-NIAGARA	Incineration	Pre 2006	Abandoned Jul 2008
HALTON	Incineration	Aug 2006	Abandoned June 2007
GUELPH	Incineration	Jun 2006	Rejected Jul 2007

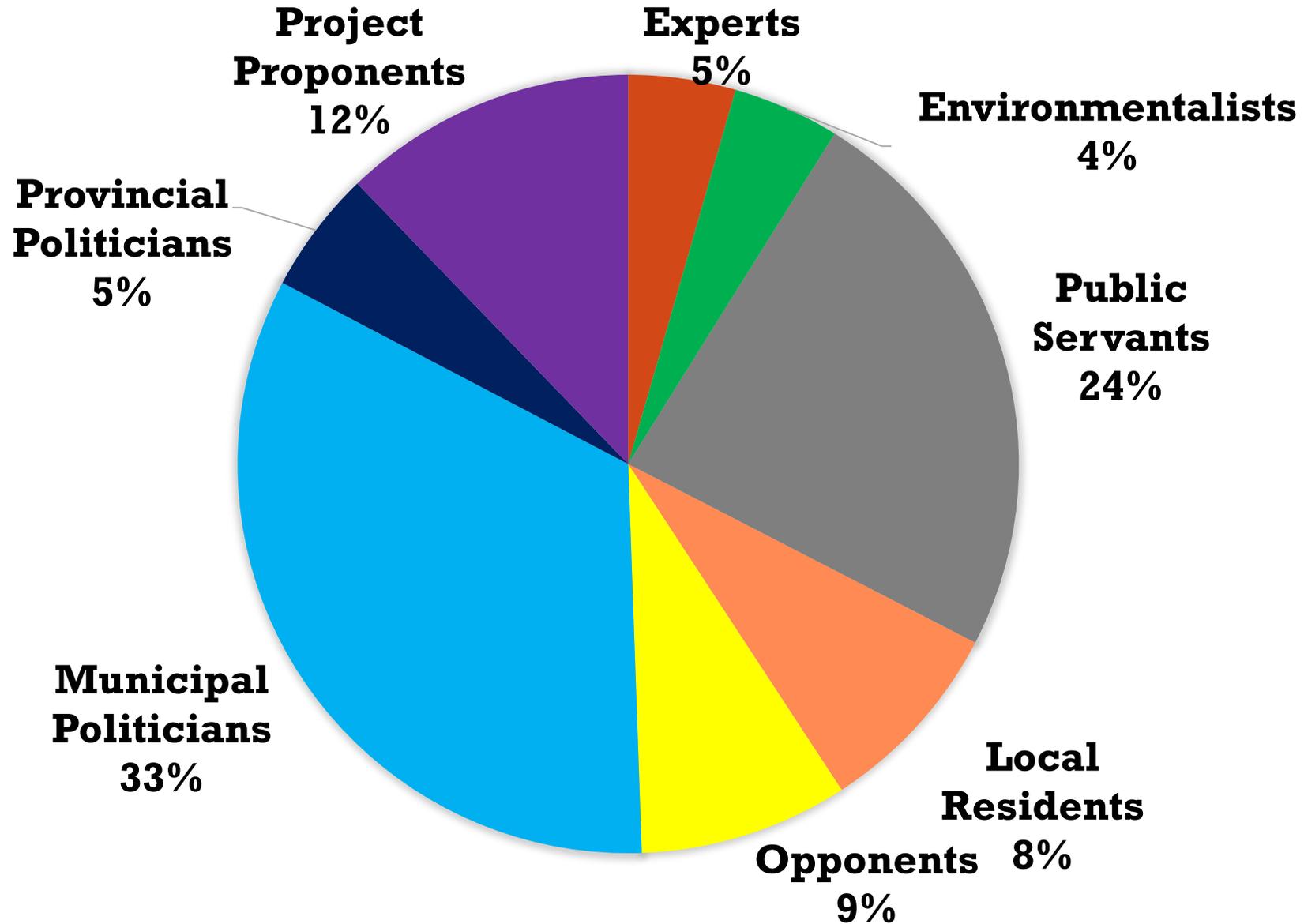
## Articles by Jurisdiction (Out of 21 total)



## Total No. of Articles Incineration vs. Gasification



## Actors Cited (% of all references)



# ECOLOGICAL MODERNIZATION

- **“Win-win” proposition:** meets economic and environmental goals; solves energy and waste problems simultaneously
- **Environmentally progressive compared to landfilling:** “clean”, “green”, “renewable”
- **The “way of the future”:** “high-tech”; “futuristic”; “state-of-the-art”; “revolutionary”

“It’s a **win-win for Ontario...It brings us into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.** It not only disposes the garbage in a much more environmentally friendly way, it also produces energy” (Min. Health 04/28/08)

“Fears expressed over modern waste-to-energy incinerators is “crazy talk”, especially since **there are hundreds of plants operating safely in Europe**” (Pres. CRRC 01/11/15)

A “clean energy-from-waste” system...would **avoid the city’s “medieval” dependence on landfill** (Mayoral Cand. 10/31/06)

Municipal & provincial politicians, public servants, project proponents

# ECONOMIC RATIONALITY

- **Energy from waste is a valuable resource, generates economic benefits:**
  - FIT & tax revenues
  - Employment
  - Royalties

“Plasco is just one of the many companies **racing to mine the gold in garbage**” (G&M 08/21/09)

“When you see truckloads of garbage going down the 401, it’s like truckloads of \$100 bills and **we have to turn that garbage into money**” (Mayor Ford 06/20/13)

Public Servants, politicians, project proponents

# DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

- **Community should be responsible for own waste**, management should be localized

“Premier Dalton McGuinty says **Toronto should show it is a “good neighbour” by demonstrating that it is taking responsibility for its own waste** and taking “a serious look at incineration...” (WRR 10/02/06)

“We support a made-in-Simcoe-County solution, which is energy from waste. **I don’t think shipping our garbage out of the county would show any type of leadership**” (Councilor. 01/26/12)

Provincial and municipal politicians

# ECOLOGICAL HARM

- **Poses unacceptable human health and environmental risks:**
  - Incineration is a “backward approach” with proven risks
  - Gasification is unproven that modern WtE is safe
- **Negative impact on waste diversion**
  - Jeopardizes recycling, need to “feed the beast”

“The future is about the Three Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle), so **why is Port Hope trying to get a better future with incineration built on old technology?**” (NT 10/10/13)

“We need to ensure that Hamiltonians **do not become guinea pigs** for a brand-new, untested technology”  
(Andrea Horwath 11/11/15)

It’s a dirty technology that costs way more than all the responsible alternatives, especially recycling and other forms of diversion, **and it directly undermines them**” (G&M 02/12/07)

Municipal politicians, local residents, opponents, environmental groups

# ECONOMIC IRRATIONALITY

- **Too costly, technically complex** compared to other options
- **Generates negative economic impacts** on property values and tourism
- **Generates no significant economic benefits from energy production**

“Despite its deceptive characterization as an “energy from waste facility”, **potential revenues from power generation won’t come close to saving it. They’re barely a frill.**”  
(G&M 04/27/07)

“Energy from waste is **not a cheap way to produce power**, it is an **expensive way to get rid of garbage**” (OWMA 05/08/06)

“**Do you take recreation programs away from poor children in order to have an incinerator instead of a landfill?** That’s the choice you’ll be faced with” (TO Mayor Miller 11/12/06)

Municipal politicians, opponents, environmental groups

# DISTRIBUTIVE & PROCEDURAL INJUSTICE

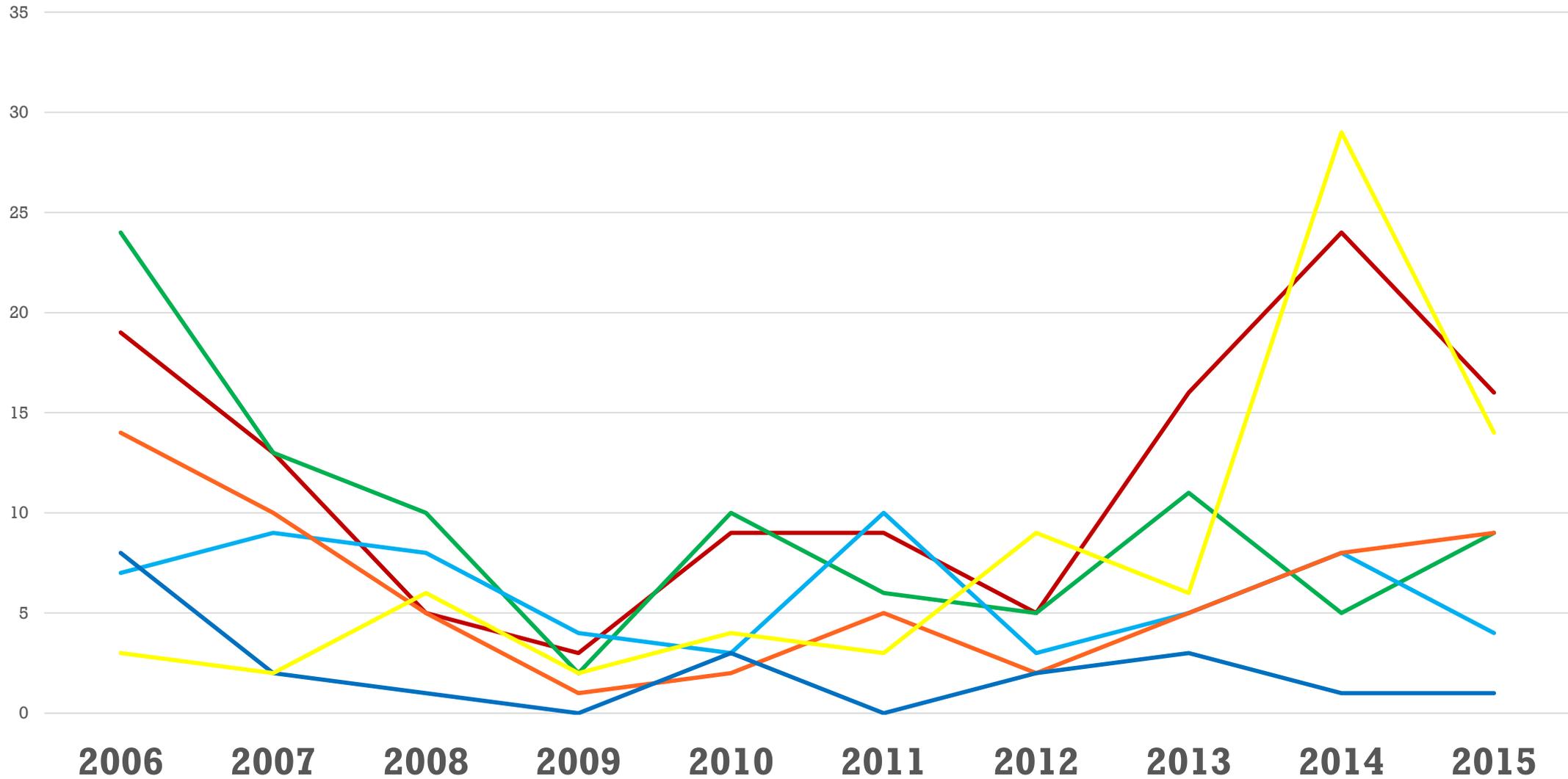
- **Backyard is full**
- **Unwilling host for other jurisdictions' waste**
- **Unfair stigmatization**
- **Weak EA requirements**
- **Lack of transparency**
- **Lack of information**
- **Conflicts of interest**

“Don’t make Hamilton **the waste treatment capital of the Golden Horseshoe**... Our waterfront vision doesn’t include gasification” (Mayoral Cand. 10/25/14)

Anti-incinerator forces in **Durham say it’s not just garbage but also democracy that might go up in smoke** if the province approves an energy-from-waste plant...” (G&M 11/12/10)

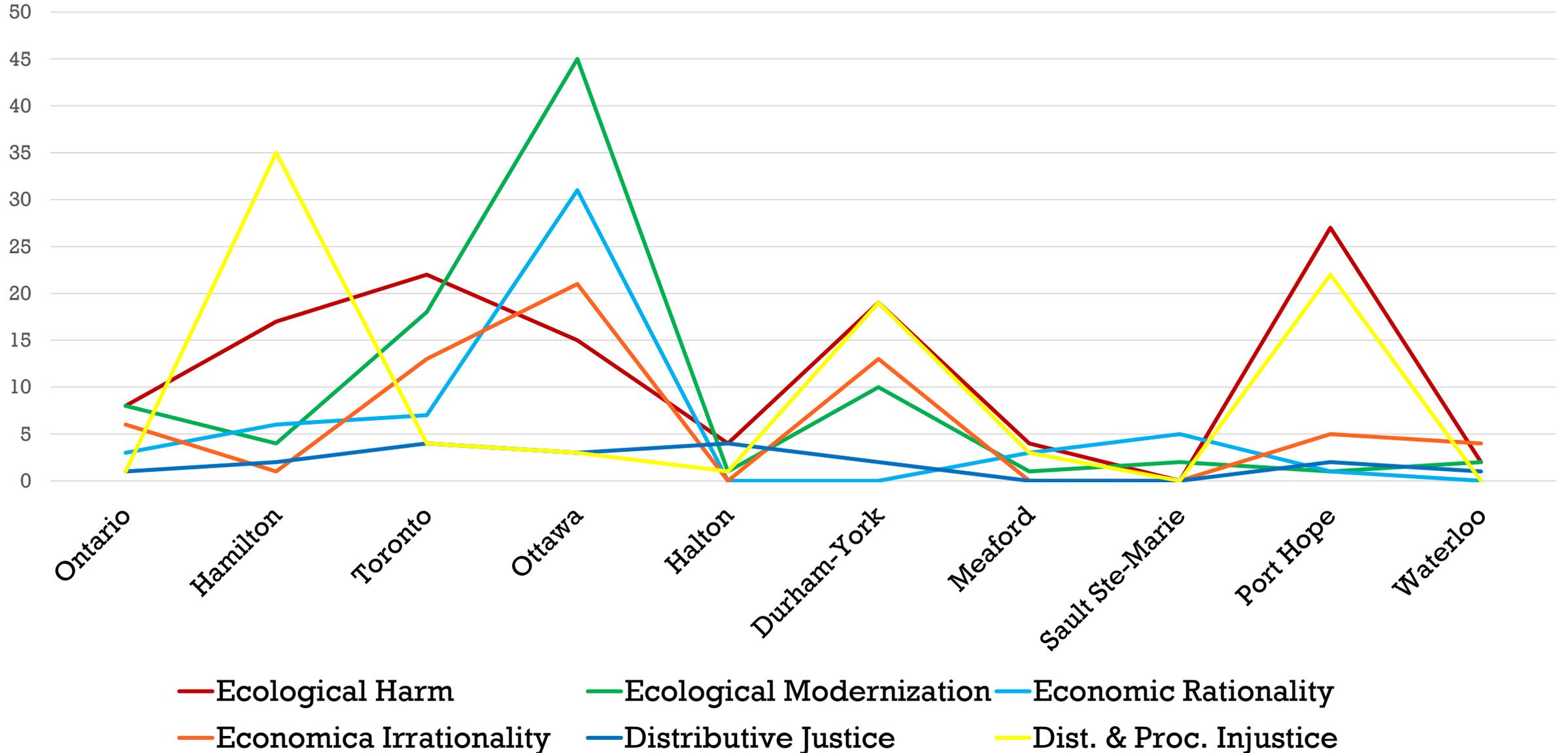
Municipal politicians, opponents, local residents, environmental groups

# Discourses over Time



- Ecological Harm
- Ecological Modernization
- Economic Rationality
- Economica Irrationality
- Distributive Justice
- Dist. & Proc. Injustice

# Discourses by Jurisdiction



# TAKEAWAYS & LINGERING QUESTIONS...

- **WtE incineration and gasification emerge as controversial in the media**
- **Distinctive WtE discourse coalitions promote and oppose it:**
  - Politicians, public servants, project proponents work to position it as desirable and *inevitable* alternative to landfilling - **environmentally and economically beneficial**
  - Local residents, environmentalists and politicians position it as a backward or unproven approach – **environmentally and economically risky**

## **Storylines about WtE are context-specific:**

- Which factors are most important for the generation of positive and negative framings of WtE? *Historical experience? Existing industrial infrastructure?*
- What implications do the diversity of (negative and positive) meanings attached to WtE have for public understanding of WtE technology? Future policy-making?

