

Legislature as a Deliberative Arena and a Discursive Role of Legislative Think Tanks: The South Korean Case

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Overview: Main Points

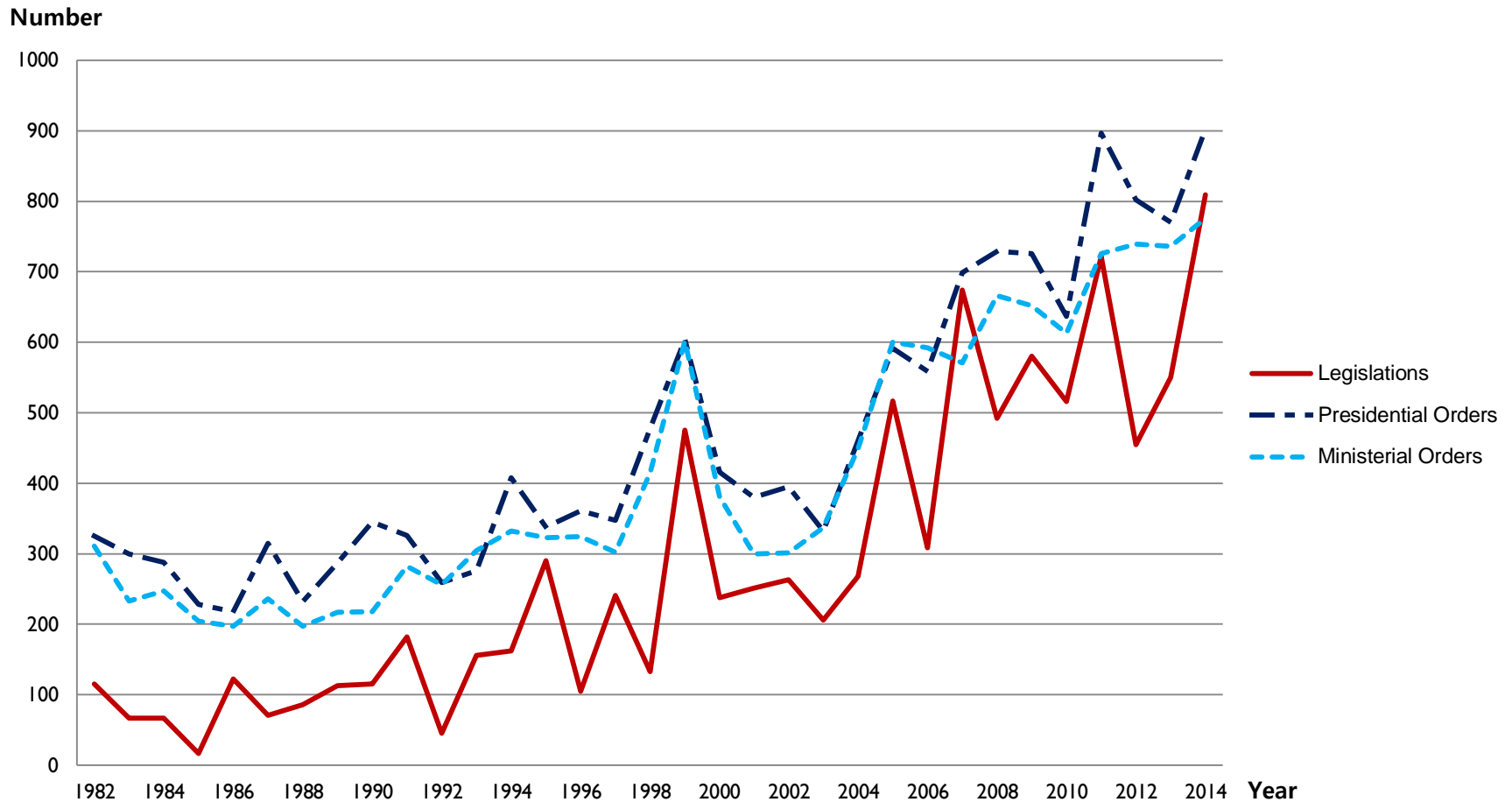
1. The Korean National Assembly (NA), while recently increasing its influence as the law-making body, is boosting its deliberative function, too.
2. The Korean National Assembly Research Service (NARS), the prime research agency for the NA, is also extending its role into deliberative dimensions.
3. The rise of the NA as a deliberative arena and the NARS's supporting role in this regard signal an important progress toward deliberative democracy.
4. But deliberative functions of legislature cause some concerns, and there should be more effort to make the best out of all those deliberative events.

Rise of the NA as Law-making Body

- ▶ Before the 1987 Democratic Uprising and the adoption of the current constitution, the NA was marginal in law-making. The presidential side dominated the law-making fields.
- ▶ But the post-1987 era has witnessed a rise of the NA as the prime law-making institution.
- ▶ This historical trend has been accelerated in recent years, thus elevating the relative status of NA vis-à-vis the executive branch.
- ▶ The NA is today exerting critical influences in law-making as well as in politics as a whole.

Increasing NA's Lawmaking Activities

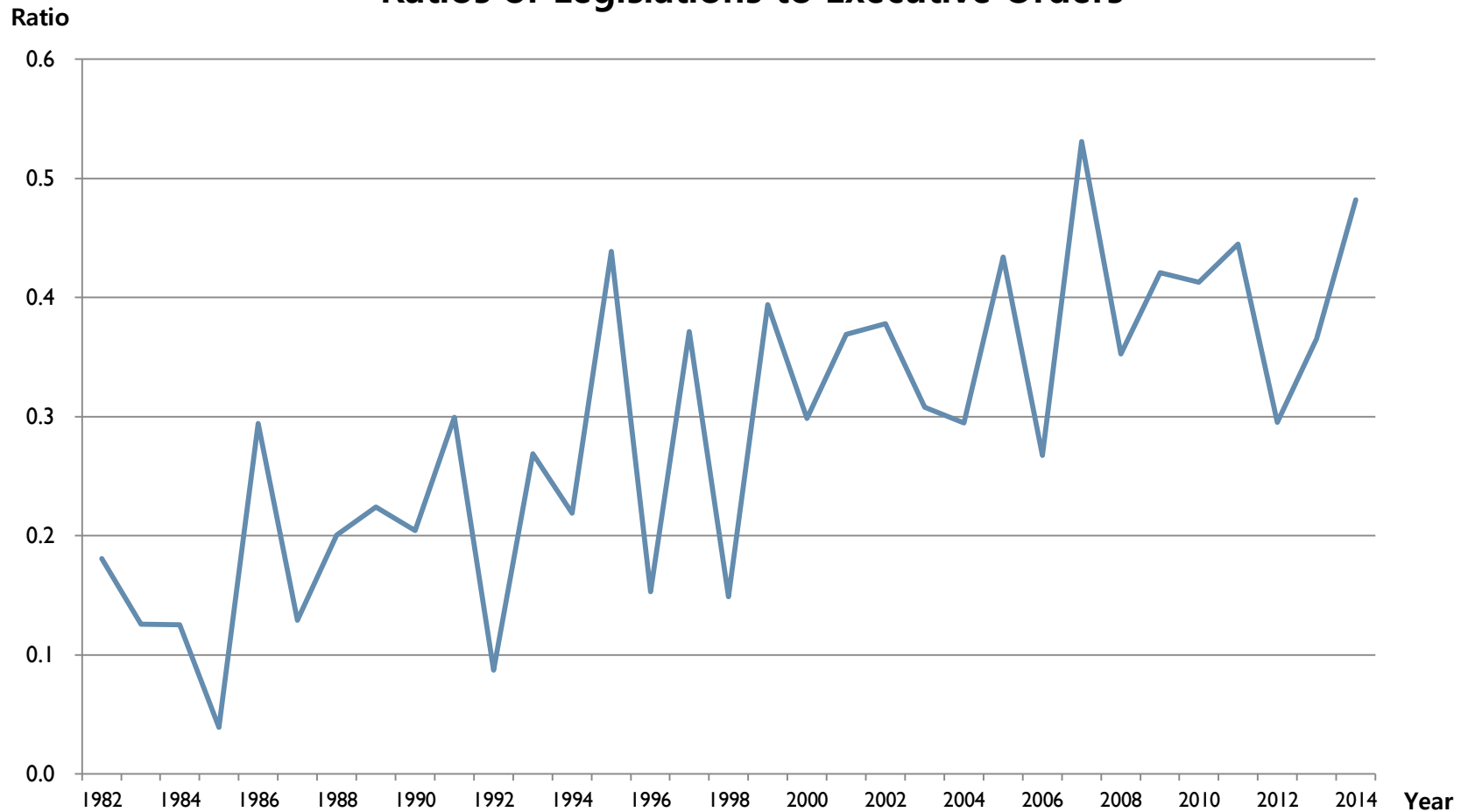
Legislations and Executive Orders Promulgated Each Year



Source: Ministry of Government Legislation Homepage

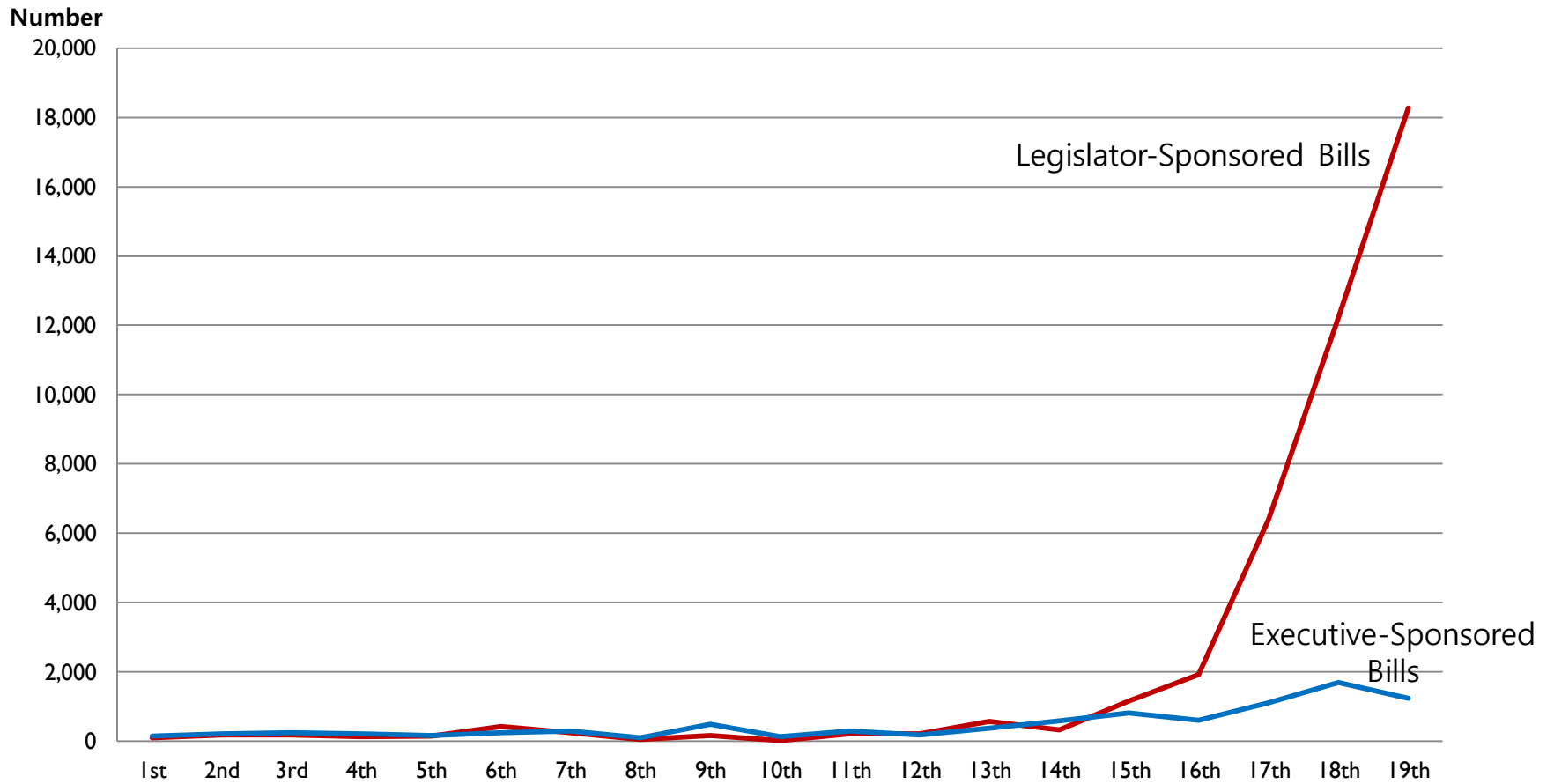
Increasing NA's Lawmaking Share

Ratios of Legislations to Executive Orders



Source: Ministry of Government Legislation Homepage

Soaring Legislator-Sponsored Bills

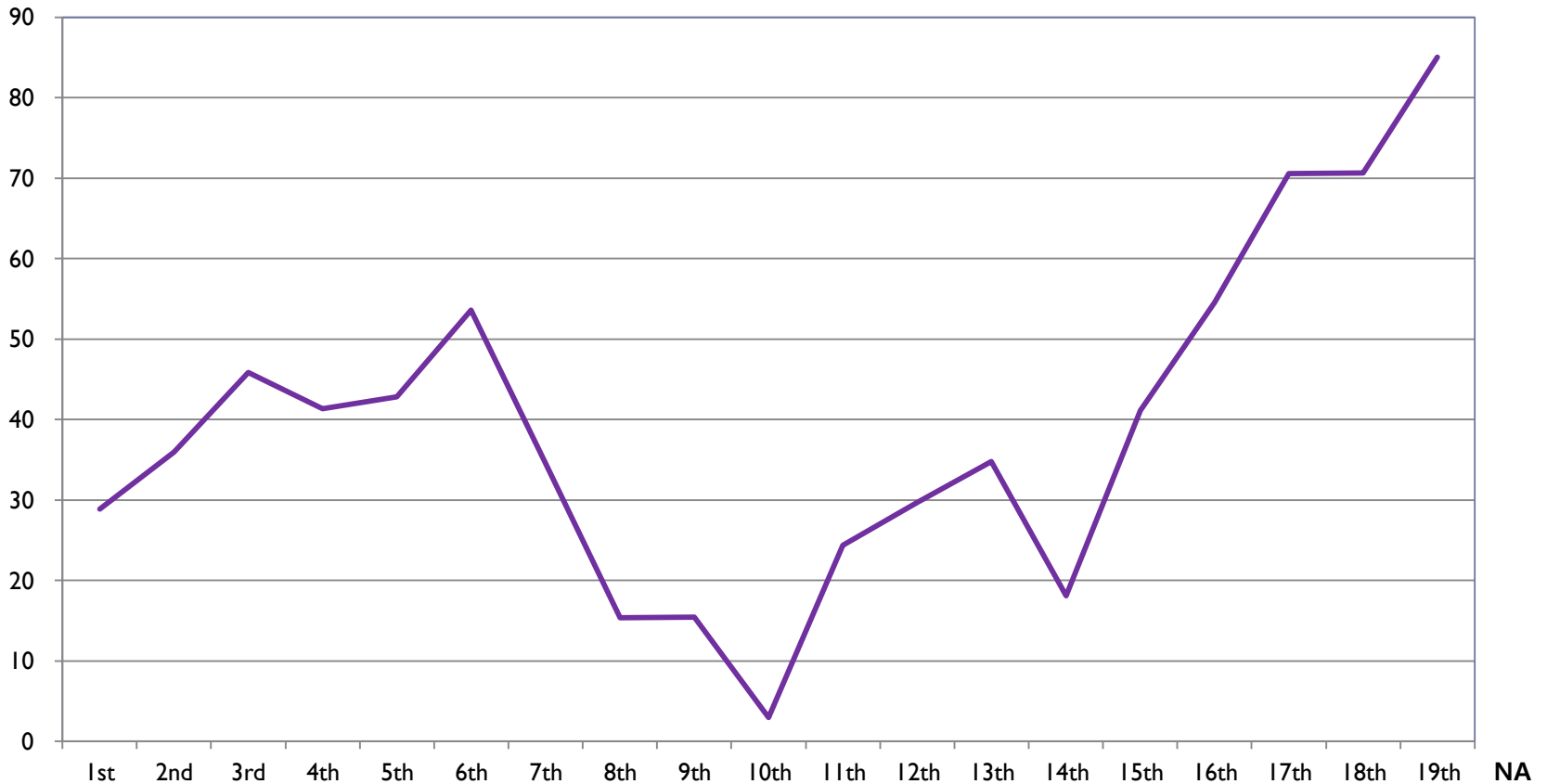


Note: the 19th NA: projected figure
Source: Facts & Figures on National Assembly

NA

Growing Legislator-Sponsored Bills' Share

Percent



Source: Facts & Figures on National Assembly

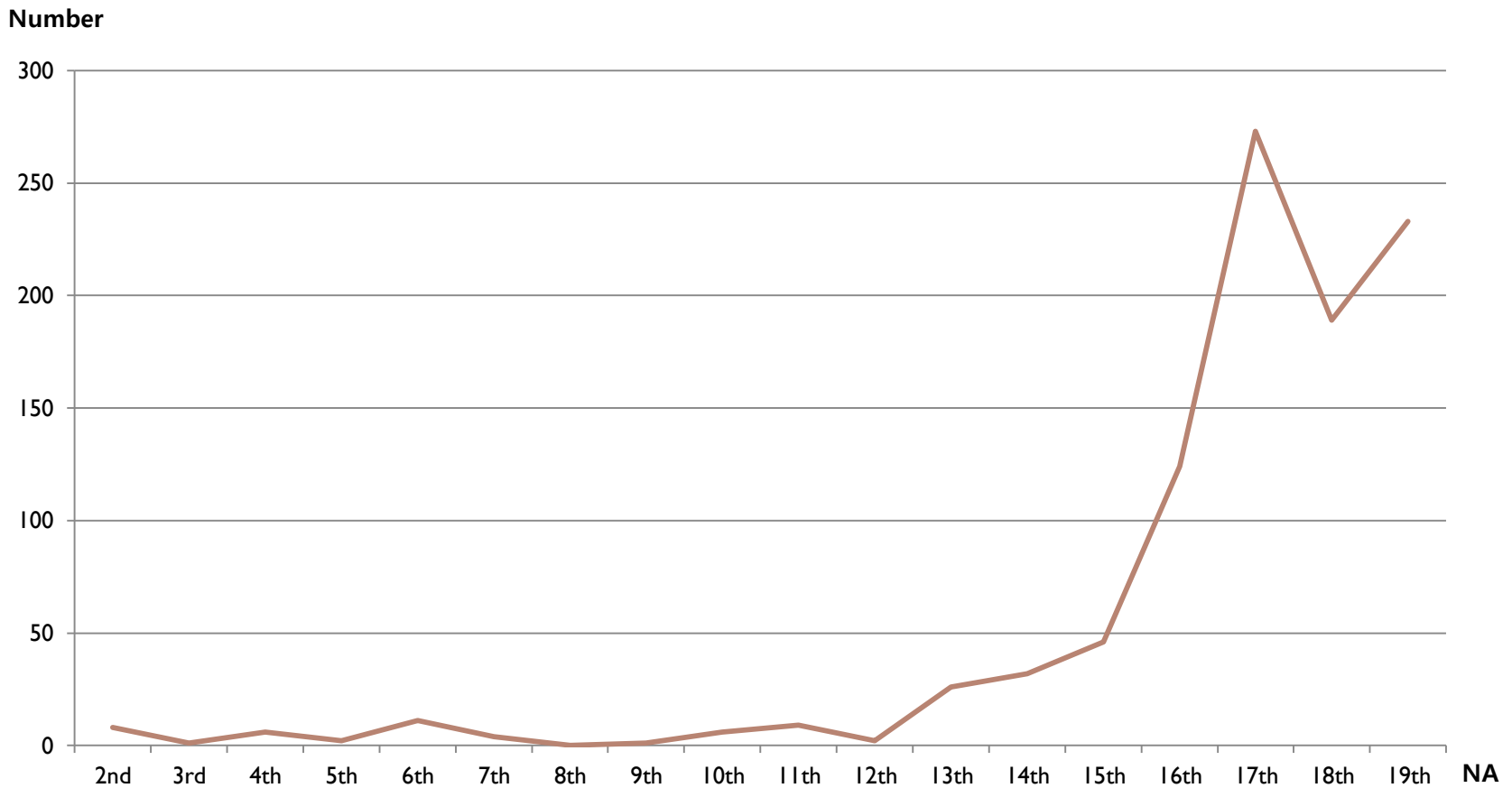


Expansion of the NA's Deliberative Role

- ▶ The number of public deliberative meetings—seminars, conferences, forums, hearings—held in the NA has recently skyrocketed.
- ▶ They cover a wide range of policy issues.
- ▶ Lawmakers, government officials, journalists, interest group agents, citizen activists, scholars, and other experts are using those open events to promote their policy agenda, call for public attention, and sway public mood in their favor.
- ▶ The NA is boosting its salience as a public deliberative arena.

Historical Rise of Public Hearings

Public Hearings Held in Each NA

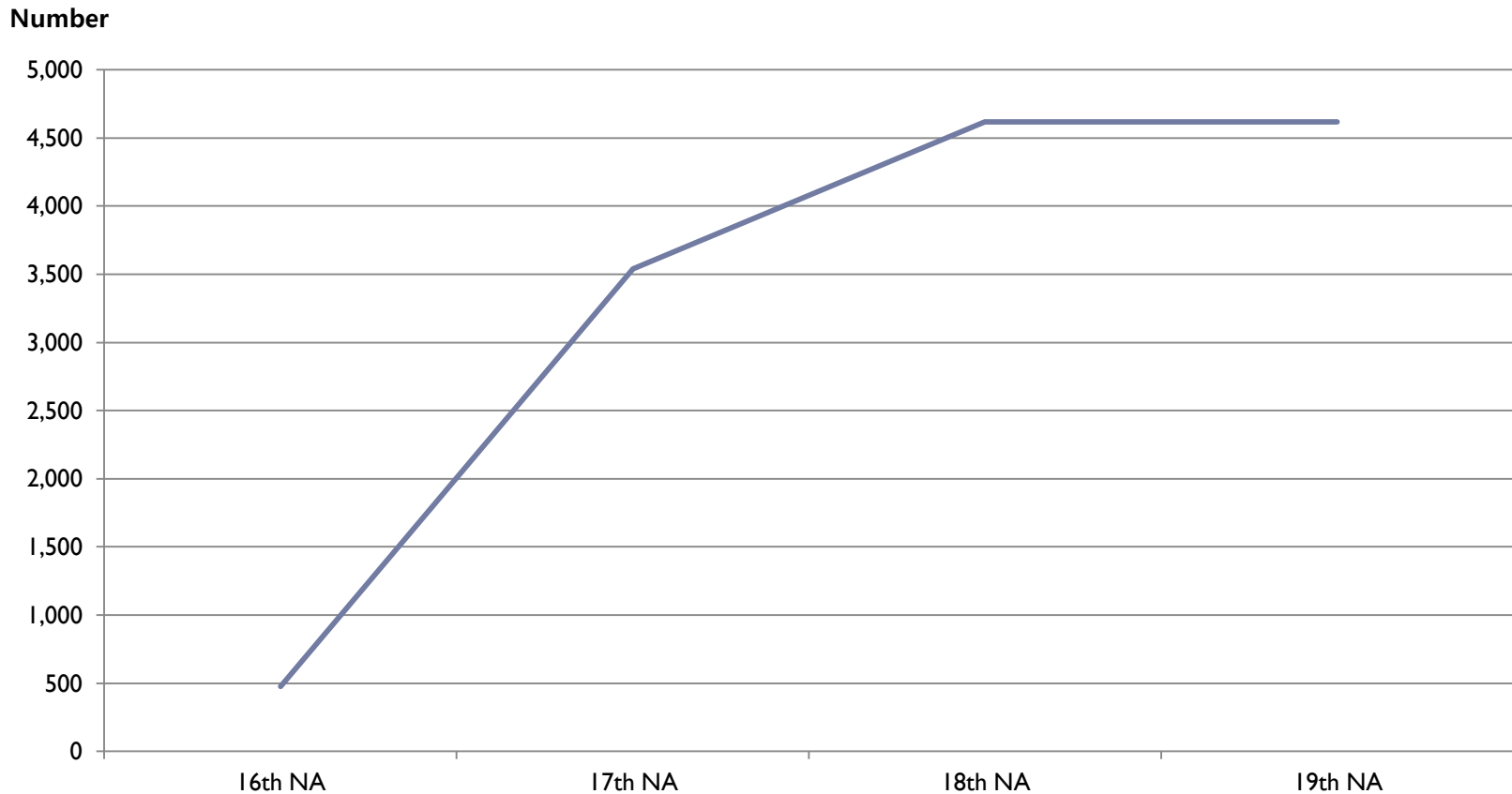


Note: the 19th NA: projected figure

Source: Facts & Figures on National Assembly, National Assembly Proceedings Report

Increasing Legislator-Hosted Seminars 1

Open Seminars Organized by Legislators in Each NA



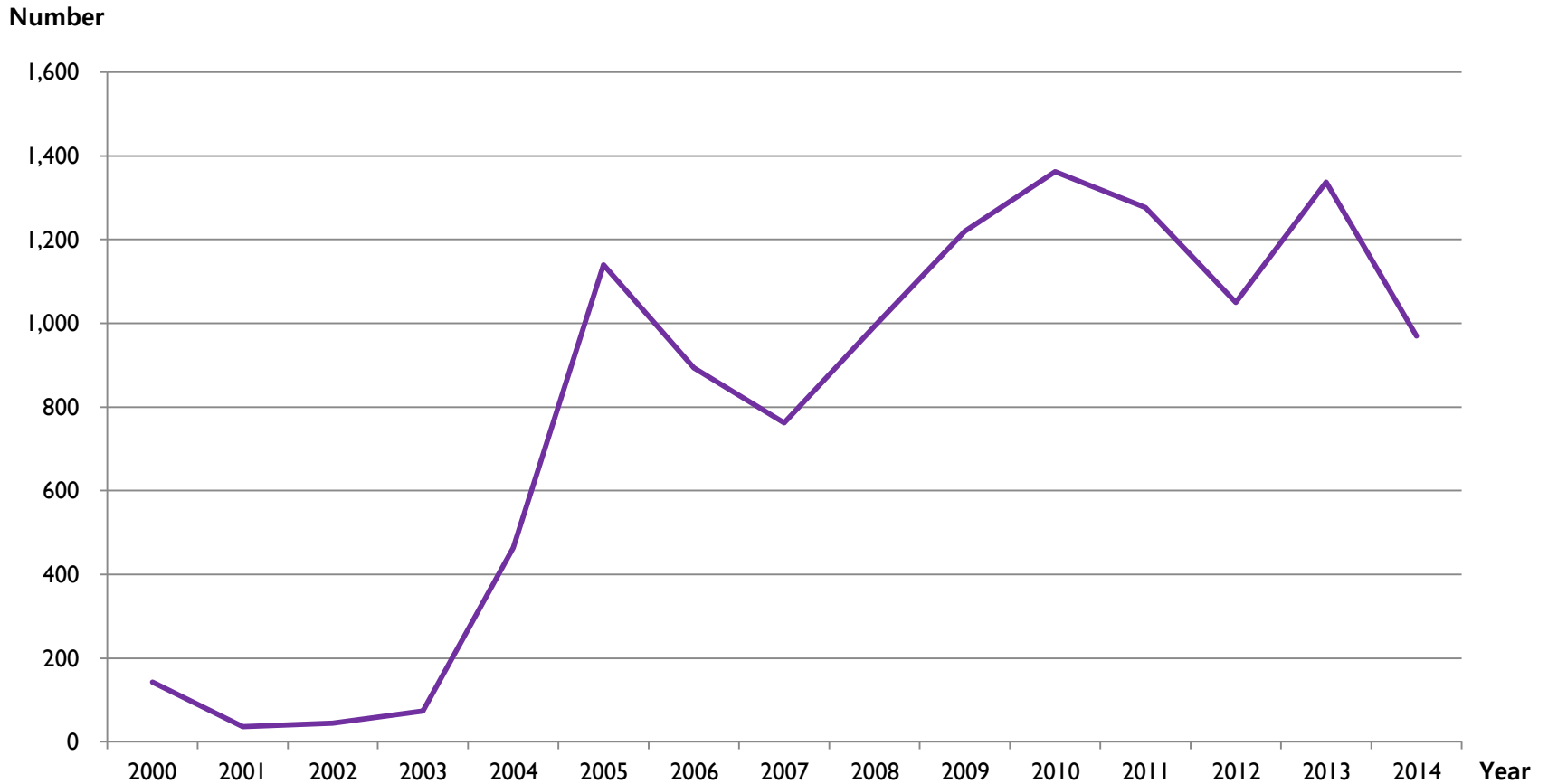
Note: the 19th NA: projected figure

Source: National Assembly Library Homepage



Increasing Legislator-Hosted Seminars 2

Open Seminars Organized by Legislators Each Year



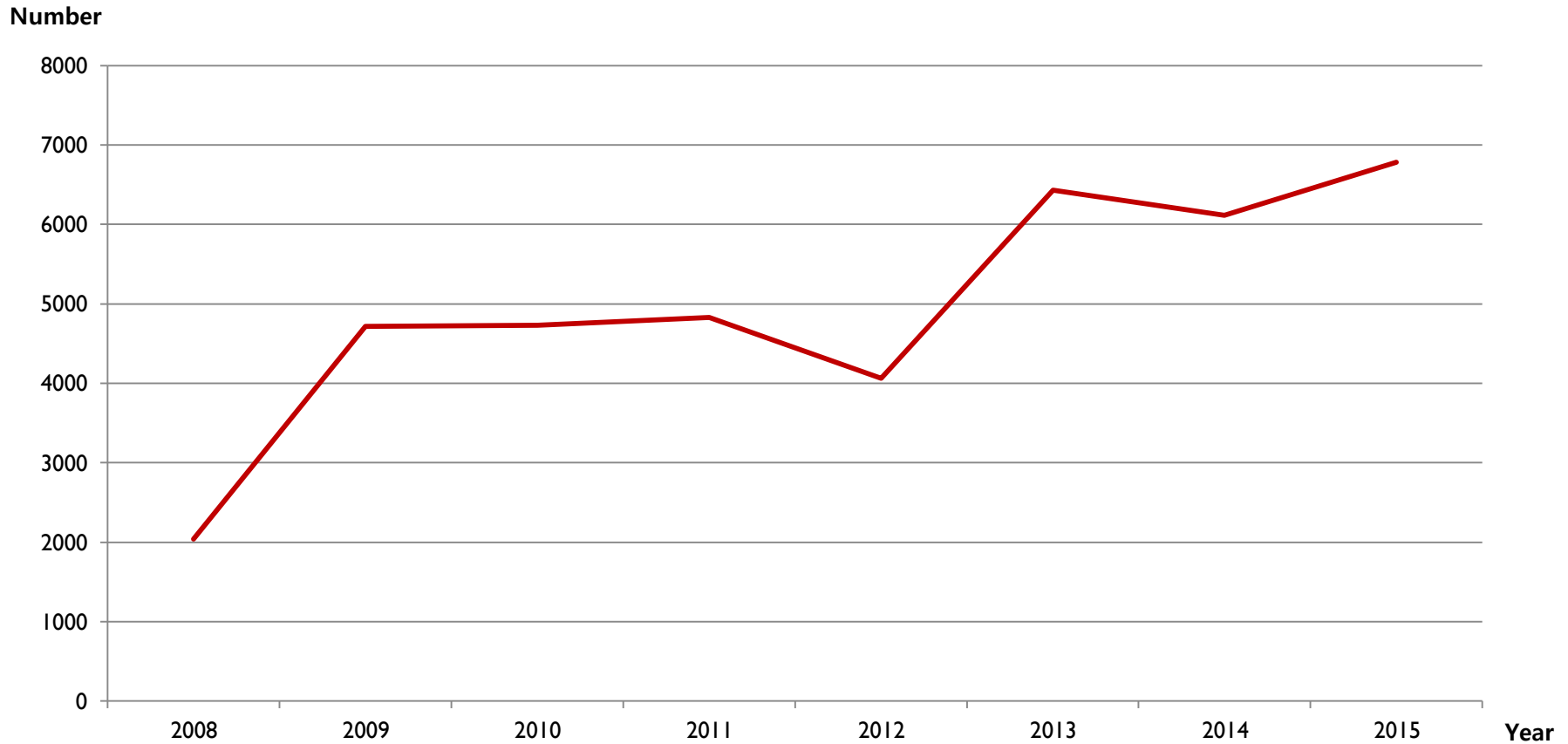
Source: National Assembly Library Homepage

NARS as Research Agency

- ▶ The NARS is the prime “think tank” for the NA.
- ▶ It was founded in 2007 as a non-partisan independent research agency to strengthen the NA’s legislative capacity.
- ▶ It conducts researches on a range of political, economic, social, cultural, and technological issues often at the request of legislators and committees but sometimes on its own initiative.
- ▶ Research activities of NARS have rapidly increased in quantity as well as in quality

Increasing NARS's Research Activities 1

Research Services Provided at the Request of NA Members

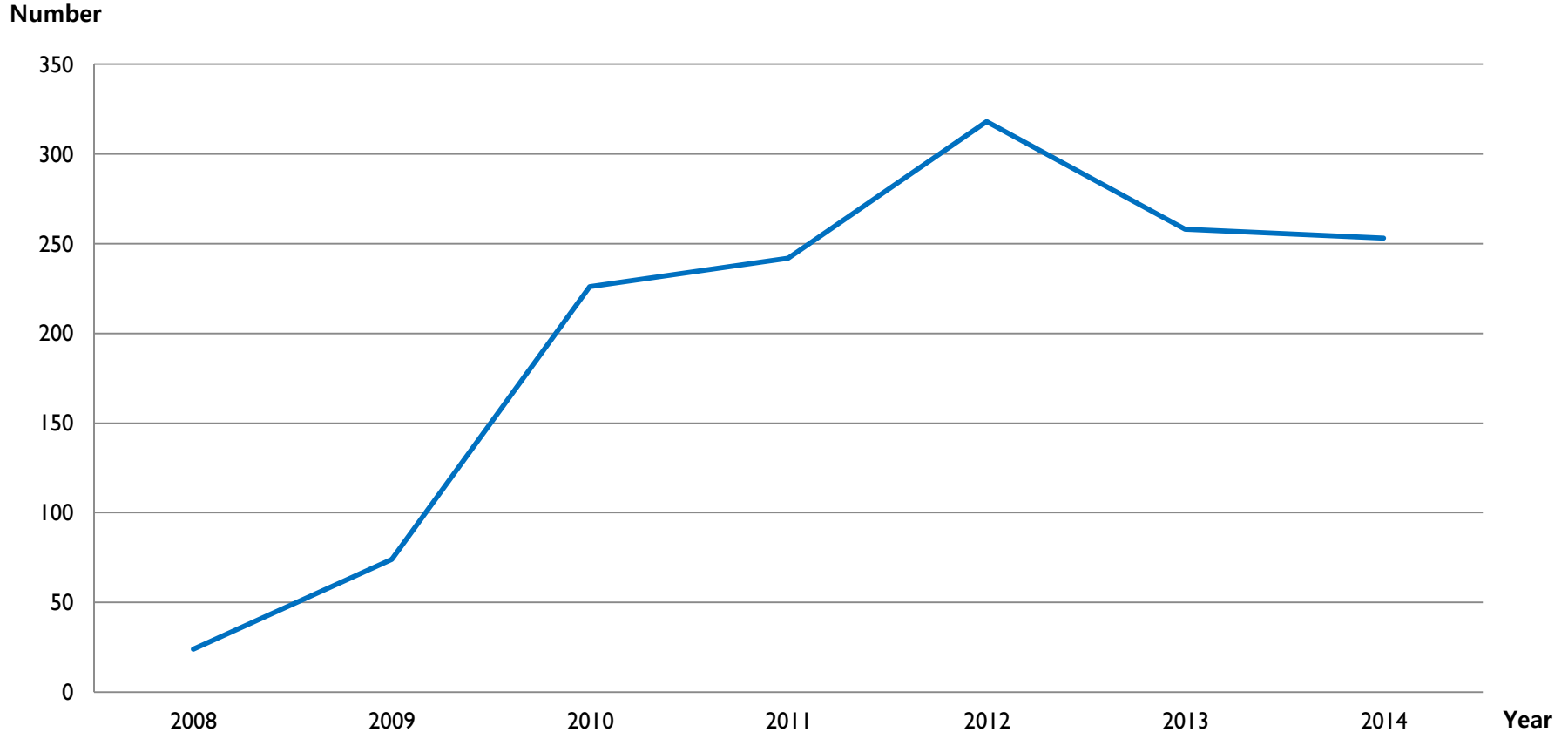


Note: 2015 Year : projected figure
Source: NARS Internal Data



Increasing NARS's Research Activities 2

Research Reports Published Openly



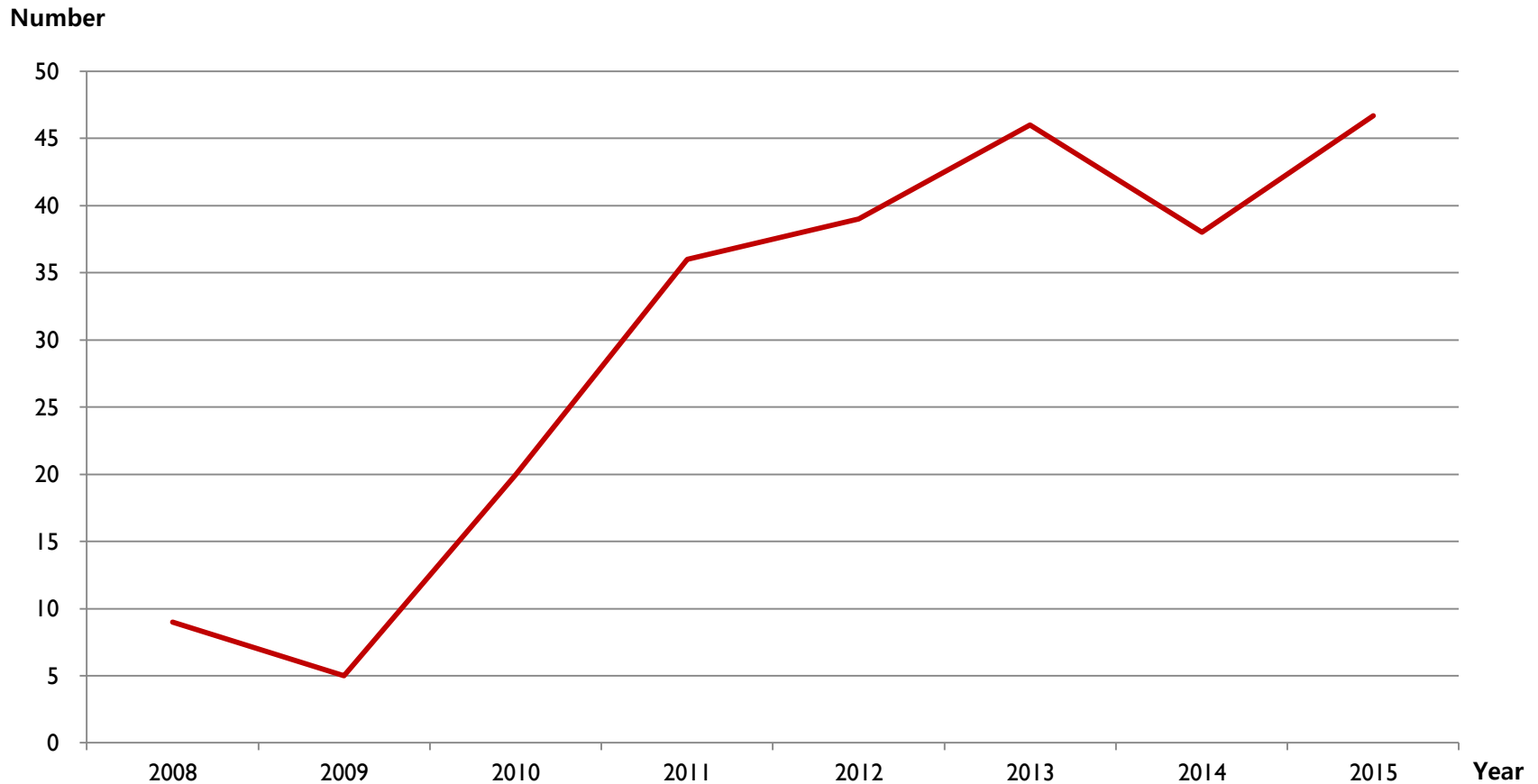
Note: 2015 Year : projected figure
Source: NARS Internal Data

NARS as a Deliberative Arena

- ▶ As much as the NA is extending its function into deliberative dimensions, the NARS as the NA's research wing is accordingly intensifying its deliberative activities.
- ▶ The NARS is organizing and sponsoring a rapidly increasing number of public seminars and open expert talks.
- ▶ These deliberative meetings cover all kinds of public issues.

Increasing NARS-Sponsored Seminars

Public Seminars Organized by NARS Each Year



Note: 2015 Year : projected figure
Source: NARS Internal Data

Positive Side: Agenda-setting, Public Information, Opinion-leading

- ▶ Using open deliberative events, NA and NARS are emerging as the prime stages for setting important public agenda, disseminating policy information, and shaping public opinion.
- ▶ Labs, incubators, and reservoirs of policy ideas
- ▶ Good for citizens' political socialization and their active participation in public issues.
- ▶ Executive branch no longer overwhelms its legislative counterpart in democratically shaping and managing public policy issues.
- ▶ Excessive power of mass media is also checked.

Positive Side: Deliberative Democracy

- ▶ The rise of NA and NARS as deliberative arenas signals an important democratic progress.
- ▶ Even if open deliberative meetings fail to bring a convergence of ideas, they would help brew senses of partnership, trust, and civic virtues among participants and the audience. This is the whole point of deliberative democracy.
- ▶ Priority goes to process rather than results.
- ▶ Korean legislative processes are highly super-majoritarian. So deliberations are indispensable for legislative agreements, and would crucially facilitate democratic governance in longer runs.

Some Concerns

- ▶ Open deliberative events aren't panacea, though.
- ▶ Public debates often get futile and go awry.
- ▶ Public debates in parliamentary settings could intensify partisan feuds, aggravate public anger, and worsen gridlocks in lawmaking process.
- ▶ Moreover, often dominated by interest groups and policy experts, those deliberative meetings could overly increase the clout of interest groups and bias public discourses in favor of elite experts at the expense of ordinary citizens.

Implications

- ▶ Co-presence of the promises and concerns of deliberative and discursive functions of NA and NARS sends a message: Take balance.
- ▶ On one hand, use deliberative events to promote participatory and deliberative democracy and effective governance. NA is not only a lawmaking body; it is also a stage for open deliberations.
- ▶ On the other, however, don't be too optimistic. Endeavor hard to represent diverse ideas and perspectives in deliberative events held in NA and NARS. And try to integrate those ideas and perspectives in fair communitarian spirits.