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Civic Opposition and Democratic Backsliding: Mobilization Dynamics and Rapport with Political Parties

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Abstract

Democratic backsliding has posed significant challenges to democracies in many countries. Recent calls for a better theorization of pushback against backsliding have triggered renewed scholarly interest in the field of opposition and its role in stopping or reversing creeping authoritarian rule. This study calls for a theoretical and empirical recalibration of the concept of opposition to account for multifaceted ‘non-partisan’ actors and venues of oppositional mobilization. It proposes a new classification of *resilient civic opposition*. The explanatory typology is based on two factors: (1) the ability of civic opposition to bring multiple grievances together and to balance between on-street and off-street mediums, and (2) the rapport between political opposition parties and civic opposition. Four cases of civic opposition from Hungary and Turkey illustrate the proposed typology empirically.

Keywords: civic opposition; autocratization; typology; Turkey; Hungary

In 2019, a coalition of political parties in Turkey won landslide victories in local elections, defeating the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in major cities. A few months later, in the Budapest mayoral elections, a candidate campaigning for fairer and greener governance ousted a competitor backed by the Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz). These victories renewed hopes in both countries of reversing democratic backsliding.¹ Nevertheless, in 2023 and 2022, coalitions between opposition parties lost general elections to the AKP and Fidesz. These results deeply demoralized and divided opposition parties and their voters and entrenched the undemocratic incumbents in both countries.

Scholars investigating democratic backsliding show a keen interest in electoral coalitions to study opposition. However, since electoral competitions are extremely unfair in democratic backsliding contexts, elections rarely oust power-abusing

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rulers or reverse backsliding. More often, they serve the incumbents to secure another term (Levitsky and Way 2010). Focusing only on elections disregards non-partisan and extra-parliamentary actors and venues of opposition. Political sociology pays closer attention to non-partisan fields of opposition but often selectively focuses on ‘revolutionary’ anti-regime civil uprisings at the expense of daily and subtle mobilizations that do not directly challenge the regime. However, the bulk of the non-partisan and extra-parliamentary oppositional mobilization originates from daily and subtle efforts that spread over time and are built on ‘creative agency’ (Hintz 2021). Investigating these subtle but incessant mobilizations requires long-term engagement and resources for fieldwork but can yield an improved understanding of the field of opposition and its resilience within the context of democratic backsliding.

This study argues that the concept of opposition needs to be recalibrated in light of the contemporary dynamics of democratic backsliding. This recalibration has both theoretical and empirical dimensions. Theoretically, it offers alternatives to the *static* typologies of opposition, such as ‘genuine’ versus ‘loyal’, ‘systemic’ versus ‘anti-establishment’ or ‘legal’ versus ‘illegal’ opposition. Empirically, interviews, participant observation and document analysis provide an expanded understanding of the socially grounded types, demands, actions and organizational forms of opposition. Based on original empirical insights, the study offers a new set of factors that can account for *resilient civic opposition* and delivers a new parsimonious classification of it. The typology revolves around two axes: (1) the long-term dynamics of mobilization and (2) the level of rapport between civic opposition and political parties.

The study contributes to different bodies of literature. First, it demonstrates that (civic) opposition is a living and creative actor transforming and adapting during democratic backsliding. It might not dethrone the incumbents from one day to another. Yet, despite formal institutional-level backsliding, civic opposition incessantly cherishes democratic civic engagement and maintains democratic demands at subnational (district, rural, or city) levels by connecting, reproducing and amplifying them through ‘everyday work’. Second, the study contributes to the literature on civic space under democratic backsliding. Many scholars have documented repression and closing civic space in autocratizing countries (Buyse 2018; Buzogány et al. 2022; Giersdorf and Croissant 2011; Roggeband and Krizsán 2021; Yabanci 2019). However, this literature has not theorized sufficiently the capacity of civic space for renewal, responding to contingencies, and developing and updating responses despite hostile conditions – hence its capacity to turn itself into a solid opposition actor. Finally, the study offers a broad guideline beyond Turkey and Hungary to gauge factors for oppositional resilience in the face of democratic backsliding.

The following sections discuss the literature to highlight the present study’s approach to opposition. Then, the subsequent section discusses the typology, laying out its central pillars and hypotheses. The last section introduces the empirical illustration of the proposed typology through Hungary and Turkey.

Opposition in undemocratic regimes

Opposition is an inherent element of any polity, serving as an essential counterpart to authority and incumbency (Schapiro 1967). Canonical studies in political science

defined opposition mainly as political parties that seek to assume power through free and fair elections (Dahl 1966; Sartori 1966). As these studies emerged at the height of the Cold War, opposition was initially considered a feature only of democratic regimes. Scholars used ‘dissent’ to label spontaneous, non-institutionalized, anti-regime actors in dictatorships (Ionescu and Madariaga 1968; Schapiro 1967).

The use of opposition was later expanded to undemocratic regimes, leading to various typologies of opposition. Gordon Skilling (1968) proposed a fourfold typology based on whether opposition originates from within or outside the power bloc in Eastern Europe. Juan Linz (1973) differentiated between semi-opposition, pseudo-opposition, and legal and illegal oppositions in Spain under Franco, and, in a later study, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1978) introduced loyal, semi-loyal and disloyal opposition categories. These typologies are criticized for inconsistent terminology and overlapping conceptual borders (Kubát 2010). Moreover, they indicate a deterministic link between regimes and the type of opposition. Accordingly, democracies breed ‘real’ or ‘genuine’ opposition, and autocracies primarily produce ‘co-opted’, ‘semi’, ‘loyal’ or ‘fake’ opposition.

The nature of contemporary democratic backsliding renders classical typologies hard to apply to the oppositional field. Many autocratizing regimes, unlike classical dictatorships, have a certain degree of democratic legacy built on institutional and collective resources, skills and memory of participatory and accountable governance (Edgell et al. 2020). This legacy gives actors of opposition not only resources, organizational skills, grassroots reach and experience inherited from democratic times but also independent agency to invent, survive and stay relevant.

Promisingly, there is a renewed interest in studying actors and institutions of opposition against autocratization. However, extant studies mainly focus on political parties and critical elections (Wahman 2011). They argue that when opposition parties utilize extra-constitutional means, such as alliances with the military to oust the government, they help the incumbents scale up their legitimacy and support (Cannon 2014; Cleary and Öztürk 2022; Gamboa 2022). Contrarily, when opposition parties adopt moderate means, such as electoral coalitions, the cost of undemocratic actions increases for the incumbents, and democratic breakdown can be prevented (Cannon 2014; Laštro and Bieber 2021; Selçuk and Hekimci 2020; Wahman 2011). However, coordination problems (Wahman 2013) and failed ideological compromise (Ong 2022) among opposition parties often end up strengthening the incumbents.

While the lens of party politics adopted by these studies excludes non-partisan or civic actors and venues of opposition, some recent studies hinted that horizontal and diagonal accountability structures (the judiciary, media and civil society) might act as an oppositional force to halt autocratization (Laebens and Lührmann 2021; Lührmann et al. 2020; V-Dem 2023). If the incumbents perceive these accountability structures as strong, they do not ‘dare’ to subvert democracy. If they underestimate the strength of accountability, they proceed but get stopped. However, accountability is an ambiguous proxy for opposition. It still directs attention to the world outside of the oppositional agency and its creative capacity to invent and adapt.

It is the field of political sociology, particularly the immense field of social movement studies, that analyses civic opposition. However, much of this research has an

‘episodic’ perspective, namely focusing on waves of mass protests and their outcomes in terms of regime change (Bunce and Wolchik 2011; Chenoweth and Stephan 2012). Mass uprisings are often evaluated through ‘opportunity structures’ and the repressive capacity of the regime (Tilly and Tarrow 2015), once again diverting attention away from the oppositional agency. As Sofie Bedford and Laurent Vinatier (2019) argue, the focus on mass uprisings has created an obsession with studying ‘successful’ cases of protests. The ‘success’ is determined by the incumbents’ response in stepping down instead of repressing protests. However, beyond mass protests, oppositional activity through civic channels includes continuous and ‘everyday’ forms such as democratic innovations, advocacy, collective experimentation, community-building and litigation.

Concurring with Stepan (1997: 657), who argues that the opposition’s role and responsibilities need to be conceptualized as broader than simply ousting the incumbents and seeking incumbency, this study advocates for lesser-explored ‘extra-parliamentary’ venues and functions of the field of opposition (Bedford and Vinatier 2019; Holzer and Hlaváček 2009; Kitrianglarp and Hewison 2009; Weinblum and Brack 2011). This engagement requires overcoming epistemological and methodological biases that arise in studies of opposition due to (1) associating opposition only with the political/partisan arena, (2) correlating oppositional success only with ousting the regime/incumbents, and (3) equating civic opposition with mass uprisings.

A typology of resilient civic opposition

Before discussing the determinants of resilient civic opposition, this section must first explicitly define civic opposition – an analytical definition inductively developed to highlight how the present approach to civic opposition differs from liberal, neo-Tocquevillian conceptualizations of civil society as well as from structural accounts within social movement studies. Civic opposition refers to a multifaceted entity outside formal political parties and institutions, comprising civic groups such as associations, NGOs, formal/informal networks, civic platforms and social movements. Civic opposition takes shape around the goal of defending democratic demands and procedures against ‘autocratic legalism’ that seeks to take advantage of grey zones in institutions and law to undermine democratic rule (Scheppelle 2018). Against autocratic legalism, civic opposition resorts to the right to assembly and association, litigation, democratic innovations, active participation and engagement of ordinary citizens. It invents occasions and venues to uphold and cherish these participatory mobilizations. In doing so, civic opposition adopts a nuanced and incremental strategy focused on addressing the everyday concerns of different social groups against creeping autocratic practices while advocating for reformist objectives to compel the incumbents to make concessions and retreats. Multi-scalar mobilizations of civic opposition might not confront the rulers directly, but corporations, employers, local authorities, corruption, captured judicial systems, sociopolitical disparities, social biases and polarization fed by the rulers. Civic opposition might not even categorically exclude meetings and negotiations and even cooperate with milder factions within the government, seeking to appeal to ‘the still working’ democratic institutions and practices. However, civic

opposition groups need to diminish their activities frequently to explore alternative approaches when repression turns against them. They scale down to reinvent participation channels and new narratives while facing an uphill battle to build resilience.

Building resilience is critical for civic opposition, given that democratic backsliding is a gradual and long-term process. However, resilience is neither a preordained nor a constant quality. In one of its early usages in environmental science, C.S. Holling (1973: 14) defined resilience as ‘the ability [of a system] to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain integrity’. Newer conceptualizations define resilience beyond simply surviving and returning to the original state after disturbance. They emphasize the capacity ‘to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten the viability’ of a system, organization, or individual (Masten 2014: 6). Emphasizing the agency and power dynamics, this study posits that civic opposition builds resilience on a collective capacity to ‘anticipate, absorb, accommodate, or recover from the effects of a shock or stress in a timely and efficient manner’ (Mitchell and Harris 2012: 2). Shock or stress refers to various forms of repression of fluctuating duration and intensity, including judicial, financial or legal measures to curb, limit or co-opt activities of civic opposition (Merkel and Lührmann 2021). Resilience also requires constant improvement of self-organization to overcome incapacities and vulnerabilities through raising new mobilizations, discourses and demands, and through widening support communities. As stated by Josh Holloway and Rob Manwaring (2023: 72), resilience is ‘not a single property’ to ‘possess and exhibit under all circumstances’ but is composed of ‘patterned adjustments’.

Due to adaptation being an integral trait, resilience is not a fixed, all-or-nothing quality; rather, it varies in degrees and changes from one civic opposition group or field to another. A resilient civic opposition group displays organizational longevity, survives waves of repression by innovation in and transformation of organizational forms as well as action mediums, relies on a broad coalition of supporters, including the grassroots, political parties and other civic opposition groups, raises cross-cutting claims and eventually ‘bounce forward’ (Holloway and Manwaring 2023). Two factors account for various levels of resilience: mobilization dynamics and rapport with political opposition.

Mobilization dynamics

Mobilization dynamics have two key components inherent to civic opposition groups. The first involves articulating grievances through a rights-based and justice-oriented framing. Civic opposition groups often start with localized and temporary demands that concern specific needs and groups of people. Those who successfully frame single-issue claims as demands for rights and justice can resonate beyond their immediate audiences and build extensive support networks (della Porta 2009). Indeed, claims that cut across gender/sexuality, ethnicity, class and citizenship can establish sustained support communities (Snow and Benford 1992) and bridge sociopolitical and sociocultural polarizations that breed autocratization (McCoy and Somer 2019).

The second component entails combining contentious (‘on-street’) and non-contentious (‘off-street’) strategies. On-street actions refer to non-violent occupations, marches, sit-ins and demonstrations against controversial policies. These

mediums raise awareness of emerging political issues, foster solidarity and build a sustained collective identity around these issues. On the other hand, off-street mobilization offers diverse avenues for civic opposition to emerge and spread, including outside lobbying, strategic litigation at national and international courts, petitioning, economic boycotts, reclamation of public spaces and digital space. Off-street mediums also refer to local assemblies and deliberative forums, known broadly as democratic innovations.

Civic opposition groups that combine various mediums to mobilize the grassroots are more resilient than those relying on a single mobilization medium because they can maximize their resonance and support communities. One advantage of melding on-street and off-street is the ability to alternate through tactical switches between them when faced with repression that explicitly targets their mobilization mediums (e.g. protest bans or censorship on social media). This ensures responsiveness and adaptation, preventing complete paralysis and irrelevance, which is crucial for resilience in the face of changing forms of repression. Additionally, off-street mobilization mediums can mitigate the collective action dilemma that on-street mobilizations often suffer from. Many individuals may hesitate to support or join spontaneous contentious actions in an autocratizing context due to fear of police violence, detention and imprisonment. Off-street strategies carry lower risks of violent backlash and are less likely to deepen partisan and ideological divides as they focus on improving everyday conditions and are perceived as less threatening by the incumbents and their supporters (Chenoweth and Stephan 2012).

Rapport with political opposition parties

The second pillar of civic opposition's resilience hinges on its relationship with democratic opposition parties. According to Anders Sjögren (2023), strong political opposition bolsters civic groups. This relationship is mutually empowering. That is, opposition parties can also capitalize on civic opposition's resources and skills for several reasons. Opposition parties are driven by a few motivations for developing a close rapport with civic opposition. Foremost, political parties are often constrained by historical and ideological boundaries that may deprive them of insights into emerging sociopolitical and economic concerns for groups they traditionally do not represent. Opposition parties can leverage the resources, narratives, claims and grassroots connections of civic groups to stay attuned to emerging societal concerns. Second, opposition parties are motivated to differentiate themselves from incumbents by promoting a democratic and participatory party brand. They aim to convey a message to the electorate that they cooperate with civic opposition to promote alternative democratic channels, inclusion and participation.

Opposition parties might openly collaborate with civic opposition groups. For instance, they can participate in protests and demonstrations, particularly in the face of confrontations with the police. This solidarity from opposition parties enhances the visibility of civic opposition groups in both national and international media, potentially slowing down, modifying or halting authoritarian interventions, policies or legislation. Meanwhile, civic opposition gains time to raise awareness among the public and garner increased support for resilience. Opposition parties might also substantially engage with civic opposition by emulating them. They

may adopt and advocate for civic opposition demands in public declarations and parliamentary debates, pushing for a new policy agenda aligned with the interests of civic groups.

However, several factors intermediate their rapport. Firstly, when activists and participants of civic opposition groups are convinced that political parties acknowledge and advocate their demands, they will likely support them in elections or even utilize their grassroots means to help them reduce the effects of unfair competition. Meanwhile, parties assess whether rapport can expand their voter and membership base by attracting volunteers and grassroots supporters among civic opposition groups. Secondly, political parties prefer civic opposition groups that employ a moderate approach, combining on- and off-street mediums to mobilize. Overreliance on a single type of mobilization, particularly disruptive on-street action, is difficult to reconcile with opposition parties’ ‘ballot-centred approach’ (Kahvecioğlu and Patan 2021). Opposition parties would not desire to promote the perception that on-street means are more effective than formal politics in responding to autocratization. Civic opposition groups that dominantly favour on-street means would not find themselves likely partners of political parties.

Thirdly, parties are more likely to form alliances with civic opposition groups whose goals align with their ideological orientation and voter preferences. When civic opposition groups raise claims that resound with their traditional electoral base, they are more likely to establish close rapport, even if those groups capitalize on a single-action medium. However, parties may be reluctant to partner with groups whose actions could alienate their electoral base or broader society, even if they employ diverse methods of mobilization.

Following David Collier et al. (2012) and Colin Elman (2005), crossing two variables leads to a 2 × 2 ‘explanatory typology’ with ‘partial order among the categories’, illustrated in Table 1.

Dynamic civic opposition is characterized by multi-medium and multi-frame mobilizations that weather repressive waves by revitalizing their goals and agendas under shifting and hostile circumstances. Dynamic civic opposition compels opposition parties to engage with and emulate their claims and agendas by elevating issues to social and political prominence. Parties cannot afford to remain

Table 1. Classification of resilient civic opposition

		Mobilization Dynamics	
		Rights/justice-oriented frames and multiple mediums of mobilization (wide resonance with society and broader support communities)	Single issue and one dominant mobilization medium (narrow or no resonance with society and limited support communities)
Rapport with Political Opposition Parties	Emulation and collaboration (strong rapport)	<i>Dynamic</i> (high resilience)	<i>Focused</i> (high-medium resilience)
	Limited or no dialogue (weak rapport)	<i>Integrated</i> (medium resilience)	<i>Isolated</i> (low resilience)

indifferent or ignore these prominent issues. In terms of resilience, dynamic opposition has an advantage over other categories. *Focused* civic opposition highlights groups with focused, single-issue efforts and mobilization through one dominant medium. While vulnerability exists during repression cycles given their limited mobilization mediums, due to the high salience of the issue area, focused civic opposition can still create a close rapport with political parties, which helps to build high-to-medium resilience in the long term. *Integrated* civic opposition navigates multiple mediums and frames to leverage resonance and support. However, it has limited cooperation with political parties either due to ideological/political distance or its reliance on disruptive on-street mediums. Finally, *isolated* civic opposition employs a single-issue and single-medium repertoire and finds its demands aloof from the interests of opposition parties as well as social resonance and backing. In terms of resilience, isolated civic opposition is at the bottom of the order.

Illustration from Turkey and Hungary

To illustrate the typology of civic opposition, the following pages examine two countries that are experiencing democratic backsliding, Turkey and Hungary. Four distinct cases of civic opposition (women and gender equality, electoral integrity, labour, and pro-refugee) are discussed as examples of each type (Table 2). These countries were selected due to their parallel autocratization processes, which were marked by similar patterns. Ruling parties AKP and Fidesz gradually seized control over institutions and courts, targeted civil society and independent media, exacerbated social divisions, and aimed to discredit opposition parties (Bogaards 2018; Öktem and Akkoyunlu 2017).

The findings derive from a subset of interviews with civic opposition groups conducted between 2020 and 2023. Interviews in Turkey were part of a broader project focused on the transformation of the civic space during AKP rule. For Hungary, personal exchanges and online interviews were conducted with experts on Hungary’s democratic backsliding and civic opposition groups. Additionally, the study utilized secondary sources such as reports, newsletters, news archives, public statements by government officials and opposition politicians, and literature to support interview

Table 2. Illustration from Hungary and Turkey

		Mobilization Dynamics	
		Rights/justice-oriented frames and multiple mediums of mobilization (wider resonance with society and broader support communities)	Single issue and one dominant mobilization medium (narrow or no resonance with society and limited support communities)
Rapport with Political Opposition Parties	Emulation and collaboration (strong rapport)	Women	Electoral monitoring/ ballot safety
	Limited or no dialogue (weak rapport)	Labour	Refugee

data. Finally, it analysed the election manifestos of opposition parties to assess their political stance on issues promoted by civic opposition. In total, 21 manifestos were examined (see the Appendix in the Supplementary Material), 12 from Hungarian (2010–2018) and 9 from Turkish opposition parties (2011–2018). Election manifestos serve as a proxy for evaluating the relationship between political opposition parties and civic opposition to trail how opposition parties adopted civic opposition's demands as programmatic goals over time. Additionally, the 'browse by keyword' function in the Manifesto Project (Lehmann et al. 2022) was utilized to quantitatively track changes in parties' appeals regarding women, gender equality, refugees, collective bargaining, unionization, the right to strike and occupational accidents.

Dynamic civic opposition: Women's rights

The AKP and Fidesz employ conservative and nationalist policies to advance religious morality and pro-natal, heteropatriarchal agendas, reorganizing society around traditional gender roles. These policies undercut gender equality and women's emancipation by imposing restrictions on access to birth control, abortion and reproductive rights. Both governments also endorse insecure part-time jobs for women, discouraging their participation in the labour market. Amidst rising domestic violence rates, the AKP and Fidesz oppose the Istanbul Convention,² denouncing it as promoting 'gender ideology' (Güneş-Ayata and Doğançün 2017; Petö et al. 2017).

Facing an increasingly hostile sociopolitical environment, women's rights and feminist groups have built one of the most resilient civic oppositions to these policies. Over the last decade, several associations, platforms, collectives and networks have challenged the dominant public discourse and policies of the AKP and Fidesz. In Hungary, platforms and organizations such as the Hungarian Women's Lobby, NANE Women for Women Together, the Patent Association against Patriarchy and the Háttér Society have unified collective efforts to fight against the government's patriarchal anti-feminism and anti-LGBTQ+ discourse and policies. In Turkey, the countrywide 2013 Gezi protests gave a necessary boost to these groups. The protests brought together various societal strata in opposition to the AKP's disregard for grassroots demands and democratic principles and drew support from diverse groups. In the summer of 2017, a massive protest organized by women's groups, 'Hands Off My Clothes', led to more institutionalized long-term initiatives, such as the We Will Stop Femicides Platform. New associations like the Eşik Association for Gender Equality Policies, Havle and other horizontal networks and platforms have expanded to several localities, allowing grassroots participation and mobilization (Eslen-Ziya and Kazanoğlu 2022). Additionally, in both countries, there are countless other smaller local-level networks whose numbers are difficult to pinpoint since they emerge, go dormant and re-emerge as repression oscillates.

In building resilience, women's groups have mastered the art of turning single-issue claims (gender-based discrimination and crimes) into wide-reaching and resonant appeals. In doing so, they capitalize on human rights encapsulated in the constitutions and international treaties by emphasizing the right to life, freedom from discrimination and maltreatment, and equality before the law. They also engage with a broad audience beyond their traditional supporters. In Hungary,

these groups compiled stories of LGBTQ+ people and their families to convey their message through rights and equality before the constitution. These personal stories depicting LGBTQ+ as family members, children and grandchildren – not ‘outcasts’ as claimed by Fidesz – countered attempts at monopolizing family and child protection discourse by conservative groups. In Turkey, some women’s groups referred to as Muslim feminists incorporated Islamic principles about equality and justice to resonate with conservative/religious strata that the AKP rallies as voters and supporters (Yabanci and Maritato 2024).

Women’s groups engage in multi-medium action under hostile conditions to create public support and challenge government policies. In both countries, they actively use protests, demonstrations and sit-ins to mobilize the grassroots. On 8 March, International Women’s Day, and on 25 November, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, there are regular demonstrations with mass participation. Ad hoc demonstrations are also utilized to protest femicides, controversial legislative proposals like abortion bans and unfair court decisions regarding gendered crimes. In both countries, women’s organizations protested for equal access to the job market, political representation, the right to strike and collective bargaining, as well as against class and socioeconomic inequality and discrimination against disadvantaged groups. For instance, in 2018, women were at the forefront of protesting the new labour law (the ‘slave law’) in Hungary (Walker 2018b). Similarly, women’s organizations protested the economic crisis, high inflation and crimes against refugees in Turkey and supported labour strikes, helping trade unions to send the message out to broader audiences.

Besides on-street mobilizations, targeted off-street strategies are an effective way to build resilience. Women’s groups adopt several means towards this end. Public information campaigns in districts and public markets, disseminating posters, leaflets, stickers and flyers, are the simplest but effective means to broaden their reach. They also organize women’s forums at local district or university levels to open up participatory initiatives to women from different socioeconomic backgrounds. According to one activist, if they ‘fail to convince some women to take to street protests due to fear or lack of means’, they invent ‘alternative ways to reach them’. These alternative ways get women to discuss potential solutions to urgent issues, such as unequal pay or harassment. According to another activist, this is a strategy of ‘leaving no stone unturned’ (author’s interview 2018).

In addition, many groups seek to incorporate women from among youth and LGBTQ+ communities and from disadvantaged groups like Roma and refugees. They offer individual counselling on rights, psychological violence, human trafficking and the election of women candidates in local municipal assemblies and to the parliament. Their strategies often follow a non-partisan agenda but draw attention to the undemocratic consequences of AKP and Fidesz’s agendas. For instance, in Turkey, women’s organizations carried out campaigns calling for people to vote against the 2017 constitutional reform that undermined the parliamentary system and introduced an unchecked presidential regime. While some openly supported the rejection of the constitutional reform, some, such as the ‘Women Who Say No Platform’, provided information on the potential repercussions of constitutional changes for pluralism, rights and social peace, seeking to appeal to AKP supporters and undecided voters. In Hungary, the Háltér Society carried out a campaign for

the 2022 referendum in collaboration with 14 civic organizations. The campaign 'Give Invalid Answers to Invalid Questions' aimed to invalidate the referendum. This was a tactful strategy. Instead of frontally attacking Fidesz's argument, which drew an invalid equivalence between harming children and LGBTQ+ rights, the organization encouraged people to tick both yes and no options. It became successful when 1.7 million people cast invalid votes. The referendum was considered null because the number of valid votes did not reach the 50% threshold.

Finally, women's organizations utilize strategic litigation for law enforcement. Hungarian groups offer legal help to survivors of domestic violence during trials and seek to influence legal practice through a strategic litigation programme to generate precedents in domestic violence cases. NANE and the Patent Association use strategic litigation to monitor the working of the justice system and the dysfunctional implementation of the legal framework in domestic violence cases (NANE and Patent 2011). Litigation sometimes even targets state authorities like prosecutors and police who defied legal requirements and absolved the perpetrators illegally. In Turkey, a network of activist lawyers endeavours to enforce Law No. 6284, which incorporates the Istanbul Convention into domestic legislation. However, implementation faces challenges due to judges and prosecutors often granting pardons based on criteria like 'good behaviour' or 'unjust provocation'. Women's rights groups oppose this practice, which shifts blame onto women, perpetuating gendered moral standards. Activist lawyers intervene in court cases to oppose such pardons and offer legal assistance to victims and their families. With support from women's organizations, victims receive legal aid, compelling security forces, prosecutors and judges to uphold Law 6284.

Mobilizations by women's groups invigorated opposition parties to incorporate their claims and strategies. The opposition parties in Hungary have taken a stance towards gender equality by progressively including it in their public discourse. In 2010, except for generic references to improve women's participation in the workforce and equal pay for equal work, the election manifestos of opposition parties were silent on domestic violence and gender equality. In contrast, in 2014, Hungarian parties explicitly included a commitment to gender equality in their manifestos. The scope of these references to equality also became more inclusive as they utilized claims similar to those made by women's organizations. They objected to promoting traditional gender roles and criticized the idea that household duties and domestic care are 'naturally' perceived as women's jobs. The promise for law enforcement to prevent and punish domestic violence also entered the political discourse of opposition parties. In 2018, parties expanded this agenda by promising to work towards making domestic violence a crime, reforming the education system for gender awareness, and removing obstacles to gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights. In the 2022 elections, United for Hungary, an alliance of opposition parties, promised to fight discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in its manifesto upon pressure from gender equality groups. The coalition also promised to legalize same-sex marriage and retract the so-called child protection law issued by Fidesz to ban 'homosexual propaganda'. Some Hungarian opposition parties have taken an even more progressive stance, expanding the definition of gender violence beyond intimate partner violence to include psychological violence and cyberbullying. Women's organizations in Hungary

long advocated that the legal framework did not address all types of violence, and hence women were not fully protected by law.

In Turkey, gender equality and law enforcement references to tackling gender-based crimes were limited to a few cosmetic promises in the manifestos of Turkey's opposition parties in 2011. In 2015, the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), included in its manifesto more than 80 references concerning women's equality and gendered crimes. Opposition parties promised to introduce gender equality in school curricula, to improve women's shelters and to reach out to disadvantaged women by including domestic care workers and seasonal agricultural workers in the social security system. Two specific pledges by opposition parties, establishing district-level local women's councils and providing legal help to those who survived violence, were direct emulations of successful off-street strategies of women's groups. Another act of emulation was by the CHP's women's branch, which campaigned to increase countrywide awareness about femicides and the Istanbul Convention and established a call centre for women as an alternative to the state-sponsored one (CHP 2020). Additionally, opposition lawmakers have started to bring up names of murdered women at the parliament as a strategy, like women's organizations, by making case-by-case public advocacy for femicides to pressure the AKP towards taking tangible measures against criminal impunity. They demanded a special commission for investigating femicides and pushed for parliamentary discussions at the general assembly (*Gazete Rüzgârlı* 2020). The CHP also published reports documenting gender-based violence and femicides, following the example of women's organizations (*Gazete Duvar* 2020; Evrensel 2021).

Overall, women's groups have built an example of resilient civic opposition in Hungary and Turkey, defying authoritarian discourse and policies. They owe this resilience to their dynamic strategy, bringing together multiple claims that interlaced gender equality with cross-cutting issues such as economic, social and civic rights, voting, and the rights of other disadvantaged groups. Multiple mediums of mobilization help them maintain the grassroots engaged and inspire opposition parties to promote their demands.

Focused civic opposition: Electoral integrity

The incumbents in Turkey and Hungary capitalize on hyper-electioneering to praise majoritarianism through ballot results. During their tenure, voters have gone to the polls several times to vote in unfair competitions driven by gerrymandering, the use of state resources and the media for government propaganda, irregularities over voter registration, partiality of the election administration authorities, and concerns about ballot stuffing, poll safety and group voting (OSCE 2017, 2022).

Election monitoring and ballot safety groups have emerged to correct this imbalance by mobilizing citizens as poll observers. In Hungary, electoral integrity groups follow a twofold strategy. First, they promote voter education and awareness, and second, they offer training sessions for volunteers designated as polling station commission members or observers to ensure that it is not only government party members who observe the polls. Since 2018, Unhack Democracy has invited people, including Fidesz supporters, to get training as poll workers. These trainings are offered in person and online to expand their reach. The group appeals to the

constitutional right of documenting and reporting electoral abuses and does not directly criticize the government to encourage as many citizens as possible to get involved. Thanks to this strategy, it even engaged in diaspora voting in Romania, where more than 1 million eligible Hungarian voters live. Fidesz considers diaspora votes critical and, in the past, carried out targeted electoral campaigns. Ballots sent by mail were reported to be destroyed or replaced (Zoltán 2022). As a response, Unhack Democracy initiated a project called Votes beyond Borders to investigate Fidesz campaigns for diaspora votes, including the voting registration of Hungarians abroad and collaborating with journalists to report fraud.

Foundation for Clean Elections is another nationwide civic platform that organized the ‘20K22’ campaign for the 2022 elections, aiming to recruit 20,000 vote counters to be deployed at 10,000 stations. They recruited volunteers through effective campaigns ‘Defend Democracy, and It Will Defend You’ and ‘Train with Us and Be a Guardian of Democracy’. Such campaigns, according to interviewed experts, ‘heartened citizens to come forward in defence of basic democratic principles’ (author’s interview, 2022). The Civic Liberties Union (TASZ) and Clean Voting (Tiszta Szavazás) also focus on broad civic education to improve voter turnout and prevent apathy towards elections. These efforts include an open online course about safeguarding electoral integrity in collaboration with the Central European University, an e-learning platform, legal assistance to voters and access to a lawyer if they want to report fraud (Végh 2022). Some of these activities are tailored for young voters through collaborations with artists and for disadvantaged groups like Roma.

In Turkey, electoral integrity has been pioneered by Vote and Beyond since the 2014 local elections. The organization has mobilized half a million volunteers to date to ensure a reliable vote count and monitored polling stations countrywide. It offers online training for volunteers and issued a mobile application that allows volunteers to upload the vote count at their polling stations immediately after the counting. This strategy permits cross-checking of the results of all polling stations with the official results announced by the Supreme Board of Elections, whose integrity and impartiality have been undermined. Similar to the Hungarian election monitoring groups, Vote and Beyond declared its non-partisan status and emphasized its goal to ensure electoral safety, participation and transparency for all voters. It follows a meticulous pattern to keep the grassroots engaged. As one volunteer trained with the group stated during the interview,

After completing face-to-face and online training, volunteers are informed of their assigned duty station on election day. WhatsApp groups are then created to connect volunteer ballot observers and lawyers at each station, with one moderator overseeing each group. These groups facilitate real-time communication to report irregularities, enabling lawyers to intervene promptly and provide mutual support before and during the election day to remain motivated. (Author’s interview, 2023)

Electoral integrity groups in Hungary and Turkey focus on a single issue and rely on one dominant mobilization method. This focused strategy has proved to be a potential risk for resilience when repressive measures unexpectedly turn against electoral watchdogs and threaten their grassroots links and organizational viability.

This was the case with Vote and Beyond, which had to scale down its activities during the 2017 referendum. After the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, Vote and Beyond was targeted in a series of smear campaigns in the pro-AKP media linking ballot volunteers to ‘terrorism’. As a result, local partners and volunteers became reluctant, particularly in rural areas and AKP strongholds, to observe the 2017 referendum.

However, rapport with opposition parties alleviated the risk of losing the viability and relevance of electoral integrity groups and helped them grow resilient over time. As election integrity ranks high for opposition parties, the success of Vote and Beyond in mobilizing ordinary citizens for ballot safety inspired opposition parties to increase their efforts on this issue. When Vote and Beyond had to suspend its activities, opposition parties established the Fair Elections Platform for the June 2018 elections (BBC Turkish 2018). This new electoral watchdog collaborated with major trade unions and NGOs and recruited observers in rural areas, covering 99.6% of the polls (Yazıcıoğlu 2018). Moreover, during the 2019 local and 2023 general elections, the CHP deployed ballot observers following a similar strategy of online and face-to-face training and issued a smartphone application to pool and cross-check tallies at voting stations nationwide (CHP 2019).

Meanwhile, Vote and Beyond gained time to reorganize and upscale its activities. In alliance with Avcılar municipality, run by the CHP, Vote and Beyond started a democratic innovation initiative called ‘digital democracy’. The project aimed to facilitate citizen participation in local governance through decision-making and agenda-setting with a digital application. The organization eventually resumed its countrywide activities during the critical 2023 elections to train observers and citizens about the practical consequences of the recent amendment to the electoral law (Meriç 2022).

Like in Turkey, opposition parties have established a close rapport with electoral watchdogs in Hungary due to the high salience of electoral safety. They benefited from the expertise of election integrity organizations, asking for help in the recruitment and training of vote counters, coordinating observers’ positions and conducting election-day operations. As a result, ‘Let’s Count Together’ was introduced as an intermediary organization that connects Unhack Democracy with political parties, including Fidesz.

Repression might threaten the existence of focused civic opposition groups, given that they cannot switch to another medium to compensate for the area in which action is repressed. Compared to women’s organizations that utilize multiple mediums and articulate claims beyond a single-issue focus, ballot safety organizations find it more challenging to adapt to repression and maintain organizational viability and grassroots reach when the government targets their one and only issue and medium of mobilization. And yet, if opposition parties perceive the issue as a political priority and the medium is moderate action, they emulate these groups in mobilizing and training the grassroots. In the end, focused civic opposition groups can build on this rapport, move forward and build resilience.

Integrated civic opposition: Labour rights

Fidesz and the AKP consistently push for neoliberal economic programmes, encouraging intensive privatization, labour control and increasing wealth and

income inequality. Labour rights have been minimized over the years through the legalization of low-paid, deunionized, insecure employment and the discouraging of strikes (Borsuk et al. 2022; Fazekas and Tóth 2016). In Hungary, ‘the minimum service requirement’ law was issued in 2010 to require employers who offer essential public services to guarantee a minimum level of service provision. However, the law did not name the ‘essential’ services or indicate the required hours of service. This situation has created painstaking and long court procedures to determine the sectors covered and the number of days they should be offering services. The government uses this ambiguity to call off planned strikes by declaring them illegal (Bienvenu 2022). Moreover, in 2012, the labour code introduced the flexibility of employment through unpaid or underpaid schemes (Gerocs and Gagyi 2019). In 2018, Fidesz also increased the maximum number of overtime hours that employers can require from workers from 250 to 400 per year. The so-called ‘slave law’ allowed employers to defer payment for overtime for three years (Leotard 2019). In Turkey, subcontracting in public and private jobs imposed limitations on unionization and collective bargaining (Birelma 2017). Subcontracted workers do not have access to the same benefits, protections or collective bargaining agreements that directly employed workers enjoy. Employers use subcontracting arrangements, exploiting legal loopholes to prevent subcontracted workers from forming or joining unions.

Unionized and unorganized labour mobilizations reacted to these regulations of precarization, lay-offs and occupational accidents. In Hungary, according to International Labour Organization (ILO) statistics, the number of strikes has ranged between 7 and 12 per year since 2016. The number of workers involved in stoppages (strikes or lockouts) in 2019 was 20,900, showing an uptick from 15,500 workers in 2018 (ILO 2023). Turkey had three labour mobilizations per day in 2019 and four per day in 2020 to protest poor working conditions, demand collective bargaining, tax cuts and delayed or unpaid salaries (Birelma et al. 2021a, 2021b).

In both countries, the experience accumulated through labour mobilizations in a specific sector or workplace inspired subsequent mobilizations against labour control policies, creating an integrating effect. One notable example took place in 2004 at SEKA, Turkey’s previously state-owned paper factory. To protest its privatization, workers occupied the factory for 51 days. This unusually disruptive mobilization eventually forced the government to accommodate workers’ demands. Despite the eventual closure of the factory, workers were able to maintain their employment and social rights as public employers since the ownership of the factory was transferred to the Izmit municipality.

Similarly, in 2009, TEKEL workers of the state-owned tobacco and spirits producer faced the same risk of losing their pensions, healthcare, social rights and employment due to privatization. Following the SEKA example, workers organized disruptive action by occupying central urban zones in the capital. This mobilization in Ankara’s central district triggered police violence against workers but integrated broad societal support from youth and students, artists, universities and the international community. In the following years, similar contentious strategies increased the visibility of and solidarity with labour mobilizations. For instance, the 2015 United Metal Workers Union’s strikes were supported by tens of thousands of workers in 22 automotive factories. In May, strikes expanded to factories such as Tofaş/Fiat, Ford and Renault for collective bargaining. Their mobilization spread

to Kocaeli and Eskişehir automotive workers against low wages and then to the petrochemicals, glass and textile industries (Çelik 2015). More importantly, labour groups went beyond their bread-and-butter concerns and reframed their claims as opposition to neoliberal economic policies and their authoritarian imposition, which created more comprehensive support communities across society and bridged women's and labour groups by highlighting the gendered exploitation in women-intensive sectors, creating effective public boycotts and protests against employers (Acar 2010; Saygılıgil 2018).

In Hungary, labour strikes had similar integrating effects in foreign-owned automotive factories that employed around a quarter of a million people. Workers at the Audi plant in Győr carried out a one-week strike in 2019, eventually securing an 18% wage increase (Gerocs and Gagyi 2019). Previously, Daimler workers won an increase of over 20% (Simon 2019). These success stories inspired subsequent strikes. Thousands of workers at Korean tyre manufacturer Hankook's factory based in Dunaújváros and the Bosch Group plant in Miskolc held a strike against poor working conditions and low wages. Similar protests occurred at other automotive suppliers, demanding 18% wage increases and social benefits. The threat of strikes led carmaker Suzuki to announce that they would not implement the government's 'slave law' (Salzman 2019).

Public sector employees also organized localized strikes in Hungary from 2017 to 2019. Particularly important, around 7,500 administrative employees of local governments joined nationwide strikes organized by MKKZ, a trade union for the public sector (*Hungary Today* 2019). In 2018, the 'slave law' triggered week-long protests in Budapest (Walker 2018a). In 2022, public teachers organized another strike to defy the arbitrary imposition of the 100% service requirement when eight teachers were fired by the Ministry of Interior, stating unlawful refusal to work as the reason (Makszimov 2022). One-third of public teachers participated in the strikes, one of the largest collective mobilizations in Hungary in recent years. More importantly, labour mobilizations achieved widespread resonance within society, contributing significantly to their resilience. Students and families especially joined protests to oppose the government's education policies and insufficient school funding. Students also organized sit-ins in their schools and announced an 'indefinite vigil' in front of the Ministry of Interior (Tenczer and Zsofia 2022).

However, the fact that labour mobilizations mainly utilize on-street mediums creates some limits to tactical inventions to adapt and build resilience. The COVID-19 pandemic gave AKP and Fidesz an excuse to ban demonstrations. These measures brought workers' strikes, occupations and demonstrations almost to an abrupt end in Turkey (Birelma et al. 2021b). Similarly, in Hungary, the already dwindling number of work stoppages declined from 12 in 2019 to 2 in 2020 during the pandemic. Even before the pandemic, the targeted legislation known as the minimum service requirement had a detrimental effect on strikes. By 2019, there had been only one general strike in the public sector since the introduction of the minimum service requirement in 2010. This situation indicates that when civic opposition relies mainly on the on-street mediums of action, it is much more prone to interruption, as the government can use legislative power, as in Hungary's 2010 amendment for minimum service, or unexpected causes, like the pandemic, to curb oppositional mobilization severely.

While opposition parties could not remain aloof from them, they limited their rapport with labour mobilization, mainly to selective dialogue and random acts of solidarity. Official electoral commitments testify to their limited rapport. Between 2010 and 2018, in Hungary, even left-leaning/progressive parties' manifestos loosely mentioned labour rights, while collective bargaining appeared only twice, mentioned by Dialogue and MSZP in Hungary. As argued by Tamas Geroes and Agnes Gagyí (2019), in Hungary, 'political opposition parties tend to ally with workers' claims and then continue the flexibilization trend when they come to power'. Opposition parties 'can hardly be trusted as long-lasting pro-labour allies'. They supported on-street labour mobilizations only after protests against the 'slave law' gained integrated social support. A group of opposition MPs from liberal, social democrat, green and far-right opposition parties entered the state-owned public television station controlled by Fidesz, demanding the station broadcast the public demands. These demands included the revocation of the 'slave law' and a reduction in the overtime worked by police officers (Vadai 2018). However, this act of solidarity divided public attention between workers' needs and opposition parties' demands regarding the judiciary and media because MPs seized this opportunity to gain public attention for other quests.

In Turkey, opposition parties' electoral manifestos similarly included generic promises to protect and encourage unionization, impose strict regulations on employers against fatal occupational incidents and provide job security to subcontracted workers. Yet, they avoid aligning with labour mobilizations. For instance, the main opposition party, CHP, has been selective in allying with trade unions. The party declared support for protesting workers at the construction of the new Istanbul airport because the project had symbolic importance for the AKP, and protests were turned into a public awareness campaign about the corruption of AKP cronies involved in the construction. However, the CHP preferred silence in several other labour demonstrations and strikes, mainly because some also concern CHP municipalities as subcontracted public workers employed by these municipalities demand collective bargaining rights, delayed payments and improved working conditions (BBC Turkish 2021).

Overall, labour groups in Turkey and Hungary manage to integrate a critical mass of workers and society. Nevertheless, their on-street mediums make them uneasy allies for opposition parties. Hence, the rapport remains weak, mainly limited to selective dialogue and scarce collaboration. The weak rapport limits their resilience in achieving gains for workers and against labour control and exploitation policies.

Isolated civic opposition: Refugee rights

Over the last decade, Turkey and Hungary witnessed an unprecedented increase in asylum-seekers and refugees. Following the Syrian war, Turkey received 3.7 million asylum-seekers while Hungary faced around 400,000 irregular border crossings, according to official numbers. The AKP followed an initial open-door policy for Syrian refugees. However, without legal and logistical preparation, this policy eventually created conditions for exploitation, discrimination and violence towards refugees. In Hungary, Fidesz followed an openly racist and anti-refugee policy that motivated violent pushbacks and criminal procedures against irregular border-crossings.

Two types of refugee rights groups emerged against the backdrop of inadequate legal systems and discriminatory policies in both countries. The first type, citizens' networks, provide temporary shelter and help with the immediate needs of undocumented people. These groups emerged spontaneously from citizens' initiatives, utilizing social media to identify needs and organize charity campaigns (Bernat et al. 2016; Kutlu 2015). The second type follows a long-term approach through formal organizations to provide legal counselling for the social integration of refugees in healthcare, education and the job market.

The first group of organizations failed to build resilience and terminated their activities. In Hungary, irregular crossings were curbed through EU border measures or illegal pushbacks in 2016. As a result, the networks mostly reoriented their activities towards internal minorities and disadvantaged groups like Roma. Some of the most prominent groups succumbed to the government's repressive action against pro-refugee groups and ceased their operations (Migszol 2018). In Turkey, when refugee camps were set up and the temporary protection law was issued to regularize and settle Syrians in 2014, autonomous help networks also became dormant. The government favoured a few organizations to carry out humanitarian aid; only a few reoriented for a longer-term approach (Danış and Nazlı 2019).

The second group has a different trajectory due to their more complex mobilization dynamics. They address rights violations, maltreatment and torture; denial of access to education and healthcare; restrictions on mobility and resettlement; and labour market exploitation. However, as Aslihan Cobaner (2015) demonstrates in the case of Turkey, most of their efforts are limited to reporting the daily hardships, discrimination and exploitation of refugees. Moreover, pro-refugee groups rely on case-by-case legal counselling as the primary mobilization strategy. Many utilize formal and informal ties with the governments to help refugees obtain residence permits or receive urgent medical treatment. Since Turkey and Hungary's immigration and asylum systems are heavily constrained, they need to meet and collaborate with government authorities. As a result, they are sometimes 'perceived as pro-state' by other civic opposition groups due to their obligatory collaboration with the governments. Meanwhile, the discretion of authorities and constant changes in bureaucratic procedures or legal frameworks sometimes easily hinder or delay their efforts from one day to another. This situation drains the limited resources of many pro-refugee groups without generating public awareness and support for their cause due to the lack of systematic rights-based advocacy.

Pro-refugee groups have a hard time engaging native citizens with their cause (Zihnioğlu and Dalkıran 2022). They are even hesitant to pursue systematic public advocacy for refugees regarding their socioeconomic inclusion, legal rights for work and unionization, and children's right to education and health because of 'the negative connotations of promoting rights of non-citizens and potential social backlash against refugee rights supporters' (author interview, 2022). Unlike the situation with women's, labour and electoral safety groups, cooperation and coordination are limited, even between pro-refugee groups. Joint action and knowledge sharing happen mostly between groups led by native or citizen activists.

Pro-refugee groups remain outside opposition parties' discursive or tactical emulation and alliance networks. Opposition parties avoid advocating, even

indirectly, for the rights of refugees due to ideological and electoral concerns. The central narrative of the Hungarian opposition bloc is ‘saving’ Hungarians from the social and economic burden of migration and refugees. In the 2022 elections, the six-party opposition bloc did not promote an openly anti-refugee line and even criticized Fidesz for exploiting the refugee crisis. However, Péter Márki-Zay, the joint opposition candidate, claimed that Fidesz was right to build a border fence that would remain in place when the opposition bloc resumes power (Zalan 2021). The mayor of Budapest from the opposition, Gergely Karácsony, more directly acknowledged that the opposition bloc could lose its chance of victory by campaigning for refugees because of the widespread negative public opinion towards refugees, and hence decided not to engage with pro-refugee discourse during the electoral campaign (Mandiner 2021).

In Turkey, a few references in opposition parties’ manifestos focus on eliminating refugee-intensive informal work. However, this promise is not framed as an issue of exploitation of refugees as cheap labour but as an economic burden on the Turkish economy due to its informality. In 2015, the CHP’s manifesto mentioned that Syrians should fully benefit from health services only so that they can be prepared for repatriation to their country in a healthy condition. The CHP also promised to reallocate significant portions of funds given to refugees in education and health to prevent the suffering of ‘our people’. The reactionary stance peaked in the 2023 elections when the opposition turned hostile towards refugees and blamed the AKP for altering the social fabric of Turkish society and facilitating crime by providing citizenship to Syrians in exchange for votes. The opposition coalition campaigned based on a promise of ‘sending Syrians back home in dignity within two years’ after assuming power. Similar to Hungary, Turkish opposition parties were driven by concerns over voter reaction and partisan motivations against the AKP’s unpopular ‘open door’ policy.

Refugee rights groups illustrate the quadrant in the typology where resilience is the weakest, given their limited capacity to recruit broader social support and capitalize on various action mediums. As the stigmatization of refugees continues to rally cross-class and cross-ideology communities in Hungary and Turkey, political parties do not consider collaborating with or emulating pro-refugee civic opposition groups.

Conclusion

Calling for a conceptual and empirical recalibration of opposition beyond the political and partisan arena, this study has offered an explanatory typology of resilient civic opposition in contemporary contexts of democratic backsliding. The typology highlighted two factors for civic opposition’s resilience: (1) the mobilization dynamics and (2) the level of rapport with political parties. Based on these two pillars, four types of civic opposition were identified: dynamic, focused, integrated and isolated. The study illustrated each type through examples from Turkey and Hungary, focusing on civic opposition groups in women’s rights, electoral integrity, labour rights and pro-refugee action. The empirical discussion revealed that civic opposition can reach beyond their immediate stakeholders to a broad audience when they eschew single-issue, local and temporal concerns and utilize rights-

and justice-oriented arguments. Likewise, combining on-street mobilizations (protests, sit-ins, vigils, occupations) with off-street action facilitates a broader resonance and tactical switches against incumbent repression, maintaining viability through adaptation and, hence, resilience.

The findings also suggest that while civic opposition does not depend on political opposition for existence, close rapport can entrench civic opposition in the long term, especially if repression reorients and deepens unexpectedly. Two factors contribute to opposition parties' willingness to have a closer rapport with civic opposition: their will to appeal to broader society beyond their traditional voters and their desire to develop a party brand as a democratic actor. Contrarily, the perception of a civic opposition group as 'radical' by their dominant use of the contentious method and the detachment of their voters from the issue tackled by civic opposition affect the rapport negatively.

The inductive typology draws theoretical and practical lessons for further research. First, it highlights that civic opposition needs time to reflect, recuperate and set out longer-term moves under democratic backsliding to build resilience. Instead of focusing on the success and failures of opposition groups in removing the incumbents through mass protests or elections, future studies can focus on how civic opposition builds resilience or creates opportunities to adapt, variegate and eventually expand over a long course. These 'modest' ventures of civic opposition might not directly bring electoral victories or replace the incumbents. However, their endeavour in building and maintaining democratic claims and mobilizations is no less critical. Without understanding how civic opposition develops, adapts and keeps citizens mobilized for democratic causes, our understanding of opposition and democratic backsliding remains incomplete.

Inductive theorization has clear limitations, as contingent factors shape each illustrative case. The gradual decline of democracy creates different attributes for civic and political opposition in different countries. For instance, in Latin American cases, where a strong tradition for left ideologies is historically embedded in civic and political cultures, one might find workers' mobilizations more resilient than in Turkey and Hungary. Likewise, mobilizations by indigenous groups, totally absent in the context of Europe, might carve themselves a resilient space in some countries. Countries with a more extended history of migration might host more resilient pro-refugee groups. The argument for resilient civic opposition in this study provides a conceptual and practical blueprint for further investigations. Future research is needed to test the principal axes of the typology through new illustrative cases to fine-tune the typology. Civic opposition groups like environmental justice, religious and ethnic minority rights, anti-corruption and the rule of law can be investigated to apply the typology in other contexts.

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Notes

- 1 Autocratization refers to the systematic deterioration of democratic institutions, basic rights and accountability in any polity (Tomini et al. 2023). It can unfold in an already autocratic regime as well as in a democratic one. In the cases of Turkey and Hungary, autocratization followed a unique pattern known as democratic backsliding (Bermeo 2016) and was undertaken by democratically elected incumbents who undid democratic institutions and practices. According to the V-Dem classification, both countries have backslid from electoral democracies into electoral autocracies as of 2023 (V-Dem 2023).
- 2 The AKP withdrew from the Convention through a presidential decree in 2021 without due procedure, whereas the Hungarian Parliament refused to ratify it in 2020. Government officials from both countries claim that respective national law is superior in protecting women from violence and refused to implement the Convention duly.

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