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City, University of London

**Sustaining Contention: Democratic Backsliding and the
Political Opposition in Venezuela under Chavismo and
Turkey under the AKP**

Begüm Zorlu

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy City, University of London, Department of International Politics

Declaration

I certify that the thesis is solely my work other than where I have indicated that it is the work of others. Any mistake is mine.

I declare that my thesis consists of 92,697 words.

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the dynamics of contention between the political opposition and the incumbent in two cases of democratic backsliding: Turkey under the AKP and Venezuela under *Chavismo*. The political opposition in the two cases pursued various strategies, including electoral campaigns, protests, and insider-outsider coalitions, yet have failed to achieve their intertwined purported goals of overturning increasing authoritarianism and gaining power. Building on recent theoretical and empirical work in comparative politics, International Relations and social movement studies, this thesis generates an analytical narrative that can reveal how the political opposition relates to the process of democratic backsliding in the aforementioned cases. By studying the dynamics of contention between the incumbent and the political opposition with a comparative historical study, this thesis outlines the mechanisms involved in the political opposition's interaction with the incumbent in processes of democratic backsliding. In order to study this phenomenon, the thesis brings together the contentious politics framework and frame analysis, which I term "contentious frame analysis" and applies this approach to examine the dynamics of democratic backsliding. Through using this methodology, this thesis contends that three mechanisms are at play in the process of democratic backsliding in both cases. These mechanisms, termed 'polarisation', the use of a 'fifth column frame' and 'securitisation', show how both the political opposition and incumbent in both cases, contributed to the outcome of populist authoritarianism taking root in both societies. These mechanisms served to sustain contention in both cases, which has ultimately contributed to the incumbent consolidating political control, despite the efforts of the political opposition to challenge the incumbent. The findings of this research, therefore, challenge the presentation of the role of the political opposition as solely a necessary agent for democratisation in the comparative politics literature; extends the contentious politics framework to the study of the domestic, regional and international context's influence on the development and challenging of political regimes; and, shows how the frames that are used by actors in these aforementioned processes are both contested and rooted within their historical contexts.

Acknowledgements

From popular uprisings to revolutions, the collective togetherness of opposition actors who sought change has shaped democratic rule around the world. Movements for democracy, peace and equality have shaped how we see the world today and many of the freedoms that we take for granted. The solidarity and companionship they have built, diffused political change to many polities, leading to reforming, challenging, or overturning their respective regimes. Slogans, like “*the people want the fall of the regime*,” feelings like hope, frames of injustice and tactics like occupying squares have moved and are constantly moving from one setting to the other. This interconnectedness and the collective legacy of these movements has been one of the main reasons for me to study opposition activism and the role of the international in contentious periods of increasing authoritarianism. This thesis is dedicated to those who took part in these struggles.

The period of writing this thesis was mentally challenging. It was a time when contention turned violent in both of the polities that this research investigates. The dynamics of violence and repression have devastated the lives of thousands and has led to irreversible destruction. The writing process was accompanied by a process of mourning for the losses and marked a separation from my family and friends. I was lucky to have confidants in the UK, and supportive advisors Tom Davies and Iosif Kovras, without whom this thesis could not have been completed. The International Politics Department at City University was also supportive from day one, especially Stefano Pagliari, who first communicated with me during the admission process, Gad Yishayahu and Amnon Aran, who provided constructive feedback as discussants during research seminars. I have also learned a lot throughout my time as a teaching assistant from Mustafa Kutlay, Laust Schouenborg, Gwilym David Blunt and Tom

Davies, along with City's outstanding students. Overall, City has provided me with a safe and comfortable environment to conduct this research. Again, without the support of the department, this thesis could not have been completed.

I also want to acknowledge the academics, rights activists, and journalists whose work has helped me build my framework and data. Their names are widely cited in this research. My work builds on theirs, and hopefully, the contributions of this thesis will be useful for other researchers. My role at PSA Turkish Politics Specialist Group as its digital media officer has also made my PhD journey more valuable, and I want to acknowledge its conveyors Matthew Whiting and Yaprak Gürsoy, who contributed to building a community to share knowledge. I especially want to thank Bahar Başer and Mari Toivanen, who have introduced me to the field of research ethics and positionality and have been role models with their solidarity and knowledge. I also want to acknowledge the role that the scholars of İstanbul Bilgi University and Sabancı University played in my studies. In particular, my undergraduate days at Bilgi University gave me the motivation to pursue this research agenda. Cemal Bali Akal's module first introduced me to Latin American history, and I was mainly influenced by the scholars Mehmet Ali Tuğtan, Ömer Turan, Cemil Boyraz and Ayhan Kaya. During my masters at Sabancı University, I was deeply inspired by Ayşe Betül Çelik's work, and I learned a lot from Bülent Aras and Pınar Akpınar during my time at İstanbul Policy Center and built friendships that will last a lifetime.

I would like to acknowledge the role that Marc Sinan Winrow, Nazan and Gareth Winrow, Arife Köse, Balki Begüm Bayhan, Simge Vurtok, Jonathan Parker, Tan Morgül, Kemal Göktaş, Oya Aydın, Andrés Besserer Rayas and David Mora have played since I have moved to the UK as they became my confidants and have been exposed to the contests of this thesis

more than once. They have become my family in the UK, and I feel grateful that they are in my life. I would like to thank my nuclear family Sena, Sevda and Nafiz Zorlu, who have never left me alone even though we were not able to see each other for a long time. I also want to acknowledge the role that Sevgi and Murat Mutluay, Melisa Mendoza Vasquez, Yasin Duman, Onur Devrim Üçbaş, Deniz Can Akkaya, Sam Halegua, Meir Abuaf, Besna Tonguç, Fatma Lale and Gülseren Onanç have played in my life as my memories with them have made me the person that I am today. I also want to thank my colleagues at the Equality, Justice and Women Platform that have made this journey more meaningful. Lastly, I would like to thank Andrew Lowe for proofreading some sections of this thesis.

Abbreviations

AD Democratic Action

ALBA Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America

AKP Justice and Development Party

BDP Peace and Democracy Party

CEPAZ Center of Justice and Peace

CHP Republican People's Party

CNE National Electoral Council (Venezuela)

EU The European Union

CAUSA-R Radical Cause Party

HDP Peoples' Democratic Party

HSYK High Council Judges and Public Prosecutors (Turkey)

IACHR Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

IACtHR Inter-American Court of Human Rights

MUD Democratic Unity Roundtable

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NED National Endowment for Democracy

PdVSA Petroleum of Venezuela

PROVEA Venezuelan Education-Action Program on Human Rights

PJ Justice First

PSUV The United Socialist Party of Venezuela

OAS Organisation of American States

OHCHR The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UNASUR Union of South American Nations

TBMM Grand National Assembly of Turkey

TSJ Supreme Justice Tribunal (Venezuela)

VP Popular Will

WOLA Washington Office on Latin America

YSK Supreme Electoral Council (Turkey)

INTRODUCTION

1. The Problem

In studies of International Relations, social movement studies, and comparative politics, the opposition has been understood as the agents who are the main drivers of political change under non-democratic regimes. These literatures focused on the interaction between the political context and the opposition, including social movements, individual initiatives, violent movements and political parties, to explain the ways in which opposition agents achieve their goals (Bunce and Wolchik, 2007; Halliday, 1987; Tarrow, 2005). The impact of coalition formation (Cavatorta, 2009; Kurzman, 2004; Wahman, 2012), opposition activism triggering elite splits (Brownlee, 2007; Tarrow, 2011; Stephan and Chenoweth, 2008) and externalisation of opposition demands to international actors (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Tarrow, 2005) have been considered as some of the successful ways for opposition groups to pressure non-democratic regimes. The agency of the opposition has also been studied by investigating the different means by which they challenge non-democratic regimes, for example, peacefully (Davies, 2014; McAdam and Tarrow, 2000; Sharp, 1993) or violently (Alimi, 2011; della Porta and Tarrow, 1986). For non-violent movements, the potential punitive aspect of international pressures (Gordon, 2016; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Tarrow, 2005), the moral dimension of non-violence triggering broad participation and elite splits (Stephan and Chenoweth, 2008) have been proposed to understand political change. While the increasing number of studies on non-violent resistance have argued that opposition activism would lead to better results in terms of agents achieving their goals (Sharp, 1993; Stephan and Chenoweth, 2008), multiple case studies have presented a counter narrative to this proposition (Davies, 2014). Therefore, studying the dynamics of each case, which are shaped by a unique context, including the complex relations of interaction between actors,

can provide a better way of understanding opposition agency, which does not try and draw conclusions from very different cases to the case being considered.

The significance of the international has especially stood out in the scholarship that has investigated how international actors and processes shape opposition activism against their respective regimes (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Levitsky and Way, 2010; Tarrow, 2005). There has been an upsurge in studies of transnational activism (Joachim and Locher, 2008; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Olesen, 2006; Tarrow, 2005), norm diffusion (Klotz, 1995; Risse, 1999; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, 1999), international leverage (Carothers, 2002; Levitsky and Way, 2006) and studies focusing on the increased influence of globalisation (Flesher Fominaya, 2014; Ruiz-Junco, 2015; Tarrow, 2005), which have explored how the international shaped the political regime dynamics, either empowering domestic actors or weakening regimes in non-democratic settings (Goldstone, 2003). For example, the cases of Eastern European democratic transitions in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union demonstrate how such processes can occur due to a combination of a favourable international context (Oberschall, 1996) along with the diffusion of ideas shaping collective action¹ (Dimitrova and Pridham, 2004; Givan, Roberts and Soule, 2010; Glenn, 2003). The international is significant in the process of regime transitions both in the process towards or away from democracy because different incumbents and oppositions, present in different states, are integrated into the international in various ways and may establish cross-border ties, including supporting each other. Different opposition movements and states may also strive to influence international organisations and nation-states and channel their resources to their

¹ The scholarship that highlighted the post-Cold War democratisation in Eastern Europe saw the role of the international as vital for the emergence of new political parties by adapting the methods and ideas of those in neighbouring countries through diffusion (Bunce and Wolchik, 2007). Relatedly, how diffusion can trigger a learning process beyond borders has been a key question in the studies of social movement studies and international relations (della Porta and Tarrow, 2012; Givan, Roberts and Soule, 2012).

struggles (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Tarrow, 2005). Consequently, the nature and extent of the effects of phenomena emanating from the international context on different agents engaged in contentious politics, namely the opposition and the incumbent, needs to be considered to explore the dynamics of contention between them.

Studies on transitions towards democracy have recognised the role of the political opposition and social movements in this process, which featured heavily in the scholarship in the 1990s and early 2000s (Bunce and Wolchik, 2007; McFaul, 2002). However, the literature after the 2010s has increasingly taken an interest in studying the process of increasing authoritarianism around the globe referred to mostly as “democratic backsliding” (Bermeo, 2016; Mechkova, Lührmann and Lindberg, 2017; Waldner and Lust, 2018). “Democratic backsliding” has been broadly defined as the “deterioration of qualities associated with democratic governance” (Waldner and Lust, 2018, p. 95). Scholars have mapped out how a trend has been emerging around the world, as both “consolidated” and “non-consolidated” democracies became a part of a “democratic recession” (Diamond, 2015). This new wave of “global” backsliding has created a shift in the literature from the previous focus on authoritarianism, which focused mostly on the disabling role of tutelary institutions like the military in preventing democratisation² (Bermeo, 2016). What stood out in this recent “wave” was, as Bermeo (2016) demonstrated, how it involved civilian endeavours in hampering democracy. In this context, Bermeo (2016, p.10) emphasised the role of “executive aggrandisement”, which refers to the obstruction of democratic institutions that “hamper the power of opposition forces”. The actions of the incumbent in Venezuela under Chavismo and Turkey under the AKP have been illustrative of the implementation of executive

² The complexity of these cases has been affiliated with how recent cases of backsliding occurred in a process in which incumbents were “mimicking democratic institutions” (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019, p.1096).

aggrandisement³ (Diamond, 2015; Ocaklı, 2021) during contentious interactions with the opposition. Consequently, although the earlier literature on democratisation posited that the agency of the political opposition was key in democratisation, the cases of Turkey and Venezuela – two key cases of recent backsliding – both show how democratic backsliding has occurred despite the presence of active political opposition groups in both countries.

The cases of Venezuela and Turkey, therefore, point to a puzzle that the current literature struggles to answer. Studying the transition processes, including processes that involve a movement away from democracy, and how actors are involved in these processes, can reveal the role of the agency of the incumbent and the political opposition in the process of democratic backsliding. This can thereby provide a means of addressing and resolving the aforementioned puzzle. Recent scholarship on regime types has shown how recent forms of authoritarianism, in contrast to earlier studies of historical forms of authoritarianism, involve different types of political agency. Following the worldwide rise of authoritarianism, scholars of comparative politics advanced regime categories such as hybrid (Levitsky and Way, 2010; Diamond, 2002), which were also separated by their characteristics like competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way, 2010), and electoral authoritarianism (Schedler, 1999). These categories aimed to define polities that demonstrated the characteristics of both democracy and authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way, 2010). What made these various types of hybrid regimes different to authoritarian ones has been the existence of active opposition agents and the invention of regime strategies for survival (Schedler, 1999, 2007). While the literature on regime types defined how regimes limit contestation, the role of the political opposition in relation to regime dynamics, was not considered in detail, apart from a few

³ These common patterns in the playing in both cases were marked by “power-concentrating constitutional reforms” a characteristic of populist authoritarian regimes (Weyland, 2018, p.324).

exceptions (Albrecht, 2005, 2013; Blondel, 1997; LeBas, 2011; Mutalib, 2000). More importantly, most of these studies dominantly focused on the characteristics of these agents rather than the interactions that sustained them. This thesis, therefore, aims to contribute to explaining the complex interactions between the political opposition and the incumbent to understand the agency of the political opposition in processes of democratic backsliding.

Yet, there are no straightforward answers to the problem of identifying the dynamics of democratic backsliding and how the impact of the political opposition and international influences shape these dynamics. Contrary to what some commentators expect, the process is firstly complex because some opposition movements may not seek to achieve democratisation, even while seeking to challenge the incumbent. Additionally, opposition groups might be unable to coordinate and work together, or the repression for agents can be too high. The international can also aid or prevent democratisation in multiple ways. For instance, under the Concert of Europe⁴ in the nineteenth century, conservative European states intervened to prevent other states from democratising (Weber, 1994, p. 53) to maintain their desired international order. Hegemonic states in the international system can also support dictatorships, as demonstrated by the US's foreign policy choices to support incumbents like Augusto Pinochet of Chile in the context of the Cold War (Schneider, 1992). Powerful states can pressure states with strategies like conditionality and sanctioning to push policy or regime change (Levitsky and Way, 2010; Sorensen, 2013). However, it is crucial to underline that international support alone cannot shape the dynamics of regime change, especially democratisation. Influential allies may not be sufficient to actualise change if the opposition is divided or, if there is no robust domestic partner. The dynamics between the

⁴ The Concert system which emerged after the Napoleonic Wars can be understood as reacting against these new repertoires of contention, as the Concert initially mandated intervention against states that violated the post-Napoleonic peace and its conservative principles (Weber, 1994).

incumbent and the political opposition both domestically and internationally is complex and ever changing. This thesis seeks to address how to study this complex landscape and, to this end, by utilising the concepts developed by the contentious politics framework (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001; Tarrow, 2011), which will be outlined below.

2. The Cases and the Research Question

To understand the political opposition's role in the process of democratic backsliding, this thesis conducts a comparative historical case study of the dynamics of contention between the political opposition and the incumbent during processes of democratic backsliding in Turkey under the AKP and Venezuela under Chavismo. These campaigns are titled "contentious" because there is sustained collective mobilisation and contestation during democratic backsliding. Similarly, in both contexts, the political opposition in Turkey and Venezuela failed to reach their goals of overturning the regime's increasing authoritarianism. Consequently, the common and diverging characteristics of the cases can contribute to theorising the patterns of the dynamics of the political opposition and incumbent interaction. Turkey and Venezuela are distant countries, yet they have similar characteristics of democratic backsliding under increasingly repressive regimes. Prior to experiencing democratic backsliding, both countries were considered "exceptional" insofar as the literature of comparative politics overwhelmingly saw them as examples of democratising states which were relatively advanced on the path to democratic consolidation, when compared with other states in their regions, throughout the second half of the twentieth century (Hillman, 1994; Hinnebusch, 2006, p.388). For instance, multi-party competition has existed in both cases since the 1950s, with established opposition parties being present (Kalaycıoğlu, 2016; Levine, 1987, 2002). While military dictatorship was on the rise in Latin America in the

1970s and 1980s, Venezuela's "pacted democracy" endured (Hillman 1994, Levine, 2002). Even though military coups and human rights violations were prominent, the literature still saw Turkey as a democracy with some minimal level of compliance to democratic norms (Hinnebusch, 2006; Mandıracı, 2012).

There have been common trends in the process of democratic backsliding for both cases. Firstly, by utilising executive aggrandisement, political elites in both states weakened "constraints on their power" (Bermeo, 2016, p.10) with judicial and legislative changes. Both governments⁵ also came to power after crisis events (Birdal, 2014, Roberts, 2003) around the same time frame and share the characteristics of what the literature has called electoral (Bogaards, 2009; Schedler, 1999) and populist authoritarianism (Hinnebusch, 2002; Tang, 2016). The arenas of contestation available in both authoritarian regimes were shaped by a broader context involving deteriorating freedom of information, human rights violations, and increasingly violent elections of questionable fairness (Human Rights Watch, 2015, 2016; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2017; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2015). In both Turkey and Venezuela, there were also cases of the incumbent selectively co-opting and criminalising groups from within the opposition (Doyle, 2017; Jiménez, 2021). The populist style of the leadership of the incumbent has also increasingly stood out in the literature (Moffit, 2016), though Venezuela was considered an example of left-wing populism and the AKP is viewed as an example of right-wing populism⁶ (Aytaç and Öniş, 2014; Weyland, 2013, 2018). Therefore, both states have experienced similar processes of democratic backsliding in roughly the same time frame,

⁵ In thesis I define government borrowing from Tilly (2003, p.9) as "a substantial, durable, bounded organization that exercises control over the major concentrated means of coercion within some territory."

⁶ Scholars have also named Turkey under the AKP as a case of neoliberal populism (Akçay, 2018, Boyraz; 2018).

which have also resulted in both states being recognised as hybrid regimes combining elements of authoritarianism and democracy (Esen and Gümüşcü, 2016).

These different interactions between the international and the domestic have also characterised the period of the rise of authoritarianism in both states. The political opposition and the incumbent in these countries historically had significant links with the international. The early democratisation of Venezuela and its natural resources led to the creation of new links between state and business elites (Tinker Salas, 2015). During the Cold War, Turkey's alignment with the US and its allies ensured that the state and business actors were closer to the West (Cagaptay, 2013). In both cases, regional and international groups have been active, which has provided the opportunity for the opposition to act in concert with such international actors where their interests coincide (Hoffmann, 2019). Turkey, for instance, has been integrated into Europe in terms of trade and as a neighbouring country. It expressed a desire to join the then-EEC in the 1960s and joined a customs union with the EU in 1996 (Tocci, 2014). Turkey, under the AKP, followed the conditionality criteria of the EU for membership in the first years of the AKP government (Öniş, 2000). In turn, Venezuela has been a key partner of the OAS since its formation after World War II (Hoffmann, 2019). The OAS has taken an interest in the backsliding of in Venezuela, with the OAS mediating between the incumbent and the opposition, issuing reports and organising meetings on the state of the political crisis in Venezuela multiple times (McCarthy, 2017; Organization of American States, 2015). More recently, the Lima Group, formed of twelve countries that are concerned with the political situation in Venezuela, has called for measures to pressure the Venezuelan regime and ensure that the political opposition is not unfairly excluded from the political process (McCarthy, 2017).

Both Venezuela's and Turkey's recent democratic backsliding is arguably puzzling in light of the involvement of international actors in both countries due to the aforementioned high level of linkage between domestic and international actors. Although Venezuela's opposition has longstanding ties with Western states and wields some influence in the US, it has not been able to harness this support to prevent rising authoritarianism despite the presence of strong domestic-international cooperation. Notwithstanding these differences in the two cases, including the international linkages of the political opposition in both regimes, authoritarianism has puzzlingly risen in both states, despite previous scholarly assessments highlighting the democratic potential of both regimes (Özbudun, 1996, Wilpert, 2007). In Turkey, despite historically being committed to what scholars have labelled "Westernisation" or "modernisation" (Celep, 2011, p.424) the CHP, the biggest opposition group in Turkey, which can be defined as Kemalist⁸ in origin, has throughout its history adopted a sceptical stance towards Western actors (Kıratlı, 2015). In the first term of the AKP in office, from 2002 to 2007, for instance, several prominent members of the CHP and Kemalist social movements were highly suspicious of the AKP's agenda to promote Turkey's EU membership (Celep, 2011). In the case of Venezuela, the increasing appeals of the main political opposition to international organisations and states shifted the scale of contention. While the main political opposition in Turkey adopted a more sceptical stance of international actors, most members of the leading Venezuelan opposition aimed to receive the backing of regional and Western states to pursue their goals.

The presence of such links has been assumed to be one of the means by which democracy can be promoted by international actors. This means that it is a puzzle as to why the involvement

⁸ Kemalism refers to the "founding ideology" of the republic, that has been defined with the six pillars it promoted: "secularism; republicanism, statism, populism, nationalism, and reformism" (Buzan and Diez, 1999, p.44).

of actors deemed to be in favour of democracy promotion, such as the US, which has been influential in the politics of both cases, has not resulted in the consolidation of democracy. Furthermore, throughout the period in consideration, studies have also stressed how authoritarianism has spread throughout the world and liberal democracy has been in decay (Diamond, 2015). To unravel these puzzles and global trends, this project considers also the international dynamics of the contention between the political opposition and the incumbent in the process of increasing authoritarianism. To provide a full picture of the context in which the incumbent and the opposition contest each other and seek to bring about political change, this thesis benefits from the academic literatures of International Relations, comparative politics and contentious politics. Specifically, a relational approach is used to explain the interaction between international actors and the domestic political opposition and incumbents in Venezuela and Turkey. By doing so, the thesis provides an analytical narrative of the process of democratic backsliding in the two regimes in a way that allows an assessment of the nature and extent of the agency of the political opposition and incumbent in the backsliding process. This will, in turn, answer the following research question:

How does the political opposition's interaction with the incumbent shape the contentious process of democratic backsliding?

Engaging in a comparative study of Venezuela and Turkey can provide a means of answering this question because both states experienced democratic backsliding, having previously been expected to undergo a process of democratisation by academic commentators. The process of backsliding in both cases was also particularly comprehensive as populist political outsiders were able to take control of the government in both cases. This resulted in the former political elites entering into a defensive position in opposition, which were situations that lacked

historical precedent. In both cases, the former elites have constituted the main political opposition, and, despite the pre-existing history of democratic opposition, they have been unable to make significant political gains. This raises the question as to whether there are similar dynamics at play in both cases that have prevented the opposition from coming to power, despite its prolonged efforts in both cases. Nevertheless, the incumbent does not exist in a vacuum in both cases and, in fact, owes its success, in both cases, to a drawn-out struggle with the political opposition. Therefore, it is also possible to ask whether the agency of the political opposition may also have contributed to, and is perhaps still contributing to, the process of democratic backsliding. For instance, the participation of the opposition in elections, in the two hybrid regimes, can be seen to provide a degree of democratic legitimacy to the incumbent. In these regimes, the opposition not only poses a challenge with contentious activity, but the interaction between the political opposition and the incumbent can be utilised for incumbent's legitimacy. Therefore, providing an analytical narrative of the relational processes in both cases will show the contingencies that resulted in opposition agency and incumbent responses that have shaped the process of democratic backsliding. This, in turn, will display whether similar contingencies occurred in both cases and outline the extent to which these findings can be generalised to similar past, current and future cases.

Given the centrality of framing in the construction of opposition agency and building on the research question, this thesis also asks the sub-question:

How do contentious framing processes between the incumbent, the opposition, and the international shape the mechanisms contributing to democratic backsliding?

The question aims to grasp the interactive agency of the opposition and the incumbent, as the thesis argues this is best understood in terms of the frames that the opposition and the incumbent deploy. Frames refer to “schemata of interpretation”, which are used by agents to shape their own perception of the world and, when they are conveyed through communication (Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford, 1986). Frames therefore enable understanding agency since agency is often accompanied by an awareness of the world and how to change it. As the social movements literature recognises, frames form the basis of the collective actions that movements engage in, since participants in a movement need to share common goals and understandings for their movement to cohere in the first place, as well as to undertake different forms of collective action (Gillan, 2008). Because of how frames are therefore constitutive of collective agency, studying frames can also provide an understanding of how collective agents develop over time.⁹ A historical narrative can hence be utilised to examine the contingent foundations of agency, in the form of the frames that constitute such agency. When integrated into a contentious politics framework, such a study of frames can reveal how different forms of agency are constructed in time, including by demonstrating how different agents seek to reinvoke past forms of agency. Crucially, collective agents, premised on shared frames, interact with other collective agents, leading to certain patterns of relations unfolding over time, which can, in turn, trigger certain outcomes. These patterned processes, in turn, can show mechanisms, in which a certain set of events result in a certain set of outcomes.

⁹ There is also the need to underline that a form of collective agency, such as a political party, cannot be reduced solely to the individuals that compose it, since, as a form of collective agency, its ability to act as a collective is enabled by frames shared by its followers. Actors may also invoke frames to trigger new forms of collective action by either developing new frames or drawing upon pre-existing frames that form part of their repertoire, which are stored and conveyed through means such as culture or memory. The frames of the political elite especially are built on pre-existing forms of collective agency, based on the political tradition and societal location in which they find themselves, which can, in turn, be used to compose collective action frames, which are defined as “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate action” (Benford and Snow, 2000, p.614).

In order to explain how the contentious politics and contentious framing of the incumbent and the political opposition contribute to democratic backsliding, this thesis adopts a historical perspective that involves focusing on transformative events that trigger and influence contentious interactions. Due to how collective action is always based on frames, contentious politics also often involve a contention of frames, meaning that the frames of actors in contention with each other are also oppositional towards each other. By incorporating the study of contentious frames in the study of the events involved in the two cases of democratic backsliding, this thesis subsequently develops a model that seeks to explain how new frames are developed or recycled by the incumbent and the opposition in the context of backsliding and with the intention of advancing their agendas with its "contentious framing" model. Such a model will reveal how considerable political change, of the scale experienced in Venezuela and Turkey over the last twenty years, has come about through the development of new or sustained forms of agency. It would, in addition, serve to show which frames and actors contributed to the changing fortunes of democratisation in both cases, which went from experiencing minimal and gradual democratisation to increasing authoritarianism.

This study finds that, in both cases, three different mechanisms were present, in the form of polarisation, securitisation and fifth column framing; all of which contributed to processes of mutual othering which, in turn, contributed to democratic backsliding. In this context, polarisation is taken to refer to the process whereby divisions emerge within society, which compels actors to take sides along these divides. The fifth column frame, which, as will be explored, tends to occur once polarisation has taken place, involves one section of society viewing others as advancing the interests of foreign outsiders. The deployment of fifth column frames can be used to legitimise certain actions against groups deemed to be "fifth

columns", which, in turn, may result in reactions from these groups. One of the possible responses to fifth column and populist framing, on the part of either the incumbent or the opposition, is securitisation, which involves the use of speech to, in effect, frame something or someone as an existential threat to a given audience (Buzan and Waever, 2009, p.257). The success or failure of securitisation often hinges not only on the relative strength of the securitising agent but also their ability to convince a given audience of the extent to which there is a threat to the object that they claim needs to be defended, i.e., "the referent object" (Buzan and Wæver, 2009; Buzan, Waever and Wilde, 1997). As will be shown to be the case, in the case studies of this thesis, the audiences of securitisation can either be international or domestic. Consequently, how the three mechanisms successively trigger each other in a way that leads to democratic backsliding in these two cases will be presented.

Moreover, the process which leads to democratic backsliding would appear to be linear, with one mechanism leading to the other. However, this thesis finds that the frames used throughout this process were cyclical, given how they often based on frames that actors affiliated with the opposition, or the incumbent had previously drawn upon in the course of earlier contentious periods of political history within the two domestic societies. As will be demonstrated in the thesis, frames, drawn on historical experiences, form the basis of the forms of collective agency of both the incumbent and the opposition, which trigger the three mechanisms identified in this thesis. The thesis thereby finds that, in both cases, the sustained interaction between the incumbent and the opposition contributed to rising authoritarianism.

3. Plan of the Thesis

Chapter One of this thesis reviews the literatures of political process theory, contentious politics and argues that the concept of political opportunities can be used to make sense of the interaction between the opposition and the incumbent in the context of cases of democratic backsliding. Accordingly, it begins by reviewing the literature on and examining the key concepts of this research: political regimes, government, and the political opposition. It then turns to the contentious politics framework and notes how the turn away from more structural towards more relational approaches within the contentious politics framework offers a means of approaching the interaction between the opposition and incumbent in the context of democratic backsliding. A more relational approach can also involve viewing how political opportunities emerge and are exploited by the opposition and the incumbent in the process of democratic backsliding. The chapter therefore ends by introducing a number of domestic political opportunities which will be considered in the thesis, including coalitions, elite splits, the use of organisational power, regularly scheduled events within the electoral cycle that can pose opportunities to the opposition or incumbent, repression by state authorities and how they can backfire by allowing the opposition to organise and, finally, protests and counter-protests, which can be organised by the opposition or incumbent.

Next, *Chapter Two* reviews the literature on contentious politics and International Relations and demonstrates the usefulness of taking an international approach to the studying processes of contention, including under democratic backsliding. In this chapter, how the international context has been understood thus far in work studying the international context of contentious politics and how it can be employed in a relational study of contentious politics is explored. The international context of democratic backsliding and how it can potentially include

regional and international state and non-state actors is also discussed in the chapter. In this regard, the concept of ‘international order’ is discussed as a key concept which explains how the international and regional dynamics can influence domestic political change. It suggests that international order, at the present, is best understood as being subject to a form of ‘complex multilateralism’, which sees it as involving complex relations of multiple state and non-state actors. Viewing international order as involving these actors, in turn, enables it to be seen as an environment to which the concepts of political opportunity can be applied. Accordingly, the international context also includes a number of political opportunities, which the incumbent or the opposition can exploit, and which can have the effect of either promoting or leading to a decay of democracy. These international political opportunities include opposition externalisation, which refers to how political actors seek to gain supporters outside of the domestic sphere to advance their political goals, as well as the foreign policy of the incumbent, which can be used to achieve the goals of the incumbent. Thirdly, the chapter discusses punitive and rewarding measures that international actors can adopt towards the incumbent, to encourage or discourage certain policies.

Having explained how political opportunities can be studied in the domestic and international contexts in the previous two chapters, *Chapter Three* introduces the framing analysis and develops a novel approach to studying framing in the context of contentious politics, which I label ‘contentious framing’. The chapter begins by debating how to operationalise political opportunities, the linguistic turn in the social sciences and noting how transformative events play a crucial role in understanding the process of frame stagnation and transformation. After explaining how transformative events can be identified, through adopting a historical perspective that can enable those events to be identified and to be situated within cycles of contention, the chapter moves to presenting the contentious frame analysis approach. A

historical approach, crucially, can also allow the role of culture in the formation and articulation of frames to be considered, as historical traditions, embedded in culture, can be recycled in frames advanced in transformative events. This approach focuses on developing an understanding of how frames are contested at moments of transformation, viewing these moments as potentially resulting in a rethinking of the frames that underpin and enable collective agency.

Different stages in the analysis of contentious frame analysis, including definition, action, contestation and transformation or stagnation are also introduced in this chapter. *Definition*, in this context, refers to the development of a frame from various cultural sources, *action*, on the other hand, refers to how the resonance of frames among groups of individuals result in collective actions. However, studying collective action should also entail a focus on contestation, which occurs because of how collective action tends to occur in a context of other actions that are carried out with separate goals in mind. What occurs in these cases is contestation, not only of the actors who are advancing clashing goals, but also a contestation of their frames or different visions of making sense of reality with a view to changing it. Frame contestation, in turn, results either in changes to the original frames of actors, as a result of the interaction between those who deploy different frames, or the stagnation of frames, as frames fail to respond to contestation. As a historical perspective also serves to reveal, *frame stagnation or transformation*, then, are processes that subsequently shape future forms of frame definition. Such an approach to analysing contestation can, in turn, allow an understanding of the consequences of framing to be revealed.

Finally, the chapter introduces the two case studies that will be considered in the thesis, namely the cases of democratic backsliding in Turkey and Venezuela in the periods 1998 to

2018. Historically, both states were considered to be highly consolidated democracies within their respective regions, which underwent a process of democratic backsliding in the process of the rise of authoritarianism throughout the world. This has occurred in spite of the fact that both countries also have historically strong traditions of political opposition groups.

Therefore, this section argues that studying the dynamics of similarities and differences in the two cases can contribute to a general theoretical account and provide insights to the mechanisms of backsliding of democratic backsliding. The time frame of the case studies broadly overlaps with each other. This thesis studies the process of contention from Hugo Chávez coming to power in Venezuela in 1998, which was a process that initiated the consolidation of power by the incumbent and ends its analysis with the overriding of the National Assembly by the Constituent Assembly in 2017. Similarly, in the Turkish case, the economic crisis at the beginning of the millennium is taken as the start point, as it was a transformative event that empowered the AKP. The referendum on the presidential system in 2017, is taken as the endpoint of the analysis, as the outcome of the event marked a qualitative shift away from democracy. The chapter then ends by noting how both processes have been studied through using a range of primary and secondary sources to provide an analytical account of different transformative events in the backsliding processes. The frames used by the opposition and incumbent in both cases, on the other hand, have been studied through a range of primary sources used by actors, including speeches, statements, electoral communications and texts, as well as semi-structured interviews with some opposition actors.

Chapter Four, the first empirical chapter of the thesis, begins by focusing on the domestic contentious politics between the political opposition and the incumbent in Turkey, during the time frame 2000 to 2017. It provides an overview of the historical context, which shows how different political traditions both form the context of the democratic backsliding and, as

becomes clear later on, act, in part, as a source for the frames used by different actors throughout this process. After explaining the impact of the military interventions in shaping levels of democracy in Turkey in the first section, the second section begins by outlining how a transformative event, in the form of the economic crisis in Turkey, resulted in the emergence of the AKP. The economic crisis swiftly followed a political crisis in Turkey as the incumbent coalition was initially unable to deal with the crisis and was mired in corruption allegations. This resulted in the newly formed AKP being able to win elections on the basis of competence and grassroots campaigning, which involved a degree of populism, in the form of framing the party as advancing the democratic demands of the majority of the population through a degree of welfarism. The opposition, on the other hand, as is demonstrated extensively in Chapter Eight, came to be focused on defending the tutelary institutions of the state against the efforts of the AKP to reform it and framed the AKP as a threat to the values of the republic in the Republican Rallies of 2007. The early parliamentary elections of 2007, which the AKP called to challenge the gridlock it experienced after facing resistance towards the election of its presidential candidate, Abdullah Gül, allowed the AKP to further consolidate its political position, which later involved judicial and political reforms that empowered the AKP.

The next section of the chapter turns to the referendum on constitutional reform in 2010 and the new leadership of the opposition CHP, under Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, which resulted in a transformation within the party. In this stage the AKP sought to further consolidate its power and the opposition increasingly highlighted the potentially authoritarian moves of the AKP. This was also a period that involved the AKP overcoming several apparently existential threats, in the form of a closure case against the party in 2008 and several rumoured military interventions. Together with the Gezi protests of 2013, the AKP increasingly used police

repression against its opponents, which saw the Gezi protests as a moment in which to develop new ties and frames that facilitated cooperation amongst different elements of the opposition. These protests resulted in the AKP government first adopting a fifth column frame as will be further unpacked in *Chapter 8*, wherein they framed the protesters as acting on behalf of foreign governments. The CHP also moved towards adopting a frame that focused on defending democracy together with the HDP. Although the CHP and HDP took a principled stance towards challenging the coup attempt of 2016, the CHP has been reluctant to engage in more cooperation with the HDP, instead establishing the Millet ('Nation') alliance with parties to its right. To this day, the opposition has struggled to form a broad coalition against the AKP, due to how the CHP's statist reflexes have occasionally prevented cooperation with the HDP, even as the referendum on introducing a presidential system in 2017 further undermined democracy.

Next, *Chapter Five* focuses on the international opportunities that emerged in the course of the democratic backsliding process in Turkey throughout the different phases of the backsliding process. The first section of the chapter focuses on the historical legacy of Turkey's international relations and their continued impact on the incumbent and the political opposition. The section demonstrates how both the incumbent and the opposition in Turkey have related to the international in different ways with both actors seeking, at different points, to establish close relations with the West, while also viewing the West with suspicion, especially due to the historical legacy of the Treaty of Sèvres. The second section focuses on the international political opportunities that were present during the election of the AKP, underlining how the AKP aimed to demonstrate that it was seeking to establish close relations with the West.

The third section focuses on the foreign policy changes initiated by the AKP around 2007, which also coincided with the Arab Uprisings, where the AKP sought to encourage the formation of friendly administrations in the Middle East. However, the outbreak of civil war in Syria and the coup in Egypt resulted in the AKP framing the Gezi Park protests as a similar attack on democracy, which was understood as being driven by external forces. The condemnation of the AKP government by international actors which the AKP had previously sought to establish positive relations with, namely the EU, also resulted in suspicion towards Western international actors by the AKP. In light of the Gezi protests, the opposition also drew, to a limited extent, on the experiences of social movements throughout the world, which contributed to the increasing convergence of the CHP and the HDP's agendas. However, this convergence was short lived especially due to CHP's statist framing of foreign policy events, visibly in its votes on authorising military operations in Syria. This resulted in disagreement between the CHP and the HDP as the HDP condemned the AKP's military operations in Syria, which targeted Syrian Kurdish political and military organisations. In the context of the migrant crisis of 2015, new forms of punitive and rewarding measures were implemented by the EU, which weakened the opposition from developing opposition externalisation with the EU, as the EU had reached a deal with the government. Moreover, as *Chapter 8* will demonstrate further, the main political opposition could not form ties with international actors because of the statist frames that it sustained and how the government was framing the opposition as acting in coordination with hostile foreign actors.

Chapter Six turns to Venezuela and considers the domestic context of the contention between the incumbent and the political opposition in the context of democratic backsliding. It begins by providing an account of the history of Venezuela, which reveals how it had become one of the most democratised states in its region, despite having an initially turbulent history of

government by several dictatorships. However, as the first section demonstrates, a series of economic and political crises resulted in the collapse of the existing two-party system in Venezuela and the rise to power of Chávez as an outsider. The second section shows how Chávez's electoral victory was initially not recognised by the previous political establishment of Venezuela. This resulted in Chávez convening a Constituent Assembly to introduce constitutional reforms that would alter the system which had served to exclude Chávez's social movement and the masses from participation in politics. However, as the third section demonstrates, following several electoral defeats in 2004 and 2005, as well as the failure of the coup attempt of 2002, the opposition altered their strategy of non-recognition. At this point, the incumbent formed the PSUV, which allowed Chávez's supporters, i.e., the *Chavistas*, to organise more effectively for elections and to exploit political opportunities. This also prompted the opposition to establish the MUD to contest the PSUV and its ability to appeal to the Chavista base. The fourth section turns to the period following the death of Chávez and the emergence of a new wave of street demonstrations, in the form of the *la Salida* protests. These protests, which occurred in the aftermath of the MUD candidate, Capriles, narrowly losing the presidential elections against Nicolas Maduro, resulted in further repression by the incumbent. The protests served both to result in minor elite splits, due to the objections to the increasingly oppressive measures being used by the regime and diversion from Chávez's socialism for the 21st century project. However, the repression after *la Salida* also resulted in splits amongst the opposition, who disagreed on whether to engage in institutional politics in an environment in which political participation increasingly appeared to be limited with the regime's institutions. The chapter ends by noting how the incumbent used increasing repression after the opposition's victory in the National Assembly elections in 2015, which culminated with the convening of the Constituent Assembly in 2017,

under extraordinary circumstances and without prior authorisation, which resulted in the bypassing of the power of the National Assembly.

Chapter Seven, in turn, focuses on the international dimension of the contention between the incumbent and the political opposition in Venezuela, in the context of democratic backsliding, charting the international political opportunities that were exploited by the agents. The first section provides the international context to the development of international political opportunities. It notes how Venezuela, though subject to the influence of the United States, as a result of the Monroe Doctrine, was able to develop a more autonomous foreign policy owing to how its oil reserves allowed it to be economically more self-sufficient. However, Venezuela had a tradition of anti-colonial and anti-imperial activism, in both the revolutionary process that resulted in the founding of the country and in the process of the struggles of several of its strongmen leaders, i.e., caudillos, at the international stage. This section demonstrates how Chavismo initially appealed to elements of the caudillo tradition, while also emphasising opposition to the US and the Washington Consensus, but was more conciliatory, seeking inspiration from the New Democrats and the Third Way in the United States and Britain, respectively. The second section focuses on the populist foreign policy of Chávez in the period following the coup attempt and unsuccessful recall referendum, noting how, at this time, Chávez was contesting the US and its allies. However, the chapter demonstrates how the disagreements between the opposition and the incumbent resulted in political gridlock within Venezuela, which was only resolved after mediation by a number of international actors, including the Carter Center. Throughout this time, the foreign policy of the incumbent was geared towards establishing networks of international support amongst state and non-state actors to counteract possible challenges from other hostile international actors. A shift would also come to occur following 2009, when INGOs, for the first time,

began to voice concerns that the regime in Venezuela was taking on an authoritarian character. This period also resulted in the weakening of the government due to how the economic crisis of 2008 meant that the government's redistributive policies could not be carried out as effectively as before. The final section of the chapter focuses on the period after 2013-2014, which begins with the La Salida protests. Throughout this period, the incumbent, increasingly isolated internationally, sought to construct or further strengthen alternative alliances to Venezuela's traditional alliances to challenge the opposition it faced from international actors. Simultaneously, Venezuela's political opposition also sought to create more international ties in a strategy of opposition externalisation. At this moment, there were some attempts to engage in dialogue on the part of the opposition and the incumbent. However, the Trump administration's support towards sections of the opposition who eschewed dialogue with the incumbent, arguably intensified the gridlock in Venezuela instead of constructively intervening against democratic backsliding.

Chapter Eight turns to providing an analysis of the process of democratic backsliding in Turkey and the use of frames within the context of democratic backsliding, explaining the mechanisms that were involved in this process. The first section of the chapter focuses on the historical traditions that were present in the context of Turkey. This section serves to demonstrate, in the course of the democratic backsliding process, many of the frames used by the opposition and the incumbent underwent transformation. The second section explains how the AKP used frames that presented it as a movement that was challenging elitism through a frame that emphasised its identity as democratic. On the other hand, the opposition came to adopt an elitist frame that presented the rise of the AKP as a threat to the values of the republic, especially secularism. Ultimately, the AKP relied on its organisational power to challenge obstacles to its rule, by framing the opposition as promoting an anti-democratic

form of statism, including to international actors, such as the European Union. In the second section, the chapter discusses how the AKP advanced further polarising frames by developing a populist frame to challenge the opposition, which were presented as closely aligned to the bureaucracy and the military. This period was marked with frame transformation with the new leadership of the CHP, as there was a shift away from an elitist frame, with the CHP emphasising democracy and freedoms to domestic and international audiences.

The third section focuses on the developments following the Gezi Park protests, which saw a path towards the consolidation of authoritarianism. The AKP, and more specifically then-Prime Minister Erdoğan used fifth column frames against the Gezi protestors, which was advancing the interests of foreign “lobbies”. This signified a shift from the AKP’s earlier frames, which had emphasised challenging what it viewed to be the anti-democratic practices of the bureaucracy, which were being supported by the opposition. Following the Gezi protests, the social movement surrounding Gezi resulted in the circulation of new frames that centred around the defence of democracy, which, in some cases, allowed opposition actors affiliated with the HDP and CHP to coordinate collective action. However, owing to the CHP’s statist background, the CHP continued to lend support to several of the AKP’s government’s military operations in Syria. As the following section demonstrates, following the actions of the Gülenist movement and the coup attempt of 2016, however, the AKP increasingly began to frame the opposition not only through a fifth column frame, but also through a securitisation frame, meaning that the AKP deployed several frames that presented the opposition as an existential threat to itself or the nation. The securitisation frame was deployed extensively in the 2015 elections in the context of the AKP forming a coalition with the far right MHP. Yet, the CHP also contributed to the securitisation frames, which point to

existential security threats, that resonated with those of the AKP, when it agreed with the AKP's framing of the Syrian Kurdish movement as a threat for Turkey.

Chapter Nine applies the contentious framing analysis to the democratic backsliding process in Venezuela, explaining whether and how frame transformation and stagnation occurred in this context. It begins by highlighting the legacy of Venezuelan history and how it has had an impact on the use of frames by both the opposition and the incumbent in the recent process of democratic backsliding. In the next section, the chapter finds that the opposition's approach of nonrecognition backfired, as it was counter-framed as an elitist and pro-coup by the incumbent. The next section demonstrates how, during the context of the rise of Chavismo, how the incumbent and the opposition relate to international actors underwent change. Previously, the incumbent had relied on the support of global civil society, but, following criticisms of its authoritarianism, it had become more suspicious of it and increasingly began to contribute to the emergence of an alternative world order to challenge US hegemony. Following the 2013 elections, which Maduro won with a narrow margin, frame stagnation occurred, as Maduro merely repeated his claim to be the successor of the Chávez, whereas the opposition highlighted the repression that they were facing. Splits occurred within the opposition concerning how to respond to rising authoritarianism, with some advocating a policy of nonrecognition whereas other sought to engage with institutional politics. However, many members of the opposition engaged in a securitisation of the regime at this time, which resulted in the incumbent engaging in its own securitisation in response. In the context, following the convention of the Constituent Assembly in 2017, both the opposition and the incumbent have become more entrenched in their approaches, leading to sustained contention.

Chapter Ten concludes the thesis by summarising the argument of the dissertation and outlining how the study contributes to the literature and paves the way for further research. It restates how both cases demonstrate how the political opposition has come to play a role in sustaining contention, through triggering three different mechanisms that contribute to othering, which ultimately benefited the incumbent in both cases. It notes, in the first section, how the cases involved firstly a mechanism of polarisation, which involved the reuse of historical frames in a way that resulted in the division of groups within society. Once polarisation was underway, the second mechanism could be triggered through the use of fifth column frames. However, the thesis notes how there was a difference in the democratic backsliding process in both cases at this point, since, in the Venezuelan case, the political opposition securitised the incumbent first, whereas, in Turkey, the incumbent securitised parts of the opposition. How this variance may be attributable to the differences in the development of the state in Turkey and in Venezuela is discussed.

The next two sections demonstrate the broader contribution of the thesis. Firstly, the third section highlights how the thesis has contributed to the literature by focusing on a relational approach to understanding how frames emerge, with actors drawing upon historical experiences, and become political opportunities, which challenges the structuralist approaches that have marked the development of political opportunities. Secondly, how the thesis has questioned the boomerang theory, suggesting that international support can often backfire, is demonstrated, as well as pointing to how authoritarian international actors may also prevent the opposition's agenda from being advanced. Thirdly, the role of populism in shaping the foreign policies of the governments undergoing democratic backsliding as a research agenda is discussed. Lastly, the fourth section examines the relevance of these findings for other similar cases and research agendas emerging from the thesis. Firstly, the

thesis shows that studies of the alliances that are built by authoritarian incumbents and the implications of these for the future of international order can be studied. It also points to the importance of noting differences in the historical trajectories of states in different historical and geographical contexts, which can account for differing actions by the political opposition and the incumbent in the context of democratic backsliding. Although the section notes that further studies could focus on the role of the media in the process of democratic backsliding, it is important to note how, in both cases, the media lost its position as an autonomous force in society, once the process of democratic backsliding was underway.

CHAPTER 1: Theorising Political Change from the Political Process Theory to Contentious Politics

Introduction

This chapter makes a case for adopting the contentious politics framework to explore the dynamics of political change in processes of democratic backsliding. The first section reviews the comparative politics literature that has come up with regime types and discusses the dynamics of contention under non-democratic regimes. This section introduces the two main concepts of this research: *political regimes* and *the political opposition*. It principally assesses the role of the political opposition in non-democracies and critiques the assumptions of the opposition's role in providing democratisation present in the literature on comparative politics. The second section of the chapter unpacks the historical development of political process theory and the introduction of contentious politics to study political change. This section primarily unpacks political opportunities, mobilising structures, and frames, three concepts that have dominated social movements research since the 1980s. It proposes that a dynamic analysis of agency should consider how and the extent to which political opportunities can be located in the context or can be produced by the movement (Alimi, 2007). The following section makes a case for categorising political opportunities that can be produced by the movement by investigating the dynamics of frames, organisational power, elite alignments, regular and non-regular events, and the availability of coalition partners.

1. Regimes, the Political Opposition and Contestation in Non-Democracies

"Authoritarian regimes are not all alike. Rather, they vary according to their level of institutionalisation, which, in turn, is shaped by and shapes the social forces that they include and exclude."

(Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 380)

Defining how the nature and the strength of a regime shape the political context has been an essential task for social sciences. In the broader literature in comparative politics, the study of political regimes is closely interlinked with the study of the opposition, and the relationship between the regime and the opposition. A political regime broadly refers to the type of governance which shapes the political arena of contestation; what scholars of comparative politics call “the playing field¹⁰” (Levitsky and Way, 2006, p.380) in the domestic political environment of individual states. Political regimes include relations which “consist of government” and “populations falling under their claimed jurisdictions” (Tilly, 2003, p, 38). Apart from rules, regimes possess “cultural or social norms” that shape relations between agents (Anderson, 2013, p.44). Therefore, a regime possesses the sum of the rules and institutions that shape political life. Different political regimes, such as a democratic or authoritarian regime, will empower and disempower different agents. The political opposition, on the other hand, can be understood as whichever entity is in a relationship of competition with the incumbent regime (Albrecht, 2005). Hence, the political opposition includes an array of opposition actors, including political parties, NGOs and social movements that aim to oppose the incumbent. Studying the political opposition can help us

¹⁰ Openness of the playing field refers to the existence of open institutions like having "open court systems" (Goldstone, 2004, p. 332) that could facilitate opposition goals.

understand the nature of the opportunities present in a political regime. This can, in turn, reveal the nature of the regime in question, since regimes can be categorised on the basis of the opportunities they provide to the opposition (Dahl, 1971).

The existing literature has distinguished diverse regime types in several different ways. Regimes have been studied with a focus on their concentration of power (Kandil, 2016; Mann, 1986), their distinct institutional features (Linz and Stepan, 1996) and the functions of their institutions (Lust- Okar, 2005). Beetham (1994, pp.28 – 29) and Linz and Stepan (1996, p.38), respectively provide general definitions of democratic and authoritarian regimes, which can be used to understand the position of a regime along a spectrum of democracy and authoritarianism. Firstly, Beetham (1994, pp.28 – 29) argues that democracies are founded on “popular control and political equality”, which implicates the inclusion of broad segments of society through “elections” and “the continuous accountability of the government” and allocates a crucial role to “civil society”. It can be argued that a strong democracy is one where the opposition expresses itself non-violently, making use of democratic institutions to voice their concerns. Therefore, the literature sees the political opposition as essential for consolidated democracies, as democratic systems rely on institutionalised oppositions to function effectively (McFaul, 2002). In contrast, authoritarian regimes are marked by obstacles to political equality due to “limited political pluralism” (Linz and Stepan, 1996, p.38). Linz and Stepan (1996, p.38) also stress how “political mobilization” within authoritarian regimes tends to be directed by “a leader or occasionally a small group”. Although Linz and Stepan (1996, p.38) argue that the leadership and small groups that are part of these regimes only mobilise “at some points in their development”, Przeworski (1988, p.60) defines authoritarian regimes as possessing a “power apparatus capable of overturning

the outcomes of the institutional process.” Przeworski’s (1988, p.60) definition, therefore, points to how, when and why authoritarian regimes may seek to mobilise supporters.

Hybrid regimes though do not fit into either of these two categories due to the presence of some, albeit sub-optimal democratic institutions, which would prevent them from being categorised as mere non-democracies. The concept of hybrid regimes has emerged in the context of attempts to develop classifications of different regime types to explain their dynamics of contestation, meaning how the opposition can scrutinise or challenge the regime (Diamond, 2002; Brownlee, 2007; Schedler, 2001). Understanding the specificities of different hybrid regimes and the nature and extent to which they can be considered authoritarian or democratic requires using an additional set of criteria that can be adopted from the contentious politics framework. Hybrid regimes refer to a new regime classification that emerged in the literature after the two-dimensional focus of the transitology literature on authoritarian and democratising regimes failed to conceptualise the specificities of regimes that failed to democratise (Diamond, 2002; Ekman, 2009). As they are understood here, hybrid regimes are an umbrella category that includes democracies that are not fully closed. As hybrid regimes differ from democracies and non-democracies (Levitsky and Way, 2010), studying regime dynamics with contentious politics can demonstrate the openness of political institutions, the extent and nature of repression and the relative capacities of the regime and the opposition. Identifying the specific characteristics of a given hybrid regime can then be used to understand the nature of the context in which the incumbent and the opposition operate.

The incumbents in hybrid regimes have a wide repertoire of actions that allow them to act either in a democratic or authoritarian manner, depending on the circumstances they find themselves in, which, in turn, influences the political opportunities available to the

opposition. More specifically, to understand the contingencies that result in rising authoritarianism, it is important to recognise that the political institutions of democracy operate differently in contexts where they are present, but which are undergoing processes of rising authoritarianism (Albrecht, 2005; Cavatorta, 2009). This means that different opportunities are available to agents in these different contexts based on their institutional and broader political characteristics (Hinnebusch, 2006). Studying the different political institutions that emerge in these contexts can enable the political opportunities to be understood and hence different forms of agency that are possible in these contexts. Especially in hybrid regimes, opposition institutions, meaning those institutions that the opposition can access and use to exert its agency, are important for the legitimacy of the democratic political order (Jung and Shapiro, 1995, p. 272). These opposition institutions can take the form of competitive party politics but also social movements and other actors with organisational capabilities. However, to resist challenges from the opposition, Levitsky and Loxton (2013) point to how competitive authoritarian regimes may deploy a series of different options, ranging from repression to populism¹¹ (Kendall-Taylor and Frantz, 2016). Hinnebusch (2006), in his study of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, has also outlined the need to be mindful of the differing nature and extent of institutions that result in authoritarianism. An incumbent in a hybrid regime, therefore, has among the more democratic options available to them, like the ability to maintain an electoral system or to partially allow social movements and other forms of dissent, to ensure a degree of legitimacy for the regime. However, the incumbent in hybrid regimes can also utilise authoritarian measures, including repression and populism, when necessary.

¹¹ Populism's role in democratic backsliding is increasingly being studied in the literatures of International Relations and comparative politics (Castaldo, 2018; Söderbaum, Spandler, and Pacciardi, 2021; Waldner and Lust, 2018).

While the literature has mostly studied electoral authoritarian and broadly competitive authoritarian regime dynamics, the centrality of populism in many cases of hybrid regimes is increasingly being studied (Kendall-Taylor and Frantz, 2016; Weyland, 2018). Populism here is taken to be a style of politics that asserts that politics needs to respond to the interests of a group identified as the ‘true’ people, who, in turn, need to be represented against those of a narrow and unrepresentative group (Moffitt, 2015). Populism, therefore, entails bringing about the social and political polarisation of society into two opposed camps, based on the construction of what one camp argues the “true” people within society and others who are excluded from being part of this idea of the “people” (Mudde, 2005). Alongside Hinnebusch’s (2006) and Kendall-Taylor and Frantz’s (2016) discussed works, which focus on the role of populism in authoritarianism, other studies have also sought to demonstrate the populism of authoritarian movements (Weyland, 2018). The forms of populist authoritarianism highlighted in these studies shape the interactions between the political opposition and the incumbent in hybrid regimes. Populism emerges as a distinctive characteristic for these regimes because the use of a populist rhetorical style can influence the nature and extent to which the regime strives to include or exclude other groups in political processes. Although predominantly left- and right-wing versions of populism have been developed by scholars, populism, of both sorts, involves the shaping of a polarised arena of the opposition. This is because all forms of populism involve the critique of a group of political elites and support and advocate the relative empowerment of the masses who are excluded or weakened by these elites, even though different forms of populism advocate different theories of the elites and, indeed, the ‘people’ (Mudde, 2005; Moffitt, 2016). Most forms of populism also involve empowering an opposing set of elites to incumbent elites, which means that most forms of populism attach great significance to the figure of the leader (Moffitt, 2016; Weyland, 2018). This leads to populism invariably containing characteristics

of authoritarianism (Weyland, 2018). However, while the accounts of the process of democratic backsliding have explored the role of populism as an incumbent strategy, there has been little focus on the interaction between an increasingly populist incumbent and the opposition, in the process of democratic backsliding.

2. Contentious Politics: From Structural to Relational Analyses

The literature on social movements is ideal in explaining contentious processes in contexts of democratic backsliding by demonstrating how changing political opportunities and constraints create incentives for the opposition and the incumbent (Kitschelt, 1986; McAdam, 1982; Tarrow, 2011, p. 6). Studied primarily as part of political process theory, political opportunity and mobilising structures have emerged as one of the key concepts that have explained the emergence of movements (McAdam, 1982) and contentious politics (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001). Political opportunities refer to "the conflict and alliance structures" which provide "resources" to agents (Tarrow, 2011, p.52) to facilitate a course of action (McAdam, 1982, p. 40). By reviewing the literature McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996, p.10) list:

- the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system
- the stability of that broad set of elite alignments
- the presence of elite allies
- the state's capacity and propensity for repression

As McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996, p.13) highlight, political opportunities are not simply the "reflection of changes occurring elsewhere" but are shaped by "the interaction of the movement with its environment." Moreover, as the movement has the "capacity" to reshape the political context, there is a need to link organisational dynamics of the movement and its frames (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996, p.13).

Alongside political opportunities, mobilising structures, which refer to “the informal networks and connective structures” (Tarrow, 2011, p.265), are also seen as playing an important role in the emergence of social movements. As McCarthy (1996, p.141) highlights, the concept includes the “agreed upon ways” within social movements that includes their respective “organisational form” and repertoires. However, the social movements literature tends to focus more on social movements rather than other forms of opposition agency. Yet, political parties are also crucial actors because they have the potential to challenge the regime and organise and potentially provide the means for coordinating and empowering all who seek political change (McAdam and Tarrow, 2010). Political parties have a distinct role in democratic societies in harnessing a range of social actors, processing their different demands, and projecting an "ideological message" to grasp the demands of different interest groups (Crabtree, 2010, p.359). Moreover, the party system that is present in a given regime has an impact on the political coalitions that are considered by different actors and hence also shapes the political opportunities available to actors (Kriesi, 1989). Therefore, the party system, as well as individual political parties within it, can be said to be opportunities, since they facilitate the mobilisation of social movements and other actors in electoral politics and other forms of contention. However, political parties can also create and/or obstruct opportunities for actors. This means that, in the interests of revealing the broader significance of political parties in the context of the interaction between the regime and the incumbent, they are best understood as forming part of the political opportunities. Crucially, viewing political parties or movements as merely mobilising structures fails to reveal how they have the potential to allow certain groups in society to bring about political change in the regime in which they are situated in. This focus on bringing about broader change, in addition, allows political parties to be viewed more relationally. This is because political opportunities extend beyond individual political parties and come about through them interacting with the range of

structures and agents present in the political sphere. For the purposes of studying the role of the interaction between the opposition and the incumbent in democratic backsliding, it is important to recognise the role of different agents in mobilising groups in society to bring about change. However, it is also crucial to understand how they play a role in constructing or closing political opportunities.

Nevertheless, the concept of political opportunity has been understood in a wide variety of different ways in the literature, which means that a study of political opportunity must begin by outlining which definition of political opportunity is adopted in the study. As Goodwin and Jasper (1999) underline, there is no consensus in political process theory on a clear definition that can be used to produce a list of opportunities. Aside from the need to address the aforementioned problem of defining political opportunities, earlier forms of political process theory have also been criticised for possessing what has been identified as a “structural bias” (Goodwin and Jasper 1999). Critics of political process theory stressed that the theory did not consider the role of individual agency in developing ideas that could facilitate collective action, instead relying on the concept of “cognitive liberation” (McAdam, 1982) which does not grasp the role of agency¹². The social movement literature responded to what has been termed the “structural bias” (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999) in multiple ways. For instance, the concept of “discursive opportunities” has been introduced to demonstrate how ideas and communication can facilitate mobilisation (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004; McCammon, 2013). Although the idea of discourse raises the question of how we are to understand discourses embedded in specific contexts, without imposing our own

¹² In political process theory, the concept of “cognitive liberation” has been understood as facilitating the emergence of movement with the formation of shared understandings within a group (McAdam, 1982). This view has been criticised based on how the “incentives and expectations” that play a role in leading to the formation of ideas “involve interpretation” (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999, p. 33).

preconceived notions¹³ (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999, p. 33), a solution to this problem is offered by an analysis of the context in which ideas are articulated by agents (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004, p. 1483). Meyer and Minkoff (2004, p.1483) note that not only is the definition of a political opportunity conditional on its context, and the meaning of terms such as “moderation” and “compromise” can also only be understood with the context¹⁴.

Therefore, any study of contentious political periods must be attentive to differences in the specific contexts in which agents are situated and from which they derive the meanings they attach to phenomena (Meyer, 2004, p. 136). In addition, a contextual approach to political opportunity must also explain how these contexts provide specific opportunities or constraints to different actors (Meyer, 2004, p.126).

Given the central role of case studies in developing an understanding of political opportunities, the question remains of as to how political opportunities can be identified within these cases, to contribute to understanding contentious periods. After the 1990s concept of political opportunity has been studied in many different ways, which raises the question of how best to operationalise this concept. In explaining how “movements [themselves] can be considered opportunities”, Gamson and Meyer (1996, p.276) have also presented potentially alternative conceptualisations to the bifurcation of political opportunities into more stable and volatile opportunities. These opportunities can, according to Gamson and Meyer (1996, p. 278), be grouped into different categories based on whether they are more or less rooted or complex than others. Similarly, Goldstone and Tilly (2001, p.180), by referring to how political opportunities increase through external or internal

¹³There is a need to consider deeply the role of ideas due to the importance of interpretation in allowing actors to recognise and exploit political opportunities. Furthermore, the opposition can create what refers to ideational opportunities, as Kurzman (1996, p. 164) argues, in the case of the Iranian Revolution, that the opposition was able to successfully challenge the regime with the perception of increased opportunities.

¹⁴ Similarly, what can be named the same opportunity might provoke different processes in different contexts (Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996).

factors that “weaken the state” or “increase the resources and confidence of popular groups seeking change”, incorporated a more interpretative understanding. This is because whether a phenomenon results in the weakening of the state or the increase in confidence amongst groups can be said to be understood through interpreting its meaning for political actors. Meyer (2004), in efforts, tried to separate opportunities into groups as dynamic opportunities versus more static ones, or long term and short-term opportunities, to bring more dynamism to the concept¹⁵. The approach of Meyer (2004) and his colleagues, which focuses on whether opportunities are fixed or fluid, and Goldstone and Tilly’s (2001) understanding of political opportunities, as discernible through an interpretivist lens, can be combined. Doing so will firstly help provide a robust understanding of the basis of political opportunities, understood as discernible through the interpretations of actors and manifesting in either more fixed or fleeting forms to agents in the process of democratic backsliding. These conceptual tools allow us to understand how political opportunities emerge and will, therefore, play a role in identifying the political opportunities that occurred in the course of the process of democratic backsliding.

Considering the role of political opportunities in a context of democratic backsliding involves studying political opportunities in a dynamic context, in which there is a shift from a more to a less democratic political regime. This involves recognising that different actors, engaged in contentious political activity with and/or against each other, come to shape the opportunities and constraints that they face in the context of different regimes. Most studies of political opportunities have, however, focused on democracies, with a few exceptions (Osa, 2003; Osa

¹⁵ By looking at the case of Eastern European transitions, Oberrschal (1996, pp.94-95) underlines, even though the “structural setting” of non-democracies may seem closed, short term events and mobilisations can further open up opportunities for the opposition to challenge the legitimacy of the state. Similarly, by highlighting its suddenness, Tarrow (1996, p. 278) also refers to “proximate opportunity factors” that are less systemic.

and Corduneanu-Huci, 2003), meaning that more studies revealing the dynamics of contention under non-democracies are needed. In contexts of non-democracies, the interaction between the political opposition and the incumbent can determine the fate of social change. While in authoritarian regimes, political opportunities are assumed to be limited because of the restrictions on the public sphere (Osa, 2003, p.79), informal networks in authoritarian regimes can evolve in time to become movements. In non-democracies, “social networks” can “operate as a basis for movement recruitment” (Osa, 2003). Consequently, a rejection of a stable structure is suited to grasp the dynamics of what can be said more volatile regimes, like electoral authoritarian regimes, as the rules of the playing field can be altered by agents easily. The relational understanding of opportunity that has been embraced by new generation of social movements scholarship (Alimi, 2009, p.106; Alimi and Hirsch-Hoefler, 2012) can contribute to understanding the complex playing field. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly’s (2001) *Dynamics of Contention* notably advanced such an approach to understanding how contention involves interaction between the opposition and the incumbent. In addition, focusing on interactions also forms a key part of this relational approach, since it involves studying the processes that shape or alter relations between actors during contentious interactions (Tarrow, 2015, p.93). Rather than define a fixed regime that actors find themselves in at the onset of the study, answering the question of the role of the interaction between the opposition and incumbent in democratic backsliding requires being aware of how the regime itself is undergoing change.

The literature on contentious politics can present a comprehensive outlook, allowing us to see the consequences of opposition agency in bringing about changes to regimes (della Porta, 2014). As Goodwin and Jasper (1999) demonstrated, choices are an important part of the dynamics of contention, which traditional political process theory has ignored. This is

because, for example, in repressive settings, actors choose to continue to contest or desist from doing so due to various reasons that can range from their leadership to their ideologies. Therefore, there are a number of factors, such as timing and surprise (Kuran, 1991), which allow actors to exploit the opportunities they encounter, thereby allowing them to have an impact on the political process and shape political change. Consequently, the role of interaction, timing, and the subjective understanding of agents, in shaping the political process, must be incorporated in explanations of contention to get a holistic grasp of how the process of contention unfolds. The importance of the interaction of objective and subjective precursors to political change is captured by Tarrow's (2011, p.6) broad statement that contentious cycles are "triggered when changing political opportunities, and constraints create incentives to take action". The consequences, in turn, of political opportunities, can be understood as resulting in the opening of some and the closing of other political spaces and choices for different agents who can be considered part of the incumbent or the opposition. Revealing the different causes and consequences of political opportunities, through a study of political processes, can help construct mechanisms which explain the various sequences in the relations between actors and their environment that produce specific outcomes, such as backsliding. This speaks directly to Tarrow's (2011, p.28) concern that the predominant structuralist explanations in political process theory did not specify "the mechanisms that connected different elements", which can be revealed through studying the interactions highlighted in the *Dynamics of Contention*. This study will accordingly build on Tarrow's (2011, p.185) definition of mechanisms as "delimited class of changes that alter relations" that span "a variety of situations" to construct the mechanisms for explaining the role of the incumbent-political opposition interaction in democratic backsliding.

Studies that recognise the importance of ideas and communication in political process theory have incorporated framing into their theories which seek to understand how social movements emerge and shape political change (Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford, 1986). Integrating the concept of framing into studies of contentious politics provides a useful means of understanding how ideas can be used to bring about collective action in contentious political processes (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996). Framing, as developed by Goffman (1974), has been increasingly used in social movement studies (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996; Benford and Snow, 2000). Specifically, framing in social movement studies has been widely defined as the collective processes of “interpretation, attribution and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action” (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996, p.2). Accordingly, framing can be a means by which political opportunities to facilitate mobilisation are created, though, for instance, making individual actors aware of such opportunities (Gamson and Meyer, 1996). This is because the forms of agency that actors can engage in through framing allow them to comprehend their political environment and mobilise others with the goal of changing it (Benford and Snow, 2000). Framing, which can demonstrate how ideas and actions are interwoven, encompasses those involved in contentious politics selecting and communicating parts of reality to others, as they make political claims and pursue their political goals (Kovras and Loizides, 2011, p.524). Therefore, framing ought to be understood firstly as a form of agency, on the part of the framer. However, frames also need to be seen as part of the structure of society, since frames draw upon the legacy of earlier frames and ideas, such as those present in ideologies (Gillan, 2008) and serve to shape the dominant ideas within society. Owing to how framing is crucial to understanding agency, studying framing is essential to understanding how the agency of the incumbent and the opposition plays a role in

shaping political opportunities and how can frames can be seen as opportunities, consequently enabling collective action.

3. Political Opportunities for the Incumbent and the Political Opposition During Democratic Backsliding

This section of the chapter investigates political opportunities for the political opposition and the incumbent during democratic backsliding by bringing together concepts from contentious and comparative politics. The first concept which can be used to approach political opportunities is organisational power (Levitsky and Way, 2010), which can potentially be applied to understanding the political opportunities faced by both the incumbent and the opposition. Organisational power, in the sense used here, can derive both from established institutions, such as those associated with the state, as well as political organisations more generally conceived, including political parties. Utilising the concept of organisational power can demonstrate how what has been termed mobilising structures can be understood as political opportunities. As authors working in the fields of social movements and comparative politics both agree, the relations between different groups amongst the elite, specifically whether they are fractious or united, can also provide political opportunities to the incumbent or the opposition. Thirdly, especially in the context of democratic backsliding, regularly scheduled events, such as elections, can accord opportunities to both the incumbent and the political opposition, as is recognised in the comparative politics literature (Blaydes, 2010; Gandhi, and Lust-Okar, 2009). Fourthly, repression by state authorities and the backlash that often accompanies such repression, as suggested by social movement studies, can also be considered as giving rise to opportunities (Hess and Martin, 2006). Fifthly, protests, and the counter-protests that tend to follow them, have also been recognised as providing

opportunities to both the incumbent and opposition (Bengi, 2021). Having introduced these different sources of political opportunities for the incumbent and the opposition, this section sets the stage for a study of the actual historical process of democratic backsliding, which will be undertaken subsequently. Such a historical and comparative study can demonstrate which of these opportunities were exploited by which of the two groups of actors considered, i.e., the incumbent and the political opposition, and with what effect on the broader process of democratic backsliding. This, in turn, will allow the question of the role of the opposition and the incumbent in the process of democratic backsliding to be answered in a way that contributes to the aforementioned discussions in comparative politics and social movements studies.

Firstly, organisational power, which Levitsky and Way (2010, p.71) associate with “cohesion and coercive power” held by the incumbent, plays an important role in shaping political opportunities. Organisational power can further strengthen the incumbent by providing resource distribution like ethnic favouritism in divided societies or patronage, which shapes how the incumbent mobilises followers and maintains authoritarian control (Pepinsky, 2014). However, although Levitsky and Way (2010, pp.71 – 72) associate organisational power with the incumbent, it can be argued that the opposition can also come to wield organisational power. For instance, the opposition may come to possess organisational power through their own networks and organisations, such as political parties and civil society organisations¹⁶. In addition, the opposition may, in some contexts, have access to degrees of state power, which they can also use to their advantage to generate and exploit political opportunities. As

¹⁶ It is important to note that a party possessing organisational power alone does not guarantee successful mobilization. This may be due to multiple reasons, for example, a political party may be considered troublesome for a section of society due to the context of social polarisation. This can take the form of lacking the “memory of performance”, which Mutalib (2000, pp.314-318) recognised as being necessary to challenge authoritarianism.

scholars working in comparative politics acknowledge, institutions such as political parties may contribute to regime stability, since, in authoritarian regimes, the incumbent elites can use the governing political party to maintain ties with the masses (Svolik, 2012). This, in turn, can allow authoritarian leaders to use political parties to maintain their power by ensuring that the regime maintains some links and ability to influence the masses (Svolik, 2012, p.13). Political parties also serve as tools for mobilisation, including for the incumbent in authoritarian regimes (Blaydes, 2010), and as a means of organising sections of society to challenge others linked with the opposition. In the case of the incumbents, organisational power may also extend to incorporate what Mann (2012, p.11) terms “political power”, meaning the control over the internal functions of the state. This political power can be expressed through the military and security services (Kandil, 2016; Svolik, 2012), along with other institutions of the state, such as the judiciary (Özbudun, 2015), over which the elites in an authoritarian state may have control. However, in some cases, the opposition may also accrue considerable organisational power, through developing extensive “catnets”, meaning networks made up of specific categories of people (Tilly, 1978, p.63), such as those affiliated with specific professions (Tarrow, 2011, p.230). Therefore, an emphasis on organisational power of the incumbent or of the political opposition can demonstrate one of the key political opportunities in the context of democratic backsliding.

Secondly, the comparative politics and social movements literatures have both studied elite alignments, such as elite splits and the cohesion of elites, as important influences on the political process of democratisation or democratic backsliding. Within the so-called ‘transitology’ literature especially, elite splits (or defections) have been identified as crucial in presenting political opportunities to opposition actors engaged in democratisation (Levitsky and Way, 2010). Accordingly, the stability of elite alignments has been seen as a

crucial factor influencing the possibility of regime change in the social movements literature (Tarrow, 2011). Moreover, a range of scholars in comparative politics (e.g., Gandhi and Przeworski, 2007; Magaloni, 2008) have argued that the loss of unity amongst a group of elite scholars results in opening up the possibility for the opposition of challenging the regime, who may align themselves with disaffected elites or exploit the new divisions amongst the elites. Particularly, if the incumbent has made use of “strategic elite incorporation” by taking on board “high-status individuals” that are not a part of its “non-core constituency” (Ocaklı, 2015, p.391) to expand its appeal, the opposition can be more likely to recruit those actors. However, in several cases of democratic backsliding, such as Turkey, the personalisation of power can serve to prevent “internal strife” amongst the governing authoritarian elites (Çınar, 2018a, p.138). Given how this position of power of the leader serves to establish a “disciplining” mechanism that challenges dissent within the ruling party (Çınar, 2018a, p.138), this may appear to make the incumbent less vulnerable. However, arguably, it also results in vulnerability in the long term, as effective authoritarian rule comes to be dependent on the uniting force of a single leader, meaning that the death or departure of the leader imperils the non-democratic regime. Tarrow (2011, p.160) also argues that elite splits, together with the emergence of new allies for movements and a reduction in state repression, can result in the emergence of new opportunities. Elite splits, therefore, are another phenomenon identified as providing political opportunities, especially to the opposition¹⁷. Nevertheless, a closer historical study of their role in democratic backsliding can help determine the extent to which they may play a role in the backsliding process.

¹⁷ It is important to note that Albrecht (2005, p.390) points out that if the opposition in a country is divided, it can provide opportunities “for the regime to use one opposition camp, at least as a part-time ally, to check another” (Albrecht, 2005, p.390).

Thirdly, scholars of contentious politics distinguished “regularly scheduled events” (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001, p.5) from contentious politics. However, as subsequent contributions have highlighted (e.g., McAdam and Tarrow, 2010), these events are crucial for understanding how the opposition interacts with the incumbent and vice versa. In the context of cases of democratic backsliding, elections are highly significant regularly scheduled events, made up of rules which shape official contestation routes (McAdam and Tarrow, 2010), which, in turn, influence the possible strategies of the political opposition¹⁸. The dynamics of elections become complex as nondemocracies, like electoral authoritarian regimes, may have elections in conditions of curtailed press freedom, where misinformation can be easily spread, and in which the opposition’s ability to campaign has been limited¹⁹ (Schedler, 1999). From the point of view of the incumbent, elections can be used as an institution to justify the political system and maintain in power (Gandhi, and Lust-Okar, 2009; Lust-Okar, 2005; Magaloni, 2008). In addition, elections can be used by authoritarian incumbents to generate popular support for undermining democratic institutions through centralising power and increase repressive capacity (Lust-Okar, 2005; Svoboda, 2012). Similarly, sustaining limited participation of the political opposition can be a legitimising mechanism of a government and can function for measures like co-optation (Bill and Springborg, 1990). In this sense, elections in non-democracies are characterised by their unlevel electoral playing fields, constructed to give the incumbent a clear advantage and reduce the degree of competition (Greene, 2007; Levitsky and Way, 2010). However, even though unfair elections are unjust, they provide political opportunities to opposition agents as they play a central role in claim making and entail mobilisation that includes appealing to the

¹⁸ Especially in hybrid regimes, electoral dynamics can demonstrate how political competition deteriorates, and opposition groups can mobilise. Such electoral dynamics can also include violence and other pressures directed towards the opposition, owing to how they occur in a “divided structure of contestation” (Lust-Okar, 2005, p.1).

¹⁹ For a further review on the dynamics of incumbent strategies to promote unfair elections, see Schedler (1999, 2007).

electorate and dialogue within different groups (Lust-Okar, 2005). Several authors have therefore acknowledged opposition coordination to be a possible strategy for decreasing incumbent advantages and possibly achieving political change by elections (Jiménez, 2021). Accordingly, elections can act as a “mechanism to bring about the end of authoritarianism” (Lust-Okar, 2005, p.24). Moreover, elections often stand out as one of the main regular characteristics of hybrid regimes (Ekman, 2009) which arguably closely tied to contentious politics. The question of the role of regularly occurring events in contributing to or preventing democratic backsliding, however, has yet to be considered.

Fourthly, forms of non-regular events like civil resistance or protests, which “contentious politics” was originally understood as encapsulating, have constituted movements from below for democratization and have been considered to be existential threats for authoritarian regimes. Movements or events like protests, civil disobedience and strikes can take the form of anti-regime campaigns that can serve to unite various opposition groups (Almeida, 2010, p. 26). However, authoritarian regimes can also stage their own counter-protests in response to the challenge they face from protests (Bengi, 2021). This raises the question of whether opportunities can be generated for the incumbent or the opposition through protests. In the contentious political literature protests are traditionally seen as claim making events which “disrupt, or attempt to disrupt, the activities of elites, institutions or third parties” (della Porta & Tarrow, 1986, p. 609). They have been referred to in the early social movements literature as part of the repertoire of actions used by those who are usually considered out of the playing field (Lipsky, 1968) or institutional politics. As they are a means of opening up opportunities for movements, protests and other political events that do not occur within the usual routine of politics, become intimidating for regimes (della Porta, 2016). This is because if they become sufficiently substantial, they can transform structures through “relational,

emotional and cognitive mechanisms” (della Porta, 2016, p.3). Protests in transition processes can lead to political change by “altering the power relations” among agents, since they may compel the incumbent to respond to the opposition, thereby resulting in possibly innovative processes that alter existing relationships between the incumbent and opposition (Giugni, 1999, p.xxiii). Protests can therefore alter the political system “on structural and cultural levels” (Giugni, 1999, p.xxiii) and become transformative events. However, as protests can become existential threats to regimes, they can contribute to an increase in violence (della Porta and Tarrow, 1986, Tarrow, 2012), which could either increase opposition cooperation and contestation or retreat. Therefore, while the literature is broadly in agreement that protests can transform the political system, how they do so during processes of democratic backsliding can be further examined within the case dynamics.

Furthermore, the willingness and capacity of the incumbent to engage in repression has been one of the main influences on the political opportunities present to both the incumbent and the opposition. Democratic backsliding is often identified on the basis of increasing repression in a given polity (Bermeo, 2016), but repression may also play a role in the broader process that results in democratic backsliding, through being a part of or influencing the actions of the opposition or the incumbent. Repression can refer to forms of harassment, detention, categories of bans, and political violence that often target the opposition²⁰ (Davenport, 2007) in non-democratic regimes. Although the presence of repression can pose tremendous challenges to an opposition movement, it may bolster the movement as in the case of repression of protests rather than its diminution. Moreover, repression may have contrasting consequences depending on each case as it can lead to increasing protests or

²⁰ The incumbent may use multiple institutions of the state for repression, including police, military (Kandil, 2016) but also the judiciary.

opposition fractalization (Alimi and Hirsch-Hoefler, 2012, p.334). However, as the social movements studies literature has demonstrated, disruptive tactics, employed against collective action (Gamson and Meyer, 1996, p. 286) have been recognised as increasing the chances of backfire against the incumbent²¹. If the agents maintain networks, international actors can get involved in the contention, either of their own accord or after being invited to do so by the opposition, as will be discussed in chapter 2. Therefore, repression or the threat of repression may encourage mobilisation (VanDyke and McCammon, 2010), and can result in new frames emerging amongst the opposition movement which can lead to a range of different modes of action (Alimi, 2007).

Lastly, availability of coalition partners both domestically and internationally, along with the capacity of agents to form coalitions have been recognised as central components of political opportunities in the literature of contentious politics (Goldstone, 2011; Van Dyke and McCammon, 2010; Tarrow, 2011) and comparative politics (Cavatorta, 2009). Coalitions are the “permanent or temporal alliances between political actors” (Flores and Filho, 2020, p.677). These groups can merge resources like symbols, followers, and capital to pursue their desired agenda (Tarrow, 2011). The success of the French, Russian and Chinese Revolutions were understood as having been made possible as a result of coalitions that included the peasantry, which came to play a pivotal role in mobilisations leading up to the revolutions, also due to their involvements in conflicts before the revolutions (Skocpol, 1979). More recent cases of democratisation in Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War included the formation of broad organisations like Civic Forums in Czechoslovakia (Olson, 1993) and Solidarność in Poland (Stokes, 1993) that built broad support for regime transformation. In

²¹ Backfire has been defined as a “public reaction of outrage to an event that is publicised and perceived as unjust” (Hess and Martin, 2006, p. 250).

all of these cases, different opposition groups united to bring about political change. Building on the aforementioned opportunities, coalitions can be vital in allowing the opposition and incumbent to organise elections, protests and counter-protests. Coalitions can also be entered into by the incumbent to compensate for elite splits by entering into new partnerships, if other groups within society are available. Coalitions, established by the incumbent or by opposition groups, can also allow either opposition or incumbent actors to co-opt actual or potential rivals, thereby leading to their empowerment. While the literature has underlined the significant role of coalitions in contributing to regime change, the broader role of coalitions in the process of democratic backsliding can be examined further to understand the opportunities available to both the incumbent and the political opposition in this process.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the key concepts of this research and reviewed the contentious politics framework as it has been applied in the domestic context, thereby demonstrating how this thesis will contribute to the literature on the role of the opposition in democratic backsliding. Specifically, it demonstrated how political process theory provided a number of conceptual tools with which the political opportunities of the incumbent and the opposition can be understood in the context of democratic backsliding within a polity. The first section of the chapter defined the key concepts used in the literature, such as the incumbent, political opposition and political regimes and also reviewed and demonstrated the relevance of the literature that focuses on hybrid regimes for considering processes of democratic backsliding. The second section considered the contentious politics framework and discussed the importance of political opportunities, mobilising structures, the context of contention and framing to study the incumbent–opposition interaction. After critically assessing the literature

on political opportunities, it ended by firstly noting the importance of having a set of conceptual tools to identify and assess political opportunities unfolding within a given political process. Secondly, it emphasised the importance of understanding the ever-changing contexts in which the incumbent–opposition interaction occurs in influencing what can be understood as a political opportunity. Thirdly, it highlighted the significance of framing for making sense of how the political opposition and the incumbent interact with each other as a means of understanding specific contexts of democratic backsliding. The next section reviewed the relevant opportunities that are rooted in the literatures of contentious politics and comparative politics, which shape both opposition and the incumbent to perform or shape their agency. This section has reviewed the literatures of social movements studies, contentious politics, and comparative politics to identify multiple different types of opportunities that can be said to be present in the context of democratic backsliding. These different types of opportunities, which can be exploited by both the incumbent and the opposition, include the level of the agent’s organisational strength, the presence of elite splits, regularly scheduled events, non-regular events, the regime’s repressive capacity and the availability of coalition partners.

CHAPTER 2: Contentious Politics at the International Level

Introduction

The previous chapter has explored the domestic sources of the dynamics of contention. This chapter argues that the examination of the incumbent–political opposition dynamic necessitates focusing on what has typically been referred to as the international realm. The international realm has been central in studying historical cases of contentious politics and grew in prominence with the interrelated processes of globalisation and externalisation (Meyer 2003; Tarrow, 2005, 2010). The literature on social movements, comparative politics and International Relations studied the consequences of the agency of international actors (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Tarrow, 2005; Weber, 1994) and the role of ideas (Petrova, 2003) to explore how the international shapes domestic contention. The literature overwhelmingly investigated the ways in which global actors and states can promote human rights (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Jochnick, 1999; Sorensen, 2013) and strategies that provide a role to transnational actors promoting or enabling democratisation (Levitsky and Way, 2006; Wetzel, 2011). This chapter will build on the existing literature and advance several different ways in which the incumbent and the opposition can utilise connections between the international and the domestic contexts to further their goals. By building on the work that has been carried out in the literatures of International Relations, comparative politics and social movements, this chapter starts with presenting the concept of the international, along with international actors. The chapter then moves on to define the political opportunities that the opposition and the incumbent encounter, which stem from the international. These include those stemming from the power relations in the international system, the influence of foreign policies of states, opposition externalisation and punitive and rewarding measures

implemented by international actors. While scholars have put forward various conceptualisations of an “international opportunity structure” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Meyer, 2003; Sikkink, 2005; Tarrow 2005), this chapter furthers this discussion by explaining how it is necessary to challenge the static conception of the international system that this conception of an international opportunity structure suggests. Instead, this chapter outlines how international and regional orders, which are the context of the international opportunity structure, are subject to change over time. Indeed, throughout the time period of the two cases, several transformative events resulted in shifts to the nature of the regional and international orders that the incumbents and oppositions in the two cases discussed found themselves to be a part of. Consequently, recognising how the broader international and regional context undergoes change is significant for understanding the contentious dynamics of democratic backsliding.

1. The International Context and International Actors

Studying the international realm and investigating how it encompasses the dynamic relations between states and non-state actors can provide a holistic understanding of the context in which contentious politics occurs. The international sphere, realm, or arena, consists of what has been termed material and normative elements (Wendt, 1999), and is where states share the stage with a multitude of other actors, including international organisations and non-governmental organisations (Tarrow, 2005). It therefore refers to the space in which any single sovereign state lacks authority and power and which is hence labelled a context of anarchy (Bull, 1977). In addition, the idea of an international realm is premised on the presence of multiple different states, which are understood as interacting with each other in relations that can be said to be ordered or just (Bull, 1977). Additionally, the international is

often distinguished from other concepts, such as the global or the transnational. The global, which is a term that is European in origin, refers to that which pertains to the entire globe and thus highlights geographic scope, rather than the interaction of different sovereign political units (Bartelson, 2018). The transnational, on the other hand, refers to how an actor can be understood to have ties to more than one sovereign political unit, such as a transnational social movement that has ties in two or more different states (Tarrow, 2005). The distinction between the international and the domestic stems from which actors have regular access to means of participating in the political process in a given context (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, 2001). This distinction involves delineating the sovereignty of states and, by extension, the arena where incumbents can exercise repression, in theory²², without external interference. However, the international and the domestic are not isolated, as domestic politics shape the boundary and content of international politics of states (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, p. 4) and vice versa, meaning that contentious politics can span the domestic-international divide.

International Relations, comparative politics and social movements studies have advanced three groups of international actors that can promote change at the domestic level, through the global connections that tie them to each other. Firstly, states who hold coercive power are uniquely positioned to influence domestic and international spheres (Held, 1991; Tilly, 2007). States in the international system are recognised organisations that operate in defined territories and possess the “concentration of coercive means” above other actors in the domestic realm (Tilly, 2007, p.11). States also exist as a community at the international level and engage in dialogue and share interests with each other (Watson, 2009). Alongside states, secondly, international organisations are also significant actors, which differ in regional,

²² Although sovereignty is generally taken to imply a norm of non-interference in the affairs of other states, in practice, cases of humanitarian intervention demonstrate that there are limits on sovereignty. Accordingly, even defenders of sovereignty, such as Walzer (1980), concede that there are some cases, such as crimes against humanity, in which sovereignty can be and is violated by external actors.

international, or issue-based scope (Buzan and Schoenberg, 2018) and have been defined as mediating the anarchic nature of the international system by providing rules and regulations (Risse, 2002). Scholars working within the English School approach recognise that international organisations are part of the institutions that make up a part of international society, which refers to the rules that are present at the international level that enable it to be ordered to a certain extent (Bull, 1977; Buzan, 2004). Even though certain states are more able to influence the workings of international organisations, international organisations also have interests shaped by and independent of their members and possess distinct identities (Barnett and Adler, 1998 p.420). The third group at the international level are INGOs and committed individuals. This category refers to organisations formed of determined individuals with various degrees of autonomy from states and state organisations that deal with specific issue areas (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Tarrow, 2005). In cases of democratic backsliding, interactions between all of these different agents can occur, as how INGOs and international organisations may seek to defend democracy, along with the opposition, against a domestic incumbent who is undermining democracy.

Understanding how these different actors are interlinked with each other in the process of democratic backsliding can contribute to explaining the nature and extent of the influence of international actors on the incumbent-opposition interaction in the context of democratic backsliding. The relationalist perspective to approaching the study of International Relations point to how the interaction between these different actors at the international level can be understood (Jackson and Nexon, 1999). Jackson and Nexon (1999) specifically challenge the assumption that actors, such as states, are fixed in international relations, suggesting that they are constantly undergoing change on the basis of their interactions with others. This allows the state to be viewed as an aggregate of different parts, including the incumbent and the

opposition, each of which can be empowered or disempowered through the international ties it establishes or severs. In this context, INGOs can lead diffusion processes by connecting actors protesting the same agendas in different contexts (Bunce and Wolchik, 2007; Joachim and Schneiker, 2012, p. 376) and can play “a critical role” in insider-outsider coalitions (Brysk, 1993) by linking different parties and civil society actors²³. Often this occurs through a joint effort, for instance, some INGOs can focus on campaigning and advocacy, other INGOs can provide direct support to domestic opposition groups seeking to challenge authoritarianism (Eldman, 2001; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). International organisations can gather information, monitor, and encourage the maintenance of democratic norms, even though their activity may be limited or controlled by individual states²⁴. Yet, different incumbents’ intent on democratic backsliding may also cooperate with each other at the international level or adopt each other’s practices with the aim of reducing international pressure (Tansey, 2016). Consequently, a wide range of different international and domestic actors can establish relations that have an impact on domestic political change.

2. Conceptualising the International Context

As the international context alters, and smaller scale regional contexts within it, so do the political opportunities available to the incumbents and oppositions situated in different states. Therefore, to investigate international political opportunities, it is necessary to start with tracing the broad “changes in the international context”, including the “perception” of “political and economic conditions” (Meyer 2003, p. 20). Smith and Wiest, (2012, p.3)

²³ The scholarship has highly studied of NGOs international politics have been growing since the end of the Cold War as NGOs increasingly made use of the opportunities created by international institutions (Smith, Pagnucco and Chatfield, 1997, p.69).

²⁴ Nevertheless, in the interests of maintaining their international standing, sovereign states may also give permission international organisations to engage in such activities, such as election monitoring and supporting human rights, within their borders.

emphasize that the world system has transformed both agents and structures, and different historical contexts have led to different historical particularities. Buzan and Waever (2003), for instance, demonstrate how different regions have emerged within the international system, which have their own distinct conceptions of threats and security. Buzan and Waever's (2003) initial reflections on regions have initiated a broader engagement within the literature in international relations on uncovering different regional institutions (see Buzan and Schouenborg, 2018). These regional institutions may, in turn, come to shape different domestic political contexts. As the international system and its regional components are constantly evolving, in response to agency by leading states (e.g., Buzan and Schouenborg, 2018) or in response to external shocks to the system (e.g. Buzan and Lawson, 2015) new opportunities emerge for domestic actors who have ties to the international. Recognising that the international system is never stable and subject to change either through the agency of actors within it or in response to external shocks that trigger crises, such as industrialisation or economic changes, points to how agents may seek to maintain or challenge the status quo within an international system (Smith, Pagnucco and Chatfield, 1997, Smith and Wiest, 2012). Therefore, certain transformative events, which result in this status quo being disrupted, can also enable or disable international opportunities for agents who are situated in different locales. Such changes in the international and/or regional political context can have an impact on longstanding domestic political contentions, allowing either the incumbent or the opposition to exploit these political opportunities for their own gain.

The broader international system, or regional systems, which contain political opportunities, can be said to have different international or regional orders, which refer to the nature and extent of certain institutions within international and regional systems. As Wendt (1999) notes, together with the international actors discussed above, the ideas and institutions of the

international order compose the international system. These international orders can be maintained through the agency of hegemonic states, but the norms and institutions of the international order can also come to be influential in shaping the expectations and actions of international actors (Bull, 1977; Smith and Wiest, 2012, p.2). These orders therefore can be seen similar to the domestic playing field as it can mark the openness of the international institutions and availability of international partners for agents. The liberal international order, for instance, has, on the one hand, been understood as maintained by the agency of powerful Western states, such as the US and involves the promotion of a set of practices within the international system (Acharya, 2018; Parmar, 2018). Yet others have acknowledged that the international order has its own self-sustaining logic, grounded in “markets, relations and institutions” (Ikenberry, 2009, p. 78). Even though states in this order are taken to be some of the most powerful actors, their power is nonetheless influenced by these relations including their global economic ties (Smith, Pagnucco, Chatfield, 1997). Moreover, it has been suggested that the norms and institutions that underpin the order have a self-sustaining nature that allows them to become consolidated (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). This self-sustaining nature has been affiliated with the suggestion that the institutions of the international order allow it to be resilient and to evolve through periods of “crisis” and “renewal” (Ikenberry, 2009). However, regardless of the relative significance of actors or logics in maintaining international orders, relationalists stress how they are built on relations like power, legitimacy, respect, and recognition (Go and Lawson, 2017; Ringmar, 2014). Accordingly, it can be said that international order is volatile, as it is founded on relations, which demonstrates how changes in power relations may result in challengers to existing forms of international order emerging and hence changes to political opportunities available also at the domestic level.

In addition to being shaped by different power relations, international orders can also be understood as based on hegemony, meaning including both force and consent. Due to the absence of a world sovereign, shared international institutions and norms serve to facilitate international order (Bull, 1977), but different conceptions of international order can be promoted by different actors vying for hegemony in the international context (Clark, 2011). Therefore, a historical approach is useful to understand how the international system has been shaped over time through interactions between agents, such as the interaction between the “West” and the “rest” from the nineteenth century onwards (Buzan and Lawson, 2015) shapes the current order today. This is because contemporary international system continues to be shaped by the legacy of the rise of Western power, which came about through a series of transformative events commonly referred to as the onset of global or colonial modernity, including practices of European colonialism, improved communications technology, and the industrial revolution (Buzan and Lawson, 2015, p.2). What determines whether a hegemonic project of international order is successful is, firstly, the incentives and forms of coercion push actors towards embracing an international order (Ikenberry and Kupchan, 1990). Secondly, arguments regarding the legitimacy of an international order may also lead to a particular form of international order becoming consolidated (or more stable) as ideas supporting a particular hegemonic vision of international order become rooted (Ikenberry and Kupchan, 1990). Academic concerns with the waning of one order and the possible rise of others can also be placed into the broader political context in which they occur, with the literature on the collapse or contestation of what has been termed the “liberal international order” being produced by the proponents or challengers of this “international order” (Ikenberry, 2010; 2018; Mearsheimer, 2019). The existence of visions of multiple international orders and the dynamics of its contestation can also provide different sets of political opportunities to the opposition or the incumbent in different domestic contexts.

A number of different understandings of the contemporary international order have been advanced by the literature, which can be understood as demonstrating the presence of different forms of hegemony as well as tracing their origins to different transformative events. For many scholars, the end of the Cold War was a key transformative event, which resulted in a unipolar world order and/or the onset of a new form of liberal international order²⁵. Theorists focusing on the liberal international order have stressed how it involved the promotion of the free market economy, and, relatedly, globalisation (Ikenberry, 2010; Mearsheimer, 2019), along with the spread of liberal norms (Mearsheimer, 2019) and the broadening of liberal international institutions (Ikenberry, 2010, 2018). Other scholars have noted how the US consolidated its hegemonic position in the liberal international order as the end of the Cold War generated a unipolar moment in which the US was the sole global hegemon (Walt, 2008). Therefore, although theories of unipolarity were originally articulated from a more realist perspective, perspectives that focus on hegemony were also developed to understand the nature of the post-Cold War international order. The US, which has been the most powerful actor advocating the principles of the liberal international order, was perceived as a hegemon by scholars advancing the concept of the liberal international order (Ikenberry, 2009 p. 72), who have pointed to its role in promoting free markets and supporting global neoliberal policies (Ikenberry 2009, p.78). Others have characterised other transformative events, such as the 2008 economic crisis (Buzan and Lawson, 2015), the 11 September 2001 attacks (Tarrow, 2005) and the rise of the BRICS (Lieber, 2014) as having more of an impact on dominant forms of international order. As Gunitsky (2014) suggests, crises can generate “hegemonic shocks”, resulting in the emergence of new alignments and forms of hegemony based on different forms of coercion and consent. Smith and Wiest (2012) therefore, argue

²⁵ It is important to note that though those who promoted the norms of the "liberal international order" were more powerful in creating a hegemony, especially after the 1990s, alternative visions for organisation of the world have been put forward by states and non-state actors (Flockhart, 2016; Smith, Pagnucco, Chatfield, 1997).

that crises brought about geopolitical changes, which allowed changes in the form of international hegemony, which altered the international opportunities available to states and social movements.

One of the core interpretations of the contemporary international order is to suggest that it is fundamentally a continuation of the liberal international order, which Ikenberry (2010) identifies as first crystallising following the establishment of the League of Nations in the aftermath of the First World War. While Ikenberry (2010) underlines how the liberal international has passed through stages of renewal, a critical scholarship suggests that it is currently undergoing a crisis (Acharya, 2019; Mearsheimer, 2019). Many commentators, including Ikenberry (2018), have suggested that the current shaped by the contestation and decline of American hegemony has occurred with the receiving a backlash following events such as the Iraq War and as a result of the emergence of new rising powers. This would imply that certain changes to the nature of the international order may occur in response to the weakening of US power and shaping the international opportunities available for domestic agents. For instance, based on the understanding that liberalism in economics and politics mutually support each other, the US has, at times, promoted free-market economics and/or democracy together to advance the spread of liberal principles throughout the world, in processes such as those termed “democracy promotion” (Carrothers, 2002). It can be argued that the weakening of the US may therefore lead to the transformation of such forms of democracy promotion as part of the liberal international order. Therefore, if the current international order is understood to, indeed, be a liberal international order then the international political opportunities available to the incumbent and the opposition in different domestic contexts would be viewed as being those that we would associate with a liberal international order and the contestations that are a part of it.

Although those that argue that the current international order can be classified as a liberal international order are likely to point to one set of international opportunities, others have challenged this argument by either suggesting that a liberal international order never emerged or that it has now ended. It can also be argued that the fact that there is room for agents to contest the meaning and implications of the ideas that underpin the liberal international order in ways that advance their interests suggests that the liberal international order is not significant as a means of ordering international relations. Separately, several commentators have argued that the increasing economic and military powers of states like China within the international system means that the system gradually moved from unipolarity to multipolarity (Mearsheimer, 2019, p.22). The end of unipolarity has, according to realists such as Mearsheimer (2019, p.22) resulted in the end of the so-called liberal international order, which they view as nothing more than the norms promoted by the single superpower of the unipolar period following the Cold War, namely, the US. Moreover, others have pointed to trends of regionalisation throughout the world, which, in some cases, is seen as being caused by the waning power of the unipolar hegemon of the US and the rise of new middle or rising powers. Others, such as Acharya (2004, 2012), have similarly identified processes of the localisation of norms rather than adoption. This refers to the process of the diffusion of norms that were originally articulated by the leading states in the international system in ways that retain aspects of the original articulation of norms, while but “reconstituting” to make a norm “congruent” with local characteristics (Acharya, 2004). The rise of the BRICS, increasing regionalism and bilateralism, challenges to an international economic system based on free trade and challenges to human rights have been seen as significant challenges to the liberal international order by those who believed that it was once dominant (Lieber, 2014). Such perspectives that discount the explanatory value of the idea of liberal international order, would therefore suggest that the opportunities associated with the liberal order either never

materialised or are no longer present and would instead suggest the presence of a different set of political opportunities.

While there have been multiple readings of the international context after the Cold War, the concept of “complex multilateralism” (Smith, 2008, p.40) can be employed to provide an understanding of the international context that builds on the other understandings of international order discussed above. Firstly, complex multilateralism can build on the vision of the international context provided by theorists focusing on the liberal international order. The concept of the liberal international order or other proposed orders which build on the template provided by the liberal international order, involving the identification of the material and ideational sources of order, convincingly demonstrate the importance of hegemony. However, such conceptions of international order arguably focus too much on a specific set of values, such as liberalism, which they take to play a key role in organising the order. Even though those actors who are the architects of an international order may desire certain values to be reflected in the order they are constructing, in practice, these ideals may not be instantiated in the resulting order²⁶. Approaches focusing on the rise of new powers and of a multipolar order are better able to account for the impact of transformative events, such as the 2008 economic crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic and the backlash against the US after the post-9/11 invasions. However, such accounts do not take into account how the institutions of the liberal international order, such as multilateralism, may still be present in more complex forms. Complex multilateralism, views “preferences, and policy options as constructed in the course of interactions with other actors” (Smith, 2008, p.41) and can therefore demonstrate how the values underpinning international order are subject to change.

²⁶ Different institutions and norms associated with, for instance, the liberal international order, such as human rights, free markets and democracy promotion may also clash with each other in certain instances.

This view not only relates to the conception of hegemony as subject to change but also demonstrates how the ideational content of hegemony can also be constructed in response to the aforementioned transformative events. Therefore, complex multilateralism will be employed to define the international context in which international political opportunities emerge in the context of democratic backsliding in different domestic contexts of the two case studies.

3. Conceptualising International Opportunities

In this thesis, I group international opportunities by looking at agent's appeals to the international and the availability of international partners for agents to promote their agenda and the agency of these international actors, which can have an impact on the domestic dynamics of contention. Relatedly, I provide three categorisations for the consideration of agency at the international sphere, which I label the process of opposition externalisation; the incumbent's foreign policy; and punitive and rewarding strategies employed by international actors. Externalisation refers to the targeting of "external actors" for opposition agents to safeguard "their interest" through "support against an incumbent" (Tarrow, 2011, p.235). The role of transnational networks in contributing to the externalisation of domestic social movements demands has been increasingly studied as the primary process of how this type of opportunity occurs (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Secondly, punitive or rewarding strategies include the dynamics of the pressuring means of international actors via measures like economic sanctions or political aid. This category refers to how international agents can promote changes in the political context for a certain goal. Thirdly, the incumbent's foreign policy refers to the external policies and actions initiated by the incumbent governments that occur via the interaction of "multiple endogenous choices" (Hill, 2003, p. 254). The

incumbent's foreign policy can contribute to regime strength because of how ruling elites can use it to create opportunities that can provide survival mechanisms for the incumbent.

The externalisation of opposition, which refers to how opposition demands come to be taken up by external actors, meaning those beyond the borders of the domestic context in which the opposition-incumbent interaction occurs, has been identified as shaping the dynamics of contentious politics (Tarrow, 2005). Externalisation, in this context, defined by Tarrow (2005, p. 174) refers to “the vertical projection of domestic claims onto the international.” The presence of international institutions and norms that can facilitate the conveyance of issues from domestic contexts to the international context, via regional organisations, like the EU or OAS and INGOs. In addition, opposition externalisation can occur in many different ways, including through transnational coalition formation, as outlined by the boomerang model (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Most famously, the concept of the "boomerang effect" has been conceptualised as playing a crucial role in creating opportunities for advocacy groups when domestic means are blocked (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). With the boomerang pattern, domestic agents aim to unblock the closed political context by broadening their claims with the partnership of international agents (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Tarrow, 2005). The tactics that transnational advocacy networks can bring are information, symbols, securing leverage and accountability (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, p.16). Keck and Sikkink underline that these international actors cooperate on the basis of "shared values" and appeal to norms at the international level (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, pp. 199-200). The formation of networks and relationships, which focus on specific issues and are hence often termed "issue networks" in the literature, can initiate a mechanism of learning (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, pp. 183) as these bodies can diffuse new information and repertoires (Tarrow, 2005). Opposition externalisation therefore can provide opportunities for the opposition in the context of

contentious politics, meaning that it must be considered in any study of the nature and extent of the opposition-incumbent interaction in contributing to democratic backsliding.

Although many studies have highlighted opposition externalisation as allowing political change to occur through external actors lending their support to those advocating change, this may not always result in change and may, in fact, backfire. The outcome of backfire may especially be pronounced in cases where the political change advocated by a transnational network clashes with the norm of sovereignty that is being advocated by the incumbents of specific domestic contexts. This may result in backlash against transnational networks from various domestic incumbents, meaning that the original aim of the transnational network will not be met. There is, therefore, a need, within the literature, to consider how international actors can put pressure on actors who are not complying with the norms and goals being promoted by transnational actors. Turning to the literature on international organisations may prove to be a solution in this context. This is because international institutions can become arenas of contestation between actors advocating different norms and political objectives (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Actions by authoritarian states within the UN to ensure that the bodies of the UN, such as the Human Rights Council, are composed of representatives who are less likely to criticise them is another example of how international institutions are sites of such contestation. Moreover, opposition externalisation, which can lead to the establishment of ties of solidarity are fostered among different actors in different locales, can both open or even restrict political opportunities. Given these problems with the original theorisation of opposition externalisation, there is a need to consider how this effect can be reconceptualised through a study of the political opportunities it can provide to different actors. Therefore, the study of democratic backsliding and the role of the opposition and the

incumbent in this process not only requires engaging with the boomerang effect but may, in addition, provide means of refining its theorisation.

In addition to opposition externalisation and transnational activism, punitive and rewarding strategies employed by external actors towards governments, in attempts to enact political change, also provide a set of opportunities to both the incumbent and the opposition. To begin with, punitive strategies tend to employ the vulnerabilities of states and involve targeting them, or threatening to target them, in various ways to ensure that the targeted actor enacts a change in policy. These strategies can be employed with minor punitive measures, ranging from limited to broad sanctioning or even military intervention, the most extreme punitive strategy (Meernik, 2001). Owing to their inherent internal differences, as well as the nature and extent of their embeddedness in the international order (Linz, 1996), different regimes face different vulnerabilities in the context of the strategies employed by external actors. Wright and Escribà-Folch (2012) argue that authoritarian leaders are sensitive to the loss of external resources as these resources can fund their patronage efforts. Given how these patronage networks are essential for sustaining authoritarianism, these regimes are arguably more prone to be destabilised by sanctions that could alter patronage dynamics than leaders in other types of regimes. International organisations and states can engage in sanctions aimed to hurt or exclude states from the international system as a means of punishing their transgressions from international norms (Gordon, 2016). However, sanctions can backfire as they might lead to a unity against what can be labelled foreign intervention within the domestic arena (Alexseev and Hale, 2020) or cannot work as politicians are not the ones that are affected (Wright and Escribà-Folch, 2012). Moreover, previous administrations can place states in a position that rendered them vulnerable to punitive strategies, through for instance ratifying treaties that allow international bodies, such as tribunals, to be able to

enforce certain norms and prevent the states in question from transgressing them. Therefore, the literature recognises how punitive and rewarding strategies will have different effects in different contexts, but how such strategies operate in, and whether or not they contribute to shaping, the context of democratic backsliding remains unexplored. This thesis will hence contribute to the literature on punitive and rewarding strategies by revealing how they influence the political opportunities available during cases democratic backsliding.

Democracy promotion and democratic assistance are especially relevant to consider in democratic backsliding since the onset of democratic backsliding would be indicative of the failure or backfire of democracy promotion efforts. Democracy promotion is usually affiliated with western states that can use diplomacy, threats or even invasion (Levitsky and Way, 2010, p. 39) to provoke domestic change. While creating free and fair elections have been one of the most important determinants for international democracy promotion, other forms of democracy promotion and assistance can take a wide range of different forms, ranging from the formation of issue networks to the promotion of democratic norms and the employment of punitive and rewarding strategies to encourage democratisation (Elliott, 2017; Gafuri, 2021). The promotion process can be harmonised with several rewarding strategies that international actors can pursue, such as the provision of aid (Wright, 2009) or the conditional granting of certain goods²⁷, to ensure to push for democratisation. In the current literature, democracy promotion is often equated with the process of spreading liberal democracy throughout the world (Carothers, 2002; Clement, 2005; Elliott, 2017). Elliott (2017, p.12) defines the efforts as a process that involves the “state-based attempt to build and support the institutions of liberal democracy” in other polities. The norms of liberal

²⁷ Goods here can include both physical goods, such as monetary or other forms of aid, as well as desirable outcomes for the recipient, such as international recognition and solidarity.

democracy thereby became a part of the common repertoire for understanding democracy promotion which has, in turn, also shaped how certain NGOs and regional institutions understand and, in turn, promote democracy (Carothers, 2002). Consequently, democracy promotion and assistance programmes initiated by external actors can therefore provide political opportunities to the opposition or the incumbent in contexts of democratic backsliding and hence need to be studied to discern the international dimension of the dynamics of contention.

Similarly, political conditionality has been utilised by powerful states and organisation to pressure the incumbent for political change, with a specific goal like a membership at an international-regional organisation (Sorensen, 2013). In most cases these measures aim to create regime transformation and decrease human rights violations and undemocratic practices (Molenaers, Dellepiane and Faust, 2015). For example, by making membership conditional to democratic standards (Schimmelfennig and Seidelmeier, 2004) regional organisations like the EU and the OAS promote political behaviour with a focus on safeguarding political representation and human rights. Organisations that uphold the conditionality measures both give states responsibility and serve to ensure that their governments are accountable. The EU's success in pushing political conditionality in Central European countries after the context of the end of the Cold War have been affiliated to a "hard conditionality" that formed empowered civil society actors by providing funding and partnerships (Dimitrova and Pridham, 2004). However, as Pridham (2007) revealed, external conditionalities do not always run smoothly because their effectiveness is highly dependent on the domestic agency both from the opposition and the incumbent. Much of the conditionality literature is also shaped by the assumption that there are fixed actors at the domestic context which are socialised into accepting certain norms by international actors

that subsequently become fixed aspects of their identity. However, rather than adopting norms as part of their identities, actors, such as the opposition and incumbent, have forms of collective agency that are grounded in different frames that are available to them and which can undergo change, including through the pressures of conditionality.

Thirdly, the incumbent's foreign policy can also play a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of contention between the incumbent and the opposition, especially as a means of shielding the incumbent from the pressures of the boomerang and punitive measures. Foreign policy can be broadly defined as the "goals, purposes or objective" sought by political elites, meaning those who possess power in the domestic realm, beyond a country's national jurisdiction (Stern, 1995, p. 108). Foreign policy processes reflect the priorities of governing elites that stretch from security to prestige along with survival (Stern, 1995, p. 105). As domestic agents with a level of control over the state become more authoritarian, they may also turn to foreign policy to bolster their position, including seeking support and recognition from other authoritarian actors abroad (Tansey, 2016). This is because ruling elites can form economic and political partnerships with other states or agents to promote their interests. For instance, they can enter into treaties or alliances that empower the state, which can also impact on how the state serves to provide or limit political opportunities at the domestic level. Foreign policy can also be used to trigger processes such as war-making that function as a means of consolidating internal power through, for instance, repressing dissent in the context of mobilisation for war²⁸ (Tilly, 1993). Recent studies of populist foreign policy have also noted how foreign policy can be used to highlight the divisions between the people and its others, including domestic elites and, often times, foreign actors who are presented as

²⁸ It is important to note, the consequences of such action can backfire due to processes like the challenge of demobilising; once a war has concluded. It may also result in the extension of democracy to other sections of society, and war may have a democratising effect on society.

being aligned with these domestic elites (Kaliber and Kaliber, 2019, p.5). This also demonstrates how the domestic and the international are linked as foreign policy of the incumbent can therefore serve to reinforce the domestic forms of polarisation that are essential to populism. Consequently, foreign policy processes can contribute to state agents empowering themselves with partnerships and linkages and can also open or limit political opportunities to either the opposition or incumbent within a state, meaning that foreign policy decisions can contribute to democratic backsliding.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how there can be an international dimension to the incumbent-opposition contention that is the focus of this thesis, since the international forms a part of the broader context in which states and their citizens are embedded in. The first section began by outlining the literature on the international context and how it has been understood to intersect with domestic contentious politics, as part of a demonstration of the relevance of considering the international context in processes of democratic backsliding. The second section then builds on the idea of the international context and reviews several ways in which it has been understood in the literature. The chapter also argues that the conceptual framework of complex multilateralism, can be employed to understand the nature, extent and process of the emergence and development of international orders, ranging from the worldwide international order as well as smaller international orders present in specific regions. Subsequently, the third section, by building on the literature of comparative politics, social movements and international relations, has mapped out various possible international opportunities namely the multiple punitive or rewarding strategies from international actors, opposition externalisation and foreign policy. Having reviewed the literature on political opportunities in the international sphere, it is evident that these theorisations of international

political opportunities provide conceptual tools to study international political opportunities, including in the context of democratic backsliding. However, in addition, a study of a democratic backsliding process, in which both the opposition and the incumbent in a state either failed to or was able to exploit political opportunities would also serve to advance our understanding of how political opportunities emerge and are understood at the international level. Consequently, the two case studies of this thesis will contribute to exploring how the interaction between the domestic and the international can influence the processes of democratic backsliding.

CHAPTER 3: The Contentious Framing Model and Methodology

Introduction

The previous two chapters unpacked the relevance of the conceptual framework provided by contentious politics, especially that of political opportunities, to understand the international and domestic political context and its impact on the political opposition and the incumbent during contentious periods. This chapter presents the methodological contribution of this thesis by proposing a model to investigate the agency of actors during contentions periods. To insinuate this model, the first section operationalises political opportunities in the broader context of contention. Although the usage of the concept of political opportunities has been criticised due to its “structural bias” (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999), I view political opportunities as useful for understanding the outcomes of contentious politics, provided that they are understood in an interactive process-based manner. In the following section of the chapter, I discuss the “ideational turn” in social sciences and focus on frame and discourse analysis as the two dominant branches representing the ideational turn in social movement studies and International Relations. In the latter section, I argue that as frame analysis can demonstrate how agents view the world and mobilise for change (Benford and Snow, 2000), the bringing together the contentious politics framework with frame analysis can demonstrate the role of agency in contentious periods. Framing already offers a means of understanding how agents deploy different ideas about their political and international context, as well as themselves and other actors, to achieve their political goals (Benford and Snow, 2000). Naming the togetherness as contentious frame analysis, this method provides a systematic exposition of frame content during transformative events to track the relational interactions of agents in a given context. Changes that come through transformative events

should be thought through what Sewell (2005) has named “structure of the conjuncture”, meaning how structure unfolds in time by incorporating temporality. Tracing framing processes during these events can account for how structures themselves are changeable. By focusing on the processes of the context and framing of agents, the outcomes of contention can be discerned. After presenting this model, the chapter introduces the case selection of Venezuela and Turkey, data collection and research ethics.

1. An Interactive Approach to Understanding Political Opportunities

“Opportunity is always in interaction with current and repressive threats, and this interaction gives rise to varied dynamic patterns of protest and contention.” (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, 2001, p. 193)

By reviewing the literature, the previous chapters demonstrated how political opportunities are subjective, ever-changing, wide-ranging, and their availability is insufficient to provoke change as they have to be asserted by agents. Nevertheless, agents, which, in the case of this thesis consist of the incumbent or the political opposition, need to exploit political opportunities to be able to achieve their political goals. Therefore, a conceptualisation of political opportunities should be built on recognising the influences that aid groups in strengthening their base and creating room for exhibiting their agency. This is because influences that enable collective agency to unfold can demonstrate how political opportunities be meaningfully exploited. The different categories of political opportunities, discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 (*see table 1*), show how the concept of political opportunity can be used to understand the agency of the opposition and the incumbent. However, as has been noted, the concept of political opportunity is often seen as being a characteristic of the

structure of society in the social movements literature, as there is an assumption that opportunities appear as openings within a structure of politics that sets the limits of agency. Yet given how political opportunities can emerge through interaction between different actors and need to be recognised by individual actors, it is necessary to challenge the pairing of structuralism with political opportunities. Instead of viewing political opportunities as part of the structure they therefore need to be viewed as emerging, at least in part, through the interactions of different agents. This means that political opportunities differ in each context because of how they are essentially subjective, in the sense that they need to be recognised to be exploited, and because, if we accept that they are produced through the interactions of agents, then they are ever-changing. Accordingly, a theory of political opportunity needs to be developed that can accommodate for the agency of different agents for the making or exploitation of opportunities.

Table 1: Components of Political Opportunities

Domestic	International
• The degree of political access • Organisational power • Regular and non-regular events • Dynamics of elite alignments • Incumbent's capacity for repression • Availability of coalition partners	• The degree of political access • Punitive or rewarding strategies from international actors • Opposition externalisation • Foreign policy • Availability of coalition partners

However, even though political opportunities are recognised by individual subjects, they appear as entities that are distinct from individual subjects, which means that they are still structural in the sense of being something that is acted upon, rather than a part of, agency. Yet given how political opportunities are ever-changing they can be understood as part of a structure of a given society that is also ever-changing. Similarly, if the political opportunities stem from the international then they can be considered to be embedded in a similarly dynamic structure of the international. Sewell's (2005) idea of the "structure of the conjuncture", meaning how the structure has and continues to unfold in time can be usefully deployed to conceptualise how political opportunities are a part of ever-changing structures. This idea of structures as subject to change is also compatible with the idea that the impressions that actors have of the structure, which have an impact on the actions they choose to commit to, may also undergo change. As Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009) suggest, social science is but one of many different "social practices" that involves reflecting

on the meaning of structure, which can later result in the formation of impressions of the structure of society that guide individual action. However, in contrast to Giddens's (1984) concept of "structuration"²⁹, such an interactive perspective does not suggest that the structure is ultimately reducible to the actions of individual agents. Instead, such an approach enables one to borrow Wendt's (1992) formulation, to suggest that structure "is what" agents "make of it". In other words, although there is a material structure present in all social contexts, the exact nature of this structure is contested not just by different social scientists but also by actors engaged in social practices. This necessitates looking at how the political opportunities present within the ever-changing structure are exploited interactively by actors, in the context of their relations with each other.

The question remains, however, of which units are to be identified to be analysed in the course of answering the research question of how the interaction between the opposition and the incumbent plays a role in democratic backsliding. Here, the framework provided by relationalism offers a useful means of identifying the units to be studied. Relationalism³⁰, questions the assumption of stable essences within the social sciences, arguing that the phenomena studied by social scientists, such as the state (Jackson and Nexon, 1999), are shaped through interactions, rather than having a pre-given nature (Emirbayer, 1997). Emirbayer (1997) argues that relationalism also implies a focus on processes, since relations unfold and change in time, with each moment resulting in the transformation of the entity in question. For this reason, relationalism does not focus on variables, since variable-driven research is premised on keeping certain unstudied variables constant, which relationalists

²⁹ Giddens's structuration theory (1984) proposes that agency produces structures and vice versa. However, Giddens's concept of structuration ultimately places too much significance on the ability of individuals to shape structures through the sum of their actions. This leaves the potential limiting effect of structures on individual action unexplained.

³⁰ For relationalism see: Emirbayer (1997), Go (2018) and Jackson and Nexon (1999).

would view as constantly changing, as the context in which relations unfold itself undergoes variation. Rather than involving a study of variables or of entities, such as the incumbent and the opposition, relationalism focuses on events as the primary units of analysis, rather than the constituent elements, or "things" themselves, because "things"

"are not assumed as independent existences present anterior to any relation, but . . . gain their whole being . . . first in and with the relations which are predicated of them. Such 'things' are terms of relations, and as such can never be 'given' in isolation but only in ideal community with each other" (Cassirer 1953, p. 36, cf. Emirbayer, 1997, p.287).

Such an approach also reveals how different agents, at different points in time, engage in actions that contribute to constructing the structures in which they are embedded in, and which result in them contributing to political outcomes, including democratic backsliding.

1.1.Addressing the Ideational and Linguistic Turns in the Social Sciences: Towards Framing and Discourse Analysis

Within International Relations and social movements studies, many scholars have reacted against the excessive focus on structures in explaining outcomes, resulting in the emergence of post-positivist approaches within both disciplines (Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams, 2015). In International Relations, several scholars have challenged the focus of existing approaches on structure, especially considering the inability of liberal and realist approaches to predict the end of the Cold War (Hopf, 1998; Wendt, 1992, 1999). These scholars, termed constructivists, have argued, instead, that ideas form the basis of reality, meaning that changes in ideas result in changes to the structures that compose the international.

International Relations scholars questioned several of the key assumptions of the discipline, seeking to demonstrate how the state, which realists especially attach significance to, could, in fact, be reduced to a set of ideas and associated practices (Biersteker and Weber, 1996, p. 11). Constructivist scholars also challenged liberalism by demonstrating how practices that facilitated cooperation were not necessarily rationally motivated, as liberals suggested, with factors such as socially constructed identities and interests playing a role in motivating actors (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, pp. 889 - 891). From a more ontological and epistemological standpoint, constructivism in the social sciences more generally has challenged the positivist and scientific realist focus on revealing the causal mechanisms that explain phenomena in social reality (Hopf, 1998, p.197). Constructivists have hence critiqued the dominance of "static material assumptions" in International Relations by highlighting the need to focus on the aforementioned "social dimensions" (Fierke, 2021), which has given rise to a rich literature focusing on norms, ideas (Fierke, 2021) and language to understand the construction of identities³¹ (Aydın Düzgit, 2014). Constructivism came to emphasise that structure and interests are not fixed and gave the spotlight more to human agency, and challenged structuralist theories (Hopf, 1998, p. 177). However, constructivists have parted ways with each other when considering how to understand the social dimension of international relations. Some, such as those associated with the "Third Debate" in the literature on International Relations, have adopted more radical constructivist stances towards the construction of reality (e.g. Ashley and Walker, 1990), whereas others have argued that there is an element of material reality which, in fact, has an influence on shaping reality alongside ideas (Adler, 1997; Wendt, 1992). In addition, some constructivists have viewed ideas as more changeable (see Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998) whereas others have pointed to how ideas constitute norms that are "social

³¹ Recent studies in International Relations has expanded the scope of analysis beyond linguistic elements to visual dimensions (Lundborg and Williams, 2015, p.10).

facts” that can be measured using positivist methods (e.g., Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998).

Therefore, although constructivism has emerged as an alternative approach within International Relations, divisions have nonetheless occurred within the broader tradition of constructivism, with implications on how to conduct constructivist research.

Within the context of these questions over the differing ontological perspectives of constructivists, which, as in the case of their differing perspectives towards ideas, come to shape how they interpret elements of reality, new divisions amongst scholars emerged. On the one hand, some, such as Wendt (1992) and Adler (1997), conceived of constructivism as a “middle way” between a radical post-positivist suspicion of the idea of a foundation of reality and the positivist belief in the measurability of identity. Wendt (1992, 1999) argued that reality has a material core and that norms coexist with and influence material structures, as in his suggestion that anarchy is a characteristic of the system, but that states have an ability to influence its nature. Adler (1997), similarly, argued that those norms that were shared by multiple different actors come to have an intersubjective reality, as they shape the worldviews and approaches of those who believe in them. Post-structuralists, on the other hand, diverged from ‘middle way constructivists’ in arguing against the very idea of a foundation to social reality, arguing that social reality and the actors within it were ultimately constructed through language or speech (Hansen, 2006). This view, which had risen to prominence in the humanities and the social sciences as a part of the linguistic turn (Lindekilde, 2014), had, in fact, influenced several of the scholars involved in the “Third Debate”, but, following the emergence of ‘middle way constructivism’ came to be a distinct approach within International Relations. Goodwin and Jasper (1999, p.41) have adopted a similar approach that arguably follows a ‘middle-way’ between focusing on structural explanations based on material conditions alongside considering the role of agency in social

movements. Similarly, the turn to considering discourse within social movement studies can also be said to pursue a middle-way between focusing on structure and agency, wherein structure is understood as tied to the forms of discourse, meaning speech, that actors are exposed to (Snow, 2004; Steinberg, 1999). Such middle-way approaches within International Relations and social movements studies hence offer an approach to deploying framing within both disciplines, since framing involves forms of agency that involve individuals making use of structures, such as forms of discourse.

Owing to how post-structuralist's focus on discourse, a post-structuralist approach would hence appear to offer a means of studying how the opposition and the incumbent interact with each other by taking account of the non-material elements of this interaction. The post-structuralist insight that subjectivity and identity are formed in interaction with others, as a result of forms of speech that refer to one's self and others³² (Neumann and Welsh, 1991), would appear especially to be relevant for the question of this thesis regarding the role of the opposition-incumbent interaction in democratic backsliding. Post-structuralists in International Relations have indeed focused especially on the development of subjectivity and its content, in the form of identity (Hansen, 2006). Post-structuralist approaches focus on how discourses of self and other, meaning how one views oneself and others, including how one views others as having different "degrees of otherness" in relation to themselves, are used when constructing their own identities (Hansen, 2006, p.33). Post-structuralist approaches have criticised constructivist approaches by demonstrating how the foundations of mainstream constructivist theories are themselves reducible to discourses, meaning that they are forms of productive power (Epstein, 2012). In particular, post-structuralist critiques of constructivist theories of norm socialisation have suggested that these theories 'infantilise'

³² For a review on how *the other* has been studied in International Relations see Hansen (2006, pp.33-39).

the recipients of norms (Epstein, 2012). This is because constructivists imply that those who adopt norms are akin to children in terms of not having been properly socialised and needing to receive norms through their interactions with others, meaning socialisation (Epstein, 2012). However, post-structuralists in International Relations have also been subjected to critiques (Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams, 2014) that have also been applied to post-structuralists in social movements studies (Veltmeyer, 1997). Firstly, despite its apparent ability to explain the formation of identities, such as those adopted by the opposition and the incumbent, as occurring relationally through the discourses of the opposition and the incumbent, post-structuralism struggles to explain change (Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams, 2014; Nøhr, 2021). This is because discourses are presented as existing independently of and shaping the structure of society, which raises the question of whether post-structuralists are wrongly assuming that the context in which discourses are deployed are of no import for understanding how they shape society. In the context of social movement studies, the idea of the “discursive opportunity structure” directly speaks to this concern, given how it views discourses as part of the broader opportunity structure (McCammon, 2013). However, this raises the question of whether discourse is being used in this context merely to provide the basis for a structural determinist explanation, in which the structure in question is viewed as producing a specific social outcome.

On the other hand, post-structuralist approaches struggle to account for changes in the forms of agency, due to how they follow a circular logic. This is because agency is viewed as being shaped, at least in part, by discourses themselves, which raises the question of how the agency that brings about a new discourse emerges. Perhaps not coincidentally, accounts that deploy post-structuralist methods in International Relations have focused on apparently stable discourses that have been present for many centuries, as in the accounts of the construction of

a European self through reference to various Eastern or non-Western others, including the Ottomans and Russians (Neumann and Welsh, 1991). An alternative approach is offered by Laclau and Mouffe (2014, 55%), who argue that social phenomena and meanings are never fixed or concrete but that instead there is a constant struggle within societies to define the meaning of ambiguous terms, which they refer to as “floating signifiers”. This approach suggests that the demands of social movements involve attempts to advance interpretations of floating signifiers. In turn, those movements that are most able to advance interpretations that gain acceptance or maintain constructive ambiguity in a way that is inclusive of other interpretations are successful. This is because of how they can either fix the meaning of terms (Clohesy, 2000, p. 83) or because of how they are able to gather support around their agenda by intentionally maintaining the vagueness of terms and hence becoming more inclusive of differences (Griggs and Howarth, 2000, p. 56). However, such an approach can benefit from a consideration of what it is that makes these different approaches towards floating signifiers successful in different contexts.

The framing approach, developed by communications scholars but adopted by many social movements scholars after Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford’s (1986) seminal article, offers a richer account of how actors deploy meanings strategically, including by studying frames in specific historical contexts (Lindekilde, 2014). Discourse and frame analysis can both provide useful methodological tools for understanding the interaction between the incumbent and the opposition, as they share “ontological and epistemological assumptions”, including their joint focus on the importance of language in the construction of social reality (Lindekilde, 2014, pp.196-197). However, the two approaches serve to answer different questions. While, both frame and discourse analysis focus on processes of “meaning construction” and “active meaning-making processes” (Lindekilde, 2014, p 203; Snow, 2004)

frame analysis can provide a more comprehensive approach to explaining the dynamics of mobilisation and action (Lindekilde, 2014, p. 203). Framing analysis can explain how frames mobilise actors and are deployed in contexts in which other actors are also engaged in framing, meaning that it is more attuned to the interactions between actors. Moreover, framing is also more attuned to the practical dimension of discourse, which has been recognised by some scholars in International Relations as of importance (Neumann, 2002; Bueger and Gadinger, 2018). This is because, similarly to the use of speech acts by those engaged in the presentation of security threats to others, i.e., securitisation (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, 1998, p. 23), frames, as considered by social movements scholars, are used by actors engaged in strategic action to mobilise resources and define aims. As will be demonstrated below, frame analysis can be utilised to unpack the mechanism involved in contentious processes.

1.2. Where and When to Look? Tracing Transformative Events

"Transformative events change attitudes of complacency or possibly even agreement with nondemocratic systems or practices into widespread attitudes of dissatisfaction and rejection among the oppressed."

(Shultziner, 2018, p.54)

A framing approach can, as has been demonstrated, be deployed to understand how the opposition and the incumbent frame each other and interact with each other in an attempt to pursue their own goals and mobilise their resources, including their supporters. Studying the impact of and motivation behind the use of frames does not involve focusing on language as a static form of structure. Instead, it requires considering how framing practices are deployed

by an actor in response to the environment they are in, which is shaped, in part, by the frames of others. Given this relational conception of framing, it is necessary to study how the context in which frames occur undergoes change through transformative events. Tracing the dynamics of contention, by tracing transformative events in the path of political change, can provide an account of the contentious process of democratic backsliding which details how different agents were able to bring about change in the political context. In order to do so, the framework of contentious politics, in combination with the concept of "transformative events" (McAdam and Sewell, 2001; Sewell, 2005; Shultziner, 2018), can be utilised to form a model to explain political change. Transformative events refer to "dramatic symbolic events that substantially change the degree and sense of injustice and motivation for resistance in the population" (Shultziner, 2018, p.53). McAdam and Sewell (2001, p. 102) underline that transformative events are distinguishable by their "disruptiveness" of "routines", and they can occur in cycles of protests and repression (Della Porta, 2014). Transformative events also mark the points at which relations emerge, thereby bringing about new forms of structure and agency and result in changes to the context (Della Porta, 2014, p.295). As transformative events can contribute to the mobilisation of different actors, employing the concepts from contentious politics, changing political opportunities and framing efforts can demonstrate how agents exhibit their agency during transformative events. Therefore, what I term contentious frame analysis can be carried out by tracing how agents, during transformative events, come to use different frames, which, in turn, allow them to engage in novel forms of political action that influence the context of contention. In turn, the patterns, and connections between each of these moments, of transformation, new or sustained forms of framing and agency, as well as changes to how the context of contention is understood, can be made visible by adopting a historical perspective to contentious politics.

In this study, after identifying the key transformative events that have shaped developments in both cases, I trace the process of framing efforts undertaken by the agents of contention in interaction with each other. These instances are also be considered within the broader context of ideological and political traditions within the two countries. This is because understanding these traditions are crucial to gain a comprehensive view of the contexts of the statements considered, which in turn is necessary to convey the full scope of their meaning. These meanings, in turn, are vital to understanding how such statements are understood within the domestic and international contexts of their different audiences, which opposition actors communicate to. This, in turn, enables the construction of a model theorising the role of the interaction, between the incumbent and the opposition in both cases, that incorporates a focus on long-term trends at the domestic and international levels which I call the contentious frame analysis. Contentious frame analysis, in turn, allow the mechanisms involved in altering the relationship from one point to another to be revealed and modelled, since mechanisms refer to processes in which a number of events occur in a specific sequence to produce a specific outcome.

2. Contentious Frame Analysis

While transformative events signify turning points leading to changes in the context and agents of contention, the agency of actors during democratic decline can be revealed by exploring the interactive processes of framing. Framing is especially significant as a means of tracing agency during contentious periods because these periods involve changes in the “attribution” of “opportunities and threats” (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, 2001, p.41) and offers a means of understanding how agents aim to achieve their political goals (Benford and Snow, 2005). Framing, therefore, can be used as an analytical and explanatory tool to understand

agency as it shows how groups interpret events (Benford and Snow, 2000; Blee and Taylor, 2002, p.97), reveal what the actors see as a legitimate model of mobilisation (Johnston, 2005) or, grasp the individual and collective visions and expectations (Blee & Taylor, 2002).

Framing can also be considered a means by which identities are constructed by actors, either through attempts to define themselves or through others that define them on the basis of their subjective opinions. Framing, however, is a concept that refers to phenomena that are related to both structure and agency since provides a means of understanding how ideas can be used to bring about collective action, meaning agency, in contentious political processes (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996). Framing is inherently tied to contention because it can be used by actors as a means of constructing coalitions that can be domestic and/or transnational in nature which can mobilise against repression (Benford, 1993). In authoritarian contexts, successful frames, used by the opposition, can mobilise against repression by underlining the vulnerability of the regime, thereby leading opposition actors to becoming aware of political opportunities (Kenney, 2001). Moreover, these processes, frames are interwoven, shape each other, and acknowledging their interaction addresses “temporality and relationality” (Stobaugh and Snow, 2010), they are not constant, develop over time and are responsive (Johnson and Noakes, 2005, p.7). Therefore, the dynamics of framing in contentious processes is crucial in understanding the role and the agency of the opposition under democratic backsliding.

Adopting a historical perspective can also involve integrating the role of culture in a study of contentious politics, since culture acts as a source in the construction of frames by actors in the course of their interactions with each other. Such an approach can build on the weaknesses of the earlier social movement literature, which, while acknowledging how frames create the basis for strategic action, has neglected how previously constructed ideas

and networks, broadly understood under relations of hegemony, have shaped the creation of master frames in social movements. Attempts to focus on the ideological origins of frames (Gillian, 2008) can be interpreted as a turn to culture, since ideologies can be interpreted as being embedded in culture (Zald, 1996). Culture has also been frequently equated with a form of adaptation, from an evolutionary perspective, which suggests that cultures emerge as a biproduct of the attempts of individuals to adapt to outside external events (Koopmans, 1999). However, such an approach fails to realise how culture is never directly conveyed by individuals, in a manner akin to a pre-given script, but is instead constantly being re-interpreted by individuals (Bröer and Duyvendak, 2011, pp. 243-244). Framing, then, can be understood as a means of revealing the changing nature and extent of individual agency at different moments, while also tracing how these changes involve drawing upon different aspects of culture and ideology, as reflected in different frames. Such an approach to studying frame contestation and transformation also involves adopting a historical approach to the study of framing. This can demonstrate how the contention and transformation of frames is shaped by long-term processes of learning, or the failure of learning, where agents either develop or fail to develop new frames to bring about political change.

2.1. Definition and Action

The first stage of the analysis of the contentious framing process is that of *definition*, where, by building on the framework developed by Benford and Snow (2000), I trace how agents identify and define a problem in the context of the selected transformative events, which involves revealing the diagnostic frames that they use. Next, I consider the prognostic frames, which involve identifying how the problem outlined by diagnostic frames can be resolved. This phase can also include master frames which are “socially and culturally dominant

ideational reservoirs from which social movements construct their own and more action-oriented frames” (Olesen, 2006, p.181). Consequently, this phase incorporates studying the historical legacies of ideology and culture that shape frames. The second phase, under the name *action*, investigates the collective action frames of agents, which refer to the “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate” action (Benford and Snow, 2000, p.614). While the *definition* phase demonstrates how different frames exist in a given context, the second phase looks at how they turn their definitions into collective action which shape relations between actors and the context of contention. Therefore, collective action frames trigger certain processes of mobilisation and diffusion on the part of the government, the opposition and other actors operating in domestic and the international realm. Observing collective action frames, in the action phase, is hence crucial to understand how the two cases of democratic backsliding have unfolded.

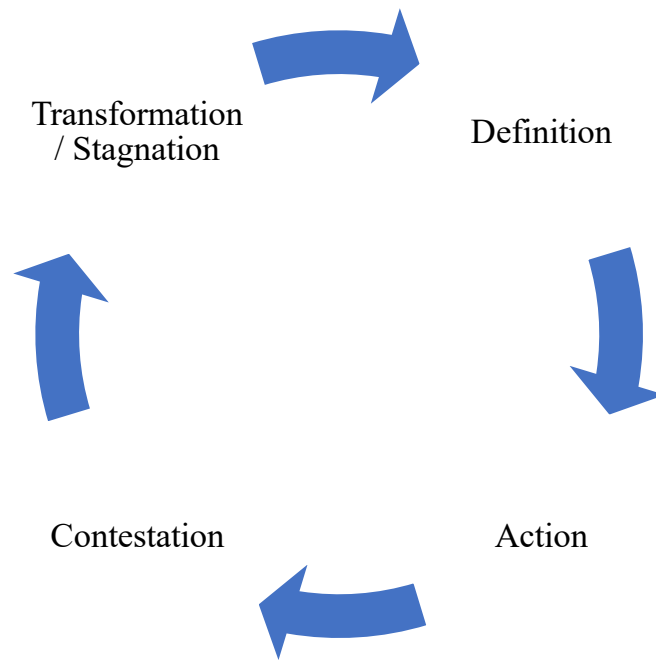
2.2. Contestation and Transformation or Stagnation

The next two phases of contestation and transformation versus stagnation, are crucial for observing how the interaction of actors, such as the opposition and the incumbent, result in political change, which occurs as new frames emerge that then result in political actors engaging in actions that alter the structure. The contestation phase, which constitutes the third phase of contentious frame analysis, deals with the interaction of different frames in a certain context. Frame contestation can be defined as a “confrontational framing technique” that aim to discredit opponents (Boscarino, 2016, p.280). This stage includes the deployment of counter-frames, which refer to frames that actors articulate in response to, and in opposition to, the frames made by other actors (Benford, 1993). Counter-frames can also emerge as efforts to discredit frames originally expressed by others, as is often the case with frames

used by populists (McCaffery and Keys, 2000). Counter-frames may also come to be countered by those who articulated the initial frame, which was then countered, thereby leading to the emergence of further frames in back-and-forth exchanges. The last and fourth stage is named *transformation or stagnation*, involves studying whether or not a transformation occurred to the frames used by actors and, if so, what the consequences of this were for the contention between the opposition and the incumbent. While frame transformation refers to the change in the frames used by actors, stagnation signals the lack of change. The transformation phase will accordingly involve identifying whether such changes occurred, by tracing whether subsequent frame definitions employ the transformed frames.

Tracing the transformation will be followed by considering the broader impact of such changes on agents involved in contentious politics and the broader context of contention. Given how the broader impact of transformation will be discerned through observing whether or not transformed frames are utilised in the context of frame definition, the study of frames involves a cyclical turn. This is because frame definition will be employed to study whether the frames produced during frame transformation came to shape subsequent forms of collective action. By considering how frames develop and are expressed through four phases of definition, action, contestation and transformation or stagnation, this thesis will be able to reveal the key role of frames within broader mechanisms involved in democratic backsliding.

Figure 1: Contentious Frame Analysis



3. Understanding the Consequences of Contention

The contentious framing model can provide a richer understanding of the role of agency in producing the consequences of campaigns. The literature on the outcomes of social movements and international relations have mapped out multiple consequences of contentious politics including repression, movement institutionalisation, the transfer of symbols associated with a movement to further generations (Masclet, 2016). Regarding the different possible outcomes of social movements, the literature on social movements has focused on different types of successful pressures ranging from acceptance, agenda access and structural changes (Kitschelt, 1986) which are the original targets of the movements. Kitschelt (1986, p.67) here differentiates between three types of impacts, namely, procedural, substantive and structural. While procedural impacts result in changes to who has access to the political context, substantive impacts involve policy responses to a movement and structural impacts involve the transformation of the political opportunities available to actors in a given context (Kitschelt, 1986, p.67). Somaia (2010) on the other hand defines the

success of a social movement is dependent on its ability to realise its goals. Likewise, Luders, (2004, p. 186) stresses that when social movements “win”, they disrupt the interests of their opponents and persuade third parties to contribute to forming a negotiation with those they oppose through “conventional institutional tactics”. Therefore, the possible impacts of social movements, identified in the literature so far, have focused on changes to the environment in which contention occurs, with some also focusing on changes to the actors involved in contention. As a demonstration of the different outcomes that are possible in these interactions, the table below presents the range of potential results in the interaction, which include dynamics of contention between the incumbent and the opposition, which are repression, regime adaptability or opposition success. However, by focusing on two interrelated processes, namely the process of the change to the context of contention, and secondly how groups, individuals and institutions interact, the role that agents play in shaping the impact of contentious politics, including in the two cases of democratic backsliding, can be discerned.

Table 2: Potential Consequences of Processes in the Incumbent-Opposition Dynamic

Results of the Interaction with the Incumbent	Details on the Interaction
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Movement Success	Movement success refers to multiple forms of policy change, co-existence with the incumbent with some or all demands of the opposition met, which may entail openings in the system.
Incumbent Adaptability	Adaptability is a term used in comparative politics and is useful in defining the characteristics of the regime in the model, as it both corresponds to the capacity and learning of the authoritarian incumbent and the conditions under which regimes survive, including the tactics that they deploy. A case of adaptation occurs via (Stacher, p. 2012, p.22) “controlled openings”, which includes the strategies of co-optation, change in frames or insignificant concessions from the regime that shapes the consequences of movements.
Repression	Repression can take the immense form of different types of harassment, bans and killings (Davenport, 2007). While opposition groups can be demobilized, there may be splinter resistance movements.

4. Case Selection

4.1. Venezuela and Turkey: Previously Democratic Countries Facing Increasing Authoritarianism

This thesis builds upon historical case studies of contentious politics. These studies provide multiple methodological tools to explain how contention dynamics influence democratic backsliding. A historical comparative case study research design is employed because exploring political change requires “historical particularity and analytical understanding” (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003, p.26). The thesis looks at democratic backsliding by examining contentious events from 1998 to 2017 in Venezuela, and 2000 to 2017 in Turkey. Throughout the social movement literature, comparisons are utilised to reveal “national political characteristics” and “important historical changes” (Della Porta, 2002, p.290). This thesis selects two cases of contention under democratic backsliding and compares in which virtually consolidated democracies experienced democratic backsliding. This is done to consider the nature and extent of the opposition’s role in backsliding. As Tarrow (2005, p.122) explains, theorisation “permits the generalisation and abstraction of a core causal idea from a particular reality into a general frame that can be applied to other realities.” Consequently, comparisons of contentious events can contribute to theories about whether shared mechanisms (McAdam and Tarrow, 2010) are present in democratic backsliding and what these mechanisms demonstrate regarding the role of the interaction between the political opposition and the incumbent.

The characteristics of Turkey and Venezuela make them ideal cases for comparison. As there was a consensus in the literature was that both of these countries were moving towards the consolidation stage of democratisation (Kandil, 2016; Hillman, 1994) the two cases are representative of states that achieved minimal democracy until the recent processes of democratic backsliding. These cases also include similarities in repression techniques, the policing of protests, populism, and polarisation, demonstrating that they currently both share the characteristics of electoral (Bogaards, 2009; Schedler, 1999) and populist

authoritarianism (Hinnebusch, 2002; Tang, 2016) that are outlined in the literature.

Moreover, the countries' contemporary politics demonstrate what the literature has identified as a worldwide spike in populism (Hawkins, 2010; Yılmaz and Bashirov, 2018), often cited as involving democratic backsliding (Haggard and Kaufman, 2021; Mechkova, Lührmann and Lindberg, 2017). While Venezuela's current government has been identified as a case of left populism (Corrales, 2015; de la Torre, 2013), whereas Turkey's ruling party has been associated with right-wing or neoliberal populism (Akçay, 2018; Aytaç and Öniş, 2014), in both cases, the political opposition's lack of recognition of the government nurtured the populist policies of the incumbent. This is because contention via non-democratic, pro-coup strategies further moulded the incumbent's choice of repression. While the particularities of polarisation led by the incumbent demonstrate the characteristics of their respective regimes, they are also helpful in understanding the outcomes of domestic and international contention. In this sense, both Venezuela and Turkey are crucial cases that are representatives of the broader tendency of non-consolidated democracies that moved in the opposite direction under populist governments.

Numerous points can be made in support of the argument that both countries were "unconsolidated democracies" that experienced backsliding. Firstly, Venezuela and Turkey are chosen because, as Diamond, (2015, p. 145) has underlined, executive degradation and the violation of the rights of the opposition has occurred in both cases. Secondly, both countries experienced contentious periods when the opposition challenged the regime through both regular and non-regular events. Thirdly, they possess a divided political opposition and multiple social movements meaning that both cases can be studied with a view to considering theoretical questions on differential cooperation of the opposition, political opportunities, and mobilisation. Fourthly, the existence of a history of democratic

institutions in both countries also makes them crucial cases to consider in explaining the role of the interaction between the opposition, incumbent and international factors in the contemporary context of democratic backsliding. This is because the latest cases of democratic backsliding have involved the use of democratic means, such as referenda and elections, to undermine levels of democracy. While in the first phase of the relationship, the regimes were more open and tolerant, after a series of challenges, elections and protest movements, the process evolved from being moderate repressive to repressive. Therefore, in this sense, both Venezuela and Turkey are crucial cases that are representatives of the broader tendency of non-consolidated democracies that moved in the opposite direction.

4.2. The International and the Political Opposition in Turkey and Venezuela

The political opposition and the incumbent in these countries also historically had significant international links. The early democratisation of Venezuela compared to its regional counterparts, and its natural resources, led to the creation of new links for transnational activity (Tinker Salas, 2015). Turkey's alignment with the US throughout the Cold War also placed pressure on it to conform to Western standards of liberal democracy (Celep, 2011). Regional organisations and international pressure groups have been active in both cases (Hoffmann, 2019; Öniş and Kutlay, 2019). Turkey joined the EEC in the 1960s and today is still a candidate country for the EU. However, in Turkey's case, the linkage goes back to the governing elites who have focused on pursuing different forms of Westernisation or modernisation since arguably the late Ottoman Empire had links to Europe through its diplomatic elites since the 1850s (Göçek, 2008). Turkey's geographical position has been important in triggering international concern with its regime type. Also, the AKP appealed to the EU, as part of its attempts to highlight Turkey's potential to reach a level of democracy

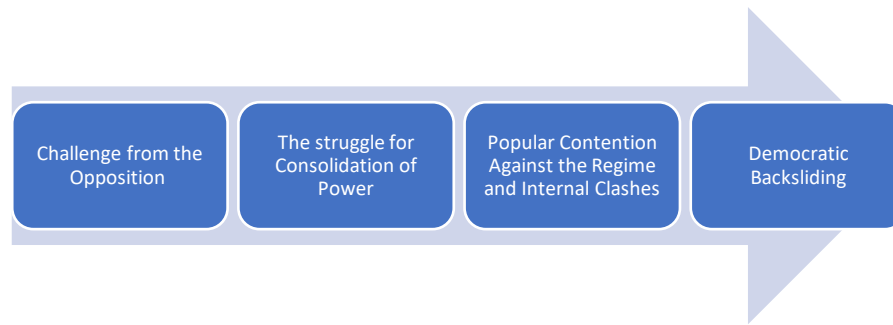
that would enable it to complete its EU accession process (Tocci, 2014). The literature on Turkey has noted how the AKP's efforts to establish close ties with the EU and other European states and actors have helped it gain legitimacy from 2003 to 2009 and these democratising reforms secured the support of liberals in the country (Akçay, 2018).

Venezuela has been a founding member of regional organisations, such as the OAS, OPEC. The international ties of both of these states have impacted the relations of the incumbent and the opposition in the context of the recent global democratic backslide. Initially, both Turkey and Venezuela's incumbents used their international ties and engagement with international organisations, states, and publics to consolidate their rule. Additionally, the current ruling parties in Venezuela and Turkey can be said to have their origins in social movements that challenged the former elites of both states and inherited, and subsequently, more often than not, reformulated their countries' ties with international actors.

4.3. The Time Frame of the Study

The scope of this thesis is limited to a time frame focusing on the period from 1998 to 2018 in Venezuela and 2001 to 2017 in Turkey. These periods stand out as being a point at which challenges from the opposition led to struggles for the consolidation of power by both regimes but leading to democratic backsliding (*see figure 2*).

Figure 2: Timeline of the Opposition-Incumbent Dynamic in Venezuela and Turkey



The transformative events that are studied are selected based on national impact and challenges to democratic backsliding (*see table 3*). I start my study of both cases with transformative events before the contentious period studied, that were partly international in origin and had a broad impact in terms of politics of both countries, in the lead up to the rise to power of the incumbent governments. These were the *Caracazo* protests in Venezuela, triggered partly by an austerity programme tied to the acceptance of an IMF programme (Tinker Salas, 2015) and the economic crisis of 2000 which effected Turkey and several other similar economies, such as Argentina (Öniş, 2006). In order to track the context of contention, I have studied both transformative events where an opportunity arose for the actors to promote political change, like crisis events, protest and electoral cycles, elite splits and international appeals. In these cases, the main events and processes that I traced are national parliamentary and presidential elections, protest movements at the national scale, instances of constitutional change, crucial institutional changes, international coalition formation, foreign policy and elite splits. Studying each of these events allowed the connections between each of these events, if present, to be identified, which contributed to the construction of mechanisms that can explain the process of democratic backsliding in both cases. Having presented an outline of the mechanisms, in the last chapter, I compared

the mechanisms present in both cases to advance my argument concerning the role of the opposition in the process of democratic backsliding.

Table 3: Transformative Events in Turkey and Venezuela

Cases	Transformative Events at the Domestic and International Level
Turkey under the AKP	• The 2007 Republic Protests • The 2008 Global Economic Crisis • The 2010 Constitutional Referendum • The 2010 Arab Uprisings • The 2013 Gezi Protests • The 2015 Parliamentary Elections • The 2015 European Migrant Crisis • The 2016 Coup Attempt • The 2017 Constitutional Referendum
Venezuela under <i>Chavismo</i>	• The 2002 Coup Attempt • The 2005 Parliamentary Elections • The 2008 Global Economic Crisis • The death of Hugo Chávez • The 2014 la Salida Protests • The 2015 Parliamentary Elections • Election of US President Trump in 2016 • The formation of the Constituent Assembly in 2017

5. Data Collection and Research Ethics

The data of this research is collected via the triangulation of multiple primary and secondary sources like party publications, interviews, and news articles. The primary data collection was shaped after reviewing the secondary literature in Turkey and Venezuela, along with the academic literature discussed above. After specifying the events, in order to grasp the agency of the domestic actors, I used sources like in-depth interviews with the opposition and the incumbent mostly via secondary sources, parliamentary speeches, news articles, movement or party publications, statements, and election manifestos, as well as biographies. I used only one of the in-depth interviews I conducted with members of the political opposition in Turkey in the final version of the thesis, and triangulated multiple interviews conducted by others in the secondary literature. Political texts like party manifestos and party congress discussions were especially crucial for this research as they demonstrate how agents account for their actions (Silverman, 2001, p. 134). In terms of accessing the statements of political parties, their online archives provided most of the data that was needed. I also acknowledged that the newspaper data can be biased and to overcome this, I undertook triangulation, frequently using secondary sources or other primary sources to verify claims advanced in such sources. However, in the context of my studies of framing, the issue of accuracy has been less significant, owing to how frames are used by actors to provide a specific interpretation of the external world and also to coordinate collective agency. Differences in how actors frame events, in the context of the interaction between the opposition and incumbent in both cases, have hence been discussed in the thesis, rather than being viewed as an obstacle to the study of these processes. Events that hosted the opposition or government members were also an avenue to trace the frames of agents. I participated in both on site and

online think tank, university and solidarity events of the incumbent and the opposition, which included travelling to Madrid to follow the transnational solidarity movement of the Venezuelan opposition in 2019.

The international actors that were considered in both cases were states, international institutions, parties, INGOs, and social movements. In this contentious period, the US emerged as the most influential international actor that has claimed to promote democratisation in both of the cases (Clement, 2005). Consequently, I traced US's punitive or rewarding strategies in these cases, by investigating Senate Committee reports, meetings, statements, memoirs of US officials and news reports. Regionally, I focused on the EU in Turkey and the OAS in Venezuela as the main bodies to implement punitive or rewarding measures during the process of democratic backsliding. The activity of the OAS was traced in multiple forums. I tracked OAS's mediation and monitoring efforts in Venezuela from news sources and its online archive that dates back to 1998. Secondly, I traced statements from members of the OAS along with the statements from the agents in Venezuela concerning the OAS. On the other hand, in the case of Turkey, the EU and the European Commission stood out as a regional actor that could implement conditionality and rewarding-punitive strategies in the context of contention. The data on the EU is collected by tracing the yearly EU Commission reports and statements from the EU, and other European politicians, with the statements from the agents in Turkey concerning the EU. These statements were traced on the EU's website, and multiple news outlets, and academic sources. Lastly, I traced the efforts of INGOs and think tanks in terms of bringing opposition demands to the international arena. I looked at the partners of INGOs as they work or form "temporary coalitions" with states and international institutions to strengthen their agency. (Tarrow, 2005, p.16). Both in Turkey and Venezuela Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch became two of the key INGOs

and think tanks working in the field. Data from other INGOs, such as the Carter Center, International Crisis Group and Woodrow Wilson Center were also crucial for reporting and voicing opposition claims to the international. I traced their activities from video sources, reports, and their website.

The data was also supported with semi-structured interviews of several opposition actors, even though their number has been limited due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The semi-structured in-depth interviews that I conducted or used from the secondary literature contributed to understanding the dynamics of the opposition by demonstrating how opposition actors perceive opportunities, how they decide on critical times to make a move against the incumbents, and their rationale in doing so. I also benefited from the interviews conducted by others, where such interviews had directed questions about the consequences of opposition failure and the questioning of the strategies of the opposition. These sources were especially beneficial to grasp how frames were disputed and the different interpretations of the events that were often held by members of the same political party. As many of the traditional avenues of research, discussion and politics moved online in 2020 and 2021, I had the opportunity to trace opposition and incumbent frames through online discussions and meetings. This provided me with an excellent opportunity to ask questions to some members of the opposition and the incumbent that I could not reach with my network. These interviews and the online discussions I observed also helped me to triangulate my data collected from other sources.

The main ethical concerns that I considered in this project were on researcher's positionality and the protection of the researcher and the participants. The concept of positionality has been gaining importance in interpretative social science (Chacko, 2004; Sultana, 2007). It is

defined as the encounters and comprehensions of experiences that shape the researcher, possibly influencing the research findings (McAreavey and Das, 2013). Throughout this research, I acknowledged my biases by reflecting on how my identity shapes the research project and recognising the power structures that shape available knowledge. To my best ability, I tried not to reproduce the discourses shaped by those power structures. Moreover, in-depth interviews were conducted under informed consent through a voluntary agreement in this research with one's right to withdraw from it. The interviews took place in London and New York, and the data acquired is protected safely. The interviews quoted in this research are cited with anonymity. Therefore, throughout the study, I sought to be mindful of and elaborate on my positionality and prejudices as a researcher and take the necessary measures to protect the researcher and the researched.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a relational model of the interaction of the political opposition and the incumbent and has demonstrated an approach to considering whether, how and the extent to which the political opposition plays a role in sustaining, enabling or overturning authoritarianism in the context of such interactions. How these political opportunities are understood and exploited through processes of framing, in which actors advance meanings to make sense of and alter social reality was also outlined and the importance of focusing on how frames are contested was also highlighted. The different steps involved in the study of contentious frames, namely those I have labelled definition, action, contestation and transformation, were also outlined. Approaching framing and contentious politics more broadly from a relational perspective also involves focusing on events. Accordingly, having identified Venezuela and Turkey as two key cases of democratising states, previously considered old democratic regimes in their regions, that have undergone democratic

backsliding, a study of events is justified as a means of tracing the role of the opposition-incumbent interaction in backsliding in both cases. Crucially, the time frame of the study, starting with crisis linked to international developments in both countries that resulted in the rise to power of the incumbent and ending with the severe weakening of both of their parliaments in 2017, was also introduced. Both primary and secondary sources were used and triangulated to piece together the context and chronology of the different events along the path of democratic backsliding. On the other hand, studying the response to the transformative events that unfolded, through observing the frames of actors as revealed in a range of primary sources, can demonstrate how these events are opportunities in which the incumbent or the opposition can exploit political opportunities or change the frames they deploy. Such an approach can, in turn, help construct an account of the mechanisms outlining the role of the incumbent-political opposition interaction in the process of democratic backsliding, through considering the two case studies.

CHAPTER 4: The Dynamics of Contention Between the Political Opposition and the Incumbent in Turkey under the AKP

Introduction

This chapter presents the transformative events and the context that have shaped the dynamic of contention between the incumbent and the political opposition in Turkey under the AKP. It traces the domestic opportunities presented in Chapter 1, by investigating the degree of political access, the organisational power of the incumbent and the political opposition, incumbent unity and splits and the incumbent's repressive strength. The first section of the chapter provides an overview of the historical legacies and political processes that have shaped the political actors who have become the incumbent and political opposition up to the AKP's election in 2002. This section discusses how the military's exclusionary influence via political institutions and the existence and threat of military coups limited political access to opposition agents. It concludes that the lack of mutual recognition and collaboration of the incumbent and the opposition has created a polarised contestation arena that has shaped the possibilities of coalition formation and a path towards democratisation (Gürsoy, 2011). The chapter then presents the critical moments and processes in the dynamics of contention under the AKP by presenting the process of three successive periods, categorised by the regime's increasing authoritarianism. Under the title, *Burgeoning of the AKP (2002–2007)*, the first section highlights the context of the AKP's rise and electoral successes. This section discusses how the AKP launched reforms that challenged state institutions' exclusionary nature and the CHP mobilised for safeguarding the Kemalist regime. The second section, *Contention and the Survival of the AKP*, describes the broadening appeal of the AKP in the 2007 and 2011 national electoral cycles and the 2010 referendum. This section demonstrates how the AKP started to contest the institutions of the Guardian-Kemalist state and how the

election of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu provided an opportunity for change for the CHP. This period ends with the emergence of the unexpected mass mobilisations that began with the Gezi Park protests, which profoundly transformed the relationship between the incumbent and the opposition. The last section, *Fragile Coalitions and Increasing Repression (2013–2018)*, investigates the aftermath of the Gezi Park protests by tracing the context of the events of the 2014 corruption scandals, the 2014 presidential elections, the 2015 electoral cycles, the 2016 coup attempt, the 2017 constitutional referendum. This section demonstrates that in the aftermath of the Gezi protests, an opportunity arose for the opposition to unite against democratic backsliding. However, after the demobilisation of the protest cycle, the opposition was not able to cooperate on multiple issues in the long run, and the regime became increasingly repressive in the course of the subsequent events.

1. The Historical Roots of the Incumbent-Opposition Dynamic in Turkey

One of the reasons Turkey has been regarded as an exceptional case compared with the regimes of the Middle East has been the existence, impact, and importance of opposition movements since the birth of the republic in 1923 (Kandil, 2016; Özbudun, 2015), with many having earlier roots in the Ottoman Empire (Çetinkaya, 2014). However, these opposition movements have faced a number of challenges over the years. From the single-party period under the CHP (1923–1945) to the periods of repression after the military interventions to civilian politics in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1998, the political opposition has managed to operate under unfavourable conditions, maintaining networks, pursuing strategies to transform political institutions or overthrow the incumbent. The literature on Turkish politics overwhelmingly argued that the main obstacle to democratisation was the regime's "strong", "bureaucratic" and "centralised" nature (Özbudun, 1996, p.124). Even though political parties

have emerged and developed throughout the republic's history, such openings occurred in the margins of the strong state led by the Kemalist ideology. Kemalism, the name given to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's and the founding idea of CHP's political thought, has been the state ideology of the Turkish Republic, formally founded in 1923 (Parla and Davison, 2004, vii). After winning the war of independence, Kemalists rose to power and initiated a process of secularisation and modernisation (Kandil, 2016). Even though there were Islamic and Kurdish opposition movements, the Kemalists were able to achieve single party rule with societal transformation and repression. Kemalism arguably contained a more potentially democratic interpretation, stressing the possibility of gradually introducing democratic institutions to Turkey, but in a manner that ensured that the political elites would always be able to intervene (Parla and Davison, 2004). The military upheld the interventionist role by framing itself as the guardian of Kemalist ideals and the regime (İnsel, 2002, Kandil, 2016) and a "veto player"³³ (Gürsoy, 2011), which has historically sought to limit the power of elected governments (Esen and Gümüüşcü, 2016). Therefore, the overwhelming literature on the state of democracy in Turkey argued that the powerful military's role in the civilian sphere led to weak governments³⁴ (Heper, 1990; Kandil, 2016;) and rights violations (Gunter, 2014). Under what has been referred to as the "guardian state," even though the representatives of the founding ideology were electorally unsuccessful after the move to a multi-party system, they continued to exert influence over the bureaucracy (Gunter, 2014).

With the foundation of the republic, Turkey's founding elites established a single-party regime, which pursued a policy of Westernisation and nationalism under a mixed economy

³³ Via the National Security Council, the army had an unofficial veto power over government policy, yet the impact was also portrayed in many outlets like the press and civil society organizations. The threats of coup took place in multiple forms as in the cases of "memoranda" which are statements that put pressure on the government which included hidden messages of a potential military takeover and/or taming.

³⁴It is important to note that some scholars categorised Turkey as a democracy, with some even naming it the "oldest democracy in the Middle East" (Mandıracı, 2012, p.63).

(Kandil, 2016). It became the first state in the region to experience such a radical transformation and has shaped secularising elites in the Middle East (Altunışık, 2009). Political opposition was briefly permitted at several intervals until the 1950s but was often subsequently met by oppressive state measures. While the single-party period restricted the emergence of new actors, after the 1940s, opposition movements flourished due to CHP's loss in popularity. The centre-right Democratic Party (DP), which became the first mass movement against the CHP's hegemony, mobilised against the party's authoritarian control and exclusionary dynamics, adopting a popular slogan, "*Enough, the power is with the people!*" (Alkan, 2015). The DP government's major transformation was to shift Turkey's relations by entering NATO and sending troops to the Korean War in 1952 (Abou-El-Fadl, 2019). While the era was marked by moving away from a centralised economy and lifting restrictions on religion, the DP leader and prime minister Menderes's authoritarian turn increased contention which was followed with a military intervention in 1960 (Zürcher, 2017). With the coup, the prime minister, Adnan Menderes and multiple ministers were executed by the military for treason. The coup plotters introduced a new constitution, which included a greater degree of rights and freedoms and checks and balances, guaranteeing an unprecedented level of academic freedom, freedom of association, including the right to form trade unions and widespread political rights (Hazama, 1996). This is because the post-1960 military regime has been characterised as having both left (Daldal, 2004, pp. 83 - 84) along with right-wing components (Daldal, 2004, p. 90) and convened two constitutional assemblies presided over by academics from Istanbul and Ankara Universities (Daldal, 2004, pp. 95 - 96). However, the new constitution also contained several articles that allowed the military and security forces to operate beyond the purview of the law. Along with the global trend of rising social movements, a powerful left-wing student movement emerged, originally

affiliated with the TIP³⁵ (Workers' Party of Turkey), before becoming autonomous and more militant, resulting in far-right nationalist and religious youth movements forming in response (Karaveli, 2018). Throughout this period, the CHP also presented itself as a centre-left party, presumably in response to the formation of the TIP, which, however, resulted in it being presented as a left-wing and communist political movement by right wing political actors in Turkey (Daldal, 2004, p. 90). The intense political polarisation of this period resulted in increased violence between far left and far right groups, resulting in a further military intervention on 12 March 1971, which resulted in the military intervening in politics, without fully assuming political control of the country (Karaveli, 2018). The intervention was significant insofar as it resulted in restrictions being imposed disproportionately on the left. Although the military later withdrew from closely supervising politics and the CHP was elected in 1973, the left-right polarisation and societal violence persisted in the lead up to the coup of 12 September 1980 (Ciddi, 2009). The CHP has also reframed itself as a social-democratic and centre-left party since embracing, in the 1960s, the concept of "left of centre", under the influence of its leader, Bülent Ecevit, and, later, the ideas of "democratic left" and "contemporary social democracy" (Ayata and Ayata, 2007; Ciddi, 2009). In the context of political polarisation resulting in violent clashes, a military intervention occurred on 12 March 1971, which resulted in the military pursuing a partnership with the civilian government to curtail the rights and freedoms introduced in the 1962 constitution and engage in widespread oppression towards left-wing activists (Karaveli, 2018). The CHP, which had rebranded itself as a centre-left party, formed a series of weak governments under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit, often with support from other left actors. The contention that

³⁵ By acknowledging the advancements of the 1961 constitution for opening up the polity Ekinçi, (2010) a member of TIP argued that the TIP was "fighting for the independence of the country" against "both imperialism and its domestic allies" (Ekinçi, 2010). The military had a far-reaching role in political life. Several of the officers who participated in the junta would also later enter politics through becoming politicians in left and centre-left parties (Bora, 2011). For example, the founder of the far-right party, the Nationalist Action Party MHP, Alparslan Türkeş, was a lieutenant who participated in the junta.

rose between right left-wing activism, and the weak response from the government was utilised by the military to pursue the 1980 coup.

The 1980 military coup became a transformative event that led to a massive closure of political space and changed the institutional and economic structures of the country. The coup resulted in massive political repression where numerous human rights violations, executions and disappearances took place, and thousands of political activists were tried with death sentences (Bozarslan, 2001). A new constitution, which dissolved the bicameral nature of the legislature and included many limitations on civil rights, in the name of national security, was introduced in 1982 and the post-coup elections were held in 1983. The 1982 constitution, which was approved under military rule with a referendum, strengthened the executive and hampered the independence of the judiciary and introduced bans on political parties and mobilisation (Özbudun, 2000). The new constitution also introduced institutions like the Council of Higher Education to hold centralised control and influence over the public (Akça, 2014, pp. 30–32). The 10 per cent electoral threshold, which prevented parties that receive less than 10 per cent of the popular vote from being represented in parliament, also emerged as a limiting mechanism that discouraged the formation of new parties and restricted smaller parties from having real influence (İnsel, 2003, p.294). Alongside these attempts to restrain the representation of the people, the constitution, though heavily amended since 1982, nonetheless contained clauses that can enable human rights and democratic freedoms to be suspended in the interests of national security (Özbudun, 1996, 2000). Overall, these legacies created a repressive context that hindered political pluralism and limited the path toward democratic consolidation.

The election of a civilian government in 1983 paved the way for new forms of contention and agency. After the coup, Turkey engaged in a period of economic restructuring, paving the path to neoliberalism (Akça, 2014, p.30). At this period, new parties emerged, and the centre-right Motherland Party (ANAP), led by Turgut Özal, won the first elections after the 1980 coup and deepened Turkey's adoption of neoliberalism. After the 1980s, violent groups like the PKK and Islamist groups, ethnicity-based movements, Kemalist and secular NGOs like the ADD (Atatürkist Thought Association) and Islamist and pro-Kurdish associations shaped the opposition-incumbent dynamic by pushing their different demands³⁶ (Şimşek, 2004). The new mainstream centre-left and centre-right political parties in the post-coup environment in Turkey made several moves to convey the wishes of the emerging social movements within the country to the domestic realm. For instance, Özal made attempts to address the Kurdish conflict, by giving signals that he was willing to recognise Kurdish identity (Çandar, 2013). As a result, the concept of civil society, which certain actors in Turkey have also identified, has been a crucial concept that can be used to understand how legal provisions enabled some space for movements to emerge in the margins of society.

Historical polarisation and the legacy of the different opposition movements of the polity consequently shaped the path of mobilisation processes after the military coup. The centre-left came to be represented with the SHP, a post-junta party formed following the merger of the left-social democratic SODEP and the left-Kemalist HP³⁷. These parties operated in an unfavourable context with increasing embeddedness to the neoliberal model, which shifted

³⁶ Multiple identity and rights-based movements also began to mobilise in the post-coup environment. The emergence of new social movements for the environment, women and LGBT rights pluralised the polity and expanded beyond Turkey's borders with transnational linkages (Ketola, 2013). While these groups pushed for democratisation with their specific issue areas they promoted, like feminism, they also tried to change the structural setting by creating new institutions (Şimşek, 2004).

³⁷ SODEP and the Populist Party were established to mobilise the bases after the coup. The two parties united in the SHP with the theme of social democracy (Polat, 2009).

the statist model that these parties had been used to (Esen, 2005, p.30). The SHP briefly represented the wishes of an emerging movement of striking miners in Zonguldak and engineered a brief electoral alliance with the pro-Kurdish political party HEP (Polat, 2009). However, the alliance received a backlash as Kurdish parties were criminalised and faced constant closure in the upcoming period³⁸ (Celep, 2014). Even though the CHP that emerged in the post-coup period ought to be distinguished from the historic CHP, which was banned alongside all other political parties in 1980 and only re-constituted in 1992³⁹, the current CHP nonetheless views itself as the continuation of the historical CHP, which established the republic in 1923 (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 1993, p.51). Naming the CHP as “the party of the status-quo”, Insel (2010) distinguished between three factions within the party: the nationalists who embrace CHP as a state party, the Alevis who see the CHP as a safeguard against a dominant Sunni Islam⁴⁰, and the members who are closer to the left⁴¹ (İnsel, 2010). As one of the key political parties, in the post-coup context, the MHP represented the extreme right and built on paramilitarism and anti-communism and Islamism⁴² (Gürkan, 2015, p.105). The Islamists also mobilised in this context and rose to power as an opposition actor as an “anti-system” movement under the Welfare Party which also challenged the founding ideology of the state, Kemalism (Ciddi, 2009).

³⁸ The party members faced imprisonment, and as they were shut repeatedly, they had to form new parties to stay on the playing field.

³⁹ Bülent Ecevit broke with the CHP and became the leader of the DSP, which was founded by his wife due to him serving a political ban. In the 1987 parliamentary elections, the party received 8.5 per cent of the vote and was excluded from the parliament due to failing to pass the 10 per cent threshold (Kiniklioğlu, 2000).

⁴⁰ Alevis are the biggest belief groups in Turkey around 15 followers. Due to historical oppression dating back to the Ottoman era, they are a highly mobilised group. (Boravali and Boyraz, 2014) Mobilised Alevi groups oppose the empowerment of Sunni Islam in state institutions but are not united by a single party, even though many studies underline that a crucial group vote for the CHP.

⁴¹ It is important to note that these groups are not mutually exclusive.

⁴² The MHP was founded by Türkeş, who previously founded the Republican Farmers Nation Party. The roots of the party were shaped by paramilitary groups. During the 1970s the nationalist groups targeted Alevis and carried out violent attacks like the Gazi Massacre (see further Bora, 2004).

Table 4: Political Parties and Ideologies after the 1980 Coup Until the AKP's Election

Ideology/Tradition	Political Parties
Islamist ⁴⁴	Virtue Party, Welfare Party
Far Right	MHP, BBP
Centre-Right	ANAP
Centre-Left	CHP, SHP, DSP, SODEP, HP
Pro-Kurdish	HADEP

While new parties emerged in the post-coup era, political parties maintained the tradition of having an organisational structure shaped by a strong leader (Musil, 2015). The legacies of the 1980 coup shaped the party system by giving too much power to the leadership on the nomination of MPs, shattering opposition within parties (Uysal and Toprak, 2013). The political party law introduced with the 1980 coup limited the basis for small-scale organisations making agents dependent on regional or national groups (Kınıklıoğlu, 2002; Uysal and Toprak, 2013). As the system gave considerable power to the party leadership on the nomination of MPs, the prospect of change in parties remained limited (Uysal and Toprak, 2013). As the leader is too influential in appointing and selecting candidates, members are pushed towards being loyal to the leader to secure seats (Uysal and Toprak, 2013). The party-list system also involved multi-member constituencies and allocated seats to candidates, previously listed by parties, based on their share of the votes (Kalaycıoğlu, 2016). The internal structure of political parties in Turkey therefore allowed the leadership to

⁴⁴ While these are ideal types, Islamist parties have attached other ideologies like nationalism. As Loizides (2009, p.283) demonstrates Islamist MPs like Cevat Ayhan were against the accession of the EU due to nationalism and xenophobia as the quote demonstrates that it “could allow millions of Pontus Greeks to settle on Turkey’s Black Sea coast.”

become entrenched. These structures maintained the strong party leader tradition for not only the incumbent but also opposition parties.

Another legacy of the obstacles to democratic consolidation was the lack of inclusion and political participation of different actors (Grigoriadis, 2017) and the historical threat of closure of political parties mainly due to ethnic and religious reasons (Güney and Başkan, 2008). The denial of political opportunities to Islamic movements has, in turn, shaped the nature and extent to which religion is mobilised as a threat to the existing political system (Cizre-Sakallioğlu 1995, p.752). With the decline of the left after the 1980 coup, Islamism rose locally and expanded with the popularisation of the Welfare Party in local politics.

Although the party experienced various obstacles from the state, the Islamists developed grassroots networks that they could translate into political power (Tuğal, 2009). After Özal's death in 1993, the period up to the AKP elections was marked by unstable coalition governments (Boravalı and Boyraz, 2014). During the 1994 local elections and parliamentary elections, the Islamist Welfare Party gained increased support and in the 1995 elections became a part of a coalition government⁴⁵. Internally, the Madımak Hotel Massacre⁴⁶ and other events which the secular elites saw as a threat to the secular order, increased opposition to the Welfare Party. This led to what has been named a soft coup by the military on February 28, 1997, in light of party leader Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist agenda in domestic and international politics (Ciddi, 2009, p.239). Subsequently, as a result of the coup, Necmettin Erbakan resigned, and the Welfare Party was later shut by the Constitutional Court.

⁴⁵In the 1995 elections, by gaining 21.38 per cent of the vote, the Welfare Party became the largest party in the parliament; the DSP and CHP votes together reached around 25, and the centre-right received 40 per cent in total. Welfare leader Necmettin Erbakan became the prime minister under the coalition government (Tuğal, 2009).

⁴⁶ The massacre refers to a literary festival that was organised by Alevi groups was attacked and the hotel where the participants were staying was set on fire by a Sunni group, killing 33 people (Boravalı and Boyraz, 2014, p.481).

The process of the formation of the AKP occurred after the Islamist movement opted to change its strategy for political change, after the 28 February military intervention. Following the 28 February intervention, the Islamists arguably lost a considerable amount of their political influence as Erbakan was forced to resign, and the movement faced multiple splits⁴⁷. The military intervention on 28 February was also preceded by a social mobilisation, which included left-wing and Kemalist political parties and movements, trade unions (DİSK - Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions) and business associations (TÜSİAD – Association of Industrialists and Businessmen of Turkey). This movement coalesced around a Kemalist discourse of opposition to Islamist rule, the enforcement of state secularism and the following of a path in foreign policy that reflected these domestic priorities. A splinter group from the Welfare Party, named the “*Traditionalists*”, founded Virtue Party (FP). As party members and grassroots followers had invested much in ensuring that they had a prominent position in everyday life and civil society, the moderates were able to form the AKP (Öniş, 2009; Tuğal, 2009). The AKP was founded in 2001 by what has been termed the reformist wing of the Welfare Party following a major economic crash in Turkey – linking the party's emergence that of identified as being conducive to the emergence of populist parties by the literature on populism (Panizza, 2005; Kaltwasser, 2012; Mudde, 2004; Moffitt, 2015, 2016). The AKP aimed to overcome and challenge Turkey's “guardian state” tradition and eventually became a unifying actor where Islamist actors met (Yıldırım and Gümrükçü, 2017). Although the younger generation of Welfare Party members formed the AKP after the 1997 military memorandum, it became an 'ideologically flexible' party that promoted a neoliberal economic model and a conservative democratic identity (Çınar, 2018a, p.135).

⁴⁷ When Erdoğan was the mayor of Istanbul, he was imprisoned for a short time due to a religious poem he read that was perceived as threat the secular order (Tuğal, 2009).

2. The Burgeoning of the AKP

The electoral triumph of the AKP in 2002 occurred in the context of a political and economic crisis, as established parties were perceived as being embedded in corruption, lacked charismatic leadership and were not as organised at the local level as were Islamist parties (Akça, 2014; Tuğal, 2009, p.86). This provided an excellent political opportunity which the AKP exploited by successfully framing itself as a competent actor to the electorate, thereby contrasting itself with the pre-existing political parties in Turkey. After the devastating effects of the economic crisis⁴⁸, the AKP emerged as an opposition actor highlighted the need for democratising reforms and aligned itself with the US in foreign policy, marking a break from the Welfare Party tradition (AK Parti, 2002). During the economic crisis, Turkey was being governed by a coalition government of the ANAP, MHP and DSP, which, in the context of the economic crisis, launched an investigation into corruption in the financial sector, through two new institutions, namely the BDDK and the TMSF, which were headed by politicians (Sungur, 2015). In 2001, during a meeting of the National Security Council, the newly elected President Sezer hurled a booklet of the constitution at Ecevit, claiming that he was disrupting his task as the president and argued that Ecevit was not aware of the constitutional role of the president⁴⁹ (The Guardian, 2001). This moment is widely considered the trigger for the subsequent economic and political crisis in Turkey and resulted in the public widely perceiving the government as corrupt. Given the wide-ranging nature of the coalition government, which encapsulated parties of the centre-right and centre-left, as well as the far-right MHP, the public became disillusioned with the established political parties. In the 2002 elections, the AKP rose to power by framing itself as an outsider and

⁴⁸ The economic crisis occurred with the plunging of the currency, and rising unemployment.

⁴⁹ While then the PM Ecevit had been aware of the need to ensure political stability, having attempted, in 2000, to ensure that the constitution was altered to allow the incumbent president, Süleyman Demirel, to continue for a second term. (Yavuz. 2000).

underlining how it would bring an end to corruption as well as the political and economic instability that had characterised Turkey under previous governments of established political parties (Ak Parti, 2002).

With the election of the AKP, the main political opposition, the centre-left, came to be represented by the CHP. The 2002 electoral process was especially a shock for the DSP under Ecevit, which received less than 2 percent of the votes, while the CHP received almost 20 percent. All other right-wing parties also remained outside the parliament due to the electoral threshold (Keyman and Öniş, 2003). The challenges that the AKP and Erdoğan faced to enter the playing field has led to the movement frame itself as a force of democratisation (Ak Parti, 2002). The AKP and Erdoğan faced multiple challenges to compete on the upset of 2002 elections. Erdoğan was primarily disqualified from running to office because of his conviction for reading a poem that “incited religious hatred” (Fisher, 2002). In order to remove his conviction from being a barrier to his political participation, Erdoğan applied to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in 2002 against the Supreme Court but was unsuccessful.⁵⁰ Another court case was opened to shut down the party for keeping Erdoğan the de-facto leader of the party, even though he was banned from politics (Tait, 2008). Yet, with the support of the opposition to open up Erdoğan's path, in the repeated Siirt elections on March 9, 2003, Erdoğan was elected and later became the prime minister. CHP leader Deniz Baykal played an instrumental role in allowing Erdoğan to become the prime minister, through supporting a vote on the removal of the ban preventing him from assuming a political position. The AKP therefore made use of the frame of democracy, which also resonated with critical actors within the opposition, to further

⁵⁰ Erdoğan's application, which aimed to utilise Article 39 of the ECHR, was rejected lawyers argued because the substance is mostly used for applications that directly concern human life (Radikal, 2002).

consolidate its political position by elevating its de facto leader to the position of the prime minister.

The first five years of the AKP's rule were marked with overcoming the challenges set by the regime in the context of mass protests, closure trials and the perceived threat of a coup d'état (Gürsoy, 2011). As a response to these challenges, the AKP continued to use a democracy frame, as well as a competence frame and increased its cooperation with the EU to push democratising reforms in Turkey (*see Chapter 8*). The AKP elites made small steps rather than confronting the institutions of the state. Throughout this period, the AKP focused on economic growth, by continuing IMF programmes and implementing centre-right free-market policies, which aimed to further entrench the neoliberal reforms initiated by centre-right governments in previous years (Akçay, 2018; Tuğal, 2009). The AKP also appealed to the working class voters (İnsel, 2003, p.299) by pursuing economic policies with populist measures for popular support (Akçay, 2018; Özden and Bekmen, 2015, p.89). As Akçay (2018, p.5) argues, the populism of the AKP demonstrated itself with partial state welfarism as the networks of the AKP supplied credits to poor households⁵¹ as a part of its policies. Akçay (2018, p.81) argued that what he named “populist redistribution techniques” led to the successful implementation of neoliberal policies that were resisted in the 1990s (Akçay, 2018, p.81). The AKP therefore successfully used the frame of democracy to create political opportunities to consolidate its position, and gain support from part of the electorate.

However, the AKP's attempts to enact its own agenda faced obstacles from the political opposition, which appealed to state institutions and thereby exploited the political

⁵¹ Furthermore Bora and Çalışkan (2007, p.150) underlined that the AKP both used resources of the state extended "emergency spending" for "the urban poor" and released "Ministry of Agriculture funds" to farmers .

opportunities provided to it by the political and constitutional institutions of Turkey at the time. The most significant crisis to emerge at this period was the nomination of Abdullah Gül as the AKP's candidate for the presidency, which triggered the mass street protests of the Republican Rallies in major cities throughout Turkey. The SHP, CHP and several unions and Kemalist civil society organisations such as the Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği (Foundation for Contemporary Living) and the ADD (Atatürkist Thought Association) supported the mass protests that saw this nomination as threat to the fundamental principles of the republic (Alyanak, 2010). In the parliament, the CHP leader Baykal argued that Abdullah Gül was a candidate that represented Islamism (Voice of America, 2007). President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, and the Chief of Staff Yaşar Büyükanıt, gave public statements voicing concerns about “the hidden Islamist agenda” of the AKP government (Köker, 2010). In the first round of voting for the new president in parliament, even though Gül received 357 votes, the CHP appealed to the Constitutional Court, to block the vote due to it being invalid because 367 MPs had not been present for the vote (BBC Türkçe, 2007). In this cycle, the military issued a statement, known as the e-memorandum⁵³, where it voiced its concerns with the possibility of the erosion of secularism in Turkey and stated its readiness to act if necessary (The Guardian, 2007). At this point, European institutions like the EU and the Council of Europe, called the army to stay out of the upcoming presidential elections (DW.com, 2007). Although the AKP stated that the obstacles to the election of Gül were "a bullet to democracy" (BBC Türkçe, 2007), the confrontation with the institutions was limited. The political opportunity opened by the democratic discourse of the AKP appeared to have been closed.

⁵³ It came to be known as the “e-memorandum” as it was published on their website. The statement included the phrase: "The Turkish armed forces... will openly and clearly display their position and attitude when necessary. No one should doubt this." (DW.com, 2007).

Yet, in the face of this gridlock, the AKP called for an early election, in which it performed better than it had done so previously, after which the AKP was able to secure the election of Abdullah Gül as president. In these parliamentary elections, the AKP became the leading party by claiming 47 per cent of the vote, gaining 327 of 550 seats (Polat, 2009). The AKP increased its vote by 12 per cent in five years, eradicating traditional centre-right parties. One of the key themes emphasised by the party throughout this process was economic growth (Ak Parti, 2007). After five years of governance, the party was able to reach about 6 million more of the electorate, broadening its appeal around the country along with increasing its organisational power. Building on its commitment to democracy, the AKP called, in 2007, for constitutional change to enable the president to be elected directly by the people, instead of being elected by the parliament. This later resulted in a referendum being called on the matter in 2007,⁵⁴ in which the CHP and MHP opposed the proposed constitutional change, whereas the SHP and the pro-Kurdish DTP supported the change (Balkır, 2007). 68 percent of the public agreed with the proposals contained in the referendum, meaning that, once Gül's term as president was concluded in seven years, the public would be able to vote for the new president in 2014. Therefore, after the elections of 2007, the republican rallies clearly failed as their primary demand could not be met and it also initiated a heightened period of confrontation with the military (Özbudun, 2015).

After the 2007 success, the AKP and state institutions entered a contentious process, during which the judiciary especially opposed the policies of the AKP. The party attempted to implement some of its previous agenda, like removing the headscarf ban for higher education, but the Constitutional Court annulled the move (Aksoy, 2015). The contention

⁵⁴ The referendum also proposed the reduction of the term of the president from seven years to five years, the reduction of the time period between elections to four from five years and the introduction of a two-term limit for the president (BBC Turkish, 2007).

with the Constitutional Court intensified in 2008 with a closure case against the AKP being launched due to anti-secularism, as well as a proposed banning of Erdoğan and other AKP members from politics, which did not pass with a very close margin (Tait, 2008). By increasingly framing the military and its civilian allies as the biggest obstacle to democracy, the AKP supported the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials, during which military commanders began to be prosecuted due to their alleged involvement in coup plots to overthrow the AKP (Houston, 2013). Another development that would mark a shift from previous governments was the introduction of a vaguely defined “the opening process” on the Kurdish conflict in 2009 (Toktamış and David, 2018) to reach a peaceful solution. As Sancar (2009) who would be later an MP from the HDP argued, this policy also served for "neutralizing the Kurdish political movement" to turn into a "controlled opening" that could broaden the AKP's base. The Kurdish opposition also faced constraints from the state as the constitutional court shut down the DTP for its alleged ties to the PKK⁵⁵ (Köker, 2010). Consequently, the AKP also began to criminalise protests primarily by the Kurdish Movement and support what has been termed the *KCK trials* during which thousands of pro-Kurdish civil society and political actors were arrested⁵⁶ (Hess, 2012). Yet, the AKP increased its policing of Kemalist groups by repressing the Republic Day celebrations with police violence in 2012 (Watson and Tuysuz, 2012). Therefore, while prominent figures from within the state bureaucracy remained opposed to the AKP, the AKP first attempted to bypass these obstacles through seeking to initiate a peace process, but later appeared to pursue a more nationalist policy that involved using police force against the Kurdish movement and its opponents.

⁵⁵ With the closure of the party, the MPs mobilised under a new party, called the BDP.

⁵⁶ Thousands of Kurdish rights defenders and politicians were imprisoned by the claim that they belong to an umbrella organisation named the KCK that also includes the PKK (Bianet, 2011). Hess (2012) underlined the contradiction of these trials as the AKP argued that it was leading reforms on Kurdish rights while maintaining the crackdown.

3. Contention and Survival of the AKP

In 2010, the AKP launched a constitutional reform package, which it framed as signifying a move away from the constitution prepared after the 12 September coup, but which also gave the incumbent a degree of shaping the appointments to the judiciary (Özbudun, 2015; Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018). The 2010 constitutional referendum became the main mobilising agenda of the incumbent as it was framed as a break away from Turkey's tutelary institutions, with the aim of limiting the military's role in civilian politics (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018). The AKP proposed 32 articles that aimed to alter the playing field by making it harder to close political parties, overturning the military's dominance and changing the judiciary's structure (Celep, 2010). The AKP elites argued that, with the 2010 referendum, the constitutional reforms would give the constitutional court a more pluralistic structure and introduced progressive measures like the procedure of individual application (Aydın Düzgit, 2010). However, the CHP, which was now being led by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, argued that the proposed changes on the constitutional court amounted to court-packing, stating the powers granted to the Minister for Justice undermined the independence of the judicial branch⁵⁷ (CNN Türk, 2010b). The BDP's focus was to raise the agenda of "democratic rights" (Aslan Akman, 2012, p.88) in the new constitution, which the party and its supporters boycotted due to the lack of transformative change and the re-production of the existing system (Tapan, 2010). However, with the AKP's success in receiving around 57 percent support for the proposed changes, the opposition came to understand that to come to power they had to come up with a strategy that did not only rely on "AKP bashing" (Aydın Düzgit, 2010).

⁵⁷ The constitutional referendum was a moment that also split the broader left within Turkey, which had largely united around the Tekel strike of tobacco and alcohol workers in the previous year. Whereas many small political parties opposed the proposed changes, which were being opposed also by the MHP and CHP, others, such as the Trotskyist Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party and the left liberal Equality and Democracy Party (EDP) supported the AKP's proposed changes.

The 2011 elections represented a further opportunity for the AKP to overcome the challenges it faced from its opponents in the opposition and the state in its first and second terms. For the opposition, this election was significant because it was seen as a means of challenging the reforms that had been initiated by the AKP. In some of its safe seats, the CHP nominated those who were imprisoned in the Ergenekon trials (Uysal and Toprak, 2013). Similarly, the MHP's opposition centred on the reforms that the AKP had initiated with the hope of peacefully resolving the Kurdish issue in dialogue and interaction with Kurdish activists, accusing the AKP of aiming to bring the PKK to the parliament (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, 2011, p.160). The CHP was also broadly critical of the peace process, specifically arguing against dialogue with the PKK and arguing that peace negotiations ought to be carried out in the parliament (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2010). The BDP, on the other hand, due to the 10 per cent electoral threshold, pursued a strategy of supporting the candidacy of a series of independent candidates in constituencies where it could receive significant support. This also resulted in the BDP forging alliances with left and progressive social movements⁵⁸ who also shared their political goals (Cumhuriyet.com.tr, 2011). This allowed the BDP and its allies to overcome the ten percent electoral threshold by fielding independent candidates, who would subsequently form their own party group once they were elected to the parliament. However, throughout the election, the AKP presented a more populist frame, as it will be further discussed in *Chapter 8*, which othered its opponents, especially presenting the CHP as having an anti-democratic past, alongside stressing its own economic and social performance (Ak Parti, 2011). The AKP further consolidated its popular power by gaining almost 50 per cent of the vote in the 2011 parliamentary elections, which resulted in other political actors further revising their approaches to opposing the AKP.

⁵⁸ These included LGBTI movements in Turkey, some of the Alevi social movements, small left wing political parties and associations representing the interests of other ethnic and religious minorities.

During the 2011 elections and afterwards, the opposition increasingly sought to distinguish itself from the AKP on policy grounds, rather than directly attacking the AKP, with the hope of winning over some of the AKP's own electorate. For instance, the CHP visibly amplified its social-democratic character (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2011, 2015a, 2015b). Even though the CHP lost the elections of 2011, its family insurance policy, which involved the state supporting families with benefits, was polled as the most popular policy amongst the electorate. The CHP furthermore started to answer the question of expanding its narrow base with its new leadership under Kılıçdaroğlu. The major shift involved the incorporation of social-democratic norms in party programmes and policies and the adoption of a more rights-based approach challenging authoritarianism and arguing that the Kurdish issue should be solved in parliament (CHP EU Representation, 2012). Throughout this period, the MHP represented the far-right opposition to the government, which almost doubled its share of the votes to 14 per cent, presumably as a result of a backlash against the attempted peace process. This was due to their opposition to the PKK, to what they perceived to be concessions on the Cyprus issue that the government was considering due to pressures from the EU and their opposition to the discussion of the Armenian issue (Milliyetçi Halk Partisi, 2011). However, the AKP decided to reinitiate the peace process. This resulted in the CHP being internally divided between those who opposed the peace process and those on the liberal and left-wing of the party who were enthusiastic supporters of it, such as Sezgin Tanrikulu, a Kurdish human rights lawyer from Diyarbakır, who was elected as a CHP MP for Istanbul. It appeared that the AKP was once again setting the initiative in terms of contributing to political opportunities that it would subsequently exploit, as the peace process provided it with an opportunity to establish new alliances and to further split the opposition.

In June 2013, the protests that occurred spontaneously in Gezi Park, near Taksim Square in Istanbul, triggered a broader movement which spread to the entire country and provided novel means of challenging the incumbent. The protests started after police in Istanbul attacked peaceful protestors who were opposed to the destruction of trees and the planned construction of a mosque and shopping centre on the site, which would commemorate a late Ottoman-era barracks that (Yardımcı-Geyikçi, 2014). After the police attacked the protestors and destroyed some of their belongings, a wider range of actors joined the protests, including LGBT organisations, environmentalist groups, numerous political parties, including ‘anti-capitalist Muslims’ and professional associations, such as city planners (Yıldırım, 2014). The violent police response triggered a backlash as the initial crowd of protestors increased in number, at which point the protests also transformed from being concerned merely with opposition to the demolition of the park. Protesters also expressed their opposition to police violence and their demands diffused throughout the country as a result of the spread of news concerning the protests in the media, including social media. The protests took on a “democratic” (Toktamış, 2015) and “plural” (Örs and Turan, 2015) character through the participation of a large range of different social movements, political parties and individuals from different sections of society. This marked a novel approach to challenging the incumbent, as the main opposition parties, except for some members of the CHP and HDP, only expressed their support for the protests at a later stage (Yıldırım, 2014). The protests also marked a new shift to street-level contention, involving the occupation of public spaces as an extra-parliamentary form of opposition. Owing to how the AKP had frequently targeted either the political establishment or the state in its previous political campaigns, the AKP failed to understand the collective agency expressed through the initial protests and the subsequent cycle of protests that spread throughout the country.

After the police attacks resulted in the expansion of the protest movement, effectively transforming the movement into one opposed to police brutality as well as the defence of public space, the scope of the movement meant that other opposition actors also became involved (Atak and Della Porta, 2016). At this point, following the remarks and stances of multiple opposition actors regarding the protests, the protests became a form of counter-hegemony that aimed to challenge the AKP (Yıldırım, 2014). The mobilisation of conflicting groups, coming from backgrounds like the radical left, Kurdish political movement, and some representatives of Islamism and Kemalism, together under the same cause resulted in the protests becoming a critical juncture (Gürcan and Peker, 2015). This was because the coming together of these different groups altered the established identities of opposition actors who were hitherto hostile towards each other. This street-level change signalled that a new form of parliamentary politics which could challenge the incumbent was also possible. The new cross-sectional forms of identity in Gezi, which some have claimed transcended class divides (Özden and Bekmen, 2015), have been viewed as an alternative bloc which had the potential to contribute to the fall of the authoritarian regime. Therefore, the Gezi protests was significant insofar as actors who were not political parties initiated the movement and took the initiative in framing the problem and mobilising large segments of society, including the political sphere, as the cycle of protest continued.

The use of repression by the police forces during the Gezi protests, therefore, resulted in the transformation of the ongoing urban resistance into a mass upheaval, leading the efforts of the incumbent to backfire (Atak and Della Porta, 2016, p.615) as well as elite splits. At this point, the AKP, which had hitherto stressed how it was distinct from the state, came increasingly to associate itself with the state, with Erdoğan referring to the police forces who attacked the protestors as ‘my police’ and stating that he gave the order for protestors to be

targeted (Diken, 2015). The police repressed the mobilising groups with arrests, physically assaulted protesters and used tear gas and water cannons, leading to 11 deaths and almost 10,000 injuries (Amnesty International, 2013). However, some alternative voices within the AKP, such as the Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç, argued that protesters needed to be persuaded rather than tear gassed (Milliyet, 2013). The President of the Republic, Abdullah Gül, stated that he admired aspects of the Gezi movement, noting that democracy should not solely be tied to elections but should also include "the rights of association and free expression" (Hürriyet, 2013). Therefore, one of the consequences of the protests was that elite splits emerged in the AKP, between those who agreed with Erdoğan's personal approach to responding to the protests and those who believed another approach needed to be pursued to resolve the issue which triggered the protests. These splits could have signified another political opportunity at this point, but Erdoğan's assertion of his personal authority, in terms of coordinating the response to the protests, meant that the AKP government became much more personalistic and focused on the decision-making of Erdoğan (Çınar, 2018a).

Gezi's transformative nature was not only due to elite reconfigurations but the challenging of established political repertoires and forms of opposition (Yıldırım, 2014; Tuğal, 2016), which persisted even after the initial protest cycle ended. The Gezi Protests led to the creation of multiple platforms that united different social movements (Yörük, 2014), thereby creating a series of counter-publics. These counter-publics, such as the Taksim Solidarity Platform (Taksim Dayanışması), as well as which emerged in parks in major cities, such as Abbasağa Park in Istanbul and Anıtpark in Ankara, allowed relations of solidarity to be constructed between protesters and provided a basis from which to challenge the official narratives being advanced by the government and state elites. Small scale parties like the Gezi Party and

various left organizations were formed like the United June Movement⁵⁹, but the main mobilisation of consequence was in the established political parties. The horizontal mobilisation helped to unify some sections of the opposition with mainly activists or youth members of the political parties who were closer to forces to the left of the CHP forming networks (Zorlu, 2019; Yıldırım, 2014). Gezi Protests also inspired transformative groups within political parties, such as the newly formed Occupy CHP group (Daily Sabah, 2014). These networks also mobilised ordinary citizens that did not belong to a political group, who became politicised through their participation, resulting in them joining political parties or volunteering as election observers (Zorlu, 2019). On the political party level, led by the political wing of the Kurdish movement founded the political party HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party), which started to employ an enhanced national appeal rather than mainly focusing on the Kurdish electorate.⁶⁰ Therefore, along with resulting in a counter-hegemonic bloc to challenge the AKP and bring about elite splits, the Gezi protests of 2013 also resulted in the emergence of the opportunity for coalition-building. This took the form of the bottom-up transformation of the opposition, which became more pluralist, collaborative, and emancipatory in outlook.

4. Fragile Coalitions and Increasing Repression

In 2014, what can be called an internal, elite-split, and a subsequent power struggle became clear after the Gülenist movement, known by its followers as the 'Hizmet' (the 'Service'), split ranks with and challenged the AKP. The Gülenists had huge and occasionally hidden networks that spanned education centres, hospitals, security services and the judiciary (Lord,

⁵⁹ Referring to the month that the protests took place.

⁶⁰ For instance, as a former HDP Party Assembly Member undelined, a mobilisation emerged during the local elections which encouraged voters to vote for the HDP candidates during the municipal assembly elections and the CHP mayoral candidate (Zorlu, 2019).

2018). Under the AKP, the Gülenists were given positions in the bureaucracy, which opposition agents viewed as an alliance (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2018). They were instrumental in executing the Ergenekon cases in the judiciary and were instrumental in pursuing corruption trials. Following the split, the Gülenists released a series of illegally acquired audio recordings of telephone conversations which appeared to highlight cases of corruption that implicated Erdoğan, those close to him and AKP officials (Martin, 2022). The tapes triggered a corruption trial that was set off by an investigation by Gülenist judges and officials were detained due to corruption (Musil, 2015, p.86). The AKP responded to the challenges posed by the Gülenists by referring to the movement as the 'parallel state structure' due to the presence of its members in state institutions (Martin, 2022). The split between the Gülen movement and the other elites of the AKP further alarmed the AKP and came to be used to justify further repressive measures, including censorship. A purge was initiated to remove Gülenists from state institutions like the judiciary, police and military (Taş, 2015). This was reflected in the coming presidential and parliamentary elections when the AKP sought to present its opponents as working with Gülen. Consequently, after 2014, the AKP increased its backsliding measures with the efforts to create a "compliant judiciary" (Özbudun, 2018, p.49) to overcome the challenges posed by the Gülenists. By giving more power to the Ministry of Justice, Erdogan sacked the public prosecutors and judges, and launched a series of corruption trials (Martin, 2022). Consequently, the attacks of the Gülenists against the AKP resulted in further repression, that would go beyond solely targeting the Gülenists.

In the aftermath of the Gezi Park protests and the contention that started between the AKP and Gülenists, two further moments of electoral mobilisation occurred in the form of the presidential and local elections. In the March 2014 local elections, the AKP won around 43

per cent of the vote and maintained its hold on power in major cities (Akyuz and Hess, 2018). The 2014 presidential elections offered an additional opportunity for the AKP to consolidate its rule due to constitutional changes, which enabled the people, rather than parliament, to vote for the president. The personalisation of power under Erdoğan increased at this era as Erdoğan was able to violate many constitutional rules, like not resigning as the prime minister after his candidacy bid for the presidency. Furthermore, opposing voices in the party started to disappear as loyalty to the leader became the main means of being promoted within the AKP (Çınar, 2018a). By forwarding Erdoğan as their candidate, the AKP were able to ensure that their leader would be able to secure the legitimacy of being a popularly elected president (Yeşilada, 2015). The CHP leadership selected the conservative academic, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu as their joint candidate with the MHP and several other small nationalist and centrist political parties, through a top-down process. Meanwhile, the HDP selected Selahattin Demirtaş, a popular figure supported by members of progressive social movements, as its candidate. In the end, Erdoğan got 51.79 per cent per cent of the vote, İhsanoğlu received 38.44 per cent, and Demirtaş received 9.76 per cent of the popular votes. The defeat at the elections and the lack of consultation in the selection of the CHP's candidate increased opposition to the leadership within the party, which resulted in a quest for mobilisation to address the failure. In contrast, whereas the Demirtaş campaign emboldened the HDP, and was seen as a trial run for testing the messages for the 2015 elections (Zorlu, 2019). As a former HDP Party Assembly Member (Zorlu, 2019) stated during an interview, the selection of İhsanoğlu resulted in many usual CHP voters voting for Demirtaş, who they saw as a progressive candidate.

In In the context of the presidential elections of 2014 and the parliamentary elections of 2015, steps were taken in February 2014 to find a solution to the Kurdish conflict within what has

been termed the "Dolmabahçe Consensus" in February 2014, with hopes that this process would provide an end to the Kurdish conflict (Gunter, 2016). At this point of time then Minister Davutoğlu argued that a “democratic process” was on its way with subsequent the termination of violence, followed by Öcalan’s Newrouz call to lay down arms (Gunter, 2016). However, soon after, Erdoğan stated that he did not approve of the Dolmabahçe meeting (Turkish Minute, 2016), and after Erdogan’s opposition, it was clear that an opportunity was closing. While the peace process was still on the agenda, the government increased repressive and backsliding measures. The government pushed the Internal Security Bill, which made it easier to introduce a state of emergency (Hürriyet Daily News, 2015). The bill was met with contentious parliamentary debates, which led to physical fighting, leading that led to MPs being injured (BBC Türkçe, 2015). The opposition opposed the bill due to the lack of checks and balances on the increasing power of the police and the HDP saw it as a threat to the peace process (Hürriyet Daily News, 2015). Overall, while an opportunity emerged for the resolution of the Kurdish conflict, the executive aggrandisement took place with the introduction of measures like the security bill and personalisation of power with institutional changes like the introduction of granting discretionary funds for the presidency (Yılmaz, 2015).

The 2015 electoral cycle became a clear demonstration of democratic backsliding as the process was not free and fair, due to the occurrence of violence during the elections, especially in the south-eastern region of the country (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2015). The AKP elites and, specifically Erdoğan, focused on having an absolute majority in the upcoming elections, and unlike their previous election programmes, the campaign was built on the fear of a return to a coalition government, which was presented as having the potential to lead to turmoil (Bardakçı, 2016, p.6). With increasing purges, the

period was marked by the notorious quote of Erdoğan, “*give us 400 deputies, and we will resolve this in peace*”, which tied the maintenance of societal peace with the continuation of the AKP’s electoral hegemony (T24, 2015). Furthermore, the AKP unfairly benefited from state resources which curtailed the opposition’s visibility in the media (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2015). The Turkish Radio and Television Corporation for example withdrew the broadcast the CHP’s election campaign broadcast due to its direct criticisms of the AKP (Voice of America, 2015). The process leading to the 2015 elections also marked increasing electoral violence. Increasing attacks took place against the HDP, such as the arson attacks on their offices and the bomb attack at the Diyarbakır rally (Bianet, 2015). The lack of prosecutions in these cases was seen by the HDP as the incumbent facilitating these attacks. Both the HDP and CHP were able to unite in their opposition to how Erdoğan was “personalising” his authoritarian grasp, which resulted in many CHP voters lending their votes to the HDP to ensure that it would not fail to meet the 10 percent electoral threshold (Zorlu, 2019). Both parties also came up with progressive policies for political change. HDP leader Demirtaş targeted the legacies of the constitution that had been built on the institutions of the 1980 coup, calling for a “libertarian civil” one that would be inclusive of various societal actors (TRT World, 2015). The CHP also signalled that it would be willing to cooperate with the HDP to resolve the issue of democratic deficit and peace. Therefore, though the elections occurred on an uneven playing field, which favoured the incumbent, they nonetheless prompted greater cooperation between the CHP and the HDP.

The 2015 June elections marked a turning point as, for the first time, the AKP could not form a government on its own⁶¹. The loss of seats led to a clear split between the prime minister,

⁶¹ While the CHP increased its vote share to 25.98 and the MHP got 13 per cent, the HDP performed above expectations by, taking the 13.02 per cent of the votes (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2015).

who was open to forming a coalition government, unlike the president, who was keen on holding new elections (BBC, 2015). The AKP's loss of hegemony in the 2015 elections changed the balance of representation balance dramatically. It provided opposition groups with the opportunity to form an electoral coalition with the AKP or among themselves. It was the first time a pro-Kurdish party surpassed the electoral threshold and entered parliament as a party. The rise of the HDP's votes led to a fall for the AKP as the AKP lost its MPs in the Kurdish region. In the elections' aftermath, the AKP engaged in coalition talks with the CHP. However, as a government could not initially be formed, a caretaker government was formed which was short-lived as a government ultimately could not be formed again by the different political parties in the parliament, due to the political parties' internal structures and the ideological divisions amongst among them, which triggered a new election (The Economist, 2015). However, in the November elections, which occurred together with the increase of terror attacks and the launch of military operations, the AKP regained its parliamentary majority. On the other hand, the HDP barely passed the electoral threshold, gaining 10.75 percent of the votes, whereas the CHP increased its percentage of the vote to 25.32 from 24.95 percent (*see table 5*). Throughout the rerun of the elections, the AKP emphasised the theme of "stability, security and unity" (Özçelik, 2015). Several violent attacks by terrorist groups, including ISIS, surfaced, and clashes occurred between the Kurdish movement and the state, which resulted in security becoming one of the main themes of the election. The ISIS attack on a pro-peace rally, which led to the death of more than a hundred participants, was linked to the government as the teargassing of protestors after the attack was also seen as demonstrating how the state was complicit or supportive of the attack (Göktaş, 2018). The violence brought a final end to the peace process as, after the November elections, the PKK's attacks and the state's repression increased with the conflict expanding to major cities, leading to human rights violations and massive destruction. During this period, violence

against Kurdish politicians and civil society actors increased, as military operations and curfews were imposed on south-eastern cities⁶² (Human Rights Watch, 2016a). With increasing human rights violations, more than 1000 academics signed a petition calling the government to continue negotiations by criticising its responsibility for the violations. Erdogan and AKP supporters targeted and threatened the academics by opening investigations, purging, and arresting many of these academics, as well as HDP members (Amnesty International, 2018). Consequently, the co-occurrence of the breakdown of the peace process, the rise in armed incidents and the elections gave rise to a situation which resulted in the AKP winning the November elections of 2015 on the basis of a theme of security and increased repression.

Table 5: Parliamentary Election Results of Major Political Parties Seats Compared 2015 June - November

Party	2015 June	2015 November
AKP	<i>258</i>	<i>317</i>
CHP	<i>317</i>	<i>134</i>
MHP	<i>80</i>	<i>40</i>
HDP	<i>80</i>	<i>59</i>

Source: Karar (2019)

⁶² Furthermore, while HDP co-leader Demirtaş survived an assassination attempt, the president of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, Tahir Elçi, was murdered.

Following the elections, the incumbent engaged in a number of moves that served to facilitate further executive aggrandisement and concentration of power under the presidency. Firstly, Prime Minister Davutoğlu was soon replaced with Binali Yıldırım, one of Erdoğan's closest and oldest allies. In order to enhance its institutional power to put forward executive aggrandizement, the AKP aligned itself with the MHP. With the AKP ending the language of peace and incorporating a repressive nationalist response, the MHP started to support the government. This allowed the MHP to empower itself through a coalition, as the party was in decline as its vote fell by 5 per cent between the two elections. Given the MHP's far-right ideology, it was easily able to enter into a coalition with the AKP, who had abandoned their earlier approach to the peace process and to democratising reforms (T24, 2017b). As will be discussed in *Chapter Eight*, the coalition between the AKP and the MHP, would be responsible for advancing new frames towards the opposition, including the presentation of the opposition as linked to hostile foreign forces, in the form of 'fifth column frames', and the deployment of securitisation frames, which presented some forms of opposition as posing an existential threat. These frames also made it very challenging for the CHP, which has historically claimed to support the interests of the state and self-identified as a nationalist party, to challenge the government, since the government presented itself as defending the state and nation. The new coalition of the AKP and the MHP also resulted in a contraction of the political opportunities, as the capacity of the HDP and other opposition parties to represent the public was undermined, following the suspension of parliamentary immunity and the arrest of many HDP mayors (Amnesty International, 2018).

The violent 15 July coup attempt, which the AKP identified as being orchestrated by the Gülenists, led the AKP to increase polarisation and targeted repression of the many members of the opposition. Together with Gülenists and those framed of being Gülenists, the aftermath

of the unsuccessful coup attempt was marked by the arrests of members of the political opposition, including the co-leaders of the HDP, Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ. (Doyle, 2017). While the AKP announced a state of emergency which would last six weeks after the coup, it lasted for two years, leading to further closing of the polity (Amnesty International, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). Anti-terrorism laws were utilised to jail activists, journalists and opposition activists and politicians. Numerous associations, foundations and 170 media outlets were closed during the state of emergency through executive decrees (Amnesty International, 2017b). The AKP government also increasingly turned its back on the international norms it seemed to have adopted in its previous terms, since, in 2016, with the announcement of a state of emergency, Turkey suspended the European Convention on Human Rights. Even though Turkey has been a participant of the United Nations Convention Against Torture since 1988, incidents of torture also increased after the failed coup attempt in 2016 (Amnesty International, 2018). Erdoğan's post-coup promise to bring the death penalty before the parliament "*if the people want him to*" (Cumhuriyet.com.tr, 2018a) was another demonstration of the backward trend against the disownment of EU norms and his populist strategies. The CHP strongly condemned the coup as an attack on Turkish democracy but identified the AKP's historical relationship with the Gülenists as facilitating the coup (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2018). Additionally, the CHP named the AKP's authoritarian turn a "civilian coup" (T24, 2017a) and responded to the measures of backsliding by organising a Justice March that included march from the capital Ankara to Istanbul demanded of the march are the lifting of the state of emergency to stop rule by decree, purges "restoration of freedoms for the judiciary"⁶³ (Srivastava and Pitel, 2017). Consequently, with the escalation of violence, and the failed coup attempt in 2016, the government used counter-terrorism

⁶³ Members of HDP also participated to the march. Erdoğan argued that those who are participating to the march are supporting terrorists (Srivastava and Pitel, 2017) as one of the demands of the march was on the unjust arrests of the members of the opposition.

measures to “combine criminalisation with strong security measures”. (Kaya and Whiting, 2019, p.10). However, while the coup attempt resulted in a further contraction of the political opportunities available to the opposition, it also contributed to it advancing an injustice frame.

At the end of this time frame, although there had been a de facto move towards presidentialism before 2017, the 2017 move to a presidential system, involved greatly reducing the power of the parliament by granting the president the power to dissolve parliament (Adar and Seufert, 2021). The lack of accountability the president will have over other representative institutions and powers like controlling the national budget (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2017, Halkların Demokratik Partisi, 2017) became the unifying theme to oppose the changes. The constitutional referendum, which was held under unfair conditions, passed with 51 per cent of the electorate voting in favour, yet was a contentious process. This is because elections took place under a state of emergency and were not “free and fair”, according to international organisation reports (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2017). The election process was marked by the decision of the YSK to accept unstamped ballots, hinting at electoral fraud. Especially in Kurdish cities, widespread cases of electoral violence and fraud were documented (BBC Türkçe, 2017). Unlike the 2010 referendum, where there were various mobilisations for supporting the “yes”, “no”, and “boycott” campaigns to change the constitution, the political opposition united under the “No” camp. The “No” camp focused on the perils of increasing the powers of an already authoritarian president. As a co-opted political party, the MHP allied itself with the AKP, arguing that increasing the president’s powers would contribute to the fight against terrorism

and ensure continued stability⁶⁴ (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, 2017). However, the referendum demonstrated the polarisation within the opposition as those who criticised the referendum results, such as Selin Sayek Böke and Fikri Sağlar, were distanced from the CHP. The main political opposition did not do enough to combat the narrow margin of loss in the referendum, with internal splits arising on how to respond to the referendum loss, with the effect that the AKP increased its political power over political and judicial institutions.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the process of events in the dynamics of contention between the incumbent and the political opposition in Turkey under the AKP and the various political opportunities that unfolded in the course of this process. The chapter started with a historical review of the dynamics of contention and argued that Turkey and the Ottoman Empire have always had strong opposition alongside a powerful state. While the literature has emphasised the structural constraints that have hampered change, from the authoritarian single-party period (1923–1945) to the episodes after the military coups of 1960 and 1980, the political opposition in Turkey has managed to operate even under unfavourable conditions, pursuing strategies to change or overthrow the incumbent. Although the AKP became the new political elite of the country, they arguably continued to feel threatened by the Kemalist bureaucracy until 2013, when they arguably were able to consolidate their power. In its first five years, the party struggled against the bureaucratic elites, experienced tension with judicial institutions which were intent on closing the party and even faced the threat of a coup d'état. The judicial reforms of 2010 can be interpreted as a key turning point which allowed the AKP to

⁶⁴ The AKP also co-opted other figures from the right like Numan Kurtulmuş and Süleyman Soylu (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018).

overcome the obstacles it faced from the state. Once the AKP felt it had considerably overcome these threats, it sought to consolidate its control. The Gezi protests, Gülenist threats against the government, the wave of electoral and general violence in 2015 and the coup attempt of 2016 were all used as pretexts to further centralise power and repress the opposition by the AKP, which forged an alliance with the MHP after 2015. In the process of increasing authoritarianism under the AKP, the freedom of information, freedom of assembly, and trust in electoral integrity deteriorated, leading the opposition seeking to construct a broad alliance to challenge the AKP. However, the ideological divides within this alliance, coupled with the need to appeal to AKP supporters, has resulted in the CHP finding it difficult to incorporate the HDP into such an alliance.

CHAPTER 5: International Opportunities and Contentious Politics in Turkey

Introduction

This chapter maps out the role of the international in the dynamics of contention between the political opposition and the incumbent in Turkey under the AKP. It tracks international opportunities presented in *Chapter 2* by investigating the openness of the international context, punitive and rewarding measures from international actors; opposition externalisation; and the incumbent's foreign policy. By tracing international opportunities and mobilising networks, the first section of the chapter starts with investigating the historical background of the role and the perception of the international in Turkey. This section demonstrates that the political opposition and the incumbent have long-standing relations with and perceptions of international actors that shaped the formation of insider-outsider coalitions and foreign policy choices. The following section explores international opportunities with a chronological organisation under the three-time frames presented in Chapter 4. The first era focuses on the international dynamics of the AKP's election and the rewarding strategies from powerful international actors. This section demonstrates how the 1999 economic recession shaped the AKP's domestic popularity and how the EU was the leading regional actor that promoted democratisation in Turkey. This section argues that the political opposition's sceptical outlook on the EU increased the incumbent's pro-EU alignment. The second section focuses on foreign policy change under the AKP. At this time, the 2010 Arab Uprisings subsequently emerged as a transformative event that critically altered the AKP's foreign policy and how different domestic actors responded to it. The last time frame, which investigates the international context of increasing authoritarianism after the Gezi Protests, demonstrates how punitive and rewarding strategies were implemented simultaneously by Western actors toward the incumbent. This section concludes that with the transformative event of what has been named the 2015 migrant crisis, mixed punitive and

rewarding strategies weakened the strategies of opposition externalisation. It also shows how, as pressure grew from international actors, the incumbent created alternative regional platforms and intensified its populist foreign policy.

1. Historical Legacies and the International Relations of Turkey

The origin of modern Turkey's links with the international is shaped by the contentious process of the decline of the Ottoman Empire. A particular effort to improve the empire's relations with Europe can be traced to the nineteenth century, in the context of its weakening and its consequent need to forge external alliances (Özavcı, 2021, p.1451). The partial or complete Westernisation project, which was one of the stated aims of the founders of the Republic of Turkey, was rooted in these efforts (Deringil, 2007). From as far back as the period commonly referred to as the onset of modernity in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, both the opposition and the incumbent have occasionally sought different forms of support for their domestic political projects from outside actors. The Ottoman bureaucrats who initiated the modernising reforms of the *Tanzimat* had close connections with European diplomats⁶⁵ (Davison, 1963, p.52). Members of the Young Ottoman movement, which contested the nature of Ottoman modernisation, sought, and received refuge in European capital cities, such as Paris and London, where they forged transnational ties with other actors (Çiçek, 2010, p.43). These ties would later shape and influence the Young Turk movement, which built on the legacy of the Young Ottomans and later came to power in 1908 (Taglia, 2015, p. 144). These Ottoman reformist elites used Europe as a way to push their desired reforms. The movement headed by Mustafa Kemal, which emerged out of the plethora of forms of resistance to Allied occupation, also sought recognition of itself and the republic it

⁶⁵ These reforms can also be seen as a successful pressuring from Western states.

was founded from powerful international actors such as the nascent Soviet Union and, later on, powerful European states (Göl, 2015). Throughout the period of the decline and collapse of the Ottoman Empire, numerous secessionist groups also broke away from the empire. They sought to receive different forms of international support, either successfully or unsuccessfully. These included the movements to establish the independent states of Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and many others and separatist movements in Crete (Şenışık, 2011) and unsuccessful attempts to create Circassian and Kurdish states (Gingeras, 2016). Numerous movements that had an ethnoreligious character also sought external support against the Ottoman state. The perceived and actual level of support such secessionist groups received internationally also resulted in scepticism and opposition to international actors in general by groups aligned with the Ottoman and later Turkish states, which has arguably persisted to the present day (Guida, 2008, p. 38).

During the single-party regime, oppressive measures were frequently justified based on the need to curtail foreign influence over Turkish politics, which was based on the late imperial and early republican experience of nationalist separatist movements breaking away from the empire, often with the support of foreign powers. The fear of such events recurring has been dubbed the “Sèvres syndrome” by scholars, in reference to the Treaty of Sèvres (Guida, 2008, p. 38), which was never implemented due to the resistance of the National Movement led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The Treaty of Sèvres had involved granting independence to the Kurds and also envisaged granting territory to Greece, Armenia and establishing foreign spheres of influence throughout the remaining parts of the country, but, as a result of negotiations with the Allies which occurred following the success of Mustafa Kemal, the Treaty of Lausanne, which formally recognised Turkey’s borders, was implemented instead (Zürcher, 2017). The impact of this event is clearly demonstrated in the case of the closure of

the Liberal Republic Party (Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası) in 1925, following an uprising in the Kurdish region of the country, due to claims that the party had collaborated with foreigners to support the uprising (Zürcher, 2017). The ongoing uncertainty over the country's south-eastern frontier, which was only resolved in 1926 after it became clear that the city of Mosul and its environs would be a part of Iraq (Beck, 1981), created an environment in which Kurdish activism was perceived as supporting the interests of other states in this territory (Kirişçi and Winrow, 1997). Throughout this period to the World War Two, far-right ethno-nationalist movements, known as the Turanists (Deringil, 2004, pp. 173— 174), as well as communist organisations and their sympathisers (Gökay, 2021, pp. 847 – 848), were subject to oppression as the single-party state sought to maintain its neutral stance throughout the Second World War. Consequently, Turkey remained neutral throughout most of the Second World War, before finally joining the Allied cause in 1945, even though different factions of intellectuals actively lobbied for the state to participate on one of the two sides (Deringil, 2004, p. 9).

Turkey's move to a multi-party system in the immediate aftermath of the end of the Second World War and its securing of membership in the UN coincided with it altering its relationship with the international. After the Soviet Union demanded extensive influence over the control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits and that Turkey cede two of its eastern provinces of Kars and Ardahan, Turkey's foreign policy moved away from neutrality (Hale, 2000). Turkey instead subsequently started to be highly integrated with Western institutions and became one of the first states to join the United Nations, established initially by the victorious Allies immediately after the Second World War (Hale, 2000). The Truman doctrine, launched by the United States after the Second World War, was shaped partly on the basis of the perceived threat of Turkey being taken over by communism and involved

Turkey and Greece receiving aid to prevent them from becoming communist countries in the orbit of the USSR (Hale, 2000). Turkey also received considerable American aid in the form of the Marshall Plan, which was part of a plan to ensure the post-war economic recovery of Europe (Hale, 2000). Moreover, under Mendres's DP, Turkey also contributed a large force to the UN-led operation in the Korean War and became a member of NATO in 1953 and later an ECC candidate in 1963 (Celep, 2011). Turkey had also become a founding member of the Council of Europe in 1949 and became a party to several international treaties, such as the Geneva Convention (İçduygu and Keyman, 2000). These treaties allowed Turkey to be integrated within international legislation that gave considerable potential political opportunities to actors within the country, who could utilise institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights⁶⁶. However, the international alignment of the country alongside the West can also be viewed as a means of limiting the potential for a separate foreign policy.

The stances taken towards historical and current relations with Western states shaped the identities of different political movements in the post-Second World War context, as different political groups came to adopt pro-Western or anti-Western perspectives. During the Cold War, Turkey's state elites became an advocate of the West on the frontline against the USSR and its allies via NATO (Brown, 2008). Centre-right governments, such as the DP, which came to power in the first democratic elections in the country in 1950, were principally responsible for this shift (Brown, 2008). However, some right-wing actors framed the opposition, including the CHP, the founding political party of the republic, as being either in sympathy with or facilitating the rise of communism (Taşkın, 2007, pp. 124–125). A small but influential minority of left and communist organisations, on the other hand, were strongly

⁶⁶ The European Convention on Human Rights has been a vital mechanism to open up the domestic. Turkey ratified it in 1954 but the usage of this process intensified after the 1980 coup.

opposed to the alliance with NATO, which they saw as limiting the independence of the country as well as preventing a future transition to socialism or communism (Kahya, 2019, p. 110). Consequently, the DP claimed to be defending anti-communism and presented itself as a strong defence against communism throughout this period. This opposition to communism also resulted in rising authoritarian populist conservatism during the later years of the DP government. As a result, the last few years of the DP government were marked by rising authoritarianism and oppression of journalists and civil society (Abou-El-Fadl, 2019). The DP was ultimately removed in a military coup in 1960, which cited the oppressive measures of the government as well as its supposed moves away from secularism to justify its decision. The military, which did not alter Turkey's place within NATO and the West after this coup, executed the president, Adnan Menderes, and arrested leading government members. In the following years, a new constitution was prepared by the military government, which established a bicameral political system and ensured greater political freedoms, upon the return to civilian life (Camelio, 2015, pp. 129-136).

Following the return to civilian politics in 1962, the international polarisation of the Cold War continued to be reflected in domestic polarisation, which took the form of a deep polarisation between right and left-wing political forces. Some within the CHP and the Turkish left were, throughout this period, more distant towards the US due to their varying levels of belief in the need to maintain Turkey's foreign policy independent throughout the Cold War (Kösebalaban, 2011, pp. 105-107). Many, accordingly, advocated for Turkey to chart an independent path in opposition to the US and the USSR (Kösebalaban, 2011, p. 96). Therefore, the opposition and the incumbent maintained the left-right polarisation within the country by framing each other as acting on behalf of different international actors, ranging from NATO to the Chinese communist regime (Karaveli, 2018). Additionally, the CHP under

Ecevit made some gestures towards closer alignment with the Non-Aligned countries, was critical of some aspects of the West's foreign policy and orchestrated Turkey's military interference in Cyprus in 1974, against the wishes of the US (Kösebalaban, 2011, pp. 105–107).⁶⁷ Although there was no fundamental shift in the foreign policy of Turkey in this period, domestic politics came to be highly-polarised, due to the impact of the ideological right-left tensions of the Cold War on the domestic politics of the country. Throughout this period, together with the end of the détente period and the increase in Cold War tensions, both sides continued to present each other as extensions of foreign actors and hence threats to national integrity⁶⁸ (Aydın, 2000, pp. 115-119). Two changes in the 1970s would result in two different paths emerging for domestic actors: increasing norms on human rights and the diffusion of neoliberalism. In the international context, the Helsinki Accords of 1975 promoted the protection of individual human rights as its core principle, and with the election of Carter, human rights became a pillar of US foreign policy (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Nevertheless, unlike Latin America, Turkey was not significantly impacted by the turn towards human rights as it was still embedded in the tensions of its Cold War context. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the presence of US military personnel and bases in Turkey became an issue that was politicised and opposed by the left (Aydın, 2000, p. 118). On the other hand, neoliberalism was also not popular in Turkey, where an interventionist economic strategy focused on development had been favoured (Öniş, 2004, p. 128). However, the centre-right AP (Adalet Partisi-Justice Party) government announced, on 24 January 1980, that it was willing to implement a set of neoliberal economic policies, in the face of economic and political upheaval (Öniş, 2004, p. 116). These decisions would be implemented in-depth after the 1980 military coup.

⁶⁷ At this time, the CHP were in government with the Islamist National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi – MSP), whose leader, Erbakan, would later claim to have decided that Turkey should intervene in Cyprus

⁶⁸ Political instability also ensued in which parties of the right, far-right, Kemalist, and Islamist right formed Nationalist Front governments against what they perceived as the communist threat.

The aftermath of the 1980 military coup, which was justified by the military as having been required, given increasing levels of violence within the country between left, right and Islamist groups, altered Turkey's relationship with the international. Together with the return to civilian rule and the election of the centre right ANAP, some reforms were undertaken to lift restrictions while continuing Turkey's integration into neoliberal institutions (Heper and Keyman, 1998, p. 267). At this point, there emerged two different ways in which international actors predominantly influenced the country's democratisation. The first was the conditionality criteria to gain membership in the European Economic Community (which later became the European Union in 1993) and the Western linkage of opposition agents (Dağı, 1996). The second was the advocacy of international rights organisations against human rights violations (İçduygu, 2011). While NATO did not directly concern itself with the promotion of democracy or human rights (Dağı, 1996) in this period, the institutions of the EU paved the way for international or domestic NGO and opposition representation through the cooperation with European parliamentarians and various committees and institutions (Joachim and Locher, 2008, p.8). The post-1983 period, therefore, resulted in the proliferation of political opportunities in Turkey, which were rooted in the new international context the country found itself.

In the context of the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, Turkey's "Western linkage" (Levitsky and Way, 2006, 2010) considerably increased with denser economic transactions, cross-border flows, and diplomatic negotiations with the EU. Even though Turkey's quest for membership to the EEC and reaching a customs union dated back to the 1960s, Turkey applied to become a member of the EEC in 1987 and entered the customs union with the EU in 1995 (Celep, 2011). In this era Deniz Baykal, later party leader, then CHP leader and the minister of foreign affairs, was instrumental in signing the deal (Celep, 2011, p.424). The

Copenhagen criteria that was established in 1993, in the context of Eastern European transitions, to lay the conditions for EU membership (İçduygu, 2011, p. 381), shaped the path of democracy promotion in Turkey. The political criteria define the political conditions that render a candidate country eligible to open accession negotiations with the EU, which include stable institutions that can provide assurance for democracy, the upholding the rule of law human rights, and minority rights (Öniş, 2000). For Turkey, the Copenhagen criteria was able to provide opportunities for altering the domestic playing field by curtailing the military's role in politics, decreasing human rights violations, giving more inclusion to minorities, and increasing judicial independence (Emerson, 2004). However, the ongoing conflict with the PKK, historical tensions with Cyprus and the state of human rights resulted in Turkey's initial application being rejected (Tocci, 2014). At this point, many social movements, including the Kurdish movement, also sought support from international organisations to secure their political demands for greater rights. These social movements also made use of Turkey's existing membership of the Council of Europe, since this allowed them to contest the state in the European Court of Human Rights (Çelik, 2005). Throughout this period, many cases dealing with issues such as the right to free elections, the right to life, prisoner's rights and other human rights were considered in the ECHR (Çelik, 2005). Therefore, the opening of negotiations for Turkey's membership in the EU resulted in the creation of new political opportunities for political actors. However, these opportunities could prove to be fleeting, given how the negotiations do not guarantee membership (Resul, 2001, p.165) and how Turkey could and can always withdraw its candidacy.

2. International Opportunities in the First Era

The recession of 2000 and the subsequent economic crisis, which unfolded at the beginning of the millennium, impacted several states, including Argentina and Turkey, was a

transformative event which facilitated the AKP's electoral success in 2001. Turkey's economy contained several features, including increasing financialization, borrowing and risky investments, that shaped the scale of the economic collapse (Tuğal, 2009, 2016). In response to the crisis, the coalition government, headed by Bülent Ecevit of the DSP, invited Kemal Derviş, a Turkish economist based in the United States, to develop a solution to the turmoil. Derviş then successfully negotiated a stand-by agreement with the IMF and acquired credits from the World Bank (Bedirhanoğlu, 2007). He also oversaw the regulation of the finance sector, which resulted in the closure of many recently formed banks and introduced laws to encourage economic competition and foreign investment, thereby further consolidating the move towards neoliberalism and Turkey's integration with the global economy (Robins, 2002). At the same period, following the 9/11 attacks, Ecevit and the DSP affirmed Turkey's support of the United States and authorised the deployment of Turkish troops as part of the NATO operation in Afghanistan against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda (CNN, 2001). However, Ecevit's ambition of Turkey playing a leading role in the rebuilding of Afghanistan, through Turkey taking over command of the NATO mission, was thwarted in the context of the economic difficulties faced by Turkey. The AKP, meanwhile, as a newly formed party, engaged in a long and hectic period of lobbying, where Erdoğan met with US officials (Çakır and Çalmuk, 2001, p.164; Olson, 2005, p.142). In the context of the economic crisis and the deal that was reached with the IMF, the perception of the AKP as free from corruption served to convince domestic and international audiences that it would be able to effectively improve the economic situation within the country (Bedirhanoğlu, 2007, p. 1247; Göl, 2009, p.803).

With the election of the AKP in 2002, the EU especially had considerable influence on Turkey's reform process at this time because of how the AKP was prioritising to become a member of the EU (Celep, 2011). The Turkish parliament, a year before, had introduced

amendments to the constitution in order to meet the Copenhagen political criteria, most significantly by abolishing the death penalty (Kirişçi, 2020, p.130). Along with the conditionality measures to open accession talks, Turkey had to take steps towards resolving the Cyprus issue. In this context, many of the political parties in the parliament, such as the centre-left CHP, hesitated to support an approach that they characterised as having the potential to weaken the position of the Turkish-supported, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (Resul, 2010). In their 2002 election manifesto, the AKP argued that joining the EU was their “priority target” and the EU’s conditionality measures were a harmonious part of Turkey’s “modernisation” process (AK Parti, 2002, p.33). This marked a shift from the anti-Western position of the Welfare Party and resulted in the AKP expanding beyond its more Islamist core constituency. Furthermore, it allowed the AKP to utilise the potential incentives and costs associated with EU conditionality to advance its own political agenda.

With the AKP coming to power in 2002, the parliament aimed to improve human rights and freedom of expression to implement the EU’s conditionality measures (Avcı and Çarkoğlu; 2016; Uslu, 2008). Many commentators have labelled the AKP’s commitment to pursuing the criteria within Europe to state that the AKP is adopting “a Christian Democrat” style of politics, combining religious conservatism and democracy along lines similar to several European parties (Kirişçi, 2004; Nasr, 2005). Throughout its first term, along with its acceptance of EU conditionality as part of its desire for EU accession, the AKP came to use its foreign policy to advance its political opportunities. In particular, the AKP came to present itself as a model democratic and Islamic state to Western actors, which came to be promoted as part of efforts to encourage moderate Islam and democracy. The US was instrumental in promoting what has been termed the “Turkish model” that brought together “formal democracy”, “free-market capitalism”, and “conservative democracy” (Tuğal, 2016, p.13),

which resonated with the democracy promotion agenda of the US, and its goal to prevent “Islamic terrorism”. Furthermore, under the AKP, Turkey became further incorporated into global markets and deepened privatisation policies that met resistance in other parts of the world (Tuğal, 2016). Unlike in other states where privatisation and austerity measures led to unrest, the AKP was able to lead the transformation by successfully maintaining some welfare policies to excluded groups and limiting union mobilisation (Akçay, 2018; Bakiner, 2017, p.21; Tuğal, 2016). As Tuğal (2016, p.12-13) noted, US elites, including President Bush, also promoted the model that included free-market capitalism as a part of it, by arguing that Turkey has been a model “with 150 years of democratic and social reform”. The US also supported Turkey’s accession to the EU (Tuğal, 2016, p.13), most visibly seen in Bush’s speech in 2006, labelling Turkey’s EU membership in line with US interests⁶⁹ (Beunderman, 2006).

Although the AKP’s first years saw Turkey become a candidate to join the EU, Turkey’s accession process experienced a stalemate due to a lack of a resolution of the Cyprus issue⁷⁰ and increasing opposition to Turkey’s membership from some European governments. With the European Council concluding that Turkey “fulfilled the political criteria” and opened accession talks in 2005, an optimism emerged that Turkey would soon become a member of the EU. Even though there was a convergence between the AKP and the EU’s attempts to resolve the Cyprus issue and push domestic reforms (Hughes, 2010; Patton, 2007), the EU did not have a comprehensive policy for pre-accession like it did in Eastern European

⁶⁹ Alongside being presented as a model for the Middle East, where the US and the UK were considering promoting regime change in Iraq, Turkey was also encouraged to partake in the Iraq War, including as a staging ground for US and coalition troops who would invade the north of the country from the Turkish border. Although the government lost a vote to authorise Turkey’s participation in the invasion of Iraq, due to cooperation with the CHP and dissident AKP MPs, as well as street protests by nationalists, the left and Islamists throughout the country, the idea of Turkey as a model neoliberal, democratic, moderate and Islamic state persisted and resulted in the AKP incumbent receiving international support.

⁷⁰ Tackling the Cyprus issue was a major step, as it became a deadlock in Turkey-EU relations since 1974 (Celep, 2011).

countries (Resul, 2010). This meant that there was no clear path for Turkey to follow with regards to becoming a member of the EU. Moreover, most Greek Cypriots objected to the Annan Plan on the account that it was “unbalanced” and “pro-Turkish⁷¹” (Palley 2005, p.224). Further obstacles emerged as the French government blocked the Eurozone accession talks of Turkey, arguing that Turkey did not have a place in the EU with an emphasis on its different culture and religion (Parker and Thornhill, 2007). At this time, a number of centre-right political parties who were opposed to migration also saw Turkey as both a potential source of migration to Europe, a security threat and culturally outside of Europe as a Muslim and Asian state⁷² (Lagendjik, 2012). Therefore, the AKP’s initial foreign policy success, tied to EU conditionality, reached a deadlock, meaning that the AKP was no longer swiftly able to exploit EU conditionality as an opportunity to secure Turkey’s EU membership and thereby also strengthen its own domestic position.

The opposition in Turkey appeared to be divided in response to the AKP’s desire to advance Turkey’s EU accession, with some seeing it as an opportunity while others saw it as a challenge to their political goals. The Kurdish movement⁷³ (Çelik, 2013), minority groups (Ak, 2015), and some civil society actors and social movements (Ketola, 2013) saw the promise of EU membership and conditionality as a form of opposition externalisation, whereby their political demands would be supported and institutionalised by external actors. EU membership was also seen by these groups as an opportunity to gain accountability to rights violations and systemic barriers of political participation⁷⁴ (Ketola, 2013). Moreover,

⁷¹ Davutoğlu, who later became the foreign and prime minister, argued that “the AKP worked very hard to solve the Cypriot question and “if that peace plan proposal were accepted” Turkey “would have an excellent peaceful, united Cyprus with good relations with Turkey” and “that historic opportunity was missed” (IIEA, 2010).

⁷² Some EU countries like France brought the proposals to hold a referendum on the issue of Turkey’s accession (Gülmez, 2008).

⁷³ The Kurdish movement especially made use of the ECHR in regards to human rights abuses.

⁷⁴ Ketola (2013) underlines that in the Turkish context, NGOs primarily consist of registered foundations and associations that operate in the field of advocacy and service delivery.

the EU's conditionality measures led to the empowerment of NGOs as a part of its advocacy towards democratisation (Ketola, 2013, 2019, p.130).⁷⁵ The CHP, however, was less enthusiastic of some of the AKP's pro-EU reforms. In its 2002 manifesto, the party stated that it saw EU membership as a project of social transformation that could democratise Turkey and make its economy "ready for the information age" (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2002). However, with the steps taken on the Cyprus issue, and the EU's proposal of conjoining Turkey's EU membership, their next election manifesto stated that they would not "accept a membership process subject to preconditions and unilateral concessions"⁷⁶ (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2007). Thus, the CHP focused on "national interest" and advocated to be on "equal terms" with the EU (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2007). Their 2007 manifesto outlined that the CHP would be "protecting Turkey's nationality, values and dignity" (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2007) and argued to defend the demands of the Turkish Cypriots.

While many political parties supported the path towards EU membership, nationalists from the CHP and the MHP along with the military expressed concern with the policies the AKP introduced on the basis of the opportunity provided by the Copenhagen Criteria, suggesting that the EU's demands could result in a Sèvres-like situation, in which the integrity of the country would be threatened on the basis of promoting human rights and democracy (Kirişçi, 2020). The main political opposition, CHP was also sceptical about some of the democratic reforms like those permitting the use of the Kurdish language on the basis of how this was perceived as a threat to "national interests" (Gülmez, 2008; Uslu, 2008). Additionally, as Celep (2012, p.216) argues, even though the CHP possessed a "pro-Western identity", its response to the EU was later shaped by its opposition to AKP and statism. It can also be said

⁷⁵ This advocacy took the form of funding dominantly rights-based NGOs (Ketola, 2013).

⁷⁶ CHP leader Baykal for example proposed a policy Cyprus "based on two separate states in the island" (Gülmez, 2007, p.127).

that an insider-outsider coalition of sorts emerged between the AKP and the EU, as the enactment of EU-supported reforms curtailed powerful Kemalist forces within the bureaucracy and military. CHP elites have argued that the AKP's main aim with the EU's affinity was "transforming Turkey into a more conservative polity" (Avcı and Çarkoğlu; 2020, p.216). Relatedly, after 2006, the CHP argued that it "would not support further reform legislation" and moved towards adopting a "nationalist and isolationist" position (Uslu, 2008, p.75). Earlier, there had been indications by some within the CHP, such as the head of the party's parliamentary group, Ali Topuz, that they preferred to improve ties with Russia, as opposed to the EU (Akçalı and Perinçek, 2009, p. 562). Topuz participated in a conference on Eurasianism in 2004, attended also by Russian Eurasianist Alexander Dugin (Akçalı and Perinçek, 2009, p. 562). An earlier conference in the same year, on improving Turkey's ties with Iran, China and Russia, as opposed to the EU, was also attended by Nur Serter, who was later elected as a CHP MP (Akçalı and Perinçek, 2009, p. 561). The MHP went further and accused the EU of helping the PKK "gain identity" (Aras, 2013, p.21) basing its rejection on the question of national interest. Consequently, while some of the opposition saw the EU reforms as an opportunity, the leadership of the CHP and MHP, in the context of mobilising towards the 2007 elections, by increasing their nationalist framing united on the sceptical outlook on the EU as a possible threat to the national interest. These frames would later be reflected at the Republican Rallies.

3. The Opposition and the International in the Second Era

After the success of the 2007 elections, the AKP furthermore argued to create a shift in Turkish foreign policy by broadening Turkey's interaction with other states and international actors. These changes, which occurred after the AKP faced obstacles in its bid to make

Turkey a member of the EU⁷⁷ (Resul, 2011, p.166), resulted in a challenge to Turkey's established foreign policy, which involved maintaining close relations with the United States and with the West. Instead of pursuing this policy, which had been supported by the military and promoted through constitutional institutions such as the National Security Council⁷⁸ (Dinçşahin, 2012), foreign policy change under the AKP involved stressing Turkey's situatedness and ties with its multiple regions. With the will to develop a more engaged regional policy and building on an earlier attempt to do so by the DSP's foreign minister, İsmail Cem, the AKP government formed a "zero problems with neighbours' policy" (Stern and Ross, 2013). Davutoğlu, who was previously a key advisor to Erdoğan and architect of this foreign policy, became foreign minister in 2007 and set off a global campaign to increase Turkey's engagement with bordering states. Under this doctrine, which he saw as a key part of his broader notion of ensuring that Turkey possessed 'strategic depth', Davutoğlu sought to make Turkey a "central country" that would play a key role in world politics, rather than a "bridge country" that divided and connected different parts of the world (Kıvaç, 2014). This foreign policy change was shaped both by economic and "civilisational" concerns (Yeşiltaş, 2014) as references to the foreign policy being "neo-Ottoman" increased, because of how it involved Turkey playing a more active role in former Ottoman territories (Gürkan, 2015). With this doctrine, the AKP argued that under their leadership, Turkey was on the way to becoming a key actor that could maintain "regional peace" against "ethnic and sectarian polarisation"⁷⁹ (AK Parti, 2007, p.52). Davutoglu brought Turkey's historical ties and "cultural affinity" in the region to the fore by arguing that Turkey provided an inclusive

⁷⁷ It is important to note that there were different voices from the EU on how to approach Turkey.

⁷⁸ Even though the NSC has the role of issuing advice in foreign policy, it occupied a more powerful role due to shaping and determining the agendas of Turkish foreign policy (Aras, 2013, p.19).

⁷⁹ Apart from the region, the AKP underlined its global policy that encompasses the relations developed with the Gulf countries, the Caucasus and Central Asia and Latin America and stated that the party had started to work on the permanent membership to the UN Security Council (AK Parti, 2007).

cultural model, which could challenge the dominance of what he named the “Eurocentric culture” (Kıvaç, 2014).

In the context of its electoral victory, the AKP experienced a renewed sense of confidence and also made two further moves with implications for the sphere of foreign policy, which served to strengthen its position with respect to the opposition. The first of these was the declaration by Erdoğan that as a result of the effective management of the economy by the AKP government the global financial crisis of 2008 had “passed [Turkey] by⁸⁰” (NTV, 2009). Moreover, the AKP’s foreign policy came, for the first time, to be defined through an Islamic lens, emphasising shared history, religion, and culture with other majority Muslim countries (Ak Parti, 2007). Turkey under the AKP, in 2008, was continuing its military and economic relations with Israel, while simultaneously hosting talks between Syria and Israel to resolve the Golan Heights dispute between the two countries. Turkey had established close economic relations with the Assad regime in Syria and had hosted joint cabinet meetings with Syria. Turkey also had close relations with many of the different religious and political factions in Lebanon and, in 2010, would negotiate a deal, together with Brazil, to allow Iran to enrich uranium for its nuclear programme (Hafezi, 2010). However, in 2008, following Israel’s raid of a flotilla formed by different aid organisations that sought to pass the Israeli naval blockade, which was staged in Turkey before sailing to Gaza, Turkey’s relations with Israel steadily deteriorated (Balcı and Kardaş, 2012). After this event, the AKP started to be more selective in terms of the actors with which it engaged in diplomacy and lent its support, since, during this incident, it positioned itself with the transnational Islamist opposition to Israel’s occupation of Gaza and other Israeli policies (Altunışık and Martin, 2011). Moreover,

⁸⁰ Turkey did not have to bail out its banks. Famously at that time period, president Gül made the statement that “Turkey used to be known as the sick man of Europe, whereas Turkey now is the only healthy man of Europe” (Landler, 2010).

in January 2009, at a meeting of the World Economic Forum at Davos, Erdoğan interpreted a speech by Israeli President Shimon Peres, by shouting “one minute!” in English, before expressing his opposition to Israel’s occupation of Palestine and other Israeli policies (Balci and Kardaş, 2012). The CHP did not directly criticise the content of the AKP’s statements but instead pointed out what they perceived to be the hypocrisy of the AKP, due to the existing ties between the AKP and Israel⁸¹ (Radikal, 2010). However, the AKP’s embrace of a more Islamic approach to foreign policy resulted in the AKP setting the agenda for the opposition, who felt compelled to tacitly approve the AKP’s statements.

In the context of the 2010 referendum, by arguing that it is a step towards democratisation, AKP elites framed the proposed changes as a steppingstone for joining to EU (Ak Parti, 2010). Even though the European Commission (2010, p.8) criticised the lack of a consultation and inclusion of political parties and civil society actors in the referendum process, the changes regarding the “judiciary, fundamental rights and public administration” were, according to the Commission, in the “right direction” (European Commission, 2010). Commission Enlargement Commissioner Štefan Füle argued that the changes would “strengthen democracy and fundamental freedoms” by underlining that it will reduce the role of the military in politics (Timetürk, 2010). On the other hand, during this period, with the change in the leadership of the CHP, an opportunity also occurred for the CHP to enhance its relationship with international actors. Kılıçdaroğlu’s leadership resulted in an attempt at opposition externalisation, which began with Kılıçdaroğlu’s immediate tour of Europe, upon being elected as the leader of the CHP (CHP Brussels, 2011). The CHP opened representative

⁸¹ It is important to note how the CHP also used derogatory framing against the AKP’s increasing appeals on the Middle East in Turkish foreign policy by making a distinction between the modern world versus “becoming a Middle Eastern country”. As the CHP congress report shows, they make this analysis of the AKP’s foreign policy: “systematically” aims to “drag” Turkey from “being a part of the modern world to becoming a Middle Eastern country, towards an understanding dominated by a Wahhabi culture.” (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2010, p.17).

offices in Brussels from Washington and increased dialogue with social democratic parties in the Middle East and Europe⁸² (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2011). Therefore, while actors like the EU were supportive of the AKP's agenda, the opposition also started building some ties internationally, appealing to think tanks and global audiences.

On the other hand, after 2010, the AKP deepened its relations with states in Africa, along with taking a position on the contentious process that emerged in the Middle East. As a part of the expansion of its foreign policy agenda at this time, Turkey increased its engagement with organisations like the Organization of Islamic Conference and the Arab League (Öztürk, 2013). Furthermore, Turkey enhanced its diplomatic relations with states in Africa by opening embassies and consulates (Öztürk, 2013, p.78). Furthermore, the AKP developed a foreign policy discourse that involved emphasising Turkey's role in standing up for the 'oppressed' masses throughout the world, building especially on the opportunity it believed it had grasped with the Arab Uprisings. The relations with Somalia especially stood out as a demonstration of solidarity at the international level due to the AKP's framing of the bilateral relationship as involving Turkey reaching out to those who had been ignored by the international community (Arman, 2015; UN News, 2011). In 2011, Erdogan became the first leader outside the African continent in the past two decades to visit Somalia as famine hit the country (BBC, 2011), and in the following years, Turkey expanded its business relations and infrastructure-based aid. In the same period, during the flotilla contention with Israel, which involved Turkey's foreign policy intensifying advocacy for the Palestinian cause, Erdoğan addressed the UN in the context of the famine in Somalia by arguing that Turkey has shown exemplary leadership due to its solidaristic actions towards the two countries (UN News,

⁸² In their 2011 manifesto, the party defined itself as the strongest social democratic organization in the Middle East that has the potential to bring parties together (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2011). In this light, the CHP framed EU membership and its foreign policy as an extension of "Atatürk's revolutionary and modernizational vision" (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2011).

2011). Furthermore, speaking at the aftermath of his Somalia visit, Erdoğan hinted at how the lack of action on the crisis at Somalia marked a contradiction in terms of how the international community claimed to be acting based on the concepts of “justice and civilization”, yet had not provided significant assistance to Somalia (UN News, 2011). However, this foreign policy, which Güner (2021) has characterised as “diplomatic activism in the Global South”, did not solely build on humanitarian measures and encompassed business expansion and the formation of religious ties.

In addition, the AKP established close ties with the Sunni Islamist movements that emerged in Tunisia and Egypt, following the quick collapse of the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes, which also demonstrates the solidarity-based foreign policy pursued by the AKP at the time. The movements that emerged in Tunisia and Egypt had close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, which the AKP’s predecessor, the Milli Görüş movement, also had close ties with (Taş, 2022). Movements that appeared to be in ideological alignment with a similar form of Sunni Islamism also rose to prominence as part of the groups that were empowered in the anti-government protests in Syria at this time (Taş, 2022). The rise of these movements, which the AKP continued to feel an affinity with, as well as the fact that these movements had been oppressed by their own incumbents, resulted in the AKP presenting its foreign policy towards the region as driven by ethical concerns (Oğuzlu, 2016). Specifically, the AKP demonstrated solidarity with the Muslim Brotherhood or Islamist-inspired movements, which were also backed by some parts of the revolutionary masses in their respective states (Arango, 2012). In the context of the coup against the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Egyptian president, Mohammed Morsi, and the killing of many of his supporters, including a daughter of a Muslim Brotherhood supporter, Rabia, the AKP strongly condemned the normalisation of ties between several Western states and the new coup government in Egypt, headed by General

Sisi (Kıvanç, 2016). This resulted in the AKP increasingly highlighting its role as the representative of the oppressed and ignored masses throughout the world, which will be reviewed in Chapter Eight. Erdoğan, at this time, also frequently criticised the composition of the UN Security Council, arguing that it ought to be reformed and the permanent membership status within it ought to be abolished (Kıvanç, 2016). The divergent approach of the AKP and Western actors to the Egyptian coup and to the Arab Uprisings, where Western actors did not differentiate the level of legitimacy of the Morsi and Sisi governments and saw the uprisings mainly through the lens of potential ‘threats’ to Europe (Voltolini and Colombo, 2018), also paved the way for the AKP to seek to foster foreign policy ties with non-Western actors.

The Arab Uprisings hence became a transformative event that would shift the AKP’s foreign policy. Similarly, the AKP and the Kurdish movement both saw the Arab Uprisings of 2011 as an opportunity which altered how they related to other political actors within Turkey and to international actors. In the immediate aftermath of the Arab Uprisings, the AKP government started to promote Turkey’s political system actively as a model democracy for the Middle East (Öniş, 2014). International actors, such as the EU, also contributed to this line of thought by continuing to promote Turkey as a model (Tuğal, 2016). However, the AKP, which had recently been able to overcome domestic challenges to its rule, came to equate its own project of moderate Islamic conservative democracy with the desires and aspirations of the mass movements that appeared in the MENA region (Tuğal, 2016). This also resulted in the AKP criticising the domestic opposition within Turkey through seeking to establish parallels with the domestic opposition and the pre-revolutionary autocratic elites in the MENA region. The Kurdish movement within Turkey, on the other hand, followed developments in Syria, where the Assad regime faced an existential threat from the Syrian Kurds assuming partial control in Syrian Kurdistan, known as Rojava. In 2011, initially

believing that the Syrian regime was about to collapse, the AKP announced its support for protests in Syria, with Davutoğlu announcing his intention to “attend Friday prayers at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus” (Kıvanç, 2016). Themes of the Islamic world becoming more democratic with governments similar to the AKP expected to emerge throughout the region were widely voiced in the 2011 elections. Ultimately, the AKP won in 2011 with just under 50 per cent of the vote with Erdoğan, for the first time, thanking those beyond Turkey, in Damascus and Baghdad, for their prayers in support (Milliyet, 2011). This time frame marked the AKP's increasing involvement in regional conflicts which would intensify in the context of democratic backsliding.

4. The International Context of Democratic Backsliding

The Gezi Protests of 2013 were not only demonstrative of the level of authoritarianism in Turkey, but they also deeply altered the relationship between the EU and the AKP (Saatçioğlu, 2015). Together with the government expressing its opposition to the Gezi protests, both the EU and the US came to adopt different punitive strategies towards Turkey. While the US criticised the violent response of the police towards the protests, members of the European Parliament expressed grave concern with the government's handling of the protests (European Parliament, 2013). In addition to harshly responding to protestors, the government also blamed foreign news agencies and advanced a conspiracy theory involving a so-called “interest rate lobby” as being responsible for the protests (Dombly, 2013; Tuğal, 2016). The idea of Turkey being a model for post-Arab Spring societies therefore came to be undermined from Western states in the course of the protests, as Turkey was instead perceived as an increasingly authoritarian state by international actors. As the Gezi movement coincided with the violent coup that ousted Morsi in Egypt, Erdoğan also sought to draw an equivalence with the coup in Egypt and the processes that were continuing to

unfold in Turkey (Akkoyunlu and Öktem, 2016), frequently using signs associated with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, such as the “Rabia” hand gesture.⁸³ Due to how the Gezi protests resulted in widespread condemnation of the AKP, the protests resulted simultaneously in the emergence of an opportunity for the opposition to engage in opposition externalisation. The Gezi movement also resulted in the increase of international pressure on the AKP and the withdrawal of international support towards the AKP, which could previously be exploited as a political opportunity by the AKP to improve its domestic standing.

The AKP also intensified its populist foreign policy in the period after the Gezi Protests and sought to consolidate its ties with the opposition in Syria and with authoritarian actors across the globe. At this time, not only was Turkey increasingly hesitating from applying EU conditionality measures but was also being highly critical of the West and Western institutions. For example, the government defied the International Criminal Court (ICC) by hosting Sudanese president Omar Bashir, who was wanted for war crimes, with Erdoğan referring to Bashir as “my brother” (İHD, 2017) Furthermore, the European Commission report of 2015 underlined how “reforms slowed down” and highlighted that “significant backsliding” took place in terms of “freedom of expression and freedom of assembly” (European Commission, 2015, pp.3-4). Opposition MPs like the ex-CHP MP, Erkan Aydemir, used the progress reports to point to increasing authoritarianism in Turkey (Woodrow Wilson Center, 2017) and some CHP and HDP members increasingly joined the programmes of international think tanks to raise the issue of Turkey’s increasing

⁸³ The Rabia sign refers to a hand gesture which has been affiliated with the supporters of Muslim Brotherhood due to the repression at Rabia Square in Egypt.

authoritarianism. Consequently, Western institutions came to raise the cause of the opposition to alter the playing field that has been becoming increasingly closed.

While with the 2015 electoral process, the AKP elites increasingly emphasised how the empowerment of the Kurdish movement in Syria was also posing a threat to Turkey (Zaman, 2015), Western states also struck a deal with the government which contributed to shielding it from punitive strategies. Under the agreement, the Turkish government received financial aid to finance projects for Syrian refugees as a response to keeping them away from Europe's borders (Kanter, 2016). At this time period, the AKP officials increasingly framed the advancements of Kurds in Syria and the PYD as a threat and aimed to limit its admission to the international by mobilising to block attending the Geneva Conference (Çandar, 2016). As a response to increasing militarism, academics both from Turkey and around the World signed a petition against the war that started in the Kurdish region citing the repressiveness of the incumbent (Amnesty International, 2018). With Erdoğan's targeting, the academics who signed the petition were purged and some of them were arrested, which Amnesty International (2018) labelled as a "climate of fear". The HDP externalised the human rights violations occurred in this period, using the European Parliament to question the repression, and made use of international reports (Al Jazeera Türk, 2015). Yet, at the same period, due to increasing number of migrants passing to Europe from Turkey's borders, the EU and Turkey intensified their partnership on this specific issue area. As the process of backsliding deepened after the coup, the EU continued to see Turkey as a strategic partner rather than a candidate country by labelling this relationship "the strategic engagement strategy" due to "significant deficits in the rule of law" (Bianet, 2018). This led to a decrease in the EU's leverage in the path of democratic backsliding.

With the coup attempt in July 2016, repression against the opposition, human rights NGOs and INGOs increased. After the coup attempt, the AKP's foreign policy took a more interventionist turn, as it directly interfered in multiple conflicts and ultra-nationalist voices intensified in foreign policy (Taş, 2020). Turkey's intervention in Syria hampered relations with its Western allies and also justified domestic repression and led to divisions within the opposition. The invasion of PYD controlled Afrin was met with domestic repression as around 850 people, including HDP executives, were detained for criticising military operations in Afrin⁸⁴ (Human Rights Watch, 2018). With increased backsliding, repression against INGOs, and the arrests of opposition agents by framing them foreign powers, signalled the failure of opposition externalisation. With further increased backsliding measures, the Council of Europe used punitive and rewarding strategies at the same time. These measures took the form of reporting and shaming the government. In 2017, the European Parliament report focused on the repression of thousands with arrest without "concrete evidence and allegations " (European Parliament, 2017). Members of the European Parliament also reported on the AKP's actions against its own citizens abroad, naming "harassment, kidnappings, covert surveillance" (European Parliament, 2017). Turkey, EU-Turkey rapporteur Kati Piri for example criticised the permanent state of emergency, underlining that "there were more academics jailed than soldiers" (PvdA Europa, 2017). Even though European Commission reports (2016, 2017) criticised rights violations and the controversial referendum election in 2017, high-ranking EU officials still stated that "membership talks are still open" if the criteria are met⁸⁵ (AP, 2017). While some European leaders, like German chancellor Angela Merkel, called for the EU's financial assistance for

⁸⁴ Furthermore, this increased splits because while in an interview, CHP leader Kilicdaoglu argued that they would only back military action against ISIS; however, two years later, they backed the coalition against the YPG on the basis of national security (Cumhuriyet, 2018). This further weakened the CHP-HDP relationship.

⁸⁵ In a speech then Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini stated, "the vital role of Turkey to secure borders and bring order into migratory flows and stem regular migration jointly" (European Parliament, 2017).

the path of EU membership to be scrapped due to democratic backsliding in 2018, punitive measures from the EU were minor and there were frame disputes within the agents.

Consequently, the denial of ECHR rulings under strong condemnations from Western states demonstrated that the leverage of European actors had declined.⁸⁶

While the EU's conditionality weakened after 2016, anti-Westernism of the incumbent increased. Erdoğan and his party members repeatedly highlighted Western powers' attempts to undermine or overturn his regime (AP, 2018) and also focused on building alternative alliances that would contribute to defying the West. These alliances included closer ties to Venezuela, on shared concepts of solidarity and defiance against the international order. This increasing suspicion of international actors was also reflected in multiple arenas. Turkey's Ministry of Interior ended the activities of some foreign NGOs, including those on humanitarian issues, on the grounds of "national security" (Wildman, 2017) with AKP members and supporters arguing that foreign NGOs were conducting espionage (Wildman, 2017). Amnesty International staff and members of various rights advocacy groups were arrested in 2017, for no apparent reason (Amnesty International, 2017a) and faced long imprisonments.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the international dimension of contention by demonstrating the relationship between domestic, international, and transnational actors and the international context that has shaped the dynamics of democratic backsliding in Turkey. It began by establishing how the political regime in Turkey has been shaped by international actors and

⁸⁶ The ECHR had ruled that the HDP leader Demirtaş's imprisonment had been aimed at "stifling pluralism and limiting freedom of political debate", calling for his release from pre-trial detention. But the domestic courts ignored it, with Erdoğan issuing a statement that he did not recognise the ECtHR ruling (Article 19, 2020).

processes since the Ottoman Empire. The EU's conditional offers of membership and support of the AKP's policies were instrumental in allowing the AKP to fend off early legal challenges to its rule and in the face of actual and threatened military intervention (Karaveli, 2018). In the first era of the AKP, the EU worked with civil society that can be labelled both as opposition and supportive of the government's reform packages. The EU was also utilised by individuals, rights-based NGOs, and the Kurdish political movement. In the second stage, the AKP slowly moved away from the EU and focused on alternative partnerships in foreign policy. The last stage, which was marked with democratic backsliding, demonstrated a defiance against the West. In the context of democratic backsliding, the EU's leverage became redundant in the course of the 2015 refugee crisis, and the significant segments of the political opposition did not form robust advocacy networks to counter increasing authoritarianism. While the leverage of the EU towards democratisation decreased, increasing pressure from international and domestic actors for both regimes led to support and solidarity with other authoritarian actors, such as Venezuela.

CHAPTER 6: The Dynamics of Contention Between the Political Opposition and the Incumbent in Venezuela under Chavismo

Introduction

This chapter presents the political context of democratic backsliding by examining the critical moments and processes that led to various opposition and incumbent interactions under Chavismo. Chavismo, in this thesis, is understood as an ideology and a movement (Cannon, 2009; Hawkins, 2010) associated with Venezuela's incumbent governments from 1998 to 2013, led by Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías and his successor Nicolás Maduro. The chapter starts with a historical review of how Venezuela had been considered one of the most democratic states in its region in the 20th century and explains the contentious dynamics that led to the election of Chávez, a political outsider and military officer. The chapter then presents the categorisation of the opposition and incumbent relationship by tracing domestic political opportunities presented in *Chapter 1*, under three time frames. The first time frame, which is named *nonrecognition*, traces Chávez's introduction of transformative policies after the 1998 presidential elections, including convening a constituent assembly and the political opposition's continuous refusal to recognise Chávez's legitimacy (Cannon, 2009, 2014). This time frame ends with the opposition's change of strategy, moving away from nonrecognition towards contesting the government electorally, after the defeats of the recall referendum of 2004 and the parliamentary elections of 2005. The second time frame, named the institutionalisation of Chavismo, starts with Chávez's 2006 presidential victory which marked the deepening of social reforms and ends with the 2013 presidential elections that brought Maduro to the presidency. This period is characterised by the formation of the PSUV, the broadening of social programmes, and institutional changes, which resulted in Chavismo's increased hegemony (Cannon, 2009) and Chávez's death. The third time frame,

called repression and internationalisation, focuses on how the incumbent increased repressive measures after the opposition coalition MUD's candidate Henrique Capriles was narrowly defeated in the 2013 presidential elections. With the loss of the elections, the process of opposition externalisation increased. During this period, the la Salida (Departure) protests of 2014 and the opposition's electoral victory in the 2015 parliamentary elections marked the biggest challenge to the incumbent after Chávez's death. However, the incumbent responded to the events with increasing repression, bolstering the divisions within the opposition.

1. The Historical Roots of the Incumbent-Opposition Dynamic in Venezuela

In the academic literature on the transition to democracy, Venezuela was considered one of the first countries to undergo democratisation in Latin America after transitioning to civilian rule in the 1950s and establishing competitive elections (Hillman, 1994; Tarver and Frederick, 2006, p.86). There is a broad literature investigating the processes of democratisation and increasing authoritarianism in Venezuela by studying the role of political parties (Ellner, 1996; Levine, 1987), consolidation of political polarisation (García-Guadilla & Mallen, 2019) and the legacies of transitions through pacts (Cadena-Roa, 2010; Derham, 2002). The triumph of what has been termed a "pacted democracy" (Karl, 1987) occurred due to the success of social movements and political parties overturning military rule and establishing a political system with a smooth transition of power between rival political parties. Therefore, Venezuela can be considered to have undergone what the comparative politics literature terms "democratic consolidation" (Schedler, 1998, p.95), owing to how it has experienced competitive elections (Schedler, 1998, pp.92-95), in which parties of different ideologies were able to share power peacefully. Venezuela was hence historically

characterised as one of the most democratically consolidated states within the region⁸⁷ (Peeler, 1991). Venezuela, when compared to these other states, was identified as being a more consolidated democracy due to its “centralised state”, “consistent economic growth”, “strong political parties” and a military that was not autonomous from the rest of the state (Levine, 2002, p. 250).

However, Venezuela’s establishment of its political system was shaped by the contentious dynamics of the struggle for power among military leaders and the legacies of the War of Independence that marked Venezuela’s transition from colonialism. From its independence from Spanish rule in the early 19th century to the mid-20th century, a path towards democratisation could not take root under what has been termed “*caudillismo*”⁸⁸, referring to the reign of strong leaders⁸⁹. While successive coups created a system of unstable governance under this system (Derham, 2002), the process of instability came to an end at the start of the 20th century, when Venezuela was ruled under the presidency of one *caudillo* Juan Vicente Gómez. Gómez ruled under what has been named a “unifying autocracy” (Dix and Juan, 2008, p. 167) for 27 years, targeting autonomous political organisations. By building on oil wealth, Gómez was able to invest in social programmes, achieving economic growth, which prompted political stability (Karl, 1987; Rudolph and Rudolph, 1996, p.63). Nonetheless, the repressiveness of his reign led to the formation of resistance movements, one being the

⁸⁷ Peeler (1991, p. 104) noted that in the region, Colombia and Costa Rica were also cases that were moving towards democratisation, however Colombia actively underwent a process of “deconsolidation” due to increasing political violence. Costa Rica, while having experienced several competitive elections, experienced problems of instability shaped by its neighbouring conflicts (Peeler, 1991, pp. 103- 104).

⁸⁸ Caudillo usually refers to military leaders that concentrate power in their hands (Lynch, 1983). Many commentators have referred to Chávez as a “caudillo” due to his concentration of power and military origins (The Economist, 1999).

⁸⁹ Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the territory of Venezuela experienced several changes to its political and constitutional status, as it briefly became a part of the Federation of Gran Colombia before declaring its second independence (Salas, 2015). Venezuela’s political and constitutional status was continually revised and challenged, developing in the civil war known as the Federal War (1859 – 1863), which resulted in the adoption of federalism (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1996).

student movement that is referred to as the “*Generation of 1928*” (Tinker Salas, 2015, pp.70-72). On the other hand, the structure of Venezuelan society, and hence the context of politics, was changing because, in the aftermath of the discovery of oil, Venezuela received migration from Europe, which contributed to the formation of “a new commercial elite” along with “a middle class and an urban working class” (Raby, 2006, p.134). These social changes resulted in the emergence of groups which had new demands in society and subsequently sought political representation (Friedman, 2010).

The leaders of political parties, like Democratic Action's (AD) Rómulo Betancourt and Raúl Leoni Otero, rose to prominence as a part of this contentious period against Gómez's rule⁹⁰ (Tarver and Frederick, 2005). The decade after Gómez's death in 1935 was marked by political liberalisation that led to the founding of multiple political parties (Martz, 1966), which had their roots in the student movement. The social democratic AD emerged as the strongest party with vast grassroots support and led a successful coup against the previous military leadership in 1945⁹¹. The first presidential elections followed the aftermath of the coup, with universal suffrage in the country's history. After gaining an overwhelming majority, the AD was able to rule for three years until being toppled by another military coup in 1948 (Tinker Salas, 2015, p.11). Even though the 1948 military coup delayed the establishment of democratic rule for ten years by repressing all political opposition (Hillman, 1994, p. 38), the subsequent 1958 coup toppled the military incumbent Marcos Pérez Jimenez, marking an end to an era of coups until the 1990s. Therefore, even though Venezuela's democracy was derailed by a coup, Venezuela nonetheless developed significant political experience in democratic governance. Secondly, a tradition and hence repertoire of

⁹⁰ The AD was founded as a Marxist and revolutionary party in 1931 in Colombia for the mobilisation to defeat Gómez (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1996, p.9). The party shifted its policies towards social-democracy in the process of building Venezuela's “pacted democracy” (Tinker Salas, 2015).

⁹¹ The coup was led by AD, civilian groups along with the military (Friedman, 2010).

contention developed, which allowed successive social movements to challenge the military regime. Both of these facts would thus later play an essential role in allowing Venezuela to continue on a democratic path following the toppling of the coup government.

In subsequent periods, Venezuela's democratic success was marked by its ability to disable military intervention (Levine, 2002) and suppress the armed insurgency that dominated the region in the latter half of the 20th century (Hillman, 1994; Friedman, 2010). With the ousting of the military dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez, the transition to democracy began after exiled political leaders returned to Venezuela to lead the electoral process (Friedman, 1998). Before the elections, the parties that opposed military rule: the AD, Democratic Republican Union (URD) and Social Christian Party (COPEI), came together to issue a statement to support democratic governance, which came to be known as the Punto Fijo Pact (Coppedge, 1992). The pact was formed on the basis of respecting the outcomes of the elections, leading the way for the transition of power within the parties. The AD and COPEI emerged as the strongest parties that went on to win elections in the subsequent years (Levine, 1987). Civilian rule was established under the AD, with Rómulo Betancourt being elected president in 1959 (Tinker Salas, 2015). The AD stayed in power for ten years and became the political opposition in 1968 when Rafael Caldera from COPEI won the elections. This transition of power between the hegemonic parties has been taken as indicative of the stabilisation of the democratic regime in Venezuela (Coppedge, 1992; Hillman, 1994), and the institutionalisation of political parties was seen as an assertion of Venezuela's exceptionalism in the region (Friedman, 2010, p.8). The *Punto Fijo* was maintained in an era where either bureaucratic authoritarian regimes or Latin American dictatorships that led to colossal human rights violations were on the rise (Friedman, 2010, pp.2-3).

The so-called *Punto Fijo system* or “Puntofijismo” was able to maintain political stability and increase living standards in Venezuela, but as most scholars of Venezuela agreed, there were still problems of political representation (Buxton, 1999; Cannon, 2009; Levine, 1987; Friedman, 2010) and clientelism (Raby, 2006). The pact did not deepen democracy as it was met with “societal demobilisation” (Levine 1987, p.266), leaving socio-economic inequalities unanswered. Ellner (2003, pp. 9-10) argued that the extensive institutionalisation of political parties led to the creation of “party loyalty”, which led to a neglect of constituents. By identifying the system as a “degenerative democracy”, Buxton (1999) argued that these traditional parties even became an obstacle to democracy due to their restriction of the emergence of civil society. While the AD and COPEI alternated in legislative and presidential power, radical left groups were repressed⁹² (Tanver and Frederick, 2004). One of the perils that the country was faced with was also its non-diversified economy (Hillman, 1994). While it has been proclaimed that oil revenues contributed to democratisation by enabling minimal welfare policies, it has enabled corporatism and corruption on the side of political parties (Karl, 1986). In this context, AD and COPEI dominated organised groups within society, thereby preventing the formation of autonomous social movements (Friedman, 2010, p.9). While stability and oil wealth were linked to Venezuela’s democratic success, the fall of oil prices in the 1980s increased social unrest and led to deepening inequalities which paved the way for the end of Puntofujismo. Due to the dependency of Venezuela’s economy on the oil sector, fluctuations within the sector, therefore, had an impact on the level of social inequality, which, in turn, contributed to political polarisation, as politics came to become a means of expressing economic grievances (Coppedge, 1992, p.35).

⁹² COPEI has been characterised as a Christian democratic party to the right of the AD. For a review of the traditional parties in Venezuela see: Coppedge (1992) and Corrales, (2012) and Myers (2017). These studies also underlined that oil-dominated economy provided possible instability in politics to the volatility of oil prices (Coppedge, 1992, p.35).

2. The End of the Dominant Two-Party System: Movements and Parties in Venezuela after the 1989 *Caracazo*

The reduction of global oil prices and the political crisis of the 1980s altered the legitimacy of traditional parties, which, in turn, resulted in the reduction of their organisational power since it damaged their traditional sources of support. The two-party system began to decline most markedly with the presidency of Carlos Andrés Pérez from 1974 to 1979. Pérez shifted away from conventional parties by advocating public spending and a pro-Third World foreign policy (Ellner, 2014, p.141). Even though he was elected as a popular candidate, promising development projects, the political process up until to the 1990s increased contention due to the austerity programmes that were to be initiated (Tinker Salas, 2015, p.119). Overall, there was a crisis of the pact-based democracy in Venezuela due to elites losing “their accustomed tools of control” while the “masses lost contacts and benefits” (Levine, 2002, p.253). In 1989 massive riots were triggered due to a reaction to the IMF sponsored austerity package that included a rise in public transport charges (Levine, 2002; Lopez-Maya, 1999, Cannon, 2009). These riots, which are remembered as the *Caracazo*, led to the deaths of thousands of people and the emergence of new groups and counter elites (Levine, 2002, p. 259). This period was also marked by the development of new social movements⁹³ (Garcia-Guadilla, 2003; López Maya and Lander, 2005). Consequently, groups that had previously been excluded from the two-party system in Venezuela, including large segments of the left, which the AD had oppressed, used this moment to call for the system to be changed (Ellner, 2003). After the *Caracazo*, the traditional parties lost support in the 1989

⁹³ The movements that emerged at this period mobilised against Andres Pérez’s austerity measures (Raby, 2006, p.141). In the context after the 1980s, human rights NGOs, neighbourhood organisations and feminist ecological movements emerged (Levine, 2002). Chávez founded the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200 (MBR-200) in 1982 with multiple military officers, with the inspiration from Venezuela's military heros Ezequiel Zamora, Simón Bolívar, and Bolivar's tutor Simón Rodríguez (Chávez, 2016).

local elections, and leftist parties like the Radical Cause Party (Causa-R) and Movement for Socialism⁹⁴ (MAS) gained increased support (Tarver and Frederick, 2006, p.145). For instance, as a more contemporary leftist party, the candidate of the Causa-R, won 22 per cent of the vote in the presidential election and gained representation in local elections in the 1990s (Chávez, 2016). The structural changes to the economy, therefore, resulted in the emergence of new political demands which could not be contained in the new 'Punto Fijo' system. The extensive repression deployed by the government to end the *Caracazo*⁹⁵ resulted in the increasing illegitimacy of existing political parties and strengthened the desire for political among the masses (Cannon, 2009).

The Punto Fijo system unravelled as increasing outrage after the *Caracazo* also provided MBR-200 (Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200), whose leader was Hugo Chávez, with the opportunity to mobilise an unsuccessful coup attempt against the Pérez administration. Though the coup was unsuccessful, Chávez, as one of the leaders of the coup, emerged as a political actor, with his powerful media presence being bolstered even further after he accepted blame and promised eventual political change (Wilpert, 2007). As Chávez (2016) underlined, the uprising, which began in 1992, started a mass mobilisation. This also signalled an end to traditional political elites, as Pérez was met with another coup attempt and was soon impeached due to corruption. During his prison sentence, following the coup, Chávez met with political and social actors and contributed to mobilising behind bars (Chávez, 2009; Roberts, 2003, 2015). In the upcoming presidential elections, Caldera became the favoured candidate running as an independent. Caldera, who was running for president

⁹⁴ MAS was founded by a group within the left that criticised the Soviet Union (Levine, 1987, p.250).

⁹⁵ Amnesty International's (1993) report on the violations under the reign of Pérez portrayed the scale of the victims were grater than the government's claims.

for a second time, pardoned Chávez due to his popularity⁹⁶ (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). After Pérez's impeachment, the presidential elections split the vote between the parties, as AD, COPEI, Causa-R's votes were floating at 20 per cent and Caldera emerged as the winner of the elections by running as an independent and getting around 30 per cent of the vote (Raby, 2006). The collapse of the established political parties, together with rising poverty, contributed to Chávez's growth (Roberts, 2003). When Caldera pardoned Chávez, he had already built the founding steps of what would become the movement (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018), yet Caldera legitimised Chávez's entry to the political arena (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Raby, 2006, pp.143–144). Caldera's campaign promise to end foreign debt was popular, but his rule was marked by contention with the Labour Movement and corruption scandals which eventually led to his impeachment (Raby, 2006). Chávez, therefore, emerged as a powerful actor that could initiate change following the *Caracazo* as a consequence of the rupture, or non-scheduled event, brought about by the mass protests.

Chávez's success lay in the movement's ability to form a coalition of actors to support his candidacy against the Punto Fijo system⁹⁷ (Levine, 2002, p.253). The Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) was founded in 1997 with the mobilisation of the MRB-200 to support Chávez in the 1998 presidential elections. The coalition included the parties like, MVR and Fatherland for All⁹⁸ (PPT) and brought together parties and movements (Gonzalez, 2014). By establishing such a coalition, which was built on a shared anti-establishment agenda, Chávez

⁹⁶ Contention within traditional parties was also emerging as COPEI leader Caldera broke away from his party and formed the *Convergencia* coalition for broader appeal. The coalition incorporated members of the left like Petkoff who has been affiliated with MAS (Raby, 2006).

⁹⁷ As Ellner and Hellinger (2003, p.5) underline, *Chavismo* rose to power due to the successful alliances including leftist intellectuals and some businesspeople. Furthermore, López Maya (2003, p.90) argues that there were also organisational weaknesses of parties in the government which laid the emphasis on a strong leader like Chávez and dissatisfaction with the then-existing political parties.

⁹⁸ PPT emerged due to a split within Causa-R over to support Chávez's candidacy (Lopez-Maya, 2004). The coalition also incorporated intellectuals like Jorge Giordani, a Marxist academic who established strong ties with Chávez while he was in prison in 1992, who later became the planning minister later on (Chávez, 2016).

and his movement were able to compensate for the fact that they were political outsiders through recruiting more experienced political actors. Their election campaign focused on radical change under the banner of *Bolivarianism* (Chávez, 2016). The parties supported the candidacy campaign to assemble a new redistributive consensus built on including the lower classes (Cannon, 2009). Chávez became the only “anti-elite candidate” when opposition against corruption grew (Gates, 2010). After the Caracazo, traditional parties declined as they lost their conventional bases (Hetland, 2007; Levine, 2002) and could not propose a strong candidate against Chávez. Even though multiple opposition candidates were contesting against Chávez, with his rising popularity, they were able to form a coalition against Chávez at the last minute, and selected a conservative politician Henrique Salas Römer, from the Project Venezuela party (Tinker Salas, 2015). The opposition was able to unite on the anti-Chávez agenda, and most of the agents within it advocated the continuation of the economic system (Buxton, 2003). This meant that a dichotomy emerged in Venezuela between those who were for and those who were against the status quo, meaning that the MVR was able to frame itself as a force for radical political change.

Through utilising an anti-establishment frame, Chávez was able to maintain his coalition and defeat the opposition by getting 56 per cent of the vote, while the opposition candidate Römer got only 39 per cent (Tinker Salas, 2015, p.134). In 1999, as soon as Chávez was elected, he made a move towards altering existing institutions by initiating the process for creating a new National Constitutional Assembly to draft a new constitution. Chávez argued that the new constitution would instead place the people of Venezuela as the sovereign, by introducing participatory mechanisms to solve the crisis of representation (Cannon, 2009). Chávez argued that the constitution was “a new Magna Carta” that was suited for the “new times” (Braver, 2016, p.565). The new constitution added the electoral and citizen branches,

in addition to the judicial, legislative, and executive branches, which served to alter existing political institutions in a way that would enhance their inclusivity for the movement led by Chávez (Cannon, 2009, %28). The 1999 constitutional changes also established more participatory governance mechanisms like referenda and local councils (Alvarez, 2003). With an emphasis on national sovereignty, the 1999 constitution paved the way for the military's inclusion in politics⁹⁹. A wide range of policies, like broader human rights and promoting institutional access, were provided to citizens (Human Rights Watch, 2008). The constitution brought inclusionary characteristics like including reserved seats for indigenous people¹⁰⁰. The new constitution also disabled state financing of political parties and increased the number of cooperatives (López -Maya, 2003). However, it strengthened the executive and gave the president overwhelming powers, such as removing the power of the parliament to impeach the president, stipulating that the president could only be removed through a recall referendum (Wilpert, 2007). Therefore, Chávez's initial move to convene the constituent assembly to bring about changes to the political institutions of Venezuela amounted to changes to the political playing field that favoured Chávez's movement, thereby enabling it to engineer political opportunities.

The consolidation of power with the government headed by Chávez, which came about as a result of the constitutional changes that occurred after his electoral gains, led to increasing organisational power for Chávez's movement. Yet while the organisational power of the movement increased through the removal of obstacles posed by state institutions, these constitutional changes also had the effect of bringing about splits within the new ruling elites.

⁹⁹As Wilpert (2007, p.49) underlines, from 1999 to 2005, almost a quarter of the ministers came from the military.

¹⁰⁰ With the new constitution, the bicameral legislature was changed with a unicameral National Assembly system. The participatory dynamics of the constitution brought referenda, the ability of civil society actors to contribute to the nomination of public officials (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Yet, it increased the power of the president by introducing re-election with increasing the term from 5 to 6 years.

For instance, the dynamics of the constituent assembly triggered some opposition within the Chavistas; Francisco Arias Cárdenas, who had participated in the 1992 coup attempt alongside Chávez and Minister Ramirez Rangel resigned citing the concentration of power (Forero, 2002b). The move to transform institutions in a way, according to critics, that served to weaken them became the primary policy of Chavismo (de la Torre, 2013), Chávez's increasing institutional power also contributed to the division of the opposition over approaches to remove him (Lombardi 2003, p.3). The opposition groups did not remain united after the 1998 elections,¹⁰¹ as traditional parties like the AD and COPEI began to dismantle, opening the path to new parties like the upcoming presidential candidate Julio Borges's Justice First (PJ). However, the new and traditional opposition had mobilised against Chávez's increasing power (López Maya, 2003). The increasing contention with Chávez's rise, subsequently met with undemocratic responses from the opposition and the military. Consequently, while the institutional context was more open to Chávez's movement, it resulted in splits among the ruling elites that had been established together with the founding of the MVR.

The opposition's response to Chávez's election and move for political change served to trigger the first phase of contention, which I call *nonrecognition*, characterised by what Roberts (2015, p.146) has called "regime-threatening confrontations" with the political opposition. The 2002 coup, which built on extra-institutional strategies through non-scheduled events like strikes and protests (Gonzalez, 2014, 57%) against Chávez's rule, became a transformative event in the relationship with the opposition (López Maya, 2003, p.71). The contentious cycle was triggered building on the opposition against MVR's

¹⁰¹ While some of these groups supported the coup attempt by signing what has been termed the Carmona document that abolished the advances that Chavistas brought, within a year, others left the political scene or lost their base to the regime.

increased institutional power. The contention intensified after the violence at an opposition march that set out on April 12 (New York Times, 2002); on 12–14 April, 73 people were killed (International Crisis Group 2008, p.8). The deadly protests triggered a coup attempt by a faction in the military (Tarver and Frederick, 2006) and were supported by the main political opposition including Borges who signed the infamous Carmona Decree (Tinker Salas, 2015, pp.155-156). An attempt to justify the coup was made by suggesting that Bolivarian¹⁰² circles were targeting anti-government protestors¹⁰³ and security forces (Silva, 2005). With the coup, military-backed Pedro Carmona, a businessman who was also the leader of *Fedecámaras*, became the interim president and dissolved the NA, invalidating the 1999 constitution (Lopez Maya, 2003, p.69). While the Bush administration recognised Carmona, the Permanent Council of the OAS and most regional governments condemned the takeover (Rother, 2002). However, street protests by supporters of Chávez meant that the coup was unsuccessful as Chávez returned to power in two days, through the support of loyal army officials and of the public. Consequently, the April 2002 coup which ousted Chávez from power for two days was a non-scheduled event that backfired and deepened the polarisation between the opposition and the incumbent.

After the coup attempt, Chávez's appointment of a new head to the national oil company PDVSA in early 2002 started a new wave of contention. The Confederation of Workers of Venezuela (CTV) organised a long-term strike due to Chávez's appointments in coalition with Fedecámaras demanding Chávez's resignation¹⁰⁴ (AP, 2002). These groups cooperated

¹⁰² Bolivarian circles, which have been a crucial part of Chavez's understanding of democracy (Chávez, 2016; Roberts, 2003) started to come to life in 2001 to provide social programmes on issues like education and health care. Within a few years, thousands of local circles were formed (Hawkins, 2010, p.176).

¹⁰³ In the coup attempt, while the National Guard and city police aligned with Chávez, there were some defections as some members of the National Guard joined the coup (Derham, 2002).

¹⁰⁴ Chavistas aimed to limit the power of the CTV, whose leadership were shaped by those from the traditional political parties, mainly the AD. ANC President Miquilena framed the leaderships of the union as "entrenched mafia" that was undemocratic. Chavistas consequently mobilised for the Bolivarian Workers Front (Coppedge, 2002, p.20) to counter CTV's disruptive contestation.

with the opposition under the newly established Democratic Coordinator¹⁰⁵ which also amplified the call for Chávez to resign and supported the oil strike¹⁰⁶ to continue “indefinitely” (Forero, 2002a). While the strike created long-term economic harm, it backfired on the opposition as it did not function to oust the president; in reverse, boosted its base for support. Chavistas, for example, disabled the oil strike by not obeying the strike or organising by creating shields to stop the strike (Tinker-Salas, 2015 p.160) Although the CTV, continued their strike that halted production in the oil company for five months, the contention was resolved via the mediating mechanism that was established by international organisations and groups to create a dialogue between the parties (Cannon, 2009, %49). The OAS Secretary General César Gaviria and Jimmy Carter were involved in the proposals for the opposition to end the deadlock and stop the general strike as the disagreements between the opposition and the incumbent continued as the opposition did not moderate its stance of nonrecognition of the government (Tinker Salas, 2015).

With the mediation led by the Carter Center and the OAS, the opposition and the incumbent agreed to host a recall referendum¹⁰⁷ for a confidence vote on the president. *Súmate*, meaning “*Join Up*,” a civil association, was formed to coordinate the opposition campaign during the recall referendum and received funding from the NED (Golinger, 2005). There was a contentious process before the referendum as the CNE rejected the first call for the recall referendum due to invalid votes, the recall referendum took place after opposition complaints and mediation (Cannon, 2009). Opposition groups argued that Chavista forces had taken over the CNE and that the publication of the name of petition signers resulted in the targeting of

¹⁰⁵ The group included NGOs like the business association Fedecámaras, the trade union confederation, and the CTV.

¹⁰⁶ For a review of the economic consequences of the strike, see International Crisis Group (2008, p.9).

¹⁰⁷ The recall took place according to a provision in the 1999 constitution if 20 per cent of the electorate participated in signing a petition (Kornblith, 2005, pp.124–125).

public workers¹⁰⁸ (Kornblith, 2005). With CNE's validation of signatures, the referendum took place. As Chávez received 56 per cent of the votes in the referendum, it can be said that the failed coup and the recall strategy contributed to Chávez's consolidation of power. Even though the opposition claimed fraud in the process, its fraud allegations did not resonate with international actors, who sought to rely on the existing institutional context of Venezuela to resolve the dispute between the two sides, and thereby maintained the structures that had provided opportunities to the government¹⁰⁹ Moreover as Hawkins (2010, p.5) highlights, the Chavistas were highly mobilised organising "as many as 1.2 million activists" grassroots activists that outnumbered the opposition.

3. Towards the Consolidation of the Regime: The Coup Attempt and the Marginalisation of the Political Opposition

The referendum's aftermath also marked the path towards the consolidation of the Bolivarian project with Chavistas emphasising deepening the missions and socio-economic and political transformation (Cannon, 2009; Hawkins, 2010). This would also further alter the institutional context of Venezuelan politics in a way that created more political opportunities that the incumbent could exploit. Building on the existing networks of the Bolivarian Circles, government-backed communal councils increased (Roberts, 2015, p.152). These councils provided organisational power to the incumbent as they dominantly served to mobilise the grassroots of PSUV supporters. Chávez also created popular policies like subsidised markets called Mission Markets and the new military reserve force which was made up of 100,000

¹⁰⁸ Opposition actors argued that the existence of fingerprint machines would lead to the incumbent revealing the identity of the voters (Kornblith, 2005). The publishing of names in the recall referendum list by a Chavista, Luis Tascon, increased the claims that those who signed the petition will face consequences like losing their jobs (Kornblith, 2005, p.134).

¹⁰⁹The international community overwhelmingly saw the results as legitimate (Cannon, 2009). For a review on the recall referendum, see Carter Center, (2005); Kornblith (2005); McCoy (2005).

soldiers (Tarver and Frederick, 2006, p.154). The participation of the military in the government also expanded the role of the military in the civilian arena, as the military was used to implement infrastructural projects (Wilpert, 2007). The intensification of the Bolivarian project took place in a more advantageous environment as 2004 also marked recovery in the economy as oil revenues increased (Tinker Salas, 2015). Moreover, with the 2004 judicial reform bill¹¹⁰, Chavista hegemony over the institution increased, marking an important shift in opportunities in the balance of the incumbent through boosting the incumbent's organisational power within the judiciary. The Supreme Tribunal of Justice was transformed with the introduction of 12 more judges, which HRW named the "court-packing law" (Human Rights Watch, 2008, pp 45-49). Therefore, the government headed by Chávez began to further consolidate their rule throughout this period by advancing reforms that served to change the institutional context of Venezuelan politics. This, in turn, had the effect of allowing the incumbent to wield greater organisational power within the state, as the new political opportunities that they created allowed them to convert their popular support into organisational power within state institutions.

In order to defeat *Chavismo* in the 2005 National Assembly elections and the 2006 presidential elections, both actors from established political parties and newly formed ones came together to form a coalition to challenge Chavismo, thereby pursuing routine democratic procedures to out Chávez. However, the decision of most of these actors to boycott the 2005 National Assembly elections limited their entry onto the playing field and facilitated the consolidation of Chavismo. The five major opposition parties that participated

¹¹⁰ While the total number of judges increased to 32, it became easier for the incumbent to purge members of the TSJ (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Furthermore, the changes gave "the National Assembly the power to remove justices from the bench with a simple majority vote rather than the two-thirds majority required by the 1999 Constitution" (Human Rights Watch, 2008, p.36). The incumbent justified the changes that it was a way to pick over corrupt judges, the process led to most of the judges being removed (Wilpert, 2007, p.45).

in the boycott justified the latter by arguing that the government could trace the identity of voters, thereby violating the principle of the secret ballot¹¹¹ and the incumbent dominating the state-run media by penalising either by fining or not renewing their licenses¹¹² (Corrales and Penfold , 2007). The decision to boycott was contested within the opposition, as Julio Borges, the leader of the JP, was against the boycott of the 2005 elections (Wilpert, 2005). The consequences of the 2005 elections left the opposition “institutionally marginalised” (Roberts, 2015, p.156), as the Chavistas won all congressional seats, thereby gaining a supermajority that would enable them to pass constitutional changes (Cannon, 2009). Hence, the boycott paved the way for institutional capture by the Chavistas and set off even more in-depth political change. Moreover, the 2005 loss pushed the opposition to transform its policy, since, although only 25 per cent of the electorate participated in the elections, this was not sufficient to give the impression that the elections were illegitimate, and the opposition relinquished the opportunity to challenge the incumbent in the legislature (Cannon, 2009).

The opposition changed its approach and built a coalition in the 2006 presidential elections, together with proposing a populist economic policy to counter Chavismo. The main political opposition decided to contest the 2006 presidential elections, and Manuel Rosales, the Zulia state’s governor, became the candidate to face Chávez. Rosales, who started his political career at the AD, and later founded the *A New Era* (Un Nuevo Tiempo) as a social-democratic party, became the coalition candidate of the opposition after Rosales successfully “outmanoeuvred the abstentionists” (The Economist, 2006) and launched a campaign which

¹¹¹ Even though the CNE made concessions on the issue of using fingerprint devices in the elections with the involvement of international actors like the OAS, the parties that boycotted the election made up the majority of the political opposition and included parties like COPEI, AD Project Venezuela, A New Era and PJ (Tinker Salas, 2015).

¹¹² However, it is important to acknowledge the existence of broad private television networks which Tinker Salas (2015, p.153) states are the “face of the opposition”. These channels were also instrumental in the coup attempt to spread the messages of the interim government.

was focused on grassroots mobilisation (Jimenez and Trak, 2022, p. 76). The campaign marked a shift away from the earlier approach of nonrecognition that had been adopted by the majority of the Venezuelan opposition (Jimenez and Trak, 2022, p. 76). Rosales's campaign focused on criticising increasing authoritarianism and incorporated policies of distribution. It also involved many large-scale rallies (The Economist, 2006). However, Rosales was accused of clientelism in the 2006 elections by offering prepaid debit cards to poor households under the programme named "*Mi Negra*" (Cannon, 2009, %21), meaning "*my black lady*". The elections re-marked Chávez's popularity as he received an overwhelming majority with 63 per cent, appealing to twice as many people as at the previous election (Corrales and Penfold, 2007, p. 99). The 2005–2006 electoral cycle brought popular legitimacy to Chávez, who shifted to an increasingly left agenda (Roberts, 2015, p.146), and deepened nationalisation and foreign exchange control (Sullivan, 2013). However, even though the opposition was unsuccessful, the election marked a turning point in terms of the efforts they exerted towards mobilisation which marked another shift away from their approach of nonrecognition towards the incumbent.

After 2006, Chavistas expanded their organisational power by forming the PSUV and initiating constitutional changes, which served to further consolidate their control over political institutions. Chavistas argued that the PSUV would be able to create more grassroots contact between different electoral constituencies and the government (Ellner, 2008; Hetland, 2007, p.21). The party also aimed to become a platform where different political forces could be brought together with Chávez aiming to "create unity" amongst the groups that supported his project by forming the party (Cannon, 2009, %26). The opposition argued that the incumbent altered the playing field as the government extensively used state resources to pursue these goals and build new institutions (Roberts, 2015, p.156). With new constitutional

changes, which came via a referendum in 2007, the executive was also strengthened through increasing presidential terms and allowing the re-election of presidents (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Moreover, the president had the right to dissolve congress along with making appointments to the military and triggering referendums (Roberts, 2015, p. 154). As Weyland (2013) expresses it, even though steps were taken to increase participation and inclusion under the “participatory democracy” argument (Weyland 2013, p.31), institutional steps taken at this period were used to further increase the powers of the president. The rise of Chavismo increased the efforts for the opposition to form a coalition.

4. Crisis, Contention, and the Survival of the PSUV

After the 2005 boycott and 2006 defeat, members of the main political opposition formed the MUD as a “unifying organisation” to challenge Chavismo (Mesa de Unidad Democrática, 2008). The MUD was composed of 26 parties from the centre-left, left, centre and right and united on the “Anti-Chávez” agenda¹¹³. The foundational document of the MUD underlined the need to “rescue the prestige and autonomous functioning of the institutions of the Republic” and emphasised to overturn what it termed the ideological takeover of institutions in fields like education (Mesa de Unidad Democrática, 2008). With the new party, the opposition increased the electoral struggle by mobilising for the regional and upcoming National Assembly elections. During the local elections in Miranda and Zulia, the opposition was able to gain three seats, with the later presidential candidate Capriles winning the Miranda governorship in 2008 (Tinker Salas, 2015, p.204). Building on his local success, Capriles, who had been imprisoned in 2004 for four months due to his participation in the

¹¹³ For example, within the MUD, while some parties are a part of the Socialist International, others are on the right of the spectrum (International Crisis Group, 2018).

attack the Cuban Embassy during the 2002 coup against Chávez (Anderson, 2017), started to emerge as the main figure for the opposition (Sullivan, 2013). Their success in forming the coalition built on Chávez's primary electoral defeat in the 2007 referendum, where he advocated to alter the constitution to deepen the socialist transformation of Venezuela (Tinker Salas, 2015). However, the change of strategies of the opposition and the referendum's loss was marked by increasing repression. During the local elections, the Supreme Court disqualified 272 politicians for corruption (Human Rights Watch, 2008). This led to Rosales, charged with corruption, seeking asylum in Peru (Carroll, 2009). Chávez also began to further restrict the judiciary, for instance, by targeting judges, as in his call for judge María Lourdes Afiuni, who ruled that a critic of the incumbent was not guilty of the crimes that were alleged by the government, to be imprisoned (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Her subsequent imprisonment, for supposed corruption, demonstrated increasing authoritarianism and the personalisation of power under Chávez, despite the success of the opposition in forming a coalition in the lead up to the 2010 parliamentary elections.

The establishment of a broad coalition by the opposition resulted in a mixed set of results for the opposition as, on the one hand, the opposition was unable to defeat the proposal of the incumbent to abolish term limits in the 2009 referendum but was able to make gains in the 2010 National Assembly elections. Chavismo therefore lost its electoral strength as the MUD was able to get 52 per cent of the votes in the election and the PSUV lost its majority (Financial Times, 2010). This suggested that the government's efforts at consolidating power through pushing power concentrated institutional changes had begun to backfire. The constitutional referendum of 2009, however, was won by 54 per cent of the electorate voting for the abolition of term limits, with 70 per cent of the electorate participating. As a response to increasing closing of the playing field, Antonio Ledezma, the Caracas mayor, who had

been stripped of his power, launched a hunger strike by camping in front of the Caracas office of the OAS (Americas Quarterly, 2009). He argued that his hunger strike would convince the OAS to denounce what he called a “constitutional” coup against himself, along “with the broader threat to democracy in Venezuela” (Mander, 2009), which could trigger the OAS’s democratic charter. The removal of Ledezma and other opposition members signalled the use of “discriminatory legalism,” which refers to “the use, abuse and non-use of the law” that alters the balance of power in favour of the incumbent (Corrales, 2015, p.38; Weyland, 2013, p.23). With discriminatory legalism, the incumbent suppressed the democratic demands of the opposition which was accompanied by derogatory framing that would justify discriminatory practices. Consequently, together with the constitutional reforms of 2009, the incumbent increasingly came to move towards competitive authoritarianism (Mainwaring, 2012; Weyland, 2013), marked by the existence of “significant parliamentary opposition” (Diamond, 2002) but an uneven playing field. Therefore, although the political opposition was able to make several gains by exploiting political opportunities in electoral politics, the changing legal and political context of Venezuela, brought about by the incumbent, meant that exploiting these opportunities was not sufficient in preventing the backsliding of democracy in the country.

In the 2012 presidential elections, and the following 2013 presidential elections after Chávez’s death,¹¹⁴ by rising to leadership in the MUD, Capriles became the opposition’s candidate to contest Chavismo. In the mobilisation processes, Capriles accepted the need for some of the Chavista reforms that the government had been advocating, and therefore put forward a conciliatory approach by arguing that the social missions would be maintained

¹¹⁴ After Chávez’s death, Maduro, previously foreign minister and later the Vice President, became interim president.

(Scully and Tovar, 2015). He based one of his main criticisms in 2012 on Chávez's absence, stating that Venezuela is "not a monarchy" or "like Cuba" (AP Archive, 2015).

After Chávez's death, Nicolás Maduro, previously a foreign minister and vice-president, became the presidential candidate as a loyal Chavista and mobilised under the "I am Chávez" slogan in the 2013 elections, representing the candidate to maintain Chávez's legacy.

Although Capriles, as the presidential candidate of the MUD, did not challenge the legitimacy of the existing political institutions in the course of the election campaign in 2012, following his defeat by a very close margin in the 2013 elections, he did not recognise Maduro's victory (Tinker Salas, 2015, p.210).¹¹⁵ The opposition's loss of the 2013 elections and increasing repression led to non-scheduled events in the form of protests, opposition externalisation and splits. Following the elections, the opposition contested the results by taking them to the Supreme Court, and Capriles appealed to international actors touring Latin America to audit the presidential elections (New York Times, 2013). However, the opposition failed to provide a convincing argument for fraud, as the OAS and several countries, such as Mexico and Chile, had recognised the 2013 elections (Hidalgo, Álvarez, & Alarcón, 2016). The protests after Maduro's victory, which were repressively policed by the incumbent, led to a further cycle of protests. The outrage towards what the opposition termed unfair elections and repression created mass mobilisation, which turned into the La Salida (the Exit) protest movement led by both the opposition and student movements (Hetland, 2015, p.44). Growing with broad social media support under the hashtag #lasalida, protests that demanded Maduro's departure lasted three months, leading to casualties and repression¹¹⁶ (Amnesty International, 2014). While the incumbent viewed the protests via a

¹¹⁵ While Capriles was defeated by 11 percentage points in 2012 (Tinker Salas, 2015), he continued to be the popular candidate for the 2013 elections.

¹¹⁶ Alferdo Romero, who received the Robert F. Kennedy award, argued that social media "increased the cost of repression" (Talks at Google; 2018, 7:32–7:35). Furthermore, he argued that the reporting on political prisoners and sharing it with the OAS increased the "political cost" for the regime (Talks at Google, 2018).

security lens, arguing that the opposition was amplifying violence, the opposition raised awareness of the human rights violations and police violence at the hands of the government (Voluntad Popular, 2014). The protests led to the strengthening of networks like Fero Penal which enlarged its network with more than 4000 volunteers to keep track of political detainees, report on the numbers and give legal assistance (Talks at Google, 2018). From 2014 to 2019 the number of what the opposition has termed “political prisoners” rose to the 500s, with more than 800 being prosecuted in military courts (Foro Penal, 2019). Consequently, the incumbent’s approach to the la Salida protests backfired, since, although the incumbent deployed repression in response to the protests, this merely resulted in the growth of the movement against the government and shifted the focus of the protests from opposing the election result to challenging the government’s repression.

After Capriles’s defeat and la Salida protests, the strategy of the MUD shifted decisively towards removing Maduro from office (Hetland 2014, p.34) which in turn, intensified the repression of the incumbent to an even greater extent. This occurred in the context of further repression from the incumbent along with cracks within the opposition in the course of which activism also grew to release jailed opposition members (Voluntad Popular, 2014). The cracks within the MUD set off whether how to engage with the incumbent either via non-recognition or engagement. The party was cracking as even though the agreement within the MUD was that the party’s decision-making would be consensus-based (Salazar Marín, 2016, p.15), the ideological differences functioned as an impediment to agreement. Moreover, the leaders had an autonomous style and lacked cohesion (Salazar Marín, 2016, p.11), which resulted in two different camps being strengthened from within the party. The two dominant parties, Justice First (PJ) led by Capriles, and Popular Will (VP) led by Lopez, had different ambitions and strategies (Hetland, 2014). While Popular Will pursued a “hardcore” approach,

which Gonzalez (2014, 58%) has characterised as involving a “soft coup” method, Capriles maintained an engagement strategy with the incumbent (TeleSUR TV, 2014). Crucially, while the Lopez camp eventually advocated more punitive measures against the incumbent, the Capriles camp was more hesitant and sought to negotiate with the incumbent (Cannon, 2014) and more importantly recruit ex-Chavistas (Financial Times, 2018). On the other hand, in the aftermath of the protests, many activists, including Lopez, were jailed for “inciting violence”¹¹⁷ (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The fact that students and opposition members were put on trial due to their involvement was condemned by a range of international actors and increasing advocacy. Human Rights Watch’s (2014) report directly targeted the incumbent underlining that the repression that Venezuelan security forces used against peaceful protesters “with the complicity of state prosecutors and judges”. Therefore, while the opposition united to remove Maduro, this had the effect of intensifying repression by the incumbent to an unprecedented extent, as international actors such as international human rights NGOs, international organisations and other states also recognised.

With increasing unpopularity, the incumbent got its most significant challenge in the 2015 elections. The MUD secured 112 seats out of 167 in the National Assembly, marking its biggest success in the period following Chávez’s election (*see table 6*). The opposition contested under unfair context¹¹⁸, highlighted by Leopoldo Lopez’s hunger strike which brought international attention, making the elections a critical moment for political change (The Economist, 2015). With the increasing economic crisis and inflation, advocating a

¹¹⁷ The violence from the protestors was also documented. HRW said that while some demonstrators had resorted to violence “including throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails at security forces”, the state’s response had been disproportionate and “extended beyond the protests” to include hundreds of people in custody (Human Rights Watch, 2016b).

¹¹⁸ One of the contentious discussions about the electoral cycle was about electoral observers. The government tried to limit the electoral observers to UNASUR. Moreover, the elections took under a state of emergency which was justified due to “the measures aimed at combating smuggling and crimes against the domestic currency.” (Organization of American States, 2015).

solution to economic problems and criticising the regime's authoritarianism became the primary strategy of the opposition (Lobo-Guerrero, 2015). While Maduro blamed the opposition and international agents for the economic crisis, the MUD was able to reach out to some of Chavismo's support base (Hetland, 2015) and raised concern on the increasing role of the military in civilian government visible in AD's Ramos Allup citing the disastrous legacies of military's overreach in politics in the region (NTN24 Venezuela, 2014). The loss of support for PSUV paved the way for it to implement increasingly authoritarian measures to repress the political opposition. After MUD's electoral success, repression dominantly occurred through attacks on the MUD's legislative power by altering the institutional setting and arresting opposition members (Trinkunas, 2018). This led to influential leaders fleeing the country, as in the case of Caracas mayor Antonio Ladezma who was accused of plotting to kill Maduro (Cawthorne and Ore, 2014). In 2015, the aftermath of the *la Salida* marked repression most dominantly via arrests as López received a 14-year prison sentence, along with multiple high-profile members¹¹⁹ due to their role in facilitating violent protests¹²⁰. Those who were not arrested also faced crucial restrictions and political violence. Similarly, in April 2017, Capriles was banned from political participation for 15 years along with other opposition members (BBC Mundo, 2017a). Authoritarian institutions of the regime limited the opposition in cases like the CNE in 2016, facilitating delaying the elections without giving any solid reason (Trinkunas, 2018). Institutions such as the Supreme Court, in this period, continued their function of blocking political agents as they disqualified members (Fermín, 2016). As Hetland (2016, p.195) demonstrated after the *la Salida* protests, the incumbent pursued "limited concessions and targeted repression" to maintain its adaptability towards the threats. However, this led to elite splits within the ruling coalition of the PSUV,

¹¹⁹ The repression became more blatant as Mayor Alfredo Ramos was arrested by being dragged out of his office (El Español, 2017).

¹²⁰ The charges were seen absurd as protesters were arrested for "subliminally" trying to overthrow the government (Corrales 2015, p.43).

because it started to exclude the soft-liners and critics¹²¹ (Alarcon, 2016). Chávez's supervisor and close mentor, academic Giordani split from the party arguing that Maduro was a president "who lacks an ability to project leadership¹²²" (TeleSUR, 2017). Although repression was once again deployed to challenge the opposition, the severity of repression began to further cause a split within the PSUV (TeleSUR, 2016), leading some to challenge the hard-line approach being adopted by the government, thereby pointing to the presence of a challenge to the ruling coalition. However, most of the splits remained independent rather than appealing to the opposition arguably due to their understanding and of the presence of extreme right groups.

¹²¹ Splits also occurred within the opposition at this time. Most importantly, the Soy Venezuela group emerged after splitting from the MUD due to "strategic differences" led by opposition leaders Ladezma and Machado with a hardliner approach (El Nacional, 2017). The group criticised MUD for negotiating with the regime (Soy Venezuela, 2018). Earlier, Venezuela United Active Youth, known as JAVU, left the MUD to a lack of common goals and arguing their voices were not heard (Salazar Marin, 2015, p.17).

¹²² Similarly, Luisa Ortega, one of the pro-Chávez judges in the Supreme Court broke, denounced the institutions' move, stating that "sovereign power does not lie with the president; it lies with the people" (Long, 2017), underlining the incumbent's loss of popular power.

Table 6: Parliamentary Election Results of Major Political Parties Seats Compared 2010 and 2015

Political Party	2010	2015
PSUV	98	55
MUD	65	109
Indigenous Representation	3	3

Source: CNE (2010, 2015)

However, the dynamics of contention in Venezuela arguably entered into a stalemate as it was the case of opposition protests in the aftermath of Chávez's first years in power, but this time it was marked by the imprisonment of opposition actors and the increasingly restrictive usage of state institutions like the CNE's decision to suspend the local and regional elections of December 2016 or disqualify candidates. As institutional arenas were being closed by the incumbent, the MUD continued street protests with the demand of the immediate removal of Maduro (Hernáiz and Smilde, 2016), which further increased polarisation. The contention was followed with international mediation, in the course of which agents like the Vatican, UNASUR along with others facilitating talks to pursue a way out of the deadlock (Latouche, 2016). However, after the Supreme Court decided to strip the National Assembly of its powers in March 2017, the contentious politics between the opposition and the incumbent entered into a new phase of sustained contention as the political opportunities that were available to the opposition through participation in the assembly diminished. The decision to

establish a Constituent Assembly (CA) election without issuing the procedure, which led to further backsliding, led to the failure of the talks, as the opposition boycott and denounce the practice (International Crisis Group, 2018). While the 1999 CA was assembled following a referendum, a presidential decree convened the CA assembly elections in 2017, which once again demonstrated the incumbent's lack of public support. The new assembly was given powers that could enable it to shut down the National Assembly, change laws and halt electoral processes (Human Rights Watch, 2017). While the constituent assembly intensified punitive strategies from international actors in terms of shaming and sanctioning, which the next chapter will discuss, the incumbent framed the move as a response to violence as it would bring peace (Anderson, 2017). However, as the incumbent imposed the assembly to eliminate the opposition from the playing field, this allowed the opposition to frame the National Assembly as the "sole democratic institution" and argue that they represent the people (Ramsey, 2017). These elections became a key point as they were a clear demonstration of the competitive aspect of the regime being diminished due to how the Constituent Assembly had the authority to suspend the National Assembly (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

Conclusion

By starting with a review of the historical context of the incumbent-opposition relationship in Venezuela, this chapter primarily discussed how what has been termed the democratisation of Venezuela occurred after the political opposition defeated the oppressive military regime and built a "pacted democracy" by establishing competitive elections. However, the exclusionary characteristic and the corruption affiliated with the Puntofijo parties led a political outsider, Hugo Chávez, to rise to power (Tarver and Frederick, 2006). The process of democratic backsliding under Chavismo was complex, as the process was marked by the participation of

popular masses along with the concentration of power in the presidency (Cannon, 2009). The incumbent used plebiscitary measures to consolidate its authority to implement radical institutional change in the first time frame. At the same time, the incumbent had to overcome the challenge from the opposition that blended conventional and extra-institutional strategies to contest the rise of Chavismo. After the 2005 election boycott, the opposition changed its approach of nonrecognition and started to pursue an electoral strategy by being able to unite on multiple occasions to challenge Chavismo. After the MUD's parliamentary success in 2010, democratic backsliding advanced due to "discriminatory legalism" against and repression of the political opposition (Weyland, 2013). This had the effect of restricting domestic political opportunities that were available to the opposition. The aftermath of the 2013 elections marked a strong mobilisation during the La Salida protests and increased the opposition externalisation to build solid insider-outsider coalitions between opposition agents and INGOS, and supportive states. However, the aftermath of the protests was marked by increasing repression and arrests of opposition members. The opposition's most significant success became the 2015 National Assembly elections, where they became the majority in the assembly for the first time under Chavismo. However, the incumbent's increasingly repressive response to the opposition's success led to further opposition and incumbent splits and opposition externalisation, which will be discussed in the following chapter. Consequently, this chapter ends at the convening of the Constituent Assembly in irregular circumstances in 2017, on the other hand, resulted in the further diminution of political opportunities for the incumbent.

CHAPTER 7: The International and Contentious Politics in Venezuela

Introduction

This chapter maps out the role of the international in the dynamics of contention between the opposition and the incumbent under *Chavismo*. By applying the categories presented in *Chapter 2*, this chapter tracks the international opportunities including the following: punitive and rewarding measures from international actors; opposition externalisation; and the incumbent's foreign policy. The first section of the chapter starts with investigating the historical background of the role of the international in Venezuela. The following section chronologically explores the categories under the three time frames presented in Chapter 6. The section focusing on the first era demonstrates how the US and the main political opposition were in resonance in pursuing strategies of nonrecognition against Chavismo and explores the international agents' attempts to mediate between the political opposition and the incumbent during the 2002 coup attempt and the 2004 recall referendum. The consideration of the second era focuses on how the populist foreign policy of Chavismo gained prominence by focusing on its attempts to build alternative alliances to challenge the US's hegemonic role in the international system, the introduction of punitive measures from the US and increasing shaming strategies from INGOs. In this time frame, the 2008 financial crisis emerges as a transformative event that alters the domestic sphere due to the paving the way for loss in oil revenues. The section on the last era focuses on the intensifying linkages of the political opposition with external actors and the increasing punitive strategies employed by international actors to implement political change in Venezuela under the banners of democracy promotion (Elliot, 2017) and protection of human rights. This section ends by explaining the efforts of international mediation and the punitive strategies employed by international actors as a response to democratic backsliding.

1. Historical Legacies and the International Relations of Venezuela

The political opportunity approach can be utilised to understand the dynamics of the international in Venezuelan history as it has been crucial in shaping the mobilisation of the opposition dating back to the struggle against Spanish rule. The mobilisation for the Venezuelan War of Independence in the early 19th century was clearly tied to the opening of political opportunities, as opposition actors intensified their efforts to topple the colonial rule when Spain was weakened following the invasion of France (Anderson, 2013). Since Venezuela's quest for independence, opposition actors were inspired by the diffusion of ideas from the international and have been influenced by global events, such as the French and the Haitian Revolutions¹²³ (Armas, 2017; Salas, 2015). Under Bolivar's leadership, Venezuela became independent, but Bolivar's aim to unify Latin America backfired, leading to a period of political instability and wars (Salas, 2015). In the subsequent years, several caudillos rose to power in Venezuela as part of the legacy of strong leadership being displayed in its struggle for independence (Lynch, 1983). Overall, Venezuela's early foreign policy was shaped by its assertion of independence from Spain and its struggles for recognition from other European empires.

Venezuela's subsequent history would be shaped, to a greater extent, by its deepening relations with the US. In the context of its rising power, the US devised the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, effectively excluding European states from wielding influence in or engaging in colonialism in the Western hemisphere (Livingstone, 2009). The Monroe Doctrine asserted that this region was naturally tied to the interests of the US, which meant that other states would need to be excluded from this region. This approach led Venezuela's president,

¹²³ The struggle of leaders like Simon Bolivar and Francisco de Miranda was shaped by their travels and encounters with revolutionaries in America and Europe (Arana, 2013).

Cipriano Castro, to seek assistance from the US after Venezuela's European debtors imposed a naval blockade on the country in 1902, due to its debts to Britain, Germany and Italy¹²⁴ (Ewell, 1984). Castro hence perceived the Monroe Doctrine as providing an opportunity to punish European powers who were seeking to extend their influence in the region. However, US President Elihu Root refused to assist Venezuela and argued that the Monroe Doctrine merely amounted to opposition to European territorial control (Ewell, 1984). The US, as a result, refused to support Venezuela and later adopted a more confrontational style in its dealings with South American countries, termed the "Big Stick approach" by US Foreign Secretary, Theodore Roosevelt, to supposedly prevent such crises from occurring again in the future (Bryne, 2020). Therefore, the Monroe Doctrine had the effect of the US asserting its own right to be the dominant power within the region (Bryne, 2020; Livingstone, 2009) and the concept has shaped how the incumbents understood the US as an external agent in the region.

Venezuela's role in the international system came to be shaped by gaining the status of being one of the world's largest oil exporters in early 20th century. With geographical proximity and economic interests, the US became an even more important actor for Venezuela's foreign policymakers. At the start of the twentieth century, US-Venezuelan relations improved under the leadership of Gómez with the discovery of oil (Rabe, 2014). The discovery of oil has increased international linkages since the 1910s, with Venezuela forming a stronger relationship with the US based on exporting large amounts of petroleum (Corrales and Romero, 2012). This is demonstrated by how, when met with repression with Jimenez's grab of power in the 1950s, Venezuela's first democratic president Rómulo Betancourt was able to

¹²⁴ These losses occurred in the course of the Federal War, due to the losses that the citizens of these states experienced (Tarver and Frederick, 2006).

continue mobilising from exile in New York City (Tinker Salas, 2015, p.92) and eventually return to Venezuela to lead political change (Tarver and Frederick, 2006). Forming the AD as a social-democrat, Betancourt viewed Venezuela's participation in the international oil market as a means of ensuring the stable and swift development of Venezuela's economics and politics (Martz, 1966). Therefore, the international oil market came to function as a means of ensuring Venezuela's internal stability.

During the Cold War, Venezuela pursued an independent foreign policy closer to that of the Non-Aligned Movement yet maintained closer links to the US. With the AD's social democratic programmes, under the popular leadership of Betancourt, Venezuela was able to implement redistribution policies like land reform¹²⁵ (Martz, 1966), when the US was reluctant to support such policies in the region. US-Venezuela foreign policies were not always in unity as Betancourt advocated democracy in the region by not recognising military-led regimes and remaining largely independent of international tensions during the Cold War (Tarver and Grederick, 2006, p.106). Even though Venezuela continued to be a key provider of petroleum to the US, especially under the Caldera administration, it also endorsed the nationalisation of oil production in the OPEC (Tinker Salas, 2015, p.104). Venezuela was also able to invest even though not sufficiently in welfare with the oil revenues in its domestic politics (Ellner, 2003). Overall, while there were coups and military dictatorships around Latin America, Venezuela enjoyed relative stability and prosperity, which the literature linked to its democratic status as well as its economic power, which would be sustained until the 1990s.

¹²⁵ Furthermore, in this period, Betancourt introduced Agrarian reform law in 1960 and nationalised steel industry in 1962 (Tarver and Frederick, 2006).

As one of the first countries in the region to go through a democratic transition away from dictatorship, Venezuela has been embedded in regional and international organisations and their efforts to promote democracy and the peaceful resolution of disputes throughout the region. Soon after the OAS was founded in 1948, under the leadership of the US, as an institution intended to “resolve conflicts in the region” (Shaw, 2004), Venezuela was considered a crucial actor within it. Rather than directly confronting Castro’s Cuba and Trujillo’s Dominican Republic for threatening Venezuela’s regime, Venezuela sought to use the OAS to counter the threats posed by these states (Rabe, 1996). While the founding norm in the organisation was respect for state sovereignty (Organisation of American States, 1948) mechanisms to pressure nondemocratic regimes gradually increased. After the 1970s, international and regional organisations came to promote democracy to a greater extent. For instance, Carter’s human rights agenda shaped the OAS’s inclusion of democracy-building in Latin America as one of its key issue areas (Arnold, 1980). This role was later further emphasised in the context of the establishment of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) under the Reagan administration, which marked a crucial juncture in the U.S.’s policy of democracy promotion (Carothers, 2002; Clement, 2005). Venezuela therefore played a leading role within the region, in the course of efforts to promote regional cooperation on issues related to democracy promotion, which also converged with the US’s broader agenda for the region. Venezuela was hence able to make use of the rewarding strategies of the US in the context of human rights and democracy promotion, during the Carter and Reagan administrations, respectively, to empower its own regional position.

Venezuela continued to play an active role in democracy promotion, as well as the punitive mechanisms for non-democratic states, throughout its region as, subsequently, Venezuela took part in founding the OAS’s Inter-American Democratic Charter in 2001, which put an

emphasis on fair elections and democratic institutions. Venezuela's foreign policy in this regard can be said to be congruent with its broad approach of promoting democracy and good governance and its position as a leading state in the region in these areas. The charter built a system of exclusion to target "unconstitutional" amendments of political regimes by eventually suspending a country from the organisation (Organization of American States, 2011). Relatedly, the OAS's institutions had grown with the formation of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) in 1979, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) which contributed to the implementation of decision-making by creating punitive results in cases of human rights abuses (Méndez, 1999). These institutions work closely with local and international NGOs, which remain critical in the documentation of abuses¹²⁷. While these NGOs also facilitate agenda-setting and help articulate the demands of the opposition, which may overlap with their own agendas, they also document the state of repression with documentation (Minami, 2019). Consequently, Venezuelan politics was deeply shaped by its international links, including both its ties to the US, which continued in the context of the OAS, in addition to its aforementioned international economic position, stemming from the centrality of oil to its economy. As Venezuela's role in the expansion of means of measuring and punishing violations of democratic norms and human rights demonstrates, Venezuela historically played a key role in the development of institutions to not only promote but also enforce democratic norms throughout the region.

2. Chavismo Challenging the Washington Consensus

¹²⁷ These include local NGOs like PROVEA, FUNPAZ and INGOs like HRW and Amnesty International, documenting human rights violations since the late 1980s.

With the end of the Cold War, the international system came to be characterised by the presence of actors who were increasingly influenced by the neoliberal Washington Consensus and its pressures on states to conform to the neoliberal model (Babb and Kentikelenis, 2021; Ikenberry, 2011; Smith, 2008). In this context, throughout Latin America, resistance against the state's austerity measures and neoliberal policies grew (Calderon, 1997), which resulted in the increasing mobilisation of social movements like the Zapatistas and the Landless Workers Movement (Olesen, 2006; Smith, 2008). These movements, usually studied under the banner of "anti-globalisation movements", with the formation of transnational networks, challenged international liberal institutions (Smith, 2008). Chavismo, with a similar discourse emerged as a challenger movement to the current international system which proposed that the goal of the movement is to support "a just economic order", an argument that had been utilised by Third World countries (Livingstone, 1992). Therefore, changes in the international system following the end of the Cold War, which ushered in the emergence of a more neoliberal international order within the system, had several implications for Venezuela. Chavismo emerged as a distinct response to the austerity measures and other policies of neoliberalisation that were promoted by actors using the framework of the Washington Consensus. Crucially, the austerity measures undermined the existing two-party system in Venezuela, under which both mainstream parties redistributed a degree of the oil wealth within the country. This, in turn, paved the way for the emergence of an alternative form of politics that would represent the demands of those who were affected by the newly implemented austerity measures. This framing of Chavismo therefore emerged as a contestation to the neoliberal austerity measures and promoted an economic approach that would diverge from that being promoted by the United States.

By building on the contestation of neoliberalism, Chávez's immediate implementation of what has been named a "populist foreign policy" further restrained US-Venezuela relations (Dodson and Dorraj, 2008). Yet, the rise of Chavismo was a disruption both domestically and in the region, as Venezuela has been considered a strong ally of the US and largely adherent to the neoliberal policies of the Washington Consensus. The international context of the time was also marked by challenges to American hegemony in Latin America and the world (Gonzalez, 2014; Parmar, 2018; Smith, 2012). Upon his election, Chávez visited Iraq to meet Saddam Hussein, as part of a meeting occurring under the auspices of OPEC, and condemned US policy in Iraq (Friedman, 2000). In a speech, Chávez labelled the process of globalisation led by the US as "evil", echoing his argument that the "world cannot be unipolar" (Gonzalez, 2014, 50%). This further crystallised the idea of Chávez's regime as a threat to Western interests due to its contestation of the US's foreign policy and the presence of oil in Venezuela. As a response to the direction taken by Venezuela in its foreign and economic policy, international actors affiliated with the US, mainly the NED, intensified their networks, which included Venezuela's opposition actors (Clement, 2005). Shortly after opening its office in Venezuela in 2000, the NED worked closely with like-minded groups opposed to Chávez, including Súmate and the PJ (Corrales and Penfold, 2007, p. 108). In the context of deepening the relationship between the opposition, the NED, classified Venezuela as a "semi-authoritarian regime" in 2002 (Clement, 2005, p. 69). Consequently, the foreign policy of Venezuela's new incumbent, the Chávez regime, served to form a coalition between the US and the opposition, owing to how the incumbent attempted to frame its own legitimacy by referring to its populist foreign policy as a means of challenging neoliberalism and defending Venezuela's interests.

With the election of Bush, the US has reframed liberal internationalism as entailing a more aggressive foreign policy to promote the Bush administration's conception of democracy promotion. The US's foreign policy under Bush increased the Venezuelan government's distrust towards US, which already viewed the US with suspicion, owing to its history of intervention against left-wing governments in the region. These concerns were first amplified following 9/11 and the 2002 coup attempt. 9/11 altered the characteristics and institutions of the liberal international order towards a greater focus on identifying actual and potential security threats (Tarrow, 2010). The US violated both its domestic and international institutional norms and processes in its "fight against terror", which demonstrated that it was adopting a more flexible stance towards human rights, suggesting that security concerns could trump liberal rights and freedoms. The coup of 2002, which occurred in the context of the Bush administration's vocal and severe criticism of the Venezuelan regime, became a critical moment in the development of Venezuela's foreign policy towards the US. The Bush administration immediately recognised the new government under businessman Pedro Carmona (Clement 2005, p, 70) with multiple reports highlighting the US's knowledge¹²⁸ (Cannon, 2009) and Chávez arguing US's involvement (CNN, 2013). In this time frame, unlike the US, the OAS and neighbouring countries played a constructive role in building mechanisms to resolve disputes. While some countries in the region threatened the coup government with sanctions, the OAS responded to the coup by condemning it and demanding Chávez's return (Tinker Salas, 2015). The Democratic Charter provided the basis of the OAS's nonrecognition of the coup as it gives the right to governments that if 'legitimate' power is at risk, the OAS can be of assistance in the quest to preserve democratic rule. Given how the coup coincided with the Bush administration's move towards challenging regimes

¹²⁸ Many reports have argued that the US was aware of the coup. Yet after the mediation, there was a short period of ease in the relationship where officials from the Department of State were calling for Venezuela to "reduce tensions" and "engage in a constructive, democratic dialogue" (Webb-Vidal, 2004). However, this came to be short lived.

opposed to it and viewing them as threats, the generals who carried out the coup may have foreseen that the Bush administration's policies would ensure that they would be supported by the US.

However, after the coup, the contentious process between the opposition and the incumbent continued with the strike wave, and the mediation of international organisations, including the Carter Center, the Group of Friends initiative. The OAS and the Carter Center were instrumental for the deadlock to come to an end due to the opposition's reluctance to accept Chávez as legitimate (Tarver and Frederick, 2006). With the success of Chávez in the recall referendum, and verification from international actors that it was not fraudulent, the opposition was pushed to alter its strategy of nonrecognition. While the response of international actors was vital for Chávez to return to power, the relationship between the incumbent and the OAS was hence not an insider-outsider coalition in the sense described by Keck and Sikkink (1998). This was because the OAS and Carter Center acted as a third party that presented itself as a neutral arbiter in its efforts to resolve the dispute between the incumbent and the opposition and had a more top-down approach. There was an overlap between the norms promoted by international institutions and challenging the undemocratic nature of the coup. It appeared, at this point, that the Venezuelan government was relying on the international to challenge threats from the opposition. This was because international arbitration by international organisations had the prospect of resulting in advantage to the government, which had been removed by the coup and led to punishing the coup plotters by thwarting their goal of taking control of the government. With the loss in the recall referendum, the opposition was therefore no longer able, at this point, to receive the support it desired from international actors, which resulted in its weakening in this period.

3. The International Rise of Chavismo

After the success of the recall referendum, the international environment for Chavismo encountered a more favourable international context with the so-called rise of the “Pink Tide”¹²⁹, which involved several left-leaning governments coming to power in Latin America (Gonzalez, 2014, 2018). Under Chávez’s leadership, Venezuela cooperated with the governments of the Pink Tide in attempts to transform existing regional and international organisations (Kellogg, 2007) along with founding new ones to strengthen alternative forms of solidarity against US dominance and hegemony. The new regional integration projects launched by Chávez aimed to institutionalise Anti-Americanism, urging the formation of alternative alliances and seeking to disrupt various free trade deals that the US was seeking to introduce (Gonzalez, 2014). Significantly, in 2005, Venezuela introduced the Petrocaribe project that aimed to create a regional energy alliance in the region as it provided easier access to oil (Gonzalez, 2014, 88%). Another initiative was the creation of ALBA, a regional organisation that aimed to promote “regional economic integration” by specifically distinguishing “socialist and social democratic governments”¹³⁰ (Bianculli, 2020). ALBA was formed as a “socially oriented” international organisation that focused on policies like “eradicating poverty” (Corrales and Penfold, 2015, p.108). In this period Venezuela initiated a foreign policy of “poverty reduction aid” in the region (Corrales and Penfold, 2015). The third biggest regional project was launched with the aim of building an EU model for Latin America in 2008 to increase integration between states. Subsequently, building on existing ties, UNASUR, which was framed as a Bolivarian institution, was also pioneered by Venezuela¹³¹. While ALBA was focused on improving socio-economic conditions, UNASUR

¹²⁹ The Pink Tide refers to the election of left-wing Latin American governments, such as Lula’s Brazil in 2003, Evo Morales’s Bolivia in 2006 and the Kirchner governments in Argentina (Gonzalez, 2018).

¹³⁰ ALBA started first with Venezuela-Cuba partnership. Programmes like the “doctors for oil” with Cuba became a central part of the partnership (Cannon, 2009).

¹³¹ Chávez usually justified the formation of the organisation on the historical attempts of Simon Bolivar to form a united Latin America (Chávez, 2016).

claimed to be focused on fostering economic and political cooperation (Cannon, 2009). The fourth institution was Banco del Sur, which was founded in 2009 to counter the IMF as a monetary fund. As a media outlet to counter news outlets like CNN, TeleSUR was founded in 2005 with joint funding from multiple Latin American countries. With the promotion of new projects, Chavistas advocated a model of development and democracy that addressed social justice which, according to Corrales and Penfold (2015, p.107), took the form of “a type of soft power.” In this regard, Venezuela’s regional efforts had an anti-neoliberal stance against the common regional market promoted under US hegemony (Dodson and Doraj, 2008). These efforts took place in a regional environment within South America when it became favourable to challenge the US’s dominance, resulting in the deepening of the incumbent’s populist foreign policy that was framed as challenging US hegemony.

Apart from the rise of ideologically similar governments in the region, for the international context of Chavismo, until 2012, there were multiple opportunities that the incumbent could exploit. Firstly, oil prices rose, which contributed to funding Bolivarian projects at home and abroad. (Gonzalez, 2014, 19%). Secondly, Venezuela strengthened its relationship with “transnational leftist solidarity movements” (Striffler, 2021) and anti-globalisation movements, which contributed to its challenging of the liberal international order and sharing common frames of solidarity. Significantly, Venezuela hosted the World Social Forum in Caracas in 2006, presenting itself as an ally to the movements opposed to neoliberalism within global civil society (Gonzalez, 2014, 35%). Chávez also became a prominent figure for international socialists (The Guardian, 2006). The rise in support for the incumbent by transnational and international actors, largely self-identifying as left or progressive, can be identified as a moment in which the incumbent bolstered its legitimacy by establishing solidarity networks. These networks included actors throughout the world who could also

lobby their own governments and lobby to prevent them from enacting sanctions against the Venezuelan government if necessary. The Venezuela Solidarity Network, present in multiple states, came to be one of the key organising groups behind these efforts. Hence, it is possible to identify a coalition that is not easily captured by Keck and Sikkink's (1998) insider-outsider coalition model. This is because, in this case, the incumbent, which had already captured the state, established networks that would allow it to secure its position and prevent a global backlash against it. A series of conjunctural developments, including oil prices, the 'Pink Tide' and the rise of anti-neoliberal activist networks throughout the world consequently all favoured the Venezuelan government, allowing it to establish the foundations of insider-outsider coalitions.

The alternative alliances forged by Chavistas at this point can be interpreted as a new stage in Venezuela's attempts to challenge US hegemony by establishing links with the US's international rivals. Establishing alternative alliances, which would enable the incumbent to be protected by the possibly punitive approach of the US and its allies, became the central part of Chavismo's foreign policy. Foreign policy under Chavismo moved away from the West and involved deepening partnerships with Russia, China and, eventually, Iran (Dodson and Doraj, 2008). After 2005, the Venezuelan-Russian partnership increased with joint military exercises and later incorporated building a Kalashnikov factory in Venezuela (TeleSUR, 2006). In the same year, Russia set up a \$2.2 billion credit for arms purchases which Chávez argued were framed as a "necessary" part of the precautions that Venezuela was taking against US aggression (CNN, 2010). Consequently, to counter US hegemony, Chávez argued that "*all of Latin America needs friends like Russia.*" (Schwartz, 2008). At this time, China also began to experience a growth in its economy and to establish ties with other regions, including in South America, and launched multiple projects with Venezuela

(Jenkins, 2010). Therefore, the Chavistas can be said to have exploited the changing international environment, with Russia's and China's ascendant power, to begin to challenge American hegemony not only in Latin America but internationally. Following Chávez's attempts to align Venezuela with actors challenging US hegemony globally, like Iran and Libya, which had been identified as part of the 'axis of evil' by the US, the Venezuelan government was considered one of these "others" by US officials (Anderson, 2008). Moreover, such alternative alliances can also be seen as being driven by authoritarian linkages, whereby the regime would receive external support that could bolster its domestic power (Tansey, 2016). Significantly, unlike the US, these regimes did not request conditions for Venezuela, in return for their support, and were also more willing to provide Venezuela with support that would allow it to counter the punitive approach of the US and its allies. Therefore, these alliances played an important role in enabling Venezuela to evade any punitive strategies that could be employed against it by the US and its allies.

In 2005 and 2006, while Venezuela made several initiatives to try to gain more influence at the international level¹³², the US started formally challenging Venezuela's incumbent with punitive measures, including sanctions. The process of punitive strategies started in 2005, with the US Department of State prohibiting the sale of arms and services to Venezuela, citing a "lack of cooperation on anti-terrorism efforts" (Sullivan, 2013), which would be further amplified in the subsequent sanctions. In 2005, the US took Venezuela off its list of states that are cooperating in the war on drugs¹³³, which created the basis of subsequent sanctions. The relations further deteriorated with Chávez's famous speech at the UN against Bush, calling him "the devil" (Rabe, 2011). In the subsequent years, multiple processes

¹³² Some of these include pursuing a campaign to gain a seat at the Security Council in 2006. While mobilising for it, Venezuela secured deals from China (Financial Times, 2006). Another strategy to gain power was to mobilise OPEC members to maximize the gain for members (Bellos, 2000).

¹³³ The US officials referred to Venezuela as a "threat" in multiple speeches (Al Jazeera, 2015).

shaped the downward path in US-Venezuela relations. In 2006, US authorities argued that Venezuela was hosting a Hezbollah training camp which Republicans called for Venezuela to be listed as “a state-sponsor of terrorism” (Financial Times, 2016). From 2008, tensions with bordering Colombia under the presidency of Uribe increased in light of Colombia’s close cooperation with the US on military matters and the drug policy, along with the conflict with the FARC (Sullivan, 2013). The contention with Colombia rose to such a point that Venezuela broke ties with Colombia when the country intervened militarily in a territory in Ecuador to target a FARC camp (Corrales and Penfold , 2015, p. 126-127). Colombia appealed to the OAS and claimed that Venezuela was “tolerating” terrorism (El Tiempo, 2012). The tension turned into multiple actions like Venezuela expelling the US ambassador to Venezuela in solidarity with Bolivia, as a retaliation for the Ambassador in La Paz being expelled due to “accusations of fomenting unrest” (Sullivan, 2012). Therefore, even though Venezuela sought to continue to challenge the US through exerting its influence at the international level, the US’s punitive strategies intensified at this time. By arguing that Venezuela was sponsoring terrorism and narcotics, Venezuela’s government was framed as acting against the norms of the international order (Mander, 2011).

While Venezuela was enjoying popularity in the region, regional institutions and INGOs increased their criticism towards the centralisation of power and the repression of the opposition agents after 2008, which marked a change in how these actors framed the incumbent. By acknowledging the undemocratic legacy of the 2002 coup attempt, Human Rights Watch’s 2008 report defined the era as “political intolerance” (Human Rights Watch 2008, p. 1) due to increasing restrictions on the political opposition. Moreover, the alterations on the judiciary and supreme court became a focal point of criticism from NGOs with HRW referred to as “court packing” (Human Rights Watch, 2008). The shaming campaigns of

INGOs were met with repressive measures as Venezuela expelled the deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Americas division due to "meddling illegally in the internal affairs" of the country (Financial Times, 2008). In this context, with the case of judge María Lourdes Afiuni's arrest in 2009, INGOs further coordinated their shaming campaigns, which attracted global attention, and even resulted in international supporters of Chávez mobilising for her release. Multiple networks mobilised and international public intellectuals, including Noam Chomsky, supportive of the Chavista project, called for her to be released (Phillips, 2011). When Leopoldo López's candidacy was banned, the following year the IACtHR ruled that he should run for public office and INGOs amplified the message (Human Rights Watch, 2012a). However, regardless of these criticisms, the incumbent continued punishing criticisms that came from international agents. Overall, from 2006 onwards, actors in global civil society, as well as states supportive of the US, came to be critical of the policies of the Venezuelan government, which meant that the incumbent could no longer rely on a coalition with actors from global civil society to challenge the negative framing by the US and its allies.

4. Opposition Externalisation after the La Salida Protests

In the post-2012 period, several changes in the regional context resulted in the loss of an environment supportive of the incumbent in Venezuela. Firstly, the rise of oil prices in the early 2000s had provided the incumbent with the opportunity to promote its domestic and regional policies. The 2008 crisis damaged the ability of the incumbent to sustain the amount of funding to welfare programmes both nationally and internationally (Buxton, 2018, p.18). Secondly, many of the "Pink Tide" governments supporting Venezuela began to be replaced

by right-wing governments or were also in decline¹³⁴. Even though the Bush presidency had ended, the othering of Venezuela persisted at the international level, spearheaded by the US's opposition, persisted. During the Obama administration's time in office in the US, Venezuela was described as a "threat to [the US's] national security" (Mason and Rampton, 2015), and the administration maintained punitive strategies. Multiple INGOs like Amnesty International that also used shaming strategies, worked inside Venezuela to document the protests of 2014 with domestic NGOs. The Carter Center report (2013, p.8) on the 2013 election, similarly highlighted the onset of democratic backsliding by pointing to the unfair usage of state resources for political purposes and the regulation of the access of opposition politicians to the media. In light of increasing criticisms, Venezuela moved away from regional organisations, as it decided to leave the IACtHR in 2013¹³⁵ and contested the criticisms of INGOs that were vital to secure mediation a decade earlier. Therefore, together with the 2008 economic crisis and the fading of the 'Pink Tide' Venezuela's incumbent experienced a loss of support at the regional and global level, which had previously been crucial in terms of punishing anti-democratic moves against it. Together with the fall in oil prices, one of the Venezuelan government's chief strategies for survival, which relied on the dependence of its critics on its oil, was also undermined.

The death of Chávez altered the role of the international in the dynamics of contention between the incumbent and the opposition in Venezuela. After the narrow defeat of Capriles in the 2013 elections, while international actors expressed concerns, without concrete evidence, Maduro's presidency was recognised internationally (Tinker Salas, 2015).

¹³⁴ In Brazil after the 2013 protests the Workers Party lost its popularity and its leader Dilma Rousseff was later impeached.

¹³⁵ In 2012 Venezuela denounced the American Convention on Human Rights and left it the following year due to its ruling in favour of Raúl Díaz Peña who was charged in Venezuela for planting a bomb in 2000 (Gill, 2013).

Opposition externalisation also occurred at this point, in the form of Capriles's regional campaign to tour Latin America, in the aftermath of the elections of 2013, resulting in closer ties being forged between the opposition and international actors. The mobilisation led to denser transnational support, including INGOs and think tanks which would upsurge with the *la Salida* protests (Amnesty International, 2014). With the onset of large-scale protests calling for the resignation of the regime, #SOSVenezuela became a mobilising hashtag on social media that contributed to building an international network of solidarity. Twitter was the leading platform for communicating and presenting the repression encountered in protests (CEPAZ, 2015). The 2014 *la Salida* protests were crucial on the path towards internationalisation as the opposition appealed to international actors for support, following the arrests of popular opposition members. INGOs also became much more critical of the Venezuelan regime. For instance, both Human Rights Watch (2014) and Amnesty International (2014) argued that the government had committed serious human rights violations. The primary tools that the advocacy networks used were “information politics” and “symbolic politics” (see Keck and Sikkink, 1998) to produce reports and knowledge from international groups like HRW, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and Amnesty International in partnership with local NGOs, like PROVEA and CEPAZ (Amnesty International, 2019). Documentation of stories and the scale of repression became one of the key demonstrations of increasing authoritarianism. It can be said that the cooperation between the opposition and global civil society was characterised by a division of labour wherein global civil society would produce and circulate information on the regime to international audiences. The reports of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch became one of the key documents which the opposition utilised to demonstrate democratic backsliding. Therefore, a new insider-outsider coalition between the opposition and INGOs was launched, which, in turn, allowed the production of new diagnostic frames that directly

challenged the incumbent, due to rising authoritarianism and democratic backsliding, and empowered the opposition.

While the US started to gradually amplify punitive measures, as the Obama administration introduced limited sanctions (Sullivan, 2015), the protest cycle was followed by international mediation led by the OAS and UNASUR but entered a stalemate and contentious street activism from the opposition and backsliding steps from the incumbent. UNASUR and the OAS held a broad array of meetings with the government in 2014, the opposition, civil society and human rights groups (Mccarthy, 2018), however, the mediation process increased splits within the opposition as not all parties within the opposition were not supportive of it (Hetland, 2018) and leaders within the MUD also pursued different strategies. For example, Panama invited right-wing opposition leader Machado as a temporary member of Panama's OAS delegation with the intention of speaking about the situation in Venezuela, but this backfired as it was rejected, and Machado subsequently was stripped of her seat in the National Assembly in March 2014 (BBC, 2015b). While Capriles argued to keep the dialogue open, other members of the opposition, such as Machado, Ledezma who later founded Soy Venezuela, were opposed to the mediations, Machado claiming that the regime was using the negotiations to buy itself time (Vente Venezuela, 2017). Regarding the efforts of Zapatero, the ex-president of Spain, some members of the MUD accused of him being not impartial¹³⁶ (Meza, 2017c). The opposition was, hence, initially divided on how to approach the offer of negotiations with the government to end the political deadlock that had emerged following the elections. The coalition of the opposition could not reach a consensus on what prognostic frame to adopt in their dealings with the regime, even though, as has been illustrated, they were unanimous and forceful in their criticism of the incumbent. The negotiation process

¹³⁶ This was also due to Zapatero's leftist background.

therefore failed due to the opposition's departure, with some suggesting that this occurred due to pressure from both the opposition's "radical" camp as well as pressures from the Trump administration in the US (Buxton, 2018, p.19).

While the dissolution of the National Assembly and the consequent establishment of the Constituent Assembly intensified the punitive and shaming measures from various international actors, as well as efforts by international actors to exclude Venezuela from international organisations, a humanitarian frame also emerged from INGOs due to the consequences of the economic crisis in Venezuela. At this stage, under the leadership of Luis Almagro, the OAS's Permanent Council increased pressure on the regime with multiple methods. A series of meetings in 2017 addressing the "situation in Venezuela" brought states in the region to counter the deteriorating state of democracy (OAS OEA Videos, 2017) and the OAS's Permanent Council along with multiple states directly voiced opposition demands. At the end of this period, it was clear that while the OAS's Democratic Charter functioned to protect the incumbent against a coup in 2002; it later became the main opposition channel in the international arena, granting the opposition the political opportunity of external support in moments of increased repression. The OAS further spread its advocacy against the Venezuelan government to other international institutions that were more global in scope, demonstrating how the strategy of opposition externalisation allowed regional and global actors to be involved in criticising the process of democratic backsliding. For instance, in 2018, the OAS submitted human rights abuses to the ICC (Mccarthy, 2018). Similarly, the US, under the Trump administration, threatened further punitive strategies as the international environment became more sympathetic to the cause of the opposition, which resulted in the Soy Venezuela camp of the opposition viewing the election of Trump as opening up opportunities for pressuring the regime (Soy Venezuela, 2018). Moreover, justifying the

move under the “responsibility to protect”, OAS leader Almagro stated that “no option should be ruled out” (Financial Times, 2018) while President Trump presented military intervention as an option¹³⁸ (Borger, 2018). However, these threats did not resonate with other regimes in the region, as member states of the Lima Group and INGOs stood against it (Sabatini, 2018). Consequently, punitive measures targeting Venezuela diffused and came to be advocated by a broader set of actors both in the region and internationally and some, such as the US, made explicit remarks targeting the incumbent and highlighting its support towards the opposition. These attempts as *Chapter 9* will argue, shaped by the OAS under the leadership of Luis Almagro and the US under Trump administration further polarised the polity and amplified the incumbent's fifth column and securitisation frames.

Conclusion

Venezuela's situatedness in the international system and both opposition and incumbent agents' ties with international actors has been crucial in the dynamics of contention between the political opposition and the incumbent. Venezuela's oil-based economy has been vital in its relationship with the US and the broader international system, playing a key part in shaping Venezuela's foreign policy. However, this meant that as the US's dependence on Venezuelan oil and Venezuela's oil production declined, more punitive approaches could be employed by international critics and opponents of the Venezuelan regime. Under this positioning, Venezuela under Chavismo sought to challenge US hegemony by establishing ties with different actors opposed to the US throughout the globe, ranging from global civil society activists to powerful states. Venezuela's rich oil resources and consequent economic

¹³⁸ Other figures have also promoted similar strategies like Diego Arria, a former Venezuelan ambassador to the UN, advocated the idea of "humanitarian intervention" backed by an Inter-American effort (Financial Times, 2018).

influence also resulted in Chavismo spearheading the formation of several regional organisations, which could provide a means of facilitating international support for the Venezuelan incumbent. The regional empowerment of left-wing forces in South America at the same period resulted in the formation of new international organisations that functioned as counter-hegemonic blocs working on challenging US hegemony. Not only did Venezuela build regional organisations, such as ALBA and Banco del Sur, but its high level of economic and political power ensured that Venezuela's influence was prominent within these organisations and, hence, throughout the region. Nevertheless, the decline of Venezuelan oil revenues and the subsequent weakening of its economy has both domestically and regionally shaped Venezuela's relations with other states. The 2008 global economic crisis was also a key transformative event that brought an end to high oil prices, which had been consistently increasing from 1999, resulting in Venezuela's economy and domestic and regional influence being reduced. Significantly, Venezuela was no longer as influential in regional Latin American economic and political institutions which it had historically established and sustained.

In response to Chavismo's rise, international actors had multidimensional policies. In the three periods, the US cooperated with Venezuela's domestic opposition, neighbours, and regional actors to challenge the incumbent. The contentious process also led to the polarisation between anti and pro-US actors within Venezuela and the region, with the punitive strategies deployed by the US and Venezuela's actions serving to increase such polarisation. In the context of rising authoritarianism, relations with INGOs and regional organizations also altered both for the incumbent and the political opposition. One of the most significant international condemnations of the coup attempt against Chávez in 2002 came from the OAS, which responded in its Permanent Council to the crisis by condemning

the non-democratic intervention. With increasing authoritarianism and contextual change, the international institutions that strengthened the legitimacy of the Chavista regime later turned against it. Under the leadership of Almagro, the OAS became one of the key international institutions to contest the legitimacy of the regime after 2014. At the same period multiple domestic and international and INGOs that were concerned with rising levels of authoritarianism in Venezuela increasingly acted in concert to raise awareness of human rights violations in Venezuela (CEPAZ, 2019). The number of international organisations concerned with authoritarianism in Venezuela also enlarged and formed ties with each other in time, which persist to this day. However, with increased agency on the part of international actors who challenge the incumbent, as *Chapter Nine* will demonstrate, the incumbent in Venezuela has increasingly framed the opposition through a fifth column frame, which has also, at times, involved presenting the opposition as a security threat to the state.

CHAPTER 8: Contentious Framing and Democratic Backsliding in Turkey

Introduction

This chapter investigates the dynamics of contention between the incumbent and the political opposition in Turkey with the contentious frame analysis framework outlined in *Chapter 3*. The framework traces the development, interaction, and transformation of frames in the context of democratic backsliding unpacked in *Chapters 4* and *5*. By building on the political context presented in the two chapters, this first section of the chapter presents the historical context of agents' frames. The subsequent section examines the four stages of the contentious frame analysis: definition, action, contestation, and transformation. These framing processes are first traced in three time frames that were presented in *Chapter 4*: the Burgeoning of the AKP (2002-2007), Contention and the Survival of the AKP (2007-2013), Fragile Coalitions and Increasing Repression (2013-2018). In this model, the definition phase outlines how opposition and regime actors define themselves and the world by revealing their prognostic, diagnostic and motivational frames. The action phase demonstrates how these actors mobilised to bring about the world they envisaged through tracing their collective action frames. The contestation phase looks at how different frames coexist and clash, which leads to processes of counter-framing. The transformation/stagnation phase looks at how after contestation frames, the consequences of frames are, at least in part, based on how agents interpret the consequences of framing. After presenting the four stages, the subsequent section of the chapter discusses the consequences of contentious framing and how the contestation and transformation of frames in the three time periods shaped the dynamics of content.

1. The Historical Context of Frames: Foundational Legacies and Perpetual Polarisation in Turkey

Modern Turkey's highly polarised status can be traced back to the legacies of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the republic in 1923 (Gingeras, 2016). Every social group has a different narrative of the foundation of Turkey: while for Kemalists, it is salvation (Alaranta, 2014), for minority, Kurdish and Islamist groups, it has been often marked with grievances¹³⁹ (Eligür, 2010; Yeğen, 1999) that arose from exclusion. With a historical pattern of undemocratic interventions from the military and the institutions of the regime, repression and exclusion led to the marginalisation of mobilised groups, which has played a role in shaping the frames of actors. This is because the early republican era is marked by the instituting of CHP's brutal repression of Kurdish rebellions¹⁴⁰ and their role in facilitating the closure of political parties mainly due to ethnic and religious reasons (Güney and Başkan, 2008). These legacies shaped different groups' relationships with and understanding of the state and each other. The legacies of exclusion and repression have made Kurdish political agents suspicious of and often opposed to the state (Yeğen, 1999). Overall, the exclusion due to the tutelary institutions created narratives and positioning towards the state that shapes the frames of actors to this day.

The centre-left parties' failure to come to power as the dominant party and the rise of Islamism in Turkey after the 1980 coup shifted the frames of these parties. Even though in the 1960s, different interpretations of Kemalism, like Ecevit's idea of the 'left of centre', provided an opportunity for the CHP to overcome its elitist baggage, it was unable to lead such a frame transformation (Ciddi, 2009). The latter interpretation of Kemalism, which emphasised the state's role in maintaining secularism, came to be highly influential within

¹³⁹ In areas such as education, access to public resources, etc., a policy of centralising and empowering the state was implemented in which minorities and, in some cases, pious Sunni Muslims were excluded (Ergil, 2000).

¹⁴⁰ The Kurds and other actors deemed to have narratives that were opposed to that of the state were strictly denied representation in the institutions, with the Kurdish language and organisations being banned (Yeğen, 1999).

centre-left parties. While parties like ANAP confronted military rule in its 1983 manifesto, at the post-coup period centre-left parties largely maintained a statist perspective (Esen, 2005) which meant that they embraced the military's frame of two sources of national threats in the 1990s: the PKK and Islamists.¹⁴¹ The resonance of these frames positioned these parties as in favour of undemocratic interventions from tutelary actors. In addition, the centre-left parties formed after the restoration of civilian rule in 1983 have also developed this notion of anti-imperialism in the context of the twenty-first century. As Karaveli (2018, %28) argues "the supposedly 'anti-imperialist' origin of Turkish nationalism" has shaped how Kemalist actors framed the Kurds as "agents of imperialism." Parties such as the CHP, SHP and the DSP sought to bridge anti-imperialist frames with nationalist ones to develop a "democratic left" or "Anatolian left" platform which could appeal to nationalist voters (Karaveli, 2018). Consequently, these parties and affiliated civil society actors were able to unite by primarily framing Islamism as a threat (Alyanak, 2010) and protecting the unity of the state.

After the Iranian Revolution, the upswing of Islamism as an ideology diffused ideas of political change to Islamists in Turkey (Tuğal, 2016). While multiple Islamist groups emerged after the 1970s, some of them filtered out the ideas and the practice of the Iranian Revolution, and merged different ideas, ranging from more moderate to radical change (Çakır, 1994, pp.165-173). While the nationalists presented a conflict-based framing with a focus on protecting the state and suppressing the Kurdish movement, the Islamists increased their popularity by advancing new conceptions of a just order ("adil düzen") and new conceptions of secularism and democracy (Erbakan, 1975). In this context, the emergence of the idea of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis after the 1980 military coup was a novel

¹⁴¹ The military officials famously argued that "political Islam" is "more dangerous than Kurdish nationalism", which paved the way to justify the 1997 military intervention.

development that provided Islamists with a new set of political opportunities¹⁴² (Bilgiç, 2016). In this context, the Islamists mobilised around the Welfare Party and sought to exploit the newly available opportunities by framing themselves as an anti-system movement. Erbakan also pledged to challenge Turkey's position as an ally of Western states and Israel and believed that Turkey needed to promote new Islamic international institutions in the economic, political, military, and cultural spheres (Tuğal, 2016). They were more successful than the nationalists in expanding their grassroots reach due to their mobilisation at the local level (Tuğal, 2009) and ties of solidarity. With the 1997 military intervention, the Welfare Party splintered due to disagreements about how to frame and act on the threats it faced in the increasingly repressive political environment. Two groups emerged in the form of the modernisers and the traditionalists, with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan becoming one of the prominent figures within the modernising camp. The two groups differed especially in economic and foreign policy as the modernisers eventually abandoned a solid anti-western stance and embraced neoliberalism (Tuğal, 2009). Although Erdoğan had expressed his opposition to Turkey's alignment with what he considered Western institutions, including NATO and the EU, upon becoming the leader of the AKP, he embraced a pro-Western stance, pledging his dedication to Turkey's international alliances and to the secular nature of the state (32. Gün, 2019). Consequently, by building on the Welfare Party networks and later seeking to expand their base of support through engaging with other domestic and international actors, the AKP emerged as an opposition party.

2. Framing During the AKP's Rise

¹⁴² Karaveli (2018, p.23) argues that Islamism and nationalism were supported by the military elite as a means of countering leftism as an ideology and therefore it can be argued that the context was open for the development of Islamist ideas.

In the first stage of the first period of contention, the AKP advanced a series of definitions that entailed presenting itself as a moderate and legitimate actor that could transform Turkish politics. AKP elites and supporters used multiple diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames to characterise their newly found party and the context in which they operated. Erdoğan and the AKP, which emerged out of the modernising wing of the Welfare Party, framed their movement as subscribing to “moderate Islam” and were able to receive support from different groups by not adopting an anti-secularist ideology (Çarkoğlu, 2006, p.175). While their election manifesto deprioritised their Islamic identity, the party elites adopted the frames of prior conservative parties in Turkey’s history, which built on popular legitimacy against the guardian elites (Karaveli, 2018). However, the challenging of the guardian elites took place in the second era when the AKP consolidated its popular legitimacy further. With the economic crisis, the AKP used prognostic frames to present itself as a non-corrupt party¹⁴³ that could overcome the crisis. By bringing criticism of corruption to the fore, the party used an anti-establishment tone and promised a break from the “inefficient” political system that produced deadlocks in Turkey (Ak Parti, 2002). The AKP elites defined the party as a “pragmatic political force” (Çınar, 2018, p.134) unlike previous administrations which the party identified as being “ideologically driven” (Ak Parti, 2002). The AKP also promoted itself as a political actor that could implement EU’s conditionality criteria. By referring to the opposition as unsuccessful, the AKP argued in foreign policy that “ideological approaches based on national sovereignty, national security, national interest” hampered the implementation of the Copenhagen Criteria (Ak Parti, 2002, p.12). The AKP consequently maintained the existing alliances of the country and allowed it to pursue a pragmatic approach to resolving the challenges faced by the country through the means of politics. It

¹⁴³ The AKP used the term “*ak*”, which means “white” and “clean” in Turkish, to underline its lack of corruption (Göl, 2009, p.803).

was thereby able to build on its original Islamist base by attracting many voters who were traditionally aligned with centre-right parties or who were floating voters.

In the mobilisation running up to the 2002 election, as the main opposition party, the CHP proposed a reconciliatory agenda mentioning “respect for ethnicity”, religious beliefs, and language under the quest for a “peace and equality seeking, solidaristic society” (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2002). Their agenda included “clean politics” against corruption and promoting social democracy (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2002). Under the slogan “democratising the state” the party programme promised to overthrow the undemocratic legacies of the 1980 coup by leading a new constitution and an independent judiciary (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2002). However, in the context of the rise to power of the AKP, the CHP came to function as a conservative party that challenged many of the AKP’s early reforms as attacks on the fundamental values of the Republic. The definitions that the CHP proposed as a response are visible in their 2007 manifesto, which underlined the threats against “Turkey’s secular order” and “the achievements of the republic and Atatürk’s revolutions” (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2007). The CHP presented itself as the preserver of “nation-state, unitary state and secular Republic,” the three foundations that should be preserved for societal peace and democracy (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2007). Thus, the frames that the CHP deployed emphasised the historical legacy of nationalism and secularism in Turkey, which emphasised addressing perceived security threats to the state while also pledging to advance and maintain a degree of democracy and freedom.

The CHP’s leadership turned their interpretation of threat into action by taking part in the Republican Rallies and using the tutelary institutions to block the AKP’s representation. The rallies took place in 70 cities, with a million attending in metropolises like Izmir, Ankara,

Istanbul, which were attended by party leaders, speakers of Kemalist NGOs, along with the members of the public (Toktamış, 2015). Alyanak (2010) argued that feelings of loss against the ‘Islamists’ had been the primary motivation for the mobilisation of the masses that supported the party (Alyanak, 2010, p.20). The collective action frames of the protest movement became “stopping Islamisation” and preserving the Republic. Elites from the CHP and Kemalist civil society actors have underlined that they were sceptical of Europe as “it might divide the country.” (Gürkan, 2015, p.112; Loizides, 2009, p.283). Consequently, the slogans and speeches of the Republican Rallies included multiple targets like Islamists, as expressed in slogans such as “down with sharia”, and “No to Islamic fascism” (Açık Radyo, 2008; Alyanak, 2010). Many pro-army and nationalist slogans were also chanted, such as “May the hands that reach for the Army be broken”, “No to America, no to EU, down with the government” and “If there is no homeland, there is no honour”. Some of these slogans were pro-sovereignty like “Neither EU nor US, fully independent Turkey”. The slogans also addressed the Prime Minister, Erdoğan, calling him to “count how many people we are” (Alyanak, 2010). The urgency of the threat was also reflected in the visible slogan “tomorrow will be too late” (Alyanak, 2010). The multiple references of the Republican rallies can best be grasped by referring to the speech of Nur Serter, who was to become an MP for the CHP, in the 2007 elections:

“Under the AKP, being a Turk has become a crime. Now, they are making people accept the statements ‘how happy I am to be an Armenian or Kurdish’ to demonstrate democracy. As a nationalist and a Turkish citizen, I present my gratitude for the Turkish military. I am calling the masses who believe in the statement “how happy is the one who says I am a Turk!” to the streets” (Hürriyet, 2008).

Consequently, the protesters of the Republican Rallies emphasised the Sèvres complex (for the term see: Uslu, 2008), which, as has been discussed, has frequently been used by movements throughout the history of Turkey to help galvanise a movement against the AKP and to prompt state elites and officials to favour their interpretation of the threats facing the country.

However, the reliance on the military and other state institutions and the use of frames which restricted mass participation led to a backlash against the movement. While the literature mainly argues that movements aim to broaden their bases via framing, this has not been the case in the Flag Protests. Similarly, the case demonstrates that even though Turkish nationalism and Kemalist ideology have provided successful mass mobilisation, they restricted the movement's inclusivity and backfired. This was also met with an elitist frame, which was reflected in the statements of the opposition, as in the case of MP Nur Serter, who argued that the CHP voters were located in regions of Turkey with low fertility rates (Daily Sabah, 2014). Some of the members also had an exclusionary view of Islam and Islamism, which Alaranta (2014) argues suggests that they did not comprehend the extent of global cultural-religious sentiment and that in Turkey. As a former HDP Party Assembly Member in an interview state:

"I think the opposition in Turkey did not understand how AKP wins all the elections. Whenever AKP wins an election the opposition either claimed that AKP was cheating or people voted for AKP because of their economic interests, because AKP gives them food, money etc. So, the opposition has never been able to analyse the relationship between AKP and its grassroots" (Zorlu, 2019).

Therefore, in the first phase, when the AKP was elected, the main political opposition did not contain an extensive repertoire of contention, beyond relying on state institutions and viewing their perceived frame resonance with these state institutions as a means of providing itself with political opportunities against the AKP. Consequently, it may be the case that the success of several of the groups who were once part of the opposition in organising a social movement against the Welfare Party, which later triggered the 28 February military intervention, was perceived as providing a means of challenging the AKP.

As a response to the threats from the tutelary institutions and the opposition, the AKP's action frames were not shaped by confrontation in the first era and responded to the opposition's frames with performance and democracy frames. In response, the AKP challenged the opposition's arguments with a democracy frame, stressing its own democratic legitimacy and claiming its desire to democratise the country. As a response to the rallies Erdoğan stated, "we cannot accept the domination of the minority by the majority" (Milliyet, 2007). The AKP consistently used a democracy frame and sought recognition from state institutions and the political opposition on the basis of inclusion. Along with the democracy frame, an essential pillar of the AKP's framing strategies was shaped by "performance", which referred to increased public services to boost their legitimacy compared with the previous governments. The AKP underlined its success by freeing Turkey from dependency on foreign currency, increasing central bank reserves, and reducing unemployment (AK Parti, 2007, 2011). Secondly, the EU reforms were prioritised and were presented as strengthening both Turkey's international standing (AK Parti, 2007) and the democratisation frame. The AKP's democratisation frame against tutelary institutions turned it into action with the reforms it initiated. The broad domestic and international coalition that emerged around the AKP led to the creation of a master frame by the EU, US that the AKP was a force of

democratisation (Tuğal, 2016). This frame was constructed and strengthened due to the restriction and repression of political agents in Turkey before the election of the AKP. After the AKP was elected, it continued to emphasise its moderate identity, especially to maintain and extend the support it received amongst those who were not aligned with its Islamist core vote. As well as serving as an effective frame that could be deployed during elections, this approach enabled the AKP to receive sympathy and support from the EU and other Western international actors, which it was able to mobilise into a political opportunity by advancing Turkey's EU accession process.

In contrast to the AKP's grassroots movement, which had been focused on coalition building, the grassroots campaigns that the CHP found itself in, the most prominent of which were the Republican Rallies, were more elitist and exclusionary, emphasising a suspicion of foreign actors and a deeply conservative outlook on maintaining the fundamental principles of the Republic of Turkey. The statism of the CHP, both in its historical form and in the form, it took after the 12 September coup, also meant that it found itself defending the bureaucracy against the AKP, which many of its members saw as providing the basis for secularism, which had been threatened by previous Islamist governments. CHP members and civil society organisations who participated in the Republican rallies framed the AKP as an Islamist party that posed a threat to the secular order, with the secular order, in turn, being framed as the necessary precursor of democracy. Therefore, the CHP saw the bureaucracy as providing it with political opportunities that it could exploit against the AKP, with efforts to promote a new political discourse that emphasised democracy or indigeneity being limited to a few circles close to the leadership.

4. Contentious Framing in the Second Stage: From the Republican Rallies to Gezi

Frame Bridging and Steps Towards Opposition Unity

In the second stage of contention, the AKP adopted a diagnostic frame that defined Turkey as still being governed by a tutelary regime, which it saw as needing to be dismantled for democracy to be advanced. At the same time, it expanded its appeal to politicians from the centre-right and left, promoting the party as a reconciliatory arena that could harbour those from different ideological backgrounds. This is captured in the claims of Ertuğrul Günay, a former CHP MP who was appointed Minister for Culture, that his involvement within the AKP was “a natural process” of the AKP transcending left and right divisions within society with its inclusive politics (Şimşek, 2007). The difference in framing strategies from the first period was that the AKP elites adopted a more confrontational frame, challenging the tutelary regime it identified as governing Turkey, which also amounted to an adoption of a populist frame. The populist frames employed by the AKP increasingly in the second era sought to present the AKP as representative of the ‘true’ people, while simultaneously deploying derogatory frames towards the CHP that stressed how it had historically represented Westernised elites who were alienated from the masses. The experience of exclusion by individuals who had been aligned with the AKP helped construct these frames, which also acted as a form of motivational framing that could mobilise the AKP during elections. The 2010 constitutional changes became a key moment during which the AKP was able to use derogatory frames against the opposition through increasing its polarising frames. The AKP framed the 2010 constitutional changes as a major step to overcome the bureaucratic hinderances of the challenges to their rule. This approach involved referring to the military’s threat in the form of an e-memorandum as well as the closure case launched against the AKP in 2008, as a part of the AKP’s counter-framing. The CHP framed the changes as the AKP is

“abusing democracy” and threatening to undermine the separation of powers by increasing the influence of the executive over judicial appointments (Euronews, 2010). By building on the CHP’s historical electoral losses, Erdoğan countered the CHP’s criticisms against democracy as insincere, arguing that the party historically rose to power with “force and deceit” (Haberler.com, 2010). As he outlined in another speech, referring to the CHP’s appeal to the constitutional court to block the 2010 referendum: *“the Constitutional Court has become the main opposition court. Why are you afraid of the referendum, going to the nation?”* (Habertürk.com, 2010). By using populist frames, and bridging historical grievances with democratisation frames, Erdogan argued that if the changes are approved the “will of the late Adnan Menderes will be fulfilled.” He further stated: *“We say ‘yes’ to advanced democracy. Just like Adnan Menderes, we call ‘enough’, we say, ‘words and decisions belong to the nation.’”* (CNN Türk, 2010a). Therefore, the AKP deployed a series of frames, from 2007 to 2010, which presented the opposition as closely associated with anti-democratic traditions in Turkish politics, which lacked legitimacy and had facilitated exclusion and repression.

While the political opposition mobilised to vote “no” in the upcoming referendum, the election of Kılıçdaroğlu created an opportunity to tackle the issues, such as those relating to secularism, democracy, and the Kurdish conflict, which the “traditional” CHP had been reluctant to discuss. Under the new leadership of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who presented himself as a more left wing and less nationalist figure, the CHP responded to the counter-framing efforts of the AKP by presenting Kılıçdaroğlu as a peaceful as opposed to militarist figure, which also involved presenting him with the moniker ‘Gandhi Kemal’, which was not challenged by the leader. Kılıçdaroğlu also donned a flat cap, of the sort which had been worn by Bülent Ecevit, when he was the CHP leader and prime minister in the 1970s, thereby

signalling his desire to reconnect with the centre-left and democratic politics of this predecessor. This appeared to suggest that Kılıçdaroğlu was aware of the damage that had been wrought by the previous association of the party with calls for action from the military. The party changed its stance on framing pious Islam as a threat, with Kılıçdaroğlu arguing that the barring of headscarved women from attending university would be resolved by the CHP (Esen and Ciddi, 2011). While the 2007 manifesto framed the Kurdish problem mainly as a terror and development issue, the 2011 party programme pioneered inclusive cultural rights (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2007; 2011). The CHP, at this point, also claimed that it was a representative of various groups, including the left, the social democrats, the Kemalists and left liberals (Kılıçdaroğlu, 2019). Kılıçdaroğlu aimed to amplify the social-democrat identity as in a speech to international audiences, he argued that “the democrats of the world should unite” (Oxford Union, 2018). Consequently, the election of Kılıçdaroğlu as the leader of the CHP allowed it to introduce new frames in addition to those it had previously promoted throughout its period of opposition against the AKP.

Alongside continuing to emphasise its Kemalist ideology, there were other cases of continuity between the CHP’s election campaign in 2011 and earlier campaigns, which pointed to a degree of frame stagnation. This was exploited by the AKP in its counter-framing directed towards the CHP. In the lead up to the 2011 elections, the CHP simultaneously put forward several candidates who had been imprisoned under the so-called Ergenekon coup plot, such as the journalists Mustafa Balbay and Tuncay Özkan, and whom it was hoped would be released upon receiving parliamentary immunity. This move was interpreted by the AKP as signalling that the CHP had not moved on from its elitist and anti-democratic stance. The CHP also tried to counter the competence frames of the AKP, as it had done so in the previous elections, during the 2011 election, questioning the extent of

economic growth by stating that the financing of growth had been dependent on foreign resource inflows and that the contribution of employment and total factor productivity to growth was weak. The CHP also added that a significant part of the consumption is met directly or indirectly by imports (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2011). Therefore, although the CHP sought to alter its approach with the new leadership under Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, there was also a degree of frame inconsistency and frame stagnation owing to how many of the previous frames that the CHP had announced were sustained. This continued to leave the CHP vulnerable to the polarising frames being advanced by the AKP.

While the CHP aimed to shift its frames, with the AKP's 2011 electoral success, the AKP increased its polarising framing, but also used an inclusive frame at the same time, which served to expand the definition of the 'people' which was being implied in the populism of Erdoğan. In his speech in the aftermath of the 2011 election victory, Erdoğan said, *"today, my Turkish brother, my Kurdish brother, my Roman, my Laz, 74 million has won."* At this stage, the polarising frames were not very exclusive and included a reach out to ethnic groups, which were also justified on the basis of how more inclusive policies were in line with the EU's inclusionary and democratic practices. Erdoğan made multiple statements that addressed those left behind due to their identity or beliefs (Akça, 2014). By bringing this exclusion to the fore, Erdoğan bridged Islamists' grievances with the Kurds by using anti-nationalist slogans like "we have smashed nationalism" (Hürriyet, 2013) in a more amplified way in this stage.

Foreign policy became an important part of framing in the second period, which came to be combined with the AKP's earlier focus on competence, as foreign policy success was interpreted as another means of signalling competence and as a means of countering the

claims that the AKP was neglecting the national interest of the country (AK Parti, 2007, 2011). After the 2007 elections, the principle of “zero problems with neighbouring countries” had envisaged Turkey as a global actor under the slogan “strong country, leader Turkey” (AK Parti, 2007, 2011). With the increasing foreign policy efforts, the AKP also tried to define itself as an anti-establishment actor within the international community and increase its relations with other states. After coming to his role as the foreign minister in 2009, Davutoğlu argued to promote multicultural coexistence against the 9/11 order which he defined led to securitisation and limited freedoms (IIEA, 2010). Therefore, Davutoğlu combined a focus on advancing an anti-establishment foreign policy with seeking to demonstrate that Turkey could play a constructive role in resolving foreign policy issues of regional and global scope. In this quest, he argued that “security and freedom must exist together¹⁴⁴” (IIEA, 2010). In line with the Obama administration’s policy of withdrawing US influence from the Middle East and other regions, in favour of allowing leading regional powers which were US allies to defend its interests, Davutoğlu sought to define and position Turkey as a key state in multiple regions (Kıvanç, 2016). In this context, his foreign ministry came to involve the positioning of Turkey as engaged in diplomacy with multiple different actors in different regions (AK Parti, 2011, 2015). The policy of increasing Turkey’s relations with African countries, which had not been a priority of the foreign ministry, was put into practice, and the Alliance of Civilizations project was co-chaired by Spain and Turkey. Therefore, all these instances served to amplify the frame that the AKP was a global actor (AK Parti, 2011) and that it was promoting Turkey’s national interests with its foreign policy, rather than neglecting them, as the CHP had earlier suggested.

¹⁴⁴ The style of these frames can be seen in the slogan that Erdoğan used to appeal to the international which was “World is bigger than five”, to challenge the composition of the UN Security Council, and turned into a campaign to alter international governance (Kıvanç, 2014, p. 54)

The frames that the AKP came to use within its foreign policy would soon undergo change under the pressure of external foreign policy developments to which the AKP was compelled to respond and, in doing so, happened to utilise several frames that its predecessors had used. The Arab Uprisings played a key role in transforming the AKP's "zero problem with neighbours" approach as the AKP chose to make sense of the unexpected toppling of the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia and the Mubarak regime in Egypt on the basis of its own experience of democratisation. The AKP therefore saw the uprisings as being against 'tutelary regimes' in the MENA region, which it saw as being similar to the tutelary regime which it had contested in Turkey. Seeking to influence the course of the uprisings, the AKP supported like-minded actors throughout the region and, in doing so, abandoned its policy of zero problems with neighbours with regards to Syria (Kıvanç, 2016). This change in the foreign policy frame was tied to the domestic populist frames of the AKP and resonated with voters in the 2011 elections, while simultaneously resulting in the CHP reverting to its statist approach in the area of foreign policy¹⁴⁵, since the CHP believed that Turkey should maintain its aloofness towards political developments in the Middle East (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2018).

In contrast, in the Middle East and Africa, AKP elites promoted a "moral discourse" by highlighting oppression and promoting "liberation and democracy", especially in the context of the intensification of the Syrian Civil War (Demirtas-Bagdonas, 2014, p.145). With increasing interaction with countries from the Global South, solidarity and injustice frames emerged, most visibly in the case of Erdoğan's visit to Somalia in 2011 (*see Chapter 5*) during which the then foreign minister Davutoğlu promoted the concept of solidarity with Somalian "brothers and sisters" (BBC, 2011). This frame was amplified by those in the

¹⁴⁵ The CHP continued to prioritise "defense and national security" in its foreign policy agenda, arguing in foreign policy they would overturn the "threatening or populist approach" and raised concerns about the changes of the foreign ministry as an institution which has lost its meritocratic structure (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2011).

Global South, as demonstrated in a commentary by how a Somali diplomat hailed Erdoğan as "the hero of Somalia" (Arman, 2015). The solidarity frame was highlighted in pro-government media outlets, which labelled Turkey's foreign policy in Africa "a humanitarian policy" (Ataman, 2021). Pro-government columnist, Ataman (2021), for example, argued that the AKP elites were "prioritizing the interests of the peoples" of the continent by naming the partnership between them and the AKP as "based on equality". Ataman (2021) contrasted this with "the political discourse of Western countries", since, unlike them, Erdoğan purportedly envisaged a "more independent and more developed Africa" with the aid of Turkey's state institutions and businesses. Hence, the AKP came to promote a foreign policy based on a distinction between the Global South and the powerful West, positioning the AKP's stance as being alongside the Global South that was presented as having experienced injustice and requiring solidarity. This, in turn, mirrored the AKP's approach to the domestic sphere, which was based on a similar frame of polarisation between Westernised elites and the oppressed traditional masses. Therefore, the domestic polarisation that the AKP helped construct was presented as being present in the global level, meaning that the AKP's foreign and domestic policies became intertwined with each other. This reinforced and globalised the us versus them distinction that the AKP's political strategy relied upon, as well as providing it with a supposedly universal and ethical dimension.

The moment for an opportunity for frame transformation for the opposition emerged during the Gezi Protests, as the initial police repression urged participants from different sections of society, which faced different grievances to unite in the cause of "protecting the park" (Anisin, 2016). A broad alliance was formed which included anti-capitalist Muslims, who were protected when other protesters in Taksim Square formed a chain around them while they were praying (Milliyet, 2013). Feminist activists also instructed other protesters to avoid

using sexist language against the police and against the government, which resulted in the emergence of a new frame that was opposed to the government, but which also involved the linking together of different movements with different political backgrounds. Toktamış (2015, p.29) has also consequently named this “a democratising event” unlike the Republican Rallies proposing a “top-down engineered nationhood.” In Istanbul, Kurdish activists, CHP members and other Kemalists and individuals from different social classes, including blue- and white-collar workers and the middle classes, were able to unite under the demands of the movement. During the Gezi protests, practices and slogans from the Arab Spring and other square occupations, such as Occupy Wall Street, were evident. The protestors came up with creative slogans which aimed to overcome the populist framing of the incumbent (Dursun, 2014) and its repressive policies prolonged the movement and its existence in the square due to the interactions with the state (Karşıyaka and Kerem, 2015). Gezi’s slogan created inclusive framing, like “we are the soldiers of Mustafa Keser (creatively changing the Kemalist-militarist slogan “we are the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal” to refer to a popular musician) to underline that they are not militaristic. Other slogans included “*We are the people*”, “*Do not bow down*”, “*Salvation does not happen alone*”, “*Either all of us or none of us*”, “*Everywhere is Taksim, everywhere is resistance*” and “*This is only the beginning, we will keep on fighting*”. These slogans demonstrate the presence of a resistance frame, which contributed to mass mobilisation, and which was later amplified after cycles of police violence. Consequently, as a response to the AKP’s increasing repression, during the Gezi movement, multiple frames met under the broader frame of challenging an authoritarian-personalist rule, which first stressed the need to prevent the destruction of the park and to challenge police violence conducted by the state.

By targeting the protestors as looters and linking them to international actors, the AKP elites responded to the Gezi protests with a “conspiracy-driven reaction” (Gürcan and Peker, 2015, p.145). Erdoğan also argued that the protests had been initiated by an “interest rate lobby” that had its roots abroad (Yıldırım, 2014). The Gezi protests became a key moment when the government started to use its fifth column frames, which are a type of derogatory framing that attempts to frame an actor as acting on behalf of foreign agents. Many pro-AKP commentators argued that the Gezi protesters were led by international actors and global civil society (Bengi, 2021). However, the polarising and antagonising statements of the government backfired and led to increased mobilisation and participation. The AKP elites maintained the conspiracy framing of Gezi, even likening the protests to a coup attempt against its rule (Bengi, 2021). To counter the mobilisation, several ‘Respect for National Will’ (*Milli İradeye Saygı*) rallies took place to spread the message that the protests were presented as a threat to the popular sovereignty of the AKP and Erdoğan. These rallies were organised by the AKP, in contrast to the Gezi Park protests which had occurred spontaneously throughout the country. In these mass protests, during which the most widespread slogan was “we will not let you devour Erdoğan” (Akkoyunlu and Öktem, 2014) several derogatory frames were also used towards the Gezi protestors, who were blamed as “raiders”, and “violent.” In this context, the AKP leadership also counter-framed protestors as “looters” (Acar, 2018). A former HDP Party Assembly member argued this was possible because:

“The tradition of shaping politics through taking to the streets is very weak. This is why there is so much emphasis on the elections. I think this is also the reason why it is so easy to label the social movements as terrorists” (Zorlu, 2019).

Therefore, the Gezi Park protests resulted in a shift away from the AKP's previous frames which had not resorted to a conspiratorial framing of the opposition's agency (Nefes, 2017), as well as resulting in a move towards autocratic rule and police repression.

4. Framing during Increasing Authoritarianism

In the third cycle of contestation, the political opposition came to argue that the AKP was not only a threat to the established state order in Turkey but was also establishing a personalist authoritarian regime. After the Gezi Protests, the political wing of the Kurdish political movement founded the HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party), which started to appeal to the broader public, instead of dominantly seeking to appeal to the Kurdish electorate. On the other hand, while officially the CHP moved on to amplify a social democracy frame, which was echoed in its publications and international appeals (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2015a, 2015b), there were frame disputes within the party and several cases of frame inconsistency. The nomination of the conservative Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu by Kılıçdaroğlu, as the CHP-supported presidential candidate for the 2014 elections, who was also supported by the MHP, clashed with its earlier dedication to social democracy. After İhsanoğlu's defeat in the 2014 presidential elections, Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership was under criticism, which led to increasing voices for change within the party, like the "Occupy CHP" (Daily Sabah, 2014). Although an extraordinary congress of the CHP was held in September 2014, Kılıçdaroğlu won the leadership, facing off a challenge from Muharrem İnce. However, during the 2014 and 2015 parliamentary elections, the national appeal of the HDP electoral campaign, which emphasised the importance of democracy and halting the rise of authoritarianism, also contributed to bringing the CHP electorate and party activists together again under the frame of "halting authoritarianism" (Ayata, 2016).

After the Gezi Protests, elite splits and corruption trials, the leadership of Erdoğan was further consolidated as Erdoğan took the initiative in dealing with the Gezi protests, which allowed him to act as a figure who could unify the party and respond to what were perceived to be national threats. As democracy underwent a further process of backsliding, with Erdoğan utilising the power of the presidency, the AKP's framing of the opposition included seeing them as 'traitors' (Yılmaz and Bashirov, 2018). On the other hand, even though the AKP promoted the EU accession process in its first era, the party elites later adopted a frame that was 'native and national', which intensified its argument that it was seeking to overcome "the contaminating effects of Westernisation" (Çınar, 2018b, p.177). The AKP also increasingly developed the conspiracy frame that it had first used against the Gezi Park protesters against the Gülen movement, which, at this time, released several illegally taken recordings of prominent AKP politicians, with the aim of highlighting practices of corruption (Taş, 2015). The practices of the Gülen movement therefore reinforced the perception of a threat towards the AKP, which led it to highlight electoral politics as a means of mobilising the public against what it deemed to be security threats towards democracy. Therefore, the AKP increasingly came to highlight threats to democracy and hence advanced securitisation frames, which refers to presenting something or someone as a threat to existence. Consequently, the AKP shifted its framing strategy by arguing for populism while also pointing to threats to democracy and employing securitisation frames alongside the fifth column frames it had originally deployed in the context of the Gezi Park protests. On the other hand, the CHP defined democratic backsliding as the key problem after the Gezi protests and the election of Erdoğan as president in 2014.

The CHP's 2015 party programme put forward a programme which it claimed provided means of "end[ing] the process of increasing authoritarianism" (Ayata, 2016). With a focus

on bringing democracy back, the CHP 2015 manifesto also included themes focused on fixing wealth inequality and institutional means through which democratic governance could be enhanced (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2015a). The CHP made wide-ranging social policy assurances on labour rights and included a promise to increase the minimum wage in its programme (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2015a), which was projected to counter the neo-liberal policies of the AKP. The party proposed economic policies which involved progressive taxation and the “family insurance system” to provide a minimum safety net for families (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2015a). The party also called for democratisation and an ending of the legacy of the 12 September constitution through the abolition of the Higher Education Board (YÖK) and the reduction of the election threshold to 5 per cent. The manifesto also incorporated removing repressive measures like the use of tear gas and stressed the need to comply with EU norms and the principles of the European Convention on Human Rights (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2015a). As a further indicator of its commitment to democratisation, the party argued that it would establish a national inter-party commission for a peace process to resolve the Kurdish conflict (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2015a). The CHP also signalled that it would be willing to cooperate with the HDP to democratise the country, which was an appeal that the party had not previously made. Consequently, while during the 2015 electoral cycle the diagnostic frames of the CHP were the AKP’s increasing authoritarianism, the party’s prognostic frames were shaped by rebranding themselves as a party that could provide increasing representation, welfare, and a more conciliatory approach to establishing stability and peace within the country.

This period also marked the rise of the HDP as a transformative agent in Turkey. This was due to three frame transformation processes. Firstly, the HDP produced a frame transformation in which it increasingly claimed to be the party of the whole of Turkey,

meaning that it would not only be the party of the Kurdish population but other movements too (Grigoriadis, 2016). In practice, this involved the HDP establishing closer ties with democratic Islamists, the representatives of ethnic and religious minorities and various other social movements and intellectuals (Zorlu, 2019). This also allowed the HDP to extend its message to many of the participants of the Gezi protests who were not happy with mainstream politics. Secondly, it also claimed that the party would be organised through incorporating grassroots and social movements like feminist circles and environmentalists, uniting these groups by stressing “the harm that the AKP has given to all” (Zorlu, 2019). Thirdly, the party’s ideology incorporated the concept of radical democracy shaped by its incorporation of aspects of the programmes of parties throughout the world with which it had an affinity, such as SYRIZA and PODEMOS (Yörük, 2018). This period was also marked with increasing conversations and visits between these parties. The HDP defined democracy as entailing representation beyond the parliament arguing that the party “defends and fights for the removal of all obstacles to citizens' direct participation in discussion, organization and decision mechanisms” (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, 2015). During one of the interviews, a former HDP Party Assembly Member outlined that:

“The HDP’s popularity in 2014 and 2015 brought social movements into electoral politics. The CHP was never able to do that because it did not have such a relationship with the people, because it has never been under an existential threat. But it is different for HDP, it is always under an existential threat. Without its grassroots, it would not be able to survive.” (Zorlu, 2019).

Hence, in the post-Gezi political context, which was swiftly becoming more authoritarian, the HDP was able to benefit from the emergence and strengthening of support for social

movements that challenged increasing authoritarianism. Consequently, during the 2015 June elections, while the AKP could not enlarge its appeal, the CHP and HDP created mobilisation and counter-frames despite contesting in disadvantaged terms.

During the electoral cycles, with increasing insurgency, the AKP further used securitisation frames to legitimise its authoritarian actions as necessary steps to confront threats. This stance made it easier to side with and co-opt the far-right MHP, which had first been able to pass the ten per cent electoral threshold in 2007 in response to its highlighting securitisation frames to deal with the violent clashes and terrorism occurring in the context of the Kurdish conflict. In 2015, both parties formed an umbrella frame of protecting the state, which they deemed to be Turkish and Islamic in identity, from different types of threats that they perceived as emerging from both domestic and international actors. Although the MHP and AKP emphasised the need to engage in a more militarised foreign policy to the south of the country, during the 2015 elections, the CHP differentiated itself from the government by arguing that it would end “adventurism, valour, dogmatic and ideological obsessions, irresponsible behaviour”, which they argued were shaped by the increasing authoritarianism domestically (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2015). The CHP defined the AKP as a problem in the region by arguing that the AKP has been breaching sovereignty of other states like Syria and Egypt and promoting Islamism (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2018). By highlighting the AKP’s sectarianism, the CHP situated itself as an actor that can promote secularism and therefore conflict resolution in foreign policy. The HDP, similarly, was highly critical of the AKP’s foreign policy and focused on the achievements of the Kurdish movement in Syria, which had established a de facto statelet in Rojava, i.e., northern Syria (Evrensel, 2013). The HDP also highlighted how it believed that the AKP was leading to a decline in the security of Turkey through supporting radical Islamists and becoming overly involved in the Syrian civil

war (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, 2014). Conflicting notions of security hence came to be used by both the HDP and the CHP to challenge the AKP's foreign policy.

However, prior to the military coup attempt of 2016, repression became more widespread, as violence between the state and the PKK in the Kurdish region diffused to the cities. The increasing violence resulted in the use of more securitisation frames against the HDP. While the AKP justified its actions through referring to security issues and othered those who did not agree with the immense human rights violations, the OHCHR report demonstrated that the victims interpreted practices of the AKP as “collective punishment” (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017). While the HDP amplified this message, the CHP, apart from the individual efforts of some MPs, did not provide a strong counter-frame against what has been termed “collective punishment.” The securitisation frames of the AKP were used to delegitimise the opposition at this point, as the AKP also argued that military operations needed to occur within Syria and Iraq to challenge ISIS and other terrorist organisations, in addition to the military operations that the AKP had been involved in in the southeast (Gall and Barnard, 2018). However, these frames were utilised to divide the opposition.

The military coup attempt, which occurred in the context of increasing violence, became another moment for frame transformation on the part of the major opposition actors. The CHP diagnosed the facilitating reason for the coup as bad governance and highlighted how the post-coup environment was one in which democracy had been highly damaged (CHP Halkla İlişkiler, 2016). The CHP countered the AKP's claims of being democratic by arguing that their definition of democracy was not “real” as it hampered the legal system, freedoms, political reconciliation, and secularism (CHP Halkla İlişkiler, 2016, p.3). In the aftermath of

the coup, the AKP had arrested and dismissed many thousands of individuals who it deemed to be linked to the Gülenist movement, which it saw as being responsible for the coup attempt. In addition, the CHP defined the AKP as a party that was not able to provide security and underlined the suspicious circumstances in which the coup unfolded and the closeness of the Gülen organisation with the AKP in the past. However, in the immediate post-coup context, the CHP appealed to the AKP and noted how the immediate post-coup context was a moment in which a “common understanding and attitude” has emerged, which could “pave the way to the consolidation of a culture of reconciliation in politics” (Hürriyet Daily News, 2016). In his speech, which was called the “Taksim Declaration”, Kılıçdaroğlu argued that the Assembly was able to “repel the coup” even though it was being bombed by aircraft under the command of the coup plotters. At this point, Kılıçdaroğlu promoted the democracy frame, countering the AKP’s securitisation frames with the motto “no coup, no dictatorship, but democracy” (Hürriyet Daily News, 2016). As captured in one statement, Kılıçdaroğlu came to argue that “democracy can be the common denominator for everyone who is seeking for justice, peace, equality, freedom and brotherhood” (Oxford Union, 2018). The CHP therefore partially aligned itself with the frames of the AKP, only insofar as it stressed its agreement with the need to defend democracy but diverged from the AKP in terms of how it believed democracy needed to be consolidated in the aftermath of the coup attempt.

The increasing closing of the polity and repression has created an opportunity for opposition actors to engage in frame bridging, whereby their frames would come to resemble those of each other.

Moreover, with the Justice Rally in 2017, the CHP highlighted the three themes of “rights, law, justice”, and bridged democracy frames with an injustice frame that appealed not only to its base but also to other movements and actors that were facing repression, including the

HDP. In an op-ed to New York Times, Kılıçdaroğlu wrote: *“We did not carry the signs of our political party but a simple placard that read: Justice”* (Kılıçdaroğlu, 2017). That the CHP was increasingly able to appeal to other sections of society was demonstrated by the following statement made to me by a former HDP Party Assembly Member:

“Since the Justice Rally, the CHP started to see that it cannot be a real alternative to AKP by only relying on anti-Islamist and secular discourse. But I think it is almost impossible for the CHP to give up its secularist discourse entirely. The positive reactions from the society made CHP further realise that it must include the different factions of the society, and this is possible. I think, to be able to do that, it claimed to be the party that reduces the polarisation in the society. Accordingly, the CHP framed AKP as the party which increases the polarisation” (Zorlu, 2019).

In addition, a subsequent opportunity for the CHP and the HDP to engage in frame bridging emerged, as both opposition actors sought to engage in opposition externalisation, but the CHP was once again faced with the dilemma of being a party of statist tendencies, which was nonetheless opposing the existing regime. The HDP transferred its domestic grievances, concerning the breakdown of democracy and freedoms to the international level, and took part in advocacy (Al Jazeera Türk, 2015) to amplify the injustice frame. The CHP continued using the democracy frame, under Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership, linking the party's opposition in harmony with concluding all the remaining and required chapters on the path to EU accession (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2017). Yet, the nationalist ideology of the CHP hampered these appeals as the CHP did not cooperate with the EU when it opposed the re-insertion of Turkey onto the Council of Europe's human rights watchlist (Hürriyet Daily News, 2018). The CHP's support for the government's military operation in Afrin, in northern Syria, against the

Democratic Syrian Federation, established by the Syrian Kurdish also demonstrated the scale of statist frames, which arguably led to frame stagnation (Cumhuriyet.com.tr, 2018c).

Therefore, cooperation between international actors, the HDP and the CHP was hampered by the nationalism and statist reflexes of the CHP, which prevented the convergence of all three actors around a set of prognostic frames, even though they were all agreed with the diagnostic frame of authoritarianism. With nationalist ideology shaping the CHP's coalition strategies, the CHP moved to the right and made a coalition with right-wing parties in the lead up to the 2017 referendum and the 2018 elections.

4. Contentious Framing in the Three Time Frames

Studying the different frames that were used by the opposition and the incumbent in Turkey throughout the three different periods reveal the mechanisms that were involved in democratic backsliding, given how these three time periods culminated in the present process of democratic backsliding. Throughout the three periods considered, the frames that were used by the opposition and the incumbent in Turkey underwent considerable change. In the first period considered, the AKP came to power as a result of a change in the frames it was using, which differed considerably from those previously used by its Islamist core constituency. Prior to its success in its first term, the AKP presented itself as a modern conservative democratic party, which resulted in it moving away from the Islamist frame under which its predecessors had been previously categorised. The moderation mechanism involved in this frame transformation was one which combined maintaining the grassroots organisational power of the party, rooted in its core Islamist constituency, while simultaneously seeking to frame the party as moderate and in favour of the Turkish state's traditional domestic and foreign policy preferences.

The consequence of this frame transformation was not only the electoral success of the AKP, but also the bewilderment of the former centre and elites of Turkey, which found themselves in opposition. In response to the AKP, the CHP, which became the new focal point of the broader opposition, having swept up the votes from the DSP and other centre-left and centre parties, advanced an elitist frame that questioned the competence of the AKP and what it saw as its ploy to present itself as a moderate party, while advancing a hidden agenda of Islamic authoritarianism. Moreover, the CHP viewed the EU-AKP rapprochement sceptically, framing the changes in the military and used nationalist frames on Kurdish rights as a way to “divide the country” and thus fed the rise of Euroscepticism in Turkey. With the usage of nationalist and elitist frames, the CHP used what has been called the “politics of fear” and had a “preference for anti-democratic solutions” (Öniş, 2009, p.30). This not only allowed the AKP to secure its initial electoral success by building on the injustice of exclusion, but also frustrated the efforts of the opposition, which had primarily coalesced around the CHP, and was unable to provide a new frame that challenged that of the AKP and resonated with the public. Therefore, it can be argued that the opposition contributed to strengthening the AKP’s democracy and injustice frames.

The approach of the AKP, which involved the AKP maintaining close relations with its grassroots base, while expanding beyond it, can be contrasted with the vision of the people that was developed by the CHP, which was ultimately, as a former HDP Party Assembly Member (Zorlu, 2019) argued, “detached from reality”. By not using exclusionary populist frames in the first era, the AKP was able to maintain its coalition and secure the greatest electoral victory in its history during the 2007 parliamentary elections, by receiving around 50 per cent of the vote. This allowed the AKP to initiate a peace process to solve the conflict between the PKK and the state and pursue a more activist foreign policy in its following

term, especially in the Middle East. Moreover, in this stage, the fifth column frame was implemented by the CHP to delegitimise the AKP's cooperation with external actors, such as the EU, in its attempts to resolve the Cyprus crisis. The counter-framing occurred in a context in which EU membership was on the horizon. In this context, the two parties put forward different visions for the defence of national sovereignty and national interest. The fifth column frame did not lead to a backlash because the AKP had already framed the EU as a part of the national interest. The action frames of the AKP, which emphasised its promotion of the national interests and its lack of any attempt to bring about a significant change in Turkey's traditional foreign policy were therefore successful in eliminating a successful fifth column mechanism.

In the second period, the AKP's framing efforts underwent a change, moving from a frame focused on democratisation to a focus on confrontation with the so-called 'tutelary' institutions, which involved the adoption of an amplified populist frame. The AKP started to transform its democratisation frame by stressing a majoritarian argument for democracy and identifying itself as the representative of the majority of the people. This majoritarian frame became stronger via electoral success which the elites define as the manifestation of the "national will" (Akkoyunlu, 2017, p.49). The multiple election campaigns throughout this period, as well as the judicial processes regarding the so-called 'deep state' and coup plots and the 2010 referendum campaign, functioned as moments in which the AKP boosted the democracy frame. Even though the CHP underwent a transformation at this point, with the changes in its leadership, it nonetheless failed to galvanise support and mount a challenge to polarisation, even though it increased its share of the vote in this period. The CHP appeared to be internally divided and displayed frame inconsistency as it sought to defend the state institutions which were being criticised by the AKP, while also increasingly referring to the

need to defend and extend democracy and rights. In the second time frame, the increasing use of a majoritarian understanding of democracy, in frames of the AKP contribute to its counter-framing of the CHP as the “effective minority” (Taşkın, 2017).

As an event that shaped the transformation from the second stage to the third, the Gezi Protests marked a crucial difference from the Republican Rallies in terms of providing an opportunity to create a coalition against the AKP’s rule. While during the Republican Rallies, even though Turkish nationalism and Kemalist ideology provided successful mass mobilisation, the frames of the protests were exclusive and backfired. In the long run, while the counter-framing of the elitist frames that were amplified in the Republican Rallies has been reflected in the derogatory frames of the AKP against the opposition, the moment of unity and pluralism has become a mobilising memory named “the spirit of Gezi” (Atak and Della Porta, 2017; Yıldırım, 2014). Furthermore, while the Republican Rallies resulted in the electoral failure of the political opposition, the Gezi movement led to the creation of electoral coalitions, which provided a successful challenge to the AKP. Consequently, the Gezi protests correspond to what Della Porta (2016, p.88) defines “a school of democracy”, since new understandings of democracy were pioneered in the counter-publics that the movement generated, and new frames were developed by distinct opposition movements who found themselves on the same side.

In the third period, the AKP again altered its frames towards the opposition, introducing a fifth column frame as well as a securitisation frame in response to the Gezi protests in 2013 and the coup attempt in 2016, respectively. The AKP elites ushered in transformation in its frame in response to the new frame of democracy and pluralism launched by the opposition in the course of the Gezi Park protest movement in 2013, which presented the opposition as

acting as a fifth column. Hence, the opposition was presented as being a part of international conspiracies to undermine the AKP government and was presented as tied to global civil society. The fifth column frames increased with the AKP's increasing defiance of the West, which the AKP elites aimed to other by highlighting the "hypocrisy of the west" (Öztürk, 2021, p.123) and Islamophobia, which they tried to associate with the domestic opposition. The AKP also started to use "civilisational terms", combining a discourse of Islam and Turkish nationalism and presenting the opposition as Islamophobic or elitist (Çınar, 2018b, p.177). The AKP also increasingly voiced a majoritarian understanding of democracy that it started to adopt in the second time frame, rather than an inclusive one, which was utilised to justify increasingly authoritarian policies (Çınar, 2018a). An additional securitisation frame was later added to this approach in 2014 when the AKP presented primarily Gülenists and increasingly other members of the political opposition as an existential threat to its rule. As a part of this frame, the AKP used perpetual conflict as a part of its framing strategies. Erdogan, in one speech, argued that "the fight against terrorism will continue the doomsday" (BBC Türkçe, 2016). While the party had a limited nationalist frame in the first and second stages, in the third stage, nationalist frames were dominant discourses glorifying being a "martyr" (Cumhuriyet.com.tr, 2018b). Overall, as a response to the threats that emerged, the AKP used securitising frames. Consequently, the AKP elites bridged the fifth column and securitisation frames as a dominant framing strategy in this period.

On the other hand, in the third period, the opposition nonetheless did not challenge the AKP's understanding of the national interest on several occasions except for the HDP. While the opposition acted swiftly to declare its dedication to democracy and opposition to the coup, the CHP initially extended its support to the AKP's military operations in Syria against the YPG. Kılıçdaroğlu continued to use nationalistic frames as visible in a response to the Greek

defence minister by stating that he would take back a total of 18 islands “occupied by Greece” (Hürriyet, 2017). The party’s statism, led to frame immobility and shaped the path of counter-framing and coalition formation. Indeed, the CHP elites defined the party as “the party that founded the state” (Milliyet, 2014). This legacy has helped the AKP to continue to frame itself as an opposition actor even though it continued to consolidate its control over the state, which again shaped its strategies and relationship with various actors. This is because while the AKP framed itself as an anti-establishment party, the CHP, in opposition, held on to the statist party notion as a means of exploiting political opportunities offered by existing state institutions. This statist frame has also shaped the dynamics of why the HDP and the CHP ultimately could not form a coalition, as the HDP is seen by some within the CHP as being too close to the PKK and as linked to terrorism. Consequently, statism has led to frame stagnation amongst the political opposition. Following the counter-framing efforts of the incumbent, the CHP aimed to adopt a policy of seeking to create a broad alliance to defend the regime while also declaring its commitment to democracy and the rule of law, this ultimately resulted in frame incoherence. As a former HDP Party Assembly Member stated:

“CHP is a highly inconsistent party. For instance, when there was the Peace Process, CHP was against it. Now, the war started again, and now CHP seeks to embrace the Kurds, talks about the release of Demirtaş etc. So, one wants to ask: what is your principle, your real policy about the Kurdish question?” (Zorlu, 2019).

Conclusion

The contentious frame analysis demonstrated how historical understandings, held by the incumbent and the opposition, came to interact with each other in the frames deployed by both sides, as well as in response to political events. As a result of both events and

interaction, the opposition and the incumbent frames underwent a change. The first section of this chapter reviewed the historical narratives and ideological legacies that shaped the frames deployed by the incumbent and the opposition. The second section of the chapter demonstrated how, in the context of AKP's rise to power, while the dominant political opposition used elitist frames, the incumbents emphasised voicing the people's demands with a democracy frame. This phase ended with the AKP managing to overcome the challenges posed to its government by the bureaucracy through its organizational party networks, framing the non-democratic interventions from the opposition and appealing to the centre-right, thereby eradicating previously established centre-right parties as an electoral force. In the second phase, the polarising frames of the AKP, in contrast, served to distinguish themselves from the previous state elites, which became part of the political opposition, by framing the AKP as closely aligned with the majority of the people. During the two eras, the CHP and Kemalist social movements criticised the AKP's efforts to dismantle the republic's institutions, arguing that this would weaken the state's institutions and undermine democracy and secularism. Even though some sections of the political opposition tried to shift polarising frames in the first two eras by developing visions of democratic reform, the main political opposition, and especially the CHP, largely maintained elitist frames. With clear increasing authoritarianism in the third stage, the legacy of elitist frames has helped the AKP to continue to frame itself as an opposition actor even though it continued to consolidate its control over the state, which again shaped its strategies and relationship with the political opposition. Consequently, the AKP's framing strategies included the fifth column frame, which presented the opposition as promoting the interests of foreign actors and, subsequently, the securitisation frame, which suggested that some of the elements of the opposition posed an existential threat to the country, and which placed the political opposition in a defensive position.

CHAPTER 9: Contentious Framing and Democratic Backsliding in Venezuela

Introduction

This chapter investigates the dynamics of contention between the incumbent and the political opposition in Venezuela with the contentious frame analysis framework outlined in *Chapter 3*. The framework traces the development and the interaction of frames in the context of changing political opportunities during transformative events in Venezuela from 1998 to 2018, unpacked in *Chapters 6 and 7*. By building on the political context presented in *Chapters 6 and 7*, the chapter starts by describing the historical context of agents' frames. The subsequent section applies the contentious framing analysis to the contentious process in three time periods: nonrecognition of the opposition (1998–2006); the institutionalisation of Chavismo (2006–2013); and repression and internationalisation of the contention (2013–2018). This section traces the four sections of the contentious frame analysis: definition, action, contestation, and transformation-stagnation. The definition phase outlines how opposition and regime actors define themselves and the world by revealing their prognostic, diagnostic and motivational frames. The action phase demonstrates how these actors mobilised to bring about the world they envisioned through tracing their collective action frames. The contestation phase looks at how different frames coexist and clash, which could lead to processes of counterframing. The last phase looks at how after frames contestation, the agents pursue frame transformation or stagnation by looking at processes like global framing. After presenting the four stages, the subsequent section of the chapter discusses the consequences of contentious framing and how the contestation and transformation of frames in the three periods shaped the dynamics of contention.

1. The Historical Context of Frames: Foundational Legacies and Perpetual Polarisation in Venezuela

By building on historical injustices, Venezuela's status as a colonised country and the struggle for independence have shaped the frames of agents, especially of Chavistas. The independence movement, led by Bolívar, and the subsequent administrations under *caudillos* primarily gave the military a crucial role throughout Venezuelan history, which continues to this day. While the early history of Venezuela was marked with the military hindering democracy, in the 20th century, the armed forces also started to take part in movements towards progressive political change, as in the case of the AD's coup against Jiménez to restore democracy in the 1940s (Cannon, 2009). However, certain *caudillos*, such as the military dictator Gómez, sought to redistribute oil wealth and advance literacy programmes throughout the country (Tanver and Frederick, 2004). While the historical background of Venezuela before the introduction of democracy was marked by the struggle for power between the *caudillos*, with the introduction of Puntofujismo, the military as an institution took over the role of suppressing insurgency, dominantly by repressing Marxist guerrilla groups (Cortes, 1999; Ellner, 2007). The exclusion of the left from the Puntofujismo led to the formation of multiple radical left groups from different ideological backgrounds. However, while the military as an institution had the role of repressing dissent (Ellner, 2007), multiple leftist groups within the military emerged after the 1960s, most famously MBR-200 in the early 1980s under the leadership of Chávez, which would mobilise a coup attempt in the early 1990s (Wilpert, 2007). Even though the framing of the military by traditional parties was of an institution to protect the democratic order, the spread of leftist ideas within the military paved the way for the formation of groups within the military as an actor that could facilitate political change (Chávez, 2016). This crucially involved drawing upon the legacy of

earlier frames which presented the military as an important actor, in advancing social policies and defending the sovereignty of the nation throughout Venezuelan history.

While Venezuela had a deep leftist tradition, dating back to the AD's Marxist activism in the 1920s (Kantor, 1959), the amplification of Bolivarianism as an ideology has emerged with the rise of ELVP, MBR-200 and later on Chavismo. The movement displayed what they named a Bolivarian ideology that emphasised ideas of "social justice and national sovereignty"¹⁴⁷ (Wilpert, 2007, pp.15–16) that would be used to mobilise and justify the coup attempt of 1992. As captured by Chávez:

"The MBR200 commanders were united by a deep feeling of brotherhood; by the idea of liberating Venezuela from oppression; by the desire to make Venezuela a free and sovereign country committed to Bolivarian ideals; and by the wish to free our people from political sleaze merchants and intriguers" (Chávez, 2016).

Even though, as Chávez expressed in his memoirs, plans for a coup had been building up since the 1980s, the right moment came with the crisis that started with the austerity measures¹⁴⁸ (Chávez, 2016). Consequently, the movement that mobilised around Chávez defined the corruption of the elites as a threat to Venezuela's sovereignty and unjust (Chávez, 2016). By leading the coup attempt in 1992, Chávez emerged as a powerful leader and called for radical policies that marked a clear break from the Punto Fijo regime (Cannon, 2009). By highlighting his status as an outsider, the prognostic frames of the mobilisation around

¹⁴⁷ The radical left mobilised in multiple ways. Urban guerrillas that were inspired by the Cuban revolution launched multiple offences during the 1960s but were repressed under the AD and COPEI governments (Tinker Salas, 2015).

¹⁴⁸ Chávez was mobilised further after the Caracazo and did not join the repression during the Caracazo and called in sick (Chávez, 2016).

Chávez were of the concept of “participatory democracy” (Garcia-Guadilla, 2003) which would bring social justice. Chávez argued that the movement’s mobilisation would bring Bolivarian democracy, which he defined as “happiness for the people, socio-economic security for the people, and political stability for the people” (Chávez, 2016). This indicates how earlier frames concerning the centrality of the military were later deployed by Chávez and his followers, who saw their own position as one of defending Venezuela’s sovereignty as a prerequisite to enabling participatory democracy.

In the lead up to the rise of Chávez’s movement, Venezuela’s established parties and elites found themselves in a defensive position in the face of the mass protests against the austerity measures that were being introduced. The austerity measures led to a transformation of the frames of the traditional elites. This is because the Punto Fijo system was built on a dominant discourse that Coronil and Skurski (1991, p.292) argue:

“closely links democracy to development, attributing Venezuela’s rapid growth and prestige concerning political freedom and human rights to its multiparty system of government and construes the democratic regime to be the nation’s guardian, entrusted with directing the flow of oil income to benefit the interests of the pueblo¹⁴⁹ and the nation.” (Coronil and Skurski, 1991, p.292)

The Puntofijo elites, even though they had ideological differences, kept “the rhetoric of populist nationalism” (Coronil and Skurski, 1991, p.293) which was termed one of the key mechanisms that maintained democratic rule in Venezuela (Ellner, 2003). The Caracazo, in which the masses organised mass demonstrations, which included looting and killings of

¹⁴⁹ *Pueblo* here refers to the *people*.

protestors, resulted in the decline of legitimacy for the Venezuelan elite. This was because the event overturned the consensus that gave the state a “paternalistic role” (Coronil and Skurski, 1991, p.309; Lopez-Maya, 2005, p.119) and became a “betrayal of the moral economy” (Lopez-Maya, p.120). While Pérez, the president during the massacre, ran an anti-establishment campaign, even though having served under the COPEI, he overturned his promises by deepening the austerity measures and “silenc[ed]... critics as subversives”¹⁵⁰ (Coronil and Skurski, 1991, p.309). However, the uprising, which was a direct response to the austerity measures, was framed by multiple social movements¹⁵¹ and the left as showing the inability of the established parties to “govern the country and a need for a new social pact” (Chávez, 2016). Chávez’s subsequent coup attempt was therefore framed as resulting from a need to address the inability of the established political parties and elites to answer the demands of the people effectively.

The agenda to challenge Venezuela’s Puntofijo regime incorporated leftist intellectuals and activists, who united on the agenda to transform the status quo (Lopez-Maya, 2003, p.75) and acted to transform the movement initiated by Chávez towards a movement that could seize power electorally. Chávez had advocated radical change through redistributive social and economic reforms that received the support of the lower socio-economic classes (Roberts, 2015, p.682) which built the organisational power for his electoral victory. After the Caracazo, by rejecting mobilising under a political party, Chávez’s project used prognostic frames that sought to alter the established order in Venezuela. The success of Cardenas, who led the coup with Chávez in the previous electoral cycle with a coalition with the Causa-R, led to a transformation of the prognostic frame used by the movement as it suggested that

¹⁵⁰ While the elites called the events “disturbances”, the opposition called them a “popular uprising” and a “massacre” (Coronil and Skurski, 1991, p. 331).

¹⁵¹ The student movement played a critical role in the mobilisation of the protests (Lopez-Maya, 2005).

Chávez could also come to power via an electoral path (Hellinger, 2003, p.42). By denouncing the prior political system, the MVR proposed “participatory democracy” (Posner, 2020) and situated the movement against liberal democracy (Roberts, 2003). This conception of democracy entailed stressing the centrality of the concept of “popular sovereignty” (Roberts, 2003, p.147) and led to the formation of populist frames that defined a clear distinction between the people and the elite. The MVR’s electoral campaign made references to the war of independence, defining the people “as the main actors of history” (Lopez-Maya, 2003, p.84). The incumbent’s populism, which rose in the context of contention against neoliberalism, defined exclusion as the core problem (Chávez, 2016). Chávez referred to the people as “powerless masses” that could provoke change by supporting a radical project which would diminish the power of established elites (Roberts, 2003, 2015). Therefore, under the influence of Caldera’s success, the movement around Chávez came to move towards embracing a prognostic frame that saw electoral politics as the chief means by which to come to power in Venezuela.

2. Contentious Framing During Chavismo’s Rise

While Chávez framed the lack of representation as a diagnostic frame and framed his outsidership as potentially resulting in a new beginning for Venezuelan politics in the form of a new, clean political slate, the process of the definition of the problem of representation integrated the international sphere. Chávez’s domestic frames were reflected in his foreign policy, as what came to be known as ‘Bolivarian foreign policy’ aimed to promote a just international system by supporting a multicentric world order (Angosto-Ferrández, 2013, p.3). This foreign policy outlook framed the hegemony of the US in the international system as a part of the problem. Consequently, the contestation between the US became a crucial

part of Chávez's foreign policy discourse, which has been sustained under the Maduro administration. For example, in a speech to promote high-oil prices and the need for solidarity between OPEC members, Chávez argued that the states were victimised due to "the imbalances of the world economy" (Bellos, 2000). A year later, on a trip to Moscow, Chávez sought to promote democracy but distinguished his own movement from what he termed "forced" democracy, referring to the US's democracy promotion efforts (LA Times, 2001). Chávez argued that partnerships with countries like Russia could "build a just world order" without the imposition of a unipolar world order (President of Russia, 2001). Therefore, Bolivarianism, both at home and abroad, came to be defined as the ideology of the incumbent that sought to defy the establishment and promote radical change in domestic and international society through the representation of those who were framed as being excluded in both the domestic and international order.

As a response to Chávez's rise and election, the political opposition's frames were shaped by their strategy of nonrecognition and alignment with the international institutions which were also opposed to the new incumbent. The anti-Chavista coalition, that primarily united to support Salas Römer's presidency in the 1998 elections, came to defend the status quo against Chávez's radical policies (Ellner, 2003, pp. 21-22). During the 1998 presidential elections, Römer's campaign aimed to continue the austerity policies that led to the *Caracazo* by pledging to continue the IMF deal (Buxton, 2003, p.124). The opposition's criticism focused on rejecting the transformation process that was going to be initiated with the Constituent Assembly (Ellner, 2003, p. 22) and Chávez's issuing of decree to push reforms were framed as a path towards authoritarianism (Hellinger, 2003, p.48). Members of the established elite from the AD and COPEI, framed Chávez as "incompetent" and framed the

need for his departure as urgent¹⁵² (Forero, 2002a). Therefore, their diagnostic frames saw Chávez's movement as undermining and disrupting the austerity policies they were implementing. Carlos Hermoso, from the Red Flag party, which became a part of the latter opposition coalition Democratic Coordinator stated that this strategy aimed to "encircle" Chávez to "the point where he leaves, or he is tried on charges or he goes under some other scenario" (Forero, 2002a). This strategy shaped the political opposition's actions of civil disobedience and support for non-democratic means, including supporting the coup attempt for toppling the incumbent. Ex-president Caldera reflected on the opposition's failure at this point by not being able to grasp the outrage against corruption and criticised the lack of acknowledgment of the mass support of Chavistas (Hellinger, 2003, p.32). As the coup was overturned due to "counter-mobilisation" of the members of the military loyal to Chávez and "lower-class supporters" (Roberts, 2003, p.68), the incumbent was able to demonstrate its mass support. While Chávez sought moderation and a reduced derogatory framing at the aftermath of the coup, eventually the opposition's continuation of strategies of non-recognition led to Chavistas using the elitist frame against the opposition. The funding and training received by some groups within the broad anti-Chavista opposition, like Súmate from NED and USAID in the path to the recall referendum and their role in the 2002–2003 PDVSA strike, has led Chavistas to argue that the US funded the nonrecognition strategies of the opposition (Golinger, 2005, pp.107–109). Therefore, the opposition experienced an externalisation of its cause, owing to the support that it appeared to receive from several actors who were in alignment with its nonrecognition approach towards the movement centred around Chávez.

¹⁵² The incompetent argument Lee Anderson (2017) underlined that business executives whom he interviewed had referred to Chávez as an "ape."

Nevertheless, the opposition's policy of nonrecognition backfired, resulting in their political exclusion, as well as in them being framed as 'anti-democratic' by the incumbent. With the failure of the coup, the opposition started to be framed as *golpistas*, meaning 'coup plotters', which contributed to the incumbent building a populist frame that presented the opposition as elites who were intent on excluding broad sections of society. Consequently, the opposition groups who supported the coup contributed to providing a justification for the incumbent's populist frames. The coup also offered a justification for the regime to oppress the opposition and contributed to Chávez's consolidation of power. The opposition was not able to transform its frames after the 2002 coup and the 2004 recall election because of how its attempts to enact political change in both instances were unsuccessful. This meant that the opposition could not claim legitimacy on the basis of a democratic vote, in the case of the recall referendum, in which it could have secured the majority. This lack of success resulted in several splits amongst the opposition. In private writing, to express the divisions within the opposition, the US embassy in Caracas underlined that opposition forces against Chávez are "choosing to shoot their wounded." (Tinker-Salas, 2015, p.163). Meanwhile, Oswaldo Álvarez Paz created a new group called Popular Alliance which focused on "freedom and democracy" yet defied the popular policies of the incumbent by underlining the importance of "private property" (Allianca Popular, 2005). Consequently, the strategy of nonrecognition, which took the form of boycotting the elections and lending support to the coup, did not work as it further contributed to the incumbent framing the opposition as elitists and resulted in splits amongst the opposition.

3. The Formation of the MUD and PSUV: From Nonrecognition to Frame Transformation

The second phase, which was marked by the growing electoral strength and international interest in Chavismo, was marked by the increasing use of populist frames by the incumbent and the frame transformation of the political opposition. By building on increasing political opportunities for the incumbent with increasing oil revenues, the collective actions of the Chavistas were focused on implementing their transformative agenda. The primary frame transformation in this era, from the part of the incumbent occurred with the formation of the PSUV. The party's formation also led to a clear ideological framing of the movement as "socialist" (Hetland, 2007, p.22). While Chávez did define the movement as socialist until 2005, within that year, he embraced the slogan of "21st century socialism" (Manwaring, 2005; Gonzalez, 2014). 21st century socialism became a vaguely defined term whose main themes were liberty, social justice, equality, and solidarity (Wilpert, 2008). An emphasis on "21st-century socialism" is used in this context to differentiate the PSUV's understanding of socialism from Soviet-style socialism, which lacked their then-emphasis on pluralism (Cannon 2009). What has been termed radicalisation, in this context, refers to a change in the ideology that Chávez presented in his first term, where he had made statements in favour of the "third way", developed by Anthony Giddens, as Chávez later stated that it was "foolish" (CNN, 2010). Moving away from the "third way" PSUV argued for decreasing dependence on global markets and promoted national sovereignty and control over economic resources (Roberts, 2015). Consequently, the contentious framing between the incumbent and the opposition at this point demonstrated how the confrontation with the opposition has further contributed to the radicalisation of Chávez (Hetland, 2007; Wilpert, 2007). However, this also increased frame disputes within the incumbent elites, including some pro-government parties, as Chávez argued that they should all dismantle themselves to join the PSUV (Wilpert, 2007, p. 220). The PSUV therefore saw itself as a collective actor, which

was built on its self-framing as ‘socialist’, which could, in turn, function as a means of pursuing the populist and transformative policies of Chávez.

In the aftermath of the coup attempt, the anti-imperial frame of the incumbent was amplified both at home and abroad, with Chavismo contesting US hegemony along with increasing closer ties with other states and movements opposed to the US. The diagnostic frames of Chavismo defined a world order where a form of colonialism still existed (Chávez, 2016). In a 2006 OPEC speech, Chávez described Venezuela as a part of “third world nations, countries that have suffered colonialism” (Hoyos and Webb-Vidal, 2006). Anti-colonialism became a key concept in the framing of Chavistas, frequently used by Chávez with statements like “Venezuela will not become a colony of the United States” (Romero and Coralles, 2010, p.221). Moreover, Chavistas bridged the populist frame with the anti-colonial/imperialist frame by othering the US and institutions they deemed under US hegemony. By countering the Bush administration’s “axis of evil” framing, Chávez aimed to give a moral ground to the world he is envisioning by stating: “The axis of evil is Washington and its allies around the world, which go about threatening, invading, and murdering. We are forming the axis of good” (The Guardian, 2005). Chávez framed his struggle against the US as forming another international order arguing “... this is our century, we are no longer Fanon’s wretched earth” (Guevara, 2002, p.110). Furthermore, to emphasise these frames, Chávez would refer to the US as “imperialists”, “Yankees” or would name the foreign policy of the US an “arrogant imperialist foreign policy” (Corrales and Penfold, 2015, p.111). During speeches, Chávez and Maduro also repeatedly used the slogan “Yankee go home” (NODAL, 2013). Therefore, the Chavista movement’s foreign policy moved from seeking to assert sovereignty towards promoting a vision of a multipolar world order, which saw the United States as a neo-colonial and/or neo-imperial power that needed to be challenged by

actors throughout the world. Hence, the focus on anti-imperialism in the incumbent's foreign policy came to form part of the incumbent's prognostic frames and highlighted a moral contrast between the incumbent and the opposition.

By highlighting solidarity as one of the critical characteristics of his international efforts, the foreign policy of Chavismo framed the need to build alliances to contrast US-based order, likening his efforts to the historical Bandung Conference during the World Social Forum in 2006 (Gonzalez, 2014, 72%). In these appeals, Chávez also attacked international organisations that he argued were in line with US interests. Moreover, in his speeches, the alliances that Venezuela built to contest the US's hegemony and the promotion of solidarity were reflected in Chávez's statements like *"if the United States were to invade Cuba, Venezuelan blood would flow"* (Gunson, 2006). Chávez's solidarity in the anti-US block was discernible when he supported the Iranian incumbent during the contested 2009 Iranian presidential elections (CNN, 2010), during which the opposition was repressed. The solidarity formed under the anti-imperialist frame was visible in Chávez's quote: *"All Venezuelans feel truly proud to be your brothers, to be friends of Iran, and to share together this path of revolution, the people's dignity, and sovereignty - the path of the fight against imperialism!"* (Financial Times, 2007). Therefore, in foreign policy Chavistas used solidarity frames and put it into action, like using foreign aid or utilising supportive statements to demonstrate solidarity (Romero and Mijares, 2016). The anti-US prognostic frames developed by the Chavistas therefore came to resonate with frames advanced by other international actors who were challenging the policies of the US, which offered the incumbent a source of international support.

As part of the general prognostic frame that saw imperialism as a challenge to be tackled, the incumbent in Venezuela spearheaded efforts to construct alternative regional blocs, which were intended to challenge the influence of the US and its allies. This was due to how many representatives of the incumbent expressed how pro-American frames were overly represented in existing regional international institutions. Maintaining populist frames intact both domestically and internationally became one of the key framing strategies of the government. These frames took place in the context where the US also increased the polarising frames against Chávez, with the Bush administration affiliating Chávez with terrorism, naming Venezuela “an existential threat”¹⁵³ The US’s framing of Venezuela as a threat amplified the anti-imperialist frames that the incumbent employed. With its efforts to build solidaristic alliances internationally, Chavistas also promoted a prognostic frame to “unify Latin America” by referring to the US’s historical relationship with the region, which suppressed the national sovereignty of states. The Bolivarian institutions that Chávez initiated, like the Petrocaribe and Banco del Sur, and regional campaigns like the No to Alcala Movement turned these frames into action. Chávez contested the FTAA, framing it as a US imperialist outreach (Silva, 2012). Yet while Chávez deepened regional integration, the criticisms towards his government, either from regional organisations or INGOs reporting on Venezuela, most visibly in the case of HRW and later contesting the IACHR, were framed to be breaching Venezuelan sovereignty. The decision to expel HRW’s director after criticising institutional changes in 2008 and Chávez’s departure from the IAHCR was justified by linking these organisations with US’s efforts to topple the incumbent in Venezuela. Consequently, the incumbent sought to use alternative alliances to the US, within the Western hemisphere, to secure its own position and to challenge existing INGOs and regional

¹⁵³ The US was claiming that Venezuela is harbouring Muslim and FARC terrorists (Romero, 2005). In its relations with other Latin American states, Bush, made a distinction between "two competing futures" affiliating the US with "vision of hope" and Venezuela's as democratic backsliding.

organisations, which it claimed were being influenced by the US. The counter-framing of international actors were utilised to strengthen the frame of popular sovereignty and strengthen populist frames.

On the other hand, by framing the opposition's extra-institutional strategies as an orchestrated effort to overturn Chavismo, the incumbent increasingly employed a fifth column frame as part of a derogatory frame to discredit the main political opposition. In this regard, Chavistas frequently referred to the opposition as an extension of the US, as is captured in Chávez's quote during the constitutional referendum, "who votes yes is for Chávez," as well as adding that "who votes no is voting for George W. Bush." (Romero, 2007). Chávez led his campaign on the legitimacy of being the majority and deployed 'fifth column' and populist frames jointly. In one statement, referring to the opposition, Chávez stated: "they say I'm on the ground, only good to clean floors" (Maner, 2010). Therefore, Chávez implied that the opposition-held a classist view of himself and his supporters and was opposed, in principle, to his leadership. Instead of addressing the opposition with their names, the ruling elite used words like "traitors" and "conspirators" to characterise the opposition. The deployment of the fifth column meant that Chavistas characterised the opposition as advancing the interests of hostile international actors at the domestic level. During the subsequent electoral process, Maduro accused the opposition of being led by the US and reacted in multiple ways, like expelling the Assistant Secretary of State of Western Hemisphere Affairs for supporting Capriles (Financial Times, 2013). Some Chavistas used anti-Semitic framing against Capriles, who has Jewish roots, stating that he was supported by the power of the "Zionist capitalism" and "was acting against the interests of the state, in favour of Israel" or acts on behalf of the "Jewish Lobby" (Lomnitz and Sánchez, 2009). Consequently, the incumbent's

combined use of the fifth column and populist frames contributed to the increasing othering between the opposition and the incumbent.

While the opposition also changed its policy of nonrecognition to engagement (Brading, 2012), and built a large coalition, it defined a context where there was a move towards increasing authoritarianism. As Jimenez underlines (2021, p.7), at this stage of the contention, repression was lower, which made the cooperation of the opposition parties weaker. Consequently, the opposition needed frame transformation and further unity to provide a viable challenge to Chavismo. With multiple losses, groups within the main political opposition came to promote that without cooperating, they would not be able to challenge Chavismo. The opposition framed the institutional changes of 2009 as a step towards increasing authoritarianism. By forming the MUD, they started to act on it by acting strategically to gain representation (Jimenez, 2021, pp.10-12). This unity led to Chavistas losing their supermajority in the National Assembly and in the subsequent elections, resulting in increased support for its presidential candidate in the 2012-2013 electoral cycle. At this time, López and Capriles emerged as the two most influential leaders, organising rallies and touring the country to appeal to the electorate (Leopoldo López, 2012). Even though Capriles was part of the camp that previously pursued the strategies of nonrecognition, the Capriles camp utilised more institutional channels and recognised the need for changing opposition strategies (Hetland, 2018). The selection of Capriles rather than a more polarising figure like Lopez or Machado provided an opportunity to nullify the counter-framing of the incumbent as elitists. Consequently, Capriles's 2012 campaign did not challenge Chavismo straightforwardly and put forward a "progressive" agenda that emphasised "security" and "tranquillity" (Capriles Radonski, 2012). On the state of democracy, Capriles promoted "conviviality" by stating that under his leadership, there would be "respect" for "political and

social diversity, gender equity, and coexistence between different political positions” (Capriles Radonski, 2012, p.19). Therefore, the opposition moved away from its policy of nonrecognition, instead, advancing a number of different diagnostic frames, including the need to stress unity in diversity and to address economic difficulties through fiscal policy.

Frame disputes increasingly occurred within the opposition, however, as different approaches with varying prognostic and diagnostic frames came to be advanced, with Capriles being able to reject the nonrecognition frame of the main political opposition. This was highly significant due to how it involved Capriles acknowledging the possible benefits of Chávez’s time in office, as well as trying to distance himself from his past. In this way, Capriles’s campaign contrasted Chávez’s populist rhetoric as demonstrated in his phrases “*there are many more things that unite us than those that separate us*” (NTN24, 2012). He further stated that he had been inspired by the Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Tinker Salas, 2015, p.205). Capriles’s approach consequently has been marked as entailing a “compromise” as he would continue “funding social programs and would keep the Cuban doctors” (Anderson, 2017). However, while the opposition was able to join the 2012-2013 electoral cycles under the MUD umbrella, frame disputes within the group challenged Capriles’s conciliatory approach. Under the leadership of María Corina Machado, Vente Venezuela represented a more radical-right wing party of the coalition that promoted the policy of nonrecognition of Chavismo and the slogan “popular capitalism” (Vente Venezuela, 2014), contrasting the MUD’s agenda. The fact that members of the MUD, including Machado, shared history of supporting the coup and organising the oil strikes made it harder to demonstrate frame transformation. While Capriles demonstrated moderation by provoking strategies of nonrecognition over and over again, leaders like Machado and Lopez lacked in-depth reflection on the opposition’s failures. Hence, Capriles’s move to adopt a united policy

that differed from that of nonrecognition was nonetheless undermined by disputes within the opposition, signalling that frame resonance within the opposition was needed.

4. Framing During Increasing Authoritarianism

After Chávez's death and the 2013 presidential elections, Maduro's announcement of his victory in the 2013 presidential elections, with a very narrow margin, contributed to opposition externalisation and mobilisation for street protests. After the 2013 defeat with a narrow margin, by highlighting fraud, the MUD pursued a global framing strategy, using an injustice frame to strengthen the opposition's demands (Al Jazeera English, 2013). By building on this loss and the closure of the political context, a broader protest cycle known as the *la Salida (the Exit)* emerged, with the aim of pushing the government to resign with sustained non-violent resistance (Voluntad Popular, 2014). The 2014 protests, which initially started with student protests, gained momentum together with opposition leaders like Machado and Lopez's actively calling for the government to resign (Masullo Jimenez, 2017, pp. 89-90). The protests were led dominantly by Lopez's VP that sought to implement the nonrecognition strategy by mobilising grievances due to shortages in goods, inflation, crime (Tinker Salas, pp.212-213) and increasing authoritarianism (Voluntad Popular, 2014). While the *la Salida* brought together some sections of the student movement and the political opposition¹⁵⁴, the protests were mostly located in the middle- and upper-middle-class locales in cities (Tinker Salas, pp.212-213). Nonviolence and remaining peaceful was promoted by the protestors as their main framing strategy, with participants and Lopez emphasising it in

¹⁵⁴ Whereas the motivational framing of the protests were halting authoritarianism, the threat of Venezuela being like Cuba was also being highlighted by some of the participants (Masullo Jimenez, 2017, p.90). Moreover, the VP tried to integrate the students to the party to enlarge its coalition (Voluntad Popular, 2015).

every speech, dressing in white mostly during the protest cycle¹⁵⁵. Yet, the protests were counterframed with securitisation and fifth-column frames, with the incumbent arguing that the protests were sponsored by external actors which were contributing to the training of fascists in Venezuela (Voluntad Popular, 2014). These frames led to the police raids and mass arrests, with PSUV elites holding Lopez directly responsible for violence (Voluntad Popular, 2014).

Nonetheless, with increasing repression, the protest cycle contributed to the dividedness of the opposition (Garcia-Guadilla and Mallen, 2019). In 2014, the splits between the MUD became more evident as executive secretary Ramón Guillermo Aveledo resigned (Prodavinci, 2014). Moreover, while Capriles earlier appealed to the international, he recognised Maduro and cooperated on issue areas, demonstrating recognition (Masullo Jimenez, 2017, p.87). He continued to appeal to Chavistas visible in his discussions in what has been labelled a peace meeting between the opposition and the incumbent in 2014 where he highlights an injustice frame by underlining the incumbent's lack of respect towards half of the population via derogatory framing like naming "fascists" (CGTN, 2017; TeleSUR TV, 2014). Moreover, Capriles targeted the incumbent by marking the polarising agenda promoted by the government "sustainable", which also aimed to shift the increasing violence on the incumbent by making the statement: "we don't want a coup, we don't want social explosion" (TeleSUR TV, 2014). Capriles's disagreement is captured in a 2015 after the election victory:

"What was the mistake last year? They called for changing the government when it had 54% popular support. Explain to me how you change a government with that support. In politics,

¹⁵⁵ Lopez has emphasised the role of non-violence increasingly after the protests, stating that Gandhi and Martin Luther King has been some of his idols (El Tiempo, 2019).

when influences. Were you going to change the government in the streets? The streets are meeting points. That has already happened, it is behind us, but it was a mistake that cost us.”
(Lobo-Guerrero, 2015)

Even though Capriles was able to contest the framing of the securitisation of the incumbent with an injustice frame, the lack of active support for the protests amplified the divisions between the more radical elements within the MUD (Masullo Jimenez, 2017, p.87). Even though there was agreement on the diagnostic framing of the problem in Venezuela being one of authoritarianism, actors differed with regards to the prognostic framing of how to overcome these difficulties, with some groups continuing to advocate the immediate exit of the incumbent. Therefore, the protests highlighted the radical and moderate division within the MUD more clearly.

The repression during the la Salida protest cycle created a process of scale shift which refers to the modification “in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions leading to a broader contention involving a wider range of actors” (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001, p. 331). Opposition externalisation, on the part of the opposition, led to the creation of global framing, which was of an authoritarian regime. By appealing to these institutions, and the reporting and advocacy done by actors like the Human Rights Watch (2014, 2015), Amnesty International (2014, 2015), the OAS (2015) framed the process in a similar way by arguing that regime was violating human rights. Celebrities in the US used the hashtag #freeleopoldo, which popularised the campaign¹⁵⁶ (Lovato, 2015). However, radical actors within the MUD pursued their own strategy of opposition externalisation, which involved establishing ties

¹⁵⁶ The success of global framing was linked to how the members like Lopez studied in Ivy League institutions in the US and were able to make their grievances heard through these networks (Lovato, 2015).

with other external actors. These groups focused especially on establishing close relations with the OAS and right-wing governments in the region, as well as, subsequently, the Trump administration in the US. However, this approach led to failure in coordinating the pressure against the incumbent as in the case of the OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro's usage of the main political opposition frames by amplifying the call for Venezuela's suspension from the Democratic Charter, without "proper" consultation with other states in the region "backfired" (Buxton, 2016, p.24). Consequently, while the repression of the opposition led to a resistance frame and an injustice narrative, the contention between the radical and moderate factions within the opposition transcended to the international level. Therefore, the aforementioned differences in the prognostic frames of members of the opposition, present in spite of consensus on diagnostic frames, were maintained in the course of the opposition's externalisation of its activities.

The Maduro government appeared to maintain unity among its supporters and key figures in the face of the protests, but in the context of rising challenges, Chavistas could not engage in frame transformation and relied on the legacies set by Chávez. While the opposition pursued strategies of global framing, with increasing economic downturn, Maduro aimed to frame his legitimacy by relying on being the appointed leader of Chavismo and maintaining the system he established. He frequently outlined how Chávez him in charge to argue that his rule is "moral and spiritual" (Euronews, 2019). The incumbent framed the protests as an effort to dismantle Chavismo and used derogatory frames against the opposition, primarily Lopez, by naming him a radical. While Capriles, "urged supporters not to fuel the government's description of them as saboteurs" (Financial Times, 2014) he was also fuelled with inconsistent frames. While opposition members called on the military to act, this can be interpreted as a miscalculation, as Buxton (2016, p.24) underlines:

“The military establishment has a large stake in the economy, with its own TV station and its own production and distribution networks. Maduro has granted them a new mining concession, and the army is providing security in some of the key mining areas, where violence is widespread. When Capriles urged the army to step in and remove Maduro, you had to wonder what he was thinking, because the last thing they would want to do is to hand over power to Capriles or López. They would be more likely to try and revert back to the Bolivarian path, which Maduro has failed to uphold. For the opposition to call for military intervention is utterly reckless, even suicidal.”

Therefore, in the context of la Salida, the opposition and the incumbent’s frames underwent diverging processes, as the opposition experienced frame transformation whereas the incumbent experienced frame stagnation. The frame transformation of the opposition took the form of them appealing to international actors, ranging from celebrities to the EU and the US. But, the incumbent’s counter-frames, stressing that the opposition was responsible for the violence, did not resonate with global civil society actors and other international actors concerned with democracy. Instead, the incumbent resorted to frame stagnation, with Maduro arguing that he was the genuine representative of the Chavista movement, without engaging with any of the opposition’s concerns, which were expressed in their diagnostic frames.

While the opposition faced splits and referred to previous repertoires to oust Chavistas after la Salida, they managed to maintain the electoral path and gained increasing support in the 2015 National Assembly elections. In the run-up to the 2015 elections, the political opposition operated in an international context that reflected their frames. After 2014, the word crisis was utilised in the international media to explain the dynamics of Venezuela. The

utilisation of the *Cubanisation* discourse of the opposition, starting with the election of Chávez, resonated with US foreign policy outlooks (Hudson Institute, 2010; Cardenas, 2014). Therefore, although the opposition criticised authoritarianism, in the form of the discourse of Cubanisation, some within the MUD emphasised an alternative concept of ‘social justice’ to that being advanced by the Chavistas. Regardless of the extent to which they disagreed or agreed with the notion of social justice the political opposition’s frames were in alignment with the OAS’s interpretation of the situation in Venezuela as a threat to democracy. The amplification of the illegitimacy of the government, contributed to the opposition justifying non-democratic measures to oust the incumbent. During the new wave of protests it triggered, by stating that the army should defend democracy, Borges stated that there is “a continuing coup” in the country and the people will remain in the streets to press for a democratic exit (Castro, 2017). Similarly, Lopez in a broadcast while serving his sentence from his house called for protests to continue and appealed to the military, pledging "the people's support" (Leopoldo Lopez, 2017). Furthermore, in 2017, the National Assembly announced that Maduro is responsible of “hiding the humanitarian crisis” (Meza, 2017a). International actors used the democracy norm to frame Venezuela’s democratic backsliding, following the convening of the Constituent Assembly, with the United States threatening and subsequently launching a new round of sanctions against the incumbent. INGOs also voiced their concern with the deteriorating economic situation within Venezuela, which was due, in part, to the breakdown of the political system within the country. Multiple NGOs were able to coordinate and bridge their frames by amplifying the humanitarian and democracy frame. Therefore, the humanitarian frame became the master frame of international organisations and NGOs, and international actors coordinated their efforts and reports.¹⁵⁷ Consequently, the regime’s

¹⁵⁷ The humanitarian frame became the master frame of international agents especially after 2017. This humanitarian frame also contested US’s aggressive sanctioning policies as in the case of UN human rights chief Bachelet, while deeply criticising the regime, arguing in 2017 that US’s policies “may contribute to aggravating the economic crisis, with possible repercussions on people’s basic rights and wellbeing” (Long, 2019). Multiple

attempt to introduce a new round of constitutional reforms, similarly to how it had done so when it initially came to power, backfired after the opposition, as well as several international actors, converged on the diagnostic frame stressing how this was unconstitutional and undemocratic as it would side-line their elected representatives.

5. Contentious Framing in the Three Time Frames

The dynamics of contention in Venezuela between the incumbent and the opposition demonstrate that the framing process has been marked by stagnation rather than transformation. The incumbent sustained contention in the three time frames by primarily applying populist frames. In the first time frame, Chávez, emerging as an independent, was able to link his military background to his populism and incorporate symbols from the Latin American left and national imaginaries to amplify his quest to lead Venezuela. In this way, he mobilised the military and defining the military's role as a "servant of the people" (Chávez, 2016). This frame was put into action primarily with Plan Bolívar 2000, in which Chávez aimed to use the military for social problems and development projects (Hellinger, 2003, p.44). By giving the military an executive role in implementing its project, and incorporating the institution into the civilian arena, the incumbent gained the support of the military, which gave it repressive power and protected it from further coup attempts. Similarly, by giving a military a civilian role, and defining it as in the service of the people, the incumbent differed from other cases of militarism and military dictatorships in the region, which are founded on repression. Therefore, Chávez's MVR framed Venezuela as suffering from a lack of economic development and reasserted the caudillo tradition by mobilising frames tied to it

NGOs, international organisations and think tanks like WOLA were able to coordinate and amplify the humanitarian frame beyond the period studied in this thesis (WOLA, 2019).

and arguing that the military would be able to protect and empower the masses of Venezuela in the context of neoliberalism. Consequently, the incorporation of the military into populist frames gave the incumbent the opportunity to justify the military's increasing presence within the civilian government. This was because, throughout the process of the rise and consolidation of the power of the incumbent, frames advanced by the military, emphasising the need to ensure the survival of its political project through the defence of sovereignty, always played a role in shaping how the incumbent responded to challenges to its political rule.

For the main political opposition, which came to be represented by the fragile coalitions they formed like the AD, MUD, along with the splinter groups that emerged like Súmate, Soy Venezuela, the examination of the contentious framing in three time frames demonstrated that, the opposition was marked with frame stagnation. Even though there were actors within the main political opposition to contest the elitist and nonrecognition frames, these agents have been marked by frame disputes and frame contestation within the group. As the political opposition's primary focus has been to "defeat Chavismo" (Cusack, 2017) with from time to time anti-democratic frames, they came to be counter-framed with the populist frames of the incumbent. Moreover, the contention cycle demonstrated that learning has been weak for the opposition. The hegemonic groups within the political opposition insisted that not participating in the playing field was the correct path (Meza, 2017b). The lack of learning was demonstrated in the case of the side-lining of Capriles after la Salida or the subsequent 2018 presidential elections, with the radical opposition framing Falcón as a Chavista due to competing in the elections (Ellsworth, 2018). As a response to the internal criticisms for participating in the elections, Falcón (2018) wrote an article to New York Times citing research on boycott as an unsuccessful strategy and argued that "opposition forces that

abandoned the field of electoral competition have lost ground¹⁵⁸ and allowed rulers to consolidate power.” The polarising framing of the hardliners led to frame disputes within the political opposition and their non-participation contributed to amplifying the division between the party as “hardliners” versus “the moderates”. This division contributed to the incumbent’s justification of repression. Likewise, while the Chavistas were subjected to nonrecognition in the first time frame, which bolstered its populist frames, the incumbent started not to recognise the democratic mandate of the opposition in the third time frame. Yet, while promoting this nonrecognition of the opposition, the incumbent continued to use populist frames to justify their exclusion from the playing field. This was visible in the case when he threatened not to recognise Capriles as a governor; Maduro argued instead to allocate state resources “directly to the people” (Schipani, 2014). Hence, the nonrecognition of the opposition, which fluctuated in intensity throughout the time period considered, but was still a constant that was sustained by certain key actors, enabled the incumbent to present themselves as challenging elitism. This was because the nonrecognition of the incumbent by these actors was framed by the incumbent as a form of elitism, stemming from their opposition to an alternative form of politics that was more participatory.

In the three time frames, the Chavistas defied the international order and justified repression by referring to the international dimension of contention through anti-imperial and fifth column frames. In the first time frame, one of the reasons why the opposition’s support for extra-institutional strategies backfired was due to their actions incompatibility with the regional and international normative context. The openness of the international and regional context, which was discussed in *Chapter 7*, was marked by the democratic frames that have

¹⁵⁸ While the MUD cited disqualification of parties and the authoritarian structure opposition, Henri Falcón stood in the elections against Maduro's elections, marking similar strategies used by Capriles in 2012.

been utilised by INGOs and international institutions, especially of the OAS with its introduction of the democratic charter. The OAS's democracy framing paved the path for it to take action and frame the 2002 coup as a "government is overthrown by force" (Organization of American States, 2011). While international agents were critical in providing legitimacy for Chávez's return, the subsequent period was marked with increasing contestation of both the US and international agents that criticise the incumbent. As a response to the US's framing of Venezuela as a threat, Chavistas promoted the anti-imperialist frame to contest US's hegemonic position in the international system. By framing the US as a non-democracy, Chávez linked the coup to the US arguing "that [it] had a strong smell of oil" (Guevara, 2002, p.45). The Venezuelan government situated itself against imperialism and colonialism, as captured in Maduro's statement, "we aspire to be a dignified sovereign independent country, not a colony nor to be dominated by blackmailed" (Euronews, 2019). The punitive strategies of the US led to the strengthening of injustice frames, as in the case of sanctions, the incumbent underlined its humanitarian consequence, arguing that the US's maintaining "economic warfare" (Lopez, 2013), which has been used by the Chavistas as the diagnostic frames for the severe economic crisis in the country. By highlighting sovereignty, as the international efforts for sanctions on Venezuela increased, the incumbent consistently framed international efforts as a foreign intervention. While the OAS was vital to solve the deadlock between the incumbent and the opposition in the first time frame, they became a part of the counter framing process of the incumbent through anti-imperialist frames. The incumbent framed the OAS as the US's "puppet" (Financial Times, 2017), and the Secretary-General Almagro leadership's close alignment with the hegemonic groups within the MUD (International Crisis Group, 2018) bolstered fifth-column frames. Consequently, the anti-imperialist and fifth column frames are woven together to push the opposition out from the playing field and provide to counter the international actors' punitive strategies.

Conclusion

This chapter has applied the approach of contentious frame analysis to demonstrate how, in the context of democratic backsliding in Venezuela, the incumbent and the opposition experienced frame stagnation, resulting, more recently, in increased securitisation on the part of both actors. The first part demonstrated how historical frames that were present in the Venezuelan context were reused in the course of the democratic backsliding process. This involved the incumbent drawing upon frames of resisting the international order and seeking to construct an alternative world order, which first emerged in the course of the anticolonial movement for independence. While Chávez and his supporters framed their intervention in politics as facilitating a defence of sovereignty and participatory democracy, the opposition initially presented the movement as illegitimate and adopted a policy of nonrecognition. This policy of nonrecognition backfired on the part of the opposition, as the incumbent was able to present them as elitist coup plotters, as a form of counter-framing. After 2006, there were clear attempts on the part of the incumbent to encourage and join efforts at constructing a vision of world order that challenged that promoted by the US. On the other hand, the main political opposition was able to facilitate frame transformation with the formation of the MUD as a broad coalition. The frame transformation within the main political opposition was marked by the MUD's 2012-2013 presidential candidate Capriles's conciliatory approach that agreed with elements of Chávez's programme, including the social policies, while criticising what they saw as mounting authoritarianism.

The shift towards greater repression on the part of the incumbent, following the silencing of opposition and the consolidation of power, resulted in a change the approaches of the part of the incumbent and the opposition. The level of polarisation within society, which had been established as a result of the use of framing and counter-framing, became more pronounced

and the incumbent amplified to present the opposition as acting on behalf of international actors. Even though the incumbent had initially relied on support from international organisations to prevent its removal from power, by 2008, and especially after the response to the la Salida protests, the incumbent engaged in repression and challenged actors aligned with global civil society and other nation states. At this time, more divisions emerged amongst the opposition, with some advocating a return to a policy of nonrecognition. This also coincided with opposition externalisation, which involved the opposition receiving support from international actors, especially following the dismissal of the Constituent Assembly in 2017. Frame stagnation occurred in this context as the incumbent merely stressed their continuity with Chávez to secure legitimacy whereas the opposition responded to repression with adopting seeking further international support for its cause. What was visible at this moment was that the leadership of political groups that makes the political opposition from the coup attempt to the contentious period, including Machado, Ledezma and Borges mostly remained the same. Throughout this period, the incumbent presented themselves as opposed to elitism whereas the opposition moved from nonrecognition, to claiming to agree with aspects of Chávez's programme to, finally, calling for international support against what they term Cubanisation.

CHAPTER 10: Conclusion: Venezuela, Turkey, and Sustaining Contention in Processes of Democratic Backsliding

Introduction

This chapter presents the mechanisms that demonstrate the role of the political opposition in the process of democratic backsliding in Turkey under the AKP and Venezuela under Chavismo. The chapter starts with discussing how frames were connected to the broader mechanisms that contributed to democratic backsliding in the two cases. This section demonstrates how sustaining contention, which refers to the usage of contention for the incumbent in a way that serves to channel the actions of the opposition towards maintaining rather than challenging the incumbent regime, was shaped by several mechanisms. The mechanisms involved in these processes were securitisation, polarisation and fifth-column indictments that were driven by the use of a populist discourse by the incumbent towards the opposition in both cases. This section argues that the inability to compete with the populist discourse advanced by the incumbent in both cases, due to their historical legacies and the elitist frames used at certain points, provided the incumbent with the opportunity to counterframe the opposition. This demonstrates that in the two cases these three mechanisms assigned the opposition a role in the process of democratic backsliding, which meant that while contention was sustained in both cases, it did not result in the implementation of the opposition's agenda. The next section discusses the implications of this research and other research agendas that can emerge from it. This section argues that while further research would be useful to focus on the role of the media in the communication of frames in both contexts, this thesis contributes to the literature on democratic backsliding by pointing to how it is problematic to view the opposition as necessarily a force that can avert democratic

backsliding. Furthermore, its understanding of the political context stresses how actors within and beyond individual polities, i.e., including those in the international context, influence each other and the nature of the political regimes they are in.

1. Mechanisms During Democratic Backsliding in Turkey under the AKP and Venezuela under the PSUV

This thesis has identified three mechanisms that explain how the opposition relates to the course of democratic backsliding, namely, polarisation, fifth column mechanisms and securitisation. Polarisation, in this context, refers to the emergence of two distinct groups within society, with different individuals and groups gravitating towards either of the two different groups. Polarisation often entails disagreement and division between the two sides, which can also result in relations of enmity being present between them, which can be harmful for democracy due to its contrast with pluralism and consensus. The ‘fifth column mechanisms’, on the other hand, refer to the mechanisms that unfold following the use of fifth column frames by an actor, which, in turn, involve the framing of an actor as promoting the interests of other foreign actors. Given how democracy operates institutionally within the bounds of a single state, framing actors as fifth columns, acting in the interests of other states or their citizens, can serve to undermine their legitimacy. This, in turn, can result in other moves that challenge democratisation, such as securitisation, which involves the presentation of an entity or person as an existential threat. Securitisation can contribute to democratic backsliding if it is used to frame certain actors as existential threats, as a precursor to removing their democratic rights. All three of these mechanisms contributed to populism, since they all resulted in the development of relations of othering within society, in which one group was deemed to be the ‘true’ people, at the expense of others. In both the case of

Turkey and Venezuela, all three of these mechanisms have also occurred in stages, with polarisation frequently leading to the use of fifth column frames, which, in turn, often resulted in the deployment of various mechanisms of securitisation.

1.1. Polarisation

In both cases, the opposition did not, within the time frame considered, expend considerable efforts to ensure that polarisation within the polity was overcome. This meant that opposition actors in both cases were unable to overcome the divisions that the incumbent in both cases had been promoting through their increasingly populist frames. Prior to the time periods considered in the cases of Venezuela and Turkey, the incumbents had, in fact, acted in ways that could be said to advance polarisation. For instance, Chávez had framed the elites within the country as opponents to be eliminated, during the military coup and had previously been close to left wing officers in the military whose worldviews were conducive to polarisation along the lines of class contradictions and the issue of anti-imperialism. Similarly, Erdoğan and other members of the AKP, prior to the formation of the AKP, had, for many years, been part of the Islamist ‘National View’ (“*Milli Görüş*”) movement, which had seen the establishment politicians and elites as un-Islamic and had promoted a polarising Islamising agenda. However, in both cases, after the incumbents came to power electorally, they sought to present themselves as catch-all movements which sought to overcome existing levels of polarisation. In contrast to this, the main actors of the opposition, in both contexts, did not strive to overcome polarisation and, in fact, encouraged it through their respective policies of nonrecognition. While the opposition in Venezuela refused to recognise the Chávez government and later supported the coup, the opposition in Turkey also claimed that the AKP posed a threat to the values of the republic. In both cases, the opposition therefore initially highlighted their differences with the incumbents which were experiencing mass

support. This, in turn, allowed the incumbents in both cases to subsequently amplify populist frames, wherein they claimed that the opposition were elitists who were not representatives of the broader population. In this juncture, both the opposition's act of nonrecognition of their democratically elected governments and the moves on the part of the incumbent to present them as illegitimate were harmful for democracy since they resulted in further polarisation and undermined pluralism and a democratic culture of consensus.

1.2. 'Fifth Column' Mechanisms

Fifth column mechanisms were used by the incumbents in both cases and often built on patterns of pre-existing polarisation and were also closely related to historically differing perspectives on foreign policy in both countries. In Venezuela, the fifth column frame was deployed after the short-lived coup of 2002, after the opposition supported the coup, alongside the US. The incumbent in Venezuela, at this time, was staunchly opposed to the US, which meant that the opposition were framed as acting as a fifth column of the US, due to how they had extended their support to a coup, which had also been supported by the US. Similarly, in Turkey, the opposition came to be framed as a fifth column after the countrywide Gezi Park protests of 2013, which the incumbent framed as being orchestrated by an 'interest rate lobby'. In the Turkish case, this involved drawing upon a longstanding tradition of actors using fifth column frames against each other, since the experience of the Treaty of Sèvres, wherein several actors were seen to collude with foreign powers to secede from the republic, is frequently referred to in the public sphere. A fifth column frame was hence also utilised by the opposition towards the incumbent during the first term of the AKP, when the opposition claimed that the AKP was betraying the interests of the Turkish Republic to secure its EU accession. Fifth column frames have also been frequently used against the Kurdish movement in Turkey, owing to the aforementioned Sèvres complex and

the related fear that foreign actors may seek to use the movement to bring about the fragmentation of the state. However, in Venezuela and Turkey, the deployment of fifth column frames by the incumbent resulted in radically different outcomes. Following the use of fifth column frames against the opposition in Turkey, the main opposition emphasised their statism and agreement with the incumbent on advancing national interests, while also avoiding strong opposition externalisation. However, in Venezuela, following the use of the fifth column frame, the opposition strove to establish closer ties with external actors and to receive international support to reach their aim of preventing them from being excluded from democratic participation.

1.3. Securitisation

Securitisation has been another mechanism that has contributed to democratic backsliding in both Turkey and Venezuela through presenting the opposition as an existential threat to a referent object, such as the nation, the state or sovereignty. In the case of Venezuela, securitisation can also be said to have triggered a security dilemma, owing to how the securitisations of the opposition and the incumbent resulted in both sides escalating their frames against each other. In this context, the fifth column frame used by the incumbent resulted in the opposition introducing securitisation frames, wherein they presented the incumbent as posing an existential threat to themselves, to the audience of the US and its allies. This resulted in securitisation frames being amplified by the incumbent, following the pressure applied on the Venezuelan incumbent by the US and several other international actors, which only escalated the mutual securitisations of the opposition and the incumbent. In the context of democratic backsliding in Turkey, however, securitisation resulted in a different reaction from the opposition. This was because, in response to securitisation, most actors from within the opposition came to moderate their demands and at least partially

accept the framing of the incumbent. This is demonstrated most clearly by the CHP's statist reflexes, which resulted in it voting in favour of several military operations in Syria, which were called for by the AKP, in the Grand National Assembly. The CHP also did not engage in opposition externalisation as CHP representatives in the Council of Europe case voted alongside the government against criticisms directed towards it (Hürriyet Daily News, 2018). Moreover, the CHP supported the removal of parliamentary immunity, which resulted in one of their own MPs, as well as several HDP MPs, being arrested for charges such as espionage or supporting terrorism. In both Venezuela and Turkey, securitisations, in turn, had the impact of damaging democracy, since, by presenting the other side as a security threat, they undermined the basis for democracy, which involves viewing one's democratic opponent as a legitimate actor.

2. Summary of Findings

There were similarities and differences in how the three mechanisms played out in the contexts of Turkey and Venezuela. Although polarisation, in the given periods, was partly due to both oppositions not seeking to engage in efforts to prevent polarisation, the fifth column mechanism and securitisation operated differently in the two contexts. However, regardless of these differences, both contexts saw the presence of all three mechanisms contributing to the rise of different forms of populism, which ultimately contributed to the development of democratic backsliding. In this study, I find that all three mechanisms also resulted in the efforts of the opposition backfiring and occasionally resulting in the emergence of another mechanism. Therefore, the actions of the oppositions, in both cases, unwittingly contributed to the escalation of democratic backsliding, despite the efforts of the opposition to challenge these processes. In the case of polarisation, due to how the opposition

failed to and arguably did not expend significant effort to overcome forms of polarisation, the agency of the opposition, which drew on historical frames of opposition in both polities, served to exacerbate levels of polarisation. In the context of the fifth column frames used by the incumbent, both responses of the opposition, of either securitising the incumbent or becoming more moderate in the eyes of the incumbent, were insufficient in stopping the trend of democratic backsliding. Moreover, both of these actions can be said to have resulted in further democratic backsliding, either by stifling democratic participation or by triggering a process of mutual securitisation. Similarly, securitisation also placed the opposition in a difficult position as the opposition in both cases either accepted aspects of the securitisation frame of the incumbent, as in the case of the CHP in Turkey, or it engaged in counter-securitisation, as was the case in Venezuela. Both of these options did not serve to prevent democratic backsliding in the two cases. However, although the fifth column and securitisation frames were especially challenging in terms of the options they provided for the opposition, the opposition could arguably have prevented these mechanisms from unfolding by seeking to challenge the levels of polarisation in their societies when the incumbents in both contexts first assumed power.

The differences between the two cases raise the question of what accounts for the differences in the patterns between the incumbent and the opposition in both cases, even though, as has been discussed, both cases are similar in terms of historically being relatively consolidated democracies in their regions. As explained, the key difference between the process of democratic backsliding is that unlike the Turkish case, in Venezuelan the opposition responded to the fifth column frames of the incumbent with a securitisation frame as it amplified the call for assistance from international actors. In the Turkish case, the opposition also deployed a fifth column frame against the opposition, especially during the AKP's first

term, when it appeared more intent on securing EU accession. In addition, the opposition in Turkey has been more hesitant to challenge the securitisation frames of the incumbent, resulting in the opposition often agreeing with some of these frames. Given how the differences centre on how the oppositions respond to frames highlighting the interests of the state in both cases, it makes sense to focus on the differences in the historical development of the Venezuelan and Turkish states. It may indeed be the case that the very different circumstances in which the Venezuelan and Turkish states emerged and developed, notwithstanding their similarities at the start of the time period considered in this thesis, can be said to explain the different stances taken by the opposition. While Venezuela experienced few interstate wars after its founding¹⁶⁰ (Centeno– 1997, pp. 1572 - 1573), Turkey emerged as a product of the wars that resulted in the end of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶¹ This experience of war arguably explains how Turkey is a more centralised state, with actors within the state having a strong ideational tradition of supporting the interests of state, whereas Venezuela is historically a federation with a smaller military and less capacity and need for extensive state control. The differing stances of the oppositions to the fifth column frames and securitisations of the incumbent can hence be attributable to the different histories of their states and the different stances taken towards the state by actors within them.

3. Contributions to the Literature

By adopting a relational approach, this thesis has contributed to the literatures of comparative politics, International Relations and contentious politics. Primarily, the study has argued that the term sustaining contention can lead to understanding how the incumbent can rely on

¹⁶⁰ After becoming independent in 1811, following a war, Venezuela, experienced a civil war in 1868, which was the only other war it experienced in the nineteenth century (Centeno, 1997, pp. 1572 - 1573).

¹⁶¹ While Venezuela experienced relatively few interstate wars, notwithstanding the internal conflicts it experienced, Turkey's founding was preceded by the Russo-Turkish War (1877 – 1878), the Greco-Turkish War of 1897, the Italo-Turkish War of 1911 – 1912, the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, the First World War (1914 - 1918) and the War of Independence (1919 – 1923).

polarisation and contention in processes of rising authoritarianism. In both cases, while the opposition did not reach its goal, the contention was sustained in a way that benefited the incumbent. Consequently, this thesis can help to understand the durability of authoritarianism and the role of opposition in sustaining authoritarianism. This is because contention has become a characteristic of both of the regimes considered in this thesis. Such contention was also shown to be tied closely to the use of frames, which facilitate the collective agency of actors engaged in contentious politics. Crucially, frames were shown not only to play a role in motivating actors to achieve their political goals but also in facilitating their collective agency. Moreover, these frames were tied to frames that were used previously in the political history of both of the countries considered, demonstrating how frames can convey traditions across time in the same political context. However, though this allowed the frames of the opposition to resonate with their core constituencies, they also meant that the frames constructed by the incumbent could draw upon historical analogies to construct the opposition as undemocratic. This was especially the case with the populist frames used by the incumbent in Turkey, to challenge the statist frames of the opposition, as well as the fifth column frames deployed by the Venezuelan incumbent against the opposition. Finally, the thesis has demonstrated how framing can be used to demonstrate how political opportunities are understood and exploited through framing. This, in turn, has demonstrated the usefulness of moving away from a structural conception of political opportunities, since, as has been shown through the focus on transformative events throughout the thesis and how they have been understood, tracing political opportunities involves studying events and how they have been made sense of by individual actors.

In terms of contributing to the literature on International Relations, this thesis has contributed to the literature by demonstrating how the reception of international support on the part of the

opposition is often not sufficient and in fact, can be detrimental to the success of the opposition. This occurred in a context in which the liberal international order was being undermined, due to the rise of anti-Americanism and anti-Western sentiment at the time of the Iraq War, which had an impact on the two cases being considered. Given high levels of anti-Westernism, insider-outsider coalitions between the opposition and prominent international actors which were seen as pro-American or Western contributed or had the potential to contribute to the framing of the opposition as a fifth column. In this sense, even though the earlier literature in International Relations has argued that the involvement of international actors, including states and INGOs, in democratisation or other campaigns was likely to have a positive effect on those campaigns, this thesis has demonstrated how the reverse could be the case. In Turkey, elements of the opposition which were charged with collaborating with foreign actors felt that they needed to emphasise how they were working in the national interests of the country, which meant that they moderated their demands to and allowed the incumbent to define the national interest. In Venezuela, on the other hand, in a manner which also did not contribute to democratisation, the opposition securitised the incumbent, which resulted in a breakdown of politics and the emergence of a state of affairs in which the incumbent and the opposition began to see each other as security threats. Moreover, this thesis has shown that the claims of opposition agents can also be blocked and manipulated by other non-democratic or authoritarian states who share interests with the incumbent in question, as in the case of China and Russia shielding Venezuela from being investigated in the UN Security Council. The support that the incumbent in Turkey received as part of the refugee deal also resulted in the prevention of the leverage of the EU, which could previously use conditionality to promote reform in Turkey. Finally, all of these examples demonstrate how frames and transformative events cannot be viewed as contained

within single political units but that they have potential influences beyond and across individual domestic contexts.

The dynamics of the interaction demonstrate that the role of populism should be integrated while studying to the characteristic of these regimes and their foreign policies. This is because the aforementioned mechanisms contributed to populism and shaped how the agency of the opposition could not effectively challenge the incumbent. However, it is also the case that international actors and commentators may come to view populist governments as democratising their polities. Yet there can be a dilemma that while populist incumbents can have democratic characteristics, and present themselves as representing the people, they can push an agenda of increasing authoritarianism. The democratic activism of agents can also, unintentionally contribute to the process of the consolidation of authoritarianism. Most importantly populist actors usually frame electoral processes as the mechanism that demonstrates “the popular will” (Sözen 2018), rather than functioning as a means of facilitating checks and balances and pluralist democratic engagement. Left populism’s emphasis on popular inclusion as a means of defending its own legitimacy (Rhodes-Purdy, 2015) can, indeed, be observed in the Venezuelan case¹⁶². In Turkey, on the other hand, tensions occurred between the CHP’s focus on the state and its tutelary institutions and the AKP’s focus on the need to democratise these institutions. The AKP certainly appeared to be democratising Turkey through the reforms it was initiating, including to many international actors, like the EU and the United States. In this context, the CHP’s arguments that these democratising moves could result in corruption and the tyranny of the majority, were only taken seriously by international actors following the Gezi Park protests of 2013, but, subsequently, with the refugee deal negotiated with the EU in 2016, criticisms were more

¹⁶² Venezuela, along with Bolivia and Ecuador has also been cited as a case of left populism (de la Torre, 2013).

mented. Therefore, the democratic characteristics of hybrid authoritarian and democratic regimes, such as the two cases considered, make it especially challenging for domestic and international actors seeking to prevent or reverse democratic backsliding. International actors may also choose to define a regime as either democratic or authoritarian on the basis of their own interests.

The framework presented in this thesis can contribute to studies of other cases which are similar in some regards to the two cases being studied. Hungary, India, Brazil and the Philippines, for instance, have been identified in the literature as cases of regimes that have experienced democratic backsliding and the rise of populist regimes (Diamond, 2021). Although each of these cases have different historical trajectories and are of differing levels of power, at the international level, some of them resemble the two cases studied in this thesis to a greater extent, meaning that the comparative case study can contribute to research on these cases. For instance, Hungary, despite having a history of non-democratic and totalitarian regimes, also has a history of democratic and liberal movements, dating back to the nineteenth century. Moreover, similarly to Venezuela, these elites were in a relatively peripheral position in relation to an imperial centre, prior to the independence of Hungary. Consequently, similar sets of historical frames may have been used in Hungary, in the context of the democratic backsliding process there (Toomey, 2020). The postcolonial aspect of the other cases as well as Venezuela also means that the use of frames in these contexts can be compared with framing in the Venezuelan context of backsliding. While Turkey was never colonised, its subjection to relations of hierarchy at the global level, can also allow it, along with Venezuela, to be included in comparisons with other states which have experienced democratic backsliding, and which were also historically subject to relations of hierarchy at the international level. Specifically, such comparisons can focus on whether or

not the three mechanisms of polarisation, the use of the fifth column frame and the securitisation frames are present in these cases as well. Given how the incumbents in all of these states have been said to have pursued foreign policies that have recently been characterised as populist, there is some indication that fifth column frames were deployed within these cases, building also on forms of polarisation within societies (Plagemann and Destradi, 2019; Visnovitz and Jenne, 2021). Moreover, the striving of incumbents in these societies to realign their states may have also resulted in forms of securitisation or counter-securitisation, akin to the processes of securitisation that have been discussed in this thesis.

4. Further Debates and Research Agenda

This thesis has demonstrated that increasing authoritarianism in Venezuela and Turkey came with an active opposition movement marked by the incumbent's ability to sustain popular support, overcome elite splits, and the use increasing repressive measures. Further studies can investigate the dynamics of solidaristic alliances that the incumbents are building in the context of challenging the liberal international order and its norms. The challenging of the liberal international order is being studied increasingly (Söderbaum, Spandler, and Pacciardi, 2021), especially with a focus on states that have populist foreign policies. Yet, there is a lack of emphasis on how populist states form partnerships to challenge the liberal international order. These agents formed solidaristic partnerships which can be established and utilised to challenge other existing understandings of international order. For instance, Venezuela increasingly looked for new alliances as its existing alliances lessened after 2013, with the "Pink Tide" in Latin America declining. Turkey, on the other hand, has sought to contest and advance its own definitions of some of the key concepts of the liberal international order, such as human rights and democracy, following the Gezi Park protests. The AKP has also

increasingly pursued a foreign policy that seeks to emphasise the importance of challenging Western international institutions, with Erdoğan frequently challenging the composition of the UN Security Council. The incumbents studied in this thesis, increased their solidaristic framing with each other, following Juan Guadio's claim to be the interim president with Erdogan stating, "stand up tall Brother Maduro, stand up tall. We are at your side" (VoaNews, 2019.) The amplification of solidarity framing presented here, also refers to how these states promote an identity through foreign policy. Consequently, foreign policies of Venezuela and Turkey could be studied jointly to explore the dynamics of contesting the liberal international order and forming solidaristic partnerships.

Secondly, and relatedly to the suggestion above, further studies could also focus further on the development of the state in both contexts and regions. Studying the process of the development and ongoing evolution of the two states would also help in understanding how the legacies of both states are shaping the current populist turn in their foreign policies, if at all. This is because both Turkey and Venezuela pursued foreign policies that sought to ensure their recognition by the established Western states throughout their history, which raises the question of whether what is currently occurring is a realignment in terms of the actors that incumbents in both states are seeking recognition from. As has been noted, the comparative study of the circumstances that resulted in the emergence and development of the two states can also help account for the differences that were identified in the democratic backsliding processes in both states. This can, in turn, allow more general statements concerning the democratic backsliding processes in similar states, such as states with a strong state tradition like Turkey or states that have experienced relatively fewer interstate conflicts, such as Venezuela, to be developed and explored. Relatedly, building on the observation of the reluctance of actors within the opposition in Turkey to establish ties with international actors,

when compared to the lack of hesitance on the part of many actors in the Venezuelan opposition, it may also be useful to study the connection between international ties and the historical development of states. Many of the movements that the CHP, for instance, historically identifies as its predecessors were diasporic movements which had transnational links to Ottoman intellectual networks in Europe and the Middle East, with the movement that eventually became the CHP taking on a more nationalist character in the course of the wars of the early twentieth century. Studying the comparative development of the two states in further detail would serve to identify how and whether the divergent historical development of the states created environments in which transnational links were considered more acceptable by the opposition in Venezuela but frowned upon in Turkey.¹⁶³ Such studies would therefore serve to demonstrate how the differences in the history of the development of the state can result in different paths to democratic backsliding.

While this thesis has not engaged extensively with the scholarship on media and framing, further research can benefit from looking at the role of media in the context of democratic backsliding. The media was targeted in the process of increasing authoritarianism in both cases, leading to multiple types of repression. Television channels were fined, shut down, critical journalists faced derogatory frames as traitors and were imprisoned. While this was the case, the incumbents aimed to construct a loyal media. However, in studying the media, it is crucial to note that the media environment is often only as vibrant as is permitted by the state. This would mean that it would be expected that the media environment would come to be limited as a result of the processes of democratic backsliding and declining rights in both states. Nevertheless, this thesis has demonstrated how the opposition made use of the media

¹⁶³ Additionally, in this regard, it may also be useful to examine the temporality of the founding of the two states, since Venezuela was founded in 1811, in regional and historical circumstances that differed greatly from Turkey's founding in 1923.

early on in the course of the process of democratic backsliding, through announcing their approaches of nonrecognition through the media. Further studies could therefore build on the role played by the media in sustaining and perhaps increasing polarisation, as well as highlighting the other possible routes out of greater polarisation, which could have been enabled by the media.

5. Epilogue

Having demonstrated how the opposition can play a role, alongside authoritarian incumbents, in resulting in democratic backsliding, this thesis is intended to be a provocation to studies of democratic backsliding and to actors generally concerned with this process, including practitioners. Studies have all too often operated with the assumption of an authoritarian incumbent embedded in a zero-sum game, in which it is challenged by an opposition that would act as a democratising force. The short time frame or the “structural bias” of studies of frames in contentious politics has prevented these studies from recognising how the identities of actors, such as the opposition and the incumbent, are developed in interaction with each other, in processes in which historical and cultural frames present in the background are frequently recycled and re-articulated. Recognising how frames are central to the formation of collective forms of agency, in the form of the incumbent and the opposition, raises the question of how these two entities are shaped by broader mechanisms, which can be studied by viewing the changing or sustained nature of the frames that sustain them. Being mindful of changing or sustained patterns of framing reveals different mechanisms that can shape these interactions and, ultimately, their outcomes. It is the argument of this thesis that the idea of sustaining contention is an outcome of such an interaction, which has hitherto been neglected in the literature. The literature has, instead, been focused on success stories of

democratisation or has focused overly on cases in which it is assumed that the victory of the opposition will result in democratisation. By focusing on such cases of sustained contention, the basic assumptions of the literature on democratic backsliding, and the role of the international in spreading or averting it, can hence be re-examined. Turkey and Venezuela are highly significant cases to take into consideration in this regard. The broad consensus on both these cases considered them the most democratised states within their regions. However, both undergone democratic backsliding that is arguably been sustained, rather than necessarily been hindered, by the actions of the political opposition.

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