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HOW DO AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES WIN RE-ELECTION DURING AN
ECONOMIC RECESSION?

By

MST SARMIN AKTER MAZUMDER

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,

The City University of New York

2023

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APPROVAL

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

How Do Authoritarian Regimes Win Re-Election During an Economic Recession?

By

Mst Sarmin Akter Mazumder

Thesis Advisor: Prof. Mark D. Ungar

Democracies around the world continue to decline at the hands of democratic leaders elected by majority vote in free and fair elections. Turkey, one of the oldest democracies in the Middle East has experienced democratic breakdown under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Similarly, Venezuela was one of the longest-running and most established liberal democracies in the Latin American region. Hugo Chávez and his successor Nicolás Maduro have turned the country into one of the most authoritarian regimes in the world. Turkey has been experiencing a prolonged economic decline for nearly a decade. Venezuela's economy has suffered due to the policies adopted by the Chávez administration. How could an electoral authoritarian win re-election even under difficult economic conditions? Despite the fast-growing economic challenges, why haven't the opposition parties been more successful in preventing democratic erosions in these countries? This study takes a closer look at the state of opposition actors and points out how the oppositions in both countries have failed to coordinate their efforts to prevent the democratic backsliding in these countries, rather opposition strategies reinforced incumbent's attempt to create personalization of power. The fragmentation among the opposition actors and their inability to work together have contributed to the emergence of a one-party government system in these countries. Democracy can be better protected when the opposition actors become united claiming electoral fairness and other democratic norms.

Keywords: authoritarianism, opposition, Turkey, Venezuela, fragmentation, coordination

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In recent years, electoral democracies have experienced the surge of autocratic tendencies where autocrats mask their autocratic agendas behind a guise of democracy and try to label themselves as strongmen leaders. It has long been assumed by most political scientists that once democracy in a particular country has been consolidated, it is safe. However, Foa and Mounk (2017) argue that democratic consolidation might not be a one-way street after all. Providing examples of several liberal democracies such as Poland, Hungary, and Greece where populist leaders have achieved unprecedented successes, these scholars contend that such a trend calls into doubt the confidence in the stability of supposedly “consolidated” liberal democracies. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2019), in their book “How Democracies Die”, point out two ways of democratic breakdown. One of the ways to break a democracy is through military power. Today’s democratic breakdown begins at the ballot box. The electoral road to democratic breakdown is dangerously deceptive. The death of democracy through a coup, as in Pinochet’s Chile, is immediate and apparent to all. In a classic coup d’état, the incumbent is killed, imprisoned, or forced into exile. The constitution is suspended or scrapped. However, for Levitsky and Ziblatt, there is no single moment-no military coup or suspension of the constitution on the electoral road. People still vote in elections. The gradual erosion of democracy, on the electoral road, is almost unnoticeable. Democracies around the world continue to decline at the hands of democratic leaders elected by majority vote in free and fair elections. Democratic leaders, who fear losing power, deliberately create distrust in elections. Unscrupulous politicians tend to undermine and shatter the very institutions that bring them to

power (Repucci and Slipowitz, 2022). These leaders subvert rule of law, freedom of press, peaceful coexistence of ethnic and religious groups (Galston, 2020).

The role of opposition parties

Scholars in Political Science have focused greater attention on the role of the political executives in understanding and analyzing a country's political transition. While executive-centered view of politics or executive-centered research agendas are common in the study of Political Science, there is a notable scarcity of work devoted to revealing how exactly the political oppositions in different types of political regimes can play an important role in a country's transition toward democracy or dictatorship. A strong and constructive opposition is a necessary safeguard for democratic stability. As for Dahl (1966), the existence of an opposition party can be regarded as very nearly the most distinctive characteristics of democracy itself. He emphasizes that the absence of an opposition party could be seen as compelling evidence for the absence of democracy. Opposition parties play a significant role in criticizing the incumbent, responding to the government's specific policy issues, and framing debates. A vigilant opposition can prevent potential misuse of government powers by keeping a watch over the ruling party, thus also preventing it from becoming an authoritarian power. The voters view an effective opposition as providing a credible alternative to the repressive regime. Such an opposition is lacking when the autocratic ruler cracks it; or the opposition is inherently weak due to internal conflicts and fragmentation, poor leadership, and lack of adequate resources.

Democratic erosion does not happen in a single day. Instead, it develops incrementally, providing the opposition ample opportunities to respond. The opposition can use institutional (e.g., significant presence in Congress and courts) and non-institutional resources (e.g., economic resources and its ability to demonstrate) against the government to prevent it from becoming an

autocrat. How the opposition uses its resources to fight the would-be autocrat's initial attempts to subvert democratic institutions are, therefore, critical to better understanding why some incumbents are successful in their attempts to erode democracy-i.e., increase their executive powers and extend their tenure beyond a second term-and others fail to do so. When the opposition uses institutional or extra-institutional strategies with moderate goals, it can preserve its legitimacy domestically and abroad. However, when the opposition uses extra- institutional strategies with radical goals such as to oust the incumbent before the end of his constitutional term, it may lose its legitimacy domestically and abroad. Radical responses can have detrimental consequences for democracy and provide the authoritarian incumbent with more scope to repress the opposition and enough support to push for additional aggressive attempts (Gamboa, 2017).

The behavior of the opposition parties can exert influence the incumbent's tenures (Ziegfeld and Tudor, 2017). The performance of the opposition actors may sometimes stabilize the authoritarian regime even further. This happens when an authoritarian government manages to co-opt some portion of opposition parties into the ruling alliance to create a 'loyal opposition'. Opposition parties' response regarding the co-option offered by the authoritarian ruler largely depends on the characteristics of the organizational structure of the opposition parties. The cases where opposition parties are organizationally extensive and where the internal decision-making power is distributed among different party members, co-option offers from the autocratic rulers are less likely to be accepted. Whether an opposition would be able to disrupt the stability of the dictatorial regime or would be absorbed by the government is also dependent on the party leadership of the opposition. In a competitive authoritarianism, one of the key strategies the opposition parties use is the formation of electoral alliances which increases their chances of

winning elections. However, creating such a ‘loyal opposition’ co-opted by the autocratic regime may weaken the opposition’s efforts in building electoral alliances (Helms, 2022).

Disadvantages of fragmented opposition: an opportunity for the autocrat

One study of the European integration process in Central and East European democracies observed that fragmented oppositions appear to weaken not only political competition but may also weaken popular support for democracy (Meka, 2022). A fragmented opposition significantly obstructs efforts to unseat a dominant incumbent. Hence, authoritarian regimes may employ different divide-and-conquer strategies to prevent opposition forces from cooperating with one another. By creating a non-level playing field, these autocrats keep the opposition divided. Such incumbents may co-opt segments of the opposition parties to inhibit coordination. Another important strategy of autocrats includes the creation of a ‘state-sanctioned opposition party.’ Such opposition does not threaten the incumbent as it remains under the control of the ruling party. The formation of the ‘state-sanctioned opposition’ party aimed at funnelling votes away from the opposition. The creation of a centre-left parastatal opposition party in Russia is the example of such state sanctioned opposition. A fragmented opposition cannot agree on nominating a common candidate and creating a joint platform thereby splitting the opposition votes. Thus, fragmented opposition fails to pose any serious threat to autocrats (Jiménez, 2021).

The importance of forming coalitions

Electoral authoritarianism has three common characteristics: an uneven playing field for the opposition, elections are neither free nor fair, and a widespread crackdown on fundamental freedoms. In electoral authoritarian systems, elections occur regularly, yet those elections are often planned in favor of the ruling party. The elections are not competitive since the incumbent severely curtails political freedoms. These authoritarian regimes hold multi-party elections and

allow opposition parties' presence in the polls mainly to enhance their legitimacy (Yilmaz and Galib, 2018). While sometimes, the opposition, in principle, gets a chance to come to power by elections, however, it faces challenges from the ruling party. Sometimes the authoritarian regimes hold elections to curry favor with the international community, norms and regulations. They get a better understanding about the followers and challengers, establish their dominance, and weaken the domestic opposition by co-opting parties in the opposition alliance. Whatever the reason the authoritarian incumbents decide to hold elections, those elections are not intended to allow alternation via the ballot (Gandhi, 2013).

Why do opposition parties in authoritarian elections become interested in forming electoral coalitions? An organized and united opposition is one of the biggest threats to authoritarian leaders. Authoritarian incumbents apply their strategies to win elections by any means necessary. Such autocratic leaders have countless instruments at their disposal to give the would-be-challengers a hard time and prevent the opposition actors from becoming too powerful. The opposition, competing in authoritarian elections, faces uncertainty regarding the willingness of the incumbent to step down from power in the event of an electoral defeat (Helms, 2022). In such a highly unequal campaign environment that favors the incumbent, the opposition parties, if they decide to participate in the elections, are required to develop strategies to maximize their support. The opposition may choose to form pre-electoral alliances so that their coordinated electoral strategies make it difficult for the ruling party to win re-election. Study on the formation of pre-electoral coalitions in elections under authoritarian rulers finds that the formation of such coalitions has significant effects on electoral results. A study conducted by Gandhi and Reuter (2013) studies on 413 authoritarian elections from 1946 to 2006 has identified 65 pre-electoral coalitions among opposition parties which comprise almost 16% of all

authoritarian elections of that period. To contest against the dominant incumbents, opposition parties do three common things: parties nominate joint candidates; parties agree not to run against each other in some areas; in multi-round elections, parties agree to support each other's candidates (Gandhi and Reuter, 2013). Opposition parties' strategies to nominate common candidates minimizes the splitting of their vote shares and maximizes their chances of victory. Other than participating in elections, it can challenge the incumbent through coordinated protests and events. As a form of protest, the opposition parties may simply boycott the unfair elections. Research on election boycotts suggests that opposition in non-democracies resort to this tactic when they believe that the unfairness in the election process is too high and that their chances of winning the elections are significantly low (Jamiénez, 2020). Some scholars explain opposition coordination as an outcome. According to that explanation, the process of democratic backsliding gives rise to the democracy-authoritarian cleavage, which gradually overshadows the historically rooted religious and class cleavages among the parties in opposition (Selçuk & Hekimci, 2020).

Challenges of forming opposition alliances

Forming pre-electoral coalitions is deeply challenging for several reasons. There exist challenges of credible commitment and ideological compromises. Though opposition parties join coalitions to win majorities, forming pre-electoral alliances only sometimes ensure the electoral success of the opposition coalitions. It is argued by Political Science scholars that policy agreements made publicly among the members of the pre-electoral coalitions help them pursue those policy goals after the coalitions win the election (Kellam, 2015). However, one important finding in the politics of opposition coordination is the failure of the opposition coalitions even when opposition party leaders successfully negotiate mergers. There exists uncertainty about

how much coalition members can trust one another to honor any agreement during or after the election. The coalition partners may face difficulties to reach an agreement regarding the distribution of cabinet portfolios among them if the coalition wins a legislative majority. A party within a pre-electoral coalition may even refuse to go into government with coalition members. This is because, once elected, the president is not bound to the pre-electoral pledges (Gandhi, 2013). Although the formation of an opposition coalition in electoral autocracy offers the best hope for a transition to democracy, forming such alliances also requires convincing opposition voters. Because the supporters of the opposition parties may not be willing to engage in cross-party voting. Leaders of the opposition parties decide that coalition formation may not be worth the costly effort when supporters are less likely to follow their own leaders in the gamble (Gandhi and Ong, 2019). Party members of ideologically divided oppositions may not tolerate ideological compromises for alliance formation. Also, the supporters of an opposition party may abandon their own party if the party makes too many compromises with their ideological rivals. Gandhi and Ong's (2019) study on the Malaysian elections in 1999 suggests that one important source for the failure of the opposition coalition in authoritarian elections stems from the opposition voters themselves. In the 1999 general election, the Chinese- and Indian-backed Democratic Action Party (DAP) entered an alliance with Malay-Islamist Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) together with the multi-ethnic Part Keadilan Rakyat. The alliance failed to emphasize ethnic minority issues that were crucial for the Chinese and Indian voters. Consequently, the DAP lost a significant share of its supporters in the elections.

Case studies

This thesis will test the theory of opposition coordination through the case studies of Turkey and Venezuela. These countries have been selected because they are two of the few cases

where democratic erosion has turned into a full blown breakdown as the authoritarian leaders in these countries have personalized their control of the government system. Turkey, one of the oldest democracies in the Middle East, experienced a democratic breakdown under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Similarly, the longstanding democracy in Venezuela has experienced democratic backsliding under the leadership of both Hugo Chávez and his successor Nicolás Maduro. This paper analyzes the similarities in the process of democratic breakdown in Turkey and Venezuela and points out how the oppositions in both countries have failed to coordinate their efforts to prevent the democratic backsliding in these countries; rather opposition strategies reinforced the incumbent's attempt to personalize power. Leaders of both countries have similarities in terms of their contexts of emergence, route to power, and their control over state institutions. In both countries, severe economic crises triggered legitimacy crises of the traditional governments. The traditional parties who were in power of the governments could not present themselves as credible alternatives, which paved the way for radical outsiders Hugo Chávez and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to win the presidencies. Both Venezuela and Turkey have exceeded democratic erosion and have experienced reversion to authoritarianism by undermining the democratic institutions, cracking down the opposition parties, imprisoning political opponents, and silencing the media. For Venezuela, reversion to authoritarianism took eight years, and for Turkey it took four years (Table 1). In both countries, executives with hegemonic aspirations sought to strengthen and extend their rule. These countries are now categorized as 'Not Free' in the Freedom House Index. While there are several common ways democracy in Turkey and Venezuela has been eroding, this paper highlights roles played by opposition actors as one of the common ways of democratic breakdown.

Country	Coding	Episode Start Date
Turkey	Erosion from electoral democracy	2010
	Reversion to authoritarianism	2014
Venezuela	Erosion from electoral democracy	1998
	Reversion to authoritarianism	2006

Table 1: Episodes of democratic backsliding in Turkey and Venezuela (Ref: Haggard and Kaufman, 2021).

Contributions of this study

It is assumed that once the would-be autocrats are in office, there is little that can be done against their hegemonic ambitions. However, this view often obscures the role of those actors out of power (Gamboa, 2017). By comparing the dynamics of democratic erosion in Turkey and Venezuela, this study brings attention to the opposition, an often-overlooked actor and points out how the roles of opposition actors are also responsible for the erosion of democratic breakdown in those countries. These two countries’ experiences can serve as leading indicators of potential challenges to democratic stability. This comparative study also shows how coordinated efforts of opposition actors can challenge the incumbent’s predominance, undermine its parliamentary majority, and win elections. The findings of this study have implications for opposition coordination in authoritarian rules. Since most of the literature on democratic erosion focuses heavily on the role of chief executives, this study aims to contribute to the literature on the role of opposition in the democratic erosion of a country.

This thesis is organized as follows: After the introduction, the second chapter contains a literature review offering scholarly contributions to the opposition strategies, especially on

opposition coordination in authoritarian elections. Literature on autocratization in Turkey and Venezuela will also be overviewed. In the third chapter, I present the case study on Turkey. Then, the case study on Venezuela is provided in the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter briefly describes examples of autocracies in other countries and opposition strategies. Finally, the paper concludes with the major findings of this comparative analysis. In the end, a list of bibliographical references will be provided.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the existing literature on autocratization in Turkey and Venezuela scrutinizes how the strategies and behavior of the incumbents contribute to the personalization of politics in these countries. Since Erdoğan came to power, Political science scholars have widely analyzed Erdoğan's dominant role in Turkish politics. Similarly, the democratic breakdown in Venezuela under Chávez and Maduro has also been broadly examined by the scholars. Here, I present a literature review that emphasizes the role of opposition in autocratization in Turkey and Venezuela.

Elections under authoritarian regimes are different from the elections under democracies. Gandhi and Reuter (2013) examine the electoral environment from the perspective of opposition and show why the electoral environment in autocracies is very different from that in established democracies. Opposition parties in autocracies face incumbents who are well positioned to employ the coercive apparatus and state resources to ensure their re-elections. In democracies, there is certainty that if the ruling party loses re-election, it will step down from power. Whereas, in autocracies, the opposition competes in an electoral environment characterized by greater uncertainty about the incumbent who may refuse to step down if it loses re-elections. They also face much greater uncertainty about the capabilities and intentions of their bargaining partners. The authors analyse factors that account for the behavior of opposition parties in autocracies. Their study points out a different set of factors that may influence the decision of parties to enter electoral coalitions. These factors include electoral rules, ideological cleavages, asymmetry among parties and voter uncertainty. The analysis also suggests that the stable presence of a major opposition party and state-sanctioned harassment of the opposition are both positively

related to the formation of coalitions. Although repression by the authoritarian incumbent may motivate opposition parties to form pre-electoral coalitions to remove the incumbent from power, however, incumbents may consider forming a pre-coalition as threatening and, in response, deploy more state-sponsored repression.

Helms (2022) analyzes the strategies and behavior of political opposition in democratic and autocratic regimes. Helms contends that the autocratic leaders take the decision to tolerate some opposition party activity to help stabilize their hold on power through elections. In authoritarian elections, there is a heavy bias towards the regime and incumbent parties, opposition voters feel alienated from the state and stay away from the polls. Besides, organizationally weak opposition parties' decision to become co-opted by the autocratic incumbent diminishes their ability to disrupt the stability of an authoritarian regime. Helms' study points out several strategic choices and behaviors of opposition parties in the electoral arena, including cooperation and coalition building, election boycotts, using institutional resources and extra-constitutional strategies. The author highlights that extra-institutional strategies have 'empowering' features; those, if used by the opposition parties, increase support for autocratic leaders instead of creating constraints.

Selçuk and Hekimci (2020) examine the evolution of opposition coordination in Turkey in elections between 2014 and 2019. Their study points out that the democratic backsliding gave rise to the democracy-authoritarian cleavage which gradually overshadowed historically rooted ethnic, religious and social cleavages in Turkey. This political cleavage incentivized the parties in opposition to coordinate in the form of nominating joint candidates, strategic voting, running a unified campaign, not competing in certain areas against each other, and establishing an official alliance. As a result, despite the government's various attempts to manipulate the elections, the

opposition successfully challenged the regime. The opposition in the 2015 and 2018 elections successfully undermined the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) parliamentary majority. Moreover, in the 2019 local elections, the opposition defeated the ruling AKP in four out of the five largest cities including Istanbul and Ankara.

Highlighting Turkey as a competitive authoritarian regime, Korkmaz (2022) sheds light on how the regime has changed over time. Although the AKP government took steps toward democratization in its first term, it began to increase its control over the state institutions and bureaucracy in its second term. The study illustrates how the AKP government has consolidated its power by crushing the opposition. How Erdoğan gradually transformed the parliamentary system of government into a hyper-presidential system devoid of checks and balances; and effectively captured all parliamentary authority. The government amended the election laws; curtailed press freedom and freedom of expression; used state resources in election campaigns. The opposition actors and alliances have also adopted different strategies throughout the dynamic autocratization process. The opposition began forming alliances after the 2011 elections when the ruling party started to consolidate its power. However, the opposition could not reach an agreement to put up a joint candidate against Erdoğan in the 2014 elections, instead they divided into two groups. Although the opposition formed an alliance in the 2018 elections, they failed to nominate joint candidates to fight Erdoğan which has only benefited Erdoğan. In the 2019 local elections, the opposition successfully nominated joint candidates in metropolitan areas instead of running against each other, leading to electoral victories.

Selçuk, Hekimci & Erpul's (2019) research seeks to examine the extent to which the opposition leaders' behavior reinforced the personalization of Turkish politics. To answer their research question, the study examines the speeches of the opposition leaders qualitatively and

quantitatively at the parliamentary meetings. Highlighting Erdoğan's growing personal domination of Turkish politics especially during his third term as prime minister (2011-2014), the authors argue that the opposition leaders through their speeches reinforced the personalization of Turkish politics in various degrees. The Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli have launched several personal attacks on Erdoğan, thus reinforcing the Erdoğanization of Turkish politics. The study analyzes 146 speeches of Kılıçdaroğlu and Bahçeli between 2011 and 2014. According to their findings, over time, both opposition leaders increasingly referred to Erdoğan in proportion to the ruling party. These leaders more frequently targeted Erdoğan with personal insults during parliamentary meetings and different protests such as the Gezi Park protests and the Corruption Scandal. They framed Erdoğan as a dictator who collaborated with the separatists, undermining Turkish democracy. The opposition actors' personal attacks provoked Erdoğan to take become increasingly authoritarian.

Arslantaş & Arslantaş (2020) examine the changes in the Turkish party system from 1923 to 1950 and highlight the role of Turkish opposition in this change. According to their analysis, the opposition in Turkey, according to their analysis, suffered from a lack of unity within the party and experienced intense intra-party rivalry which made them closer to the governing parties than to each other. The highly fragmented members in opposition did not have any comprehensive program to attract voters. As a result, the opposition was unable to open a unique front against the introduction of presidentialism in Turkey. In addition, the opposition lacked any cross-class support that might jeopardize the AKP's grip on power. The combination of all these weaknesses in opposition parties has resulted in the dominance of the right-wing parties even if they have been unresponsive to voters' demands. Their study suggests that while fragmented

opposition gave rise to the emergence of a one-party government in Turkey because of the excessive polarization it induces, the existence of a bilateral opposition prolongs AKP's one-party government as voters vote for the largest party to prevent the opposition camp from holding on to power.

Literature on opposition coordination seeks to explain what drives opposition parties to coordinate in autocratic regimes. Jiménez's (2021) analysis in the case of Venezuela under Chávez reveals that opposition parties' decision-making and strategy formation is influenced by the amount of repression they faced from the autocratic regime. Her study examines the causal relationship between repression and opposition coordination and suggests that repression by the incumbent has a curvilinear relationship with opposition coordination. She argues that different levels of repression lead to different types of opposition coordination. When the levels of repression are either very high or very low, activities of opposition coordination tend to be limited, and forms of cooperation will be informal. By contrast, when repression is at an intermediate level, opposition parties are significantly more likely to coordinate formally with each other to dislodge autocratic incumbents. In support of her argument, the author presents empirical evidence of opposition coordination in Venezuela between 1999-2018. In her study, an unlevel playing field, and partial abuse of state institutions, resources or media have been considered as low repression. A widespread and systematic violation of civil liberties, and widespread abuse of state resources or media have been considered as intermediate repression. In contrast, the government has absolute control over state resources and media, banning of opposition parties, widespread human rights violations, systematic harassment or even assassination of opposition leaders are considered as high repression.

In many democracies, democratically elected governments have attempted to undermine democratic institutions to increase their executive powers and extending their tenure. Destroying institutional checks and balances and abusing institutional reforms, some presidents with hegemonic aspirations have transformed their democracies into competitive authoritarianism, while others have failed to do so. Gamboa's (2017) comparative historical analysis of two countries in Latin America-Venezuela and Colombia demonstrates that oppositions' strategies and goals are critical to understanding why some presidents successfully erode democracy while others are not. Chávez in Venezuela was able to erode democracy successfully, while Uribe in Colombia failed to do so. In authoritarian elections, the opposition is required to fight against a government that, despite its hegemonic desires, was democratically elected. While the actions of the incumbent are always instrumental in the survival or breakdown of democracy, the reaction of opposition to executive aggrandizement is critical to the democratic survival. The opposition can use institutional or extra-institutional strategies with moderate as well as radical goals. Radical goals aim to oust the president his constitutional terms end. Whereas moderate goals aim at thwarting the president's project but do not seek to prevent the president from completing his constitutional term. Gamboa's study reveals that during the first years of these governments, the opposition in both Colombia and Venezuela had some institutional leverage. The opposition in Colombia used that institutional leverage and chose institutional and extra-institutional strategies that protected Colombia's institutional resources by preventing Uribe's second re-election reform. The opposition in Venezuela, in contrast, rejected that leverage and used radical extra-institutional strategies to oust the president before the completion of his tenure.

Cleary and Öztürk (2020) analysis, based on comparative case studies of five countries-Turkey under Erdoğan (2002-2017), Venezuela under Hugo Chávez (1999-2009), Thailand

under Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006), Bolivia under Evo Morales (2006-2019), and Ecuador under Rafael Correa (2007-2017)- reveals how the actions of the opposition actors during the process of executive aggrandizement influenced the regime outcomes. They argue that while moderate behavior of the opposition is likely to result in democratic survival, radical behavior of the opposition, on the other hand, significantly enhances the risk of democratic breakdown. According to the authors, the context of an action or the explicit goal of a behavior matter in determining whether an action is moderate or radical. The authors illustrate that, not all protests of the opposition are the same; a pre-election protest with a demand for the inclusion of a particular political party is relatively moderate. While a protest calling for the military with an intention to remove the incumbent is clearly radical action. Similarly, challenging an executive order through judicial means can be considered as a moderate behavior, whereas, trying to use allies within the judiciary to ban the incumbent's political party is radical. The authors' analysis shows that the radical behavior of the opposition actors in Turkey and Venezuela resulted in the incumbent takeover. At the same time, moderate behavior of the opposition actors in Ecuador and Bolivia resulted in democratic survival and incumbent removal respectively. In Thailand, the opposition actors after the first electoral cycle became radical that led to incumbent removal. Their findings on regime outcomes suggest that moderation does not always guarantee democratic survival. It is also evident from the analysis that radical responses are risky gambles.

CHAPTER III: TURKEY

Turkey was once considered as a role model for Muslim countries for its achievement in attaining democracy. But the failure of traditional parties to manage the economic crisis in Turkey 2000-2001 reinforced support for a strongman leader as an alternative to liberal democracy. In the aftermath of the overwhelming economic crisis, Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, promising economic and political liberalization. Nevertheless, during Erdoğan's regime, Turkey has instead moved on a deeply illiberal, authoritarian path. During Erdoğan's early years in power, the AKP government passed some liberalizing reforms to recover the economy. As a result of those reforms, Turkey witnessed economic growth and development in the first period of the AKP government. Per capita GDP increased from \$3,100 in 2001 to \$12,507 in 2013. The government's achievements in the country's democracy and economy during the AKP's early years helped launch membership negotiations with the European Union (EU). Turkey had become a model for the neighboring countries in Europe undertaking reforms. Erdoğan's continued electoral success during the AKP's initial years can be linked to its strong economic performance of the Turkish economy. However, this economic growth and positive impression regarding democratic performance did not last long (Kirişci and Sloat, 2019). Erdoğan started leaning on his authoritarian identity when economic recovery began to wane during the latter part of the 2010s. The government curtailed media freedom and severely undermined judicial independence. Today in Turkey, elections continue, but like other institutions, they lack key democratic requirements. The repressive political environment and dramatic decline in freedom have placed Turkey at the very top of the list of countries experiencing the sharpest declines in freedoms in the last ten years (Freedom

House Report, 2021). Over the past decade, the country has been on a steady downward trajectory economically. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated Turkey's economic crisis (BBC News, 2020). Despite Erdoğan's political hegemony, his electoral support was slightly over half of the electorate even at the height of his popularity (Esen, 2022). How could an electoral authoritarian win re-election even under difficult economic conditions? Despite the fast-growing economic challenges as well as a dramatic decline in Erdoğan's popularity, why haven't the opposition parties been more successful? Repression of opposition is considered one of the important instruments authoritarian leaders use to retain power (Escribà-Folch, 2013). However, repression alone cannot provide necessary stability to autocratic regimes as repression can be costly and may have destabilizing effects in the long run (Yilmaz et al., 2020). Although most of the literature highlights primarily on Erdoğan's growing authoritarian ambition, very few studies have examined how the role played by the opposition actors encouraged Erdoğan to undertake stricter authoritarian measures and allowed Erdoğan to remain in power for nearly two decades. Most approaches to democratic reversal in Turkey focus on Erdoğan's tactics and goals. This study takes a closer look at the state of opposition actors. In the case of Turkey, repression of opposition and hard-line control of the media have been important strategies of Erdoğan for solidifying his authoritarian rule. Even though repression has prevented the opposing parties from becoming successful against authoritarian power, the Turkish case shows that the actions of the incumbent do not uniquely regulate political outcomes; the behavior of the opposition parties matters too. The failure of the main opposition parties to launch strong, unified resistance to authoritarianism in Turkey was also responsible for the ongoing electoral success of the AKP. Here, opposition actors are not just the electoral opposition but also other political opponents such as civic groups, business associations, and religious groups (Cleary &

Öztürk, 2022). The parties in opposition have been highly fragmented. They tend to be more hostile toward each other than toward the ruling party. This fragmentation among the opposition actors and the inability of the opposition parties to work together have contributed to the emergence of a one-party government system in Turkey. Besides, opposition actors' radical behavior to remove the incumbent from power and their contingent decisions have extended authoritarian rule in Turkey. This study finds that in a heavily polarized country like Turkey, where the campaign environment is highly unequal, elections are won or lost with small margins, opposition parties have a higher chance of winning authoritarian elections if they form an electoral alliance.

Opposition oppression

Erdogan has retained a dominant role in Turkish politics since moving from prime minister to the presidency in 2014. Erdoğan has stifled his political opponents and critics via legal and illegal means. He gradually concentrated and monopolized political power in his hands. His government aggressively used institutional tools to change political outcomes and severely limited the opposition's ability to build voter support. The ruling party has exerted influence over the judiciary by the pro-government officials. The government has used politically motivated prosecutions to target members as well as supporters of political opponents. The government detained and charged political opponents, accusing them of offenses ranging from terrorism to insulting the president. Members of the People's Democratic Party (HDP), the second-largest opposition party, experienced politically motivated prosecutions. Other opposition leaders have also faced politically motivated prosecutions and violent attacks. (Freedom House Report, 2022). The opposition parties continue to experience obstacles even after winning the elections. The government hindered several newly elected Mayors from carrying out their duties. After the 2019

local elections, the government removed several mayors from the opposition over alleged links to Kurdish militants and replaced those positions with state-appointed trustees. Bending to the ruling party's will, the state prosecutor brought a charge against Istanbul's mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu of "insulting" the judges of the Supreme Election Council after he described canceling the legitimate elections in November 2019 as an act of "foolishness". İmamoğlu was sentenced to jail by a court in Turkey. The court imposed a political ban on him and barred him from politics for two years. İmamoğlu, who belongs to the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), was one of three potential candidates to represent the opposition bloc in the presidential elections scheduled for May 2023. Since the recent polls indicate a drop in Erdoğan's popularity, the critics view mayor's trial as an attempt to eliminate Erdoğan's key opponent (The Globe and Mail, 2022).

Turkish Economic collapse

Turkey has been experiencing a prolonged economic decline for nearly a decade. Starting in 2013, the Turkish Lira has gradually lost its value leading to very high levels of inflation. In 2013, the value of Turkish Lira was 1.8 against the dollar; by 2018 it jumped to nearly 7 (Pound Sterling Live). The dramatic increase in the inflation rate has increased the costs of living. Turkish GDP per capita has declined from \$12,614 in 2013 to 4,536 in 2018 (World Bank).

Erdoğan's decreasing popularity

Authoritarian regimes' success at winning elections is influenced by their "menu of manipulation" which include fraud, repression of opposition, patronage distribution, control over information and abuse of state resources. For winning electoral contests, the ruling parties maintain high levels of elite coordination that deprive the opposition candidates and leave voters with no real choice. Thus, re-elections of authoritarian rulers do not necessarily reflect their

popularity among the voters. In three successive general elections held in 2002, 2007 and 2011, the AKP's vote share has constantly increased. The AKP received 34.42 percent of votes in 2002, 46.58 percent of votes in 2007 and 49.83 percent of votes in 2011. However, the voting rate has reduced in subsequent elections where the AKP received 40.87 percent of votes in the 2015 elections and 42.56 percent of votes in the 2018 elections. Despite Erdogan's growing personal domination of the executive branch, his electoral support was not considered high in the 2014 and 2018 presidential elections in which Erdogan's voting share were 51.79 and 52.59 respectively. Research in authoritarian politics suggests that authoritarian regimes require popular support to lower the costs of staying in power (Guriev and Treisman, 2020). However, according to the World Value Survey (WVS) data, the popular support for a strongman leader in Turkey, which was 73.1% in 2001, dropped to 59.1% in 2012. The popular support for a strongman leader did not increase in the later period rather it was on decline in the subsequent years. In 2018, the popular support was 55.9% (Schafer, 2021). In July 2022, Erdoğan's approval declined to 41.5 per cent (Esen, 2022). The data on popular support indicates that Erdoğan's increasing authoritarianism as well as Turkey's worsening economic conditions might influence his popularity. Although Turkish politics is highly dominated by the ruling AKP and Erdoğan, the political environment has offered opportunities for the opposition parties to unite against the authoritarian rule. While the economic collapse created an opportunity for the opposition, it could not capitalize on Turkey's economic decline. Erdogan might have a thirst for personal power that encouraged him to chart an authoritarian roadmap. However, the role of opposition parties also provided him with the opportunities to further consolidate his political power and has given him new incentives to suppress the political opposition.

Fragmented opposition

Although Turkey has had a sustained experience with parliamentary democracy, the party system in Turkish politics, according to many Political Science scholars, is unstructured and inchoate that is mirrored in the high levels of fragmentation and polarization (Arslantas and Arslantas, 2020). Erdoğan has always been blessed with the heavily fragmented opposition. The opposition alliances span across left- and right-wing, Turkish and Kurdish, and secularists and conservative politics (Table-2). Turkey's opposition has suffered from several internal weaknesses. The ideologically diverse opposition had failed to converge a common political agenda and to nominate a joint presidential candidate against Erdoğan. The fragmented opposition has failed to generate any comprehensive program to convince new voters. Rather than unifying against the AKP, the opposition has often been hampered by competition and division within its ranks (Korkmaz, 2022). None of the opposition parties was able to form a broad-based, cross-class electoral coalition to mount a serious challenge to the ruling party's electoral supremacy (Öniş, 2012). While forming a coalition against the incumbent, they are also in competition with each other for popular support and influence. Even some opposition actors have chosen to form alliances with the ruling party. While the political climate is already highly polarized, the failure to nominate a single presidential candidate against Erdoğan and to agree a comprehensive agenda have hampered the ability of the opposition alliance to attract the large pool of undecided voters, many of whom previously supported AKP and MHP. These voters are dissatisfied with the government policy and assistance during economic crisis and COVID-19 pandemic (Kirişci & Esen, 2021). The fragmentation among the opposition parties provided Erdoğan with the opportunity to create further polarization among Turkish people. Erdoğan has attempted to disrupt the opposition by amending the election law and increasingly targeting key

opposition actors and journalists. As a result, Erdoğan further entrenched existing societal divisions. After the Gezi Park protests, Erdoğan blocked coalition talks. Thus, the absence of a strong opposition, and the AKP’s effective performance in office over the two decades have contributed to the AKP’s hegemonic hold over Turkish politics (Müftüler-Baç & Keyman, 2012).

Political Parties	Ideology
<i>Parties in Government</i>	
The AKP (Justice and Development Party)	Centre-right, Islamist
The MHP (Nationalist Movement Party)	Far-right
<i>Parties in Opposition</i>	
The CHP (Republican People’s Party)	Centre-left, secularist
The HDP (People’s Democratic Party)	Leftist, Kurdish
The İYİP (Good Party)	Centre-right
The SP (The Islamist Felicity Party)	Islamist
The DP (Democratic Party)	Centre-right

Table 2: Turkish political parties with different ideologies

Radical behavior and contingent decisions of opposition actors

Radical responses to executive aggrandizement, if they fail to achieve the goal, increase public support for the incumbent. Any irregular opposition attempts to oust incumbents tend to make things even worse. Studies on opposition strategies in autocratic regimes suggest that instead of relying exclusively on extra-constitutional strategies, opposition actors’ moderate responses to executive aggrandizement can be a more effective strategy to fight the authoritarian

incumbents (Cleary & Öztürk, 2022). In the case of Turkey, the government's brutal response to the violent demonstrations at Gezi Park in 2013 was a turning point in the consolidation of presidential power. The 2016 failed coup attempt to depose the incumbent from power was another critical turning point. While opposition actors' electoral campaigning and political organizing can be considered as moderate approaches, Gezi protests and failed coup attempt can be considered as radical responses of opposition actors.

a. The Gezi Park demonstrations

The ruling party's response during the Gezi Park protests in 2013 was a brutal denial of the protestors' right to peaceful assembly. The Gezi Park demonstrations opened the opportunity for Erdoğan to put himself forward as AKP's candidate for the first direct presidential election in Turkey. The Gezi Park protests initially started as a small-scale peaceful protest against the urban development plan for an Istanbul Park with the demolition of green space. The government's heavy-handed approach to suppress the peaceful protests turned it into a larger opposition movement. The demonstrators personally targeted Erdoğan because he was gradually authoritarian. Additional demonstrations were spurred across the country in response to violent crackdown by police and unfair prosecutions against protestors. The opposition leaders in their speeches held Erdoğan responsible for the occurrence and handling of the Gezi protests and criticized him for ruling the country as a dictator (Selçuk et al., 2019). Instead of reducing tension, Erdoğan evoked tension by interpreting the protests as a hostile motive of the alliance of domestic and international actors who wanted to oust Erdoğan through false claims of authoritarianism. Instead of reducing tension, Erdoğan evoked tension by interpreting the protests as an international conspiracy to oust Erdoğan (Amnesty International, 2013). Erdoğan labeled the protesters as the agents of conspirators (Al-Monitor). For Erdoğan, international

conspires are unhappy about Turkey's economic development (Nefes, 2017). Amid disagreement within the cabinet regarding government's response to the increasing demonstrations, Erdoğan used the opportunity to remove more liberal members in the AKP including the then President Abdullah Gül who preferred a more conciliatory approach toward the demonstrators (Kirişçi and Slot, 2019). Thus, personal attacks on Erdoğan by the opposition actors during the Gezi protests instead reinforced his dominance in Turkish politics.

b. The July 2016 failed coup attempt

The most obvious challenge to democratic stability is armed seizures of power. In Turkey, the July 2016 failed coup attempt shifted Erdoğan's rule to a competitive authoritarian regime. The coup attempt provided an ample opportunity for Erdoğan to become more authoritarian by extending new executive power. The coup attempts also provided him a justification for a wide-range crackdown. In the aftermath of the failed coup attempt, Erdoğan responded promptly to solidify his hold on power. In order to reassert control, the government imposed a state of emergency giving Erdoğan unprecedented power. Authoritarian-minded leaders who obtain extraordinary powers under emergency circumstances may not willingly surrender them when the emergency passes. Rather they use extraordinary powers obtained through the state emergency to crush the opposition (Galston, 2020). Erdoğan used the additional power obtained under emergency circumstances to crush the political opposition. Erdoğan came to power promising to undo the repressive measures of the 1980 military coup. Yet, in many ways he has re-enacted those repressive measures in response to the 2016 coup attempt (Eissenstat, 2017). Taking advantage of his strong position he pushed forward a constitutional referendum to transform the Turkish governance system into a hyper-presidential system. Constitutional amendments concentrated power in the hands of the president, eliminating the role of the Prime

Minister. The parliament became dysfunctional as its power was mainly shifted to the president. The presidential system made it difficult for the opposition parties to influence government decisions. As that system lacks key institutional checks and balances the regime became increasingly authoritarian. Moreover, the coup attempt helped Erdoğan to consolidate his political power by forming a new alliance with the ultranationalist MHP. The new alliance solidified its parliamentary majority. Erdoğan considered the coup attempt as a “gift from God” (Dewan, 2017).

Autocratization in Turkey and opposition coordination

Scholars have defined Erdoğan’s regime in Turkey as an “electoral authoritarian regime” as his regime since the AKP’s third term in office in 2011 has come to represent all common characteristics of electoral authoritarianism. The opposition parties compete in a political environment where the ruling party systematically tilts the playing field in its favor; state funds have been used for election campaigns; election rules and political competition have been skewed in favor of the ruling party through repression, fraud, and patronage. The AKP government responded to the Gezi protests with an unprecedented level of crackdown against the opposition. Since Erdoğan’s election to the Presidency in 2014, the AKP’s regime started moving further to the authoritarian direction. Turkey still has elections though the competition among political parties is neither free nor fair. The political environment clearly indicates that the inclusion of opposition is merely aimed at expanding the legitimacy of the incumbent (Korkmaz, 2022). Even though the opposition in Turkey is highly fragmented Selçuk & Hekimci’s study (2020) on opposition strategies in Turkish elections shows that the process of democratic backsliding in Turkey under Erdoğan gave rise to a democracy-authoritarian cleavage that gradually overshadowed the historically rooted secular-religious and the Turkish-

Kurdish cleavages in Turkish politics. Between 2014-2019, the opposition parties have made several attempts to be united against a common adversary.

In the 2014 presidential elections, the CHP and the MHP agreed to nominate a joint candidate. However, the HDP nominated its own candidate for the elections instead of allying with the CHP and MHP. Even though the opposition parties failed to defeat Erdoğan in the 2014 elections, it set a precedent for coordination in the future since Erdoğan won by a slim margin of only 51.79 percent of the votes.

Though opposition parties in Turkey previously failed to form an electoral alliance against the AKP, they created an electoral coalition in the June 2015 parliamentary elections. The main opposition party, CHP, collaborated with the pro-Kurdish HDP. The CHP's strategic voting prevented the AKP from winning parliamentary majority. Although the CHP tried to bring the HDP and the MHP together to form an alliance, the opposition ultimately fragmented over Turkish-Kurdish cleavages. Erdoğan capitalized on such splits and pushed for repeat elections in November 2015. This time the opposition failed to defeat Erdoğan. The AKP formed an alliance with the MHP and successfully won a parliamentary majority (Selçuk & Hekimci, 2020).

During the 2017 constitutional referendum the CHP managed to bring the HDP and the dissidents within the MHP and other smaller parties under the antiauthoritarianism campaign. Even though the opposition alliance failed to defeat Erdoğan, the AKP won the referendum by the slightest margin: 51 percent 'Yes' against 49 percent 'No' vote. Thus, the closeness of the votes set another precedent for opposition coordination in the future electoral contests.

In the 2018 parliamentary elections, the political parties were allowed to form official alliances for the first time. As the democracy-authoritarian cleavage was on the rise, the

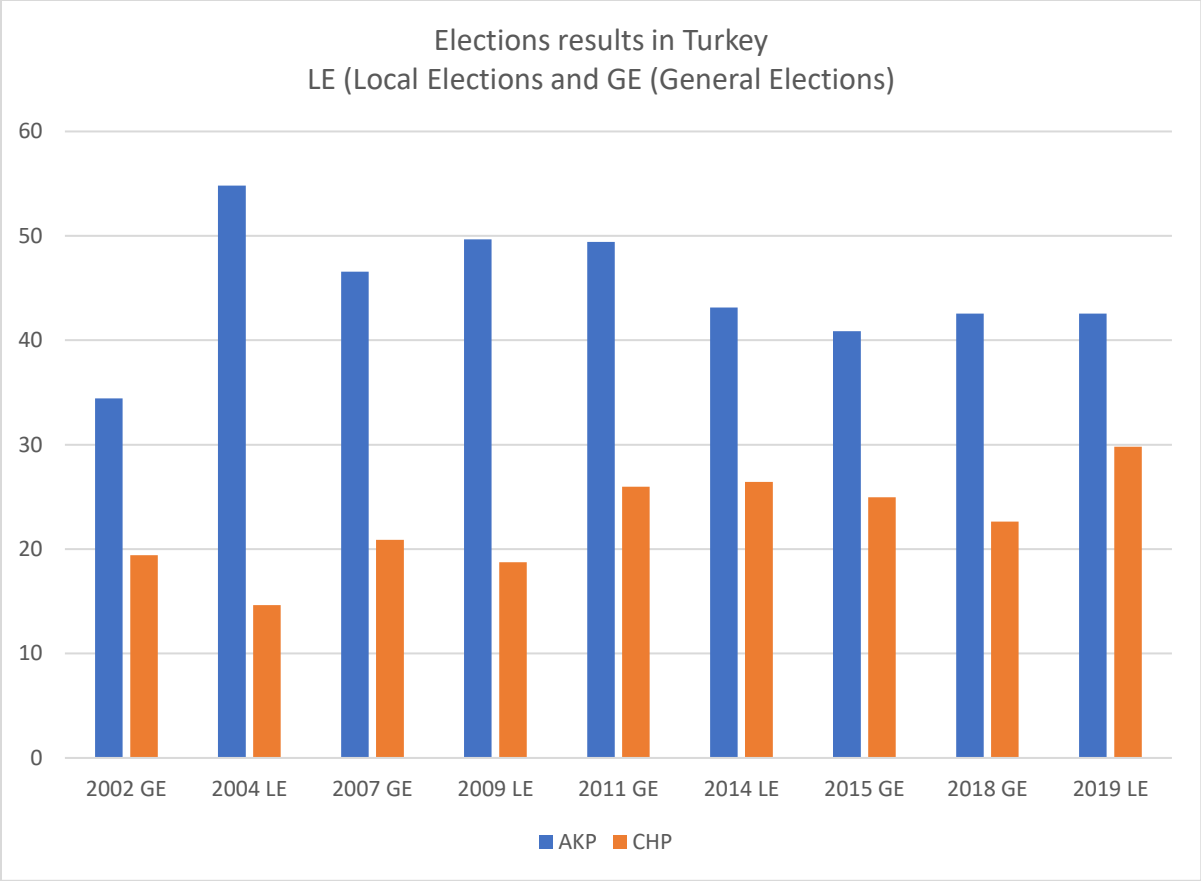
opposition parties from different ideologies formed official coalitions for the 2018 elections. The CHP led the formation of the “Nation’s Alliance” with the Good Party (İYİP) and the Islamist Felicity Party (SP), and the centre-right Democratic Party (DP). The HDP did not join the Nation Alliance which reflects the inability of the opposition to embrace ethnic identity and unite around a democratic cause fully. Despite forming an alliance, the parties in the alliance fielded their own presidential candidate against Erdoğan instead of putting up a common candidate. In contrast, Erdoğan also formalized his pre-existing alliance with the MHP and formed the “People’s Alliance” on the eve of the 2018 elections to retain control of parliament. The government’s influence over the state institutions tilted the playing field in favour of the ruling AKP. The 2018 election was marred by the AKP’s misuse of state resources to gain an electoral advantage as well as an intimidation campaign against opposition parties. As a result, Erdoğan secured victory in the first round with the support of his ally, the MHP. That alliance gave the AKP a majority in parliament. Although the opposition coalition failed to defeat Erdoğan in the 2018 elections, the alliance reduced the AKP’s vote share to the point that the ruling party required the support from the MHP to gain a majority in parliament. In the June 2018 presidential elections, Erdoğan’s vote share was only 52.59 percent. Thus, the cleavage in opposition provided Erdoğan with the opportunity to co-opt the MHP, which, in turn, helped the ruling AKP regain its parliamentary majority (Esen, 2022). The opposition parties understood the reasons behind their failure in the 2018 elections. They realized that they must rely on each other to win the elections.

In the 2019 local elections, the opposition parties with diverse socio-political orientations coordinated in the form of nominating joint candidates in metropolitan areas instead of competing against each other, running a unified campaign. None of the opposition parties put up its own candidate. Despite the unjust electoral system, the opposition parties coordinated over

the fight for democracy. Consequently, the opposition parties' joint candidates defeated the candidates from the AKP-MHP alliance. The joint candidates of the opposition parties defeated the candidates from the AKP-MHP alliance in the three biggest cities – Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. More importantly the defeat hampered Erdoğan's reputation as an unchallenged leader. In Istanbul, the ruling alliance appealed to revote after raising questions about potential voter fraud. The ruling AKP rerun the election by using its tight grip on the judiciary. However, the opposition candidate won the second election by an even bigger margin. Ekrem İmamoğlu was elected to lead Istanbul. Losing the mayorship to the opposition candidate in Istanbul was particularly a painful defeat for Erdoğan as his own political career started here. İmamoğlu's win was a historic blow to Erdoğan and the AKP which had controlled Istanbul for a quarter century. Thus, the 2019 election has carried a greater threat to Erdoğan's regime due to the level of coordination that exists among the opposition parties (Selçuk & Hekimci, 2020).

Parties	2002	2004	2007	2009	2011	2014	2015	2018	2019
	GE	LE	GE	LE	GE	LE	GE	GE	LE
AKP	34.42	54.81	46.58	49.67	49.83	43.13	40.87	42.56	42.55
CHP	19.42	14.63	20.88	18.75	25.98	26.45	24.95	22.65	29.81

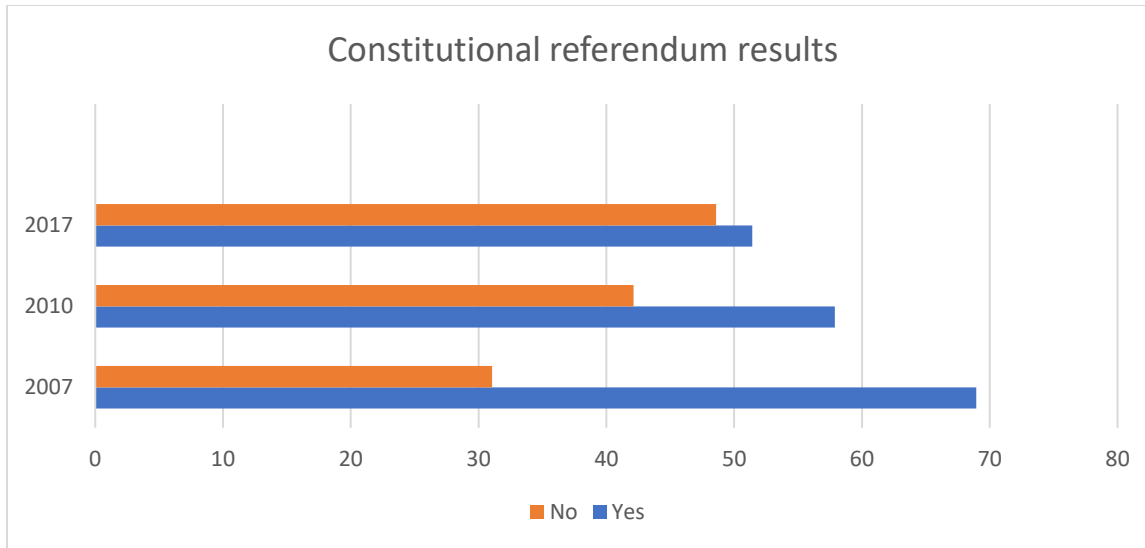
Table 3: The AKP's vote share compared to the main opposition party.



Source: Turkey Elections. *Daily Sabah* <https://www.dailysabah.com/election-results>

Year of referendum	Yes	No
2007	68.95	31.05
2010	57.88	42.12
2017	51.41	48.59

Table 4: The results of the constitutional referendum



Source: Turkey Elections. *Daily Sabah* <https://www.dailysabah.com/election-results>

The Table of Six

The six opposition parties -the CHP, Good party (iYi), the Felicity Party (SP), the Democratic Party (DP), the Democracy and the Progress Party (DEVA), the Future Party (GP)- have formed a group known collectively as the ‘Table of Six’ to prepare a joint manifesto to initiate a transition to a parliamentary system of government after the May 2023 elections. The People’s Democratic Party (HDP) is missing from the Table of Six (T6) coalition, on account of accusations from the government that as it is affiliated with the banned Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK). The leaders of six opposition parties gathered for the first time on 12 February 2022 to strategize about the future of Turkey’s governing system-a move that intended to unseat the country’s long-term autocratic ruler (AP News, 2022). After around a year of talks, on 6 March 2023, the leaders of T6 picked Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the head of CHP, as their joint presidential candidate to face Erdoğan in May’s elections. However, because of the ideological conflicts, hostilities among the members of the coalition, big egos, and a lack of organizations, it took them long enough to come together to choose a single candidate and agree on a common political

platform. Though the opposition could not pose a severe challenge to Erdoğan in previous national elections, the opposition has cooperated more closely since their success in the 2019 local elections. It is assumed that Kilicdaroglu could take advantage of the current economic crisis as well as the recent devastating earthquakes in the south that brought severe criticism of the government's response (Aljazeera, March 2023).

Turkey's recent earthquake and its impact on upcoming elections

Ahead of the presidential and parliamentary elections due on 14 May 2023, Turkey experienced a 7.8 magnitude earthquake on February 6, which caused nearly 45,000 deaths. As Turkey wrestles with the agony of a mounting death toll from the deadliest earthquake in a century, Erdoğan, is confronting a parallel crisis: the disaster's blow to an economy that was already suffering from an inflation rate of 85 percent, a rapidly collapsing currency, and a growing debt burden. The damage from the disaster is estimated to be US\$84 billion (The Conversations, February 2023). The centralization of decision-making power hindered a timely rescue response by municipalities and civil society organizations. The government's centralization to the disaster relief agencies prevented the military's independent mobilization from providing emergency help as Erdoğan excluded the army from response plans under the centralized disaster operations. The inefficiencies with the "one-man rule" have become apparent in the aftermath of the disaster which may cause public anger. Erdoğan will face one of the most significant tests of his decades-long career in Turkish politics. For the AKP, this earthquake is a political quake as well. Erdoğan's AKP rose to power on the heels of the 1999 calamity. The magnitude 7.6 earthquake that struck Turkey at that time claimed more than 17000 lives. Erdoğan pledged change promising that Turkey would be ready for the next quake. However, he could not keep his promise to make the country quake-proof. Following growing public criticism

of the government's inadequate response, Erdoğan admitted his government's "shortcomings" and claimed that "it is not possible to be ready for a disaster like this" (Arab Center Washington DC, February 2023). Erdoğan and his government had a declining popularity even before the earthquake, due in part to a financial crisis and growing concern over Erdoğan's autocratic governance. In a well-functioning democracy, a disaster on such a scale may act as a political game changer since the leaders are held responsible for anything that may directly or indirectly have contributed to the crisis or exacerbated its impact. However, in the absence of democracy, political accountability is replaced by human suffering. In such non-democracies, it is not clear whether any catastrophe—even a major natural disaster with massive economic and human costs—can act as a political game-changer. Although it is the responsibility of a government—especially one that has been in power of a country for two decades—to be well-prepared for natural disasters, thereby decreasing their damaging potential and lessening human suffering. Given the present crisis, the upcoming election may exert influence on the election campaign of competing political parties to convince the electorate that they will significantly develop Turkey's resilience if they are elected. The country experienced such a devastating disaster at a critical time for Turkey's future. Erdoğan's government is now in a race against time to do what good it can ahead of the national elections to safeguard its political survival and re-establish its shaken authority. This offers the opposition a clear advantage as Erdoğan's government is strongly criticized for both the lack of adequate preparations before the disaster and the failure to provide emergency coordinated help after the deadly earthquake properly. The government's slow response to the devastating earthquake and the potential calls for accountability as to why so many buildings have collapsed so quickly will play a significant role in Erdoğan's political future (Project Syndicate, February 2023).

CHAPTER IV: VENEZUELA

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, Venezuela was widely considered as one of Latin America's most stable and prosperous democracies, with a long record of free and fair elections and strong democratic institutions. The country had forty years of democracy when Hugo Chávez came to power in 1998. According to Weyland (2003), popular autocrats drive their legitimacy from the economy. In several democracies, economic crises and governance problems have increased the likelihood of democratic setbacks which, in turn, open the door for outside actors to win power. Scholars have argued that the failure and inability of traditional political parties and their leaders to respond with effective policies to aggravate social and political problems, create a providential scenario for the rise of outsiders. Like the Turkish case, a crisis of party legitimacy erupted in Venezuela, mostly resulting from a bad economic performance and corruption scandals of the incumbent. This economic crisis stemmed from the neoliberal reform during the 1990s. The neoliberal program was instituted only partially and in a confusing stop-and-go pattern which prevented the country from attaining socio-economic stability. The growing popular discontent regarding the failure of the traditional governing parties to stop Venezuela's continuing socio-economic and political instability, in turn, paved the way for a populist outsider to come to power (Weyland, 2004). Hugo Chávez, a charismatic leader, emerged as a potential savior promising to overcome poverty, corruption, and social inequalities; and to build a more "authentic" democracy (Mayorga, 2006; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2019). However, during his period, Venezuela transformed from one of the region's most promising democracies to one of its most authoritarian regimes. Upon taking office, Chávez started expressing his authoritarian character. He introduced a series of policies and laws to

strengthen his hold over oversight agencies and to systematically disadvantage the opposition parties. Chávez called a referendum in 1999 on a new constitution that strengthened the power of the presidency through increasing the presidential term from five to six years. In February 2009, Chávez called another referendum proposing the abolition of the presidential term limits, which was approved by the voters. As a result, Chávez and all other elected officials were no longer subject to term limits. These constitutional amendments rapidly eroded the country's institutional checks and balances; and dismantled political rights and civil liberties. Chávez used the extended power to manipulate the electoral playing field. Although the act of voting was relatively free, the contest was unfair. The political playing field favored government-backed candidates. Chávez and the ruling Unified Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) deployed the vast machinery of the state resources during the election campaigns. They enjoyed a massive advantage in media exposure. Even public servants were subjected to intense pressure to support the incumbent. The politicization of the judicial branch and military increased during Chávez. Chávez gutted the power of the opposition-led Congress and placed the judicial branch under executive branch tutelage. High courts rarely ruled against the government. Though freedom of peaceful assembly is guaranteed in the constitution, the government made legal amendments that made it easier to charge protesters with serious crimes (Freedom House report, 2012). Such presidential power grabs made those in the opposition feel more threatened and precarious (Corrales, 2011). Subsequently, the opposition started considering more radical means and extra-institutional strategies to fight Chávez. However, such radical steps to oust Chávez, helped him advance his non-democratic aspirations and even more radical reforms (Gamboa, 2017). The country that was one of the longest-standing democracies in Latin America today has become an exceptional case for the opposite reason: the country is now ranked as the least peaceful country in Latin

America and one of the least peaceful countries in the world. In the Global Peace Index 2022, Venezuela ranked 148 out of 163 countries.

Repression of opposition actors

During Chávez's early years as President, repression of opposition actors was relatively low. Chávez pursued several power grabs and engaged in a few political persecutions during his first administration. It was not until 2003 that Chávez started showing clear signs of authoritarianism. Chávez applied various strategies to delay an opposition-led referendum that would have recalled him from office. The referendum finally took place in August 2004. By then, the rising oil prices had boosted Chávez's standing enough for him to win the referendum. Also, by then, the opposition had become more divided than earlier. Later, the government blacklisted those who signed petitions for the referendum on Chávez's recall from office. Those people neither got government jobs nor did they qualify for any public assistance program (Gamboa, 2017; Freedom House Report, 2012). Chávez was re-elected in December 2006 and his government became increasingly repressive after his re-election. Several leaders of the opposition have been arrested and forced into exile. For example, Chávez sent ex-governor Oswaldo into prison and forced Manuel Rosales, a presidential candidate for the 2006 elections, into exile. Chávez's biased implementation of laws and regulations was exceptionally noticeable in the media world. In 2007, the government suspended the license of the Radio Caracas Television (RCTV), Venezuela's most widely viewed television network, covering 90 percent of the territory. Dozens of other radio stations were also forced off the air. Numerous journalists and media figures were prosecuted on dubious charges. Chávez painted all his political opponents with the same brush and constantly fanned the flames of polarization (Selçuk, 2016; Corrales, 2011). Venezuela's Freedom House scores for Political Rights and Civil Liberties grew

worse under Chávez due to an increase in such actions scores declined from 3 in 2000 to 4 in 2005. The score further ran to 5 in 2011, denoting a major decline in freedom (Freedom House report, 2012).

In recent years, conditions have grown sharply worse due to the ruling party's harsher crackdowns on the opposition. Nicolás Maduro, who became president after Chávez's death, engaged in additional violent and non-violent repressive techniques. Maduro came to power after the country had turned into a competitive authoritarian regime. Since he is not a democratically elected leader, he has doubled down on his legacy to grab power at all costs. Political opponents, real and perceived, of the Maduro government have faced continuous attacks and severe harassment. The political opponents have been at risk of arbitrary detention, torture, and other human rights violations (Amnesty International, 2022). Major opposition candidates have been banned in recent elections including the 2018 presidential elections, the 2020 legislative elections and the 2021 local and regional elections. The elections were marred by massive abuse of state resources and uneven access to the state-dominated media. The Maduro administration has used the state dominated media, security forces and the judiciary to disrupt the political opponents. The government has severely restricted freedom of assembly although the constitution guarantees it. Rather, the government has violently repressed the protesters by deploying the security forces.

Economic collapse

Venezuela's economy has suffered due to decades of poor governance. This economic decline is rooted in the policies adopted by the Chávez administration. Chávez came to power pledging to utilize the country's vast oil resources to reduce poverty and inequality. However, he successfully reduced poverty, and his several steps also steadily declined the country's petroleum

reserves. For example, in 2002, Chávez fired many skilled PDVSA employees and filled those positions with his loyalists without considering the consequences of his decision on the country's oil industry. In 2005, Chávez provided subsidized oil to several countries in Latin America. Consequently, over the course of his presidency, the oil reserves dropped, resulting in an unsustainable level of external debt (Cheatham et al., 2023). Venezuela lost 62 percent of its GDP between 2013 and 2019 (Bull and Rosales, 2020). The country's economy contracted by around 75 percent from 2014 through 2021. Venezuela's oil production declined significantly from 3 million barrels per day (mbpd) in 1999 to about 1.25 mbpd in 2018 (Bahar, et al., 2018).

Popularity of Chávez and Maduro

Even though Chávez used repressive tactics against the opposition, he was very popular among the Venezuelans. From 1999 to 2013, the country held four consecutive presidential elections; Chávez won all four elections (Table 5- Results of Venezuela's presidential elections). In addition, Chávez and his party PSUV won overall majority in the three parliamentary elections held in 2000, 2005 and 2010 (Jiménez, 2021). However, research shows that the quality of elections in Venezuela has significantly declined since 1999. Research also suggests that Chávez's regime showered Venezuela with a mounting list of electoral irregularities (Kornblith, 2013; Corrales, 2020).

Election	1998	2000	2006	2012
Hugo Chávez	56.20	59.76	62.85	55.07
Opposition	39.97	37.52	36.91	44.32
Turnout	63.45	56.63	74.69	80.56

Table 5: The results of Venezuela's presidential elections

Chávez enjoyed a continued high approval rate throughout his first year in office. In 1999, Chávez's approval rate was 76 percent. However, by 2001, his popularity began to decline abruptly. In 2002, his approval rating had fallen below 40 percent (Hawkins, 2003). Chávez, during the early period of his government, had been relatively neglectful about social spending. The only social program that continued was mainly delegated to the military. In late 2003, reaping an oil windfall, Chávez launched a series of wide-ranging social programs, the so-called "Bolivarian Missions" to boost public support. The combination of clientelist social spending with declining accountability had a decisive political effect. Chávez's opportunistic social spending gave Chávez an advantage in competing for votes and enabled him to turn his low approval rate of 45 percent in 2003, into a 59 percent victory in the 2004 recall referendum (Corrales & Penfold-Becerra, 2007).

Unlike Chávez, Maduro's popularity has always been very low. Maduro has been interested in using extensive violence to prevent any protests and crush the opponents. Maduro compounded the electoral irregularities and surpassed Chávez in terms of numbers, frequency, and severity of the irregularities. Maduro's defeat in the 2015 electoral results exposed his loss of popular support. Maduro became violently repressive after this electoral defeat and further limited the opposition's capacity to coordinate (Jiménez, 2021). Maduro's popularity has been declining since he was narrowly elected in 2013 following Chávez's death. According to national surveys, only 18 to 25 percent of Venezuelans support the Maduro administration (The Conversation, 2018). Despite widespread animosity towards the Maduro administration, why has the opposition not been able to capitalize on the lower approval ratings for Maduro? Scholars in Political Science suggest that fragmentation among opposition actors, opposition's failure to coordinate their actions and misleading opposition strategies have contributed to the opposition's

decreasing effectiveness in challenging authoritarian rule in Venezuela (Rosales and Jiménez, 2021).

Polarization and fragmented opposition

Venezuela under Chávez was highly polarized. According to scholars, Venezuela's polarization was not so much the result of socio-economic clash between different social classes, but, rather, a deliberate pursuit of polarization by the state. Polarization was electorally beneficial because it increased Chávez's supporters, therefore, became the state's preferred strategy. This polarization is considered one of the main reasons that Chávez won so many electoral contests (Corrales, 2011).

Despite the government's continuous effort to keep the opposition divided, the opposition members from widely varying political platforms coordinated through forming a united anti-Chavista coalition with clear decision-making rules, the Democratic Unity Committee (MUD). However, the coalition, according to the critics, is tenuous. Venezuelan electoral rules provide an incentive for the regime opponents to collectively nominate one candidate for any chance to win an election. This is one of the main reasons for the opposition's interest in forming the coalition. The coalition is not more than an election-winning machine; there is little ideological affinity or shared policy consensus among the members that can hold them together (Trinkunas, 2018).

Maduro's government applied various repressive strategies to divide the opposition effectively and to implode their ability and incentives to formally coordinate. The government used national security forces and parliamentary groups to persecute and detain political dissidents. Consequently, between 2015 and 2018, the opposition moved from coordinated to being seriously divided (Jiménez, 2021).

The opposition was not able to coordinate an inclusive strategy to change the regime successfully and instead became further divided. Instead of forming collective strategy, the opposition parties have put forward their own preferences and goals. Although it is evident that the government's continuous efforts to crush the opposition have made it very difficult for the MUD to act effectively, the disunity among the members also hampered its efforts to challenge the regime. The opposition has been divided not only along ideological lines but also along strategic ones. For example, the opposition members faced a dilemma to decide whether the MUD should participate in elections or boycott them. Members who support participating in elections argue that participating in elections is the only way of keeping up pressure on the regime. This group considers the electoral route a more effective road towards democratization. Whereas other members who are in favor of boycotting elections argue that participating in election means to legitimize it, therefore elections should be boycotted (The London Globalist, 2018).

Radical behavior and contingent decisions of opposition actors

Venezuelan democracy did not erode in one day. After coming to power in 1999, it took Chávez almost six years to dismantle the country's horizontal accountability. So, democratic erosion in Venezuela provided the opposition an opportunity to respond. Throughout the process of democratic erosion, the opposition actors had several institutional and non-institutional resources at their disposal. The opposition actors, however, choose radical strategies. A portion of the opposition sought to unseat Chávez before the end of his constitutional term, undermining the very principle of majority rule and electoral processes. These opposition actors' undemocratic means to fight Chávez include a military coup in 2002, an oil strike in 2002-2003, and an electoral boycott in 2005 (Gamboa, 2022).

a. The 2002 military coup:

In April 2002, the opposition leaders, taking advantages of Chávez's low popularity and utilizing the support they had inside the military, converted a massive anti-government protest into a coup d'état. However, this step backfired. Although the opposition actors became divided on the coup issue, some portion of the opposition brought Chávez back two days afterward. The coup attempt had devastating consequences for the opposition. Before the coup, 35 percent Venezuelans approved of Chávez's performance in the government. However, after the coup, the domestic support of Chávez enhanced to 45 percent. The coup provided Chávez with the valid ground to prosecute the opposition and remove them from key institutions.

b. The 2002 Strike:

After the failed coup, the government and opposition attempted to negotiate. However, both sides were still applying radical strategies. The government moved forward pressing charges against the leaders involved in the coup. In response, the opposition moved to the streets. In December 2002, the opposition actors called for a general strike in an attempt to force Chávez to resign. As the strike continued indefinitely, it severely affected Venezuela's economy resulting in a negative growth in the country's GDP. In two months, the national GDP dropped by US\$ 4.5 billion. The public opinion surveys suggested that people blamed the opposition for the economic collapse. According to a survey, 64 percent of citizens believed the strike affected citizens more than the government. Consequently, the strike further split the opposition. Before the strike, more than 35 percent of Venezuelans supported the opposition. However, the percentage was reduced to 30 percent after the strike (Gamboa, 2022). The most severe impact of the 2002 strike was that it allowed the government to impose direct control over PDVSA, a state-owned petroleum company. Before the strike, the opposition had a strong control over PDVSA.

The strike gave Chávez a good reason to prosecute the PDVSA employees. Chávez fired roughly 18,000 PDVSA staff and replaced those positions with loyalists leveling charges of corruption and mismanagement. Thus, the opposition's extra-institutional strategies killed its opportunity to oversee the use of PDVSA resources and allowed Chávez to gain full control over PDVSA.

c. Electoral boycotts:

Although the failed coup and strike severely weakened the opposition by 2003, it still had some resources left to use against the incumbent. The opposition parties boycotted the 2005 parliamentary elections to delegitimize Chávez and force him to resign. However, this radical strategy backfired as well. After the opposition boycott, the National Assembly contained not a single opposition leader, giving the ruling party the opportunity to seize further public powers. Instead of losing power, Chávez's victory opened the scope to pass several laws that resulted in further democratic backsliding (Bull and Rosales, 2020). Thus, although the opposition had several institutional and non-institutional strategies at their hands, their strategy of boycotting elections facilitated the consolidation of authoritarianism in Venezuela. The opposition also boycotted the 2017 municipal elections and 2018 presidential elections as they believed that this strategy would make the authoritarian regime crumble. However, none of those boycotts could contribute to weakening authoritarianism in Venezuela (Jamiénez, 2020).

Opposition coordination (1999-present)

In the case of Venezuela, varying levels of repression triggered different types of opposition coordination due to the different types of costs and benefits associated with the coordination. The country has experienced a transition from low to intermediate to high repression under Chávez (1999-2013) and Maduro (2013-present) governments. Despite pre-

existing cleavages and individual rivalries, the opposition members have attempted to coordinate their actions formally and informally.

a. Opposition coordination during Chávez administration (1999-2013)

During Chávez's first administration (1999-2001) and the first few years of the second administration (2001-2005), he made several attempts to extend his presidential terms and presidential powers. For example, in December 2000, the voters approved a new constitution that increased the presidential term to six years and converted the two-house National Assembly into a one-house legislature. In 2002, Chávez fired the top management of PDVSA and 18,000 PDVSA employees. He appointed his political allies to the top positions in the oil company (Jamiénez, 2021; Council on Foreign Relations). Since Chávez's first two administrations were not very authoritarian, low repression could not create any serious threat to opposition members. Opposition actors still had opportunities for political participation: they had a meaningful presence in the congress, courts, and oversight institutions. Instead of formal coordination, the political parties as well as the private sector, coordinate their actions informally. During that period, the opposition actors took several radical and fragmented attempts, such as the opposition's failed coup attempt in April 2002; a strike against Chávez in December 2002 to force him out of office; and election boycotts in 2005. All these attempts clearly reflect the opposition's lack of coordinated strategies in response to power grabs and political persecutions by the Chávez administration. Although, none of these strategies could challenge Chávez.

Chávez increased his repressive tactics after 2005. In 2006, he won the 2006 presidential elections. In December 2006, Chávez declared that the government would not renew the broadcast license of the RCTV, Venezuela's oldest TV outlet. The government finally shut down the RCTV outlet in 2007. In 2007, Chávez took his first attempt to abolish presidential term

limits through a constitutional referendum. Although Chávez's first attempt for indefinite re-election was not successful, his victory in the second constitutional referendum in 2009 allowed indefinite re-election. Chávez's increasingly authoritarian behavior made the opposition realize that there is little chance to fight a less democratic government individually. After a series of failures to oust Chávez, the opposition members realized it necessary to formally coordinate their actions, particularly, when they experienced that the Chavista-controlled National Assembly started issuing autocratic laws. As a result, the opposition decided to form a cross-party coalition to fight against their common enemy (Jiménez, 2021). The actors in opposition decided to nominate a joint candidate for the 2006 presidential election. Even though, the opposition were not yet ready to coordinate formally. In 2008, more than twenty political parties with different ideologies came together to form the Democratic Unity Committee or Mesa de Unidad Democrática (MUD), a coalition to oppose Chávez collectively. In this formal setting, the opposition members decided to contest all elections including presidential and parliamentary together. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, Venezuela's opposition coalition won 65 seats out of 165 seats breaking the two-thirds majority that the ruling party had held since 2005. Under the banner of the MUD, the cross-ideological parties ran a highly coordinated election campaign, presented jointly selected candidates for most seats, offered a consensual program, and followed coordinated guidelines. Setting aside their inherited weaknesses and personal ambitions, the opposition parties selected a common presidential candidate for the 2012 presidential election through a democratic candidate selection procedure. Chávez won the election receiving a 55.07 percent-a smaller winning margin for him than in previous years.

b. Coordination during Maduro's administration (2013-present)

Following Chávez's death in 2013, Maduro became president. The opposition has experienced extensive repression under the Maduro government. In response, the opposition enhanced their level of coordination to challenge the Maduro administration more effectively. They nominated joint candidates, offered a consensual program, and followed collective guidelines. In 2014, the MUD launched a radical movement named "La Salida" (The Exit), aiming to remove Maduro from office through protests. However, the Maduro government violently repressed the opposition's protests leaving many dead and injured. In addition, leaders of that MUD movement were imprisoned and charged with instigation. In response, the opposition parties ran a highly coordinated campaign under the MUD in the 2015 parliamentary elections. The opposition's exceedingly coordinated actions helped the MUD win a two-thirds 'supermajority' (112 out of the 167 seats) in the National Assembly, marking its most decisive blow to incumbents since 1999. This major electoral win was remarkable because the Venezuelan opposition movement achieved this landslide victory in an electoral environment highly stacked in favor of the ruling party (BBC News, 2015). Although, after the electoral defeat in 2015, Maduro shut down the parliament and increased political persecution and canceled all institutional procedures pursued by the opposition to facilitate a transition, including the possibility of a recall referendum in 2016 (Jiménez, 2021).

CHAPTER: AUTOCRACIES AROUND THE WORLD AND OPPOSITION STRATEGIES

Levitsky and Ziblatt (2019) argue that erosion of democracy happened not in the hands of generals but by the elected governments themselves. Democratically elected leaders around the world, including Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia have used their popularity to introduce constitutional amendments that not only allowed them to extend their time in office beyond a second time but also to destroy the systems of institutional checks and balances, hinder free and fair elections, and dismantle political rights and civil liberties. Like Chávez in Venezuela and Erdoğan in Turkey, elected leaders have subverted democratic institutions in Georgia, Hungary, Colombia, Peru, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Sri Lanka, and Ukraine (Gamboa, 2017).

Authoritarian incumbents apply their strategies to win elections by any means necessary. Repression of the opposition is one of the strategies autocratic governments deploy to guarantee the survival of their regimes. In response, opposition parties choose institutional or extra-institutional strategies with moderate and radical goals to fight the incumbent. In Colombia, Uribe tried to erode democracy, but failed. Opposition's strategic choices have prevented democratic erosion in Colombia. For example, Uribe introduced the "Referendum against Bad Politics and Corruption bill in August 2002. In response, the opposition congress members used parliamentary procedures to manufacture procedural irregularities. The opposition's moderate institutional strategies to delay the bill and to point out the irregularities helped the Congress and the Constitutional Court (CC) to modify the bill. The 2003 Antiterrorist Statute bill sought to make permanent some president's power of decree. Had the bill passed, it would have unchecked

the executive and could suspend some civil liberties. The opposition noted procedural irregularities that gave the justices enough arguments to rule against the bill. Radical strategies are more threatening to the incumbent, enhancing the incentives for the incumbent to crush and crowd out the opposition through institutional reforms. Unlike the Colombian opposition, the Venezuelan opposition used radical strategies that posed an existential threat to the incumbent. The opposition, in 2005, boycotted the congressional elections to delegitimize the government and to unseat Chávez. In Bolivia, the opposition actors used radical institutional and extra-institutional tactics against Evo Morales (2006-2019). The opposition's radical behavior hinders their ability to protect democracy in Bolivia enabling the president to erode democracy (Gamboa, 2017). In Thailand, democratically elected leaders have curtailed political rights and media freedom, replaced presidential term limits, asserted control over state institutions, limited legislature, removed judges, detained political opponents, and prosecuted opposition parties. Like in Turkey and Venezuela, it is observed that contingent decisions of opposition actors, and irregular attempts to oust the incumbent in Thailand contributed to democratic breakdown. On the other hand, the more moderate responses to executive aggrandizement actors in Ecuador helped the opposition to sustain democratic institutions, therefore offering the survival of democracy (Cleary, 2022).

A fragmented opposition does not pose a threat to the authoritarian incumbents. Therefore, to increase their share of votes and to maximize their competitiveness in authoritarian elections, the opposition parties around the world formed pre-electoral coalitions to defeat authoritarianism. The opposition in 1988 South Korea and in 1992 Kenya elections could not defeat the incumbents because the opposition candidates failed to create a common platform splitting the opposition votes in those elections. Juan Orlando Hernández in Honduras has

employed tighter control on the judicial system and Congress; repressed the opposition; twisted the playing field to facilitate his re-election. In response, parties in the opposition formally coordinated and created a pre-electoral coalition, the “Alliance against the Dictatorship” to fight Hernández and prevent him from furthering his grip on power (Jiménez, 2021). In the 2002 Kenyan presidential elections, the leading opposition parties united under the umbrella of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) and nominated Mwai Kibaki as their joint candidate. The multi-ethnic opposition coalition overthrew the dominant incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta, who has ruled the country almost for 40 years. In Malaysia, in the 2018 general elections, the ideologically and ethnically dissimilar opposition formed a coalition. The opposition’s joint campaigns enhanced the cross-party strategic voting. The Pakatan Harapan, the Malaysian opposition alliance, successfully toppled the incumbent that had ruled the country for more than six decades (Ong, 2021). In the 2000 Senegalese presidential election, the opposition alliance nominated Abdoulaye Wade as their joint candidate for the election and defeated the long-time incumbent Abdou Diouf (Selçuk, & Hekimci, 2020). The coordinated opposition created an electoral alliance in the mid-1980s in the Philippines and successfully challenged the incumbent (Jiménez, 2021).

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

From a comparative standpoint, the personalization of Turkish politics under Erdoğan and the opposition responses shows similarities with Venezuela under Hugo Chávez. The two countries discussed in this paper had somewhat established democracies when they began their process of democratic erosion. Venezuela was one of the longest-running and most established liberal democracies in the LA region. Chávez and his successor Maduro have turned the country into one of the most authoritarian countries in the world. Similarly, Erdoğan's repressive strategies have eviscerated long-established democracy in Turkey. This study shows how strategic choices of opposition actors impacted the ability of a would-be autocrat to erode the democracy of a country. The opposition's radical behavior in both cases has provided the incumbents with excuses for additional aggrandizement. The Turkish case shows how radical responses to executive aggrandizement have allowed the incumbent to paint the opposition actors as hostile to democracy.

In a competitive authoritarian regime, opposition parties forming pre-electoral alliances are more likely to defeat the ruling party (Esen, 2022). In both Turkey and Venezuela, opposition parties from different ideologies came together and coordinated their actions against the authoritarian governments. Despite existing religious and ethnic cleavages, the opposition parties in both countries coordinated in the form of nominating joint candidates, running a unified campaign. The opposition parties left their ideological differences aside and united around a common democratic cause. Like the opposition coordination in Turkey, the opposition parties in Venezuela, when coalesced into a united front, successfully overcame the barriers to collective action. Even though the opposition alliance failed to prevent Erdoğan's victory in the 2018

election, the opposition coordination successfully undermined the ruling party's majority. Similarly, the Venezuelan opposition alliance won a two-thirds supermajority in the 2015 parliamentary elections. These electoral successes of the opposition parties in Turkey and Venezuela have proved that a united opposition can beat the autocratic incumbents.

Examples of opposition strategies in different countries show that radical strategies either help or jeopardise the opposition's ability to prevent democratic erosion. Radical tactics, if successful, have the potential to unseat the autocratic incumbent. However, if the opposition's radical strategies fail, they can deteriorate the rivalry between the incumbent and the opposition. Autocratic-minded leaders in many democracies are coming to power through democratic elections and attacking norms and institutions from within (Haggard and Kaufman, 2021). This comparative case study suggests that democracy can be better protected when the opposition actors become united claiming electoral fairness and other democratic norms.

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