

# **Changing the Combination of Authoritarian Stability Strategies Against Threats: Turkey (2002-2019)**

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Submitted to  
  
Central European University  
  
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

(2020)

## Abstract

The empirical research suggests that authoritarian stability strategies of legitimization, co-optation, and repression strengthen regimes in combination. Existing studies treat these strategies mostly as independent variables, looking at their effect on political survival. Consequently, there is a research gap on the motivations and political conflict behind why these regimes follow different combinations of strategies over time. Deriving from this gap, the thesis tries to answer the following questions: Why do some hybrid regimes change the combination of stability strategies? Why is there a change through the introduction of a strategy towards a new combination? The thesis argues that the threats coming from the masses (vertical threats), the ruling elite, and opposition parties (horizontal threats) affect the survival strategies of hybrid regimes differently.

Turkey, as a hybrid regime, is analyzed between 2002-2019 throughout three periods. The findings of the analysis are the following. 1) The combination of the stability strategies is subject to change when the incumbent is challenged by the new horizontal and/or vertical threats. 2) The horizontal threat by the ruling elites leads to the introduction of hard repression and diffuse legitimization strategy towards the ruling elite and the opposition. 3) The horizontal threat by the united opposition leads to the introduction of formal co-optation strategy towards the opposition parties. 4) The vertical threat by the citizens leads to the introduction of diffuse legitimization and hard repression strategy towards the opposition. Overall the thesis shows that vertical and horizontal threats change the way hybrid regimes try to stabilize their rule. In this sense, the thesis suggests scholars and policymakers focus on the dynamic and adaptive nature of the grey zone regimes.

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## Introduction

Why do some hybrid regimes change the combination of stability strategies? Why is there a change per se? Why is there a change through the introduction of a strategy towards a new combination? According to the literature, legitimization, co-optation, and repression are the main pillars<sup>1</sup> of stability in authoritarian and hybrid regimes (Gerschewski 2013). While the legitimization, co-optation, and repression strategies have recently become the object of several studies in political science, the researchers usually treat them as independent variables and concentrate on the effects of those strategies on regime stability (Gerschewski 2013, Schneider and Maerz 2017, Lueders and Croissant 2014, Maerz 2020). Although these studies do not entirely exclude the possibility of change, their main focus is based on the stable combinations itself. However, their dependent variable is regime stability, not the combinations. Focusing on the stable combination of the strategies itself fails to explain the reason, need, and mechanism of the change in the combination.

This study takes the combination of the three strategies as a dependent variable and focuses on its variance due to threats. The proposed independent variables that trigger a change in the combination are horizontal threat by the ruling elite, the horizontal threat by the opposition parties, and vertical threat by the citizens. The study shows that hybrid regimes and their authoritarian strategies are dynamic, and the strategy itself and the target of the strategy varies according to the type of threat. This study's novelty comes from its emphasis on the political contestation between the regime and regime challengers, determining the combination of authoritarian survival strategies. In this sense, it goes beyond exogenous explanations of

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1. This study focuses on Gerschewski (2013)'s framework on the three pillars of stability (legitimation, repression, co-optation). Since these are dynamic functions of the authoritarian incumbent and reactive to the challenges, this study uses the word "strategy" instead of "pillar." Therefore, the author uses the term pillar except when she refers to the studies that explicitly use the term "pillar."

authoritarian survival strategies, emphasizing the role of party organization, resource rents, and state apparatus (Levitsky and Way 2010).

To understand the change in the combination of the stability strategies, this study follows Schedler's (2013) theoretical framework on uncertainty, horizontal and vertical threats in electoral authoritarian (EA) regimes. Schedler (2013, 1) argues that authoritarian regimes are vulnerable to institutional and informational uncertainties. The institutional uncertainty implies that holding power is always insecure due to elections, while informational uncertainty means that the authoritarian regimes never know the level of "how secure they are" (Ibid). Regime threats are possible causes of a breakdown and instability of the regime (Ibid). Since the threats increase the regime's vulnerability for the elections and the institutions, the regime's stability strategies also react to these threats. Thus, the study argues that horizontal and/or vertical threats trigger the change in the combination of stability strategies.

In support of the argument, this study analyzes Turkey's hybrid regime under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) as a longitudinal case study (2002-2019). It divides the AKP rule into three periods and shows that the combination of the regime survival strategies changed twice, both due to vertical/horizontal challenges. Turkey is a most-likely case for confirming the hypothesis related to change in combining strategies triggered by vertical and horizontal threats. Throughout the periods, Turkey has permissive conditions such as missing international and domestic constraints to rely on challenge thwarting strategies. Also, Turkey experienced several threats as a hybrid regime, allowing it to test the threats on the combination of the stability strategies. As a spatial unit of analysis, Turkey has the conditions in three periods to explain the research questions of the study: **Why do some hybrid regimes change the combination of stability strategies? Why is there a change per se? Why is there a change through the introduction of a strategy towards a new combination?**

This study's findings suggest that incumbents respond to the regime challenging threats by introducing new survival strategies. The thesis finds that incumbents respond to the horizontal threat from the ruling elite by introducing hard repression and diffuse(ideological) legitimization strategy towards the elite and the opposition. Furthermore, the study finds that incumbents in hybrid regimes respond to the horizontal threat from the united opposition by introducing formal co-optation strategy towards the opposition parties. Lastly, the study finds partial evidence that mass demonstrations (vertical threats) lead incumbents to engage in hard repression and diffuse legitimization towards citizens and opposition.

The study aims to make two theoretical and two policy contributions. Theoretically, it tries to show that 1) When regime challenging threats fail to achieve regime change, the incumbents are likely to innovate new strategies and combine them with existing stability strategies. 2) Every regime challenging threat does not trigger the change in the behavior of incumbents in the same way. Therefore, the findings suggest that scholars should pay more attention to the challenger actors when analyzing the sources of hybrid regimes' survival behavior. In terms of policy implications, the findings suggest the following. 1) Domestic opposition in hybrid regimes should avoid extra-institutional and illiberal practices to overthrow the government and challenge the regime in electoral-legal grounds, given that the former might trigger consolidation. 2) External democracy promoters should focus on decreasing the cost of mobilization for regime challengers since failed threats are likely to trigger diversification of authoritarian survival strategies, end up leading to repression and stigmatization of the challengers. The latter could be materialized through direct involvement of Western-led NGO's, without bridging the domestic laws.

The study's structure is the following: The first chapter discusses the relevant literature on authoritarian survival strategies, points out the weaknesses in the existing debates, and explains the puzzle. The second chapter explains the research design, including definition,

operationalization of variables, and hypotheses formulation. It also explains the case selection and methodology. The third chapter analyses the Turkish case empirically. Lastly, the thesis discusses the findings, contributions, and limitations of the study.

## **Chapter 1. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

This study aims to analyze the change in the combinations of Gerschewski's (2013) pillars of stability: legitimization, repression, co-optation. The following theoretical framework discusses the main empirical studies and causal claims based on authoritarian stability strategies. Firstly, the literature based on the strategies' individual explanations as the independent and dependent variables will be presented. Secondly, studies focusing on the strategies in combination and their claims will be provided. Thirdly, the main contribution of this study will be indicated.

### **1.1 Legitimation**

Legitimation -defined as support gaining process- is one of the strategies that autocrats rely on to prolong their power (Gerschewski 2018, 18). Using sole repression might work for the short-run, but in the long-run, autocrats have to bear legitimization to frame that “they deserve power” (Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017, 1). Contemporary literature demonstrates how legitimization matters in autocratic regimes to maintain stability (von Soest and Grauvogel 2017, Gerschewski 2013, Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017). The literature also suggests that since each type of autocratic regime has a different institutional structure, to sustain its rule, they rely on different legitimization mechanisms, behaviors, and claims (Ibid). Gerschewski (2013) and Easton (1965) distinguishes legitimization into two subtypes: specific and diffuse legitimization. von Soest and Grauvogel (2017, 290) define six legitimacy claims and group them as identity-based legitimacy claims: foundational myth, ideology, personalism, and performance-based claims: procedures, performance, and international engagement, in which legitimization strategy types and/or their degrees vary over subtypes of authoritarian regimes.

Since the literature establishes that authoritarian legitimization matters for autocratic survival, studies also consider legitimization as the dependent variable. A pile of studies analyzes

the motivations behind why autocrats engage in different levels and types of legitimization strategies. Accordingly, large-scale threats such as mass demonstration and the horizontal threat from the ruling circle are likely to increase the diversity and intensity of autocrats' legitimization claims (Dukalskis and Patane 2019; Feldmann and Mazepus 2018). For instance, anti-regime mass demonstrations require autocrats' intense communication with the citizens to display the regime's strength (Dukalskis and Patane 2019, 458). These communicative efforts include showing not only regimes' ability to provide stability to the country but also frame mass demonstrations as materialized by traitors to destabilize the country (Edel and Josua 2018, 884; Dorman 2006, 1092). Furthermore, when authoritarian regimes repress mass demonstrations, they are likely to present the dissidence as a security issue to justify their brutal action through both specific and diffuse legitimization, emphasizing both the immorality and order breaking nature of challengers (Edel and Josua 2018 883; Dukalskis 2017). On the other hand, threats coming from the ruling circle intensify the need for diffuse legitimization as it requires reconstructing, we/they distinction to discredit the regime insiders who become challengers (Selvik 2018). Both types of system challenging threats also increase the diversity of legitimization strategies autocrats follow - including diffuse and specific variants, to convince different addressees in the population not to join the anti-regime movements (Josua 2017). In this sense, both authoritarian and hybrid regimes claim that legitimacy has a dynamic nature, increasing and diversifying when the rule is under threat (Mazepus et al. 2016). This dynamism includes prior legitimization as in the case of development of an anti-democratic "sovereign" ideology in Russia during color revolutions in neighboring countries (Finkel and Brudny 2012) and ex-post delegitimation of regime challenging threats as in the case Tiananmen Square events in China (Dukalskis and Patane 2019, 470-474). Overall, the literature suggests that political challenges that threaten the institutional equilibrium are likely to impact the nature of autocratic legitimization. While this study acknowledges existing perspectives and contextualizes

them in hybrid regimes, it tries go further by specifying which type of threat triggers incumbents to engage in diffuse and/or specific legitimation. The study tries to show which regime challenging actors are more (less) likely to effect regimes claims to legitimacy and how does the mechanism of legitimation change work in hybrid regimes.

## **1.2 Repression**

Although repression is more likely to be mentioned as an inseparable function of autocracies to maintain power, the sole usage of repression is not sustainable due to its high cost (Davenport 2007, Gerschewski 2013, Josua and Edel 2015). There are several explanations on why autocrats rely on repression such as the irresponsible government that is lack of mechanisms to address the demands of the citizens (Escribà-Folch 2013), or the government that does not have alternative mechanisms to affect its population but repression (Linz 2000, Davenport 2007, Geddes 1999). The usage of repression is based on a calculation that the benefits of the coercive action should be more than its cost (Davenport 2007). When autocrats are left to use repression, the benefits they expect from this are the continuation of their power (Escribà-Folch 2013). They use coercive measures to overcome threats coming from the citizens, opposition groups, and rivals (Ibid 546). Another explanation for explaining repression suggests regime type is the determinant of repression. While some scholars argue that there is a negative relationship between democracy and repression (Escribà-Folch 2013 445, Davenport 2004), some scholars emphasize that "there is an inverted U relationship" (Escribà-Folch 2013 445; Regan and Henderson 2002 in Davenport 2007, 488). Studies focusing on types of repression argue that different types of repression might vary according to the threat type among different types of authoritarian regimes (Josua and Edel 2015, Escribà-Folch 2013, Davenport 2007). Levitsky and Way (2010), and Way and Levitsky (2006) elaborate on the dynamics of autocratic coercion after Cold War and distinguish between high intensity and low-intensity coercion while Gerschewski (2013) makes a distinction between hard repression and soft

repression. Instead of the regime type, this study focuses on the type of threats – horizontal and vertical- and their effect on the combination of the strategies via the introduction of the hard repression strategy.

### **1.3 Co-optation**

Co-optation is a strategy that keeps the strategic actors, such as the military or business elite, together with the ruling elite (Gerschewski 2013, 22). Schmotz (2015) defines co-optation as a function to cover the regime's vulnerability via institutional inclusion of certain pressure groups as well as benefiting them materially. As a mechanism providing stability for the regime, some scholars focus on co-optation strategy by looking at the formal political institutions such as elections, political parties and parliament (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007, Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). Accordingly, formal co-optation enables authoritarian regimes to bind politically relevant groups to the ruling party via parliamentary representation and domesticates the opposition by pushing their dissent activity into the formal/legal sphere (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007). On the other hand, there are also informal versions of which might be achieved through clientelism and patronage (Gerschewski 2013). While the boundaries of informal co-optation are typically shaped by formal institutions (Hale 2011, Zavadskaya et al. 2017), they help authoritarian regimes to consolidate their power vis a vis the uncertainties rising from the pluralism of formal institutions (Isaacs 2010) and enhance effective governance without compromising selective rewards (Jiang 2018). Overall, the co-optation of economic and political is a necessary condition for authoritarian consolidation and survival.

When it comes to the sources of formal and informal co-optation strategies, the scholars appear to highlight the role of political institutions in accommodating and dominating the interest of the elite (Svolik 2012). Consequently, they focus on cross-case snapshots, unlike studies on repression and legitimation, which take political change and threats into account. For

instance, empirical studies show that the co-optation of political and economic elite is more (less) costly for different authoritarian and hybrid regime types. Accordingly, personalist regimes where the incumbent minimizes the members of winning coalition with personal ties are more successful in co-opting the economic elite through corruption (Chang and Golden 2010) and neutralizing the change seeking behavior within the ruling circle (Stacher 2007, 179-180). Hybrid regimes have the highest level of informal co-optation through external rents, given the coexistence of formal democratic institutions with the necessity to design informal institutions of authoritarian politics (Montinola and Jackman 2002). It is also suggested that the older and more dominant the incumbent party in electoral autocracies, the less likely they will engage in formal co-optation with other political parties given the established norms of governance (Gandhi and Reuter 2013, 149-152). Nonetheless, no matter how dominant the party electorally is, when co-opted elites within the party perceive that the party is experiencing electoral vulnerability, they are likely to defect (Reuter and Szakonyi 2019). Overall, the literature that takes co-optation as a dependent variable mainly looks at the level of dominance of party and regime defining institutions in the electoral and social arena, which identifies the regimes' need and capacity to co-opt relevant groups.

Nevertheless, like other pillars of authoritarian stability, co-optation's self-reinforcement is subject to the availability of material sources and equilibrium of power dynamic between the incumbent and opposition (Gerschewski 2013, 24). Thus, like repression and legitimation, which tend to increase with threatening regime challenges (Edel and Josua 2018), co-optation is likely to be subject to a change when opposition parties and interest groups intensify their struggle against the regime (Schedler 2013, 302).

## 1.4 Strategies in Combination

Although empirical studies analyze the roots and impact of stability strategies of legitimation, co-optation, and repression separately, studies which take survival or electoral victory of the incumbent in authoritarian regimes as a dependent variable find that these pillars provide stability for authoritarian and hybrid regimes only in conjunctural configurations (Schneider and Maerz 2017, 230). Thus, legitimation, co-optation, and repression explain authoritarian stability only when these strategies coexist to complement and enhance each other. For example, empirical studies find that "adaptive" authoritarian regimes avoid using "hard" physical repression of dissidents by combining intense material and non-material legitimation, co-optation of potential challengers, and violation of civil liberties, yet still survive (Maerz 2020, 81-82). Therefore, authoritarian regimes survive by following strategies that strengthen each other such as by justification of hard repression through diffuse legitimation (Edel and Josua 2018) and replace each other such as providing stability through economic elite (citizen) support at times, when sources citizen (elite) support is low (Shubladze and Khundadze 2017, 316). In this sense, when analyzing domestic sources of authoritarian survival either as a cause or outcome, three pillars should be analyzed in combination. To put it differently, external factors that affect one strategy is likely to impact other authoritarian stability strategies as well, given that these strategies (de)stabilize together (Ibid.).

Nonetheless, existing research does not take these strategies as the dependent variable and consequently neglect the motivations to follow a different combination of strategies. The existing research highlights that having highly dominant institutions like cohesive and widespread incumbent parties (Levitsky and Way 2010, 66), natural resources such as oil that enhances rentierism (Ross 2001) or incumbents' control of an ideological-repressive state apparatus (March 2003), strengthens the authoritarian combination. Furthermore, studies across various authoritarian regime types suggest that authoritarian regimes attempt to expand their

manipulation strategies and coercive structures due to fear of diffusion of external threats as in the case for Arab Spring and color revolutions in China and Russia (Koesel and Bunce 2013).

In particular, Bayulgen et al. (2018) analyze Turkey's case between 2013-2017 and emphasize the change in repression and legitimization, conceptualizing differently. They detail a different combination that excludes the co-optation strategy in their analysis, focusing on legitimization, repression, and centralization strategies and their changing characteristics throughout time. Although they are also interested in change towards challenges, they underestimate the co-optation strategy, replacing it with centralization. Besides, although they mention that threats lead to changes in the strategies, they do not specify what kind of threat leads to what kind of strategy. It is this gap that the study aims to fulfill and provide new hypothesis for the relationship between threats and regime's combination of survival strategies.

The novelty of the study is the following. Firstly, existing empirical research concerns less how domestic, horizontal, and vertical threats force hybrid or authoritarian regimes to change the combination. Although archival research suggests that even the coercive 20th-century communist regimes framed public unrest to reassure the elite unity and public support (Bray et al. 2019), there is a gap in the relationship between threats to the rule and its effects on authoritarian survival strategies, especially in qualitative studies. Secondly, since the literature's focus as the dependent variable is the stability of the autocratic regime, change in the combinations from one to another has not been the main focus. This study elaborates on a different causality that is between the threats and their effect on the combination of stability strategies. This study's main contribution will be to take stability strategies as a dependent variable instead of an independent variable. Also, using the longitudinal analysis and method of difference, the study tries to demonstrate the relationships between the stability strategies and different reactions towards challenges, neglected by the previous studies. Thirdly, this study

also explains why and how even some of the stable combinations might vary. Gerschewski (2013) argues that the combination of high specific support, high soft repression, and informal co-optation is one of the stable combinations that the autocracies rely on. However, the Turkish case between 2002-2006 has the same combination, which was subject to change when first threats came. Therefore, even stable combinations proposed by the literature are subject to change when it comes to horizontal and vertical threats the incumbent has to deal with.

What is puzzling in this study is that **1)** It presents a different causality by taking stability strategies as the dependent variable, **2)** It provides a longitudinal case study with the method of difference between three periods in Turkey. Therefore, the causal mechanism of the change through the introduction of a new strategy will be better understood.

## Chapter 2. Research Design

### 2.1 Conceptualization and Measurement of the Variables

The dependent variable in this study is the combination of stability strategies. There are six strategies in total that are the possible components of the combination of strategies; specific legitimation, diffuse legitimation, soft repression, hard repression, informal co-optation, and formal co-optation. Since the dependent variable is the combination of stability strategies that vary in three periods with two changes in this study, it is essential to give the details of the specific concepts in the combination itself.

“Legitimacy is a relational concept between the ruler and the ruled in which the ruled sees the entitlement claims of the ruler as being justified and follows them based on a perceived obligation to obey.” (Gerschewski 2018, 655) Operationalization and the measurement legitimation in authoritarian regimes are complex issues that several studies discussed how to measure and operationalize it (von Haldenwang 2016, 28; Gerschewski 2013; von Soest and Grauvogel 2017; Mazepus et al. 2016; Gerschewski 2018; Morgenbesser 2015; Kailitz 2013). This study relies on Gerschewski’s (2013) conceptualization on diffuse and specific legitimation and follows his measurement suggestions. Following Gerschewski (2013), specific legitimation is about the regime's performance and refers to answering the demands of the people. Diffuse legitimation strategy is about the regime’s actual representation by the incumbent, seeking long-term legitimation of the authoritarian rule through non-material sources such as ideology and leader’s personal charisma (Ibid, 20).

Following Gerschewski (2013), social assistance, IMF, and WB data on real GDP growth and inflation rate, economic growth, and performance-based projects of the government are the indicators of the specific legitimation in this study. Also, this study relies on secondary sources on the economic development of the AKP government. In addition to Gerschewski's suggestion, I also rely on performance-based projects done and advertised by the government.

These might be used by the government to rely on specific legitimization, even though the economic performance is not well, but the government still needs to legitimize its rule through performance (Kneuer 2017).

Diffuse legitimization is operationalized by looking at the discourse/speeches of the incumbent leader, and his ideological reliance (whether nationalist, populist, or Islamist), and charismatic leadership/personality. To be able to measure it, this study relies on secondary sources on the discourse of Erdoğan, and concrete measurements such as Global Populism Database.

According to Gerschewski (2013, 22), co-optation refers to the incumbent's ability to bind actors who are strategically useful to the regime's elites. Selznick (1949, 13) defines co-optation as the process of introducing new elements/actors into the organization's leader or policymaking structure as a function of preventing threats to stability or presence of the rule. This study combines these two definitions and redefines. Co-optation is a strategy to bind strategic actors to the regime elite, aiming that the incumbent's rule should be protected against the threats that might lead to instability of the regime (Gerschewski 2013, 22; Selznick 1949, 13). Co-optation with informal ways is possible through patronage and clientelism (Gerschewski 2013). Gerschewski (2013) suggests patronage and clientelism as indicators of informal co-optation. Appointment of the pro-government individuals to the state institutions (business elite, religious organization members) in exchange for support, clientelist relations with the business elite, systematic irregularities in public procurements are the indicators of informal co-optation. Since it is hard to find evidence for concrete measurement in autocracies regarding patronage and clientelism, this study relies on secondary sources and investigative journalism to be able to trace informal co-optation.

Gandhi and Przeworski (2006, 21) demonstrate that democratic institutions such as elections, legislation, and political parties are the means for dictatorships to mobilize cooperation and prevent the regime from encountering the threat of rebellion. As Gerschewski (2013, 22) mentions, Gandhi and Przeworski's (2006) argument about democratic institutions in dictatorships or authoritarian electoral regimes is based on formal channels co-optation. Therefore, in this study, formal ways of cooperating with the opposition are measured as formal co-optation strategies. Formal co-optation is operationalized by looking at the electoral coalitions between the incumbent and political parties in which whether the incumbent changes its strategy in the times of elections, either making coalitions or running alone.

Gerschewski (2013) suggests that the distinction between low-intensity coercion and high-intensity coercion (Levitsky and Way 2010) corresponds to the distinction between soft and hard repression. Therefore, this study takes the definition of low and high-intensity coercion to measure soft and hard repression strategies. While soft repression is operationalized through looking at violations of civil rights and liberties, hard repression is operationalized by looking at violent, coercive acts by the government towards mass protests, imprisonment of well-known individuals (Levitsky and Way 2010), political right violations through law and practice, replacement of the democratically elected politicians and/or imprisonment of them. Presence of at least one of them considered as the presence of hard repression Sources of the data are the secondary resources on human rights violations in Turkey, political imprisonment, and violent repression during the mass protests, CPJ (Committee to Protect Journalists: a nonprofit, non-governmental organization).

## 2.2 Hypotheses

The dependent variable's variance will be tested in Turkey's three periods under the Erdoğan rule (2002-2019). Given the condition that the incumbent has already relied on specific

legitimation, informal co-optation, and soft repression strategy, this study tests the hypotheses formulated below.

This study argues that the vulnerability of any combination of the stability strategies comes from the uncertainty that competitive authoritarian (CA) regimes are subject to (Schedler 2013). The rulers of the authoritarian regimes "can never relax," in which the incumbent always shapes the uncertainty level in reaction to the challenges (Ibid, 21). Therefore, authoritarian rulers take "adaptive responses" (Ibid). This study argues that the adaptive responses are the changes in the combination of stability strategies. Schedler (2013) argues that "competitive regimes are in disequilibrium," and they have threatening uncertainties related to incumbents' electoral strength, in which the incumbent tries to minimize these uncertainties (Schedler 2013, 213). Following Schedler (2013), the study argues that in hybrid regimes, the combinations of the stability strategies are also in disequilibrium due to the uncertainty that comes from the regime's competitiveness. Therefore, I hypothesize that **H1**) The combination of the stability strategies are subject to change when the incumbent is challenged by the new horizontal and/or vertical threats. While the theoretical background lies in the uncertainty concept of Schedler (2013), the actors (the incumbent) are considered rational actors that are aware of the challenge of uncertainty. Here, the independent variable is any horizontal or vertical threat, which leads to change in the combination through the introduction of new strategies. The independent variable is measured whether there is a horizontal or vertical threat.

Schedler (2013) argues that the uncertainty of the ruling elite also means the uncertainty of regime survival. "Most of the time, the most serious challenge to dictators' survival in office comes from high-level allies, not from regime opponents" (Geddes 2004, 6 in Schedler 2013, 35). To contain the ruling elite incoherency, hard and soft repression is the reaction against the horizontal threats that come from the ruling elite. Horizontal threats coming from ruling elites

imply that the regime fails to co-opt some of the critical actors, and these actors have autonomous power. Thus, the regime has no option but the repress to avoid alternative power forces for the regime's stability. If the hard repression strategy has never used before the horizontal threats are visible, a change in the combination of stability strategies through the introduction of the hard repression strategy might increase the chance of regime survival. Therefore, I hypothesize that **H2)** The horizontal threat by the ruling elites leads to the introduction of hard repression and diffuse legitimation strategy towards the ruling elite and the opposition.

Electoral competition and the presence of opposition parties are the major components of EA regimes; this mechanism keeping the regime's threat should also be contained by the ruling elite (Wilson 2016). Therefore, the incumbent favors manipulating and controlling the competition (Levitsky and Way 2010, Schedler 2002). Considering competitive elections, competitive authoritarian regimes are more likely to democratize through elections than hegemonic authoritarian regimes (Donno 2013). In CA regimes, the incumbent's chance to manipulate the elections can be balanced when the opposition is united and external powers threaten the incumbent when they break the electoral norms (Ibid, 714). It is legitimate to argue that a divided opposition contains less threat to the regime than the united opposition against the regime. I hypothesize that **H3)** The horizontal threat by the united opposition leads to the introduction of formal co-optation strategy towards the opposition parties. When a horizontal threat comes from a united opposition, the incumbent relies on the formal co-optation strategy that decreases the uncertainty over the election and increases the chance of electoral victory.

One of the main motivators for mass protest is lack of legitimacy (Thyen and Gerschewski 2018). I hypothesize that when there is a vertical threat challenging the incumbent through mass mobilization, the incumbents need legitimation claims to minimize the

uncertainty that the threat will or about to create. **H4)** The vertical threat by the citizens leads to the introduction of diffuse legitimation and hard repression strategy towards the opposition and citizens. Therefore, in the case of mass protest, the incumbent relies on diffuse legitimation strategy using ideology to convince large segments of society against the protesters who voiced their dissatisfaction through political mobilization. When the incumbent implies hard repression strategy or increases the amount of it, the incumbent still needs diffuse legitimation strategy to justify the repression that it relied on. Since the threat is vertical, coming from the citizens, there is a need for convincing the citizens who are the ones who will vote as well as the basis of electoral uncertainty.

Dukalskis and Patane (2019) argue that autocratic regimes bear legitimation strategies when confronted with massive systemic challenges from the citizens. Until a massive movement threatens the regime, the incumbents remain silent in terms of repression, and when they apply repression, they also try to justify it through censorship (corresponds to soft repression) and concealment (Ibid, 475). The incumbent also needs to justify the repression of protesters. March (2003, 229) argues that authoritarian regimes justify the use of repression by defining the state as a matter of common goal and defining the goals and aspirations of the nation's founders. Thus, vertical threats increase the need for diversifying and intensifying legitimation strategies. Mainly, substantial threats coming from below requires authoritarian regimes to demonstrate that they are legitimate rulers. They need to diversify their strategies both to sustain its support and justify the repressive action they take against challengers.

### **2.3 Independent Variables**

Independent variables of this study are a vertical threat by the citizens, horizontal threat by the ruling elite, and horizontal threat by the united opposition parties. To be able to count any action as a threat to the government, this study takes the horizontal and vertical actors'

actions that are explicitly pointing to the ruling party's course of action. The indicators of the threats are the following:

The indicators of the horizontal threats by the ruling elite -the judiciary and military (Schedler 2013)- are party closure case, coup attempt, direct statements against the incumbent's acts, and judicial actions towards government by the judges.

The indicators of horizontal threat coming from opposition parties are the presence of uniting/united opposition parties through electoral coalition, strategic voting of the opposition parties' electorate against the ruling party, newly establishing or established cooperation between opposition parties

Vertical threat refers to threats coming from the citizens through mass social movements (Dukalskis and Patane 2019).

## **2.4 Case Selection: Why Turkey?**

This study takes Turkey as a most-likely case. The most-likely case is the case with a high probability of approving the proposed hypotheses and arguments through analysis (Rohlfing 2012, 84). Turkey, as a most-likely case for change in the combination of strategies against threats, has permissive conditions such as lack of international and domestic pressure to allow threats to impact the incumbent's stability strategies, which allows confirming proposed hypotheses in all the three periods. For example, when the threats directing to the incumbent came in the second period, some international and domestic factors had catalyzed the government's way to change the strategies. On the one hand, relations with the EU helped the incumbent to eliminate the military tutelage by requiring demilitarization of the institutions. When institutional restrictions imposed by the military tutelage for the government were reduced, these conditions opened the way for a change in combination strategies against the threats. On the other hand, as the relations with the EU started to decrease, the area where the

government would use its strategies against the threats has widened with the absence of anyone to control repression.

In the absence of institutional constraints by the EU and the military tutelage, the government could have a favorable context to thwart challenges through certain strategies. Turkey has experienced change-generative factors such as vertical and horizontal threats with favorable conditions, which triggered changes in the strategies. This study is interested in the effects of threats in the combination of stability strategies and choosing a particular strategy to overcome the specific threat. The hybrid regime's relative competitiveness in three periods, also led to the incumbent's calculations regarding elections when it decided to use one of the strategies against threats.

## 2.5 Methodology

This study is a longitudinal comparative case study that uses Mill's (1874) method of difference. An ideal method of difference requires at least two similar comparable “cases that differ only on the outcome and a single cause.” (Rohlfing 2012, 97-98). A longitudinal comparative case study of Turkey represents an imperfect one due to the two causes and two changes in the second period (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Methodology**

Method of Difference				
Periods Threats	Horizontal threat by the ruling elite	Vertical threat by the citizens	Horizontal threat by the united opposition	New strategy to the combination
2002-2006	X	X	X	no change
2007-2012	✓	✓	X	diffuse legitimization, and hard repression
2013-2019	✓	✓	✓	formal co-optation

Given Turkey's situation, vertical and horizontal threats shifted the combination by adding new strategies (see Table 2.). Informal co-optation, specific legitimation, soft repression are the strategies that the Turkish incumbent relied on in the period between 2002-2006 when there is no direct challenge towards the incumbent. When it came across challenges, in the period between 2007 and 2012, the new combination of strategies became informal co-optation, specific legitimation, diffuse legitimation, soft repression, and hard repression. Additional vertical and horizontal threats lead to the third combination of strategies by adding formal co-optation in the period between 2013 and 2019: these are informal co-optation, formal co-optation specific legitimation, diffuse legitimation, soft repression, and hard repression. In the last period, the incumbent was required all the strategies to thwart challenges to keep its power.

**Table 2. Periods, Threats, and Change in the Combinations**

Years	Threats	Combination of Strategies
2002-2006	No direct threat against the incumbent	Specific legitimation, informal co-optation, soft repression
2007-2012	Horizontal threat by the ruling elite, vertical threat by the citizens.	Specific legitimation, <b>diffuse legitimation</b> , informal co-optation, <b>hard repression</b> , soft repression
2013-2019	Horizontal threat by the ruling elite, horizontal threat by the united opposition, vertical threat by the citizens.	Specific legitimation, diffuse legitimation, <b>formal co-optation</b> , informal co-optation, hard repression, soft repression

Each time frame after 2006 represented the time of the new threats that lead to changes in the combination of strategies. Firstly, in 2002 the AKP government came to power. Secondly, in 2007, the incumbent experienced first horizontal threat by the ruling elite and the following vertical threat by the citizens. Thirdly, in 2013, the new vertical threat by the citizens affected the incumbent's reactions, such as increasing diffuse legitimation and hard repression strategy. Also, the united opposition led to the formal co-optation strategy.

## 2.6 The Method and the Sources of the Data Collection

Since the binary measurement is advantageous in qualitative studies in terms of reducing the property space (Rohlfing 2012, 20), the measured change in the combination strategies is not based on the level of strategy (low-medium-high), but the introduction of the new strategy-binary. Although certain increases and/or decreases in certain strategies are mentioned in the study, the main focus is the introduction of a new strategy.

For each independent variable and the dependent variable, this study also relies on secondary sources, newspaper articles, and the Freedom House's country reports on Turkey as qualitative data. Secondary resources are from the journals that have peer review. Also, the IMF, WB, CPJ, Global Populism Dataset are well-known data sources that political science scholars frequently rely on. The online newspaper articles that this study uses are mostly independent newspapers such as Aljazeera, DW, T24, Birgün, Evrensel. Mainstream pro-government newspapers are also used to reach Erdoğan's statements, mention a specific event, or evaluate the government's reaction: Milliyet, Hürriyet, Sabah, CNNTürk. For the informal co-optation strategy, the data sources are also based on investigative journalism. The claim of an increase in the systematic corruption of the public procurement process was checked by Transparency International's corruption indexes. Although Transparency International does not directly approve the claim, it shows the trustworthiness of the claim.

## Chapter 3. Empirical Analysis

### 3.1 The First Period: Softer Strategies Without Threat (2002-2006)

In the first period of this study analyzed- between 2002 and 2006, there were no direct threats, pointing directly to the incumbent. There were conditions of structural constraints brought by the tutelary democracy. Therefore, uncertainty was coming from two sides: the electoral uncertainty given that the AKP was a new party ruling only with 34% of the votes, and the tutelary regime's uncertainty due to tradition of military involvement in Turkish politics through closing parties and making coups. Under these conditions, the AKP government based its survival strategies on these structural constraints given by Turkish politics' historical development and the tutelary democracy itself. Thus, AKP's combination of strategies could avoid a direct threat coming from traditional powers by not provoking them. In this environment, the AKP government refrained antagonizing opposing forces rather aimed at consolidating its support base and enhancing the power of its potential allies. The AKP government identified itself with reformist-Islamist and democratic view (Saatçioğlu 2014), and as a conservative democrat (Akdogan 2004) without challenging the secularist norms and elites<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, the stability strategies that the government based itself in this period are specific legitimation, soft repression, and informal co-optation.

Specific legitimation was one of the strategies that enhanced the newly established AKP's support base. Firstly, the economic growth contributed to the specific legitimation strategy of the AKP. When the AKP came to power, the economy was newly recovering, and

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<sup>2</sup>In the aftermath of the 1960 and 1980 coups, Turkey had been an electoral democracy under military tutelage where the military had actively intervened politics and was highly secularist and *Kemalist* (Kars-Kaynar 2018). The hegemony of the military over the political arena manifested itself by coups and preventing anti secularist actors from having a significant amount of power. The National Security Council, and judiciary bodies were ideologically secular and non-pluralist (Kars-Kaynar 2018; Kuru and Stepan 2012, 71). The constitutional court dissolved the Virtue Party – that was coming from the "National Outlook Movement," which was explicitly in favor of Islamist and nationalist political agenda (Yıldız 2003). In the wake of the closure case, the party was split into two groups (Ceran 2019). One of the groups called reformists, including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül, established a new party called Justice and Development Party (AKP) lead by Erdoğan (Ibid). The reformist group evolved to AKP presented itself as pro-democratic, moderate and reformist, quitted from the National Outlook view, and seeking close relations with the Western world, unlike the National Outlook Movement (Kesgin 2020).

the recovery was attributed to the AKP's success (Akçay 2018). In the economically and politically unstable years between 1991 to 2002, Turkey experienced many unstable coalition governments (Cosar and Ozman 2004). Due to the 2001 financial crisis' severe hit, the coalition government needed to implement neoliberal policies through the International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment program (IMF) (Özdemir 2020). After a year, the coalition government adopted IMF's program when the economy started its relative recovery, and the newly established AKP came to power in 2002 and managed the following steps of the reforms (Özdemir 2020). Even though the economy starts its recovery after 2001 (Ibid), the coalition government led by three parties held an early election due to the financial crisis. As a result of an early election, a newly established party -the AKP came to power. The first turn of the AKP government corresponded to economic improvement as well. Until the end of 2002, the real GDP growth went up from -6 to 6.4, and the relative growth remained until 2007 (IMF 2019). Also, until 2002 the inflation rate decreased to 45.1 from 54.2 and dropped to 8.8 until the end of 2006 (Ibid). In the 2007 general elections, the AKP got 49,83% of the vote share. According to a research conducted in 2007 by a research company, KONDA, 42.7% of the voters consider that country's economy is improving while 30.1% of the voters are arguing that the country's economy is getting worse. 80.1% of the AKP supporters responded that the economy has improved, 68.2 of the opposition voters stated that it was worsened (Ağırdır 2007). The financial crisis and the IMF package in the following eased the way for the AKP to be elected as well as maintain its performance-based claims. Following KONDA's mentioned research, the AKP's voters are convinced that the government is performing well in terms of economy. Firstly, the relative economic improvement contributed to the specific legitimization strategy of the incumbent in relation to the performance of the regime (Gerschewski 2013). Secondly, after a long period of Turkish politics' economic and political instability, it increased the chance of being elected for the second term.

Secondly, the specific legitimization strategy was implied with social assistance provided to a particular segment of society. The provision of these aids to a certain segment, not for everyone, and the provision of aid through municipalities rather than social policy has led to a clientelist relationship between the targeted poor population and the government (Dogan 2017). Since the early days of its office, the AKP government could penetrate lower segments of the population. The AKP government could carry out its widespread organizational structure in the neighborhoods through municipalities (Ibid). It was able to survive despite the inequalities brought by neoliberal policies of IMF and WB, mostly with the opportunities offered by the pro-AKP Islamic foundations, and specific social benefits (Özdemir 2020, Dogan 2017). The type of organization, together with the type of neoliberal policies, brought about strong clientelist relationships between the poorer segments of the society and the incumbent. Newly adopted IMF and WB implementations eased the way of clientelist redistribution policies, instead of programmatic or universal one, that was not regularly implemented, and their continuity was uncertain (Özdemir 2020). Thanks to these policies, the AKP could establish its support base through the specific legitimization strategy.<sup>3</sup> With citizens who were informally employed, unemployed, or poor, the targeted characteristic of social policies connected the poor directly to the party through the mechanism of social assistance in exchange for a vote (Ibid). Besides the social assistance has been targeted, it has had a charity-based characteristic via in-kind benefits that municipalities provided, which constructed the novel kind of clientelist structure and corruption in Turkish politics (Özdemir 2020, 10).

Thirdly, through the EU membership process, international engagement allowed the government to use it as a specific legitimization tool by bringing policies based on European standards, reorganizing the economy and politics in Turkey (Günay and Dzihic 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> Although this study's research design takes clientelist relationships as an indicator of informal co-optation strategy, it includes only the elite level. Therefore, "mass co-optation" with the larger population refers to specific legitimization (Gerschewski 2013, 33).

Besides, the EU process opened the way to remove military guardianship from specific institutions, that will allow the AKP government to strengthen informal co-optation strategy in the future. Erdoğan used the EU process in a practical manner that served to the AKP's interest other than Europeanization itself (Akçay 2018, Avcı 2011, Keyman and Öniş 2003). The process opened the gate for the liberation of the judicial system from tutelage towards the ruling of civilian authorities (Erensü and Alemdaroğlu 2018, Güler and Bölücek 2016). At the same time, areas liberated from the military tutelage was filled by pro-AKP personals. According to EU's Progress Reports for Turkey between 2002-2006, in line with the EU's necessities, the incumbent took several steps to decrease the dominance of the military in politics as well as over judiciary through decreasing the frequency of National Security Council (NSC) meetings and decreasing its effectiveness incrementally, increasing the number of civilians in the NSC, expanding the transparency for defense expenditures, decreasing the defense budget. While the incumbent tried to purify the judicial system from the military's tutelage, it is clear that the government was not eager to follow further steps towards proper European standards (Comission of the European Communities 2007). The incumbent's determination on the membership is a strategic move to both dilute secular and Kemalist players as well as get the domestic and international approval (Akçay 2018). Therefore, it is just to say that the government used the EU process for pragmatic reasons.

When the support base of the EU membership decreased, the government took action accordingly. According to public opinion researches conducted by Eurobarometer: in 2001, 59% of Turkey's public opinion supported EU membership by stating, "EU membership of Turkey would be a good thing." While the view of seeing EU membership as a good thing increased to 71% until 2004. After 2004, there was a severe drop. While in 2005 the support for the EU regressed to 59%, in 2007 and 2008 it fell below 50%. The period when the support dropped dramatically corresponds to the time negative statements made by German and French

leaders Merkel and Sarkozy towards Turkey's membership, and European Court of Human Rights' (ECHR) approval on the headscarf ban, that resulted in the alienation of the public opinion from EU (Avcı 2011, 414-416). Decreasing public opinion also decreased the government's interest in further necessary implications for membership. These situations created the usual conditions for the AKP, which has already used the EU process pragmatically to stand against the EU. Therefore EU played an active role in two directions: first, it was an indication that it will raise democratic policy standards that helped the government to earn international and domestic legitimacy until the relations got worse; second, it reduced military tutelage, facilitating future repression and assigning pro-AKP names in the aftermath of liquidations.

Informal co-optation strategy was established mostly through pro-AKP business elite and public procurements. The AKP started to strengthen its existing power by attracting economically strong groups. The AKP could co-opt with the newly emerged conservative business association- MÜSİAD, which provided the AKP financial and human resources as well as ideological support (Başkan 2010, 411) In 2002 and 2007 general elections, some of the members of the MÜSİAD were elected as MPs of the AKP (Başkan 2010, 412). The MÜSİAD created new branches in different Anatolian and Western cities of Turkey due to directions suggested by AKP and provided technical advice in economic policymaking, which souped-up AKP's export-led growth strategies (Ibid). As AKP started to consolidate its power, it strengthened its relations with the more traditional business association TÜSİAD, known as the business association of elites close to the Kemalist political circles and values (Akçay 2009, 261). The liberalizing economic policies with the EU and the IMF's help eased the collaborations between business associations and the incumbent. Therefore, economic elites were no longer in the monopoly of secular state elites. MÜSİAD, which developed with the

neoliberal wind of the 1980s and, unlike TÜSİAD, mostly consists of Anatolian conservative businesspeople, did not hesitate to openly support the AKP.

Nonetheless, informal co-optation was not limited to AKP's relations with organized interest. In the case of public procurements, councilors were faced with accusations such as making decisions in favor of local capital groups and not paying the real estate tax share that should be collected to the special provincial administration (Dogan 2017, 226). The official reports include procedures such as illegal construction on personal and state treasury lands, decisions against the zoning license, and not obeying the tender regulations in the purchase of goods to the regulated sales stores (Ibid). The infraction of rules via public procurements continued and developed throughout the AKP's following years. In 2003, the 21/b clause of the bargaining procedure in the Public Procurement Law came into force. According to the clause, if there is a state of emergency such as natural disaster, epidemic, risk of loss of life or property, or it is compulsory to make tender urgently, procurement must be made immediately in order to ensure the safety of building or life and property<sup>4</sup>. In these cases, the 21/b can be implied. According to 21/b, there is no obligation to announce the procurement, and it is not open to all firms (Toker 2019). Since it came to power, the AKP government has widely used 21/b even though there is no state of emergency and sell the procurements only to a few firms (Ibid). Since it is not announced, nobody knows, and therefore the money was transferred to certain companies (Bozkürk 2019). Therefore, by using 21/b selectively, the government was able to transfer resources to his cronies without competition. Through this mechanism, the AKP consolidated its power with informal co-optation using formal rules<sup>5</sup>.

Soft repression strategy, especially when it comes to the Kurdish Question, some inherited restraints preserved itself in spite of the EU membership process reformation.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.4734.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> The trend in Corruption Perceptions Index for Turkey (Transparency International nc.d), since 2002, corresponds to the claims.

However, there were some limited improvements in terms of civil rights and liberties. For example, the incumbent abolished the state of emergency that violated human rights in Kurdish provinces (Kirişçi 2011). The government's efforts to decrease the military power manifested itself here in terms of the decreasing influence of the military in Kurdish towns and an improvement in human rights. However, Kurdish lessons and education are banned in public schools (Freedom House Turkey Reports, 2002-2006). Freedom of speech and independent media was also under risk. The freedom area of the media was limited in that journalists are subjected to prosecution if they commit defamation and violate antiterrorism and press laws (Ibid). Five journalists were imprisoned due to their work and charged with making propaganda and/or being a member of a terrorist organization (Committee to Protect Journalists n.d). Despite the relative improvements regarding civil rights and liberties, the restrictions and prosecutions of the media and journalists prove the existence of the government's soft repression strategy. Conspicuously, AKP's soft repression strategies mainly targeted against Kurds and pro-Kurdish media, avoiding attacking the secular mainstream media.

The overall pattern suggests that structural constraints of Turkish politics shaped AKP's survival strategies. Under the conditions of no direct threat from the secular state elite and from citizens, AKP, as a newcomer to Turkish politics, refrained from using strategies that would jeopardize its power. For example, it refrained from using any diffuse – identity-related legitimization strategies. This helped the government avoid the rise of a one-dimensional secular-Islamist conflict and mobilize alliances of different interests through the EU process. Similarly, the EU "carrot," and the government's control of security apparatuses, lead the government to avoid any hard repression. The determining factor in choosing strategies was also related to the government's capacity, determining the strategies according to the circumstances by making rational calculations. Furthermore, the EU process's economic growth and relative success reinforced the existing strategies until the end of the period.

Legitimation, co-optation, and repression strategies are self-reinforcing and in relation to each other, and effective when used in combination (Gerschewski 2013). Since they are self-reinforcing, when the incumbent introduced or used one of the strategies, that means it reinforces itself, and it is hard to quit this strategy unless it is harmful to the incumbent or there is no resource to do that. Therefore, already applied strategies of specific legitimation, informal co-optation, and soft repression were not abandoned by the incumbent in the following years of the AKP's rule. However, as the following section shows, existing strategies were not enough to confront the threats coming from the citizens and the elite.

### **3.2 The Second Period: Towards Diffuse Legitimation and Hard Repression (2007-2012)**

The first set of threats directed against the incumbent came in the 2007-2012 period, leading to the introduction of high repression and diffuse legitimation strategies. Particularly, illiberal behaviors of tutelary powers and illiberal mobilization of masses further activated authoritarian tendencies of the AKP government, that started to follow new survival strategies. The 2007-2012 period includes horizontal threats by the ruling elite and vertical threat that changed the incumbent's survival strategies.

The first type of horizontal threat came from the military. On 27 April 2007, in the night of the parliament elected Abdullah Gül as President<sup>6</sup>, The Chief of General Staff Yaşar Büyükanıt, on behalf of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), published an e-memorandum on the Turkish Armed Forces website against the AKP nominating Abdullah Gül as a candidate (Akçay 2018). E-memorandum said, "The prominent problem that arises in the presidential election process focuses on secularism discussions. The latest situation worries the Turkish Armed Forces. It should not be forgotten that the TAF also is an authority in these discussions and an absolute defender of secularism. Besides, the TAF is definitely against the ongoing

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<sup>6</sup> In 2007, Erdoğan nominated Abdullah Gül as a presidential candidate. Abdullah Gül was previously a member of the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi), closed due to its anti-secular stance. Many of Abdullah Gül's anti-secular statements throughout his political life have received negative reactions from secular circles, especially the military. Therefore, his candidacy created a crisis within the secular ruling elite- the military.

discussions and will reveal its attitude and behavior when necessary. Nobody should have doubts about this” (Mynet 2015). The government officials' direct warning to change its stance towards presidential candidates was another sign of the strong military tutelage in Turkey.

Unlike the military tutelage's structural constraints towards the government, this was a clear and direct threat pointing to the party and its officials that they are not the only player. The memorandum indicated the message to the government that, under the circumstances, the incumbent's survival depends on its compliance with the military, emphasizing Kemalist and secular values of the state. Thus, the e-memorandum and the functioned as a horizontal threat against the AKP government.

Within an aggressive military environment, other tutelary powers, such as the judiciary, also challenged the AKP rule in an illiberal way. One example the way judiciary blocked Gül's election as president: Relying on a very ambiguous law in the constitution, the constitutional court declared that when the parliament elected Abdullah Gül, less than 367 parliamentarians attended the session, so the election was not binding (Paksüt 2007). As the Kemalist opposition party CHP kept boycotting the session, it forced AKP to change the constitution so that the president could be directly elected (Erem 2019). Thus, the constitutional court's decision encouraged AKP to move away from the existing rules of the game. Furthermore, other ideologically motivated branches of the judiciary also attacked AKP directly: The chief public prosecutor of the court of cassation, Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya, filed a lawsuit to the Constitutional Court with the request that the Justice and Development Party be closed with the allegation that it became the focus of acts against secularism (DW 2008). In the AKP closure case, the request for closure was rejected, with six against five votes. According to the decision reached, AKP will be deprived of half the treasury aid (Milliyet 2008a). Overall it became clear that the AKP rule faced a double horizontal threat from judicial and military tutelary powers.

The second type of threat, the citizens' vertical threat through mass demonstrations, was brought about right after the e-memorandum was published. Mass demonstrations called "Republican Meetings" organized by secular-Kemalist associations immediately followed the e-memorandum warning of the top elites (Akçay 2018, 17). Republican Meetings were highly populated and spread big cities of Turkey, such as Ankara-the capital, İstanbul, and İzmir. The concern was that the AKP was digressing from republican and democratic value, secularism, that the republic has been built on (DW 2007). Kemalist-secular groups announced that the possibility of having a political-Islamist president damages the republic's secular characteristics and its future as it is (Akçay 2018). The direct reaction to the government's decision manifested itself through the massively used slogan "Turkey is secular and will remain secular" and other slogans with the emphasis on nationalism against Islamic values (DW 2007). The statements during the demonstrations and the demonstrations themselves showed that e-memorandum is seen as legitimate by a considerable amount of the population. Current strategies the government bearing was not enough to get over the whole tutelage and the uncertainty that both the ruling elite and mass demonstrations created, concerning the future elections and the probability of being removed by another closure case or coup as they were the case in the past.

Above mentioned threats against the government required incumbency to consolidate its support-base through diffuse legitimation strategy besides other strategies. While the mass demonstrations indicated a lack of popular legitimacy (Thyen and Gerschewski 2018), the AKP government needed to secure its rule and make sure that its voters do not side with the military's position. Besides, hard repression strategy to repress the remaining influence of the military power and the opposition, was implied.

The threat from the military indicated that it still wants to be an effective actor in Turkish politics. At the same time, both the EU, especially after 2005 (Nugent 2007), and Turkish public opinion, moved away from the positive stance for Turkey's EU membership. Therefore,

with less consideration of the EU's benefits, capturing the army for power became an easier and more effective move for the incumbent. Thus, acknowledging and mobilizing the secular-Islamist divide between military and government, AKP opted for diffuse legitimation and hard repression strategies. Particularly, the diffuse legitimation strategy was established against the military's secular ideology through antagonizing ethno-populist and Islamist grievances to consolidate its support base. On the other hand, hard repression became less costly due to tutelary powers' aggressive behaviors and fabricated evidence of a coup plan prepared by informally co-opted Gülenist allies of the government.

The perceived threats coming from the ruling elite required the AKP government to counteract military power dominance in the upcoming years to survive. Judges who were supporters of the AKP initiated Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases based on the ungrounded conspiracy that the military generals are planning a coup to overthrow the government. According to the judges, the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases were one of the cases that secular-Kemalist officers were planning a coup in cooperation with secular-Kemalist journalists and non-governmental organizations. The fact that those who are accused of being involved in coup plans are not just the members of TAF but also secular-Kemalist journalists and non-governmental organizations is a sign that it is an answer to Republican Meetings as well. Therefore, the vertical threat coming from the citizens also led to the change in the incumbent's strategies, invoking hard repression.

Soft repression strategy was materialized by a wide range of detention of the Turkish Armed Forces members, civil society members, business elite, academicians, and journalists accused of involving in a coup plan (Ertuğrul and Yılmaz 2018). With the help of Ergenekon and Sledgehammer conspiracy cases, the AKP government intimidated the military and the opposition forces and seemed like a threat to the incumbency (Ibid). Through these cases, the

military tutelage was wrecked deeply in which more than a hundred military members were tried in the court and arrested.

The introduction of the hard repression strategy to the combination manifested itself through the opposition's political imprisonments or taking away their political rights either related to Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases or Kurdish question. This period corresponds to when the AKP government co-opted with the Islamist organization of the Gülen Movement through Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases (Taş 2018).

The Gülen movement could reach a variety of branches as a result of informal co-optation with the government. It had become capillary that it had considerable influence over ministries, education, judiciary, and foreign affairs through appointment the Gülen Movement members to the important posts of the government, including key positions in the military as well (Yavuz and Koç 2016, 137). Even after the constitutional changes in 2010, together with the Gülen Movement, the government could thwart any opposition and occupy bureaucratic institutions (Castaldo 2018).

The hard repression strategy in the period also involved imprisonment and political attacks against opposition forces. Following the lawsuits pointing to the army but also prosecuting the opposition and the secular associations, the cases pointing to the Kurdish movement came as KCK trials. It is also safe to say that the Gülen Movement's actors conducted KCK (Kurdistan Communities Union) trials that sought political imprisonment of the Kurdish politicians. In the report titled "15 July 2016, coup attempt in 10 questions and Gülenist terrorist organization<sup>7</sup> in 10 questions" published on the Presidential website after the 15 July coup attempt, it was revealed that Gülenist terrorist organization liquidated its rivals with false evidence and fiction courts in Ergenekon, Sledgehammer, KCK cases (Evrensel 2019) ". As a

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<sup>7</sup> Although Gülen movement was an ally of the AKP government between 2007 and 2012, the AKP government started to call the movement a terrorist organization after 15 July 2016 coup attempt.

result of KCK trials, one of the BDP (Kurdish Party) candidate's deputyship was banned due to the accusation of spreading PKK propaganda, and seven of them were banned during the election campaign to prevent the possibility of having BDP to exceed 10% electoral threshold. (Aydın-Düzgit 2012). Also, five BDP deputies, two CHP deputies, and one MHP deputy were banned from the parliament concerning Sledgehammer, Ergenekon, and KCK cases (Ibid). President of Worker's Party, Dogu Perincek was imprisoned (Milliyet 2008b). Overall, the AKP government has engaged in hard repression towards both the mainstream elite and peripheral political elites.

The vertical and horizontal threats nudged the AKP to engage in diffuse legitimization strategies as well. Both the ruling elite's challenges pointing to the AKP and the citizens' mass demonstrations activated the AKP's populist rhetoric. Quantitative data further confirms this point. According to the Global Populism Database, while Erdoğan's speeches were found 0.25 (not populist) point populist between 2003-2007. It increased to 0.875 (populist) between 2007-2011 and kept its populist rhetoric on the same numbers until 2014. Between 2014-2018 it jumped even to 1.5 points (very populist). After the e-memorandum in 2007, the liberal democratic discourse of the party members' and its leader Erdoğan's discourse has switched to conservative authoritarian one (Özsel et al. 2013, Türk 2018). The crisis of memorandum by the ruling elite and following demonstrations by the citizens incentivized Erdoğan to use us versus them distinction which based on the idea that the legitimate government who represents the will of people was tried to be eliminated by the 2007 events lead by "putschist" (Selcuk 2016, 578) who are against the will of the people (Türk 2018, 68). The rhetorical distinction between the elites -the military elite as well as the secular-Kemalist politicians who are claimed to be disconnected from society's values and the ordinary people - pious Anatolian people who supports the AKP and who are considered as the only source of legitimacy of political power- helped Erdoğan to antagonize different political camps against each other (Aytaç and Elçi 2019,

38-39). In other words, Erdoğan's populism illustrates to the people that while the founding "center" (Mardin 1973) elite establishment is against their will, Erdoğan and his party is representing the "ordinary people," (Mudde 2011) through demonizing secularism and emphasizing Islamist ideology in the background (Somer 2019, 46). In this sense, Erdoğan's ideological rhetoric mainly targeted secular establishment discrediting establishment institutions (Dinçşahin 2012). Besides there is no concrete evidence that shows Erdoğan targeted supporters of Republican rallies, using diffuse legitimation strategies. Thus, events happened between 2007-2012 activated AKP's populist and antagonist politics.

Overall, analysis of the period between 2007- 2012 suggests that AKP responded to the secular elite's and masses' illiberal pressures by hard repression and diffuse legitimation strategies. The AKP regime has engaged in hard repression to end the military tutelage, as the military targeted the AKP rule for the first time. The regime jailed military generals and the alleged coup sympathizer civil actors, journalists and politicians, using co-opted Gülenist prosecutors. Understanding the potential benefits of the secular-Islamist divide due to threats coming to secular masses and elite, it used an ethnic-populist and Islamist rhetoric to claim legitimacy and delegitimize challengers. Thus, once the regime received direct threats from opposition forces- as horizontal and vertical threats-, it has engaged in more aggressive and antagonistic strategies of diffuse legitimation and hard repression strategies.

However, it should be noted that AKP continued to use strategies that were established before 2007, although these strategies specific content have changed. Despite the inevitable negative impact of the 2008 economic crisis in macroeconomic indicators, the AKP government advertised and capitalized pork-barrel programs and large-scale investments such as bridges, roads in its rhetoric, and electoral campaigns (AKP 2011, Gumuscu 2013, 232-233). Scholarship highlights that perception of governments' economic success was the key factor for voting for the incumbent in 2011 elections and voting "yes" in the 2010 constitutional

referendum (Aydin-Duzgit 2012, 340; Cinar 2016). Soft repression was also intensified through use of defamation laws and financial pressure towards media owned by dissent groups (Akser and Baybars-Hawks 2012). More importantly, the media's securitization through accusations such as promoting terrorism started to force journalists to engage in self-censorship (Söyler 2017, 47-49). In this sense, in an environment of hard repression and diffuse legitimation, soft repression also took more offensive forms. Lastly, as stated earlier, informal co-optation with Gülen movement provided bases for hard repression: in exchange of political inclusion of Gülenists in parliament and bureaucratic appointment, judges close to Gülen movement repressed the secular dissident through Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases (Taş 2018, 397).

### **3.3 The Third Period: Introducing Formal Co-optation, Intensifying Diffuse Legitimation and Hard Repression (2013-2019)**

Between 2013-2019, the AKP's intensity on the strategies and the number of strategies increased once more. While the incumbent relied more on diffuse legitimation and hard repression strategy, it also introduced the formal co-optation strategy through an electoral alliance with a party that was in opposition before. Since the threats in this period were stronger than previous periods, the incumbency relied on a new strategy and more intense use of the previously established strategies. Since it can be said that Gezi protests were more widespread and include not one political stance but more inclusive in terms of ideologies and identities than the Republican Meetings, the diffuse legitimation and hard repression strategies used more on the opposition. Besides vertical threat through Gezi protests, the horizontal threat from the Gülen Movement – called Gülenist Terrorist Organization by the incumbency- within the army through fatal coup attempt also increased the incumbency's aggressiveness on the usage of hard repression and diffuse legitimation. Besides, the united opposition against Erdoğan's regime, which was more powerful than any time in his leadership, made the AKP formally co-opt with MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) to secure its base in the parliament with loyal allies.

A mass demonstration of the Gezi Movement made to the incumbency to rely on diffuse legitimation and hard repression strategies. Taksim Gezi Park protests had started as an action to prevent the AKP government from reconstructing the artillery barracks in Taksim Gezi Park in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul without zoning permission. The number of protesters exponentially increased in the following days and nights when the police responded to a small group's gathering to prevent the demolition of the Taksim Gezipark. The small protests began due to environmental issues against the government's widespread construction practices, and deforestation rapidly turned into a movement against the Erdoğan's authoritarian regime and his party (Castaldo 2018). Even, Gezipark demonstrations were the protests that most protesters have participated in, in the history of the Republic of Turkey (Yardimci-Geyikçi 2014). To thwart the participators, an excessive force applied by the police using intense plastic bullets and pepper spray increased the protests and made the protests spread to many districts of Istanbul and other cities. The government chose to exert pressure, which prompted more protesters to participate, rather than reconcile. The range of the hard repression strategy was present both in the political and physical sphere. On 21 June 2013, The Turkish Medical Association reported that, according to hospital records, while 4 protesters died, 7832 protestors injured, 60 of them lost their eyes due to direct involvement with police force (Karahan 2013).

The diversity and massiveness of the Gezi Movement's social coalition required Erdoğan to neutralize the protests in the eyes of the remaining part of society. Gezi protests did not resemble any protests the government had previously encountered both in terms of its number, the protestors belonged to various identities and political stances including conservative Muslims unsatisfied with AKP's authoritarian behaviors, Kemalists, liberals, Alevis, environmentalists (Bashirov and Lancaster, 2018), Kurdish people (Yardimci-Geyikçi 2014, Kaya 2016). Also, demonstrations are dominated by the youth, although elderlies are also part of that. (Kaya 2016). These societal groups had one in common that they were against the

AKP government's life-controlling implications, conservative-Islamist authoritarianism, and polarizing discourse (Kaya 2015). This diversity is another difference from the Republican Meetings, which were dominated by the people having a secular-Kemalist ideology. Thus, the incumbent used diffuse legitimation strategy, only referring more to the Gezi Movement's illegitimacy, calling the protestors as looters, foreign agents, and traitors. Also, while Gezi Protests were going on, to be able to keep the AKP's support base active, in several cities, Erdoğan too held "Meetings of Respect for the National Will" where thousands of its supporters participated either themselves or through the assistance of the government (for example, there were buses provided by the government to carry the people from their home to meeting place). Erdoğan claimed that there were terrorists and collaborators with terrorists among those who frequently participated in Gezi protests and said he would not leave this homeland to terrorists (Sabah 2013). For the government, vertical threat through mass demonstrations by the diverse coalition of the previously conflicting segments of the society represented a challenge to the incumbency and its future. Therefore, the government tried to repress protestors and political opposition, antagonize the people who are with the protestors, and the ones with the government. Erdoğan directly pointed protesters as an enemy of the nation, and the international powers' agents and the controlled media misrepresented the demonstrations and demonized the protestors. Furthermore, pro-government media attempted to portray the events in simplified and moral terms, exploiting Islam. For example, the pro-government media claimed that a hundred protesters attacked a hijabi woman only for wearing a hijab, and some protestors drank alcohol in a famous mosque Istanbul (Kaya 2017). Although both of these accusations were found false later on, they highlight how the AKP government attempted to delegitimize the protestors on moral grounds, using Islamist ideology. Therefore, the evidence suggests that the movement's regime-challenging nature led Erdoğan to frame the political conflict with protestors in antagonistic terms.

Furthermore, diffuse legitimation complemented and justified the use of hard repression during and aftermath of the Gezi movement. Thus, the incumbent delegitimized the opposition, presenting the Gezi movement as a security issue baring on nationalism, Islamism, and populism. While the hard repression strategy through political imprisonments and the imprisonment of the well-known individuals were implied in the second period, in the third period, the Gezi Movement brought hard repression of police brutality and increased the intensity of other forms of hard repression and soft repression strategy on whole opposition.

Linking the CHP's (Republican People's Party) leader with terrorist organizations, Erdoğan tried to delegitimize both the movement and the main opposition party using religion, nationalism, and populism. While the incumbent presented the Gezi Protests as a security issue and terrorized the movement, it also legitimized the hard repression strategy used on the protestors, proposing nation and its security as a pretext for hard repression. The death of fourteen-year-old Berkin Elvan, who died in the intensive care unit due to tear gas cartridge, hit his head during the Gezi protests and later caused a great public reaction. Erdoğan said at the Gaziantep meeting that the cause of Berkin's death was not the police, but the terrorist group, DHKP-C. He also accused Kılıçdaroğlu, the main opposition party leader, of collaborating with terrorist groups.

*"... Unfortunately, a child with iron balls in his pocket, given a sling by his terrorist organizations, was unfortunately addressed a pepper gas. My brothers, how can the police differentiate how old that person was, throwing iron balls with a slingshot in his hand? But Kılıçdaroğlu says his lie, as usual, says what the child was going to buy bread. To be honest, it is not about buying bread. His mother says that my child's murderer is the prime minister. (hoot) I know love at home, but I don't understand your throwing cloves and iron balls to your son's grave. I wonder if you're throwing that iron ball, what message are you giving to your son's grave? They work hand in hand with the DHKP-C terrorist organization."*

The evidence suggests that Erdoğan framed the killings in the Gezi movement in terms of national values and security to delegitimize the protestors and associated political elite.

In this period, the ruling elite's horizontal threats came from the institutions of judiciary and military, that were dominated by the government's informally co-opted ally- the Gülen

Movement since the beginning of the second period. The first two waves of detention that came after the prosecutor opened an investigation, targeting pro-AKP names, were followed by a fatal coup attempt. On 17 December 2013 Gülen Movement operated an anti-corruption unit that detained forty-seven pro-AKP names and sons of the ministers who are involved in bribery (Yavuz 2018)<sup>8</sup>. Just eight days later, on 25 December, the government encountered a new wave of threat by the Gülen Movement. Immediately after the corruption operation, Erdoğan and his son's telephone conversation about hiding the money they had were leaked to the public (Yavuz and Koç 2016, 140). Erdoğan rejected the recorded tapes, claimed that the tapes were "montaged" and launched a political campaign against the Gülen Movement by accusing the Gülen Movement as the "parallel state" that created a state within the state (Yavuz 2018). Following the waves of arrest, the AKP government dismissed hundreds of public prosecutors, police officers, and judges who were in contact with the Gülen Movement (Taş 2018, 400). As a reaction, the AKP government purged public servants who were flagged as secular, liberals, Kurds, or Gülenist and filled these approximately 100.000 positions with party clients (Bashirov and Lancaster 2018). In addition to that, Erdoğan capitalized on his populist right-wing discourse, demonizing the opposition as internal enemies who are cooperating with external enemies of Turkey (Wodak 2015, Aydın-Düzgit 2016). In 2016, the tense relationship between the government and the Gülen Movement peaked with the coup attempt of the Gülen Movement. On 15 July, the coup attempt led to the death of more than two thousand people by the members of the Gülen Movement in the army, but the coup could be prevented thanks to the pro-government civilians going out on the streets and opposing the military. Erdoğan then presented the Gülen Movement as the Gülenist Terrorist Organization (Fetullahçı Terör

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<sup>8</sup> Until the first horizontal threat by the Gülen Movement came in 2013, Erdoğan's refusal to give more privileges when the Gülen Movement became stronger -especially in the judiciary- affected the relations negatively, in which Erdoğan refused to appoint more than a hundred deputy from the Gülen Movement members in 2011 elections, and the closure of the private preparatory education establishments dominated by the Gülen Movement tightened the negative relationship between those two (Taş 2018).

Örgütü), and the group behind the Gezi Movement (Taş 2018). Four days after the coup attempt, state of emergency was declared by Erdoğan, giving the authority to Erdoğan and cabinet of ministers to rule by decree, and in the following years, Erdoğan renewed it seven times (Taş 2018, 402; Houston 2018, 532, Akbaş-Demirel et al. 2019). Strategies government intensified on were pointing horizontal threats from the military and the vertical threat from the citizens together. Erdoğan also called those who attempted the coup as a terrorist. Both Erdoğan and the media under his control frequently stated that Gezi Protests were also one of the Gülen movements planned to overthrow the government. While diffuse legitimation strategy materialized by targeting both the coup makers and Gezi protestors as traitors and the nation's enemy, the hard repression strategy was used to eliminate the whole opposition, either targeting Gülen Movement Gezi Protesters, and any opposition.

The soft repression strategy targeted large segments of society. The dismissals provided by the decree laws targeted not only the people who planned coup but also the people who were considered having a relationship with the Gülen Movement (Houston 2018, 534). Four days after the coup attempt, the government dismissed approximately fifty thousand people who were considered close to the Gülen Movement, and working in public and private education institutions, including the presidency, private educational institutions, military officers, Council of Higher Education, MIT (National Intelligence Agency), and the Energy Market Supervision Agency, and five ministries. (Milliyet 2016, T24 2016). However, the government has not dismissed only the people who were in relation to the Gülen Movement and people who have no relationship but in opposition, such as academicians and Kurdish people (Houston 2018, 534). For example, four hundred and six people signed the Academics for Peace Declaration were expelled from their jobs through decree laws (Akbaş-Demirel et al. 2019). While the soft repression strategy concentrated in general oppositional forces, hard repression strategy over the political sphere mostly implied Kurdish politics (Bayulgen et al. 2018), claiming an ongoing

relationship between Kurdish politicians and terrorist organizations, PKK. According to the Trustee Report, titled Trustee Regime in Turkey: The Extortion of the Right to Choose and to be Elected, published by the Kurdish party, HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party), "the trustee appointments took place in 3 metropolitan cities, 10 provinces, 63 districts and 22 towns and a total of 95 municipalities with HDP, and state officials, that is, appointed people, were placed in these municipalities" (Birgün 2019). The substitution of elected persons to municipalities in Kurdish cities and towns, instead of elected officials, shows the hard repression strategy's political aspect.

Diffuse legitimization strategy provided intimidation and self-censorship of the opposition. Erdoğan was able to neutralize the opposition against the hard repression strategy he implemented, thanks to his intense nationalist rhetoric. Both the opposition parties' nationalist ideology and the exclusionary, hostile, and antagonist rhetoric that Erdoğan used after the Gezi Movement and Gülen Movement's coup attempt led to intimidating the opposition (Yılmaz et al. 2020). In March 2016, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan launched a call to the parliament to remove immunity and targeted HDP and its co-chairs responsible for terrorist attacks (Sayın 2020). Erdoğan stressed that the deputies who are related to terrorism should be tried by removing the immunity of the deputies (Ibid). Following this, there was a constitutional amendment in parliament aimed at removing immunity (Ibid). Although not all opposition party members CHP's deputies supported this decision, its leader made statements confirming the removal of immunity (Pişkin 2020). The voting results also showed that some CHP members voted to lift immunity (Birgün 2016). Four months after the coup attempt was overcome, major arrest operations were initiated, especially for HDP (Ibid). Many HDP deputies were arrested and imprisoned, including HDP co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, and CHP deputy Enis Berberoğlu (Ibid).

One of the diffuse legitimation strategy tools of the incumbency was the ideology-oriented TV series following the horizontal threat of the ruling elite and vertical threat of the citizens. Empire/Islam-glorifying discourse that increased in the period after the Gezi Movement was the Ottoman TV series' that were increasingly broadcasted (Çevik 2019). The common feature of these series, such as *Payitaht Abdülhamid II.* and *Diriliş Ertuğrul*, which is broadcast on the state channel TRT and is very popular in the AKP's vote base, is that there are always internal enemies and putschist in their themes who make agreements with external powers to overthrow the government (Çevik 2019). Furthermore, the strong man figure who fights with traitors who collaborate with these external threads became prominent in the series. This narrative also corresponds to Erdoğan's turn to charismatic leadership, claiming himself as the *Reis* (the chief) of the Turkish nation who is native and national (Yilmaz et al. 2020, 8), standing against foreign powers and their collaborators. Therefore, TV series became a part of the diffuse legitimation strategy of the incumbent. Although they display the Ottoman era, there have been connections with contemporary politics in some episodes of these series, pointing the contemporary threats as the plans of the traitors (Ibid). While the *Diriliş Ertuğrul*'s first episode was broadcasted after one year later from Gezipark Movement, the *Payitaht Abdülhamid II*'s first episode was broadcasted seven months later than the coup attempt. The themes and discourses focused on in the series proceeded synchronously with the government's actions and legitimized the government's discourses as a propaganda tool (Ibid).

The Post Gezi period gradually paved the way for the unification of opposition forces against AKP's increasingly aggressive authoritarian behavior. Although the Gezi Movement was not led by the opposition parties but was a spontaneous reaction of the citizens, it was supported by the opposition parties where members of the opposition parties actively participated (Alas 2013). The horizontal threat by the united opposition materialized itself with the parties' cooperation at the elite level and the pattern of their electorate's voting behavior in

elections. The 7 June 2015 parliamentary elections that resulted in AKP's failure to achieve the majority in parliament resulted from an informal alliance of the opposition. The CHP, which has never approached any alliance with HDP because of its nationalist stance, has been able to direct its voters to vote for HDP by emphasizing that the HDP must exceed the 10 percent threshold for the AKP to lose the majority in November elections (Özçelik 2011). The AKP lost the majority for the first time in this election, and it was the first unification threat that came directly from the opposition parties against the AKP. Although this cooperation is not clearly stated, the two traditionally distant parties could convince their voters to apply for strategic voting against the AKP regime. This strategic alignment of the two parties created a clear threat to the continuity of the regime. However, immediately after AKP failed to achieve the majority to form a government for the first time, MHP's leader Devlet Bahçeli declined any possible coalition, saying that he would not be in any government coalition and wanted the MHP to be an opposition party rather than a part of the incumbency (BBC 2018). When any coalition was failed to be established, this paved the way for the AKP to call snap elections in November, which ended up as a victory of the AKP government. (Savut 2020). Nonetheless, increasing informal cooperation between HDP and CHP was the first light for opposition unification.

Relatedly MHP's lack of opposition to AKP, as indicated by its failure to form a government mobilized the democratic forces within MHP against the party. The group expelled from MHP established a new party named İYİP (Good Party). The leader of the İYİP, Meral Akşener, criticized the MHP's lack of opposition and siding with the AKP since 2015 (CNNTürk 2017). It was the first time there was a threat through a new party that can divide the conservative voters of the AKP with the possibility of a conservative party cooperating with the CHP, which has been antagonist by AKP on secular-religious cleavage.

The signs of possible vertical threats through the united opposition triggered the government towards a formal co-optation strategy. Considering all the opposition side

developments, the AKP decided to make an election alliance with MHP for the simultaneous parliamentary and presidential elections in 2018 (Esen and Gumuscu 2019, 336-337). It was the first time that the AKP government formally co-opted with another party when running elections. Since there was no horizontal threat of united opposition before, AKP did not need a formal co-optation strategy. With a divided opposition, it could keep its majority in the parliament. However, when the parties in opposition not cooperating before became more altruistic, that was considered a threat to the survival of the AKP's incumbency. Furthermore, as all the mainstream opposition parties, including HDP, CHP and Felicity Party, united around the "no" bloc in the 2017 referendum (Celep 2018, 110), the AKP needed to fortify its position by siding with one of the existing political actors who might potentially become challengers.

As a reaction to AKP's electoral alliance with MHP, called People's Alliance, CHP and İYİP established an alliance, called Nation alliance. Although HDP was excluded from the formal alliance of CHP and İYİP that are nationalist parties, it was informally supported by democratic forces within CHP. Particularly, KONDA research company noted that approximately 1% of CHP voters voted for HDP which in turn helped HDP to exceed 10% electoral threshold (Konda 2018, 56). Furthermore, HDP elite informally supported nation alliances' candidates in 2019 local elections through not nominating candidates in metropolitan cities or in the cities that the İYİP and CHP can win. As a result, CHP candidates won in the three biggest cities of the country, partially thanks to the substantial votes from HDP electorate (Esen and Gumuscu 2019, 336-337). The increasing success of coalition between democratic forces reproduced the alliance between AKP and MHP as still active by the time of writing of the study.

An improvement that proves that the informal co-optation strategy, mostly carried out through public procurements, continues in this period, became visible after the 2019 local elections as well. The tender sold by Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, which had been ruled

by AKP in 2018, for 42.9 million, was sold to the same company for 23 million Liras in 2019. While three companies participated in the tender in 2018, fifteen companies participated in 2019 (Birgün 2019).

The decreasing source of specific support directed the incumbency towards the promotion of prior accomplishments and the future plans of the government. Although by the year 2012 economic slowdown has started -that strains the specific support base- (Akçay 2018), projects of building roads, bridges, and airport construction were advertised people as public service (Türk 2018, 159). While the source of specific support decreased due to the economic decline, the government still relied on the specific legitimation strategy. The government frequently advertised and presented performance-based projects done by the government before, also similar ones to be done in the future, such as the new Istanbul Airport, KanalIstanbul project to open up a new artificial canal in the Marmara Sea, bridges and highways (Ibid.) constructed by the incumbent were highly commercialized.

### **3.4 Discussion**

The longitudinal case study of Turkey confirms three hypotheses, and partly supports one hypothesis (Please see figure 1 below). As Hypothesis 1 expects, new horizontal and/or vertical threats led to change in the combination of stability strategies of the incumbent in the second and the third period, unlike the first period when there is no threat. When the present strategies government relied on were not enough to thwart threats, the combination shifted towards another by adding new strategies.

Hypothesis 2 states that the horizontal threat by the ruling elites leads to the introduction of hard repression and diffuse legitimation strategy towards the ruling elite and the opposition. Both the second and third periods with change confirm this hypothesis. In the second-period military's e-memorandum that directly threatened the AKP government and judiciary's attempts to disannul Gül's election to the presidency and later the case to close the AKP, paved the way

for AKP to imprison and replace those authorities, with the fabricated evidence of a planned coup provided by informally co-opted ally, the Gülen Movement. In the third period, when former Gülenist allies threatened the regime by putting corruption charges against Erdoğan's cabinet members and when Gülenist attempted coup, the Erdoğan regime jailed Gülenists and declared it a terrorist organization. Thus, comparing both periods with the first period suggests that direct attacks from horizontal challengers encouraged AKP to innovatively use hard repression. While in the second period, the government introduced the hard repression strategy, in the third period, it strengthens it.

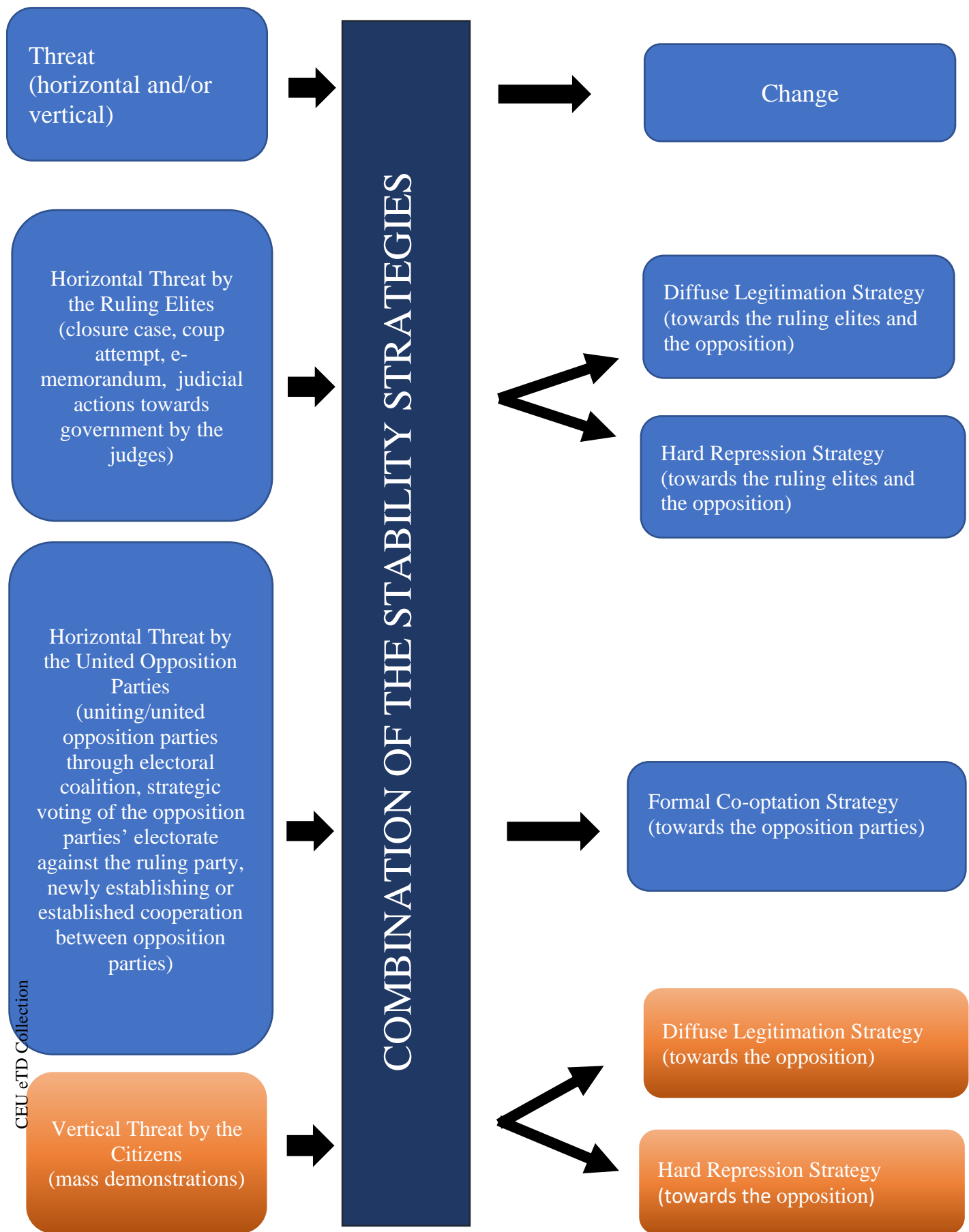
The evidence also suggests that horizontal challenges in the second and third periods activated the ideological core of the AKP government, which started to use ideological propaganda (diffuse legitimation) to legitimize its rule. In the second period, the horizontal challenges from illiberal secular powers encouraged AKP to frame the horizontal game in moral terms, AKP representing the pious Anatolian electorate, horizontal challengers being coup seeking secularists who work for the interest of very few. In the third period, Gülenists' attempt to overthrow the government with corruption charges and a coup was framed as a project of internal allies of external enemies. In this sense, although diffuse legitimation occurred against the horizontal threats in both periods, they were qualitatively different.

Hypothesis 4 expects that the vertical threat by the citizens leads to the introduction of diffuse legitimation and hard repression strategy towards the opposition and the citizens. The evidence from the Turkish case partially confirms this hypothesis. While the Gezi Movement in the third period triggered the diffuse legitimation and hard repression strategies towards the citizens and opposition, in the case of the Republican Rallies, the target of the diffuse legitimation and hard repression was not the citizens but the ruling elites. In the aftermath of the Republican Meetings, the hard repression strategy targeted the ruling elites and political imprisonment of the opposition party members and the ruling elites, but not the citizens who

participated in the rallies. Contrary, the evidence shows that the Gezi movement was brutally repressed by the regime, costing the protestors' life. Thus, although both cases were mass demonstrations (vertical threat) regimes reaction to Gezi and Republican Meetings were different. Tentatively, two explanations can be provided: Firstly, as the Gezi movement was a mobilization of a very diverse coalition of masses, participants of Republican Rallies were mainly secular middle class- typically CHP voters. Thus, an alternative hypothesis is that differences between those two movements' size and diversity led the regime to reach differently. Secondly, as the Republican rallies were intensified following the military's e-memorandum, the former might be operationalized as a horizontal threat. Therefore, vertical threats that are elite driven could be considered as part of horizontal threats.

Hypothesis 3 suggests that the united opposition parties lead incumbents to engage in formal co-optation with the opposition. The post-Gezi movement period confirms this hypothesis. The evidence suggests that the government's increasing authoritarianism lead to a gradually increasing cooperation between secularist CHP, pro-Kurdish HDP, and center-right splinter party IYIP. As all these parties united around the no bloc in the 2017 referendum and CHP and HDP informally cooperated at the elite and voter level at every election since 2013, the government attempted and managed the co-opt the far-right MHP so that they do not join the opposition bloc. Thus, under high electoral uncertainty, the government used formal co-optation as the last bullet to survive. Furthermore, the united opposition's victory in Ankara and Istanbul local elections reinforced AKP's need for a coalition with MHP.

Overall, the findings highlight the causal relationship between the direction and the content of the authoritarian stability strategies and the mass protests, elite disputes, and opposition challenges.



**Figure 1: Findings**  
(orange boxes refer to the partly confirmed hypothesis 4)

## Conclusion

Why do some hybrid regimes change the combination of stability strategies? The research question has two dimensions: 1) Why is there a change per se? 2) Why is there a change through the introduction of a strategy towards a new combination? As mentioned in the discussion above, this study demonstrates that direct vertical and/or horizontal threats impact the combination of stability strategies substantially. The evidence derives from the longitudinal case study of Turkey.

The findings contribute to the literature on hybrid regimes and regime change in two ways. Firstly, it shows that vertical and/or horizontal threats are likely to impact the way hybrid regimes attempt to survive. Thus, the findings encourage scholars to go beyond examining whether which type of repression, co-optation, and legitimation strategies provide (more) less stability and consider the latter also as a dynamic result of the political conflict between incumbent and change seeking actors. In other words, in line with Schedler's (2013) uncertainty theory, findings suggest that autocrats take regime challenging threats seriously and direct their stability strategies accordingly. It also implies that the cases of "near misses" (Cappocia and Kelemen 2007, 352) for democratization, such as the Gezi protest in Turkey, could encourage autocrats to enhance stabilization strategies. Also, effects of the threats could be tested in other theories that emphasize domestic sources of authoritarian stability, such as the selectorate theory (de Mesquita et al. 2005).

Secondly, horizontal and vertical threats are likely to force incumbents to introduce different strategies. As the Turkish case shows, vertical threats in the form of mass protests and the horizontal threats from the ruling elite lead to the use of hard repression in the form of political imprisonment and diffuse legitimation through the rhetorical establishment of ideological conflict by the incumbent. Furthermore, the events between 2013-2019 suggest opposition unification encouraged the incumbent to create a formal co-optation with potential

challengers. Thus, the findings imply that students of regime change should pay attention to actor-oriented causalities (Gerschewski 2018, 11) to explain the authoritarian behavior, given that political contestation between opposition and incumbent, the ruling elite, and incumbent, and citizens and the incumbent lead to different outcomes. Therefore, without discounting structural factors such as global waves of political change (Gunitsky 2018) or the regime's organizational power (Levitsky and Way 2010 376-378), the findings urge us to deeply analyze the role of the domestic agents in triggering a change in the regime behavior.

This research has policy implications for both domestic and international actors in hybrid regimes. For internal opposition in hybrid regimes, the findings imply that they should avoid siding with horizontal challengers' illiberal-militant practices, like the Turkish opposition policies during the 2007-2012 period. Although previous research suggests that the dual game of democratic and autocratic politics in hybrid regimes encourages opposition parties to seek extra-institutional mechanisms for change (Levitsky and Way 2010, 29-30), the Turkish case highlights that it would be more beneficial to fight in the electoral-legal arena to do not activate aggressive behavior of the incumbent regime. For external democracy promoters such as the EU, the findings show that large scale regime challenging threats might trigger autocrats to adapt to the new environment and reinforce their survival. Thus, democracy promoters should be cautious in encouraging these movements to challenge the regime in the form of protests to ensure that these movements do not get suppressed by the regime. As Levitsky and Way (2010) suggest, one way to increase the cost for autocrats to repress these movements could be the direct installation of western linkage through direct civil society involvement and funds, in the respective countries, to increase these movements' capacity to overthrow the regime. Furthermore, the findings urge democracy promoters to capture the dynamic nature of authoritarian survival strategies that can adopt the new conditions and thwart challenges in three

relational way. Therefore, one should not consider only repression but the other types of strategies of co-optation and legitimation in relation to each other.

Nonetheless, this study has limitations. Firstly, due to the interaction between the authoritarian institutionalization over time and the capability of using strategies, it is not uncomplicated to explain either the authoritarian institutionalization or the type of threat led the incumbency to rely on the specific strategies. Probably, both. However, since this study's focus is on threat and the introduction of a specific strategy to the combination, this discussion was intentionally undermined. Secondly, this study demonstrates that both vertical threat by the citizens and horizontal threat by the ruling elites lead to diffuse legitimation and hard repression strategies. The reason is methodologically related to Mill's method of difference. In this study, two different threats came in the same period (2007-2012), and two new strategies were added to the combination. Throughout the research, the relationship between two different threats and two different strategies has been explained. However, if future research compares the periods that these threats come separately, and perfectly apply Mill's method of difference, it contributes to the literature and this study. Thirdly, this study could not establish a hypothesis based on the relationship between the level of specific threats and the level of strategies, as it measures with binary variables. For example, the variance between the police's brutal reaction to the Gezi Movement and lack of police brutality in Republican Meetings might be explained with continuous or categorical variables. Further studies might analyze the relationship between the degree of the types of threat (vertical, horizontal by the ruling elite, horizontal by the opposition parties) and the degree/intensity of the strategies used by the incumbent. A contribution to the literature of hybrid regimes can also be made by examining threats and strategies as continuous or categorical variables. However, the first limitation mentioned above might also apply here.

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