WHY SOME HOUSING STRUGGLES SUCCEED:

A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF MOVEMENT STRATEGIES IN HUNGARY BETWEEN 1987 AND 2024

By

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Author's Declaration

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Vienna, October 10, 2025

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- I used GPT-4o mini, https://chatgpt.com/overview to support the writing process. The tool was used specifically for brainstorming, testing phrasing options, and improving clarity. They were not employed to generate substantive content, arguments, or analysis. All intellectual contributions, interpretations, and conclusions are my own.

Vienna, October 10, 2025

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Abstract

When do housing struggles succeed? This question gains urgency amid a rampant housing crisis when the transformation of this vital asset into a lucrative commodity has left 40 million people in Europe, including more than 830,000 in Hungary, struggling with unaffordability. This dissertation explores possible answers by examining the effectiveness of movement strategies. I integrate Gramscian theory into the research on movement strategies and outcomes, and analyze the combination of two factors: (1) how social movement organizations engage political parties in social struggles (orientation to state power), and (2) how they bolster the position of their constituencies within emerging alliances contesting the existing order (orientation to constituency power).

I analyze four strategic approaches along this state power – constituency power axes: (1.1) movement organizations engage in the long-term work of building an ideological alliance with a party, and operate in close alignment, almost in symbiosis; or (1.2) movement organizations consider political parties as constantly moving campaign targets, depending on their stance on a particular issue; while (2.1) movement organizations articulate constituency interest on behalf of a mass base; or (2.2) movement organizations articulate constituency interest without controlling a mass base but using other, cultural, policy, or organizational, resources.

The research is designed as a comparative case study of Hungarian housing struggles between 1987 and 2024, examining movement impact through three hegemonic phases of housing economies: state socialist, neoliberal, and illiberal. I study the struggles of five constituencies: large families, public housing tenants, Roma people, homeless people, and indebted homeowners. The primary data sources for the five case studies are printed and online media

articles (N=1,794), organizational documents (N=438), and semi-structured interviews with movement leaders and experts (n=16).

My results show that movement organizations have the most potential to contribute to a systemic shift when they can utilize the potential dependence of political parties on movement constituencies and turn that dependence into influence over the structure of a new emerging historical bloc. Movement organizations can achieve this most effectively when they combine social and organizational embeddedness – a mass base – with a long-term strategic political alignment with a party. In this case, the mass base can lend a strong position to the movement organization and its constituency within the emerging historical bloc, and maximize the complementary potential of movements and parties in advancing an alternative vision of society. My analysis also provides a detailed account of the counter-hegemonic potential of the other examined strategies. I also find that strategic approaches determine how the political opportunity is perceived, and that the cooperation between organic and traditional intellectuals could compensate for severe inequalities between and within constituencies.

This dissertation reinforces the idea that movement organizations, if they choose, can influence the emergence of new political and social alliances, and adopt an orientation to engage in conflict over the historical bloc that dominates the state and society. This perspective is particularly relevant in housing struggles, for the affordability crisis is unresolvable without effective state intervention.

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I could not have undertaken this journey without the support and inspiration of the **CEU community**. I am extremely grateful to my supervisor, Professor **Andrea Krizsán,** for setting high standards for rigorous research, encouraging me to find my voice in writing, and providing a solid foundation throughout the research process. I am deeply indebted to my supervisory panel for showing support in crucial moments: Professor **Béla Greskovits**, whose work is an endless source of inspiration for me; Professor **Cristina Corduneanu-Huci**, who profoundly shaped my thinking about political economy; and Professor **Violetta Zentai**, whose blend of knowledge and empathy provided me with precious feedback. Special thanks to **Felix Butzlaff** and colleagues at the **CEU Democracy Institute** for their helpful comments. I would also like to acknowledge the competent support of **Borbála Faragó** in academic writing and **Monica Lafaire** in navigating the program requirements.

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My personal housing story also motivated me to write this dissertation. It was transformative for **my mother** and me when we gained access to public housing and could leave a household loaded with domestic violence. Safe and adequate housing means everything; in our situation, it was similar to being freed from captivity. My eight years of activism in **The City Is For All** (AVM), a housing group of homeless people and their allies, helped me understand how such a family experience is a product of systemic inequality rather than simply poor personal choices. Immersing myself in AVM as a volunteer community organizer – on top of my regular work – taught one of the most important lessons in my life: anybody can blossom into a leader with enough individualized and community support. I am thankful for being able to share the passion for working for social change with **all my comrades**.

My interest in strategy is rooted in both the theory and the practice of organizing. **Three experiences** have shaped my perspective in recent years. The **first** one was an experience I had talking about the radical organizing process of AVM when my professor gently pushed back, "But what was radical about it?" I meant participation and direct action; he alluded to something else. The **second** prompt came from one of my relatives, a strong working-class woman. When I was telling her about how we teach social action and strategy, she gently asked, "But what if that strategy is wrong?" She lost her home during the global financial crisis. The **third** influence was a generational trauma: the demise of the Hungarian political party LMP in 2013. This party could have been the most powerful asset in the struggle against the illiberal regime, had we more assertively and collectively protected it.

Lastly, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my spouse, **Gordon Whitman**, for his unwavering support during the ups and downs of this research and writing process. His political astuteness and compassion make him a remarkable agent in this world.

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Abbreviations

AVM A Város Mindenkié (The City Is For All)

CSOK Családok Otthonteremtési Kedvezménye (Home Creation Subsidy for Families)

EkGP Egyesült Történelmi Kisgazda és Polgári Párt (United Smallholders' Party)

Fidesz Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség (Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance)

FkGP Független Kisgazda-, Földmunkás- és Polgári Párt (Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party)

KDNP Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt (Christian Democratic People's Party)

LABE Lakásbérlők Egyesülete (Tenants' Association)

LMP Lehet Más a Politika (Politics Can Be Different)

MDF Magyar Demokrata Fórum (Hungarian Democratic Forum)

MSZP Magyar Szocialista Párt (Hungarian Socialist Party)

NET Nemzeti Eszközkezelő Zrt. (National Asset Management Ltd.)

NOE Nagycsaládosok Országos Egyesülete (National Association of Large Families)

RPA Roma Polgárjogi Alapítvány (Roma Civil Rights Foundation)

SMO social movement organization

SZDSZ Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (Alliance of Free Democrats)

szocpol szociálpolitikai támogatás (social policy allowance)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

How do organizers and activists know they are proceeding in the right direction? How can they ensure their efforts add up to radical social transformation? It is an everyday dilemma for those working ardently for social change in polities or policy areas where it seems impossible to achieve a breakthrough. The response is not evident in social movement research. Although understanding social change has always been a central concern of the field, there is room to explore **whether movement strategies advance radical, counter-hegemonic social change** or if the outcomes become absorbed into the dominant system.

This question takes on particular significance in the context of the rampant housing crisis. Today, **housing unaffordability** affects up to 3 billion people worldwide (United Nations, 2025), including 40 million in the U.S. (USAFacts, 2023), 40 million in Europe, and more than 830,000 in Hungary (Eurostat, 2023a).[1] Most scholars agree that financialization is the major driver of this affordability crisis; the deregulation of the domestic markets in the 1970s opened the heavy door of the formerly strictly regulated mortgage lending to new households, meshed the housing market with the financial sector, and turned **housing into a lucrative business**, attracting investors and speculators (Brenner et al., 2012; Aalbers, 2017; Fuller, 2019). As a result, housing has become **a more significant store of wealth** and **a source of capital formation**, with wealth tied up solely in residential real estate being almost three times the size of the global GDP (Tostevin & Rushton, 2023).

Apparently, the accumulation of capital at this massive scale has no intention of stopping. As David Harvey and David Wachsmuth say, it "will have to be stopped" (2012:239).

[1] Housing unaffordability is defined by the ratio of the total monthly income of the household spent on housing costs such as rent, mortgage payments, or utilities. The UN and the U.S. consider the ratio of 30 percent unaffordable (UN-Habitat, 2020a; USAFacts, 2023), whereas in the EU, this value is 40 percent (Eurostat, 2023a).

However, admittedly, the vision of what is to be done to overcome the neoliberal hegemony and what movement strategies can make a difference is a work in progress (Harvey, 2005, 2010; Brenner et al., 2012; Goldberg, n.d.; Fraser, 2021; Taylor & Brehmer, 2023). I aim to contribute to this work by exploring possible answers to this **research question**: **"How do different movement strategies shape social movement organizations' ability to achieve counter-hegemonic outcomes?"** Therefore, my objectives are two-fold: (1) to understand through what strategies movements can contribute to the radical reconfiguration of power relations between social and political groups, and (2) what signposts mark this path. There are several ways to describe radical social transformation, such as the "mainstreaming" of constituency interests, "transformative social change," or even perhaps "democracy." Yet, I undertake the intriguing task of working with the concept of counter-hegemony because it uniquely captures the various pillars of change, as well as the complex set of relationships that, in my view, radical social transformation requires.

My dissertation thus integrates **Gramscian theory into the research on movement strategies and outcomes**, contributing to debates in social movement studies. I join the circle of researchers (Jenkins & Klandermans, 1995; Burstein et al., 1995; Maguire, 1995; Goldstone, 2003; Williams, 2003; Mair, 2009; Mudge & Chen, 2014; Bozóki, 2014; Greskovits & Wittenberg, 2016; Greskovits, 2017, 2020; Hutter et al., 2019; Tarrow, 2021) who argue that **the state, political parties, and social movements are interdependent and often intertwined** through relationships. Rather than simply viewing social struggles as a "communicative" action in which movements make demands that political actors resist or concede to, these scholars illuminate a more complex dynamic in which movements, parties, and the state compete or complement one another, and may even overlap.

These interdependent relationships underscore that **social movements can be either potential rivals or allies to the political representation system** (Jenkins & Klandermans,

1995; Mair, 2009; Hutter et al., 2019). By advancing claims on behalf of their constituencies, **movements assert a form of representation** that may overlap with, or contradict, the interests of governments and political parties. It is precisely this tension – or alignment – that generates leverage for social change. In Gramscian-inspired terms, **the counter-hegemonic movement potential** to reconfigure established power relations between social and political groups stems from both the dependence of parties on movement constituencies and the complementary role of movements and parties in advancing social change.

Based on this insight, I analyze the counter-hegemonic potential of **movement strategies along two dimensions**: (1) strategic orientation to state power: how movement organizations engage political parties in social struggles, and (2) strategic orientation to constituency power: how movement organizations bolster the position of their constituencies within emerging alliances contesting the existing order. Examining movement impact through this two-dimensional approach can elucidate relationships that would otherwise be overlooked, empowering the researcher with a complex comparative analytical capacity.

Let me illustrate this through global examples. Abahlali baseMjondolo in contemporary South Africa and the Austrian labor movement in the early 20th century had a similar approach to constituency power: they both built a mass base. However, while the tens of thousands of shack dwellers of Abahlali claimed to be autonomous from party politics, and mobilized to confront decision-makers for their living circumstances (Gibson, 2011; Johansson, 2019), the hundreds of thousands of Austrian workers suffering from housing shortage were closely knit with the ambitious social democratic party (Smaldone, 2023). In comparison, the Right to the City Alliance in the U.S., instead of building a mass base, created a mobilizing infrastructure uniting local organizing efforts and confronted decision-makers through collective issue campaigns (Goldberg, n.d.; Liss, 2012; Torrejón Chu, 2016). Finally, a fourth variation closes the list of examples: the U.S. National Low Income Housing Coalition, while drawing on

policy resources, has often worked with Democratic sponsors to advance affordable housing in Congress (Thrush, 2021; Ngo, 2025).

As these examples show, I accentuate the following strategic differences along the **state power – constituency power axes** (previewed in **Figure 1-1** below): (1.1) movement organizations engage in the long-term work of building an ideological alliance with a party, and operate in close alignment, almost in symbiosis; or (1.2) movement organizations consider political parties as constantly moving campaign targets, depending on their stance on a particular issue; while (2.1) movement organizations articulate constituency interest on behalf of a mass base; or (2.2) movement organizations articulate constituency interest without controlling a mass base but using other, cultural, policy, or organizational, resources. This **2x2 conceptual framework** is an **original contribution** to social movement literature which either applies strategy as a "generic" term separate from tactics, demands, and collective action (Meyer & Staggenborg, 2007; 2012; Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2012; Maney et al., 2012), or distinguishes strategies based on the level of confrontation (Piven & Cloward, 1977) or the level of organization (Ganz, 2000; Han et al., 2021).

Counter-hegemonic movement potential can be assessed in relation to **counter-hegemonic movement outcomes**, the identification of which constitutes my other research objective. Drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci ([1929] 1999), William Gamson (1975), Herbert Kitschelt (1986), and Jennifer Earl (2000), I **systematize the concept of counter-hegemony** as a set of structural, substantive, and cultural movement outcomes, indicating three groups of tangible achievements that can solidify movements' positions in social struggles. I focus on the structural and substantive pillars in my analysis: the realignment of social and political groups at the state and constituency levels, and the material and symbolic policy gains applying to whole constituencies.

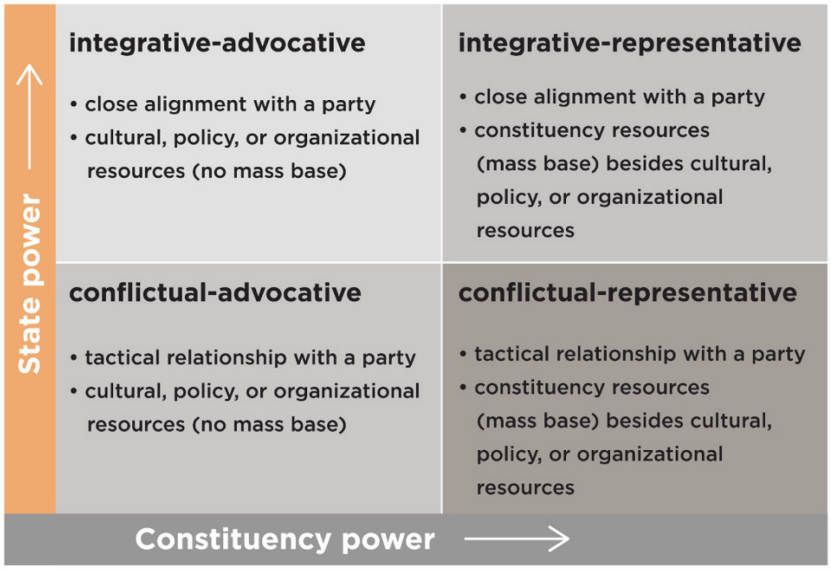


Figure 1-1: 2x2 of four sets of movement strategies to state power and constituency power. The Y-axis represents the potential influence on state power, and the X-axis represents the potential influence on constituency power. (See Section 2.3 for more explanation on the strategies.)

I examine the counter-hegemonic potential of movement strategies in a **comparative case study** through the **housing struggles of five constituencies** in **Hungary between 1987 and 2024**. The selected constituencies are large families, public housing tenants, Roma people, homeless people, and indebted homeowners. My analysis is grounded in eight years of organizing and activism in The City Is For All, one of the examined movement organizations. Prior to my doctoral studies, between 2009 and 2017, I helped build this voluntary community organization of homeless people and their allies by nurturing potential leaders, involving them in organizing direct actions and recruiting new members, and preparing them to speak to the media. This democracy experience shaped my decision to pursue a PhD, with the hope that by critically reflecting on what we achieved and where we fell short, I could contribute to future housing movements being able to advance a more profound change.

Therefore, my research is ambitious. The specific geographic and temporal horizon (Hungary, 1987-2024) allows me to examine movement strategies through **three hegemonic**

phases of housing economies: state socialist, neoliberal, and illiberal. This makes **Hungary a particularly enlightening case to study** compared to most other countries, as we can analyze movement impact in relation to **two counter-hegemonic shifts**: one from the state socialist to the neoliberal housing economy in 1990, and one from the neoliberal to the illiberal one in 2010. Hungary thus demonstrates how a once largely decommodified, state socialist housing system evolves into a homeownership-based, domestically-driven financialized housing economy (Pósfai & Sokol, 2024). My case studies analyze the impact of Hungarian housing struggles through these phases.

Moreover, the research has **further relevance for understanding the challenges facing movements in other countries**. First and foremost, many countries in the world suffer from the crisis of democracy (Rahman, 2018; Fraser, 2022); liberal democracies tangled in neoliberal capitalism have long failed to deliver for low-income and working-class people. This often results in the perception that social movements cannot do much when there is a lack of a political alternative. Nevertheless, my analytical framework **reinforces the social imaginary** that **movements can aim to influence the emergence of a new political alternative**; they can elevate it, crush it, create it, or make it accountable if they position their constituency well. It is crucial to be able to picture these different modes of struggles for affordable housing, as state intervention is essential for effective solutions.

Furthermore, Central and Eastern Europe is still underrepresented in social movement research, and many of the field's most influential conclusions are based on Western European and U.S. cases and concepts (Amenta et al., 2010:302; Jacobsson & Saxonberg, [2013] 2016; Gagyi, 2015, 2015b; Jacobsson, [2015] 2020; Bosi & Uba, 2021:990). Therefore, the thorough **analysis of "less prominent cases,"** such as these Hungarian case studies, contributes to a more complex understanding of what makes social movements win (Amenta et al., 2010:302). Last but not least, my case selection allows for **comparing strategies on the political left and**

right, contributing to new findings on the rise of conservative civil society (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012; Greskovits, 2017, 2020; Youngs, 2018; Taylor, 2021), and empowering movement leaders in our polarized societies with a complex understanding of their struggles.

The dissertation consists of six chapters. **Chapter 2** (following the current introductory chapter) lays the theoretical and methodological groundwork for the research on counter-hegemonic movement potential, bringing multiple streams of social movement and civil society literature into dialogue with Gramscian theory. First, I **systematize the concept of counter-hegemony** as a set of structural, substantive, and cultural movement outcomes, providing a fundamental conceptual and operational framework for counter-hegemonic social transformation. Counter-hegemony immediately problematizes the alleged autonomy of social movements and civil society from the state, which I briefly discuss. Then I review the literature on how movements shape state and constituency power, **identify four strategic orientations** (which I have previewed in Figure 1-1 above), and theorize on their counter-hegemonic potential. I conclude the chapter by presenting my **methodology** for examining the counter-hegemonic impact of these strategies.

Chapter 3 contrasts housing policy as it should be with housing policy as it is. I view decommodification – the removal of housing from the market or reduction of its exposure to market logic – as a path towards **normative counter-hegemonic shift** (Achtenberg & Marcuse, 1986; Slater, 2012; Fuller, 2019). Drawing on state-of-the-art policy literature (UNECE, 2021), I identify substantive policy outcomes that advance this normative shift towards affordable housing. Then I trace the **development of the Hungarian housing economy** between 1952 and 2024. The analysis unfolds across three hegemonic phases – state socialist, neoliberal, and illiberal – and highlights the ruptures that enabled each transition. Thus, the chapter distinguishes between the normative and positive ("real") counter-hegemonic shifts to identify the current state of the Hungarian housing economy, and anticipates possible future directions.

Chapter 4 presents the **housing struggles of five constituencies** – large families, public housing tenants, Roma people, homeless people, and indebted homeowners – from the perspective of their social movement organizations. These struggles provide an insight into the potential of movement strategies theorized in Chapter 2. The cases demonstrate the extent to which movement organizations can navigate the political landscape and advance the issue of housing. The subsequent stories, which follow one another chronologically, unfold a comprehensive picture of the Hungarian housing struggles through three phases of housing economies – state socialist, neoliberal, and illiberal – introduced in Chapter 3.

The analytical comparison of how these strategies shape the movement organizations' ability to achieve counter-hegemonic outcomes takes place in **Chapter 5**. This chapter summarizes the **findings** of the case studies and discusses their strategic, policy, theoretical, and methodological **implications**. It also **evaluates** which collective **policy outcomes** can be regarded as counter-hegemonic, **assesses the current standing of movements**, and **identifies patterns to help SMOs** effectively **advance a normative counter-hegemonic turn**. Finally, **Chapter 6** draws the conclusions, makes recommendations for future research, and highlights the contributions to social movements study. Lastly, the **Appendices** include valuable membership data on the examined movement organizations.

In sum, **this dissertation offers a guiding framework** for researchers and movement leaders seeking to navigate the path to radical – counter-hegemonic – social change. I view this change as the disruption of existing building-block alliances among political and social groups, and the emergence of new alliances, leading to new dominant values and policies. The modes of strategic orientations I propose are certainly ideal types; nevertheless, they enable us to think about complex social processes, raise awareness about the fuzzy contours of civil society, and empower movement organizations to think broadly about how to tap into the complementary potential between movements and parties, and the power of their constituencies.

CHAPTER 2: WHY DO SOME HOUSING STRUGGLES SUCCEED? *A theoretical and methodological framework for movement strategies with counter-hegemonic impact*

How do organizers and activists know they are proceeding in the right direction? How can they ensure their efforts add up to radical – counter-hegemonic – social transformation? This puzzle motivating my research is captured in the following **research question**: **"How do different movement strategies shape social movement organizations' ability to achieve counter-hegemonic outcomes?"** This chapter lays the **theoretical and methodological groundwork** to answer this question and identifies signposts for successful movement strategies. My proposition is that *counter-hegemonic movement outcomes* depend on the combination of two factors: how social movement organizations relate to political parties that aim to grab or maintain state power, and how they approach to strengthening their constituency's position. In other words, their ability to reconfigure the established balance of power between social and political groups is contingent on their *strategic orientations to state power* and *constituency power*.

I start by **conceptualizing and operationalizing counter-hegemonic movement outcomes** by marrying related elements of counter-hegemony theory with movement outcomes research. Counter-hegemony immediately problematizes **the alleged autonomy of social movements and civil society from the state**, so after the conceptualization, I engage in the autonomy-separation debate in related literature. The next step is the movement strategy. After reviewing and incorporating lessons from extant research, I identify **four different strategic orientations** to state power and constituency power and **theorize on their counter-hegemonic impact**. I conclude the chapter by presenting my **methodology** for examining the counter-hegemonic impact of these strategies.

2.1 Defining the prize: the conceptualization and operationalization of counter-hegemonic movement outcomes

Movement outcomes are short-term or long-term modifications of politics and culture or the movement itself (Earl, 2000:4-5). They help break down what is sometimes referred to as movement "success" or "failure" into a set of **tangible consequences of activities** (Bosi & Uba, 2009:409). Movement outcomes research – a relatively new subfield of social movement studies – has made significant progress in the last thirty to fifty years by identifying various outcomes (Bosi & Uba, 2009, 2021), understanding how and to what extent movements matter (Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi, 1995; Staggenborg, 1995; Giugni, 1998; Earl, 2000; Bosi & Uba, 2009, 2021), and how they can increase their effectiveness (Gamson, 1975; Piven & Cloward, 1977; Andrews, 2001; Meyer et al., 2002; Amenta et al., 2019). However, although comprehending transformative social change has always been the underlying motivation, the field has not directly addressed **whether and how movement outcomes work towards the radical reconfiguration of power relations** resulting in counter-hegemonic social transformation.

This is not surprising considering the methodological challenges. The typical **methodological pitfalls** facing movement outcomes research (Burstein et al., 1995; McAdam & Snow, 1997; Giugni, 1998) are also present when conceptualizing counter-hegemonic movement outcomes. As Jennifer Earl points out, the primary challenge in case of unintended movement outcomes (such as counter-hegemonic movement outcomes) is that the burden falls on the researcher to identify the possible outcomes and define them in precise and measurable ways (2000:7). (In contrast, intended outcomes are determined based on actual movement demands.) Earl suggests the extensive use of theory and the creation of "broad, theory-driven categories of possible outcomes" (2000:13), which can also make comparisons across movements easier (2000:14). Following her advice, I draw on the **theories of counter-**

hegemony and movement outcomes research to conceptualize and operationalize counter-hegemonic movement outcomes. The following section reviews the literature, highlights my contribution, and shows the outcome of the conceptualization and operationalization in a table.

2.1.1 Defining counter-hegemony

Breaking down how counter-hegemony works is an intriguing idea. It suggests that we come close to understanding a **process of building a new power structure** where alternative values and policies gain dominance. While Gramsci did not use the exact phrase "counter-hegemony," the idea was central to his theory on hegemony, and many have drawn on it in their analysis (e.g., Gorz, 1968; Michnik, [1976] 1987; Laclau & Mouffe, [1985] 2001; Jenkins & Brents, 1989; Billings, 1990; Cox, 1995, 1999, 2024; Filc, 2021; Balkan Şahin & Bodur Ün, 2022). Let me encapsulate the main ideas of hegemony in this section to lay the groundwork for conceptualizing and operationalizing counter-hegemonic outcomes.

Undoubtedly, **counter-hegemony is the antithesis of hegemony**. However, Gramsci never provided a compact definition of hegemony (Crehan, 2002:101). His theory, crafted in the 1930s in Fascist Italy against the backdrop of roaring capitalism, suggests how the capitalist state maintains power through **consent** rather than coercion (Gramsci, [1929] 1999:504, 527; Crehan, 2002:102; Martin, 2023:Section 3.2). Hegemony is, therefore, more than mere domination. First and foremost, it is **the organization of consent**, the tacit or explicit support of various social groups to the dominant system (Gramsci, [1929] 1999:145).

Therefore, Gramsci considered **civil society** the locus of hegemonic struggles. Although he never came up with a single conception of civil society (Hoare & Smith, 1999:447), he consistently saw it as a terrain where the state promotes a particular way of life – through schools, churches, civic associations, newspapers, intellectual circles, etc. – contributing to the organization of consent (Gramsci, [1929] 1999:145, 502-503). This turns

civil society into "an object of conquest" (Brighenti, 2016:4) for the capitalist state and those who aim to challenge this state in support of a new model of society. This way, **hegemony is a conflictual *process*** – a conflict *for* and *over* hegemony – and is never complete.

At the same time, **hegemony is also an *outcome***. It is **a specific variation of established power relations** of social and political groups. Gramsci sometimes calls this equilibrium of forces a *historical bloc*, the alignment of groups joined politically and culturally under a specific form of hegemony (Gramsci, [1929] 1999:690; Levy & Egan, 2003:806; Martin, 2023:Section 3.2). Each historical bloc enables and maintains a particular mode of production and worldview. Therefore, hegemony also expresses **a specific variation of dominant ideas** in which certain values and meanings become "*common sense*," i.e., a "widely shared and seemingly self-evident" reality (Crehan, 2016:45). Those social groups whose ideas "make their way into people's everyday existence" become hegemonic (Brighenti, 2016:3).

So, based on this heuristic summary of Gramsci's expansive theory, **counter-hegemony** is no less than breaking the consent over a seemingly ubiquitous reality and building a new historical bloc representing a new worldview that can emerge as hegemonic. Drawing on this, I define *counter-hegemony* **as the process and outcome** *of the radical reconfiguration of power relations between social and political groups through civil society, resulting in new dominant values and policies*. Nevertheless, the challenge remains: how can counter-hegemony be broken down into movement outcomes? Let me incorporate the lessons of outcomes research into my conceptualization.

2.1.2 Systematizing counter-hegemonic movement outcomes

In his seminal study, **William Gamson** (1975:28-29) **defined movement success as a set of outcomes** that fall into his categories of A) movement organizations being accepted as legitimate claimants and B) winning new advantages. Expanding on Gamson, **Herbert**

Kitschelt (1986:66-67) distinguished between *procedural impact* (greater access to formal political decision-making), *substantive impact* (policy changes of significant importance or considerable amount), and *structural impact* (transformation of the political system, such as the rise of a new political party).[a] Since then, Kitschelt's typology has remained the benchmark for movement scholars, with varied analytical interests in the procedural, substantive, structural, and normative aspects (latter implicit by Kitschelt) (e.g., Amenta & Young, 1999; Giugni & Yamasaki, 2009; Krizsán & Lombardo, 2013; Amenta et al., 2019; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2018).

I apply a modified version of Kitschelt's seminal framework to **systematize the concept of counter-hegemonic movement outcomes**. Following the logic of Gamson (1975) with his definition of movement success, I consider **counter-hegemonic movement outcomes** as a set of *structural*, *substantive*, and *cultural* outcomes that signal a shift to counter-hegemony. The top rows of **Table 2-1** below display these three dimensions (categorized as political outcomes and cultural outcomes), previewing the result of the conceptualization and operationalization process.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="5">Counter-hegemonic movement outcomes</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="4">Political outcomes</th><th>Cultural outcomes</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Structural</th><th colspan="2">Substantive</th><th rowspan="2">Cultural</th></tr>
<tr><th>State level</th><th>Constituency level</th><th>Material</th><th>Symbolic</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">-the disruption of building-block alliances and creation of new alliances</td><td rowspan="2">-widespread policy change affecting the reallocation of resources</td><td rowspan="2">-widespread policy change affecting the recognition of constituencies</td><td rowspan="2">-widespread dominance of alternative narratives and values</td></tr>
<tr><td>-ideologically aligned political party rises as leader of an emerging historical bloc</td><td>-struggles of the constituency become central and indispensable in an emerging historical bloc</td></tr>
<tr><td>Indicator:
-shifting party preferences among constituencies
-poll results
-election results
-party leadership in protests</td><td>Indicator:
-political affirmation of claims and collective identity by politicians' media comments and legislative decisions</td><td>Indicator:
-collective benefits to the constituency (beyond individual or small group concessions)</td><td>Indicator:
-collective benefits to the constituency (beyond individual or small group concessions)</td><td>Indicator:
-cultural values survey results
-frame and discourse analysis results
-media analysis</td></tr>
</table>

Table 2-1: Conceptualization and operationalization of counter-hegemonic movement outcomes integrating theories of counter-hegemony and movement outcomes research. *The dissertation focuses on the political counter-hegemonic outcomes*.

I keep the ***structural*** and ***substantive*** dimensions of Kitschelt's framework as they provide important reference points for conceptualizing counter-hegemonic movement outcomes. First, structural outcomes reflect shifts in the alignment of social and political groups, indicating motion in the historical bloc. Second, substantive outcomes trace significant and considerable changes in policy, which can signal a counter-hegemonic shift or be proxies of a new hegemonic consent. However, I add a ***cultural*** dimension, which is missing from Kitschelt's typology, incorporating changes in values, which are intrinsic to counter-hegemony.

On the other hand, I put aside the *procedural* and *normative* dimensions. Procedural outcomes capture the level of integration into decision-making: they indicate incremental influence over the state and policies or signal a shift towards a participatory political culture (Arnstein, 1969; Fung, 2006). At the same time, from a counter-hegemonic perspective, procedural outcomes seem to suggest not much more than what structural outcomes already indicate: shifts in the alignment of social and political groups. Regarding the other aspect: the normative dimension can create confirmation bias towards normatively aligned outcomes. Although this lens is crucial to detect counter-hegemonic transformation in a particular direction, it may result in disregarding processes leading to unfavorable counter-hegemonic social change. This choice does not indicate that I ignore what a normative counter-hegemonic shift is (Chapter 3 is dedicated to this). It means that my theoretical framework is neutral to accommodate both normative and non-normative changes.

However, the question remains: **what counter-hegemonic outcomes fall under the structural, substantive, and cultural dimensions?** In other words, what are and what are not counter-hegemonic movement outcomes?

2.1.3 Conceptualizing and operationalizing counter-hegemonic movement outcomes

Identifying which movement outcomes are significant, milestone-like accomplishments in a social struggle has long been a dilemma for movement outcomes scholars (Giugni, 1998; Amenta et al., 2010). First, the path to social change is *incremental* and paved with possible fallbacks (policy setbacks, electoral losses, repression, etc.) (Amenta et al., 2018:451). One outcome may seem rock solid only to diminish when circumstances change. Moreover, outcomes are *interconnected*; they may strengthen or weaken one another over time (Staggenborg, 1995; Amenta & Young, 1999). Their *importance* may *change retrospectively* in

light of new information, even though they came across as incremental or significant (Scott, 1987; Staggenborg, 1995; Bayat, 1997).

The *aggregate* and *non-linear nature of social change* has been perceived as equally challenging by theorists of counter-hegemony. It has been the core of the debate for centuries, dating back to pre-Marxist thought, whether "reform," i.e., gradual change, or "revolution," i.e., abrupt change, dismantles hegemonic power structures. It was the theorists of the New Left who attempted to reconcile these two views: they suggested that ***strategically chosen* "milestone" outcomes** threatening the building blocks of capitalist hegemony can eventually erode the system rather than improve conditions within it (e.g., Marcuse, 1964; Gorz, 1968; Castoriadis, [1975] 1987; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Thinkers inspired by this tradition suggest concrete policies (e.g., universal basic income) or democratic practices (e.g., direct democracy), highlight the importance of ideologically driven, grassroots resistance, and emphasize the organic connection of claims and actions between different types of resistance (e.g., Castoriadis, 1990; Fraser, 2003, 2022; Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017; Mouffe, 2018).

My goal here is more modest. **I aim to provide a conceptual and operational framework of counter-hegemonic movement outcomes that is applicable regardless of ideological motivation**. In other words, I identify essential and measurable "milestones" along the structural, substantive, and cultural dimensions, tracing the contours of a path leading to counter-hegemonic social transformation. Table 2-1 above has shown this framework.

In alignment with the New Left's statement that material and cultural aspects are equally important for radical social transformation (Fraser, 2003; Mouffe, 2018), I add two subcategories under the ***substantive dimension*** to address both the ***material*** and ***symbolic*** dimensions of social change (see the second column of Table 2-1). These dimensions indicate that counter-hegemonic movement outcomes must be widespread policy changes, which extend to the reallocation of resources (e.g., social benefits) and the recognition of

constituencies (e.g., new modes of referring to a social group). I draw on Amenta and his colleagues' "collective goods standard" to operationalize widespread policy change (Amenta & Young, 1999:24; Amenta et al., 2010:289-291), and consider **material and symbolic policy changes counter-hegemonic movement outcomes when *they apply to the whole constituency,*** not only those participating in the challenge.

However, substantive movement outcomes can be quickly taken away (or not given) when political interest shifts or the constituency weakens. Therefore, material and symbolic counter-hegemonic gains are highly contingent on outcomes in the **structural dimension**. As the definition of counter-hegemony indicates, its fundamental "structural event" is the formation of a new historical bloc: building-block alliances are disrupted, and new alliances are created. This evidently involves a *political party struggle*, but perhaps it is often underemphasized that it also comprises a *struggle among constituencies* (or subgroups of constituencies). This illuminates that the structural dimension of social change is not solely about **transforming the political system** (as Kitschelt argued in 1986) but also the **transformation of the power balance between the constituencies**.

As a result, Table 2-1 displays two subcategories under the structural dimension: the state and the constituency levels. At the ***state level***, I consider a movement outcome counter-hegemonic when a party ideologically aligned with the movement rises as a leader of an emerging historical bloc. This holds the possibility that the movement sees a close political ally grab governing power and control the state. (Naturally, movements can also become parties or spin off parties that can acquire this leadership position.) I propose this counter-hegemonic outcome to be measured by shifting party preferences, poll results, election results, and party leadership in protest events.

In order for specific constituencies to trigger or benefit from this shift, they must "constitute the core around which the bloc will organize" and be "relevant to societies' central

conflicts at a given historical moment" (Filc, 2021:28). Therefore, at the ***constituency level***, social movement organizations attain a counter-hegemonic outcome when their constituencies get to play a predominant role in the emerging historical bloc. Measured by political affirmation through media and legislative decisions, this perspective might sound inconsiderate to inequality; indeed, chances to build positions as an organized and recognized constituency are far from equal for marginalized or otherwise disadvantaged constituencies (Hull et al., 1982; Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Arruzza et al., 2019; Petri et al., 2021; Zentai, 2022; Sebály, 2022a; 2023). At the same time, the counter-hegemonic perspective that constituency positions are "not finite but ongoing and changing" (Filc, 2021:28) and "may move up and down […] fairly quickly, depending on shifts in state and party alignments" (Goldstone, 2003:9) is plausible considering the tectonic shifts in human history.[b]

Although the ***cultural dimension*** has been left last in my conceptualization, Gramsci engaged with this aspect the most concerning counter-hegemony (Crehan, 2002:71). For Gramsci, counter-hegemony is grassroots cultural transformation requiring the leadership of so-called organic intellectuals. The ideational material for this cultural work "emerges out of the lived reality of oppressed people's day-to-day lives" (Crehan, 2002:5). The intellectuals emerge from a particular (marginalized) constituency, and remain involved in the struggles for social change. At the heart of this counter-hegemonic work is the crafting of a coherent and unifying counter-hegemonic narrative (a ***good sense***) (Crehan, 2002:113; 2016:49) out of the jumble of people's incoherent "beliefs and opinions held in common" (***common sense***) (Crehan, 2016:44) based on dialogue between subalterns and their organic intellectuals. I propose that the dominance of these alternative narratives and values be measured by cultural values surveys and media analysis.

To conclude, **Table 2-1 above shows counter-hegemonic movement outcomes** integrating lessons of counter-hegemonic theory and movement outcomes research. One

question has remained unclear: how much do the different types of outcomes depend on one another? The answer follows from the definition of counter-hegemony, according to which **structural, substantive, and cultural outcomes are necessarily intertwined** (see definition at the end of Section 2.1.1). In other words, the realignment of social and political groups without widespread policy and cultural change, or vice versa, widespread policy and cultural change without the realignment of social and political groups, do not constitute counter-hegemony. The situation is similar to the two types of substantive and structural outcomes. Although counter-hegemonic movement struggles can produce significant milestones in one or the other front along the way, when the predominant position of one or more constituencies in a historical bloc is considered, subdimensions are interdependent to constitute counter-hegemony in the long run.

2.1.4 Summary of contribution to movement outcomes research and counter-hegemony theory

To conclude, I **summarize the essence of my conceptualization and operationalization** and **highlight my contribution** to extant movement outcomes research and counter-hegemony theorization:

1. I conceptualize *counter-hegemonic movement outcomes* as a set of *structural, substantive,* and *cultural outcomes* that pave the way to *counter-hegemony* (defined as the process and outcome of the radical reconfiguration of power relations between social and political groups through civil society, resulting in new dominant values and policies). The conceptualization and operationalization contribute to a comprehensive understanding of transformative social change, filling a gap in both movement outcome and counter-hegemony literature, which have not focused sufficiently on the systematic understanding of counter-

hegemonic outcomes. The conceptualization also refines Kitschelt's (1986) seminal typology of outcomes.

2. *Structural counter-hegemonic movement outcomes* must include the transformation of power relations both at the state and the constituency levels. With the latter, this conceptualization contributes to Kitschelt's typology, which overlooks the importance of reconfiguring power relations among the constituencies.

3. *Substantive counter-hegemonic movement outcomes* must include widespread policy changes that affect the reallocation of resources (*material* dimension) and the recognition of constituencies (*symbolic* dimension). These subcategories refine the substantive dimension of Kitschelt's typology. Substantive movement outcomes are highly contingent on outcomes in the structural dimension.

4. *Cultural counter-hegemonic movement outcomes* indicate the widespread dominance of alternative narratives. They are the result of cultural transformational work at the grassroots level, which requires organic intellectuals in dialogue with subaltern constituencies to consistently advance a related set of values and narratives. This category incorporates the cultural dimension as an add-on to Kitschelt's typology, the latter framed at a time when cultural outcomes were less at the center of movement outcomes research.

2.1.5 The focus of my research and the next steps

I focus on movement impact on structural and substantive outcomes. Although cultural outcomes are still under-researched (Earl, 2000; Bosi & Uba, 2009, 2021; Amenta et al., 2010; Bosi et al., 2016), and their analysis would be an important contribution to the subfield, it lies beyond the scope of this research. Naturally, I reflect on cultural changes in my case studies. However, my analytical attention focuses on exploring the strategic impact on political (structural and substantive) counter-hegemonic outcomes.

When I have "weighed" the relationship between substantive and structural outcomes in Section 2.1.3, I have argued that tilting the balance of power in favor of the widespread implementation of specific policies is ultimately driven by which party controls the state and how strong the constituency is. This puts ***state power*** **and** ***constituency power*** at the heart of my inquiry on counter-hegemonic strategic impact. I define *state* as an institutionalized system of government, an aggregate of sub-players including municipalities (Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015; State, 2025). Thus, *state power* is the aggregate influence of these sub-players and institutionalized system of government. I define *constituency* as a group of people with shared interest, therefore, with the potential to wield electoral power. Constituencies can organize themselves through social movement organizations or political parties, and build *constituency power*, i.e., the influence of an organized group of people to achieve a common cause (Ganz, 2000; Warren, 2011; Han, 2016).

My proposition is that social movement organizations' *strategic orientations to state power* and *constituency power* influence their ability to achieve *(political) counter-hegemonic movement outcomes*. In other words, movement organizations' ability to reconfigure the established balance of power between social and political groups *simultaneously* depends on how they relate to political parties that aim to grab or maintain state power and how they approach to strengthening their constituency's position.

My goal by the end of this chapter is to delineate typical strategic orientations to state power and constituency power and theorize their potential counter-hegemonic impact. The typology is inevitably in tension with the liberal democratic interpretations of civil society, which rigidly isolate the "civil" and the "political." This requires clarifying what I mean by civil society and makes it necessary to reflect on the alleged autonomy of civil society and social movements from the state and political parties. The following section is about this question.

2.2 Setting the terrain of struggle: civil society

Social movement and civil society studies have rarely interacted (della Porta, 2020), yet they share a convention: their subjects are **often considered separate, autonomous entities from the state**. **Civil society**, a concept tied to distinct political-economic agendas (Edelman, 2004:30), is primarily understood as a sphere of autonomous human association between the individual and the state (Walzer, 1998:123; Edwards, 2011:4; della Porta, 2020:939). Although historically, it is only one of the many interpretations of civil society and state relationships (Arato & Cohen, 1994; Ehrenberg, 2017; Taylor, 2021), the common sense remains that civil society is a separate sphere that "serves liberty and limits the power of central institutions" (Ehrenberg, 2017:4).

The **"separation argument"** (Goldstone, 2003:8) is also **ontological to social movement research**. Modern social movements were theorized to have emerged in the late 18th and early 19th century in defiance (and as a consequence) of the modern liberal democratic state and capitalist form of economy (Tilly, 1995; Jenkins & Klandermans, 1995:5; Goldstone, 2003:8; Tilly, 2004:16-37; Johnston, 2011:11).[c] Electoral politics and political ambitions have characterized social movements since the 19th century (Jenkins, 1995; Goldstone, 2003:8), and movement and party structures were intertwined especially in those early decades; yet, the subjects of the emerging scientific field were defined as "challengers" (Tilly, 1978), "outsider" groups (Gamson, 1990), or "extra-institutional" actors (Katzenstein, 1998), indicating social movements' ostensibly separate entity from the state and parties.

At the same time, various literature has **challenged this ideal type of autonomy** in both research fields. Regarding **civil society studies**, critical reflection on "civil society development" and democracy promotion has long shown interdependence between the state, political parties, and civic organizations (Bocz, 2009:127-154). When neoliberal **states**

delegated social responsibilities – formerly executed by the state – to civic organizations, they reconfigured "civil society through the accelerated growth and expanded role of NGOs" (Dagnino, 2011:128). Besides domestic governments, **foreign states have also shaped civil society** in this third wave of democratization (Jacobsson, [2015] 2020:274, Gagyi & Ivancheva, 2019:56). USAID, among other donors, created opportunities for alignment between civic actors and political parties to challenge anti-EU or anti-U.S. governments, contributing to building social movements (at least temporarily) in Slovakia, Croatia, or Serbia (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011; Irvine, 2013); or enhancing NGO-ization in the case of Bosnia and Russia (Henderson, 2002; Irvine, 2013).

A critical approach to the **notion of "good society"** has also illuminated the contradictions around civil society's autonomy. Defined by "norms of freedom, democracy, respect, tolerance, cooperation, and any number of other estimable values" (Bob, 2011:212), "good society" has been increasingly associated with progressive values such as women's empowerment, anti-racism, LGBTQ+ or other human rights (Youngs, 2018:7; Gagyi, 2021:19) – closely associated with liberal democratic norms where the power of civil society lies in its (alleged) independence from the state. However, historical examples such as the role of German civil society in the rise of Nazism or the recent strengthening of new conservative civic movements challenge the normative understanding of civil society; moreover, these examples also show how power can be drawn from the strategic alignment between civil society and ambitious political parties (Berman, 1997; Carothers & Barndt, 1999; Skocpol & Williamson, 2012; Greskovits, 2017, 2020; Youngs, 2018; Hanley & Vachudova, 2018:286).

Despite the conventional wisdom that movements relate to the state in two ways, i.e., the state would block movements or reluctantly yield to movement demands (Goldstone, 2003:20; illustratively Johnston, 2011), **social movement scholars** did articulate the **varied patterns of relationships** between institutionalized and non-institutionalized politics. (1) First,

social movements, political parties, and the state may **compete** with or **complement** one another (Jenkins & Klandermans, 1995). Movements advance demands on behalf of their constituency for which they need political support; parties aim to grab (or maintain) state power by winning or sidelining specific constituencies and their organizations (Garner & Zald, 1983; Kriesi, 1989; Maguire, 1995). (2) Second, social movements, political parties, and the state may **interpenetrate** one another (Garner & Zald, 1983; Goldstone, 2003). Similar agendas or values inevitably lead to a revolving door or an overlap of people. As Jack Goldstone expressively puts it, there is "a fuzzy and permeable boundary" between institutionalized and noninstitutionalized politics (2003:2).

This stream of social movement literature (explicitly or implicitly drawing on Gramsci's hegemony theory) also emphasizes the determinative influence of the state. **Political opportunity structures** – elite cleavages, party behavior, electoral systems, and so on, all linked to the organization of the state – heavily affect movement strategies and impact (Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi, 1989; Rucht, 1990; della Porta & Rucht, 1991; Kriesi et al., 1995; Amenta & Young, 1999; Koopmans & Statham, 2000; Amenta et al., 2005; Bocz, 2009:139-154). Moreover, further relativizing the autonomy of social movements, the **complexity of state apparatuses** shaping the **culture and the political-economic system** affects how challengers perceive the existing order (Schattschneider, 1960; Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Lukes, [1974] 2005). Charles Tilly describes this subtle effect of state power: "[A]s a result of mystification, repression, or the sheer unavailability of alternative ideological frames, subordinates remain unaware of their true interests" (1991:594).

The critical reflection of civil society and social movement scholars on "autonomy" and "separation" is essential to engage with movement strategy and counter-hegemony. Nevertheless, the arguments run in parallel streams of separate frameworks, preventing researchers of the two fields from incorporating the convoluted nature of state-movement-civil

society relationships into their work. Motivated by the recent call of scholars for more significant interaction between civil society and social movement studies (della Porta, 2020; Baca et al., 2024), I propose combining the two streams of arguments by defining **civil society as a *terrain of struggle*** where social movements vis-à-vis political parties and the state *compete*, *complement* or *interpenetrate* one another to gain (or maintain) constituency support. **Figure 2-1** below illuminates these dynamics.

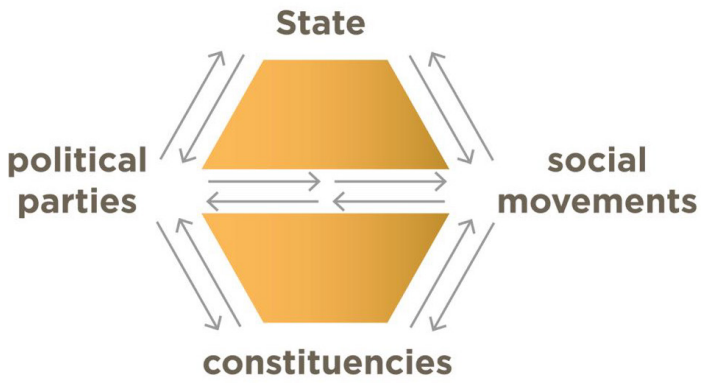


Figure 2-1: Relations among the state, social movements, political parties, and constituencies. The image draws on that of Jenkins and Klandermans, who use citizens instead of constituencies and a political representation system instead of political parties (1995:5). The colored part representing civil society is the author's addition.

Understood this way, **civil society** is "not an autonomous sphere of self-contained democratic activity" but "a chaotic sphere of competition" (Ehrenberg, 2017:7) with amorphous contours where social and political groups adjoin to reconfigure established power relations and advance their model of society. Civil society as a 'terrain of struggle' gains inspiration from the Gramscian notion of civil society,[2] but it turns his ideas into concepts applicable to social movement analysis.

[2] See Section 2.1.1 on this. As a reminder: Gramsci did not come up with a single conception of civil society (Hoare & Smith, 1999:447), but he consistently saw it as the locus of hegemonic struggles (Gramsci, [1929] 1999:145). As Andrea Mubi Brighenti sees it, civil society simultaneously becomes "an object of conquest, a

Civil society as a 'terrain of struggle' thus reinforces my conclusion at the end of the previous section: movement organizations' **strategic orientation to *state power* and *constituency power*** influences their ability to achieve counter-hegemonic outcomes, i.e., movements' ability to reconfigure the established balance of power between social and political groups *simultaneously* depends on how they relate to political parties that aim to grab or maintain state power and how they approach to strengthening the position of their constituency. The following section reviews the literature on movement strategies from this dual perspective, delineate typical strategic orientations to state power and constituency power, and theorize their potential counter-hegemonic impact.

2.3 Choosing the means: strategies with potential counter-hegemonic impact

Movement strategies are a prominent area of movement outcomes research (Gamson, 1975; Piven & Cloward, 1977; Kitschelt, 1986; Giugni, 1998; Ganz, 2000; Maney et al., 2012). Nevertheless, despite the relatively long history of the subfield, there is no consensual definition of the concept (Maney et al., 2012:xvii). The recurring common denominator for many scholars has been that **strategy is *an overall plan of collective action to achieve goals*** (Jenkins, 1981:135; Meyer & Staggenborg, 2007:6; Maney et al., 2012:xvii; Booth-Tobin et al., 2021:6). Whether these plans are small, limited, and incidental, or detailed, elaborate and intentional, they are considered strategies (Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2012:286). As a result, strategy simultaneously means action and orientation such as protest, organizing, mobilizing, bargaining, electoral, violent, and non-violent strategies, among many others.

battlefield among different social and political groups, and the outcome of a given configuration of opposing forces" in Gramsci's theory of hegemony (2016:4).

What I refer to by **strategy** in my analysis is purely *an orientation*: an overall orientation of social movement organizations to the state, political parties, and constituencies to achieve goals through collective action in civil society. Therefore, what distinguishes strategies in my typology is how movement organizations relate to these actors. I aim to capture the different levels of engagement between (1) movements and political parties and (2) movements and constituencies while reconfiguring power relations through civil society. In other words, I aim to illuminate the strategic orientations through which movement organizations shape the political power landscape and relate to their constituencies during their struggles.

First, I review the literature on how movements shape state and constituency power. Based on this review, I synthesize four strategic orientations to state power and constituency power: **integrative, conflictual, representative, and advocative**. Finally, I theorize on the counter-hegemonic potential of these strategies and identify my contribution to extant research.

2.3.1 Strategic orientations to state power: integrative or conflictual

Social movements continuously influence the position of political parties in a historical bloc. Their decisions and actions create opportunities for certain parties while delegitimizing others, actively contributing to **reconfiguring (or maintaining) political power relations**. The mutual benefits are clear: movements and parties are interdependent in their struggle for social change, so they can potentially gain from each other's success (Maguire, 1995:202-204; Goldstone, 2003:23). At the same time, while parties can provide a vehicle for movement demands, they can also abandon or sideline movements when the alignment does not serve their electoral interest. Therefore, social movement literature emphasizes both the complementary potential and the potential risks in movement-party relationships.

First, the **complementary potential** may be displayed through ***intentional or incidental alliance***. When movements embrace ignored or unaddressed demands, they open space for certain parties to step forward and appeal to new constituencies (Hutter et al., 2019:325). When they advance issues simultaneously with parties, they enhance their legitimacy (Kriesi, 1989; della Porta & Rucht, 1991; Gandin & Apple, 2002; Sebály, 2020:17). Movements can also appear together with a party in the media, in front of the constituency or in legislative spaces. In addition, movement leaders can accept positions in the party or the state (Goldstone, 2003:2), either by maintaining double identities or moving back and forth through a "revolving door" between political and movement spaces. Finally, to cut the list short, movements can also push for policies to grease the progress of policy-making advanced by insider allies or challenge compromise-seeking proposals (Hutter et al., 2018:325).

Moreover, the complementary potential can manifest through ***electoral dynamics***. Movements can choose to become parties, spin off parties, or create opportunities for parties to emerge (Garner & Zald, 1983; Desai, 2003; Osa, 2003; Osa & Corduneanu-Huci, 2003; Dagnino, 2011:125; Bozóki, 2014). They can actively revitalize a party's base or shape its agenda (Williamson et al., 2011; Greskovits, 2017, 2020; Youngs, 2018). They can enhance voter turnout for elections (McAdam & Tarrow, 2013) or mobilize for electoral breakthroughs, even in authoritarian regimes (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011). Last, but not least, movements can run candidates in local and national elections, endorse their own or other candidates, and even determine these candidates' electoral success by giving or withdrawing support (Goldstone, 2003:4). **Figure 2-2** summarizes these different tactics of alignment between movement organizations and parties.

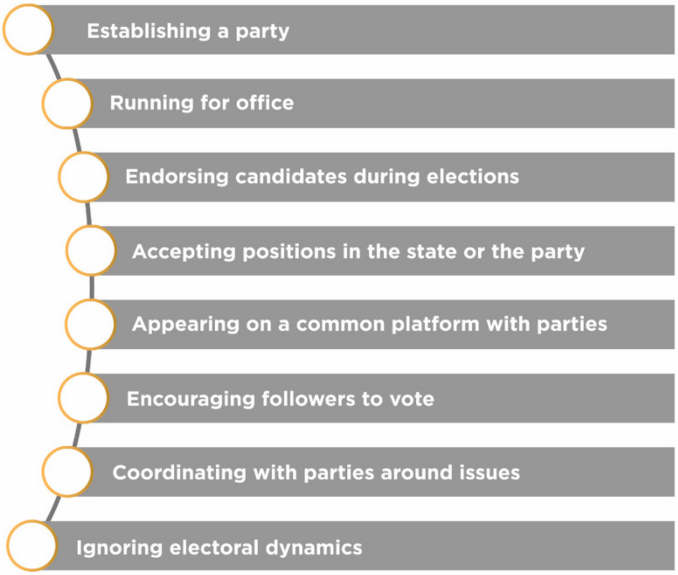


Figure 2-2: A scale of alignment between movements and parties representing potential indirect movement control over state power

At the same time, any type of movement-party alignment, no matter how incidental or intentional it is, is **"fraught with dangers"** (Jenkins, 1995:31, emphasis mine). For example, in a quest for a governing position, opposition parties are more likely to provide a vehicle for movement demands to generate constituency support (Maguire, 1995:202; Koopmans & Statham 2000:34-35). However, they may abandon their movement allies after winning if movements pose no threat of accountability or an alignment with them holds out little electoral reward (Hutter et al., 2018:328). In response, when movements want to keep the governing ally close or maintain strong relationships with opposition parties, they may sacrifice the interests of marginalized constituents. Last but not least, parties can diminish the movement's autonomy (Maguire, 1995), for example, by co-opting movement issues or annexing movement leaders.

The **different alignment tactics** listed in Figure 2-2 signal the **orientation of movement organizations to influencing state power**. I propose synthesizing these alignment tactics as strategic orientations to state power in the *integrative* and *conflictual* division. In my

definition, an organization applies an ***integrative*** **strategy when it engages in the long-term work of building an ideological alliance with a party to influence the state**.[d] On the other hand, an organization applies a ***conflictual*** **strategy when it considers political parties as campaign targets or allies, depending on their stance on a particular issue**.

The difference between the two strategies is significant, but it may initially seem subtle. The combination of alignment tactics indicates the distinction to some extent. Movement organizations with a conflictual orientation may regularly coordinate with parties around issues or encourage followers to vote. At the same time, movement organizations with an integrative orientation would also systematically appear on a common platform with parties, accept positions in the state or the party, endorse candidates during the elections, or even run for office or establish their own party. In both cases, movements and parties can gain from each other's success, albeit in supposedly different ways. (This is shown in Section 2.3.3 in the theorization about their counter-hegemonic potential.)

However, what illuminates the difference between the two orientations the best is where movement organizations draw the imaginary red line between themselves and political parties in the 'terrain of struggle,' i.e., where they set up the no trespassing sign in civil society. In the case of the conflictual orientation, movement organizations see the alignment as a tactical relationship connected to the advancement of an issue. Regarding the integrative orientation, movement organizations operate almost in symbiosis with the ideologically aligned party, "enthusiastically embracing" its approach and actively reinforcing its position in the historical bloc. I theorize about these strategies' counter-hegemonic potential after I review strategic orientations to constituency power in the next section.

2.3.2 Strategic orientations to constituency power: representative or advocative

Social movement literature is divided on what generates constituency power to achieve gains. One stream of literature juxtaposes the influence of ***confrontational tactics*** (protests, disruption, violence) and ***less conflictual forms*** of attaining response from political elites (negotiations, lobbying, litigation, insider relations) (Milbrath, 1970; Gamson, 1975; Piven & Cloward, 1977; Jenkins, 1983; Kitschelt, 1986; Fowler & Shaiko, 1987; Soule & Olzak, 2004; Johnston, 2011). On the one hand, scholars argue that conflict disrupts the routine state of affairs, forcing decision-makers to respond. On the other hand, they point out the long-term benefits (and, of course, downsides) of acquiring regular access to the state through less conflictual, institutionalized practices.

Another set of social movement students explores the effect of the ***levels of organization***. They contrast organizing a base with mobilizing people, comparing robust organizational structures with less stable forms of convening (Gamson, 1975; Piven & Cloward, 1977; Staggenborg, 1988; Ganz, 2000; Warren, 2011; Speer, 2002; Speer et al., 2010; Han, 2014; Whitman, 2018; Hutter et al., 2018:326; Han et al., 2021; Christens et al., 2021; Jansson & Uba, 2022; Han et al., 2024). While one group of scholars highlights the potential of developing new leaders and strengthening a marginalized constituency to the level that it matters politically, the second group focuses on the effect of mobilizing large numbers of people and the danger that too much structure limits the disruptive power of oppressed people.

In response, various scholars attempted to reconcile these views in one framework by focusing on the ***interplay of strategies***. Along this line, Marshall Ganz's strategic capacity approach (Ganz, 2000; Han et al., 2021), Kenneth T. Andrews' movement infrastructure model (Andrews, 2001; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2018; Sebály, 2020), and Gregory M. Maney's strategic multiplicity concept (Maney, 2012) emphasize the benefit of multiple mechanisms of

influence in social movements. Others converged these different views by highlighting the ***potential dependence of parties on movements***. In this regard, Paul Burstein and his colleagues' bargaining concept and Diarmuid Maguire's balance of resources model illuminate that movement power lies in the functional value or utility of the movements' resources for the target instead of the mere possession of particular resources (Burstein et al., 1995; Maguire, 1995; Williams, 2003).

All these lessons of movement research about constituency power allude to or directly refer to the importance of **electoral influence**, i.e., whether movements can threaten (or reinforce) the electoral stability of governing parties or open up opportunities for electoral success for opposition parties. Therefore, I aim to synthesize the lessons of the literature by applying this electoral lens. Drawing on Maguire (1995:203-204), **I define four resources through which movement organizations can demonstrate *constituency power*:**

1) *Constituency resources*: the ability to cultivate a mass base of constituents (i.e., directly impacted people) that is potentially valuable to parties because of the electoral value of the large percentage of the constituency involved in the movement;

2) *Cultural resources*: the ability to manifest values that are potentially valuable to parties in gaining electoral support of broader constituencies (even if the majority of those constituencies is not involved in the movement);

3) *Policy resources*: the ability to demonstrate expertise that is potentially valuable to parties in gaining the support of broader constituencies (even if the majority of those constituencies is not involved in the movement);

4) *Organizational resources*: the ability to provide infrastructure for mobilization (skills, money, activists) in a cause that is potentially valuable to parties in gaining the support of broader constituencies (even if the majority of those constituencies are not involved in the movement).

Figure 2-3: The components of representative and advocative strategies

As **Figure 2-3** above illustrates, I propose to use these resources to capture movement organizations' strategic **orientation to constituency power** in the *representative* and *advocative* division. In my definition, an organization applies **a *representative* strategy when it articulates constituency interest on behalf of a mass base, i.e., it generates and controls constituency resources besides any of the cultural, policy, or organizational resources**. On the other hand, an organization applies an ***advocative* strategy when it articulates constituency interest based on any of the cultural, policy, or organizational resources without generating and controlling a mass base**. The following section explores the counter-hegemonic potential of the presented strategies.

2.3.3 The counter-hegemonic potential of movement strategies to state power and constituency power

Hence, I synthesize the integrative/conflictual, and representative/advocative strategic orientations into four sets of movement strategies. **Figure 2-4** below presents these strategies

along the axes of state power and constituency power (with snapshots of the descriptions introduced in Sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2).

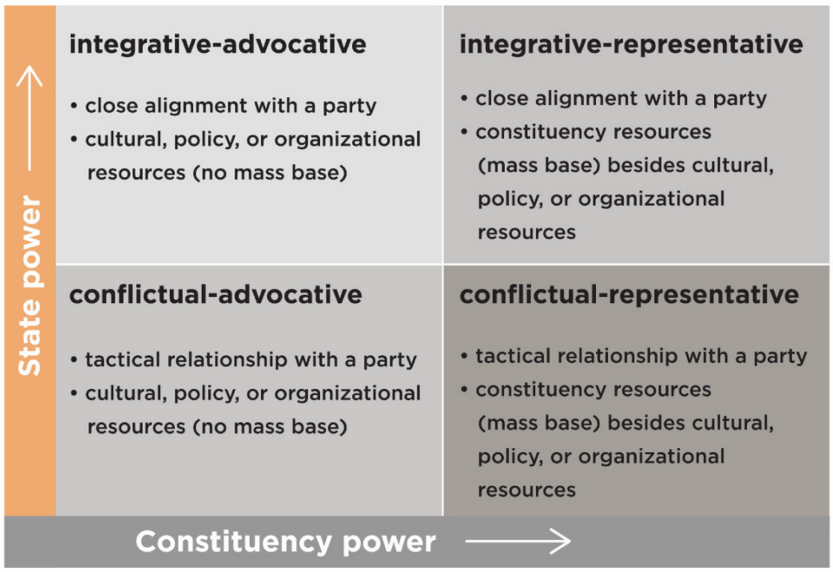


Figure 2-4: 2x2 of four sets of movement strategies to state power and constituency power. The Y-axis represents the potential influence on state power, and the X-axis represents the potential influence on constituency power.

In this **two-dimensional conceptual framework**, the strategies are systematic and comparable expressions of how movement organizations relate to political parties that aim to grab or maintain state power and, simultaneously, how they approach to strengthening the position of their constituency. The framework provides researchers with **a new tool** to juxtapose movement strategies. As the review of movement strategy literature has suggested, all sets of strategies may have counter-hegemonic potential under certain configurations of power relations, albeit with different likelihoods.

The **combination of integrative and representative strategies** – a close alignment with a party and the power of a mass base – **supposedly** provides **the most potential** for counter-hegemonic outcomes. The mass base can lend a strong position for a movement organization and its constituency within an emerging historical bloc and make the movement

agenda appealing to an ambitious political party. The close alignment such as the appearance on common platforms can maximize the complementary potential of movements and parties in advancing power reconfiguration. The electoral value of the mass base can provide enough gravity to control the threats inherent in a close alignment before and after the elections. At the same time, while movements aim to maintain strong political relationships, they may sacrifice the interests of marginalized constituents who hold out little electoral reward for the party, or let the party co-opt movement issues or annex movement leaders.

The **mix of conflictual and representative strategies** – a tactical relationship with a party and the power of a mass base – has **arguably less counter-hegemonic** impact because it considers political parties as constantly moving campaign targets and utilizes the movement-party complementary potential limited to issue campaigns. However, in some cases, as Goldstone suggests, a social movement "gains influence not by imposing its demands on reluctant polity members, but through the enthusiastic embrace of the state or state actors," and I add, political parties, "who seek an ongoing alliance with the movement" (2003:23). As this strategy enhances the position of the political ally only through the issue campaign, it misses on the variety of resources the party could bring into the alliance. At the same time, the strategy could be the most relevant when there are no ideologically aligned parties on the horizon.

The **coalescence of conflictual and advocative strategies** – a tactical relationship with a party and the compensation for no mass base with cultural, policy, or organizational resources – **supposedly also has less counter-hegemonic impact** because the movement organizations cannot utilize the opportunities inherent in the previous two strategies. However, as the literature review has highlighted (Burstein et al., 1995; Maguire, 1995; Williams, 2003), the potential of building leverage and demonstrating electoral power is not solely about the possession of resources – e.g., the size of the base – but also about the value of the actual resources relative to other groups in the historical bloc. Leverage boils down to whether the

organization has something the party lacks or wants, and cultural, policy, or organizational resources can be such. As a result, even movement organizations with thin or no base can be seen as valuable in social struggles and attain a higher value in a historical bloc. Moreover, if the party aligned with them succeeds on its own terms (or thanks to other movement organizations), the constituency may benefit from a counter-hegemonic turn.

The **mix of integrative and advocative strategies** – a close alignment with a party and compensation for no mass base with cultural, policy, or organizational resources – **arguably** has **less counter-hegemonic potential**. The symbiosis with the ideologically aligned party provides the advantage of sharing resources and maximizing the complementary potential between the party and the movement. However, the lack of a mass base makes the movement organization more vulnerable to the threats of party-movement alignment. The cultural, policy, and organizational resources can be valuable enough for the party not to abandon the movement after winning, or, for the same reason, the movement can use these resources to force the party to stay on track instead of making too many compromises. At the same time, the lack of the electoral value of the mass base makes the position of the movement organization and its constituency volatile in an emerging historical bloc or in an attempt to pressure the party.

The next section explains the methodological approach to examine the counter-hegemonic impact of these four sets of movement strategies.

2.4 Methodology

2.4.1 Comparative case study method

My research is designed as a comparative case study defined as "the empirical analysis of a small sample of bounded phenomena that are instances of a population of similar phenomena" (Rohlfing, 2012:27). I compare the counter-hegemonic potential of movement strategies through **five case studies**: the housing struggles of **five constituencies** in **Hungary between 1987 and 2024**. The selected constituencies are *large families*, *Roma people*, *public housing tenants*, *homeless people*, and *indebted homeowners*. The specific geographic and temporal horizons allow me to examine counter-hegemonic outcomes of movement strategies through **three phases of housing economies**: *state socialist*, *neoliberal*, and *illiberal*. This methodological choice pays off in several ways.

First, it lessens the challenges of establishing causal relations. As Earl points out, "It is not enough to show that changes in movement activity occur in time with changes in political outcomes; researchers must be able to offer an explanation for *how and in what circumstances* movement activities cause outcomes" (2000:9, emphasis in original). Comparing **a small number of historically similar movements** over long stretches of time with very different results in political influence offsets many of the related challenges (Amenta et al., 2010:302). It lets me test complex, theoretical arguments such as counter-hegemonic outcomes, and address movement impact on major political and social structural shifts. Moreover, the **broad temporal horizon** allows me to focus on feedback loops between strategy and outcome, liberating me from establishing strict causality. I cannot eliminate rival causes (plausible alternative explanations for a specific outcome) and spuriousness (when a third, confounding variable causes the causal connection). However, I can explore the opportunities and risks of different movement strategies more deeply and **place movement impact in perspective**.

Second, my specific geographic and temporal horizons (Hungary, 1987-2024) enrich movement outcomes research in several ways. To start with, Central and Eastern Europe is still underrepresented, and a substantive number of conclusions are drawn based on Western European and U.S. cases and concepts (Amenta et al., 2010:302; Jacobsson & Saxonberg, [2013] 2016; Gagyi, 2015, 2015b; Jacobsson, [2015] 2020; Bosi & Uba, 2021:990). Therefore, thorough **analysis of "less prominent cases" contributes to a more complex understanding** of what makes social movements win (Amenta et al., 2010:302). Moreover, the case of Hungary plays an important role in constructing Hungary and the Central and Eastern European region's **movement history**. Last but not least, the case selection allows for **comparing strategies on the political left and right**, contributing to new findings on the rise of conservative civil society (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012; Greskovits, 2017, 2020; Youngs, 2018).

The five constituencies – large families, Roma people, public housing tenants, homeless people, and indebted homeowners – have been selected because their movement organizations pursued different strategies with different results in political influence, and their stories provide a comprehensive picture of Hungarian housing struggles. At the same time, these **constituencies raise the issue of rival explanations and confounding variables** because they potentially possess different levels of social, cultural, and political capital and cope with different levels of racial, class, gender, and other forms of inequalities. The **broad temporal perspective** of the research and the **in-depth empirical analysis** significantly **lessen these valid threats**.

Last but not least, the analysis enhances the understanding of post-socialist housing struggles in Hungary, which is valuable for both academics and movement leaders. It also contributes to the **ongoing research on housing movements in Central and Eastern Europe**. So far, scholars have provided a panorama view of the evolution of post-socialist Hungarian

housing movements (Udvarhelyi, 2014a; Sebály, 2021, 2022b; Florea et al., 2022). The current analysis expands on extant research by analyzing movement strategies.

2.4.2 Unit of analysis: Social movement organizations

The unit of analysis of this research is social movement organizations (SMOs). Social movements are networks of organizations engaging in political or cultural conflicts on the basis of shared collective identities (Diani, 1992:13). SMOs are organizations that acquire a leadership role in the movement because of their resources. Although the early definition suggests that SMOs are exclusively complex or formal organizations (McCarthy & Zald, 1977:1218), I propose to adapt the concept to less robust movement contexts like the Hungarian one. Therefore, I define **SMOs based on their prominent leadership role in protests or other movement activities**.

I have selected SMOs for the analysis according to the following process:

- I have examined a dataset on two decades of Hungarian protest events (Greskovits & Wittenberg, 2016) to identify organizations involved in housing struggles;
- I have added protest events based on my research on housing movements (Sebály, 2021, 2022; Bakó et al., 2024);
- I have examined various types of footage, such as documentary footage from the Black Box Foundation's video archive at the Open Society Archive (OSA), the documentary called Ragged Revolution (*Rongyosforradalom*), and news footage from the Hungarian newsreel database, *nava.hu*;
- I have reviewed the Hungarian Central Statistical Office's (*Központi Statisztikai Hivatal,* KSH) non-profit dataset (KSH, 2020b) to identify organizations that may have remained under my radar.

This selection process has **lessened potential ideological or confirmation bias** and provided me with an **approximately exhaustive list of organizations involved in housing-related conflicts both on the political left and right**. I have included those organizations (according to my definition of SMOs) which played a prominent role in housing struggles. **Table 2-2** below lists the **selected SMOs according to the constituencies they represent** and the periods when they were active. The assigned constituency indicates the primary constituency the particular SMO represents based on its organizational profile. Obviously, there are overlaps and opportunities for cross-representation among the SMOs not indicated in this table.

Primary housing constituency based on organizational profile	**Period**	**Organization**
Large families	1987-	National Association of Large Families (*Nagycsaládosok Országos Egyesülete*, NOE)
Roma people	1989-1994	Phralipe
	1995-2010	Roma Civil Rights Foundation (*Roma Polgárjogi Alapítvány*, RPA)
Public housing tenants	1988-1995	Tenants' Association (*Lakásbérlők Egyesülete*, LABE)
Homeless people	2010-2023	The City Is For All (*A Város Mindenkié*, AVM)
Indebted homeowners	2009-2019	Home Defenders (*Otthonvédők*)

Table 2-2: Constituencies and their movement organizations examined in the current dissertation

Large families are any families with three or more children. **Roma** people are members of an ethnic group who self-identify as Roma or are identified as Roma by the movement organizations supporting them. Public housing tenants are residents of public housing units with relatively secure status. **Homeless people** are defined as people who sleep rough or live in squats, shacks, or homeless shelters, or are at the risk of being evicted. **Indebted homeowners** have difficulty redeeming their loans and fall behind on paying monthly

installments. In general, **people with housing insecurity** couch surf at their friends or relatives' place or depend on the courtesy of other people in other ways, or live in public housing, rented apartments, squatted buildings, or private property at the risk of being evicted and without the capacity to improve their situation after a possible eviction, or live under unsafe or undignified circumstances in any other ways.

Unsurprisingly, movement strategy researchers often choose SMOs as their unit of analysis (e.g., Gamson, 1975; Staggenborg, 1995; Cress & Snow, 2000). SMOs have a critical role because of their leadership position; therefore, their strategic choices significantly shape the course of struggles. This suggests that **looking at SMOs is sufficient to articulate and analyze the full potential of strategies** regarding movement outcomes. It also makes the analysis executable, crucial in research with a long temporal horizon. Although I follow this methodological orientation, its limits must be pointed out. As Giugni illuminates it, this approach focuses on "the organizations instead of on the broader cycles of protest, which may include various movements whose **combined effect might be more important than the impact of a single challenging group**" (1998:383, emphasis mine). I consider this during the data analysis and **counterbalance the limitations** with knowledge from my previous research about the evolution of the Hungarian housing movement infrastructure and alliances between 1988 and 2020 (Sebály, 2021, 2022b).

2.4.3 Substantive boundaries of the case study

A comparative project with a broad temporal horizon demands "steep knowledge requirements" (Amenta et al., 2010:295). Moreover, **movement strategy research requires caution**: it may quickly happen that researchers consider something a strategy when it is hardly articulated. "In this worst-case scenario, social movement scholars risk reifying movements and misattributing meanings and intentions of movement actors. In the best case, we help to

articulate and analyze the full potential of strategies habitually reproduced and only semiconsciously constructed" (Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2012:286). To mitigate these risks, Rachel V. Kutz-Flamenbaum recommends that the research takes seriously "the experiential knowledge of activists and the participatory experience of scholars," and allows itself "to be challenged and questioned by the voices of activists within the movement, either virtually through archives and personal accounts or through direct conversation" (2012:296-297). I have followed these principles during data collection.

Table 2-3 shows my primary data sources to identify movement strategies and their impact: 1) **1,794 articles** in printed and online media drawing on the database of Hungarian printed newspapers called Arcanum Digitheca as well as online media portals; and 2) **438 organizational documents** of the examined SMOs (publicly available or received upon request), such as reports, minutes of meetings, proposals to decision-makers, newsletters, press releases, and the organization's journal articles or blog posts.

	NOE (1987-)	**Phralipe** (1989-1994) **RPA** (1995-2010)	**LABE** (1988-1995)	**AVM** (2009-2023)	**Home Defenders** (2009-2019)	*N subtotal*
Printed articles	667	209	347	0	125	*1348*
Online articles	52	79	27	54	234	*446*
Organizational documents	42	74	0	322	0	*438*
N TOTAL	*761*	*362*	*374*	*376*	*359*	**2232**

Table 2-3: Primary data sources

These sources have provided me with in-depth and multi-faceted insight into the SMOs' operation to get **a good sense of their strategic orientation** to *constituency power* (size of membership; modes of organization building; the use of constituency, cultural, policy, and

organizational resources) and *state power* (approaches to different parties whether they are in government or in opposition; the willingness to appear on common platform; behavior and tactics around elections; the willingness to run for office). Many of the media articles conveyed the voice of movement leaders in the form of interviews or quotations, or were based on the SMO's public statement. I have systematically organized the content from these primary sources in a document, grouping data by organizational attributes, policy issues (particularly housing), and relationships to parties and the state under subsequent governments. I have segmented my search for media data in Arcanum Digitheca by governing cycles and used keywords such as the organization's name or a combination of the organization's name and other expressions (such as an issue or a party). I have juxtaposed articles to lessen data validity issues.

I have used newsreel footage (*nava.hu*), minutes of parliamentary debates and records of appeals (*dlib.ogyk.hu*, *parlament.hu*, *parlament.k-monitor.hu*), and election data of examined SMOs running for office (*valasztas.hu*) to further triangulate data. The parliamentary minutes have provided insight into the participation of examined SMOs in committee meetings or showed whether the organizations or their issues were mentioned in debates. After processing these written and visual sources, I have conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with 14 people to check my preliminary conclusions and further triangulate data. **Table 2-4** shows this data source disaggregated by type and organizations. I did not conduct any interviews with Home Defenders because I have drawn on interview-based ethnographic research (Szabó, 2018).

	NOE (1987-)	**Phralipe** (1989-1994) **RPA** (1995-2010)	**LABE** (1988-1995)	**AVM** (2009-2023)	**Home Defenders** (2009-2019)	*n subtotal*
Movement leader interview	2	5	2	2	0	*11*
Expert interview	1	2	2	0	0	*5*
n TOTAL	*3*	*7*	*4*	*2*	*0*	**16**

Table 2-4: Semi-structured interviews disaggregated by type and examined SMOs

By using **media articles and organizational documents instead of interviews as primary sources** I have overcome the limits of memory and lessened the distortion from retrospective reconstruction or reinterpretation of organizational motivations, and accessed underlying, semiconsciously constructed layers of movement strategy. On top of the above-mentioned sources, **data for political outcomes** have been collected from secondary sources. To trace the *structural shift* in the position of the allied party and the constituency in the historical bloc, data from my collection of media articles, organizational documents, parliamentary minutes, and election results were accompanied by the relevant political science literature. I have obtained data for *substantive policy outcomes* from the relevant policy literature on top of my collection of media articles, and the assessment of movement leaders in the interviews.

At the same time, my methods of data collection have **certain limitations**: a **mixed-methods model**, i.e., using quantitative methods to supplement the current qualitative methods, would increase the possibility to lessen rival causes and spuriousness. Although my goal is not to establish strict causality (as I have clarified above in Section 2.4.1), quantitative methods such as statistical tests would scaffold the analysis, and the use of mixed methods would increase the methodological contribution (Earl, 2000). However, this is

counterbalanced by the fact that **comparative case studies** on major structural shifts **with a broad temporal scope** – my design – have been identified as **a niche** in the movement outcomes subfield (Amenta et al., 2010:302); therefore, I **establish a good level of methodological contribution** with my research.

2.5 Conclusion of the chapter

In this chapter, I have laid out the theoretical and methodological groundwork to examine the counter-hegemonic potential of movement strategies. I have conceptualized and operationalized counter-hegemonic movement outcomes as a set of structural, substantive, and cultural outcomes (see Table 2-1 in Section 2.1.2). I have argued that the structural dimension of counter-hegemonic social change is not solely about the reconfiguration of political power, but also the transformation of the power balance between the constituencies themselves (Section 2.1.3). Based on this, I have proposed to put social movement organizations' *strategic orientations to state power* and *constituency power* at the heart of the inquiry. I delineated four sets of strategies to state and constituency power depending on how movement organizations relate to political parties that aim to grab or maintain state power, and simultaneously how they approach to strengthening the position of their constituency. I produced a two-dimensional conceptual framework by which these strategies are systematically comparable (see Figure 2-4 in Section 2.3.3) and presented a methodology to carry out the analysis (see Section 2.4).

To conclude, my main theoretical propositions are the following:

- **counter-hegemony** is the process and outcome of the radical reconfiguration of power relations between social and political groups through civil society, as a result of which new policies and values gain dominance (see Section 2.1.1);

- **civil society** is a 'terrain of struggle' where social movements vis-à-vis political parties and the state compete, complement or interpenetrate one another to gain (or maintain) constituency support (see Figure 2-1 in Section 2.2);
- **counter-hegemonic movement outcomes** are a set of structural, substantive, and cultural outcomes that signal a shift to counter-hegemony (see Table 2-1 in Section 2.1.2);
- **strategic orientations to state power and constituency power** are two factors that capture social movement organizations' ability to achieve (political) counter-hegemonic outcomes (see Sections 2.1.5 and 2.2);
- **strategies with potential counter-hegemonic impact** maximize the complementary potential between social movement organizations and political parties while offsetting the threats inherent in movement-party alignment and strengthening the position of movement constituencies (see Figure 2-4 in Section 2.3.3).

As I have said in Chapter 2.2 above, political-economic systems heavily affect challengers' perception and impact, even more so when the temporal horizon of the struggle encompasses three distinct forms of housing systems: state socialist, neoliberal, and illiberal. The next chapter provides an insight into these housing economies and conveys the necessary policy context for the understanding of the case studies.

Endnotes

[a] Three years before Kitschelt, Jenkins suggested that "changes in social power" can be assessed in three ways: short-term policy changes, change in the composition and organization of decision-making elites, and long-term changes in the distribution of socially valued goods. Thus, he emphasized the importance of political transformation and the normative and substantive aspects of policy gains (1983:544).

[b] Various achievements of the abolitionist movement, the labor movement, the feminist movement, the Civil Rights Movement, or the disability movement, etc. can be seen as examples of "tectonic" shifts. Goldstone also shares that group positions are not finite when he says that it is "more accurate to think of a continuum of alignment and influence, with some groups having very little access and influence through conventional politics, others having somewhat more, and still others quite a lot; but groups may move up and down this continuum fairly quickly, depending on shifts in state and party alignments" (2003:9).

[c] There is another conjuncture that explains the ontological nature of the "separation argument." Contemporary social movement studies emerged in the 1970s when a new generation of researchers turned their analytical attention to the new social conflicts around identity, cultural values, and lifestyle (Edwards, 2014:112; della Porta, 2020:941). These movements were hallmarked by defying state power or turning their back on the state. Many of the researchers founding the field were not only observers but also participants of these new social movements.

[d] The meaning of the term is not equivalent with how Kriesi (1989) used it in his analysis of the Dutch peace movement. First of all, he called the strategy of "the members of the system" as integrative. He aimed to capture how the state and political parties deal with new challengers through co-optation, co-operation, and accommodation (1989:295-296).

CHAPTER 3: HOUSING POLICY AS IT IS AND AS IT SHOULD BE

For most of human history, housing was not a matter of public policy; it remained the responsibility of individual households with minimal state intervention or institutional support. This began to change in the 19th century due to rapid urbanization and industrial expansion. Many European states acknowledged that affordable housing is a public concern and the state has a role to play. At the same time, financial institutions gradually became key intermediaries, and the increased flow of private finance into housing created housing markets that have become more and more interconnected with financial markets over time. Today, many scholars agree that the **financialization of housing** – a very tight integration of the housing market with the financial sector – is the **major driver of the affordability crisis** (Harvey & Wachsmuth, 2012; Aalbers, 2017; Taylor & Brehmer, 2023). Decommodification – the removal of housing from the market or reduction of its exposure to market logic – is often viewed as the basic countermeasure (Achtenberg & Marcuse, 1986; Slater, 2012; Fuller, 2019).

From this position, **substantive decommodification** represents a **normative counter-hegemonic shift**. In less commodified housing systems, homes are not primarily treated as economic goods to be bought and sold for profit, or used to generate financial assets. Instead, they are understood as fulfilling a fundamental social need – one that should be addressed through targeted policies (Achtenberg & Marcuse, 1986:475-476; Fuller, 2019:19-20). As opposed to the approach which sees a well-regulated real estate market, complemented by an essential social safety net and social housing policies, as a primary driver of affordable housing (World Bank, 1993; Hegedüs et al., 1996; UNECE, 2019), policy frameworks advancing decommodification place markets in a secondary role. They ensure that housing is allocated independently from market dynamics.

Therefore, in the view of many, including the author of this dissertation, decommodification holds the potential to create **a more equitable and inclusive housing economy** (Achtenberg & Marcuse, 1986; Slater, 2012; Fuller, 2019). However, this has rarely been the trajectory in the past five decades in the world. Until the 1970s, European governments, and to some extent, the U.S., typically regarded the provision of affordable housing as a public responsibility and protected housing finance from the volatility of financial markets. Since then, this approach has been steadily reversed across both Western and post-socialist contexts. As Manuel B. Aalbers puts it, housing entered a "neoliberal" or "financialized, real estate-driven regime of accumulation" (2017:3).

This chapter contrasts **housing policy as it should be** – guided by the principles of decommodification – with **housing policy as it is**. It distinguishes between the normative and positive ("real") counter-hegemonic shifts to identify the current state of the Hungarian housing economy, and anticipate possible future directions. I begin by presenting **a normative policy framework with a practical policy toolbox** that can guide organizers, movement leaders, and policymakers in shaping a decommodification agenda. Then I trace the **development of the Hungarian housing economy** between 1952 and 2024, showing how a once largely decommodified system evolved into a homeownership-based, domestically-driven financialized housing economy (Pósfai & Sokol, 2024). The analysis unfolds across three hegemonic phases – state socialist, neoliberal, and illiberal – and highlights the ruptures that enabled each transition. I conclude that large families, eligible for unprecedented material and symbolic policy gains, occupy a central position in the illiberal hegemonic phase. Finally, I provide a brief assessment of the Hungarian housing economy against the normative policy framework.

3.1 Housing policy as it should be

Housing economies have developed in different ways across countries; therefore, there is **no universal blueprint** to reduce the exposure of housing to financial markets or to decommodify this essential asset. Understanding the national and local specificities of unaffordable housing is necessary to develop the right demands and solutions. At the same time, a range of policies can contribute to building a more equitable and inclusive housing system, with the directives and guidelines of the **United Nations (UN) offering a valuable knowledge base**. While the UN-recommended policy frameworks and measures differ in how strongly they call for reducing housing's exposure to market logic, their aim is to ensure access to decent, adequate, and affordable housing for all.

One of the most prominent documents, the **Shift Directives** (Farha et al., 2022) takes a **clear stance against financialization** and calls explicitly for moving housing systems toward housing as a social good instead of a commodity. Supported by eminent scholars and practitioners of this approach, former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing, Leilani Farha puts forward policies regulating finance in a human rights framework. Her directives are primarily concerned with the role of institutional investors (private equity firms, private and public pension funds, asset management companies, etc.) and the leverage states can exert on these actors through human-rights based legislation. As a result, these policy recommendations comprise the regulation of investment, lending, and rental practices.

In contrast, the **New Urban Agenda** (UN-Habitat, 2020b) advocates for a path where **markets are harnessed to meet housing needs**, and **public policies and regulations** ensure that housing remains a social good accessible to all. The New Urban Agenda encourages public-private partnerships, tax and non-tax incentives for developers, as well as the utilization of zoning and land value capture to finance the vision of sustainable urban life as long as the

state has the capacity to ensure that private investments meet public needs. The agenda is presented in the framework of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) addressing a wide range of policy areas from land, urban design, and municipal finance to transport, waste management, and health, to mention a few. The policy recommendations are primarily concerned with state intervention in a participatory manner.

The **Housing2030** initiative (UNECE, 2021) occupies a position between the approaches of the Shift Directives and the New Urban Agenda. This extensive international collaboration of leading housing experts[1] offers a **critical response to the financialization and commodification of housing** while acknowledging **a role for markets only under robust, socially-anchored regulation**. Housing2030 includes much of the Shift Directives agenda and emphasizes financial market regulation more explicitly than the New Urban Agenda. While both Housing2030 and the New Urban Agenda highlight the importance of effective state intervention, the former provides concrete policy tools for civic engagement, enabling communities to participate actively in taming financialization and ensuring affordable housing access. In contrast to the New Urban Agenda, which emphasizes participatory policy planning and decision-making, Housing2030 views effective state action and community-based housing models as complementary mechanisms for delivering affordable housing. Due to its normative policy framework and rich repository of best practices, this section primarily draws on Housing2030 to propose a policy pathway to advance decommodification.

[1] Housing2030 is a joint international initiative of housing experts from over 56 governments through UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe), and UN-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Program), and 43,000 affordable housing providers and neighborhood developers represented by Housing Europe (the latter is a network of 45 national and regional federations of public, social, and cooperative housing providers operating in 24 countries, and managing around 25 million homes). Housing2030 aims to improve the capacity of national and local governments to formulate policies that improve housing affordability and sustainability (https://www.housing2030.org).

3.1.1 Capable governance[2]

States are not passive players in the commodification and financialization of housing. Financialized housing markets are deeply embedded in and dependent on public policy, while financialization further transforms the state (Aalbers, 2017:10). Therefore, effective and well-planned **state intervention** is **central** to addressing the housing affordability crisis. By providing viable alternatives to risky mortgage borrowing and housing poverty, the state can shield a significant portion of housing from the pressures of market logic. Long-term, robust, affordable housing reform depends on the **coordinated efforts of national and local governments**. A committed state can regulate unchecked capital, ensure the efficient use of land, funding, and expertise, support civic initiatives, and foster housing conditions that contribute to **a more inclusive and cohesive society**.

Key elements of governance with norm-setting and market-shaping power:

- **Strategic framework** (often in the form of a national housing strategy): a long-term plan which provides direction, clarifies the role of various stakeholders, defines priorities and actions, and receives the sufficient resources and supervision to succeed (e.g., "More Homes Scotland" (2016-2021) delivering 50,000 affordable homes in a country with a population of 5.4 million people);
- **Multi-level housing institutions**: a capable and well-resourced national institution (e.g., a ministry and a national housing agency) which coordinates housing policy across relevant departments and increases the effectiveness of implementation; capable and well-resourced local housing agencies or strategic alliances between local governments and housing providers (co-operatives, not-for-profit housing associations,

[2] This section draws on Housing2030's chapter on governance (UNECE, 2021:5-48) unless otherwise noted.

etc.), well-connected to national government departments and local communities (e.g., the Finnish Housing Finance and Development Center called ARA, receiving 6 million EUR annually from the state-funded Housing Fund of Finland);

- **Housing standards**: monitored quality requirements that prevent overcrowding, guarantee safety, ensure access of various constituencies (aged, disabled, etc.) and income and household types, and secures proximity to employment, education, recreation, etc.; provide benchmarks to measure progress (e.g., housing cost to disposable income ratio measures housing affordability).

Capable governance also shields housing from financialization by **regulating short-term and long-term rental markets**.[3] The massive commercial use of short-term letting (such as Airbnb) has reduced the supply in the long-term rental market, inflated real estate prices, created unfair conditions for licensed accommodation providers, and exacerbated gentrification. Thoughtful municipalities respond with restrictive measures, requiring hosts of short-term holiday rental housing to register with the municipality and limit the number of nights annually (e.g., Amsterdam, Berlin, Portland, San Francisco). Others choose to use prohibitive systems, banning short-term letting in certain neighborhoods or the entire city (e.g., citywide ban of new Airbnb registrations in Budapest for the period of 2025-2026; districtwide ban on all Airbnb rental in Terézváros of Budapest from 2026; citywide ban on all Airbnb rental in Barcelona from 2029) (Terézváros, 2024; Pupli, 2024; Carey, 2024).

Long-term rental markets can be compelling and safe alternatives to mortgages when conditions of tenancy, including the amount of rent, duration of rental, maintenance, eviction measures, and access to address-related public services, are adequate and predictable.

[3] Rental contracts for large landlords can securitized and converted into financial products, but these tools are not yet widespread, especially not in Europe (Fuller, 2019:28).

Therefore, **well-regulated rental markets** enhance decommodification by decreasing demand for purchasing homes, insulating tenants from market pressures, and partially fulfilling the function of a social housing system (Fuller, 2019:28-29). Thus, **rent setting** and **eviction measures** are particularly crucial. **Table 3-1** gives an overview of the latter in Europe.

Comparative no-fault eviction policies		
Less than one year	**More than one year**	**Permanent**
Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, England, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Switzerland	Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Spain	Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Scotland, Slovakia, Sweden

Table 3-1: Duration of protection from no-fault eviction across Europe in 2016. In a no-fault eviction, a landlord can evict a tenant without giving a reason, even though the tenant did not violate the terms of their lease. Source: Fuller, 2019:31.

Most European long-term rental markets prevent rent increases over local market averages (e.g., Ireland, Germany, Spain), tie rent increase to housing inflation indices (e.g., France, Germany), or control rent setting through collective bargaining by tenant unions or other organized ways (e.g., Sweden in for-profit and non-profit provision, Denmark in non-profit provision) (Fuller, 2019:29-30; UNECE, 2021:43, 67-68). In contrast, Hungary, Estonia, Finland, Portugal, and the UK do not regulate rent setting (Fuller, 2019:31). Not surprisingly, these countries offer limited protection against evictions. At the same time, renters in Germany, Scotland, and much of Scandinavia (except Finland) enjoy strong legal protection (Fuller, 2019:30).

3.1.2 Purposeful circuits of finance and investment[4]

When households are exposed to the instability of financial markets at such unprecedented levels as today (Aalbers, 2017:4), regulating mortgage lending is the reflexive response of many states. **Tightening mortgage lending rules** is **essential and effective** in decreasing household indebtedness and somewhat subduing house price increases. However, **tighter rules exclude certain constituencies** from mortgage-borrowing, and if states return to financial markets to address this housing problem, they scaffold financialization with taxpayers' money. Generous **tax reliefs** or **subsidized loan** interest rates can be helpful tools when properly targeted, but they **only moderately insulate low-income borrowers** from market pressure and can lead to increasing house prices. Governments have the **power to regulate finance and channel investment in other ways**, and must use this power to serve the public interest.

Key elements of finance and investment that the state can shape:

- **Regulating finance beyond bank lending**: extending regulation to non-bank finance with increasing interest in housing (private equity investors, pension funds, real estate investment trusts, etc.), protecting economic, social, labor, and environmental policies from collateral effect, and preventing housing booms and busts (e.g., the United Nations Environment Program's framework for action in *The Financial System We Need*, 2015);
- **Supporting non-profit provision of social and affordable housing**: enabling legal environment for non-profit provision (by municipalities, public housing agencies, state-owned companies, charities, non-profit and limited-profit housing associations, community interest companies, co-operatives, etc.); contribution to building, renovating, or maintaining social housing or creating new social housing through real

[4] This section draws on Housing2030's chapter on finance (UNECE, 2021:49-100) unless otherwise noted.

estate purchase or utilizing vacant private units (land, funding, loans, etc., e.g., in Angyalföld of Budapest); contribution to setting up revolving funds which repeatedly reinvest in housing; providing operating subsidies to social housing providers to build or create new social housing through real estate purchase or utilizing vacant private units (often subsidized loan interests); insulating subsidies from for-profit housing providers (e.g., housing funds in Denmark, Finland, Scotland, Slovakia, Slovenia, etc.);

- **Channeling investment into social and affordable housing**: special-purpose financial intermediaries to secure loans for social and affordable housing providers (including by aggregating the borrowing needs) (e.g., public investment banks in the Netherlands and Germany, a government agency in Ireland, a non-profit organization in the UK, a bond-issuing cooperative in Switzerland); taxation to guide investment into affordable housing (e.g., renting out private property through the national social rental agency of France in exchange for tax credit and other benefits; low-income housing tax credits in the U.S. to non-profit and for-profit developers);
- **Supporting circuits of household savings schemes**: enabling legal environment for building societies and financial support to complement savings (e.g., Bausparkasse in Germany, Housing Construction Savings Bank in Kazakhstan); state-backed household savings combined and used to fund loans for social housing provision (e.g., the French public agency CDC managing savings in the public interest);
- **Supporting sharing housing equity and costs**: enabling homeownership for aspiring homeowners without having them pay the whole capital otherwise required to access homeownership, such as
    - *subsidy retention models*: home buyers purchase at a discount, of which value is retained during each subsequent resale (Belgium);

- *shared ownership models*: a third party purchases a portion of the equity (or retains, if they are the seller), thus the home buyer purchases at a discount, and pays a monthly rent (Budapest in Jelinek & Pósfai, 2020);
- *shared equity loan*: a portion of the price is paid through an equity loan, which appreciates with the market value;
- *right-of-occupancy housing*: the occupier pays a one-time right-of-occupancy payment and a monthly charge (Finland; Budapest in Jelinek & Pósfai, 2020).

3.1.3 Effective land use[5]

Land is the foundation of all housing; therefore, land is leverage. If states – including municipalities – control the land, they can control who builds, what gets built, and for whom. This makes land policies one of the most powerful tools to maximize affordable, inclusive, and sustainable housing. States have the **power to intervene and improve the capacity of land markets** provided state agencies have the necessary jurisdiction, expertise, and funding. The creation of good-quality, egalitarian living environments also requires a long-term strategy, coupled with flexibility, that can guide urban development for decades while also adapting to changing market conditions.

Key land policy tools through which the state can intervene in land markets:

- **Public land banking**: a portfolio of property created by the state through direct land purchases at the open market when the state acquires, reassembles, prepares, and releases land (often by conditional **public land leasing**) to ensure that housing is delivered in the required amount, location, tenure mix and cost, and with the necessary

[5] This section draws on Housing2030's chapter on land (UNECE, 2021:101-132) unless otherwise noted.

infrastructure and services (e.g., the Vienna Land Procurement and Urban Renewal Fund (Wohnfonds Wien) banking 3 million m^2 of land (appr. 550-800 city blocks); Ile-de-France Public Property Establishment (EPF) banking 18,000 sites of which 50 percent have been dedicated to social housing; Genesee County Land Bank in Michigan banking 14,000 abandoned tax delinquent homes);

- **Public land leasing**: the conditional "renting out" of land with defined use and responsibilities (such as the construction of a set percentage of social housing, and contribution to developing public infrastructure, respectively) (e.g., Helsinki, Munich, Vienna, etc.; non-profit community land trusts owning and leasing land in the U.S., France, etc.);
- **Land readjustment**: the consolidation and rezoning of multiple pieces of land into a more orderly site to facilitate development (e.g., a federal law enabling municipal governments to readjust existing plots in Germany);
- **Land value capture**: tax instruments or special fees to capture land value increases resulting from planning decisions (such as rezoning or public investment into transport infrastructure); development-based instruments to obtain contributions from property owners or businesses who benefit from infrastructure provision (e.g., density bonus schemes and tax increment financing (TIF) schemes in the U.S.);
- **Comprehensive city and neighborhood planning**: local area planning with long-term policy objectives regarding land policies, infrastructure, and public services (e.g., soft urban renewal in Vienna to improve dilapidated areas without demolishing historic buildings, constructing entirely new urban areas, and displacing residents, and by avoiding social segregation and gentrification);

- **Inclusionary zoning**: a land-use instrument requiring developers to sell or rent at least 10 to 30 per cent of new residential units to lower-income residents, sometimes penalizing localities that fail to comply; less efficient without eliminating "backdoors" such as cash compensation to municipalities instead of dwellings or land (e.g., Austria (Vienna), Germany, France (including penalizing), Ireland, Netherlands, Scotland, the U.S.);
- **Land value taxation, including vacant housing**: taxation of immovable property and the prevention of inappropriate land use (e.g., taxing vacant housing based on potential rental income in France; taxing vacant housing based on property value in Canada).

3.1.4 Climate-neutral housing[6]

In economically developed countries, buildings use more than 70 percent of the electrical power and are responsible for 40 percent of CO_2 emissions from combustion (UNECE, 2021:133). This makes climate-neutral housing policies significant tools to create affordable and sustainable living environments, in particular, in the European Union (EU), which has dedicated resources to the energy-efficient renovation of buildings (Bajomi, 2022:22). States can support and direct housing markets towards energy efficiency provided they proactively apply a combination of regulatory and non-regulatory policy initiatives, funding, financial incentives, awareness-raising, and training across stakeholders. A powerful toolbox comprises technological innovations, behavior-related programs, and strategic investments driven by inclusivity and affordability.

[6] This section draws on Housing2030's chapter on climate-neutral housing (UNECE, 2021:133-164) unless otherwise noted.

Key climate policy tools with norm-setting and market-shaping power:

- **Energy performance-related building regulations**: legal framework for the construction sector, including building codes (e.g., the EU's energy performance of buildings directive; the EU's energy performance certificates required when selling or renting out a unit; mandatory renovation of poor energy-efficiency buildings in France);
- **Non-binding climate policy initiatives**: standards and recommendations based on voluntary compliance (e.g., Climate Protection Initiative in Austria, National Climate Agreement in the Netherlands);
- **Financial incentives**: instruments including preferential public loans (public co-investment) and government-guaranteed financing schemes increasing the availability of, or access to capital for investing in energy-efficient buildings or retrofits (e.g., revolving funds for energy efficiency renovation in Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia; social impact bonds in Finland, France, the Netherlands; tax deduction in Luxembourg, Sweden; tax incentives in Luxembourg, Sweden).

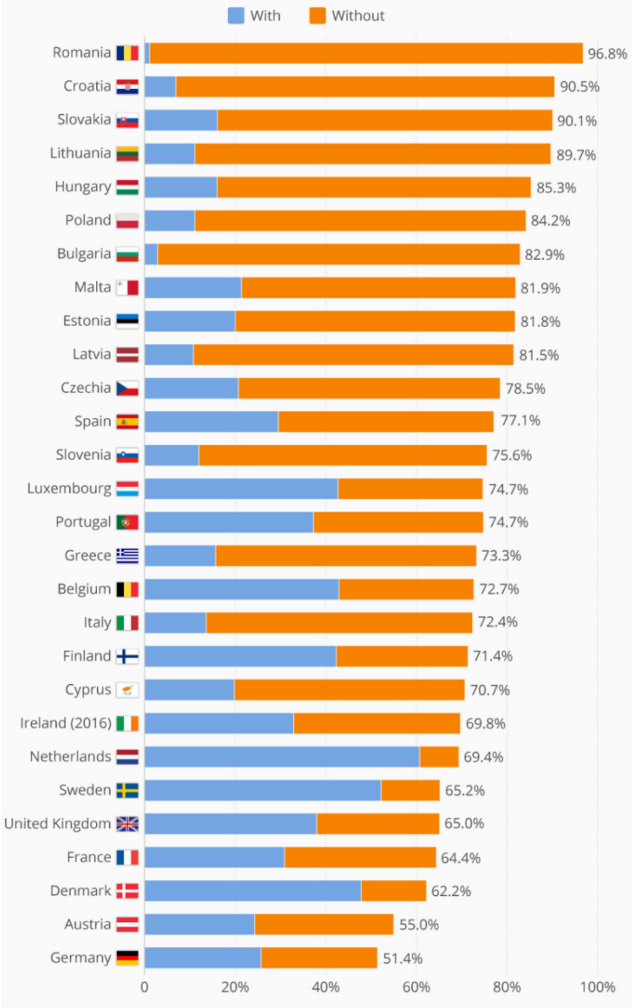
This section of Chapter 3 has outlined a normative policy framework and a practical policy toolbox that support a normative counter-hegemonic shift in housing across four key areas: governance, finance and investment, land policy, and climate neutrality. These tools can help organizers, movement leaders, and policy advocates articulate strategic demands capable of driving substantive policy change. This framework and toolbox serve as a normative benchmark for identifying specific measures that could guide Hungary's housing economy toward decommodification. These measures will be presented following the analysis of the Hungarian housing economy in the next section.

3.2 From decommodification to financialization: the development of the Hungarian housing economy in brief

Housing financialization is not a uniform and even process. Around the world, housing markets have evolved in diverse ways, making financialization inherently "fragmented, path-dependent and variegated" (Aalbers, 2017:4). While a range of factors – such as pension schemes, the labor market, or cultural attitudes towards homeownership – shape the development of housing economies, four key indicators reveal the extent of their commodification and financialization: the penetration of mortgage markets, the scale of social housing, the characteristics of the rental market, and the liquidity of housing wealth (Fuller, 2019:20).

Drawing on these characteristics, Gregory Fuller categorizes the **housing economies of post-socialist countries** as **highly commodified but less financialized** (2019:42). **Graph 3-1** demonstrates two crucial indicators within the European context: their high homeownership rate and relatively low mortgage market penetration. Over the past 25 years, post-socialist countries have followed a broadly similar – though not identical – trajectory marked by the large-scale privatization of public housing, the transformation of tenants into outright owners, a resulting decline in public housing stock, and the gradual development of mortgage markets. These shared features position post-socialist housing economies within a distinct cluster (Fuller, 2019:42). This section traces this trajectory through the case of **Hungary** from a limited comparative perspective. I show how a once largely decommodified housing economy[7] has become **one of the most commodified**, and **least affordable in Europe**, as financialization has been forged by the growing involvement of domestic banks, while housing policy has been increasingly shaped by concerns about demographic decline.

[7] As I explain in the following section, socialist housing economy was never fully decommodified or definancialized. However, as Fuller says, it was "arguably as close as we have come to non-commodified, non-financialized housing markets in the modern world" (2019:19).



Graph 3-1: Home ownership rate by owner-occupiers with and without a mortgage in 2017. Data: Hofinet, Eurostat. Chart: Statista (CC BY-ND 3.0), https://www.statista.com/chart/16764/mortgage-markets-in-europe/.

3.2.1 State socialist housing economy (1952-1990): nationalization, construction, amortization

Communist parties coming to power in post-WWII Eastern Europe typically addressed the acute housing shortage through two subsequent policies: **nationalization and construction**. They differed from post-WWI and post-WWII social democratic parties in Western Europe which skipped the assumption of government ownership and provided affordable housing through large-scale public housing construction projects (e.g., Austria, Germany), and tenant rights protection (e.g., Austria, Germany, Sweden) (Bengtsson & Ruonavaara, 2011:401;

O'Connell, 2019; Conway, 2023; Housing Estates, n.d.). While in many Eastern European countries, expropriation affected every apartment, in Hungary in **1952**[8], communists nationalized only tenement houses and bourgeois apartments (Clapham et al., 1996; Mihályi, 2010; Serban, 2015).

The consolidating regime soon embarked on **large-scale subsidized construction projects** using the "panel" technology (prefabricated reinforced concrete panels) to build standardized, multi-story housing blocks. Between **1959 and 1993**, 800,000 units were built (the majority until 1980), limited to large industrial cities (Hat évtizede, 2020; Talamon & Sugár, 2016:185). While in the beginning, these were primarily state-owned rental units, from the 1970s, purchase was incentivized for certain constituencies (young families, co-operative members, etc.) using a social policy allowance (*szocpol*)[9] and subsidized housing loans.[10]

For families living in small towns and villages, where detached housing dominated, *szocpol* could only be requested from 1983, but subsidized loans were available for construction and purchase from 1960[11] (Lengyel, 1991:2, 6). Residents of slum-like, segregated neighborhoods and enclaves, the majority of whom were Roma, were the least subsidized. Those with a permanent employment status could participate in state desegregation programs provided they take a subsidized loan (at 0 percent interest) and put down the necessary down payment (Kerényi, 1998; Hajnáczky, 2018:16-17). Others were often subject

[8] 4/1952 government decree. https://jogkodex.hu/jsz/1952_4_tvr_1868658
[9] Social policy allowance (*szociálpolitikai támogatás, "szocpol")* is a form of a housing grant incentivizing childbearing. *Szocpol* subsidizes housing purchase, construction, or renovation, depending on the actual administration. It was introduced in 1971, and suspended between 2009 and 2012. The subsidy level depends on the number of children born or anticipated.
[10] Subsidized housing loans for purchase and construction were introduced in 1960 but the amount designated to the purchase of prefabricated housing units increased from 1973 compared to other types of housing (Lengyel, 1991:6).
[11] Subsidized housing loans for the purchase and construction of detached housing were lower in small towns and villages, and significantly smaller than the amount for the purchase of prefabricated housing units (Lengyel, 1991:6).

to forced eviction and relocated to unsuitable conditions where slum-like neighborhoods reemerged (Hajnáczky, 2018:33-36).

Although operating under unequal redistributive conditions that favored urban and better-off working families, state socialism in Hungary provided affordable housing for millions of people. The socialist ideology largely insulated this valuable asset from economic conditions, creating a housing market in Eastern Europe that was arguably the closest in the modern world to being non-commodified and non-financialized (Fuller, 2019:43). However, this insulation was far from complete. First, **privatization of public housing** was **enabled in 1969**[12] (Zolnay, 1993:97), giving influential party officials or others favored by the regime an edge in accumulating wealth. Second, *szocpol* was a constant **revenue stream to the state-subsidized construction industry**, increasing prices and budget deficit, and leaving space for rent-seeking (Lengyel, 1991:4). Third, as economic performance deteriorated in the **1980s**, the state heavily **increased rents and cracked down on squatting**, leading to formerly unseen **collection proceedings**, **evictions**, and the **liquidation of workers' hostels** (Ungi, 1988; Matern, 1990; F. Havas, 1990; Győri & Gábor, 1990). Last but not least, due to inadequate maintenance by the often poorly managed state companies, the massive **public housing stock** was **losing value** (Farkas & Szabó, 1995).

3.2.2 Neoliberal housing economy: privatization without reinvestment, commodification, financialization (1990-2010)

Around the time of the transition, more than 1 million people in Hungary lived in severe housing poverty (Helyzetjelentés, 1989:5-7). The economic restructuring – trade liberalization, privatization, and financial liberalization – that resulted from the transition reinforced these

[12] 32/1969. (IX. 30.) government decree. http://www.jogiportal.hu/index.php?id=9dews0inv91ih2zu0&state=19910901&menu=view Privatization of public housing accelerated after the eighth modification of the 1969 decree in 1988 (Zolnay, 1993:97).

initial housing disadvantages, exacerbating geographic, class, and ethnic inequalities. Neither the international nor the national environment prompted the newly elected MDF-FKgP-KDNP government (1990-1994) to establish a robust public housing system. Many Western countries had drifted away from subsidized rental housing, and tenants' "Right to Buy" became the international policy (Aalbers, 2017:3). Driven by this spirit, Eastern European governments typically saw public housing as a burden as most public housing stock needed renovation, and capital investment in inner-city neighborhoods required purchasable properties. Tenants also sought the safety of ownership and saw the possibility of rent-seeking (Dániel, 1996; Csendes-Erdei, 2021).[13]

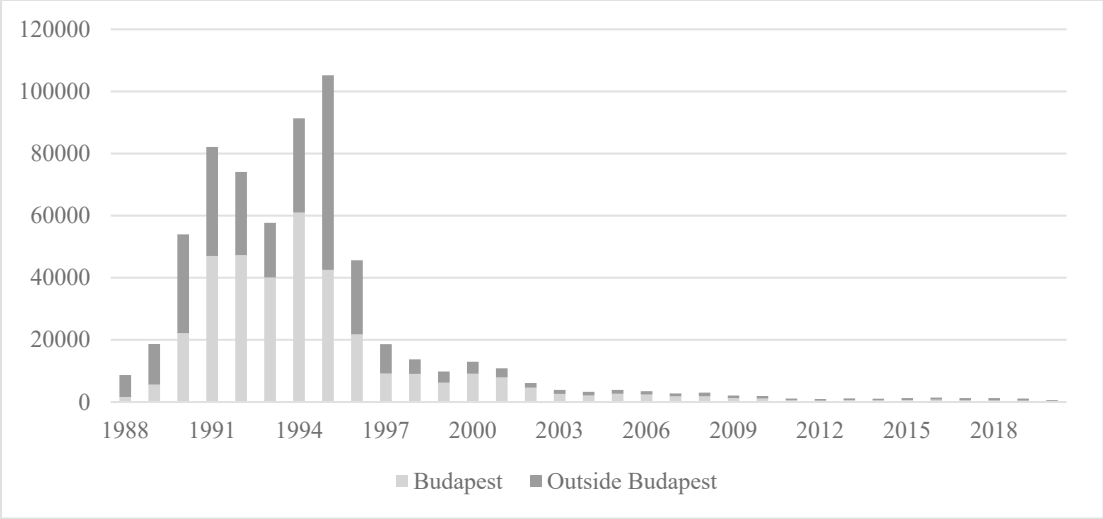
Therefore, the **first five years** of neoliberal state building **(1990-1995)**[14] witnessed a rapid **shift** from a heavily state-subsidized **to a highly commodified and increasingly financialized housing economy**. This transformation started with the restructuring of debtor conditions in line with capitalist market principles. As part of the 1991 **liberalization of the banking sector**, the previously state-subsidized housing loans, offered at highly favorable interest rates of 0 to 3 percent, were sharply increased to rates as high as 15 or 32 percent (Kerényi, 1998; Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:86-87).[15]

Among the debtors were low-income small-town and rural households who had hardly any access to public housing, did not benefit from subsidized housing constructions, and had been left out of *szocpol* for more than a decade (Lengyel, 1991). Moreover, primarily Roma households in ethnically segregated slums were required to take loans (at 0 percent interest) to be eligible for state desegregation programs (Kerényi, 1998; Hajnáczky, 2018:16-17). Despite public outcry, both the state and the Constitutional Court approved[16] the retrospective change,

[13] For more reasons, see e.g., Dániel (1996), and Csendes-Erdei (2021).
[14] I draw on Czirfusz & Jelinek (2022), and Hegedüs (2009) in this periodization.
[15] Debtors had two options: they either paid a 32 percent interest rate and half of their debt got cancelled, or they paid 15 percent on the whole amount (Kerényi, 1998; https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/1991-32-30-75).
[16] 32/1991. (VI.6.) Constitutional Court Resolution, https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/1991-32-30-75.

harming hundreds of thousands of low-income households, including Roma.[17] It shows the longevity of the problem that, by 1998, 280,000 and by 2009, 56,200 of these debtors were insolvent (Kiss, 1998; Több tízezer, 2008). The state had to allocate resources to mitigate insolvency until as late as 2016 (Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:87).

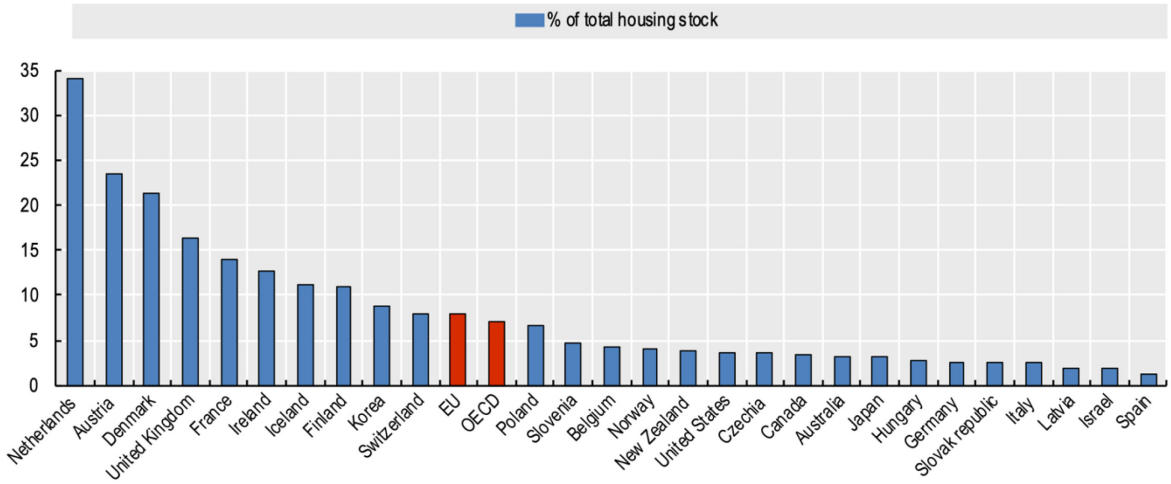
The next crucial set of measures dismantled public housing, seeking to enhance urban development according to pure market logic. **Privatization of public housing** had already been in place since 1969 and **was accelerated in 1988**[18] (Zolnay, 1993:97). Instead of reversing this process, in **1991**, the Christian conservative MDF-FKgP-KDNP government **transferred** the **ownership** of public housing units – essentially, the right of privatization – from the state to the newly elected municipalities **without a national strategic framework**.[19] In Budapest, district city councils received complete jurisdiction over privatization and urban renewal, resulting in the clash of district and overall city interests.[20] **Graph 3-2** shows the impact of these decisions on the rate of privatization between 1988 and 2020.



Graph 3-2: Public housing units sold between 1988 and 2020. Data: Dániel, 1996; KSH, 2020a.

[17] The state approved the change when it passed the 1991 budget. The Constitutional Court verified the decision in 1991 with the possibility to revise individual cases (Resolution of 32/1991 (VI. 6.), https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/1991-32-30-75).
[18] See Footnote 11.
[19] Act of 33/1991 (VIII. 2.), https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC023456/.
[20] Act of 65/1991 (VII. 10), https://mkogy.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99100024.TV.

There was no intention to effectively reform public housing management and create safe and transparent conditions for tenants. Instead, the government entirely dropped the reins in **1993** by introducing **the right to buy**.[21] This decision eliminated the discretion of municipal governments over privatization, and allowed tenants to purchase their units at an average of 15-30 percent of the market price (Dániel, 1996:209; Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:85).[a] Consequently, within a decade, the Hungarian public housing stock, formerly accessible to mixed-income tenants, shrank from more than 20 to 2 percent (from 50 to 4 percent in Budapest)[22], comprising largely poor-quality apartments inhabited by mostly low-income constituencies (Dániel, 1996; Hegedüs, 2009; Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:81; onkormanyzatilakasok.periferiakozpont.hu).



Graph 3-3: Number of social rental dwellings as a share of the total number of dwellings, 2022 or latest years available. Data: OECD (2024), OECD Affordable Housing Database – indicator PH4.2. Social rental housing stock, http://oe.cd/ahd. Chart: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/data/datasets/affordable-housing-database/ph4-2-social-rental-housing-stock.pdf.

[21] Act of 78/1993 (VII. 30.) https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99300078.tv
[22] From 721,000 to 102,000 units nationally, and from 400,000 to less than 40,000 units in Budapest (1990-2022/2023) (Dániel, 1996; Periféria Kutatóközpont & K-Monitor, 2024; Futó, 2025).

Graph 3-3 illustrates the size of the Hungarian public housing stock in comparison to other European countries. As we can see, it is not notably low compared to other Eastern European countries, except for Poland, where the public housing stock accounted for 8 percent in 2011 (Augustyniak et al., 2019:987). Yet **there would have been alternatives** for Hungary: a strategic framework with long-term social housing priorities, a multi-level institutional structure between the government and the municipalities, adequate tenant protection including the long-term rental market, the purposeful circuits of investment and finance, effective land policy to prevent speculation, and enabling environment for non-profit affordable housing provision.

Let alone long-term policy-making, Hungarian legislators **did not** even create a robust mechanism to **secure the reinvestment of incoming public housing privatization revenue** (an estimated 414 billion HUF between 1990 and 1994)[23] into affordable housing. Although the idea of allocating at least part of the income in a **housing fund** (*lakásalap*) was on the agenda as early as in 1991 and enjoyed some support among both members of the governing and opposition parties, the proposal gradually eroded in the parliamentary debates by 1993 (minutes regarding bills no. 2148 and no. 5401, library.hungaricana.hu). Eventually, municipal governments were only obliged to collect their privatization income on a separate bank account with broadly defined spending restrictions (such as "privatization-related expenses"), leaving ample room for waste and rent-seeking.[24]

The **second period** of the neoliberal housing economy **(1996-2003)** saw institutional changes **enabling financialization**. First, the left-liberal MSZP-SZDSZ government (1994-1998) created the conditions for **state-subsidized building societies** (*lakástakarékpénztár*) in

[23] See the difficulties of calculations and the different estimates in Farkas & Szabó (1995:1004-1005, 1012-1014).
[24] Article 62 in the Housing Act LXXVIII of 1993 (July 30). In Budapest, district city halls were obliged to collect fifty percent of their privatization income on the bank account of the Budapest City Hall, also with broadly defined spending restrictions (Article 63 in the former version of the Housing Act LXXVIII of 1993 (July 30)). The partially collected income was redistributed through an application system with moderate success (Győri, n.d.)

1996,[25] and **mortgage-based housing loans** in 1997[26] amidst a decreasing trend in borrowing (Hegedüs & Várhegyi, 1999; Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:82, 88). The governing parties increased ***szocpol*** to boost housing construction, and encouraged *szocpol* recipients to borrow by providing 4, 3, and 1 percent **interest subsidies** in the first, second, and third five-year periods of the housing loans, respectively (A lakáscélú, 1995:52; Hegedüs, 2006:69).

The following conservative Fidesz-MDF-FKgP government (1998-2002), led by Viktor Orbán, continued this path: it stimulated the slack construction industry and mortgage market through heavy subsidies. Developers received generous **tax credits** from 1999, while households received **subsidized housing loans** from 2000, and **tax credits** from 2001 on top of *szocpol*. Macroeconomic motivations were shaped by a **conservative family policy and worldview** as well as **political calculations**: **(1)** couples younger than 35, and large families (3+ children) could borrow at an eight percent interest rate in the first ten years (from 2001, six percent) (*kiegészítő kamattámogatás*), while **(2)** the state covered three percent from any debtor's interest rate in the first five years (from 2001, 4.5 percent, resulting in a 13-14 percent interest rate) (*általános kamattámogatás*), and **(3)** borrowers could deduct 40 percent of the instalments (a maximum of 240,000 HUF) of their housing loans from their income tax (from 2001) (Lakner, 2003:80; Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:89-90).

On the one hand, this form of public resource allocation **reversed the negative borrowing trend**, fueled housing construction, and created the conditions of the first post-transition **housing boom** (Hegedüs, 2009; Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:82). However, while the state invested massively in housing, it reinforced a policy trajectory of **homeownership-based financialization** by enhancing home ownership acquisition through subsidized loans, non-

[25] Act of 215/1996 (XII. 23.), https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99600215.kor. In 2004, the MSZP-SZDSZ governments (2002-2010) substantially increased state subsidies after savings in building societies (creating opportunities of growth for the lower-middle and the middle class) (Hegedüs, 2018a).
[26] Act of XXX/1997 (V. 8.), https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99700030.tv.

repayable grants (such as *szocpol*[27]), and tax refunds, and further encouraged the use of childbearing incentives in housing policy. Overall, with smaller or larger structural corrections (or detours), this direction has prevailed to the present. However, **Fidesz** also aspired for the triumph of **conservative family and population policies**: it nudged households to create **large families** (with 3+ children) by policy tools beyond *szocpol*, increasingly prioritized families with **fair financial standing**, and generated disproportionate housing opportunities for **better-off households**.

The Orbán-led government introduced the first two **structural corrections** (which subsequent governments continued). First, a **public housing program** (*Állami Támogatású Bérlakás Program*) was launched involving municipal governments and churches, and targeting low-income and lower-middle class constituencies (2000-2005); about 11-12,000 units[28] were built or purchased (and, at a smaller rate, renovated) (Hegedüs & Teller, 2006:64; Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:96). Although the program was popular, its funding was small compared to the total housing budget,[29] and has remained a one-time detour in post-transition housing policy.[30] Another structural correction was the **energy-efficient renovation of prefabricated housing blocks** (*Panel Program*) (2000-2014) targeting the same constituencies. Between 2001 and 2008, 15.5 percent of the stock was renovated (Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:98). For a short period of less than a year, the Orbán-led government also put on the agenda the possible reform of *szocpol*, which would have replaced the universal benefit

[27] See Footnote 8 for the definition.
[28] Public housing stock increased by units at subsidized or cost-based rent, units in nursing homes (*idősek otthona*) or senior living facilities (*nyugdíjasház*), or units specifically targeting young couples (married or in civic union) with a 5-year "stepping-stone" rental opportunity (*fecskeház*) (Hegedüs & Teller, 2006:64).
[29] A total of 63 billion HUF was spent on public housing construction, while the total housing spending was 170 billion in 2002, and 243 billion in 2003 (Farkas et al., 2005; Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:96).
[30] The MSZP-SZDSZ government (2002-2010) replaced it with a public housing loan scheme ("*Sikeres Magyarországért" Bérlakás Program*) (2006-2012) for municipal governments, but the loan allocation did not reach a sufficient scale.

with a means-tested form of support provided by the municipal governments and subsidized mostly by the state (L. GY., 1999:14).

The **third period** of the neoliberal housing economy **(2004-2010)** witnessed the **expansion of financialization and commodification** and the retraction of the state. Due to a growing budget deficit and consequently high interest rates, the left-liberal MSZP-SZDSZ governments (2002-2010) restricted lavish subsidized housing loans in 2003, ceased public housing construction and developers' tax credits in 2005, and relied on the market to provide "affordable" housing through cheap **foreign currency loans**. The popularity of these products grew rapidly, with their share of housing loans increasing from 1 percent to 63 percent between 2000 and 2008 (Csizmady et al., 2019:11-12). However, due to fierce competition and lax state regulation, banks increasingly allocated large loans to vulnerable households, with borrowers disproportionately bearing the exchange rate risk. Moreover, a generous **home ownership subsidizing scheme** called Nesting (*Fészekrakó*) from 2005 improved the creditworthiness of lower-middle-class young couples by the state acting as a guarantor, providing access to an increased *szocpol* (44,000 loan contracts were issued).[31]

A set of **corrections** introduced by the MSZP-SZDSZ governments targeted low-income households. A state-subsidized national **debt management program** (*adósságkezelési program*) (2003-2014) benefited tens of thousands of families with significant arrears in utility bills, common costs, rent, or housing loans, and the otherwise low **housing allowance** (*lakásfenntartási támogatás*) (2004-2014) became available in all municipalities. Although MSZP-SZDSZ launched a long-awaited **desegregation program**, it benefited only a few

[31] 44,000 loan contracts were issued as part of the *Fészekrakó* scheme between 2005 and 2008 (Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:89). However, a large-scale fraud leading to the deterioration of housing conditions in a prefabricated housing block in Miskolc (Avas) stained the reputation of the program (Holubár, 2005; Kovács, 2011; Havasi, 2018).

hundred Roma families due to severe budget cuts (2005-2010) (Farkas, 2017).[32] Moreover, commitment to **social urban renewal** (*szociális városfejlesztés*), i.e., slower-moving development without displacing residents (Jelinek, 2019), was stained by **urban development projects driven by pure market logic, large-scale property speculations, real estate embezzlement, and evictions** connected to politicians from the governing party (Zolnay, 2006; K-Monitor, n.d.; Feljelentés, 2006).

Moreover, after the global financial crisis began in 2008, the MSZP-led government introduced hardly any corrections. The impact of the crisis was underestimated by the Hungarian National Bank and leading analysts until 2010, either reiterating foreign currency debtors' responsibility or depicting the issue as a middle-class problem (Csizmady et al., 2019:13-19; Ki volt a felelős, 2019). All in all, the **net outcome** of the third period was that the **exposure** of the Hungarian housing economy **to global financial markets increased dramatically**, **financialization** became **homeownership-based**, and affordable housing, until it backfired in 2008, was increasingly provided through the market.

3.2.3 Illiberal housing economy: incentivizing childbearing of better-off households through an increasingly domestically owned bank sector (2010-present)

In 2010, the Fidesz-KDNP government (2010-present) won with an absolute majority amid a culminating housing crisis: an estimated 340,000 people (40 percent of the 850,000 households with forint and foreign currency mortgage) suffered severe financial loss due to the global financial crisis (Csizmady et al., 2019:21), and 280-300,000 people lived in segregated neighborhoods or enclaves across 820 municipalities (and 10 districts in Budapest) (Farkas,

[32] The program's scale shrank from 10.5 billion HUF and 440-667 neighborhoods to 3.2 billion HUF and 54 neighborhoods, in some cases allowing rehabilitation without desegregation (Farkas, 2017:90, 102).

2017:56). With far-reaching ambitions to change power relations in society, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán used the housing crisis as a political opportunity to increase the share of domestic and state ownership in the bank sector, consolidate the position of middle-class families, and neutralize housing constituencies in need (Csizmady et al., 2019:19).

The **first period** of the illiberal housing economy **(2010-2015)**[33] was dedicated to rearranging the composition of the **bank sector** and restructuring **debtor conditions**. Wrapped up in an anti-bank freedom-fighting rhetoric, the Fidesz-led government levied taxes on financial institutions (bank tax in 2010, financial transaction tax in 2013) and restricted foreign currency loans (Bohle, 2014:935). This prompted several foreign banks to exit the Hungarian market, allowing the Hungarian state to enhance its acquisition and **increase domestic and state ownership to 60 percent** by 2022 (Wiedemann, 2022). Moreover, the government also prioritized its interests at the expense of the debtors when it ordered the forint conversion[34] of the loans in 2014 at the actual exchange rate (instead of the original exchange rate valid at the time of signing the loan contract). The decision resulted in an extra profit of 136 billion HUF for the Hungarian National Bank (136 milliárdot, 2015) – and an average compensation of 710,000 HUF for mortgage debtors due to unfair components of the contract (MNB: Gigantikus, 2015).

This period witnessed one major correction. The worst-off families were bailed out by the **National Asset Management Ltd.** (*Nemzeti Eszközkezelő Zrt.,* NET), set up by the government in 2012. It effectively created a **public housing portfolio** by purchasing properties from former owners, who could then remain as tenants in their former homes at low rents. The company bought about 40,000 units by 2019 (the equivalent of 35 percent of the municipality-owned public housing units). However, the purchasing capacity was not expanded despite

[33] I draw on Czirfusz & Jelinek (2022), and Pósfai & Sokol (2024) in this periodization.
[34] See Chapter 4.4 for details on this and the different policies the government implemented to rescue debtors.

demand, and in 2019, the government sold the housing stock to the former owners, and handed over the remaining few thousand units to a non-profit housing agency (Lovas, 2017; Szurovecz, 2021). The state's withdrawal killed the potential to create a large-scale affordable housing scheme.

The **second period** of the illiberal housing economy **(2015-present)** saw the recycling of selected policies of the first Orbán government (1998-2002) under the reorganized market conditions. Policies that combined subsidies for **home ownership acquisition** with nudging to create **large families** and providing disproportionate opportunities for **better-off households** were adopted in a turbo mode. A new version of ***szocpol*** called CSOK and **various housing loan products** targeting the middle class and beyond were introduced:

- **Home Creation Subsidy for Families** (*Családok Otthonteremtési Kedvezménye*, CSOK) (2015-2023[35]): a re-marketed version of the non-repayable allowance *szocpol* available to couples and single parents for the purchase or construction of new housing (higher amount), or the purchase, extension or renovation of used housing (lower amount) (Elek & Szikra, 2018; Szocpol, 2018) (30,000 CSOK applications per year in the 2010s, Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:88); **Table 3-2** shows the distribution of the loan for new housing based on the number of children since 1985;
- **CSOK-loan** (*CSOK-hitel*) (2015-2023[36]): a subsidized mortgage loan at a fixed 3 percent interest rate for a 25-year term available to CSOK recipients (2015-2019: a maximum of 10 million for 3+ current or anticipated children; 2019-2023: a maximum

[35] Due to the economic crisis triggered by Covid-19, from 2024, grants are restricted to villages and towns with a population of less than 5,000 people.
[36] As a compensation for the restrictions on CSOK due to the economic crisis, the amount of loan significantly increased (15 million for 1 child, 30 million for 2 children, 50 million for 3+ children), while the fixed interest rate remained 3 percent (CSOK Plusz, 2025).

of 10 million for two children, and 15 million for 3+ current or anticipated children) (Családok, 2016:3; Bővített, 2019);

Social policy allowance (in thousand HUF)							
	1985	**1990**	**1995**	**2002**	**2004**	**2005**	**2016**
1 child	40	50	200	500	800	900	600
2 children	80	200	1,200	1,600	2,000	2,400	2,600
3 children	160	600	2,200	2,700	3,200	3,800	10,000
4 children	n.d.	600	2,400	3,200	4,000	4,600	10,000
5 children	n.d.	600	2,600	3,400	4,200	4,800	10,000
6+ children	n.d.	600	+200 per child	+200 per child	+200 per child	+200 per child	10,000

Table 3-2: The total amount of social policy allowance (*szocpol*) for the purchase or construction of new housing between 1985 and 2016 (in thousand HUF). Source: Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:88; J.G., 1994; A lakáscélú, 1995:49; Emelkedett, 2005:5.

- **VAT refund** (*áfa-visszatérítési támogatás*) (2021-2026): all CSOK recipients can reclaim 5 percent VAT when newly built housing is purchased; households involved in housing construction can reclaim the VAT at a maximum of 5 million HUF (Mit hoz, 2021; Argyelán, 2022; Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:90);
- **Baby Expecting Loan** (*Babaváró hitel*) (2019-2024): a maximum of 10 million HUF personal loan for a 20-year term with the state being the guarantor (often used for housing); if at least one child is born within 5 years of the request of the loan, the loan becomes interest-free; if 3+ children are born, the loan becomes a non-repayable subsidy (2019-2020: 110,000 contracts) (Palkó, 2024; Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:89);
- **Home Renovation Subsidy and Loan** (*Otthonfelújítási támogatás és hitel*) (2021-2022, 2025-): a maximum of 3 million HUF grant for families with at least one current or anticipated child, which retrospectively covers half of the renovation costs

(renovation capacity enhanced by a loan upon request); from 2025 only in villages and towns with a population of less than 5,000 people (Fülöp, 2021; Palkó, 2025);

- **Green Home Loan** (*Zöld otthon program*) (2021-2022): a maximum of 70 million HUF mortgage loan at a fixed 2.5 percent interest rate for a 25-year term for the purchase or construction of housing with an outstanding (BB or higher) energy rating (Hargitai-Szabó, 2025).

Indeed, Hungary continued the trajectory of homeownership-based financialization after 2010. However, the combination of increased market share of domestic and state-owned banks and the growing variety of subsidized housing loan products turned **housing financialization into a domestically-led process** (Pósfai & Sokol, 2024:101). This shift was also characterized by **conservative population policies**, as many grants and financial products included incentives not only for childbearing but also to establish large families (CSOK, CSOK-loan, Baby Expecting Loan). At the same time, the conditions often restricted the subsidy to better-off households.[37] As Zsuzsanna Pósfai and Martin Sokol conclude, "[f]inancial support increasingly takes the form of loans, and is thus accessible only to **creditworthy households**, in a structure where **the state is, in essence subsidizing the banks** through covering interest rate payments" (2024:99, emphasis mine). By generating record volumes of new housing-purpose lending (Pósfai & Sokol, 2024:96), this illiberal housing economy is experiencing **the most dramatic housing price increase in the EU** (+172.5 percent between 2015 and 2023 against an EU average of +48.1 percent) (Eurostat, 2023b).

[37] Besides the lack of savings necessary to use the subsidies, the main restrictive condition for CSOK and CSOK-loan applicants is the requirement of long-term "normal" social security status preceding the request, i.e., at least 180 days for families with 1-2 current or anticipated children, two years for families with 3+ current or anticipated children excluding public works employees but including students in college or university (Elek & Szikra, 2018).

In sum, Hungary is undoubtedly **light-years away from an equitable and inclusive housing economy**. As we have seen, the consequences of the privatization of the public housing stock, and the homeownership-based financialization of housing were occasionally counterbalanced by progressive policies, but they remained small-scale and temporary, and often fell prey to political power games. These policy "motions" took place during **two counter-hegemonic shifts**: one from the state socialist to the neoliberal housing economy, and one from the neoliberal to the illiberal one. In conclusion, **Table 3-3** below summarizes the typical policies of these three hegemonic periods.

Period	**Housing economy**	**Typical policies of the era**
1952-1990	**State socialist.** Largely non-commodified, non-financialized system	Large-scale nationalization of apartments
		Large-scale construction of standardized housing blocks
		Heavily subsidized housing loans and construction industry
		Small-scale privatization
1990-2010	**Neoliberal.** Homeownership-based financialization	Liberalization of the banking sector
		Privatization of public housing
		Building societies
		Mortgage-based housing loans
		Home ownership subsidizing scheme (szocpol + subsidized loans)
		Small-scale public housing program
		Energy-efficient renovation of standardized housing blocks
		Debt management program
		Extension of housing allowance
		Small-scale desegregation program

		Small-scale social urban renewal
		Foreign currency loans
2010-	**Illiberal.** Domestically-driven homeownership-based financialization	Increase of domestic and state ownership in financial institutions
		Public housing portfolio by purchasing homes of indebted homeowners
		Forint conversion of foreign currency loans at current rate
		Home ownership subsidizing scheme (szocpol + subsidized loans)

Table 3-3: Main development phases of the Hungarian housing economy

Undoubtedly, there is **a great deal of unexploited measures to create affordable housing in Hungary, and make a U-turn** from the model of homeownership-based financialization. The final section circles back to the normative framework and policy toolbox introduced in the beginning, and highlights crucial measures that advance this change.

3.3 A brief agenda for housing transformation in Hungary

Expert organizations – particularly, the Metropolitan Research Institute (*Városkutatás Kft.*), the Habitat for Humanity Hungary, and the Periféria Policy and Research Center (*Periféria Közpolitikai és Kutatóközpont*) – have produced a comprehensive set of policy recommendations over the past three decades, marking the path towards substantive housing policy change in Hungary. The focus of this dissertation is to contribute to this policy work through an in-depth analysis of movement struggles – rather than generating new policy knowledge. Accordingly, this concluding section draws on extant policy recommendations, particularly those of a recently established alliance, the Housing Coalition (*Lakhatási*

Koalíció)[38] (Lakhatási Minimum, 2022a, 2022b, 2024). The brief agenda, structured around the normative framework outlined at the beginning of this chapter, highlights the value of this coalition's insights, and charts a clear path toward a more equitable and decommodified housing system.

3.3.1 Capable governance

It is no exaggeration to say that housing governance in Hungary is marked by anarchic conditions. Since the dissolution of the Ministry of Construction and Urban Development in 1989, housing responsibilities remained fragmented across different ministries. **No capable and well-resourced national institution** has emerged to coordinate multi-level housing policy development and implementation. While successive governments have made recurring attempts to provide leadership, these efforts never lasted beyond a single governing cycle, let alone demonstrated continuity across administrations (Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:101-103). As a result, **no government has succeeded in drafting a comprehensive housing strategy** that moves beyond a conceptual level, and includes concrete elaborate measures backed by adequate financial resources. The post-transition privatization of public housing proceeded without such a strategic foundation. Even though governments have produced programming documents for EU funds and various policy strategies, these have failed to lay the groundwork for long-term housing policy development (Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:104-105).

[38] The Housing Coalition (*Lakhatási Koalíció*) is an alliance advocating a more equitable housing policy in Hungary. It has been publicly active since 2021. Currently, the coalition has nine members: From Streets to Homes! Association (*Utcáról Lakásba! Egyesület*), Habitat for Humanity Hungary (*Habitat for Humanity Magyarország*), Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (*Társaság a Szabadságjogokért*), Living Independently – Living in Community (*Önállóan Lakni – Közösségben Élni*), Metropolitan Research Institute (*Városkutatás Kft.*), Periféria Policy and Research Center (*Periféria Közpolitikai és Kutatóközpont*), Step So That They Can Step! Association (*Lépjünk, hogy léphessenek! Egyesület*), Street Lawyers Association (*Utcajogász Egyesület*), and The City Is For All (*A Város Mindenkié*).

Substantive policy demands addressing governance:

(1) The state should set up a capable and well-resourced national institution (a ministry or a national housing agency) with the purpose to deliver affordable housing for all;

(2) This national institution should be responsible to coordinate with or nurture the establishment of capable and well-resourced local housing agencies;

(3) This work should be driven by a long-term national housing strategy informed by leading experts and based on evidence and social consensus.

3.3.2 Purposeful circuits of finance and investment

Since the privatization of public housing, Hungarian housing policy has promoted financialized homeownership in a way that exacerbated the effect of the global **housing affordability crisis**. First, over the last three decades, **two-thirds of total housing expenditure** was directed toward **socially untargeted subsidies for homeownership** (such as *szocpol* and subsidized loans) (Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:114). While these measures stimulated the construction industry, they have also fueled financialization with taxpayers' money, driving up house prices without providing effective support for low-income families. Second, before the 2008 global financial crisis, this homeownership-based orientation unfolded through public policies that facilitated easy access to **foreign currency loans** under lax regulations. Through these measures, the state relied on financial markets to provide "affordable" housing, without mitigating the exchange rate risk (Hegedüs, 2021:143). After the financial crisis, the state has maintained the homeownership-based subsidy model without means testing instead of taking meaningful steps to channel investment into social and affordable housing. By generating record volumes of new housing-purpose lending (Pósfai & Sokol, 2024:96), Hungary is currently experiencing **the most dramatic increase in housing price in the EU**.

Substantive policy demands addressing finance and investment:

(1) The state should provide an enabling legal environment for non-profit provision of social and affordable housing by urban and rural local state and non-state actors through supportive regulations and tax policies;

(2) The state should provide an enabling financial environment for non-profit provision of social and affordable housing by urban and rural local state and non-state actors through revolving funds, special-purpose financial intermediaries, or contributions to building, renovating, or creating social housing through real estate purchases or the utilization of vacant private units;

(3) The state should support aspiring homeowners through schemes that enable homeownership by sharing housing equity and costs instead of socially untargeted housing subsidies and risky mortgage loans.

3.3.3 Effective land use

Hungary's socially untargeted homeownership subsidies model has fueled the appreciation of inner-city and suburban land, undermining sustainability. In **cities**, particularly Budapest, land has become a **highly valued asset** because rapid price increases in the housing market amplify its investment appeal. Thus, housing is increasingly treated as an investment vehicle, whether for speculation or as a form of retirement savings, by both Hungarian and foreign buyers (Jelinek, 2025). The pattern of foreign purchases in Budapest mirrors the **spread of short-term rentals** such as Airbnb (Szabó et al., 2025:284), driving up long-term rental prices. Moreover, much of the new construction spurred by housing subsidies has occurred in **metropolitan peripheries** and suburbs where land is cheaper and development is faster (A CSOK hátulütője, 2022). Municipalities have struggled to keep pace with the **resulting population growth**,

leaving natural values, water and sewage systems, road networks, as well as public education and health services overstretched.

Substantive policy demands addressing land:

(1) Municipal governments should take or maintain control over land use through land policies such as public land banking, public land leasing, inclusionary zoning, taxation of vacant land or housing, etc. to exert leverage on real estate development, increase the number of affordable housing, and reduce housing market instability;

(2) The state should create safe and attractive conditions in the long-term rental market for both tenants and landlords, incentivize this form of rental by tax credits, and incentivize the utilization of rental units as social housing through supporting the creation of social housing agencies;

(3) The state should create conditions that favor long-term rental at the expense of short-term rental and tighten regulations accordingly.

3.3.4 Climate-neutral housing

The housing stock in Hungary is in a dire state: millions of people live in **outdated, energy-inefficient dwellings** that drive up household expenses (Feldmár, 2020:47-48). In 2020, 8.5 percent of households spent more than the quarter of their income on utility costs (Feldmár, 2020:43). Among the poorest households, approximately 40 percent lack access to central heating and rely instead on costly wood, coal, or other environmentally harmful fuels, with limited access to state subsidies (Lakhatási Minimum, 2022). Residents of family houses and prefabricated housing blocks built before 1980 (altogether more than one million dwellings) are also among the hardest hit by rising housing expenses (Feldmár, 2020:48). Only 15.5 percent of the total 515,000 prefabricated housing blocks have been renovated over the past

three decades (Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:98). The universal utility reduction policy (*rezsicsökkentés*) reduced the number of low-income households in arrears by 60 percent, but resulted in more significant savings among higher-income households (Bajomi, 2022:16).

Substantive policy demands addressing climate neutrality:

(1) The state should implement a comprehensive, predictable, socially targeted housing renovation program addressing the energy efficiency of all dwelling types through financial incentives such as preferential public loans, revolving funds, or tax deductions;

(2) The state should replace the current utility reduction policy, which fails to discourage energy overconsumption, with a sustainable energy subsidy program that equally tackles energy poverty among households with and without access to central heating;

(3) The state should implement a housing policy at all levels that are environmentally sustainable and comply with binding and non-binding climate commitments.

This brief agenda charting a shift from homeownership-based financialization to a more equitable and inclusive housing economy underscores the **central role of the state**. Indeed, the first and most crucial step is to **ensure that the state finally undertakes the work required to implement a long-term, robust housing reform** – precisely the goals that housing movements strive to advance. **Chapter 4 will examine these movements' struggles in light of their strategies** and Chapter 5 will assess their counter-hegemonic impact.

Endnotes

[a] Between July 30, 1993 (the announcement of the Housing Act) and November 30, 1995, tenants had the right to purchase their units, and municipal governments could not limit this right except in some special cases (e.g., listed buildings). If tenants did not want to buy their units, they could remain tenants. Between December 1, 1995, and

November 30, 2000, tenants had a pre-emption right to purchase their units if the municipal governments wished to sell them (exceptions remained). In any case, the units could only be sold to a third party with the written consent of the tenants living in the unit. From December 1, 2000, when the pre-emption right expired, municipal governments could sell public housing units without the written consent of tenants. Municipal governments needed the tenants' consent only when tenants were pensioners.

CHAPTER 4: THE STORIES OF HOUSING STRUGGLES BETWEEN 1987 AND 2024

This chapter presents the housing struggles of five constituencies – large families, public housing tenants, Roma people, homeless people, and indebted homeowners – from the perspective of their social movement organizations (SMOs). These struggles provide an insight into the potential of movement strategies theorized in Chapter 2. The cases demonstrate the extent to which the SMOs could navigate the political landscape and advance the issue of housing through their strategies. The subsequent stories, which follow one another chronologically, unfold a comprehensive picture of the Hungarian housing struggles through three phases of housing economies – state socialist, neoliberal, and illiberal presented in Chapter 3. The analytical comparison of how these strategies shape the SMOs' ability to achieve counter-hegemonic outcomes takes place in Chapter 5.

4.1 Large families: an integrative-representative strategy

The National Association of Large Families (*Nagycsaládosok Országos Egyesülete*, NOE) has been one of the most resilient social movement organizations (SMOs) in Hungary. Since its foundation in 1987, it has advocated pro-marriage, family life with three or more children, anti-abortion, anti-divorce, and demographic growth on behalf of a membership that has never dropped below 10,000 families. NOE's position has been that large families – no matter their social or financial status – deserve the state's support because they bear the brunt of social reproduction. Thus, NOE has simultaneously represented a conservative worldview and an orientation to an excessively, non-distinctively redistributive state. NOE has advanced housing policy in this conservative welfare framework: access to housing has been understood as a

fundamental need for the welfare of families and the demographic survival of the Hungarian nation.

The case study argues that NOE's integrative-representative strategy, i.e., a close alignment with a party and building a mass base, led to structural and substantive counter-hegemonic movement outcomes over three decades. I show how this strategy enabled NOE to become central in the conservative political bloc, make its struggles indispensable to an ambitious political party, Fidesz, contribute to the party's rise as the leader of a new emerging historical bloc, and finally, achieve the mainstreaming of conservative family values during the phase of Fidesz's illiberal state-building. Indeed, large families have been favored by housing policy measures due to their higher needs since state socialism, with the better-off stratum benefiting more from state subsidies (Dániel, 1997:851-852, 863, 866). At the same time, the Viktor Orbán-led historical bloc allocated unprecedently large amounts of money to encourage childbearing through housing subsidies and made family values and population policy the core of the new illiberal regime (Kapitány, 2019; Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:88-90; Inglot et al., 2022:262-271; also see Chapter 3).

4.1.1 The position of NOE, and housing during the state socialist housing economy (1987-1990)[1]

In the late 1980s, in the years, leading up to the transition, reform communists and system-critical yet tolerated conservative intellectuals found common ground in supporting population policy and firm social policy (Bíró, 2008; Szécsi, 2021:76-77). NOE was brought to life in the summer of 1987 to be the popular vehicle of these efforts (Kardosné, 2017:15-16). Policy negotiations and organization building in this era bore the supervision of a state-run mass

[1] 1987 refers to the foundation of NOE.

organization, the Patriotic People's Front (*Hazafias Népfront*). Still, where there were common interests, the Front's tutelage came with infrastructure and lobbying power (G. Nagy, 1987:4). As a result, in the fall of 1987, on the fringes of power struggles within the state socialist party, the budding NOE was able to achieve that family tax credits for large families were incorporated into the new personal income tax legislation (Inglot et al., 2022:125).

NOE was officially established on October 24, 1987, at the Patriotic People's Front headquarters (Megalakult, 1988; Szécsi, 2021:77). 135 people signed the founding document, including members of the emerging conservative and left-liberal political opposition[a] (Kardosné, 2017:42-43). NOE's strategy from the beginning was to building a country-wide membership organization. More than 100 members of the core founders set out to recruit large families and organize them into local chapters (G. Nagy, 1988:5; Szécsi, 2021:78). Organizers drew on the infrastructure of the church (congregations, the Bokor base community), workplaces, and neighborhoods to find new members (Lindmayer & Némethy, 1988:2; Trencsényi, 1991:3; Szécsi, 2021:76-8), and built chapters across the country (G. Nagy, 1988:5).

Between 1987 and 1989, NOE's membership grew from 500 to 5,000 families (see Appendix 1 for the composition of membership). Housing issues were not high on NOE's agenda during this period (taxation issues dominated). Yet, leaders claimed broader access to public housing and social policy allowance (*szocpol*)[2] (G. Nagy, 1987:4), and set up a housing workgroup (Kardosné, 2017:25). Besides nurturing its mass base, NOE simultaneously created strongholds in the state and political parties. Thanks to the support of reform communists, the organization had a working relationship with the socialist state. At the same time, NOE

[2] Social policy allowance (*szociálpolitikai támogatás, "szocpol")* is a form of a housing grant incentivizing childbearing. *Szocpol* subsidizes housing purchase, construction, or renovation, depending on the actual administration. It was introduced in 1971, and suspended between 2009 and 2012. The subsidy level depends on the number of children born or anticipated. See Chapter 3 for details.

members played a formative role in emerging opposition parties, particularly the conservative MDF and KDNP.[b] Consequently, NOE could maximize the political opportunities during the counter-hegemonic democratic opening, construct a rising profile for its struggles, and become influential as early as the 1990 national elections.

4.1.2 The position of NOE, and housing during the neoliberal housing economy (1990-2010)

By the 1990 national elections, NOE had a mass base of 6,000 families nationwide (about three percent of the constituency),[c] and its members acquired a strong position in the Christian conservative government (MDF-KDNP-FKgP) (Várhalmi, 1990:3). NOE's vice-president, Sándor K. Keresztes (MDF), and NOE's deputy president, László Surján (KDNP), became the Minister of Environmental Protection and Development, and the Minister of People's Welfare, respectively. Moreover, eleven NOE members were elected across the political spectrum, one of whom became the deputy president of the parliamentary committee on social, family, and health issues (Kardosné, 2017:24). NOE anticipated the construction of a generous welfare state in which every large family receives concessions regardless of social status. However, instead, the conservative government (1990-1994) executed the first phase of neoliberal restructuring, which the next left-liberal MSZP-SZDSZ government (1994-1998) completed. Between 1990 and 1998, NOE fought against the welfare cuts of the conservative and left-liberal governments, albeit to different degrees.

During the ideologically aligned conservative government, NOE did not go beyond heavy criticism in the media. Indeed, the government remained open to negotiations, kept the large family cause in its rhetoric, and did not touch core family benefits. In contrast, the left-liberal government launched a series of austerity measures in 1995 without any meaningful social consultation.[d] In response, on May 14, 1995, NOE organized a demonstration in front of

the Parliament with the participation of several thousand people where NOE president Ágota Benkő demanded the abolition of anti-family measures in a speech (élő, 1995:5, Nagycsaládosok tüntetése, 1995). NOE submitted a petition signed by 43,000 people (Nagycsaládosok, 1995). Beforehand, Benkő mobilized for the demonstration at a conference organized by MDF and the Lakitelek People's College (Ó-V. J., 1995:4).

This differentiated use of conflict by NOE traced the contours of the solidifying conservative and left-liberal blocs. In the meantime, MDF and KDNP were losing influence due to intra-party conflicts, and an ambitious political party, the Viktor Orbán-led Fidesz, was taking advantage of the vacuum. The party was shifting from the center-left to the right, aiming for a dominant position in the center-right (Wéber, 2010). Between 1996 and 1998, Fidesz gradually gained trust among conservative political elites, intellectuals, and civic organizations. Being the oldest player in the conservative movement (older than MDF, KDNP, or Fidesz) and backed by a mass membership of 22,000 families and 289 chapters[e] by 1996 (Tabák, 1996), NOE became authoritative and essential for the party.

Moreover, between 1990 and 2002, NOE also demonstrated power by running candidates in municipal elections nationwide. The SMO organized training for the candidates, and supported the work of the elected members (Kardosné, 2017:24). To demonstrate the scale, in 1994, out of the 305 people who ran for office, 92 became elected representatives, six became mayors, eight became county delegates, and 176 became external committee members (Kardosné, 2017:24). Members typically ran on a single NOE ticket, while occasionally, they ran in alliance with conservative parties, or explicitly on a conservative party ticket. In any way, the organization created newer and newer strongholds in the state.

In 1998, NOE's membership comprised 22,000 families but had attained little during the conservative and left-liberal governments (Tabák, 1996:10; sbe, 1999:1). Amid this disappointment of an important constituency, Fidesz won the national elections in 1998. The

new Fidesz-FKgP-MDF government was eager to embrace a pro-family agenda and voice concerns about the demographic survival of the nation. Within two years of governing, it restored childcare benefits, universal family benefits, and family tax credits (abolished or cut by the previous administration). For the conservative movement, including NOE, Fidesz's measures countered the former left-liberal government's aggressive neoliberal restructuring and supposedly anti-family values. In return, NOE gave the Orbán government recognition many times publicly for being family-friendly and caring about demographic decline (Benkő, 1998:10; Nagycsaládosoké a T. Ház, 1998:2).

By this time, the negative impacts of neoliberal restructuring had bumped up housing on NOE's agenda. The report on its 1996 Family Congress dedicated significant attention to poverty and inequality while interpreting housing in the conservative welfare framework: "Housing is not a commodity, but an elementary need like bread. Chances of access to housing and demographic indicators strongly correlate" (Benkő, 1996:95). NOE claimed housing ownership subsidies, public housing, and higher *szocpol* as fundamental social interests. This was a response to the needs of the constituency. NOE received several emergency letters, while local chapters organized forums on housing (e.g., in Cegléd) or advocated for families losing their homes (e.g., in Oroszlány)[f] (NOÉ szociális bárkája, 1996:9; Esély a lakhatáshoz, 1997:3; K.Zs., 1998:34). Consequently, NOE leaders regularly spoke in the media against evictions due to utility and housing loan arrears[3], occasionally highlighting the situation of Roma families (NOÉ szociális bárkája, 1996:9; Bogdán, 1997:25-26; K.E.M, 1997:4; Egyre több, 1999:4).

In the beginning, the first Orbán government (1998-2002) showed disunity around housing. Part of the government assigned a central role to housing loan products, and wanted

[3] These arrears accrued after 1991 when the interest rate of formerly subsidized loans skyrocketed, leaving hundreds of thousands of households in debt (see Chapter 3.2.2 for details).

to make *szocpol* means-tested and transferred by municipal governments. In response, NOE advocated a universal *szocpol*, and requested a reduced version of *szocpol* accessible for low-income and lower-middle-class families for dwelling extension[4]; it also demanded the renovation of prefabricated housing blocks (Szikora, 1999:6). As a result of tough negotiations, NOE managed to turn the tables. In February 2000, the government maintained the universality of *szocpol*, launched a public housing program, started the energy-efficient renovation of prefabricated housing blocks, and introduced the reduced version of *szocpol* (*félszocpol*[5]) albeit only to extend extant dwellings through construction but not purchase (Farkas, 2000; also see Chapter 3.2.2). However, NOE continued its advocacy for families wanting to move from prefabricated housing blocks to larger dwelling, for whom purchase was the only option to upgrade their living standards. Eventually, in August 2001, the government gave the green light to use *félszocpol* for the purchase of used housing (in the beginning, only by large families) (Magánszemélyek, 2001). Various government members told the media that *félszocpol* was introduced based on NOE's proposal (b-c, 2000:5; Több támogatást, 2000:6; Kercza, 2002:3; Kormányülés, 2002:4).

Eventually, the Orbán government became the first after the transition which attempted to deal with housing policies in a relatively coherent framework, encompassing *szocpol*, subsidized housing loans, public housing construction, and the energy-efficient renovation of prefabricated housing blocks (Hegedüs, 2009; Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2021:6). At the same time, its housing policy allocated disproportionately more resources to the middle class. It introduced subsidized housing loans without an income cap and spent considerably less on public housing or renovating high-rise blocks benefiting low-income, working-class, and lower-middle-class people (Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:82-83).[g] Although NOE kept speaking up for less-advantaged

[4] *Szocpol* subsidized only the construction of new housing units then.
[5] A reduced version of *szocpol* ("half" *szocpol*).

constituents, these equity claims[h] were presented in a language that was fundamentally appreciative of the government's achievements. NOE president Benkő's comment to the press in 1999 after the introduction of family tax credits captures this willingness to compromise: "Family tax credits will barely benefit low-income families, but this is not a reason to abolish it […] that's why we need a variety of policies such as child protection benefit, and other benefits [such as the family benefit] which was unfortunately not raised this time" (Hajnal, 1999:5).[i]

When Fidesz lost the elections after a tight race in 2002, NOE's membership base of 20,000 families constituted nine percent of the country's large family constituency.[j] Considering NOE's readiness to bargain in favor of the middle class, Fidesz had proved to be a reliable political ally: it had embraced most of NOE's values and family policies in government (A nagycsaládosok egyesülete, 2000:3). Nevertheless, NOE pursued a pragmatic approach towards the subsequent left-liberal governments: it maintained a seat at the negotiating table with the coming MSZP-SZDSZ administrations (Muhari, 2005:3). At the same time, it remained aligned with Fidesz (Á.B., 2006:11; Tábori, 2006:3), which was engaging civil society with full steam and diligently organizing its conservative voter base after its 2002 electoral defeat (Greskovits, 2017, 2020).

When the left-liberal MSZP-SZDSZ government introduced a series of austerity measures in 2006, including hospital and tuition fees, and took steps towards integrating private insurance companies in the health care system, NOE became a catalyst of resistance. It organized two demonstrations in 2006 and 2007, criticizing the government for the devastating health care and education situation (the 2007 protest mobilized 10,000 people). The organization also supplemented Fidesz's mobilization (2007-2008) for a referendum (A népszavazás, 2008). Spearheaded by the then NOE president Endre Szabó, who was a doctor, the organization started a petition against the privatization of health care in May 2007 and

established a platform with two alter-globalist organizations[k] (Korompay, 2007:5). They later merged with a similar initiative of trade unions, farmers,' health workers' and green organizations, and collected 500,000 signatures (Elindult, 2008).[l] NOE's actions were central to a nationwide protest movement strategically fueled by Fidesz, which contributed to the moral and political annihilation of the left-liberal MSZP-SZDSZ government and the landslide victory of Orbán's party in 2010.

All in all, out of the 20 years of the liberal democratic regime, there were only four years (2002-2005) when NOE built a trustful relationship with a left-liberal government. The organization has organized demonstrations three times and endorsed about a dozen demonstrations by joining. All these demonstrations, including the ones endorsed, occurred under the left-liberal MSZP-SZDSZ governments (1995-1996, 2006-2010)[6]. The other 16 years were spent collaborating with conservative parties, which – from NOE's perspective – either delivered in government or fought alongside NOE to advance the organization's values and policies. The return of Fidesz in 2010 with a two-thirds parliamentary majority held immense opportunities for the conservative bloc, including NOE.

4.1.3 The position of NOE, and housing during the illiberal housing economy (2010-2024)[7]

After its landslide electoral victory in 2010, the conservative Fidesz-KDNP party used its robust mandate to restructure the neoliberal state built on liberal democratic principles. The government launched its "illiberal" project by centralizing the state and the media, dismantling checks and balances, and recapitalizing the economy, favoring business people loyal to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Due to past struggles, large families have occupied a distinguished

[6] These are the years of the demonstrations.
[7] 2024 is the last year of the examined period within the illiberal era.

position in the new illiberal historical bloc. Although Fidesz stranded various constituencies from its former winning coalition, such as small farmers and workers (Scheiring, 2020), NOE's approach, i.e., the centrality of family values and population policy, has remained the signature framework for the party. Thus, the legitimacy of the illiberal project has partially depended on the moral and public support of family organizations, particularly NOE.

In 2010, NOE's membership consisted of 15,000 families (Gyerekekkel öröm, 2010:4) and managed an extensive network of ethnic Hungarian families outside Hungary[8] – 31 organizations in Vojvodina (*Vajdaság)* in Serbia, three in Upper Hungary *(Felvidék)* in Slovakia, eight in Transylvania *(Erdély)* in Romania, and one in Subcarpathia *(Kárpátalja)* in Ukraine (Szabó, 2009:6). Drawing on this membership and the performance of the first Orbán administration, NOE advanced the political credit to Fidesz-KDNP right after the 2010 elections. The organization has consistently endorsed the government's family policies (M. Á., 2010:3; KCS, 2014:4) and increasingly appeared on the same platform in issues such as the government's fight against IMF or its proposal to keep stores closed on Sundays (Nem adjuk, 2010:11; Döntés, 2014:4).[m] In exchange, high-profile Fidesz politicians – including Prime Minister Viktor Orbán – emphasized in various ways that NOE's values are "particularly important for the government" (Jubileumot, 2012:2; MTI, 2012:3; Jobbágyi, 2012:2).

Indeed, Fidesz-KDNP delivered on many fronts within a short time. NOE became a strategic partner of the state, just like it had been under the first Orbán government (Fissza, 2000:10; Varga, 2017:5). Within less than two years into governing, the party restored (again) what the previous left-liberal governments had abolished or limited: family tax credits, *szocpol*, and gas price compensation. Moreover, the government shifted gears in housing in 2016; it

[8] The Carpathian Basin Alliance of Family Organizations (*Kárpát-medencei Családszervezetek Szövetsége*).

increased *szocpol*[9] twofold for large families (families with three or more children), and introduced a variety of subsidized loans contingent on childbearing without an income cap (Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:88-90; see also Chapter 3.2.3). Since then, housing and family policies have been wrapped up in a government rhetoric advancing social reproduction to a previously unseen scale.

Clearly, the illiberal turn came with unprecedented substantive counter-hegemonic outcomes for large families. However, this victory remained fractured: a particular subgroup – better-off large families – prevailed. The abandoning of disadvantaged constituents came with no surprise. As we saw during the period of neoliberal state-building, NOE has always tended to compromise in favor of the middle class and at the expense of its low-income constituents. Consequently, when NOE advocated the increase of public housing between 2011 and 2014 (Kun, 2011:4; Szabó, 2011:11; NKA javaslatok, 2014), and the government showed no response, the organization did not express much dissent. It simply observed that, in 2016, Fidesz doubled down on securing home ownership for better-off households, feeding the banks and real estate developers, and withering social redistribution (Hegedüs, 2006:80-81; Brückner & Előd, 2023).

On the other hand, a clear signal for NOE's diminishing autonomy was how it dealt with Fidesz-KDNP weakening public education and abandoning public health care. While NOE organized and endorsed protests on both issues under left-liberal governments between 1995-1998 and 2008-2010, it avoided the least sign of conflict during the illiberal period – even at the expense of its middle-class constituents. Instead, the organization became deeply enmeshed financially and politically in the illiberal state. NOE was among the beneficiaries of Fidesz-KDNP's lavish state funding to organizations engaged in population policy, which

[9] Fidesz renamed the subsidy to "Home Creation Subsidy for Families" (*Családok Otthonteremtési Kedvezménye*, CSOK).

exponentially grew after 2016 (Kapitány, 2019).[n] The same year, it popularized *szocpol* in community visits together with the Ministry of Human Resources and the vice-president of the parliament (Jobbágyi, 2016). Since 2020, the organization has cooperated with Lőrinc Mészáros, a businessman closely associated with Prime Minister Orbán,[10] by coordinating holiday charity programs for single-parent and large families financed by Mészáros's company (Egyszülős 2020; Nagycsaládosok díjazták, 2021).[o] Finally, the then-resigned NOE president Katalin Kardosné Gyurkó ran for office in the 2024 municipal elections on a joint platform with Fidesz-KDNP (Spirk, 2024).

Indeed, Hungarian housing policies have consistently favored large families due to their higher needs, with the better-off benefiting more. At the same time, the mainstreaming of conservative family values in housing policy and the government rhetoric after 2010 cannot be simply attributed to the political calculation of appealing to NOE's predominantly white, middle-class base (see Appendix 1 for the composition of membership). As we have seen, NOE's integrative-representative strategy significantly strengthened the organization's position in the conservative political bloc over the course of decades. Its mass base and willingness to construct an ideological alliance made it an essential partner for the ambitious Fidesz from 1996. The party's legitimacy depended on the support of conservative constituencies, so it embraced the well-organized NOE's agenda. In the next two decades, NOE and Fidesz amplified conservative family values in civil society and the state to a level where these values and NOE became tokens. NOE failed to use the power of its mass base to control the threats inherent in a close alignment with a party. Instead, it legitimized Fidesz's state building model: constructing a loyal Hungarian capitalist bloc and nominally strengthening the middle class through illiberal governance.

[10] Lőrinc Mészáros is Viktor Orbán's childhood friend who became a billionaire by winning government tenders (Erdélyi, 2019; Szabó, 2021).

Endnotes

[a] For example, Ottilia Solt (later SZDSZ founder and MP), and Ferenc Kőszeg (later SZDSZ member and MP) were among the signatories. Both were prominent figures of the left-liberal opposition during and after state socialism. Solt was a leader in the pro-Roma and pro-poor movement, while Kőszeg was the founder of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee.

[b] Most prominently, Christian conservative intellectuals, Sándor K. Keresztes and László Surján, were founders of both NOE and the conservative MDF and KDNP parties, respectively. They designed NOE's base building strategy in 1987, and ran for office in the 1990 general elections on their party's ticket (Szécsi 2021:78).

[c] Based on the census of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH, 2011), 188,335 families were registered as large families in 1990.

[d] The left-liberal MSZP-SZDSZ government abolished family tax credits (NOE's achievement from 1987), cut child care benefits, made family allowance means-tested while keeping its value unchanged, and abolished free higher education among other measures. Most of these policies were part of the Bokros package, the series of austerity measures, named after the then Minister of Finance and announced in March 1995. The family tax credit was abolished earlier in December 1994 when the 1995 budget was introduced. About the lack of meaningful social consultation, see Köves, 1995, and Wells, 2000.

[e] NOE has held the national membership together through regional meetings, annual family congresses, and other fun or political events. It also organizes regular leadership training to enhance skills and mobility within the organization (Tóthné, 2010:12; Kardosné, 2017:26). Since 2001, NOE has been working in some form of a regional division, which for more than a decade included regional centers in Győr, Inárcs (later replaced by Monor), Kaposvár, Pécs, Székesfehérvár, Orosháza, and Püspökladány (Kardosné, 2017:68-77).

[f] The most outstanding effort was a two-year campaign of the Oroszlány chapter led by Attila Kontó. Kontó was a public housing tenant with insecure status living in a tiny apartment with his wife and three children. Between 1996 and 1997, he advocated at the MSZP-led municipal government that it provides large families in need with land so that they can utilize the MSZP-SZDSZ government's *szocpol* scheme and build a house. His proposal explicitly supported Roma people and aimed to contribute to the desegregation of the town. Kontó could never make a deal with the municipal government, and eventually went on hunger strike in 1998 (Hűvös, 1996:3; Nyilvánosságot akarnak, 1996:2; Esély a lakhatáshoz, 1997:3; P. L., 1998a:3; P.L, 1998b:2).

[g] During the last two years of the first Fidesz-KDNP government (1998-2002), 5,000 high-rises were renovated, and 11,000 public housing units were built or purchased (Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2021:6). These amounts were far from meeting the needs, although both investments had been the first of their kind since the transition. The next MSZP-SZDSZ government continued the program, thus between 2001 and 2008, the number of publicly owned public housing units increased by approximately 12-18,000, or 5-8 percent of the total stock at that time (Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:82, 96).

[h] NOE formulated proposals to protect families threatened by eviction, demanded that the government's housing and family policies consider the interest of low-income families, and requested the acceleration of public housing construction (Cs. Benkő, 2000:3; Dusza & Vég, 2000:5; D. L., 2002:8)

[i] The extent to which NOE represented and mainstreamed the interest of large families with respect to all societal spheres has been agency-driven, depending on the president, board members, and local chapter leaders. The era of Ágota Benkő as president (1992-2000), the work of Zsuzsanna Bajai Morvayné, and Zsuzsa Debreceni Kormosné as experts, the advocacy of Attila Kontó in Oroszlány (1996-1998) as the leader of NOE's local chapter, and Károlyné Cser's contribution as a housing expert stood out in this regard.

[j] Based on the census of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH, 2011), 213,449 families were registered as large families in 2001.

[k] The platform called Social Security Ambulance (*TB-Mentők*) was established with the Humanist Movement (*Humanista Mozgalom*) and Védegylet.

[l] The referendum initiated by the civic campaign was not approved by the Constitutional Court. However, Fidesz's referendum campaign was. As a result, four million people voted in 2008 about health care and education reforms; it was half of the population eligible to vote. The referendum turned out to be crucial for Fidesz's victory in 2010.

[m] The organization's perhaps only public criticism was related to a short-lived government proposal to transfer family benefits as vouchers instead of cash.

[n] The funding increased eightfold between 2011 and 2018 (from 99,9 million to 827 million HUF), with a giant leap between 2016 and 2017 (from 280 million to 738 million HUF) (Kapitány, 2019:67).

[o] NOE gave a prize to the Mészáros Group in 2021 because it hosted 1,200 single-parent and large families in its hotels (Nagycsaládosok díjazták, 2021).

4.2 Public housing tenants: a conflictual-representative strategy

The Tenant Association (*Lakásbérlők Egyesülete*, LABE) was founded in 1988 with the aim to represent the interests of public housing tenants during the neoliberal restructuring of the housing market. LABE quickly became a national organization and advocated better conditions for tenants on behalf of a mass base. However, its actions were driven by the immediate needs of its members, who, within a few years, overwhelmingly tilted towards purchasing their units. The case study argues that LABE's leadership lacked the vision and commitment to recruit political support and unify the membership behind a comprehensive public housing reform. Consequently, the organization's conflictual-representative strategy, i.e., tactical relationships with political parties combined with building a mass base, served neoliberal hegemonic policies. LABE's mass base eventually advocated better buying conditions instead of countering or controlling the selling of public housing stock. After the culmination of privatization in 1995 with favorable conditions for many tenants, LABE lost its prominent role in the housing movement.

4.2.1 The position of LABE, and housing during the state socialist housing economy (1988-1990)[1]

In 1988, the state socialist government introduced a legislation that accelerated the privatization of public housing.[2] LABE was established in September the same year, a few weeks before the legislative change. The founding group included 39 predominantly prestigious public housing tenants living in nationalized villas or apartment blocks in affluent parts of Budapest (Égető, 1990:10; Győri & Matern, 1995:Section B, i). LABE's goal was to

[1] 1988 refers to the foundation of LABE.
[2] The privatization of public housing was enabled by the 32/1969. (IX. 30.) government decree. The decree was modified for the eighth time in 1988, which accelerated privatization (Zolnay, 1993a:97; Hegedüs & Teller, 2006:45).

pressure the malfunctioning state-controlled property management companies (PMCs) (*ingatlankezelő vállalat*, IKV) to get renovations done, increase tenant autonomy over property management, and enable the option to purchase the property (Szenkovits, 1988:16; Jegyzőkönyv, 1989:69). As public housing tenants regardless of social status suffered from the insufficient work of the PMCs, the organization's membership quickly grew by the thousands from all ranks of tenants (see Appendix 2).

As with NOE, the state supervised the foundation of LABE; Budapest's state socialist city council hosted the founding meeting, and one of its secretaries became a member (Győri & Matern, 1995:Section B, i). Local chapters grew out of local tenant networks. They were sometimes midwifed by a state-run mass organization, the Patriotic People's Front (such as Gyöngyös in 1989) or opposition parties (such as SZDSZ in Százhalombatta in 1990), which helped the tenant groups with infrastructure such as office space (Lakásbérlők, 1989:8; Szaniszló, 1990:2). The national LABE received its first office space from a state company, Novotrade, which initially covered the utility expenses (Győri & Matern, 1995:Section B, i).

During late state socialism, LABE promoted the idea of self-governing tenant associations as an alternative to the malfunctioning PMCs, and advocated dismantling their monopoly (Jegyzőkönyv, 1989:69; Eöry, 1990:5). The organization also helped resolve various debates between tenants and the PMCs, was able to postpone the rent and utility cost increases by about a year, and occasionally consulted with the government or state authorities during policy formulation (Győri & Matern, 1995:Section B, vi-vii; Nagy, 1989:3). LABE held the national membership together by holding organizational assemblies and regional meetings (Vészits, 1988:7). In 1989, LABE also entered a coalition called People's Advocacy Platform *(Lakosság Érdekvédelmi Tömörülése*, LÉT), representing constituencies such as disabled people, pensioners, and workers, among others across the country (Aláírásgyűjtés, 1989:14).

4.2.2 The position of LABE, and housing during the neoliberal housing economy (1990-1995)[3]

Public housing tenants started the era of democratic state building with a large but incoherent base. After the April 1990 general elections, LABE counted about 4,000 members with chapters or organizing committees in six districts of Budapest and 24 towns nationwide; the organization was also connected to ten self-governing tenant associations (Eöry, 1990:5; Szekeres, 1990:7). However, although all these groups were in alliance with LABE, they did not unite around a shared vision other than representing – divergent – tenant interests. These interests spanned from ineffective public housing management to the right to purchase in a climate of privatization frenzy. As LABE's national leadership lacked vision and commitment to advance a comprehensive public housing reform and recruit political support for it, opportunities for chapters to resist privatization were narrow.

For example, in the early 1990s, the Kaposvár chapter had been in a fight for tenants with the local PMC and the municipal government for at least three years. Led by Tiborné Török, tenants collected signatures against the extreme increase and alleged overcharging of utility costs in 1991; the local SZDSZ backed them. One year later, they advocated the termination of evictions resulting from higher utility expenses. In 1993, they organized a demonstration attended by about 500 people. Finally, the chapter turned to the prosecutor's office to investigate the alleged overcharging of heating costs, but did not achieve any compensation for the tenants (Tiltakozás, 1991:3; T. K., 1992:3; Lakásbérlők tüntettek, 1993:2; Lengyel, 1993:11). In another case, tenant Helga Hábetler tried to break the monopoly of the inefficient PMC in Budapest's 6th district – first as the founder of a self-governing tenant association, then as an elected representative between 1990 and 1994. As the municipality's

[3] 1995 refers to the year after which LABE gradually lost its leadership role in the housing movement.

housing committee president, she relentlessly fought for creating competition for the malfunctioning PMC. However, when it came time to vote, the municipal assembly turned down the reform proposal (Pogány, 1990:4; rist, 1994:4).

These examples of local leadership demonstrate the lost opportunities in a period when the future of public housing was still undecided. LABE's national leadership consistently argued that marketization and the liquidation of public housing property would have disastrous consequences for low-income tenants and those needing housing (tót, 1989:115-116; Nagy, 1992:9; Barabás, 1992:5). Yet, they viscerally attacked any differentiation between tenants based on the value of their units or social status, and opposed the containment of the right to purchase (R. Zs., 1990:10; újhegyi, 1991:4; Biztos kiút, 1993:9).[a] Since the organization lacked a clear policy vision, chapters were driven by their immediate self-interest and gravitated increasingly towards privatization (e.g., Szeged and Pécs) (F. K., 1991:1; Kovács, 1991:1; Közgyűlés, 1992:1). Running for office as a means of directly grabbing state power also remained an ad hoc strategy.[b]

Unsurprisingly, this discombobulated advocacy and organizing arena resulted in weak housing laws. In 1991, the state transferred the ownership of public housing units to local governments without proposing any long-term policy framework. In 1993, it passed a "housing" law that essentially regulated public housing privatization instead of public housing management, without ensuring that the privatization income is allocated to the regeneration of the remaining public housing stock and its long-term expansion.[4] At the same time, LABE's demands – favorable conditions for tenants to purchase their units or enjoy rent control (at least for a limited period) – were met (Biztos kiút, 1993:9; Sz. K., 1993:5). As a result, the size of

[4] Transfer of Ownership Act XXXIII of 1991 (September 1), https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC023456/; Housing Act LXXVIII of 1993 (July 30), https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99300078.tv.

the public housing stock had dropped from 721,000 to 454,000 units between 1990 and 1993, and to 102,000 units by 2022 (Dániel, 1996:204-5; KSH, 2020a; Graph 3-2 in Chapter 3).

Parallel to the decline in the size of the public housing stock, the proportion of public housing tenants with insecure status increased. However, LABE did not represent their interests. Until 1995, the organizations fought for those whose right to purchase was still limited, and in 1996, it shifted its work to represent former tenants who had become condominium homeowners. The status of the remaining, typically poor and low-income public housing constituents was hardly safer than squatters and former tenants who had lost their status. The Roma Civil Rights Foundation would take over their interest representation between 1995 and 2010, and The City Is For All after 2010. These stories will be presented in the following sections of this chapter.

Endnotes

[a] LABE fiercely opposed the proposal of the Metropolitan Research Institute *(Városkutatás Kft.)* and the Ministry of Finance in 1990 to introduce a rent system that differentiates based on the quality of the property (R. Zs., 1990:10). The organization also challenged the endeavors of Péter Győri, the head of the Housing Committee of the Budapest City Hall and the opposition party SZDSZ's housing policy expert, to build a coalition in 1992 and 1993 around a housing law that enables the preservation of the public housing stock while creating a secure environment for tenants (újhegyi, 1991:4). The volatile coalition Győri put together that consisted of some SZDSZ MPs (including Iván Pető) and several local governments in Budapest quickly fell apart after the dividing lines within SZDSZ had surfaced around housing policy (Bérlakások eladása, 1992:1, Zolnay, 1993a, 1993b).

[b] Although the leadership of LABE wanted to "keep the organization away from politics," several local chapters ran for office in the 1990 and 1994 municipal elections (in 1990, candidates ran in electoral alliance with MDF). In 1990, LABE ran for office in Budapest, Komárom-Esztergom county, and Székesfehérvár, and, in 1994, in Békéscsaba, Dorog, Nagykanizsa, Szombathely, Vác and Zalaegerszeg. The list may not be exhaustive. In 1994, LABE formed an electoral alliance with a chapter of the National Association of Large Families *(Nagycsaládosok Országos Egyesülete,* NOE*)* and a teachers' union *(Pedagógusok Szakszervezete,* PSZ*).*

4.3 Roma people: from an integrative-representative to a conflictual-advocative strategy

Roma leaders in Hungary have built two influential social movement organizations (SMOs) that represented Roma people living in housing insecurity: Phralipe between 1989 and 1994[1], and the Roma Civil Rights Foundation (*Roma Polgárjogi Alapítvány,* RPA) between 1995 and 2010. The two SMOs had different orientations to state power and constituency power. While Phralipe was a mass base organization closely aligned with the liberal party SZDSZ (integrative-representative strategy), RPA was an advocacy organization targeting predominantly municipalities due to rights violations (conflictual-advocative strategy). The case study illuminates that Phralipe representing poor, low-income, and working-class Roma progressed neck and neck with NOE representing conservative large families. Despite the huge inequality gap between their constituencies, they could both build their bases, and create strongholds in the state at a comparable pace. RPA then abandoned base building, and launched "frontal" attacks on the state on behalf of the most vulnerable segment of the house-poor. Although this work resulted in hard-fought, substantive policy outcomes, it could only temporarily increase the political significance of its constituency. The case study compares the potential of the two strategic approaches for the Roma, and explores the counterfactual: had Phralipe continued to pursue the integrative-representative strategy, and framed housing, unemployment, and education as issues of the Roma and non-Roma working class, would the bargaining position of this constituency have been stronger?

[1] Phralipe means brotherhood/sisterhood in Romani. The organization still exists with a different and lower profile.

4.3.1 The position of Phralipe, and housing during the state socialist housing economy (1989-1990)[2]

In February 1989, Roma people living in housing insecurity won an unprecedented victory over the state socialist council of Miskolc. Supported by liberal-minded Roma and non-Roma intellectuals from Budapest, the local community successfully organized to prevent a racist housing scheme. The city's leadership wanted to evict mostly Roma families from dilapidated public housing units in the city center to a segregated settlement on the outskirts (F. Havas, 1990; Ladányi, 1991; Sebály, 2022b:42-43). The Anti-Ghetto Committee (*Gettóellenes Bizottság*), catalyzed by a young Roma teacher, Aladár Horváth, became the first instance of cooperation between Roma and non-Roma intellectuals publicly challenging a policy decision of the state socialist regime.

Inspired by this victory, 47 people, spearheaded by liberal-minded Roma people and non-Roma members of the liberal opposition,[a] established Phralipe in Budapest at the Aesthetics Department of the Eötvös Loránd University on April 15, 1989 (Ladányi, 1991:86; Blaha et al., 1995:23; Kovats, 1998:138, 154). Some of the Roma founders, such as Ágnes Daróczi and Jenő Zsigó, were long-time critics of the top-down character of Roma politics and those Roma elites who legitimized the socialist state-run Roma organizations (Daróczi, [1986] 1995; up, 1991:21). They envisioned a political culture in which Roma leaders are accountable to a single mass membership organization (Daróczi, [1986] 1995:5). Phralipe anticipated that the transition to liberal democracy would be a political opportunity to realize this vision, and aspired to occupy an influential position in the emerging historical bloc.

Buoyed by the democratic opening, Phralipe organizers[b] reached out to their local network, and discussed why Phralipe was important (Bárdos Deák, 2022). The idea of

[2] 1989 refers to the foundation of Phralipe.

independent grassroots Roma politics quickly gained many followers in Roma communities nationwide. Local chapters and county networks proliferated, representing class and geographical diversity.[c] At least one of the chapters (Tatabánya) was recognized as a member of the local democratic opposition (Nyilatkozat, 1989:1). The growing organization elevated the issue of Roma people living in housing insecurity. Phralipe demanded public housing construction, subsidized housing construction schemes, and other financial support to help people live in better-quality homes (Cigány politikai, 1990:29; Egy régi, 1993:8). In addition, local chapters also addressed housing through advocacy, organizing, service, and charity, depending on the approach of local leaders (A Phralipe, 1989:10; Állásfoglalás, 1990:8; Cigány-nagygyűlés, 1990:8; szőke, 1990:1-2; Z. T. I., 1990:5; Daróczi, 1991:4; szilvás, 1991:3).[d]

Besides building a mass base, Phralipe also created strongholds in the state. It sent its manifesto to all political parties in November 1989, offering the possibility of cooperation (A PHRALIPE felhívása, 1990:3). Only the liberal SZDSZ responded. The party's values, rooted in the liberal human rights tradition, resonated with Phralipe (A PHRALIPE felhívása, 1990:3), and the membership overlap between the party and the movement organization reinforced the connection.[e] As a result, in February 1990, SZDSZ and Phralipe entered into an electoral pact: they announced that Phralipe would encourage Roma people to vote for SZDSZ, and the party would assign places at the top of its national list to four Phralipe members, Aladár Horváth, Antónia Hága, Ágnes Daróczi, and Béla Osztojkán (Kovats, 1998:154).[f] As SZDSZ representative Tamás Harsányi, a doctor, stated at a candidate forum in Nagykanizsa in March 1990, no matter whether SZDSZ "wins or not, they will put this people, the Hungarians, on the trajectory to Europe, and they want to bring the Roma with them" (R. L., 1990:6).

By the 1990 national elections, Phralipe became an influential organization. The membership grew (Z. T. I., 1990:5), and the organization's political ally, SZDSZ, came in

second in the general elections. This allowed two Phralipe members, Horváth and Hága, to enter the Parliament. The way chapter leader Ferenc Orsós in Nagykanizsa commented on their victory is telling about the awareness of synergies between Phralipe and the party: "Four members of our organization [Horváth, Hága, Ottilia Solt, and Gábor Havas] entered the Parliament in the last elections, two of whom [Horváth, and Hága] are Roma" (Z. T. I., 1990:5). As a result of this political gain and its growing mass base, Phralipe occupied a good position in the liberal political bloc, which comprised one-fourth of the Parliament, and was the second strongest political party behind the governing party MDF.

4.3.2 The position of Phralipe, RPA, and housing during the neoliberal housing economy (1990-2010)

By the end of 1990, Phralipe was a national organization with 1,200 members and 22 chapters (Osztojkán, 1990) (see Appendix 3 for membership data). Delegates of local chapters met at least once a year in a national meeting when they reported about their work and chose officers (T. Zselensky, 1993:31). The organization was dynamically growing, counting 6,000 members in 63 towns by 1991 (Sánta, 1991:19), reaching its zenith with 7,800 members in 73 towns in 1992 (Osztojkán, 1992:16, compare with large families in Appendix 1). As Jenő Setét, a Phralipe organizer and renowned civil rights leader, said in the late 2010s, "the level of organizing the Roma achieved between 1989 and about 1994 is immensely respectable to me. In quality, quantity, and values" (Kóczé et al., 2017:53-54).

The budding grassroots Roma politics and Horváth and Hága's electoral victory gave a lot of confidence to members. Daróczi argued in a speech at an SZDSZ general assembly in April 1990 that the party and Phralipe should cooperate in the upcoming municipal elections in the fall (Tabajdi, 1990:2). In addition, the same month, Nagykanizsa chapter leader, Orsós, reached out to the local county newspaper. He and his colleagues were on the city committee

that allocated public housing, and he was hopeful that after the coming municipal elections, their expertise would be even more widely used (Z. T. I., 1990:5).

Yet, Phralipe did not run for office in alliance with SZDSZ during the municipal elections in the fall of 1990. It ran independently in the capital, Budapest, and five counties (Hajdú-Bihar, Nógrád, Somogy, Tolna, and Zala), while in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, it entered into an electoral alliance with the three conservative governing parties MDF, KDNP, and FKgP (*valasztas.hu*). The organization might have been hedging its bets on whether to remain the ally of an opposition party or near the government, or it might not have been able to reach an agreement with local SZDSZ groups. Overall, Phralipe's calculation did not prove beneficial politically; in October 1990, SZDSZ won overwhelmingly nationwide.

In the following years, Phralipe staked everything on advancing strong minority rights legislation. However, instead of sticking to the original strategy (i.e., building a mass membership organization that keeps Roma leaders accountable), it established the Roma Parliament, a national alliance of Roma organizations, in December 1990. The alliance, by definition, legitimized the old Roma elites representing the political culture of muddy bargaining with the state (Vajda, 1991:6; Kovats, 1998:141-143; Kóczé et al., 2017:64, 67).[g] The outcome was disappointing. The state, led by the conservative MDF-KDNP-FKgP government, managed to divide and conquer the disunified platform, including Phralipe, by financial means (Ki bazsevál, 1993:5-7; Horváth, 2017). This disunity prevented Phralipe from pushing back effectively when the parliament passed an unfavorable minority rights law in 1993.[h] SZDSZ (except Horváth) eventually endorsed the government-backed legislation, evoking the disaffection of several liberal-minded Roma leaders (Kóczé et al., 2017:66).

The minority rights focus between 1991 and 1993 subjugated housing to secondary importance on the liberal Roma agenda when public housing legislation was at a critical juncture (see Chapter 3.2.2). Nevertheless, evictions and inadequate housing were primary

issues of many Phralipe members (e.g., Eger, Miskolc, Nagykanizsa, Örkény, Salgótarján, Tatabánya) (A Phralipe, 1989:10; Állásfoglalás, 1990:8; Cigány-nagygyűlés, 1990:8; szőke, 1990:1-2; Z. T. I., 1990:5; Daróczi, 1991:4; szilvás, 1991:3). The minority agenda also prevented Phralipe from framing housing, unemployment, and education as issues of the Roma and non-Roma working class (Kovats, 1998:139). Eventually, the confluence of the flawed minority rights law, the cooling relations with SZDSZ, the turf war between Roma leaders, and the lack of focus on keeping together Phralipe's mass base drifted liberal-minded Roma movement actors to the edge of the emerging neoliberal historical bloc. They closed the period under the conservative MDF-KDNP-FKgP government, disillusioned and weakened.

The 1993 minority legislation introduced a weak minority self-government system, with a high potential to segregate Roma politics from national politics, drain bright Roma organizers into a manipulative political institution, and be a tool to control Roma voters (Kovats, 1998:100-111, 155, 193-194). While one of the old Roma elites from late state socialism, Flórián Farkas,[i] acquired the presidential position of the National Roma Minority Self-Government in 1995, liberal-minded Roma leaders lost trust in political alliances and the possibility of organizing the Roma constituency.

RPA was founded in 1995 based on this negative experience; it was considered a "Roma civil response" to improve the situation of the Roma in a way that is "exempt from state control and meddling."[3] Housing quickly became one of its main areas[j] of work amid a rampant housing crisis, reinforcing the need for urgent response (see Chapter 3.2.2). The team, consisting of ex-SZDSZ MP, and Phralipe and RPA founder Aladár Horváth, Phralipe founder and lawyer János Bársony, and former Phralipe organizer and social worker Jenő Setét, provided support to primarily Roma people threatened by evictions (mainly public housing

[3] Aladár Horváth, interview by author, July 18, 2022, and April 30, 2024

tenants with insecure status and squatters), and confronted uncooperative municipal governments across the country.[k] As a result, RPA's housing agenda was shaped by the constituency's immediate needs, and focused almost entirely on municipal-level politics.

In the meantime, Farkas positioned himself as the primary liaison between the state and Roma communities. He followed the same approach he acquired during late state socialism – "good faith," non-argumentativeness, pragmatism, and co-optability – which made him an "ideal" partner for the state across governments of the whole political spectrum (Kovats, 1998:141; Révész, 1998:7). As a result, the left-liberal MSZP-SZDSZ government (1994-1998) cooperated with the Farkas-led National Roma Minority Self-Government to realize its nonprofit housing construction program. Based on Farkas's proposal, the scheme was supposed to be financed by a combination of the beneficiaries' social policy allowance (*szocpol*)[4], public workfare, and state subsidy (Cz. G., 1996:4). However, the minority self-government used the opportunity for rent-seeking by making dubious deals with disadvantaged Roma people. Consequently, the state-run housing program resulted in lousy-quality units, stolen taxpayer money, and deceived beneficiaries – and an investigation in 2002 (already under the conservative Fidesz-FKgP-MDF government) without much consequence (Kerényi & Máté, 1999:4; Iványkovics, 2002:8; K. E., 2003:15).

Swamped in anti-eviction struggles with municipal governments, RPA did not thematize the scandal. It did, however, re-engage with national politics under the conservative Fidesz-FKgP-MDF government (1998-2002). From 1999 onward, the organization demanded the enforcement of an annual winter moratorium on evictions. The campaign gained the support of MSZP, MDF, several churches, and about 50 civic organizations (Cz. G., 1999;

[4] Social policy allowance (*szociálpolitikai támogatás, "szocpol")* is a form of a housing grant incentivizing childbearing. *Szocpol* subsidizes housing purchase, construction, or renovation, depending on the actual administration. It was introduced in 1971, and suspended between 2009 and 2012. The subsidy level depends on the number of children born or anticipated.

Zivkovics, 1999), and was soon endorsed by SZDSZ (Télen szünetelnek, 2000; Demszky a kilakoltatások, 2001). RPA's second campaign in 2000 aimed to kill a bill accelerating squatters' evictions (Bernáth & S. Kállami, 2000:4; Harminc humanista, 2000:7).[1] After sending letters to MPs, RPA organized a protest on May 24 in front of the parliament. The demonstration attracted only a few thousand people, although many organizations endorsed the event, including the LIGA trade unions and SZDSZ's youth organization (Kun J., 2000:5; Legyen igazi, 2000:4). The bill passed the same day.

These measures reinforced RPA's historical embeddedness in the intellectual and political halo of SZDSZ. RPA became a source of symbolic power for SZDSZ and MSZP politicians such as László Donáth (MSZP) and Gábor Iványi (SZDSZ)[5], and intellectuals in the halo of SZDSZ and MSZP such as György Konrád, István Eörsi, and Gáspár Miklós Tamás, whose dissent from Fidesz's anti-poor policies found a good manifestation through RPA's anti-eviction actions in 2000 and 2001. They occasionally engaged in civil disobedience with RPA leaders to protect Roma families, benefiting from high media publicity and demonstrating political support (Szarka, 2000; Bohus, 2001). However, the exchange of RPA's cultural and organizational resources for individual politicians' support was insufficient to place Roma housing struggles at the center of MSZP and SZDSZ's agenda.

At the same time, important concessions were achieved. The subsequent left-liberal MSZP-SZDSZ and MSZP governments (2002-2009 and 2009-2010, respectively) delivered on the winter moratorium in 2003, which RPA had demanded since 1999 under the previous administration. It became mandatory for every municipal government to refrain from evictions between December 1 and March 1 (Domschitz, 2019b).[6] The same year, the MSZP-SZDSZ

[5] Gábor Iványi was a board member of RPA. Besides being an SZDSZ MP beween 1990-1994, and 1998-2002, he is a pastor and the longtime president of a homeless shelter, the Oltalom Charity Association (*Oltalom Karitatív Egyesület*).
[6] The original moratorium period (December 1 and March 1) was extended to November 15 and April 30 in 2018 under Fidesz-KDNP.

government introduced a state-funded national debt management program, providing crucial support for thousands of vulnerable households with significant arrears in utility bills, common costs, rent, and housing loans (Kőnig, 2006). Moreover, in 2005, RPA achieved that the Constitutional Court rendered the exclusion of squatters from public housing applications unconstitutional in three districts of Budapest, holding the potential to extend the concession to other municipalities (Az állampolgári jogok, 2005; Alkotmányellenes, 2005; Horváth, 2023).

During this period of left-liberal governing, RPA people were hired as experts in their personal capacity.[7] Horváth became the social policy advisor to Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy between 2002 and 2004, and in 2005, to Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány.[8] Setét was the national coordinator of a desegregation program in the Ministry of Health, Social, and Family Affairs between 2006 and 2010. Hiring RPA people as experts allowed SZDSZ and MSZP to benefit from these movement actors' expertise, connections, and legitimizing power. At the same time, the hiring of Horváth remained a tokenistic gesture by both governments ("Álljatok meg," 2006), while the Setét-led desegregation program – the first-of-its-kind after the transition – was severely underfunded despite promises, and reached only a few hundred families (Farkas, 2017:102).[m] Setét along with other dedicated professionals made the best out of the program (Sebály, 2022b:60-61).

Horváth and Setét's direct engagement with politics was not unique. The "revolving door" between the movement and the party had enabled several liberal Roma actors around RPA to enter the state and acquire some influence as experts or politicians.[n] However, while at the turn of the 1990s, during Phralipe, it was part of the movement's strategy to build

[7] Despite the organization's extensive knowledge about housing poverty and crisis management, RPA was never included in state-level housing consultative forums by any governments.
[8] Horváth was also the president of the National Roma Minority Self-Government for a few months in 2003.

positions in the state, in the 2000s these efforts remained individual career paths detached from the movement. RPA's strategy to advance an anti-eviction agenda by confronting primarily municipal governments, and mobilizing policy, cultural, and organizational resources, while, on the margin, use relationships to enter the state, resulted in critical and hard-fought but predominantly incremental changes.

The small, underfunded, and strenuously working RPA team had little energy to organize its broad beneficiary circle into a mass base[p]. This became clear when RPA – after an unsuccessful attempt[o] to enshrine the right to housing in the constitution – launched a campaign in 2005 to collect signatures for a popular initiative to ban evictions for anyone without adequate alternative housing. Although by this time, RPA had intervened in eviction issues on behalf of thousands of Roma people in several dozens of towns across the country, and had local offices in four towns[9], it could not convert these relationships into a unified, mobilizable base. The SMO could not collect the necessary 50,000 signatures (Sebály, 2022b:53)[r], or recruit political support for the ban through its political connections.

Finally, RPA shut down its operations in 2010 due to financial difficulties. By this time, the reality of most Roma people had drifted very far from the democratic ideals of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Both the conservative and left-liberal political blocs were primarily negotiating Roma politics through the co-opted national minority self-government system (Ármás, 1998:6; Ivánkovics, 2002:8). While liberal-minded Roma people could use the democratic opening of 1989-1990 to occupy a relatively strong position in the liberal political bloc and the state, they could not create or maintain the unity of their base. It quickly became clear that liberal democracy combined with a capitalist transition is not an evident pathway to Roma emancipation. While RPA fiercely advocated the housing rights of the most vulnerable

[9] RPA had small local offices in Debrecen, Miskolc, Nyíregyháza, and Pécs, operating for 2-4 years (Aladár Horváth, interview by author, April 30, 2024).

segment of the house-poor in the solidifying neoliberal historical bloc, it could not exploit the inside-outside status of the movement and turn the tide in favor of the Roma. With RPA's shutdown, Roma people living in housing insecurity lost a powerful vehicle of representation. In the era of illiberal state building after 2010, this constituency would receive support from The City Is For All, an organization of homeless people. Its story will be presented in the next section.

Endnotes

[a] The founding members included Jenő Zsigó, Béla Osztojkán, Aladár Horváth, Antónia Hága, Attila Balogh, Gábor Havas, Ottilia Solt, János Hoppál, Guy Lázár, Sándor Révész, and with a slight delay, Ágnes Daróczi (Blaha et al., 1995).

[b] Based on Kende (2022), about 482,000 people were considered Roma in 1993. The profile of Phralipe organizers reflected diversity and grassroots character. The Budapest chapter included the leading liberal-minded Roma leaders of the time (often with a working-class background), such as Ágnes Daróczi, then a community worker (*népművelő*) and performer, Béla Osztojkán, an author and editor, Jenő Zsigó, a sociologist, Attila Balogh, a poet and a journalist, and János Bársony, a lawyer (Blaha et al., 1995). Outside Budapest, mostly local Roma leaders organized the chapters. The Miskolc and Debrecen chapters were built by two Roma teachers, Aladár Horváth and Antónia Hága, respectively, while Zsuzsa Süléné Háry, a non-Roma district nurse, founded the Tatabánya chapter (Tóth, 1989:5; Krecz, 1990:3; Liskó, 1999:351). In addition, Ferenc Orsós, a skilled laborer, organized Nagykanizsa and Zala county; the micro-region of Bodrogköz in Borsod county was organized by Jenő Setét, then a teenager helping his family as a peddler, and his stepfather, Gyula Gombos, a peddler (Z. T. I., 1990:5; Darvas, 2020; Bárdos Deák, 2022). Later, Setét became an acclaimed social worker and one of Hungary's most renowned civil rights leaders of the Roma movement.

[c] See previous endnote. The words of Ferenc Orsós, a Phralipe organizer, from April 1990 embodies this diversity: "[W]e have 103 registered members, about 10 percent of the Roma in Nagykanizsa. We find it important that each social stratum of the Roma is represented in our membership." (Z. T. I., 1990:5).

[d] Local chapters in Eger, Miskolc, Nagykanizsa, Örkény, Salgótarján, and Tatabánya actively dealt with housing issues.

[e] Phralipe and SZDSZ also cooperated on a city level; e.g., in Miskolc, the local SZDSZ provided legal aid to victims of minority rights violations in cooperation with the local Phralipe chapter from January 1990 (Bók, 1990:5). Phralipe publicly endorsed SZDSZ and organized rallies and candidate forums in Nagykanizsa, Miskolc, Tatabánya, and Tét (among others) (Érted, 1990:8; Felhívás a megye, 1990:2; Pártközlemények, 1990:8, R. L. 1990:6). The slogan "Who votes for SZDSZ votes for Phralipe!" was promoted on flyers, in newspaper articles, and in Phralipe's monthly journal called Phralipe ("200 évre," 1990:32; Felhívás a megye, 1990:2).

[f] Phralipe founder Béla Osztojkán was among the signatories of the Charta'77 in 1979 with many future SZDSZ MPs, while Gábor Havas (later SZDSZ MP) and János Ladányi participated with Phralipe founders Aladár Horváth, Ágnes Daróczi, and Béla Osztojkán in the founding of the Anti-Ghetto Committee in 1989. Moreover, Attila Balogh nurtured good relationships with liberal opposition figures from the 1980s. He joined (among other Roma leaders) the Poor Relief Fund (*Szegényeket Támogató Alap*, SZETA), where he met Gábor Havas and Ottilia Solt (later SZDSZ MPs). Havas and Solt, two non-Roma sociologists and leaders in the pro-Roma and pro-poor movements, were both Phralipe founders and SZDSZ members (Solt was also a founder of SZDSZ). For the interconnections between movements, see Endnote "a" in Section 4.1 on Solt's relationship to the large families.

[g] See related debate in the Roma movement about the strategic value of building Phralipe vs. the Roma Parliament (Kóczé et al., 2017:204-206).

[h] In 1990, SZDSZ represented the views of Phralipe experts about minority representation in the Parliament. Moreover, in 1991, the Roma Parliament, backed up by the organizations of other ethnic minorities, gained leverage over the government in the negotiations. However, in 1992, the government proposed a new draft that replaced a previous draft approved by all minority organizations. Several Roma organizations and SZDSZ were reluctant or had no self-interest in taking a radical stance against the move. The Parliament almost unanimously passed the diluted version of the minority rights law in July 1993.

[i] Flórián Farkas was a member of the National Gypsy Council set up in 1986, and the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Gypsies set up in February 1989. He established his advocacy alliance called Lungo Drom in 1990 (Kovats, 1998:162).

[j] RPA addressed various policy areas such as education, employment, housing, media representation, and anti-discrimination. Besides its invaluable work in housing, RPA built significant pillars of the Roma movement, such as a media outlet called the Roma Press Center (Roma Sajtóközpont) in 1995 and a scholarship program for higher education students, Romaversitas, in 1996. It has also shaped memory politics through the commemoration of the Roma Holocaust (Porajmos).

[k] The most famous cases are Székesfehérvár between 1995 and 1998, Budapest (Erzsébetváros, Ferencváros, Józsefváros, Zugló, etc.) between 1995 and 2010, Ózd in 1997, Monor and Sátoraljaújhely in 2000, and Paks in 2002.

[l] The bill accelerating squatters' eviction (Law of 2000 (XLI) on Housing Units) followed another legislation that criminalized squatting after March 2000 (Law of 1999 (LXIX) on Misdemeanor). The so-called Lex Juharos bill of 2000, which passed on May 24, 2000, enabled notaries to order evictions of squatters from public housing within eight days' effect if the unit had been occupied for not longer than 60 days.

[m] Initially, the government anticipated allocating 10.5 billion HUF to dismantle 440-667 enclaves and segregated neighborhoods (Farkas, 2017:90). The budget eventually shrank to 3.2 billion HUF, and a model program of 47 small towns or villages (54 enclaves and neighborhoods), including rehabilitating segregated neighborhoods instead of dismantling them. Only a few hundred families received support over the five years of the program (2005-2010) (Farkas, 2017:102).

[n] The "revolving door" effect between the movement and politics characterized the careers of several people around RPA. Horváth founded the Anti-Ghetto Committee, as well as Phralipe, in 1989, and was an SZDSZ MP between 1990 and 1994. He was the president of RPA between 1995 and 2010 and worked for the MSZP-SZDSZ governments between 2002 and 2005. Bársony had been an SZDSZ representative in the Budapest City Hall between 1990 and 1994 before he became the program director at RPA. Members of the board had similar patterns. Blanka Kozma was the president of a Roma women's organization (*Közéleti Roma Nők Egyesülete*) while she represented SZDSZ in the Budapest City Hall. She unsuccessfully ran for office in the general elections in 2002 on an SZDSZ ticket, and also engaged in politics at different levels within the Roma minority self-government system. Gábor Iványi, a non-Roma, was an SZDSZ MP between 1990 and 1994, and between 1998 and 2002, and a methodist pastor and the president of a homeless shelter (*Oltalom*) since 1989. Another board member, Károly Bárd, a non-Roma, was a vice-minister between 1989 and 1990 during late state socialism and an undersecretary of the MDF-led government between 1990 and 1994. Eventually, he became a law professor at the Central European University (CEU).

[o] RPA turned to the Constitutional Court in September 2000, and argued that the "Lex Juharos" legislation, which accelerated squatters' eviction under certain conditions, violated the right to social security (Czene, 2000:4). It was the first and only, albeit unsuccessful, attempt to enforce the human right to housing referencing the constitution in Hungary. The Constitutional Court rejected the motion in 2002, declaring that although the state is responsible for providing accommodations after evictions, the decision concerning the mode of accommodation

is within its jurisdiction (The Constitutional Court's Resolution of 71/2002. (XII. 17.), https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2002-71-30-75).

[p] RPA built relationships with Roma communities in Monor (Budapest's metro area), Kecskemét (Central Hungary), Paks, Székesfehérvár (Western Hungary), Miskolc, Ózd, and Sátoraljaújhely (Eastern Hungary). Several local activists were also involved in religious groups and built mostly Pentecostal congregations, e.g., in Hajdúhadház (Aladár Horváth, interview by author, April 30, 2024).

[r] For comparison, disability movement organizations collected over 50,000 signatures for a popular initiative in the same year (Sebály, 2020).

4.4 Homeless people: a conflictual-advocative strategy

The City Is For All (*A Város Mindenkié*, AVM) was an influential community organization of homeless people and their allies[1] with a mission to advance the right to housing and access to public housing. From 2009, for about ten years, AVM had provided homeless people and people on the brink of eviction with immense support to regain their political agency and reframe homelessness from a problem of the shelter care system to a housing issue.[2] AVM was also a source of inspiration and expertise for the birth of three organizations with complementary profile: the Street Lawyers legal clinic (*Utcajogász*), the From Streets to Homes! housing agency (*Utcáról Lakásba! Egyesület*), and the School of Public Life training institute (*Közélet Iskolája*) (Udvarhelyi, 2019). With the help of this infrastructure, AVM could expand on the legacy of the Roma Civil Rights Foundation (*Roma Polgárjogi Alapítvány*, RPA) (see Section 4.3) by combining legal advocacy, social work, and civil disobedience with the organizing of a base.

The case study presents that AVM's conflictual-advocative strategy, i.e., its "frontal" attacks targeting municipalities and governments by utilizing cultural, policy, and organizational resources without a mass base, enabled the organization to show resistance in a hostile illiberal regime. The small, politically trained vanguard base of constituents and their allies was able to position the organization as a significant player, which endowed the homeless constituency with a symbolic value in the left-liberal political bloc aspiring for counter-hegemony. At the same time, I argue that the "frontal" attacks resulted in hard-fought but incremental changes, and did not exploit the possibilities of the political moment. The case

[1] The author of the dissertation is among the founders of The City Is For All, where she served as an organizer between 2009 and 2017. See Chapter 1 for more details how this position informs the research.
[2] AVM was established in 2009 and lost much of its homeless constituency base after 2018. The organization announced in 2023 that it will operate as an activist organization without actively recruiting homeless members. AVM still exists with this profile.

study plays with the counterfactual: had AVM followed an integrative-representative strategy and used the opportunity inherent in the global financial crisis and the electoral success of its political ally, LMP, in 2009-2010, could it have built a mass movement (a movement of various affected constituencies), and effectively counterbalanced Fidesz's illiberal housing economy?

4.4.1 The position of AVM, and housing during the illiberal housing economy (2010-2024)[3]

The Hungarian political landscape was poised to undergo a fundamental change in 2009. The conservative Fidesz was preparing its political comeback after eight years of left-liberal governing (2002-2010), while two new political parties, the green LMP and the far-right Jobbik, became strong enough to win parliamentary mandates in the 2010 general elections. All three parties gained leverage due to massive social movement support (Bozóki, 2014; Róna, 2016; Greskovits, 2017). Moreover, the housing movement infrastructure was also changing. RPA, protecting primarily Roma squatters and at-risk public housing tenants, terminated its operation in 2010, leaving a vacuum. A pro-homeless activist organization called People of the Streets (*Az Utca Embere*) also ceased to exist in 2009 after five years of operation (Sebály, 2022b:51-57). In addition, due to the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, thousands of homeowners were about to lose their homes, and many more constituencies struggled with covering their monthly housing expenses (Sebály, 2022b:62-64).

This was the political moment when four activists of the former People of the Streets, Éva Tessza Udvarhelyi, Bálint Misetics, Anna Bende, and Bálint Vojtonovszki, decided to advance the struggle for affordable housing through homeless leadership. They socialized in the activist culture during the heydays of the alter-globalization movement in the 2000s. They

[3] Although AVM was established in August 2009, at the dusk of neoliberal state building, the organization exerted most of its influence during the illiberal period (2010-present). 2024 is the last year of the analysis.

mastered the use of creative disruption and the media, and organized highly publicized performative actions such as sleep-ins in underpasses – but without the participation of homeless people (Udvarhelyi & Nagy, 2008; Sebály, 2022b:57-59). The encounter of Misetics and Udvarhelyi with the American homeless community organization Picture the Homeless (PTH) during their studies in the U.S. inspired them to level up homeless advocacy in Hungary by building a homeless-led group. The plan was informed by the Right to the City concept that emphasizes inclusivity, accessibility, and democracy in urban spaces.

AVM was founded in August 2009 in a three-day training at a community center[a] in Józsefváros (the 8th district of Budapest) by approximately fifteen homeless and fifteen non-homeless people (Misetics, 2017:393-396). Although only a fraction of the founding members stayed with the organization, the initial, closely-knit, Budapest-focused, medium-sized group (25-30 people) remained AVM's core structure (see Appendix 4 for membership data). The majority of the membership consisted of people living in homeless shelters, shacks, or sleeping rough, as well as low-income tenants, and squatters. They were supported by a handful of skilled activists (allies) not directly impacted by housing problems, all working voluntarily (Udvarhelyi, 2014a; Sebály, 2015, 2022a; Misetics, 2017). From the beginning, Udvarhelyi, Misetics, Bende, and Vojtonovszki placed the newly formed organization on a dynamic, progressive track. By providing a firm but inclusive leadership, motored by Udvarhelyi's charisma, they guided the heterogeneous group through the group formation phase, and injected the organization into the "bloodstream" of progressive leftist politics (A Város Mindenkié a Meleg, 2009; A Város Mindenkié az LMP, 2009).[b]

As a result, after the April 2010 elections, the homeless constituency entered the new period of state building more potent than ever before.[4] AVM had good visibility in the media (Ha nem látszik, 2009; 24 órát, 2010), and was increasingly recognized by professional circles (Csepregi, 2009; Erdős B., 2010b). Directly impacted members talked to journalists and decision-makers. Moreover, the newly elected green party LMP was a close ally, some of whose chapters (Csepel, Kispest) were particularly interested in the rights of homeless people (Csepi, 2010; Fné, 2010). In addition, LMP's housing policy expert was the AVM member Misetics. Consequently, the party's housing platform, co-authored by Misetics, laid out the principles of a progressive housing policy, and declared that housing was key to reducing street homelessness, and the right to housing should be enshrined in the constitution (A fenntartható jövő, 2010:87-95).

The longtime lack of affordable housing exacerbated by the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis (see Chapter 3.2.2) provided a political opportunity to organize a mass base, forcing the new administration to make concessions. Nevertheless, when the new Fidesz-KDNP government was formed in May 2010, AVM was engaged in civil disobedience related to the eviction of a squatting family in one district of Budapest (Alterglob, 2010; Nem megyünk, 2010). Generating media attention around the right to housing through this single municipal focus was out of sync with the political moment.[c] AVM first attempted to unite various constituencies – students, victims of domestic violence, low-income tenants, indebted homeowners, and homeless people – around affordable housing only at the end of 2012 (A karácsonyt, 2012). The low-key protest was not followed by systematic coalition-building. Nor was AVM's ideological ally, LMP, included even though it made more than a dozen

[4] At the turn of the 1990s, homeless people used the democratic opening to mobilize for housing. They received only paternalizing support from intellectuals, which led to the founding of the shelter care system (Sebály, 2022:46-49).

interventions in the parliament between June 2010 and 2013 to advance the codification of the right to housing, and regularly spoke up for homeless people and other housing constituencies (e.g., Jegyzőkönyvek, 2010, 2012, 2013).

In September 2010, the Ministry of Interior introduced a bill to enable municipal governments to "expel homeless people from public spaces" and sanction "sleeping on the streets" (Erdős B., 2010a).[5] From then on, the fight against the criminalization of homelessness dominated AVM's campaign agenda, media presence, and interactions with decision-makers for eight years. The government used its 2/3 majority to enshrine homeless people's criminalization in the constitution in 2013 and 2018 (Kriminalizáció, 2011; The criminalization, 2013; Börtönbe zárni, 2018). AVM aimed to mitigate the consequences by legal means and data collection until it became clear that the criminalization was hardly enforced (probably in part due to AVM's campaign) (Udvarhelyi, 2014b). However, the myriad actions against the criminalization of homeless people diverted significant energy and space away from framing housing issues, even though the campaign slogan connected criminalization to housing (Lakhatást, ne zaklatást!, 2010; Második Üres, 2012).

Being an outrageous example of institutional violence, the criminalization of homelessness became one of the symbols of Fidesz's anti-poor and anti-democratic measures in Hungary and abroad (International days, 2014). Consequently, AVM joined protests to protect the rule of law as early as November 2010, and joined anti-government demonstrations in 2012 with its homeless members speaking on the stage to thousands of people (A Város Mindenkié csoport kiáll, 2010; Az AVM beszéde, 2012). Moreover, in 2013, AVM's several homeless and non-homeless activists participated in a civil disobedience action organized by

[5] Az épített környezet alakításáról és védelméről szóló 1997. évi LXXVIII. törvény, és a területfejlesztésről és területrendezésről szóló 1996. évi XXI. törvény módosításáról, https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/1997-78-00-00

an activist group. They occupied the headquarters of Fidesz-KDNP to protest the amendment of the constitution (Lakatosné, 2013).[d]

Parties were considered potential allies or targets in this struggle for visibility and influence, depending on their stance on a particular issue.[6] AVM assessed all party platforms from a housing standpoint every election year, mobilized homeless voters in shelters, and promoted its housing policy proposals (Választási programok, 2010; Választási tájékoztatók, 2010). Due to personal and ideological connections, the organization cooperated more often with LMP than other parties, but this cooperation was instrumental and issue-based. AVM "used" LMP to acquire information, introduce a bill, or give the organization the right to speak in the parliament or the Budapest general assembly (Misetics, 2010; Ne legyen többé, 2013; Párbeszéd, 2015). At the same time, AVM reiterated several times on its website that it is non-partisan and has no political connection to LMP (Tévhitek, 2013; Az érdekvédelem, 2016). AVM members with LMP affiliations were asked to compartmentalize political and civic roles when appearing in public, and LMP politicians were told not to dominate the media space at the expense of an AVM action (compare this to NOE in Chapter 4.1). The organization's internal policy about parties captured this approach: "Demand, share, oppose, put pressure, no friendships" (Viszonyunk, 2010).

By the start of the third Orbán-government (2014-2018)[7], AVM became an iconic actor of resistance against the autocratizing regime. The organization's creative performative actions and its authentic approach to homeless leadership lent AVM publicity, significantly shaping public and movement discourse about homelessness and housing (A Város Mindenkié a sajtóban, n.d.; Fotók: a földre feküdtek, 2011; Üldözés, 2016; Mészáros, 2021). AVM's

[6] AVM categorically excluded cooperation with the far-right party Jobbik. From 2012, Jobbik consistently advanced the cause of foreign exchange debtors (see Section 4.4).
[7] The sequence of the so far five Orbán governments are as follows: (1) 1998-2002, (2) 2010-2014, (3) 2014-2018, (4) 2018-2022, and (5) 2022-present.

signature event, the annual "vacant housing" march, which drew attention to the vast number of empty units in Budapest, became a must-attend for many progressive activists and professionals (Egy szombat, 2014; Háromszáz ember, 2015). At the same time, AVM actions were characterized by a low turnout from a dozen to a few hundred people, with low participation of directly impacted people.[e] The level of support towards the organization was better expressed online with its 19,000 Facebook followers, and the 13,500 people signing one of its petitions (Stop kilakoltatás, 2018).[f]

AVM could claim success in preventing or mitigating the consequences of evictions of hundreds of people from public housing units and shacks (A Város Mindenkié – kilakoltatás, n.d.). These actions had some deterring effects on municipalities, and reinforced compliance with the law. In one of these cases, when a Fidesz-led district city hall[8] demolished four homeless people's shacks and moveable assets without due process, AVM took the case to court. The court acknowledged the homeless people's right to their property and ordered the city hall to pay each victim 500,000 HUF, and issue an apology (Legally binding, 2014).

The SMO's single housing policy achievement which provided material or symbolic gains beyond individuals or small groups followed from a similar anti-eviction action. In 2014, after AVM prevented the demolition of shacks in a Fidesz-led district of Budapest[9], it was able to persuade the city hall to allocate two vacant public housing units to people living in shacks. The victory gave impetus to the formation of the From Streets to Homes! housing agency, which started a cooperation with the municipality. As a result, the municipality extended the

[8] Zugló, the 14th district of Budapest.
[9] It was Kőbánya, the 10th district of Budapest. The action took place in 2012, the negotiations happened over 2012 and 2013, the first two couples moved in in 2013, and the commitment to extend the program annually was made in 2014. It became the first long-term Housing First Program, i.e., an initiative to provide homeless people living in shacks with housing without requiring them to use the shelter system.

scheme with two additional units every year, and the housing agency was able to launch similar "Housing First" programs[10] in other districts (Kovács, 2014; Sebály, 2022b:68, 70-71).

While focusing on resistance, evictions, and campaigns around the needs and dignity of homeless people,[g] AVM missed an opportunity to shape existing national-level public housing schemes with significant funding. First, it failed to tap into the potential of the "Successful Hungary" Public Housing Loan Program ("Sikeres Magyarországért" Bérlakás Hitelprogram)[11], created under the MSZP-SZDSZ government in 2006, and kept in effect until 2012 (see Chapter 3.2.2). The program provided municipal governments with credit to increase their public housing portfolio.[h] Besides a minor effort to request data about the program's efficiency (Adatkérés, 2010), AVM did not use this policy opportunity to scaffold its advocacy.

Similarly, the organization did not try to influence Fidesz-KDNP's public housing program. In 2011, the government established the National Asset Management Ltd. (*Nemzeti Eszközkezelő Zrt.,* NET) to support low-income indebted homeowners after the global financial crisis (see Chapter 3.2.3). By buying the debtors' property where they could stay as tenants and retain a buy-back option, NET had accumulated a public housing portfolio of about 35-40,000 units (Lovas, 2017; Csizmady et al., 2019:20).[12] AVM neither significantly dealt with this scheme (Petícióval, 2016; Udvarhelyi, 2016) nor protested when the government shut down the program in 2019.[i] The potential of NET was recognized by Habitat for Humanity Hungary and the Metropolitan Research Institute (*Városkutatás Kft.*) (Hegedüs, 2018b:106; Szurovecz, 2021).

[10] In Housing First programs, homeless people with psychiatric and/or addiction problems sleeping rough move directly into permanent housing and receive other complex, integrated support. In this case, the program provides homeless people living in shacks with housing without requiring them to use the shelter system.
[11] "Sikeres Magyarországért" Bérlakás Hitelprogram, https://www.mfb.hu/lezarult-mfb-programok/onkormanyzatok/berlakas-hitelprogram-s753
[12] 35-40,000 public housing units made up about 35 percent of all municipality-owned public housing units in 2017 (KSH, 2023).

In 2018, AVM shifted the framing and level of its anti-eviction struggles with the "family-friendly" government: it aimed to pass a bill[13] that would have prevented the eviction of families with children without adequate alternative housing (Gyerekek, 2018). Opposition parties supporting the bill within the parliament were reinforced by a handful of AVM activists protesting in front of the building, and a petition supported by 13,500 people (A Fidesz miatt, 2018; "Magyarország nem," 2018; Stopkilakoltatás, 2018).[j] Fidesz-KDNP consistently boycotted the parliamentary meetings with the bill on the agenda between February 2018 and May 2019, and did not negotiate with the organization (A Fidesz ismét nem, 2019). AVM did not get further with its other signature campaign, which focused on address registration anomalies, affecting access to services, employment, or other opportunities for 60,000 people. After a meeting with the relevant ministry and a petition supported by 2,500 people in 2016, the ministry issued a draft ordinance without an effective solution a year later (A "családbarát," 2017; Bürokratikus, 2017).

Nonetheless, by 2018, the confluence of the government's centralization of power, its anti-homeless measures, and LMP's relegation in 2013 due to power struggles within the left-liberal opposition led AVM into an amalgamated left-liberal political bloc. The respect and publicity surrounding AVM enabled the organization to recruit multi-party support for a comprehensive housing policy agenda before the 2018 general elections (Hat párt, 2017).[k] Although the opposition lost the elections, they won the majority of the districts in Budapest during the 2019 municipal elections. Several successful candidates, including Gergely Karácsony, the chief mayoral candidate, campaigned on housing issues in the run-up to the elections, including at AVM's annual vacant housing march a few days before the elections (Blaskó, 2019; Domschitz, 2019a; EF, 2019; Polgármester-választás, 2019). Moreover,

[13] Törvényjavaslat 2018 (T/19750.); Törvényjavaslat 2019 (T/5905.)

AVM's two non-homeless leaders, Bálint Misetics and Éva Tessza Udvarhelyi, were hired in the Budapest City Hall and the Józsefváros City Hall (8th district of Budapest), respectively.

Therefore, the 2019 municipal victory held out the potential of achieving a structural and substantive breakthrough in various districts of Budapest. However, the political moment concurred with AVM losing steam and the ability to target potentially responsive politicians. Despite the lack of outside pressure from AVM, former members Misetics and Udvarhelyi achieved important outcomes at a local level. The Karácsony-led Budapest City Hall, shaped by Misetics as housing and social policy advisor, took significant steps to expand the housing of homeless people in its first term (2019-2024[14]). The municipality redesigned the redistributive mechanisms of its public housing units to prioritize homeless beneficiaries, and provided more than 350 people (individuals, couples, and families with children in the shelter care systems) with housing in more than 200 units.[15]

Moreover, the city hall renovated more than 60 formerly uninhabitable public housing units, won a grant to create 26 new units, and established a housing agency to integrate vacant private apartments into its rental system (Kacskovics, 2021; Eddig három, 2024; Karácsony, 2024:12-13). The Budapest Mayor hired Vera Kovács, a former AVM activist and the president of From Streets to Homes!, to lay the foundations of the housing agency. Nevertheless, the Budapest City Hall failed to use its political leverage to advance a Budapest-wide housing agenda even though Mayor Karácsony enjoyed left-liberal majority support in the Budapest general assembly. Indeed, in Budapest, each district is a separate administrative unit; therefore, the Budapest City Hall has limited administrative capacity to introduce city-wide policies. Leverage requires the organizing of diverging political interests. Although the Budapest City

[14] Gergely Karácsony started its second term in 2024, the last year of the examined period of this dissertation.
[15] The Budapest City Hall owns 1,200 units (onkormanyzatilakasok.periferiakozpont.hu), and there are about 10-15,000 homeless people in Budapest (Győri, 2020:353; Holló, 2022; Jeki 2023).

Hall's leadership was best positioned to build a progressive housing platform of district city halls, and address the housing crisis collectively, it did not prioritize this task or lacked the necessary organizing skills.

Udvarhelyi also achieved significant policy outcomes in the Józsefváros City Hall. This district did a significant overhaul of its housing policy in its first term (2019-2024). It reformed its public housing management system, introduced a housing allowance, redesigned its debt management program, and set up a housing agency (Nagy & Czirfusz, 2024). It took on the conversion of its housing portfolio by renovating dilapidated units, moving tenants living in severely dilapidated buildings to the upgraded units, demolishing the dilapidated buildings, and using the income to increase affordable housing. Between 2019 and 2024, Udvarhelyi was responsible for making the city hall's operation client-friendly and its decision-making participatory; since 2024, she has worked as a vice-mayor. The city hall's complex approach to housing received recognition from Habitat for Humanity Hungary (Nagy & Czirfusz, 2024). At the same time, what the Budapest City Hall and the Józsefváros City Hall have done is rare but not unique. They increased the small number of municipal governments (e.g., Angyalföld, Szeged, Terézváros, Szombathely, see more in Nagy & Czirfusz, 2024) that can boast of exemplary or innovative housing policies.

Overall, AVM gained a symbolic value in the amalgamated left-liberal political bloc but could not make the bloc accountable for its 2018 election promises (Hat párt, 2017). Policy outcomes remained partial and agent-dependent; decision-makers hardly moved without civic pressure. Even the Józsefváros City Hall asserted progressive housing policies only after Udvarhelyi had exerted leverage, and external pressure from a newly formed tenant association (Tenant Association of Józsefváros, *Józsefvárosi Bérlői Érdekvédelmi Közösség*) helped her move things forward in the initially slow-moving city hall (Udvarhelyi, 2023). As key members of AVM moved into new roles, AVM's influence in the housing movement diminished after

2019.[l] The vacuum was soon filled by a coalition of expert organizations (Housing Coalition, *Lakhatási Koalíció)* spearheaded by From Streets to Homes!, Habitat for Humanity Hungary, Periféria Policy and Research Center, Metropolitan Research Institute (*Városkutatás Kft.*), and Street Lawyers Association (see full membership in Chapter 3.3). They pledged politicians to a progressive housing agenda during the 2019 and 2024 elections (*lakhatasiminimum.hu*), marking a new phase of the progressive housing movement infrastructure.

Endnotes

[a] The community center is called "Take action for humanity!" Center (*"Tégy az emberért!" központ*). The center is owned by the state and managed by the Public Foundation for the Homeless (*Hajléktalanokért Közalapítvány*) and the Shelter Foundation (*Menhely Alapítvány*). The center remained AVM's headquarters.

[b] Already in the first few months, homeless members worked with a consultative platform of shelters (*Tízek Tanácsa*), attended the LGBTQ+ Pride March, visited a Roma women's group in Eastern Hungary, and gave interviews to the media (24 órát, 2010; A Város Mindenkié a Meleg, 2009; A Város Mindenkié az LMP, 2009; Csepregi, 2009; Erdős B., 2010b; Ha nem látszik, 2009).

[c] In July 2010, AVM's homeless leader Gyula Balog, and AVM member Bálint Misetics, on behalf of AVM, argued the importance of enshrining the right to housing into the constitution at the housing parliamentary subcommittee presided by LMP (Misetics, 2010).

[d] This strong oppositional – pro-democracy – stance was somewhat counterbalanced by the fact that AVM's homeless leader, Gyula Balog, worked as an expert by experience in the Ministry of Human Resources between October 2010 and June 2011 through a program independent of AVM. AVM aimed to inject its ideas through Balog into the ministry's homeless strategy. Still, fearing co-optation and tokenism, the organization eventually encouraged Balog to resign in a performative press conference organized by AVM (Balog, 2011).

[e] The "vacant housing" march usually mobilized 150-300 people (Fotók: tüntet a belvárosban, 2014; Háromszáz ember, 2015). The highest turnout attained by AVM was about 600 people at a protest against the criminalization of homelessness in 2011 (Király, 2011; Több száz ember, 2011), and 600 people at the "vacant housing" march in 2019 before the municipal elections (Domschitz, 2019a). Both events had a low proportion of directly impacted people, even though AVM put immense efforts into recruitment, from posters in shelters to community programs and one-to-one outreach (Sebály, 2022a:54).

[f] In comparison, caregivers collected more than 50,000 signatures in the same year on the same online organizing platform in support of increasing their benefit to the level of the minimum wage. The action was part of a six-year campaign, which also enjoyed the support of opposition parties, and, to the surprise of many, reached its goal in October 2018 (Sebály, 2020, 2023).

[g] AVM was running campaigns to introduce free public toilets, solve address registration anomalies to enable access to benefits, or eliminate the shortcomings of the homeless care system, such as austerity measures disguised as administrative failures, and the lack of availability of daycare services during weekends, or enough luggage storage. Despite the AVM-friendly Budapest City Hall and AVM's 9-year campaign (2011-2020) on the issue, the public toilet situation in Budapest has not improved (A Város Mindenkié – wc, n.d.; Weiler, 2024). The SMO achieved temporary outcomes in the second and third campaigns, and limited success in the last campaign (Megérte, 2017; A Város Mindenkié – kenyszi, n.d.).

[h] The "Successful Hungary" Public Housing Loan Program was unpopular because of the financial risks associated with operating public housing. At the same time, a few dozen municipalities with experience in public housing management (or with a vision) requested the credit, such as the MSZP-led Kőbánya City Hall in 2009. It aimed to extend its public housing portfolio by 42 units (Javaslat, 2009). It shows the organizing potential of the program that the Kőbánya City Hall introduced Housing First under a Fidesz mayor as a result of an AVM action described above.

[i] NET sold the housing stock to the former owners and handed over the remaining few thousand units for free to a housing agency set up for the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta and the Hungarian Charity Service of the Reformed Church (Szurovecz, 2021).

[j] For comparison, see Endnote f.

[k] At a candidate forum in October 2017, six parties, namely DK, Együtt, LMP, MSZP, Momentum, and Párbeszéd, publicly agreed to enshrine the right to housing in the constitution (which the Constitutional Court rejected in 2002), reform and significantly expand the public housing sector, reintroduce the housing benefit and debt management program (which Fidesz abolished in 2015), make the private rental sector safer and more affordable, institutionalize the right to housing for families with children, and immediately repeal legislation criminalizing squatting and homelessness (which Fidesz introduced in 2000 and 2013, respectively) (Hat Párt, 2017).

[l] One of the last campaigns was against excessive AirBnB rentals in 2020. Despite the issue's organizing potential, AVM managed to collect 1,800 signatures in support of its petition (STOP AirBnB, 2020).

4.5 Indebted homeowners: a conflictual-representative strategy

Home Defenders (*Otthonvédők*) was a loose network of more than a dozen organizations of mortgage debtors who were threatened with losing their homes in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Starting in 2009, Home Defenders had been "at war" with banks and debt collectors for almost ten years. Their battles in courts, the streets, and people's homes against unfairly increased debt and evictions assumed a semi-military character due to highly confrontational direct actions, radical self-defense, and physical violence against property. Their freedom-fighting rhetoric to defend the Hungarian nation and the rule of law against the encroachment of banks combined an anti-capitalist and radical democratic flavor with a pro-Hungarian, nationalistic stance.

The case study argues that despite their politically favorable position in the beginning of the illiberal housing economy, Home Defenders could not leverage enough power to become central to the solidifying illiberal regime. Although they built a mass base, it was spread out within an incoherent network of organizations. Moreover, their tactical relationship with parties prevented them from building a political alliance with the ideologically aligned Jobbik, which could have increased pressure on Fidesz-KDNP. As a result, Viktor Orbán's government bailed on the invalidation of foreign exchange loan contracts, converted the loans into forint at the actual exchange rate (instead of the original exchange rate), and scaffolded the illiberal state's budget at the expense of tens of thousands of households. Overall, an estimated 340,000 people (40 percent of the 850,000 households with forint and foreign currency mortgage) suffered severe financial losses in the aftermath of the global financial crisis (Csizmady et al., 2019:21)

4.5.1 The position of Home Defenders, and housing during the neoliberal housing economy (2009-2010)[1]

In 2004, the MSZP-SZDSZ government phased out lavish state-subsidized housing loans introduced by the Fidesz-KDNP government in 2001. However, the unsubsidized forint loans were expensive, and foreign currency loan products with lower interest rates became increasingly popular. As the share of foreign currency loans grew from 1 percent to 63 percent between 2000 and 2008 (Csizmady et al., 2019:11-12), a new, diverse housing constituency emerged. Foreign exchange mortgage debtors comprised upper-middle-class to low-income constituents across different geographies.[a] As banks downplayed the risk of exchange rate change and loosened the credit approval system, low-income and lower-middle class people were prone to financial damage, status loss, and impoverishment. When the loan scheme imploded after the 2008 economic crisis, Hungary's central bank and leading analysts reiterated the debtors' responsibility and presented the issue as a middle-class problem. On this basis, the Gyurcsány (2005-2009) and Bajnai (2009-2010) governments took minimal measures to prevent widespread evictions (Sarkadi, 2018; Csizmady et al., 2019:11-19; Ki volt a felelős, 2019).

The first response to banks' encroachment came from indebted entrepreneurs as an act of solidarity. The Alliance for the Protection of the Interests of Entrepreneurs (*Vállalkozók Érdekvédelmi Szövetsége*, VÉSZ) claimed to have formed several hundred rapid response self-defense zones nationwide in May 2009 (Szalai, 2009:4).[b] VÉSZ took on a highly confrontational attitude. They chased away debt collectors and intimidatingly showed up at auctions and banks (Csécsi, 2009; Szeredi, 2009; Bankrablásnak, 2011). The crisis moment prompted the alliance of Home Defenders, a network of various – far-left, radical nationalist,

[1] 2009 refers to the foundation of VÉSZ, the first movement organization of Home Defenders.

and far-right – organizations,[c] of which VÉSZ became a member (Janecskó, 2009; Szentkirályi, 2010).

Home Defenders launched a war against financial institutions. In July 2009, VÉSZ called on banks to declare a foreclosure moratorium, blacklisted several banks, sent them threatening letters, and asked the public to boycott their services (Csécsi, 2009).[d] In response, the banks filed a complaint against VÉSZ's leader, Ádám Éliás (who was convicted to a suspended prison sentence in 2011). VÉSZ used a freedom-fighting rhetoric that the next Fidesz-KDNP government soon adopted. This rhetoric was centered around protecting the Hungarian nation against the "greedy" financial system. It also assumed an anti-capitalist and anti-elitist stance with a pro-Hungarian, nationalistic flavor (Csécsi, 2009). Home Defenders could not achieve any substantive measures before the 2010 elections. However, they built a rudimentary network of activists to mitigate the brutal consequences of the financial breakdown, and embraced the Home Defender identity by adopting a common language to frame the crisis.

4.5.2 The position of Home Defenders, and housing during the illiberal housing economy (2010-2024)

Soon after Fidesz-KDNP won the 2010 elections with a landslide victory, Viktor Orbán marked a new era of state-building by waging a battle on banks. His government levied taxes on financial institutions as early as July 2010 and set up a parliamentary committee to investigate the responsibility of previous MSZP-SZDSZ governments in the housing crisis. Adopting the freedom-fighting rhetoric, Fidesz fostered the expectations that the government would protect mortgage debtors and make banks responsible for the drastic exchange rate. However, the incoming government's relief measures quickly disappointed many.

In 2011, the first households to benefit from the Orbán government's initial housing finance intervention, the final repayment option (*végtörlesztés*), were typically in a better financial position. Under this scheme, these debtors could repay their foreign currency loans within a limited period in one lump sum at a favorable exchange rate (affecting 170-180,000 households). The same year, the government introduced an exchange rate limit (*árfolyamgát*). This allowed debtors to pay their loans at a lower exchange rate for five years, while the rest of the debts accrued on a separate account and were exempt from interest (affecting 180,000 households). This solution was supposed to help the lower-middle class, but in reality, for many, it only postponed the threat of eviction without substantially reducing the amount of debt. The worst-off families were bailed out by the National Asset Management Ltd. (*Nemzeti Eszközkezelő Zrt.,* NET), set up by the government in 2012. It effectively created a public housing scheme by buying out former owners who became tenants in their former properties for low rents (affecting 34-36,000 households) (Csizmady et al., 2019:20; also see Chapter 3.2.3). The contrast between the government's willingness to favor better-off mortgage debtors and leave, mainly, the lower-middle class without adequate support, was conspicuous. However, the government promised more relief measures to come.

In the meantime, in the spirit of self-reliance, many debtors created self-help groups as early as 2011 to empower themselves with legal arguments and become better negotiators with their banks. Some of these groups, such as the Advocacy Alliance of Foreign Exchange Debtors (*Devizaadósok Érdekvédelmi Szövetsége*) and the Organization for the Protection of Interests of Bank Debtors (*Banki Adósok Érdekvédelmi Szervezete*, BAÉSZ), took their members' cases to court. Moreover, in 2012, Béla Balogh, a longtime radical right-wing activist, founded a national network of self-defense units, Koppány Group (*Koppány csoport*) (taking over the baton from VÉSZ). These groups demonstrated people's power at evictions, debt collector agencies, and protests (Szabó, 2018:31-32).[e] The legal breakthrough came in

April and December 2012. In April, the court of second instance ruled in favor of Árpád Kásler, the head of BAÉSZ, that some components of his foreign currency loan contract were invalid. In December, a court of second instance ruled in favor of another debtor who argued that his whole contract should be nullified (Devizahitelen, 2012; MTI, 2013a).

From then on, courts became the primary battlefield. Dozens of protests aimed to pressure the judicial system and the political elites to lean in on behalf of mortgage debtors. The biggest, organized by Kásler's BAÉSZ, mobilized 7,000-10,000 people in Budapest's Hősök Square on April 21, 2013 (Devizahitelesek tüntettek, 2013; Kásler Árpád Hősök, 2013; Gagyi & Jelinek, 2017:11). Debtors hoped the Supreme Court would align with the favorable second-instance decisions, and nullify all foreign currency loan contracts. However, on July 4, 2013, the Supreme Court declared that the loan contract nullified in December 2012 was valid (Devizahiteles, 2013).

The adverse decision came the same day that a Croatian court of first instance ruled in favor of Croatian debtors, ordering banks to convert foreign exchange debts into local currency at the original exchange rate (MTI, 2013b). That day, 100-150 protestors, mobilized by Koppány Group, marched to Viktor Orbán's house. They demanded a statement from the prime minister about the Supreme Court's decision and an immediate eviction moratorium (Fotók: Orbán, 2013; Devizahitelesek: kiment, 2013). In August, several hundred to a thousand activists, mobilized by Kásler's new organization, Homeland Is Not For Sale (*A Haza Nem Eladó*), blocked the traffic by a sit-in in Budapest's busy junction. A few days later, activists, mobilized by Koppány Group, again marched to Orbán's house, and then protested in front of the houses of a banker and other politicians[2] (Buzna-Katona, 2013; Devizahitelesek: kiment, 2013; MTI, 2013d).

[2] Banker Sándor Csányi, former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, and Speaker of the House László Kövér

In response, the government, which had been slow and vague, changed gears. In July, high-profile Fidesz-KDNP politicians[3] suggested the legal possibility of changing contracts retrospectively (Benedek, 2013:4; Csécsi, 2013:1; Kárász, 2013:34-35). The government's proactivity towards debtors was probably also a response to the far-right opposition party Jobbik's political organizing. Jobbik, Fidesz's most serious potential challenger, set up the Roundtable of Foreign Exchange Mortgage Debtors (*Devizahiteles Kerekasztal*) in April 2013. The platform issued a petition with Home Defenders' organizations demanding the favorable forint conversion of the loans, the indemnification of mortgage debtors, and the extension of the eviction moratorium (MTI, 2013c:2).

In the fall, Jobbik supported a series of demonstrations, including "guerrilla actions" with its politicians chaining themselves to banks, and a mass demonstration on October 23, 2013 (Dezső, 2013). The party consistently advanced the cause of foreign exchange debtors from as early as 2012 (A Jobbik kottájából, 2012:17; Végrehajtási moratóriumot!, 2012:6), and had ideological commonalities with many Home Defenders (Zubor, 2013). However, the most influential movement organizations did not want to legitimize the party's leadership (Szabó, 2018:46). Koppány Group was skeptical about political parties (Szabó, 2018:46), and Kásler was building his own party. Koppány Group and Kásler together organized a car march on October 20, 2013, attracting a few thousand people nationwide,[f] instead of mobilizing their followers for Jobbik's protest three days later (Fotó: így okoztak, 2013). Thus, on October 23, the national holiday celebrating the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, Jobbik spoke up for the debtors in front of 10,000-12,000 people, while Viktor Orbán talked to more than a hundred thousand followers.

[3] Antal Rogán and Tibor Navracsics

The battle was soon coming to an end on both the legal and political fronts. In December 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that foreign currency loan contracts are overall valid, even though they devolve all the risk of the foreign exchange rate change to customers. The court upheld that some components may be legally problematic, such as the unilateral modification of contracts by banks, regarding which the Supreme Court requested the opinion of the European Union's Court of Justice (Haszán, 2013). The court's decision triggered a protest by a handful of people organized by Koppány Group (Plankó, 2013), but no freedom fight from Orbán followed. He assumed a populist rhetoric, saying that Fidesz would remain on the side of the people. However, he added that the government would not decide about the conversion of loans into forint until the Supreme Court concluded the remaining questions (KaG, 2013). The prime minister was probably stalling for time until the April 2014 general elections.

The final nail in the coffin came in June 2014 when the Supreme Court ruled, once and for all, that all foreign exchange loan contracts were valid; the decision applied to any future legal cases. However, the years-long battle of mortgage debtors was not without some substantive material outcomes. Banks had to compensate debtors for losses due to unfair components of the contract, and each debtor received an average of 710,000 HUF. However, the Supreme Court did not challenge the fact that debtors unilaterally carried the financial burden of the drastic exchange rate change (Devizahitelek, 2014; Semmis, 2014).

The Orbán government then simply pointed to the Supreme Court's decision when it ordered the forint conversion in November 2014 at the actual exchange rate (instead of the original exchange rate valid at the time of signing the contract). Although in other cases, the ultra-conservative Fidesz-KDNP government did not hesitate to resort to illiberal solutions and disregard even the decision of the Constitutional Court, in this case, it conserved the amount of debt for more than a hundred thousand struggling households. However, it did not do so to

comply with the standards of liberal democracy. The forint conversion of loans at the actual exchange rate epitomized illiberal state building: the decision resulted in an extra profit of 136 billion HUF for the central bank (136 milliárdot, 2015). The illiberal state, suffering from rampant corruption, was prioritized at the expense of vulnerable households.

Although mortgage debtors were part of the rhetoric at the beginning of the illiberal turn, Home Defenders could not leverage enough influence to become central and indispensable in the solidifying illiberal counter-hegemonic bloc. Although they had a mass base, it was fragmented within a weak network, in which the leaders sometimes coordinated (Szabó, 2018:33), other times competed with one another (Zubor, 2013). This organizational structure, combined with an ambivalent approach to the Jobbik party (and perhaps with too much faith in Fidesz), prevented Home Defenders from unifying its base and building political leverage before the 2014 elections. As a result, Fidesz-KDNP could bail on the invalidation of all foreign loan contracts without consequences and harvest the fiscal benefits of the forint conversion. After 2014, debtors continued to sue the banks based on supposed legal loopholes, and maintained small-scale resistance.[g] Their success remains to be seen.

Endnotes

[a] Foreign exchange mortgage debtors predominantly included people aspiring to a middle-class status, buying or building their first homes, or fixing or extending their current house. Some took advantage of the seemingly cheap and riskless loans to increase their wealth by a second or third property or diversify their investments through real estate. In addition, a small proportion of debtors used the loan to buy a car and household utilities or cover unexpected expenses such as health care (Csizmady et al., 2019:13).

[b] Self-defense zones were created with the ambition of recruiting 40-50 members per zone, e.g., in Szerencs (Békés county), Zalaegerszeg (Zala county), Győr (Győr-Moson-Sopron county), Szolnok (Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county), and the 3rd, 11th, and 15th districts of Budapest.

[c] Home Defenders was a loose „rainbow" network of various far-left, radical nationalist, and far-right organizations, with the radical nationalists dominating. Members included VÉSZ, the Hungarian Social Forum

(*Magyar Szociális Fórum*), the Civil National Summit (*Civil Nemzeti Csúcs*), the Hungarian Communist Labor Party (*Magyar Kommunista Munkáspárt*), the White Chimney Sweepers (*Fehér Kéményseprők*), the Civil Unity Forum (*Civil Összefogás Fórum*), and Koppány Group (*Koppány Csoport*) (Szentkirályi, 2010; Több százezer, 2009).

[d] The banks filed a legal complaint against Ádám Éliás, the leader of VÉSZ, in December 2009, who was convicted to a suspended prison sentence in 2011. The sentence was lifted in 2012 (Felmentő ítélet, 2012), and the organization was abolished by a court order in 2015 (A bíróság, 2015).

[e] In 2012, Koppány's leaders went on a four-day "home defending" tour to organize a country-wide network of self-defense units reaching Kaposvár (Somogy county), Miskolc (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county), Pécs (Baranya county), Salgótarján (Nógrád county), and Szombathely (Vas county) (Kilakoltatások, 2012:3). Koppány group claimed to have chapters in 16 counties in 2013 with a handful of members and varied levels of activity (including towns such as Debrecen, Dunaújváros, and Nyíregyháza) (Elmaradt, 2013; A devizakárosultak, 2014; doszerk, 2017). Its highly confrontational direct actions to prevent evictions mobilized only a few dozen people at a time (similarly to VÉSZ). Protests outside Budapest had a similar turnout, while in Budapest, it was a few hundred people most of the time.

[f] The car march consisted of a few dozen vehicles, representing various towns such as Debrecen, Gödöllő, Hajdúszoboszló, Pápa, or Komárom-Esztergom county (Fotó: így okoztak, 2013).

[g] A new organization, I Will Not Give Up My House (*Nem Adom a Házamat)*, dominated the movement landscape between 2014 and 2017, attracting plenty of media attention by blocking traffic, occupying banks, throwing red paint on a bank's window, but mobilizing only a few dozen people (Medvegy, 2015). Koppány Group had lost steam. Kásler, at that time the head of the extra-parliamentary Homeland's Party (*A Haza Pártja*), remained the only one with some mobilizing capacity. He took his case to the European Court of Human Rights and collected 10,000 signatures to request a moratorium on debt collection from the European Union (Horváth, 2018), but he was unsuccessful. In April 2019, the Chamber of Debtors (*Adóskamara*), another short-lived formation, supported by all opposition parties, unsuccessfully aimed to enforce a European Union Court of Justice decision, which ruled that foreign exchange loan contracts can be nullified provided the contract terms were unfair (Bogatin, 2019). In 2023, a new leftist movement, Spark (*Szikra*), launched a campaign against debt collectors, spearheaded by a leftist MP, András Jámbor, with a few dozen to a few hundred people participating, and achieving minor gains (Kerner, 2022; Bányai, 2024).

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter summarizes the **findings** of the case studies and discusses their **strategic**, **policy**, **theoretical**, and **methodological implications**. In doing so, it connects the empirical analysis of Chapter 4 with the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 2 and the normative agenda of Chapter 3. Section 5.2 on the strategic lessons reflects on the structural shift, assessing the counter-hegemonic potential of the examined strategies for transforming power at state and constituency levels (see Table 2-1). Section 5.3 on policy implications addresses the substantive shift, evaluating which collective policy outcomes can be regarded as counter-hegemonic (see Table 2-1), and assessing the movement struggles in light of the normative counter-hegemonic agenda (see Chapter 3.3). The chapter concludes by highlighting the theoretical and methodological contributions and limitations.

5.1 Findings

I have set out to trace the path to radical social transformation with this dissertation. I have posed the following research question: *How do different movement strategies shape social movement organizations' ability to achieve counter-hegemonic outcomes?* I have applied a two-dimensional framework during the research, through which I examined (1) how SMOs relate to political parties that aim to govern, and (2) how they seek to strengthen the position of their constituency in social and political struggles. **Figure 5-1** evokes this framework from Chapter 2.3.3.

	Constituency power ⇒	
⇑ **State power**	**integrative-advocative (no related SMO)** • close alignment with a party • cultural, policy, or organizational resources (no mass base)	**integrative-representative (NOE, Phralipe)** • close alignment with a party • constituency resources (mass base) besides cultural, policy, or organizational resources
	conflictual-advocative (RPA, AVM) • tactical relationship with a party • cultural, policy, or organizational resources (no mass base)	**conflictual-representative (LABE, Home Defenders)** • tactical relationship with a party • constituency resources (mass base) besides cultural, policy, or organizational resources

Figure 5-1: 2x2 of four sets of movement strategies to state power and constituency power, including SMOs pursuing the strategy (see also in Chapter 2.3.3)

The main finding of the research reinforces the theoretical expectations: out of the three examined strategies, **the integrative-representative strategy has the most counter-hegemonic potential**. It has the most built-in capacity to **maximize the movement-party complementary potential** and contribute to **a structural power shift at the state level** (the rise of an ideologically aligned party to lead an emerging historical bloc) and **at the constituency level** (the centrality and indispensability of the constituency's struggles in this historical bloc) (see Table 2-1 of Chapter 2.1.2 for a recap). As exemplified by **NOE** and **Phralipe**, when these SMOs built a close, ideologically aligned relationship with a political party (integrative orientation) and cultivated a mass base of directly affected constituents (representative orientation), they could advance a congruent social change agenda with their political ally, reinforce or weaken their electoral opportunities, and make the movement constituency indispensable in an emerging historical bloc. While NOE's more than 30 years of

operation shows us an iteration of the **full-fledged counter-hegemonic mechanics**, Phralipe's limited use of this strategy only demonstrates a temporal shift of power structures.

The **representative-conflictual strategy** falls short of this counter-hegemonic potential. As exemplified by the case of the **Home Defenders**, this strategy did not allow the SMO to utilize movement and party resources fully. Instead of aligning forces and building a powerful opposition bloc with the governing parties' then most potent challenger, Jobbik, Home Defenders kept an equal distance from parties and confronted the government on their own. The strategy resulted in a substantive policy outcome (an average compensation of 710,000 HUF per debtor), but failed to force the Fidesz-KDNP government to maximize its opportunities in remedying the constituents. At the same time, the research on **LABE** shows that the conflictual-representative strategy can be a **viable approach** in those phases of social struggles when the movement has **no obvious political allies** and **must create opportunities** for aligned politicians to step forward, for new parties to emerge, or for extant parties to converge to the movement agenda. **Table 5-1** is a recap on how constituencies, SMOs, and strategies match.

Constituency	**SMO**	**Movement strategy**
Large families	NOE	Integrative-representative
Roma people	Phralipe	Integrative-representative
	RPA	Conflictual-advocative
Homeless people	AVM	Conflictual-advocative
Indebted homeowners	Home Defenders	Conflictual-representative
Public housing tenants	LABE	Conflictual-representative

Table 5-1: Overview of strategies applied by examined movement organizations and their constituencies

The potential of the **conflictual-advocative strategy** also falls behind the integrative-representative strategy. The advocacy format and the vanguard base of constituents of RPA and AVM, respectively, allowed these SMOs to **confront the state from an early stage of organization formation, generate visibility, and obtain the support of broader constituencies**. Although this strategy led to substantive policy outcomes such as an annual winter moratorium on evictions (RPA), district-level housing first programs, and the utilization of vacant housing (AVM), none of these victories were accompanied by a long-term convergence of movement-party agenda, or generated the realignment of power structures. Moreover, when movement leaders entered the state, their efforts remained individual career paths detached from the movement.

Perhaps the most surprising finding is that **social inequalities, political opportunity structures (POS), and regime types influenced SMO's strategic possibilities less** than much of the literature suggests. Low-income Roma people were able to build a mass base at a comparable pace with NOE and neck and neck with LABE at the turn of the 1990s. Homeless people built a powerful organization and achieved the most success under the illiberal regime out of the three phases of state-building. These cases point beyond the ordinary structure-agent dilemma: the cooperation between **traditional and organic intellectuals** has proved to be a decisive factor in challenging inequality, POS, and regime type constraints. Let me elaborate on all this in the next section.

5.2 Strategic lessons

In my theoretical framework (see Chapter 2), I have undertaken the task of sketching the contours of a social movement struggle leading to **counter-hegemonic social transformation**. Drawing on Gramsci, I have suggested that such a radical change first and foremost **requires**

the realignment of power among political and social groups, i.e., the rise of an ideologically aligned party to lead an emerging historical bloc, *and* the centrality of the movement constituency's struggle in this bloc (see the structural shift in Table 2-1 of Chapter 2.1.2 for a recap). The section underscores that a **counter-hegemonic approach to social change requires a specific understanding of the nature of the conflict**, its agents, and the political opportunities at play, while also reflecting on the counter-hegemonic potential of the examined strategies – integrative-representative, conflictual-representative, and conflictual-advocative.

5.2.1 Strategic engagement in the conflict over the historical bloc

Counter-hegemony is **the process and outcome** of the radical reconfiguration of power relations between social and political groups through civil society, resulting in new dominant values and policies (see Chapter 2.1.1 for the definition). As the definition of counter-hegemony indicates, its fundamental "structural event" is the **formation of a new historical bloc**: building-block alliances are disrupted, and new alliances are created, involving the **transformation of the political system** as well as **transformation of the power balance between the constituencies**.

This calls for an **utterly different orientation** from SMOs than seeking social transformation through policy change and imposing claims on reluctant polity members. Counter-hegemonic social change demands an **active strategic orientation to the conflict for and over the historical bloc**: towards the political parties that aim to grab or maintain state power and, simultaneously, towards the position of the constituency in the bloc. When the **structural shift at the state and constituency levels** happens, a **substantive shift** at the policy level follows as a "natural" outcome, provided the constituency maintains its centrality.

The benefits of this level of strategic engagement are **best exemplified by the struggles of NOE** between 1987 and 2024. Thanks to its mass base and ideologically coherent agenda,

NOE became an authoritative pillar in the conservative bloc early on, even after its first political ally, MDF, lost relevance. When Fidesz strived for dominance, first within the conservative bloc, then in the national political arena, the struggles of large families became central and their support indispensable for the party's legitimacy and success as early as 1996 (*structural outcome at the constituency level*). Although NOE maintained a pragmatic approach to all parties, it reinforced Fidesz and occupied a core position in the emerging historical bloc led by Fidesz. In 2010, this bloc radically reconfigured power relations into an illiberal regime (*structural outcome at the state level*) and, as part of that, an illiberal housing economy. The primary benefiting constituency of this housing economy (and the illiberal regime overall) has been large families. The **level of policy measures** combined with the **vehement family-friendly government rhetoric** constituted an unprecedented victory for this constituency – a victory with severe losses for low-income large families (*substantive material and symbolic outcomes*). Section 5.3 of this chapter argues from a policy perspective why NOE's "fractured" gains are counter-hegemonic. Now I continue with the next strategic lesson.

5.2.2 Constituencies in motion, contesting the historical bloc

Chances to enter the public arena as an organized and recognized constituency are far from equal, particularly in the case of marginalized or otherwise disadvantaged groups. Movements experience **unequal power distribution** *within constituencies* based on race, class, gender, disability, age, etc. (Hull et al., 1982; Arruzza et al., 2019). Power differences also manifest *between constituencies* as they may not be equally able to form associations, build positions, gain legitimacy to voice demands, and exploit political opportunities (Skocpol, 2004; Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Beinin, 2012).

Therefore, several readers may think that the social status of NOE's membership – predominantly white, lower-middle-class and middle-class large families – should explain its

victory. At the end of the day, out of the six examined movement organizations, only NOE has been able to hold out for more than 30 years, so **why would such a long, uninterrupted presence with a politically "uncontroversial" membership not inevitably result in substantial outcomes, no matter the strategy?** Other readers may hold that vulnerable groups have limited strategic choices: they are less likely to build a mass base and find an ideologically aligned political ally, which also gives NOE an edge. Without denying that chances to build positions as an organized and recognized constituency are far from equal for marginalized or otherwise disadvantaged constituencies (Sebály, 2015, 2022a, 2022b, 2023), I aim to **refine these "inequality" arguments from a strategy perspective**.

Among my cases, two SMOs applied what I have identified as an ***integrative-representative strategy***: **NOE** and **Phralipe**. Despite the enormous social gap between their constituencies, on the one hand, the predominantly white, lower-middle-class and middle-class large families, and on the other, the predominantly low-income Roma families, both organizations **hit the ground running at a comparable pace**. Although NOE fared better at the turn of the 1990s, Phralipe's akin movement strategy attained similarly significant power at both the state and constituency levels. After four years of operation, **NOE counted 6,000 families** and 74 local chapters, while **Phralipe had 7,800 members** with local chapters in 73 municipalities (see Appendices 1 and 3). NOE cultivated a close **relationship with the governing parties** MDF and KDNP, and two of its founders held ministerial positions. At the same time, Phralipe had a **potent alliance with the strongest opposition party** SZDSZ, and two of its Roma founders and two of its closest non-Roma allies became MPs. Moreover, several references in the case studies underscore how both SMOs were moving towards the center of the emerging historical bloc (see the Budapest, Nagykanizsa, and Tatabánya chapters in the case of Phralipe in Chapter 4.3). These data suggest that low-income Roma people were

able to use the political opening at the turn of the 1990s just as well as lower-middle-class and middle-class large families.

AVM further refines the inequality argument. The organization applying what I identify as a ***conflictual-advocative strategy*** was able to **generate previously unseen visibility and social and political support** for homeless people through a small, politically trained vanguard base of constituents and their allies **during the illiberal regime** (see Chapter 4.4). The respect and publicity surrounding AVM in the opposition bloc enabled the SMO to recruit the support of the opposition parties for a comprehensive housing policy agenda before the 2018 general elections, and to inject two movement leaders into municipal politics. Under the illiberal pressure, the opposition bloc countering the regime was so thirsty for electoral support that AVM (thanks to its cultural, policy, and organizational resources) was seen as a potential source to gain the backing of broader constituencies.

Indeed, good organizing is impossible without taking inequalities within and between constituencies seriously (Misetics, 2017; Udvarhelyi, 2019; Sebály, 2022a, 2023). At the same time, my findings accentuate an equally important – counter-hegemonic – perspective about social movement struggles: **constituency positions are "not finite but ongoing and changing" across historical blocs** (Filc, 2021:28). Various "tectonic" shifts underscore this intellectual and strategic position: the historic achievements of the abolitionist movement, the labor movement, the feminist movement, the Civil Rights Movement, the disability movement, the LGBTQ+ movement, etc. Moreover, constituency power does not always depend on a mass base – the *functional* value or utility of cultural, policy, or organizational resources can occasionally make a constituency politically appealing. Consider the achievements of the trans movement: a relatively small group, transgender people, were able to occupy a central position in the struggle for competing historical blocs in contemporary American politics. I conclude with Jack Goldstone's words: it is "more accurate to think of a continuum of alignment and

influence, with some groups having very little access and influence through conventional politics, others having somewhat more, and still others quite a lot; but groups may move up and down this continuum fairly quickly, depending on shifts in state and party alignments" (2003:9).

5.2.3 Organic and traditional intellectuals as agents of struggle

The observations about Phralipe and AVM above also elucidate the cooperation of whom Gramsci calls **organic and traditional intellectuals** in social struggles. In the Gramscian sense, organic intellectuals emerge from a specific class (or social group), but stay engaged with that class to articulate its interests and aspirations, and channel ideas for political action. Traditional intellectuals are specialists such as scientists, politicians, bureaucrats, managers, clergy (and I add civic professionals); the struggle for dominance includes their ideological assimilation (Gramsci, [1929] 1999:131-133; Martin, 2023:Section 3.3).

The struggles of Phralipe and AVM have shown that the cooperation between **organic and traditional intellectuals** could **compensate for a good deal of the severe inequalities** of low-income Roma people and homeless people. In case of **Phralipe**, the alliance between the **leading liberal-minded Roma leaders** of the time (often with a working-class background), and **leading liberal scientists, journalists, or university professors**, some of whom had been long-time actors in the pro-poor and pro-Roma movement, and became **SZDSZ politicians**, created healthy synergies. This cooperation created the political opportunity for the nomination of four Roma candidates at the top of its SZDSZ's national list, and the victory of two of them, Aladár Horváth and Antónia Hága, in the first post-transition national election.[1] Moreover, the activation of **rural, working-class Roma leaders** such as Ferenc Orsós, a skilled laborer, who

[1] Homeless people also used the democratic opening at the turn of the 1990s to organize for housing but received only paternalizing support from traditional intellectuals (Sebály, 2022b:46-49).

organized Nagykanizsa and Zala county, and Jenő Setét, then a teenager helping his family as a peddler, and his stepfather, Gyula Gombos, a peddler who organized the micro-region of Bodrogköz in Borsod county, **contributed with the mass base for the emerging political and civic movement** (see Endnote *a* and *b* in Chapter 4.3 for the full list of names).

The cornerstone of **AVM** was also a similar cross-class and multi-racial alliance: a cooperation of poor people (homeless people, and people with housing insecurity), and a handful of highly skilled allies ranging from lower- to upper-middle-class status. The special skills of the "traditional intellectuals," Éva Tessza Udvarhelyi, Bálint Misetics, Anna Bende, and Bálint Vojtonovszki catalyzed the knowledge of those who joined them and elevated "organic intellectuals" such as Gyula Balog, Jutka Lakatosné, and many others. This small, politically trained **vanguard base** of constituents and their allies could **generate previously unseen visibility and social and political support** for homeless people and their agenda. In conclusion, the leadership development of organic intellectuals and their cooperation with traditional intellectuals can counter-balance the impact of inequality and ***open up new avenues in future social struggles***.

5.2.4 Reading the political terrain, sensing openings for change

Delineating and analyzing strategies inevitably bring forward the *interaction* between the structure and the agent: the ***perception* of political opportunities**. As Sidney Tarrow says, political opportunities – changes in the balance of political and economic resources between the state and the challengers – are not the result of objective structures; they "must be perceived and attributed in order to become the source of mobilization" (Tarrow, 2011:280). Consequently, there is not only one way of reading these opportunities; ultimately, as Marshall Ganz succinctly puts it, "[S]trategy is how we turn what we have into what we need – by translating our resources into the power to achieve purpose" (2000:1010). Therefore, in

movement outcomes research, *political opportunity structures should collocate with strategic choice:* **strategic choice determines how the political opportunity gets utilized**.

The case studies demonstrate this mechanism in practice. As we know, both **NOE and Phralipe** saw an **opportunity in the 1989-1990 transition**, and successfully got a foothold in grassroots communities *and* national politics. Soon after the transition, however, Phralipe abandoned the cultivation of the mass base and gradually drifted from SZDSZ (it ran independently or in an electoral alliance with MDF, KDNP, and FKgP in the 1990 municipal elections). It staked everything on a national alliance of various Roma organizations, and the advancement of a strong minority rights legislation, neither of which succeeded as planned (see Chapter 4.3.2). It remains a counterfactual whether the bargaining position of the Roma would have been stronger had Phralipe continued to pursue the integrative-representative strategy and framed housing, unemployment, and education as issues of the Roma and non-Roma working class.

AVM's case is illustrative of **missing the political opportunity**. This community organization of homeless people set out at the time of the **global financial crisis**, a year before the 2010 landslide victory of Fidesz-KDNP and **the electoral success of AVM's political ally, LMP** (see Chapter 4.4). Theoretically, the crisis and this political constellation together could have been a fertile seedbed to **capitalize on the longtime lack of affordable housing** and build a mass movement (a movement of various affected constituencies) scaffolded by parliamentary representation. However, the initiators' ideological commitment to create a home for poor people's social representation prevented them from seeing and benefiting from the full scale of the political opening (see Chapter 4.4). An integrative-representative strategy might have provided more opportunities for a comprehensive housing reform and counterbalanced Fidesz's illiberal aspirations.

5.2.5 Strategic space in different regimes

Such an in-depth analysis of strategies through three phases of housing economies also invites us to compare political opportunities across regimes. The cases poignantly suggest that **democratic regime types do not necessarily create significantly more room for maneuver for highly marginalized constituencies than non-democratic regime types**. For example, Roma people established Phralipe in late state socialism to leave behind a political culture of self-appointed Roma leaders bargaining with the state. However, the 1993 minority legislation introduced a weak minority self-government system, resulting in broadly similar dynamics despite Hungary's transition to a multi-party democracy (see Chapter 4.3).

Moreover, homeless people established AVM at the dawn of the illiberal hegemonic shift. Although the illiberal Fidesz-KDNP government harassed this constituency at an unprecedented level, the state's approach to removing homeless people from public spaces without investment into affordable housing was there during the neoliberal state building across governments. In general, these examples reinforce the **crisis of democracy** argument (Rahman, 2018; Fraser, 2022), i.e., the understanding that liberal democracies tangled in neoliberal capitalism have long failed to deliver for low-income and working class people, and other marginalized groups. For the sake of this analysis, the examples also suggest that strategic opportunities are not *ab ovo* constrained by regime types.

5.2.6 Weighing strategies' counter-hegemonic potential

So, **how do the different strategies compare in their counter-hegemonic potential?** Based on my cases, the ***conflictual-advocative strategy*** – associated with RPA and AVM – **falls short of the counter-hegemonic potential of the integrative-representative approach**. First, RPA and AVM's advocative approach prompted "frontal" attacks targeting municipalities and

governments, which enabled them to increase the political significance of two severely disadvantaged constituencies. At the same time, NOE's integrative orientation **prompted an intentional alliance with ideologically aligned parties**, which made the mass base of large families the core around which the conservative bloc organized. Second, while RPA and AVM won the support of several politicians (temporarily even political parties) for their causes, typically when the parties were in opposition, large families **committed a party (Fidesz) to their cause both in opposition and in government**. Third, RPA and AVM elevated a few prominent movement leaders who entered into influential positions in the state[2] but these remained individual career paths effectively detached from the movement; on the other hand, NOE **ran hundreds of people for office in municipal elections, and occupied positions in the parliament as an intrinsic part of its movement strategy** (see Chapter 4.1).

Based on this comparison, **the conflictual-advocative strategy is ultimately a shortcut**. In Maguire's language (see Chapter 2.3.2), the SMO aims to compensate for the lack of a mass base by using issue fights to manifest values, show expertise, or demonstrate organizational infrastructure to achieve broader public and political support. **Are there conditions when this shortcut may be worth it?** Perhaps when the SMO must confront the state right from an **early stage of organization formation**, has absolutely **no ability to generate the resources** required by a representative strategy, or when the SMO knows it can **piggyback on** the centrality of **other constituencies**, or the electoral success of ideologically aligned **political parties**. RPA and AVM may have perceived their opportunities in this way

[2] While Aladár Horváth from RPA and Bálint Misetics from AVM became advisors to prime ministers (2002-2005) and the Budapest mayor (2019-), respectively, Jenő Setét from RPA was the national coordinator of a state-run desegregation program (2006-2010), and Éva Tessza Udvarhelyi from AVM led a district municipality's participatory program (2019-2024) and then became the district's vice-mayor (2024-). Last but not least, AVM's homeless leader, Gyula Balog, worked as an expert by experience in the Ministry of Human Resources (2010-2011, see Endnote *d* in Chapter 4.4).

and therefore favored a conflictual-advocative strategic direction, even though the case studies and this discussion suggest they had the potential to utilize the capacity inherent in a mass base.

Regarding the counter-hegemonic potential of the ***conflictual-representative strategy***, the **difference** from the integrative-representative approach is **not so obvious**. The theoretical expectations have suggested that a tactical (often ad-hoc) relationship with a party likely prevents the movement from combining resources at full potential. It is certainly exemplified by the **Home Defenders** when they refused to take advantage of Jobbik's policy platform and mass mobilizing capacity (see Chapter 4.5.2). At the same time, this SMO's mass base spread itself too thin in a loose network of organizations. Although combining movement-party resources **during times of scarce resources** may have increased the possibilities of winning, the case also implies that with a structurally coherent mass base, the Home Defenders could have been more successful.

The situation is similar to **LABE,** where the mass base was ideologically incoherent, which quickly quenched the possibility of undertaking a counter-hegemonic struggle (see Chapter 4.2). In their case, the neoliberal approach was so deeply entrenched in institutional and individual thinking that no political parties uniformly committed themselves to the preservation and revitalization of the public housing stock. Theoretically, a persistent, unified mass base could have created a demand for such a comprehensive housing reform. Although the potent use of the ***conflictual-representative strategy*** remains a counterfactual, this alternative roadmap illuminates its strategic relevance for those **phases of social struggles when the movement has no obvious political allies** and must **create opportunities** for **aligned politicians** to step forward, for **new parties** to emerge, or for **extant parties** to converge to the movement agenda. In addition, the cases of LABE and Home Defenders together reinforce **the importance of the ideological and structural coherence of the mass base** for winning.

At the same time, the five cases also highlight the **limits of what movements can achieve**. SMO's efforts must be part of a broader counter-hegemonic project to achieve radical power reconfiguration, and require **a potent, politically astute party**. In the case of Phralipe, **SZDSZ** did not exhibit much political will to continue to advance a transformative liberal political project prioritizing the integration of Roma people after the 1990 elections. Instead, the party's politicians at the municipal level often spearheaded aggressive urban renewal projects, and the party later became a pioneer of the economic "shock therapy." In case of NOE, however, once **Fidesz** prevailed in the conservative political bloc, it continued to strive for dominance in the Hungarian political arena, keeping family values and population policy at the center of its agenda, thereby serving its power game. On the other hand, **LMP** – AVM's closest political ally – lost relevance in the struggle for dominance between old and new left-liberal political elites in 2013. The political acumen of these parties inevitably influenced the counter-hegemonic potential of SMOs.

According to the theoretical expectations, the analysis also shows that any relationship with political power (**no matter the strategy**) inherently involves the possibility of **autonomy loss, co-optation, or even total annihilation**. This can be especially difficult when the SMO's gains and influence are large and arguably serve its constituency, as in the case of NOE. At the same time, as the Orbán regime's legitimacy has depended on the support of the large family constituency, the organization would probably have had the power to oppose the illiberal approach. Instead, it chose to sacrifice the interests of its less well-off members to maintain the privileges gained from its fractured counter-hegemonic victory. This may leave some readers asking: Why call this achievement counter-hegemonic? The following section will reflect on this by assessing the policy outcomes of the examined SMOs.

5.3 Policy implications

My theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2 has treated policy outcomes as milestones that can signal **substantive shifts** in social struggles. I have considered these policy outcomes counter-hegemonic when they can "lock" the struggle in a direction which enables the constituency to solidify positions (see theorization in Chapter 2.1.3). Consequently, I have defined **counter-hegemonic movement outcomes** as ***widespread*** **material and symbolic policy outcomes** affecting the reallocation of resources or the recognition of constituencies *beyond* individual or small group concessions (see Table 2-1 of Chapter 2.1.2 for a recap). **Table 5-2** below summarizes the movement demands and related policy outcomes of the six examined SMOs between 1987 and 2024. Underlined demands set in bold indicate priority for the movement. **This section** assesses whether the policy outcomes are counter-hegemonic and evaluates where the movement stands now with a normative **counter-hegemonic** turn. By definition, only **national and local-level policy outcomes** are considered in the assessment.

Period	**SMO**	**Policy demands**	**Policy outcomes**
1987-1990 **Late state socialist**	**LABE** (public housing tenants)	**no rent increase**	***national***
		improved public housing management	*case-by-case*
		option of tenant-run public housing management	*case-by-case*
		option to purchase public housing units	no
	NOE (large families)	broader access to public housing	no
		increased szocpol	no
	Phralipe (Roma people)	**subsidized access to healthy and affordable housing**	no
		public housing construction	no
		subsidized housing construction schemes	no

		housing fund and loan program	no
		fairer allocation of public housing	*case-by-case*
1990-2010 **Neoliberal**	**LABE** (public housing tenants)	**option to purchase public housing units**	***national***
		favorable conditions of purchase	***national***
		no rent increase	no
		reform of public housing system	no
		improved public housing management	no
		option of tenant-run public housing management	no
		housing fund to reinvest privatization income	no
		support instead of evictions	*case-by-case*
	NOE (large families)	**increased szocpol that remains universal**	***national***
		option to use szocpol to purchase used housing and extend extant housing (félszocpol)	***national***
		public housing construction	***national***
		state-subsidized housing loans to support homeownership	***national***
		energy-efficient renovation of prefabricated housing blocks	***national***
		withdrawal of planned real estate tax increase	***national***
		support of indebted people instead of evictions (OTP loans, utility bills, foreign currency loans) (1998 debt management law)	***local level*** + *case-by-case*
		support instead of removal of children from family due to financial reasons (enforcing the 1997 law)	no
		no energy price increase	no
	Phralipe (Roma people)	fairer allocation of public housing	*case-by-case*
	RPA (Roma people)	**winter moratorium on evictions**	***national***
		legal protection against the exclusion of squatters from public housing applications	***local level***

		support of squatters, tenants with insecure status, and indebted people instead of evictions (OTP loans, utility bills)	*case-by-case*
		support instead of removal of children from family due to financial reasons	*case-by-case*
		legal protection against the arbitrary eviction of squatters	no
		right to housing in the constitution	no
		no eviction without adequate alternative housing enshrined in law (for individuals and families with children)	no
		public housing construction	***national***
2010-2024 **Illiberal**	**NOE** (large families)	**increased szocpol and housing construction subsidies for large families**	***national***
		option to use szocpol to purchase used housing and extend extant housing	***national***
		compensation for energy price increase	***national***
		public housing construction	no
		compensation of indebted homeowners	***national***
		eviction moratorium	***national***
	AVM (homeless people)	**utilization of vacant housing**	***local level***
		support of homeless people's housing instead of the demolition of their shacks	***local level***
		recognition of the right of homeless people to their property (shacks, moveable assets)	*case-by-case*
		support of squatters, tenants with insecure status, and indebted people instead of evictions	*case-by-case*
		support instead of removal of children from family due to financial reasons	*case-by-case*
		withdrawal of criminalization of homelessness	no
		public housing program	no
		right to housing	no
		no eviction without adequate alternative housing enshrined in law (for families with children)	no

		fixing of address registration anomalies	no
		restricted Airbnb rental	***local level***
		safe rental sector	no
	Home Defenders (indebted homeowners)	**eviction moratorium**	***national***
		compensation of indebted homeowners	***national***
		support instead of evictions (including public housing tenants)	*case-by-case*
		annulment of foreign currency loan contracts	no
		forint conversion of loans at the original exchange rate (at the time of signing the contract)	no

Table 5-2: Overview of movement demands and related policy outcomes of examined SMOs between 1987 and 2024. Underlined demands set in bold indicate priority for the movement. National = national-level measure; local level = district-level measure in Budapest, and municipality-level measure in the country; case-by-case = gains apply to individuals or small groups as a result of targeted advocacy. 1987 and 2024 indicate the beginning and end years of the research period.

5.3.1 The balance of counter-hegemonic policy outcomes

5.3.1.1 Large families

I argue that large families' national-level housing policy achievements after 2010 are **counter-hegemonic policy outcomes**. As indicated in my policy analysis (Chapter 3) and case study (Chapter 4.1), this constituency has become eligible for unprecedented material and symbolic policy gains, and occupied a central position in the illiberal hegemonic phase compared with other constituencies and regime phases.

First, CSOK (*szocpol*'s illiberal version)[3], and most of the housing loan products effectively allocated higher subsidies to large families than during the neoliberal phase (see

[3] Social policy allowance (*szociálpolitikai támogatás, "szocpol")* is a form of a housing grant incentivizing childbearing. *Szocpol* subsidizes housing purchase, construction, or renovation, depending on the actual

Table 3-2 in Chapter 3.2.2 on the values of *szocpol* as well as the list of housing loan products). Moreover, housing policies in this period are not only accompanied by generous tax credits for families with children (without an income cap), but are wrapped up in a **government rhetoric** that combined **housing, family, and population policies to a previously unseen scale** (see Chapter 4.1; also Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:88-90; Inglot et al., 2022:262-271; Ámon, 2024:206). At the same time, the illiberal policies (CSOK, housing loan products, and tax credits) overwhelmingly favored families with better financial standing compared to other periods (see Chapter 3.2 and Chapter 4.1.2 for details).

This raises the question, were not the **gains during the first Orbán government "more" counter-hegemonic** for large families? Indeed, the Fidesz-MDF-FKgP government (1998-2002) provided concessions (including public housing, renovation of prefabricated housing blocks, and *félszocpol*[4]) to the lower-middle class and low-income households, i.e., they benefited a wider range of large families on the societal spectrum, in line with NOE's demands (see Table 5-2 above). Even though these concessions in the early 2000s (unfortunately) constituted only a tiny fraction of housing subsidies and were temporary, they contributed to the better living standards of tens of thousands of families (see Chapter 3.2.2). So, were not the achievements after 2010 a regression from the SMO's perspective?

I argue **they were not**. NOE's housing (and all other) demands have always represented large families in general. According to the SMO's ideological conviction, large families – no matter their social or financial status – deserve the state's support because they bear the brunt of social reproduction. Although the organization has repeatedly stood up for low-income families (see in particular Endnote *i* in Chapter 4.1), NOE has **always welcomed and never**

administration. It was introduced in 1971, and suspended between 2009 and 2012. The subsidy level depends on the number of children born or anticipated.

[4] A reduced version of *szocpol* ("half" *szocpol*). See Chapter 4.1.2 for details.

criticized socially untargeted subsidies. The most recent example is that although the organization advocated public housing between 2011 and 2014, when eventually no public housing program was launched, it wholeheartedly popularized CSOK together with the government (see Chapter 4.1.3). Nevertheless, the level of policy measures combined with the **vehement family-friendly government rhetoric** (Inglot et al., 2022; Ámon, 2024) constituted an unprecedented victory for large families – a victory with losses concerning low-income large families.

Another relevant question may be, **countering what?** Have not large families always been, to a certain extent, for well-justified reasons, a favored, prioritized constituency over the three phases of housing economies? Indeed, and often without distinction. The untargeted *szocpol* and the subsidized housing loan products benefited households with initial capital, including large families (Dániel, 1997:866-867; Czirfusz & Jelinek, 2022:85-88, 95, 118, 124-125). At the same time, as I have shown in Chapter 4.1, NOE was actively **countering the neoliberal regime** to shift it towards a conservative welfare framework centering large families and prioritizing the issue of the nation's demographic survival.

Before 2010, the organization saw that things were moving in the right direction only under conservative governments, except for four years of left-liberal governing (2002-2005) (see Chapter 4.1). Consequently, its protests reinforced Fidesz's struggle for dominance between 2006 and 2010. After 2010, we can see the aftermath of the previous two decades: better-off large families (or families aspiring to have 3+ children) have become both the biggest symbolic and material beneficiaries of housing policies, and maintained their central position in the illiberal hegemonic phase compared to other constituencies and previous hegemonic phases. All in all, the constituency came out as a **fractured victor,** sacrificing the interests of low-income and lower-middle-class large families.

5.3.1.2 Public housing tenants

Why is not LABE the counter-hegemonic "victor"? We may ask, as public housing tenants are undeniably the beneficiaries of the **largest widespread housing policy outcomes**. The public housing privatization revenue constituted an estimated 414 billion HUF between 1990 and 1994, and tenants could become homeowners by paying an average of 15-30 percent of the state property's market price (see details in Chapter 3.2.2). Yet, I argue that these gains were **not counter-hegemonic**. As my policy analysis (see Chapter 3.3) and case study show (see Chapter 4.2), LABE had already had the "right to buy" on its very first agenda, and, even though it caressed the vision of a comprehensive public housing reform, the organization lacked the commitment to recruit political support and unify its membership behind these reform efforts. Eventually, the SMO **rode the wave of the neoliberal era** and advocated better buying conditions for its constituency. Therefore, their efforts resulted in huge material gains and the symbolic recognition of homeowners, and reinforced the neoliberal structural shift.

5.3.1.3 Indebted homeowners

How does the level of compensation of indebted homeowners relate to counter-hegemonic movement outcomes? This is another fair question, as **among all the *victims*** of the housing crisis, probably the indebted homeowners attained the **highest material policy outcomes**. The first instance was during the **liberalization of the banking sector** in 1991, when interest rates skyrocketed, and homeowners who could afford higher interest rates could have had **half of their debt cancelled**. Others were left to pay a 15 percent interest rate on their remaining loans (see Chapter 3.2.2 for details). The interest rate increase was accompanied by public outcry but **no significant movement activities**; therefore, I do not consider this a movement outcome.

In the second instance, in the aftermath of the 2008 **global financial crisis**, indebted homeowners received a **final repayment** option, which benefited primarily better-off debtors.

The state, this time, **bailed out also the worst-off families** by buying their property, but **left lower-middle-class debtors without adequate support** (see Chapter 3.2.2 and 4.5.2 for details). The Home Defenders pursued their fight for this latter group of victims. Although in the beginning they occupied a more central position in the illiberal historical bloc (Fidesz adopted the movement's freedom-fighting rhetoric), by 2012, the government ignored their needs, and they were **countering the illiberal regime**. Therefore, their gain – an **average compensation** of 710,000 HUF per debtor – was a **counter-hegemonic policy outcome**. However, they failed to force the Fidesz-KDNP government to maximize its opportunities in remedying the constituents, and indebted homeowners are still fighting for their justice.

5.3.1.4 Roma people

I argue that the **annual winter moratorium on evictions** was a **counter-hegemonic policy outcome** for RPA in 2003. It shifted the course of eviction policies in a neoliberal housing economy and has been in effect uninterruptedly since then. RPA's victory even contributed to the Home Defenders' win when the illiberal government extended the period of the moratorium in 2018 (see Chapter 4.3.2). However, most of RPA's other hard-fought gains were obtained on a case-by-case basis, i.e., concessions did not go beyond individuals or small groups (see Chapter 3.3). At the same time, two achievements constitute an exception and raise the question: **can local or indirect policy gains be counter-hegemonic?**

The answer is not so obvious. RPA's legal success – the Constitutional Court's decision in 2005 rendering **the exclusion of squatters from public housing applications unconstitutional in three districts of Budapest** – was a widespread policy outcome with a local scope and a potential to be extended to other municipalities (see Chapter 4.3.2). It was also a widespread symbolic recognition: even though the Constitutional Court's argumentation was not rights-based, the state ordered all the municipalities to review their legislation

according to the legal decision. Therefore, I consider RPA's achievement a **counter-hegemonic policy outcome** in the neoliberal housing economy because it enabled the organization to solidify its position in a long struggle. However, RPA could not capitalize on the gains, and the gains did not survive the illiberal counter-hegemonic shift. The exclusion of squatters from housing applications is still widespread (Utcajogász, 2021:48).

Another policy benefiting RPA's constituency, the **national desegregation program** between 2005 and 2010, is **indirectly connected to RPA**. RPA did not participate in the program design, and desegregation was loosely on its agenda, but staff member Jenő Setét was hired as a national coordinator of the program (not in his RPA capacity) (see Chapter 4.3.2). Nonetheless, I consider the desegregation policy a **counter-hegemonic** policy outcome of the SMO. First, even though the program reached only a few thousand people because it was severely cut back due to spending cuts (see Chapter 3.2.2 and Chapter 4.3.2), it was the first-of-its-kind after the 1989 transition (similarly to the public housing program in the 2000s). Second, the positive outcomes were associated with Setét and other dedicated Roma and non-Roma professionals who made the best out of the program from within the state (Sebály, 2022b:60-61). Whether this fractured win **in the neoliberal housing economy** would have put desegregation on a different path in the long run remains a counterfactual. The policy did not survive the illiberal counter-hegemonic shift as the illiberal housing economy replaced desegregation with the rehabilitation of segregated settlements.

5.3.1.5 Homeless people

AVM's case further refines whether policy outcomes with a limited (local or case-by-case) scope can be counter-hegemonic. AVM attained one widespread but local housing policy outcome: a long-term, annually expanding **Housing First program** introduced in the Kőbánya district of Budapest. The initiative provides homeless people living in shacks with housing

without requiring them to engage with the shelter system. This outcome led to further indirect results: AVM's sister organization, the From Streets to Homes! housing agency, launched similar programs in other districts, and inspired other organizations such as Habitat for Humanity Hungary to do the same (see Chapter 4.4.1; Sebály, 2022b:71). Although the initiative is small-scale and restricted to particular localities, I consider it a **counter-hegemonic policy outcome** as AVM could capitalize on a local victory of using vacant public housing units for the benefit of homeless people.

AVM's other significant housing policy outcome was a **court ruling recognizing the right of four homeless people to their property** (i.e., shacks and moveable assets) (see Chapter 4.4.1). It was a huge material and symbolic victory for the plaintiffs and AVM; yet, the decision applied to a single case. In contrast with the Constitutional Court's decision described in the previous section, this legal case (due to the nature of the continental law) did not establish a precedent to extend these material and symbolic gains beyond a small group; therefore, I do **not** consider it a **counter-hegemonic policy outcome**.

In contrast with RPA, AVM did not achieve national-level policy outcomes. However, similarly to the Roma organization, substantive outcomes were attained **indirectly through movement leaders** entering the state. In AVM's case, Bálint Misetics and Éva Tessza Udvarhelyi acquired positions in municipal governments and managed to gain relatively high influence over localized housing policy. These contributed to **counter-hegemonic** policy outcomes, instigating a shift **at the municipality level**: Udvarhelyi played a role in changing the **course of housing policy in Józsefváros** (a district of Budapest), and Misetics managed to put the **Budapest City Hall**[5] on a new track regarding **homeless people's access to affordable housing** (see Chapter 4.4.1 for details). Moreover, the Budapest Municipality (through the

[5] The Budapest City Hall disposes only of a fraction of the total public housing stock in the capital. Most of the public housing units are at the jurisdiction of the district municipalities (see Chapter 3.2.2 and Chapter 4.2).

work of another AVM-related movement leader, Vera Kovács), along with some other district municipalities (such as Józsefváros), created housing agencies to **integrate vacant private apartments into the long-term rental sector** and increase access to affordable housing. Although these changes are still small-scale compared to the level of the housing crisis, they constitute a localized shift towards a more equitable and inclusive housing economy.

5.3.2 Charting the way ahead: notes for movement leaders

The policy analysis in Chapter 3 has clearly shown that the two counter-hegemonic shifts (from state socialist to neoliberal, and from neoliberal to illiberal) drifted Hungary **light-years away from an equitable and inclusive housing economy**. Over the last 30 years, a once largely decommodified system evolved into a homeownership-based, domestically-driven financialized housing economy. My case studies have shown that this (positively, not normatively) substantial – counter-hegemonic – outcome is not merely the result of calculated government decisions but a long movement **struggle for recognition and redistribution** in which NOE has proved to be the most successful. Consequently, **NOE's ideological conviction about a conservative welfare state and its reluctance to push back against unfair allocation of resources have left a profound imprint on the current housing economy**. The SMO's demands were selectively fulfilled to increasingly prioritize the advancement of middle-class large families, and make them the most significant beneficiaries of housing (and family) policies during the illiberal phase.

At the same time, let me illuminate **other patterns in the examined SMOs' policy demands** (see Table 5-2 above) that may have affected this non-normative counter-hegemonic turn. These observations also point to both missed opportunities and ideas for future demands and serve as **food for thought for movement leaders** devising future housing struggles.

Notes on constituency dynamics:

(1) While **Roma people** through **Phralipe** articulated state-level housing policy demands during late state socialism with a focus on affordable housing, their claims in the neoliberal phase, channeled through **RPA**, centered primarily on preventing evictions and mitigating their harms. This shift meant that after the transition, Roma people were less firmly engaged in broader struggles for affordable housing solutions. Instead, Roma housing interests were predominantly framed as those of the most extremely vulnerable segment of the constituency, with eviction prevention at the forefront.

(2) Interestingly, **large families** and **NOE** carried forward and expanded Phralipe's housing claims in the neoliberal phase, advancing demands such as public housing construction and subsidized housing construction schemes. However, while Phralipe had articulated these claims in a socially targeted manner, NOE sought to secure benefits for every large family, regardless of social status. Nevertheless, among SMOs in the neoliberal period, it was primarily the large families who advanced affordable housing solutions in a sustained and organized way.

(3) Building on but also surpassing RPA's approach, **homeless people** organized through **AVM** combined the representation of the most vulnerable segment of house-poor with state-level housing policy demands. Consequently, in the illiberal phase, affordable housing interests were articulated by two constituencies: homeless people and large families.

(4) **Only** one organization, **LABE**, demanded the reform of the public housing system at the turn of the 1990s, and even those demands were coupled with calls for tenants' right to purchase public housing. **Only Phralipe** and **LABE** demanded the creation of a

housing fund to reinvest privatization income, but the demand lost prominence in the neoliberal phase.

(5) Throughout the housing struggles of the neoliberal phase, the left-liberal ideological stance was represented almost exclusively by **RPA**, and in the illiberal phase, entirely by **AVM**. As a result, the left-liberal voice in housing was largely articulated through the interests of the most vulnerable segment of the house-poor, while the concerns of the working class and the lower-middle class were typically ignored. This left these housing constituencies open to mobilization by conservative, far-right, and radical nationalist organizations. Consequently, the Hungarian left failed to engage with one of the most pressing housing issues of the decade: the mortgage crisis.

(6) This analysis shows that the interests of several housing constituencies have remained largely unaddressed by SMOs in the past few decades. The rental sector affecting a wide range of constituencies, such as students, young adults, or struggling households from working-class and low-income backgrounds, represents a particularly significant area of untapped potential. Moreover, when policy demands made by organizations and policy outcomes align without a clear causal link (as in the case of **RPA** and public housing construction, or **AVM** and Airbnb rental restrictions), they indicate unexploited organizing and mobilizing potential rather than the evidence of SMOs' direct impact.

Notes on movement demands vs. the normative framework:

(7) There is a **significant gap** between movement demands over the past three decades and the normative counter-hegemonic agenda presented in Chapter 3.3. Regarding **capable governance**, none of the SMOs have called for the establishment of a responsible national housing institution. While LABE briefly raised the issue of a national housing

strategy as part of its advocacy for public housing reform, this demand quickly faded from the repertoire of claims. Instead, rights-based demands have dominated the movement agenda such as enshrining the right to housing in the constitution, or guaranteeing in law that no eviction can occur without adequate alternative housing. In sum, there is space to articulate demands in the area of governance.

(8) The **gap is narrower** when it comes to claims related to **purposeful circuits of finance and investment**. Top movement demands have included public housing provision, the establishment of local housing agencies, and effective support for victims of the post-1991 and post-2008 debt crises. Demands for financial schemes facilitating homeownership have also featured prominently on the agenda, **though** not in a normative way: **universal *szocpol*** (without means testing) has been vigorously promoted by NOE, thereby advancing a homeownership-based model of financialization. In sum, there is space to diversify demands in the area of finance and investment.

(9) The **story is mixed** when it comes to policies related to **effective land use**. On one hand, anti-eviction struggles have been prominent across all SMOs, particularly, RPA, AVM, and Home Defenders. Under RPA, many of these efforts mitigated harms of aggressive urban renewal. However, RPA's and AVM's anti-eviction struggles have been largely framed in terms of rights, particularly the right to housing and the right to adequate alternative housing, rather than linked to more assertive municipal land policies. Moreover, these campaigns primarily represented the interests of the most vulnerable, leaving broader issues in the long-term rental sector largely unaddressed. Exceptions include AVM's campaign to fix address registration anomalies and its short-lived effort to restrict Airbnb rentals. Home Defenders focused specifically on

combating abusive bailiff practices and challenging the dominance of financial institutions. In sum, there is space to diversify demands in the area of land use.

(10) The **gap is narrower** when it comes to **climate-neutral housing**. Over the past three decades, these policies have been represented primarily by NOE among the SMOs, with significant normative implications. On the one hand, NOE was a fierce proponent of the energy-efficient renovation of prefabricated housing blocks. On the other hand, it also vigorously promoted universal compensation for energy price increases, thereby advancing an expensive and non-sustainable energy subsidy program. In sum, there is space to diversify demands in the area of climate neutrality.

As we can see, there is **a great deal of unexploited potential to create affordable housing, and make a U-turn** from the model of homeownership-based financialization – both by adjusting the policy tools applied by governments (see Chapter 3), and shaping movement struggles demanding these policy tools (see Chapter 4). Nevertheless, **the policy implications corroborate my theoretical proposition** that counter-hegemonic policy outcomes (substantive shift) without the realignment of political and social groups (structural shift) will not constitute counter-hegemony (see Chapter 2.1.3). This takes us to my theoretical and methodological reflections.

5.4 Theoretical and methodological reflections

Inspired by Gramsci, I have suggested considering **civil society as a 'terrain of struggle'** where social and political groups adjoin to reconfigure established power relations and advance their model of society. Letting go of the "blindfolded" approach that rigidly isolates institutionalized and non-institutionalized politics into separate spheres has **empowered me to**

expand on the thesis that movements, political parties, and the state *compete*, *complement*, and *interpenetrate* one another (Jenkins & Klandermans, 1995; Goldstone, 2003). Instead of treating these relationships as collateral or ignoring the "revolving door" between movements and parties or the state (which is often the case in movement research), I have made these dynamics a core part of my analysis. In other words, **the 'terrain of struggle' has given me the theoretical foundation to recognize and delineate the four strategic orientations** summarized in a 2x2 conceptual framework (presented in Chapter 2.3.3 and recapped as Figure 5-1 at the beginning of this chapter).

This **2x2 framework** is an **original contribution** to the literature. The state of the art is that movement research either applies strategy as a "generic" analytical term distinct from tactics, demands, and collective action (Meyer & Staggenborg, 2007; 2012; Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2012; Maney et al., 2012), or distinguishes strategies based on the level of confrontation (Piven & Cloward, 1977) or the level of organization (Ganz, 2000; Han et al., 2021). My 2x2 presents four movement strategies as **systematic and comparable expressions** of how movement organizations relate to political parties that aim to grab or maintain state power and, simultaneously, how they approach strengthening the position of their constituency. In other words, it combines the analysis of strategies to state power and constituency power in one single framework. Applying this tool requires an intimate understanding of movement strategies and an inevitable simplification of reality (the inherent nature of categorization), but **rewards the researcher with a complex analytical capacity**.

The 'terrain of struggle' points out that civil society is "not an autonomous sphere of self-contained democratic activity" but "a chaotic sphere of competition" (Ehrenberg, 2017:7) with amorphous contours where social and political groups adjoin to reconfigure established power relations and advance their model of society. Spreading consciousness about the fuzzy and permeable contours of civil society and empowering SMOs to think broadly about how to

tap into the **complementary potential between parties and movements** has crucial relevance in our current times. While this complementary potential has primarily been **utilized in anti-authoritarian struggles** (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011; Dagnino, 2011:125), this one-sided dynamic may be changing. The rise of illiberal regimes in the last few decades has often been motored by the intense collaboration of the "civil base" and the "political party" (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012; Greskovits, 2017, 2020; Youngs, 2018; Domaradzka, 2024). My comparative case study in the Hungarian context has illustrated this trend: it has shown how consistent movement efforts to nurture a mass base and closely align with a party on an ideological basis can lead to counter-hegemonic movement outcomes while also dovetailing with an illiberal political vision.

At the same time, I have also provided a more nuanced picture by showing how different movement struggles "compete" for the realization of their counter-hegemonic vision. I have been able to do this by theorizing and analyzing counter-hegemonic struggles from a **non-normative perspective**. As a result, I could **collocate conservative and left(-liberal) struggles in one analytical framework**, and critically reflect on SMO operation associated with both normative and non-normative counter-hegemonic efforts (see Chapter 5). This not only expands on the current state of art of Hungarian housing movement analyses (Udvarhelyi, 2014; Sebály, 2021, 2022b; Florea et al., 2022), but also proposes **a new analytical perspective on the success of movement struggles** in general. I posit that **juxtaposing the outcomes of progressive and non-progressive movement struggles** lets us – researchers with a bias towards progressive causes – embrace a critical perspective, and get to the heart of the question: what drives change, and how can we make this world a better place? Moreover, complementing the non-normative analysis of counter-hegemonic struggles with a **normative policy framework** has allowed me to make **concrete recommendations** on how to proceed towards a more equitable and inclusive housing economy.

Nevertheless, my theoretical and methodological framework has **limitations**. First, as anticipated in the methodological section (see Chapter 2.4.2), the **focus on SMOs** has limited the analysis of the combined effect of alliances both within the movement and between different movements (Giugni, 1998). Indeed, a movement infrastructure model (Andrews, 2001) or a focus on networks or alliances (Osa, 2003; Fraser, 2021) illuminating how different movement strategies, organizational structures, resources, and leadership types reinforce or weaken one another would have given a more nuanced – and convoluted – picture. I have used this approach in my earlier analyses (Sebály, 2021, 2022b). However, a meaningful strategic analysis would have been impossible without a focus on SMOs. The added value of my findings to the literature and praxis seems to vindicate this research approach.

Second, **when it comes to substantive counter-hegemonic movement outcomes, only policy outcomes receive real attention** in my model (see Table 2-1 of Chapter 2.1.2 for a recap). At the same time, as Suzanne Staggenborg lays out, there are various other movement outcomes which influence the progress of movement struggles such as changing norms or behaviors, new narratives and frames, or the dissemination of new vocabulary (1995:341). Indeed, these are cultural outcomes inherent in the Gramscian hegemony theory; without them, the analysis of counter-hegemonic struggles remains incomplete. Therefore, I have assigned a place to cultural outcomes in my conceptual and operational framework (see Chapter 2.1.2 and 2.1.3), and included them in the narrative of my case studies. Yet, as I have indicated in my theoretical framework (see Chapter 2.1.5), the analysis of cultural outcomes was beyond the scope of this research. Identifying counter-hegemonic policy outcomes in real life examples has been enough challenge, and the study of cultural outcomes would have required different methodological approaches (Earl, 2000:15). As a result, I **have given up the Gramscian cultural dimension of power**, but have been able to provide a **focused analysis** of the

contested equilibrium of power relations between social and political groups, capturing the counter-hegemonic turn through **the structural and the substantive shift**.

Last but not least, the **selection of my cases** has provided **ample data to test the relevance of my theoretical framework,** but **limited the generalizability** of the findings. First, as anticipated by the literature (Amenta et al., 2010:302), the comparison of a small number of historically similar movements over a long temporal horizon has allowed me to **test complex, theoretical arguments on counter-hegemony** and examine movement impact on structural and substantive shifts. I could also complete the "mandatory" task coming with the research of semi-peripheral (thus often under(or mis-)represented) countries: the **construction of movement history**. At the same time, my case selection left me with an obvious **shortcoming**: I could not analyze the **integrative-advocative strategy**. In addition, the comparison of the **integrative-representative approach** through NOE and an organization of low-income constituencies across the *three* phases of state-building would probably have extended the analytical opportunities.

My findings also have **potential relevance for the Central and Eastern European region**. First, the data-rich cases provide insight into the vivid civic activism across classes and ethnicities from the turn of the 1990s, contributing to the literature (Jacobsson & Saxonberg, [2013] 2016; Jacobsson, [2015] 2020) that **challenges the still lingering "weak civil society" thesis**. Second, the data **refine** the **"transactional activism" thesis**, which sees the potential of the region's civic activism in horizontal NGO-NGO and vertical NGO-state transactional processes (Petrova & Tarrow, 2007). In contrast with these two models, **my 2x2 conceptual framework provides a more sophisticated reading of civic activism** in the region. It includes cases with "weak" participation and transactional processes (which would be identified as conflictual-advocative in my model), but it offers three other arrangements empowering the researcher to go beyond generalization. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the tool – based

on a Gramscian-inspired civil society concept – can make sense of the fundamental dynamic in social struggles, i.e., that movements *and* parties advance social change, and their complementary potential should not be collateral but a core part of movement analysis.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Can housing struggles succeed? Indeed, social movement organizations can achieve significant gains and may even be able to reconfigure power relations, albeit not necessarily in a way that effectively advances a more equitable and inclusive housing system. As this analysis has shown, a social struggle is, in fact, a **competition for the realization of alternative visions**. The starting point for affordable housing must be a commitment to policies that remove housing from the market and reduce its exposure to market logic. One thing is sure, though: thoughtful state intervention is essential to address the affordability crisis. This requires an utterly different orientation from movement organizations than "simply" imposing policy claims on reluctant polity members. **Movement leaders need to think more broadly about how to influence the emergence of a new political alternative** and how affordable housing claims can remain indispensable within the new political and social alliance.

My dissertation has examined the extent to which **different movement strategies contribute to such a counter-hegemonic shift**. I have analyzed the combination of **two factors**: (1) how social movement organizations relate to political parties in social struggles (orientation to state power), and (2) how they bolster the position of their constituencies within new emerging alliances (orientation to constituency power). Based on these factors, I have identified four movement strategies and found that movement organizations are **the most effective** when they **combine social and organizational embeddedness** – a mass base – **with a long-term strategic political alignment** (integrative-representative strategy). As I have theoretically and empirically shown, the mass base can lend a strong position to the movement organization and its constituency within an emerging historical bloc, make the movement's agenda appealing to an ambitious political party, and maximize the complementary potential of movements and parties in advancing an alternative vision of society.

In the Hungarian comparative case study, the influence of NOE on the illiberal counter-hegemonic shift after two decades of organizing has manifested the potential of the integrative-representative strategy in contrast to the other three examined strategies. At the same time, the analysis has left ample **room for further research**. We could certainly explore the counter-hegemonic potential of the conflictual-representative strategy (when movement organizations combine a mass base with a tactical, issue-based relationship with a party) more deeply by selecting a case with an ideologically and structurally coherent base. The counter-hegemonic potential of the conflictual-advocative strategy (when movement organizations pursue a tactical, issue-based relationship with a party and compensate for the lack of a mass base with other resources) could also be understood better through cases where the political ally can grab governing power or movement organizations can piggyback on the centrality of other constituencies. None of these conditions are present in the examined cases. Moreover, I have only been able to theorize but not test the potential of the integrative-advocative strategy.

At the same time, my research design has reinforced what the literature suggests: **comparing a small number of historically similar movements over a broad temporal horizon** is critical to studying major social and political structural shifts. Due to the steep knowledge requirements and methodological challenges such a project faces, it has still remained a niche in the movement outcomes subfield, and my research contributes to **fill this gap** (Earl, 2000; Amenta et al., 2010). Furthermore, **various global examples suggest** that my **2x2 conceptual framework**, which locates the four movement strategies along the state power – constituency power axes, is a **relevant tool for movement strategy researchers**. Besides helping researchers draw insightful distinctions between strategies, it also sheds new light on relationships that would otherwise be overlooked: the strategic orientation of movement organizations to state power and constituency power.

Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik's invaluable comparative case study on **the success of electoral breakthroughs from 1998 to 2005 in post-communist Europe** are great examples that connect constituency power and state power. Bunce and Wolchik astutely elucidate how elections can serve as a political opportunity for opposition actors in authoritarian regimes under the primary condition that civic and political actors challenging the regime "mount sophisticated and energetic electoral campaigns" (2011:46). What **Slovakia, Serbia, Ukraine**, and, to some extent, **Georgia** pursued was essentially an **integrative-representative strategy**: well-organized movements with a mass base aligned with the political opposition in a critical period to tap into movement-party complementary potential. The long-term alignment of mass-based social movements and political leaders with a counter-hegemonic agenda was the driving force behind the national electoral successes of the **Brazilian Workers' Party** in 2002 and the **Bolivian Movement for Socialism** in 2005 (Dagnino, 2011).

On the other hand, the **contemporary Serbian student movement** seems to pursue the **conflictual-representative strategy** in a situation that my research could only simulate as a counterfactual through the case of LABE: the lack of a potent opposition. Similar to the Serbian anti-authoritarian struggles against Slobodan Milošević in the run-up to the 2000 elections, the current student movement challenging the government of Aleksandar Vučić has built a mass base. However, in contrast to the past when Otpor aligned with a united opposition, today's student movement leaders are lacking a potent, authentic political ally, and are now trying to use their constituency power to create opportunities for the emergence of such an ally. They are demanding a snap election and want to influence the formation of the list of running candidates (Milačić, 2025; Petrušijević, 2025). The **Hungarian pro-democracy movements** followed a less ambitious version of the same strategic approach: movement organizations built

a fragmented mass base, persuaded the old-elite-dominated opposition parties to align forces, and advanced their policy priorities toward these and the governing parties (Sebály, 2025).

The modes of strategic orientations I propose are certainly **ideal types** and entail an **inevitable simplification** of a convoluted and constantly changing reality. Moreover, they require an intimate understanding of the examined movements, and as Rachel V. Kutz-Flamenbaum says, involve the risk of "reifying movements and misattributing meanings and intentions of movement actors" (2012:286). At the same time, in return, they **enable us to think about complex social processes**, and let us "articulate and analyze the full potential of strategies habitually reproduced and only semiconsciously constructed" (2012:286).

Similar concerns apply to **counter-hegemony**. The use of this concept and its derivatives (counter-hegemonic outcome, counter-hegemonic potential) may seem **cumbersome** to some readers. I believe that this single word **uniquely captures the various pillars of change**, as well as the **complex set of relationships** necessary for radical social transformation. By **systematizing and testing counter-hegemonic movement outcomes**, I have undertaken a theoretical and methodological challenge rarely addressed by movement outcomes researchers. The subfield distinguishes between intra-movement and extra-movement outcomes (Earl, 2000) and concessions affecting an individual or a small group, or the whole constituency (Amenta et al., 2010).[1] However, movement leaders are left with the puzzle of whether they advance radical, counter-hegemonic social change or if their outcomes become absorbed into the dominant system.

I contribute to resolving this puzzle by capturing counter-hegemony as **a set of structural, substantive, and cultural movement outcomes**, i.e., **tangible achievements** that

[1] Intra-movement outcomes refer to the movement's achievements within the movement or the movement field such as an increase in the number of followers, the skills and diversity of community leaders, variety of methods, resources, and new alliances with other movements. Extra-movement outcomes locate outcomes in the political and cultural context, and refer to achievements such as policy gains, recognition of identity, or value change.

can solidify movements' positions in social struggles. This is a synthesis of the state-of-the-art knowledge (Gorz, 1968; Gamson, 1975; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Kitschelt, 1986; Earl, 2000; Fraser, 2003; Amenta et al., 2010; Filc, 2021; Cox, 2024, etc.) in a fundamental conceptual and operational framework. Acknowledging the aggregate and non-linear nature of social change, this framework indicates (1) the realignment of social and political groups; (2) widespread policy change affecting resource reallocation and recognition; as well as (3) widespread narrative and value change, providing a conceptual foundation for further research.

This dissertation has **not sought to advocate or prescribe particular strategies**. My ambition has been to illuminate the diversity of strategies in tangible ways, highlight their potential under different conditions, and inspire the thinking of researchers and movement leaders. Despite the similarities, every historical moment and our position in it are unique. What I do emphasize through my research is **the danger of falling into what Peter Mair describes as a "depoliticized version of pluralism,**" where parties and civic organizations alike lose their groundedness in society and become disconnected from each other (2009:6). Therefore, I conclude with what I have said in Chapter 1: I aim to **reinforce the social imaginary** that movements can decide to influence the emergence of a new political alternative, and tap into the complementary potential between movements and parties, and the power of their constituencies. This choice is not a threat to civic autonomy; it is the revitalization of democracy, and is essential to achieve the systemic change that affordable housing requires.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: NOE's membership

Year	Membership (families)	Local chapters	Sources
1987	500		G. Nagy, 1987:4
1988	1,200	22	G. Nagy, 1988:5; Kovács, 1988:6
1989	5,000		Kardosné, 2017:22; Szécsi, 2021:78
1990	6,000	74	Várhalmi, 1990:3
1991	8,000		dobszay, 1991:4
1992	12,000	62	G. Gaál, 1992:22-23
1993	17,500		Nagycsaládosok helyzete, 1993:2
1994	24,000		Benkő, 1996:107
1996	22,000	289	Tabák, 1996:10
1999	23,000		sbe, 1999:1
2002	20,000	380	Kormosné, 2002:28
2006	15,000		Az egészséghez való, 2006:4
2007	14,000	300	Nyusztay, 2007:4
2010	15,000		Gyerekekkel öröm, 2010:4
2012	14,000	250	MTI, 2012:3
2016	14,000	260	Jobbágyi, 2016
2017	12,000	175	Kardosné, 2017:25.; Varga, 2017:5
2021	15,000	205	Hercsel, 2021

Table A-1: Fluctuation of NOE's membership based on media and organizational data. Families can join NOE individually or form groups, which can later register themselves as associations and be part of NOE in that status. A chapter is used as an umbrella term for groups and associations.

Class

- NOE is more diverse than the stereotypical observation describing the organization as Christian and middle-class. Local chapter activities suggest that NOE membership has included deprived, low-income, and working-class families, and financially struggling families with higher social status (Haraszti, 1989:9; Kardosné, 2017). NOE members are eligible for discounted purchases, discounted holidays, and discounted entrance tickets (G. Gaál, 1992:22-23);

- As the 2014-2015 representative research commissioned by NOE shows, members have higher education levels than the national average. However, more members have elementary or vocational school certificates than college, university, and postgraduate degrees combined (Bálity & Dávid, 2015:42-43).

Race, ethnicity

- NOE is a white, ethnically homogeneous organization; only 2.5-2.9 percent of the members consider themselves Roma (Bálity & Dávid, 2015:45-46).

Gender

- Women are often seen in leadership roles both at the chapter and national levels. Between 1987 and 2017, 39 percent of board members were women; between 1987 and 2024, almost 60 percent of the time, NOE had a female president (own calculation based on Kardosné, 2017:33-47). Nearly 90 percent of fathers work full-time; this value is almost 60 percent for mothers (Bálity & Dávid, 2015:41).

Religion

- A substantial part of the base does not consider itself religious, and most of those who do are religious "in their own way" (Bálity & Dávid, 2015:80).

Geography

- The overwhelming majority of the members live in Budapest and Pest county (far exceeding the national average for large families) (Bálity & Dávid, 2015:37);
- NOE membership rate stays below the national average for large families in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties (Bálity & Dávid, 2015:37).

Appendix 2: LABE's membership

Year	Membership (individuals)	Local chapters or organizing committees	Sources
1988	1,000		K. F., 1988:3
1989	3,000	Budapest + six towns/cities	tót, 1989:115
1990	4,000	Six districts in Budapest + 24 towns + ten self-governing tenant communities	Eöry, 1990:5; Szekeres, 1990:7
1991	6,000	18 districts in Budapest + 16 towns	Cs. J., 1991:5; Jutasi, 1991:1; KSH, 2020b
1994	15,000	Forty towns/cities	mgy, 1994:5
2001	20,000		Egyesületben, 2001:36

Table A-2: Fluctuation of LABE's membership based on data provided by the organization in the media. Members could be organizations or individuals who accept the founding principles of LABE. The chapter is used as an umbrella term for groups and associations. Organizing committees refer to groups of people building a chapter. No membership data is available for years after 2001 when the organization almost wholly disappeared from the media; therefore, the 2001 membership data is probably inflated with possibly outdated members from previous years. Compare membership data with the trend of sold public housing units between 1988 and 2020 in Graph 3-2 in Chapter 3.

Class

- A mix of low-income and lower-middle-class tenants as well as tenants with higher social status in prestigious professions; often, the latter group led the local chapters and the national organization.

Appendix 3: Phralipe's membership

Year	Membership (individuals)	Local chapters	Sources
1990	1,200	22 chapters	Osztojkán, 1990:119; Z. T. I., 1990:5; Liskó, 1999:351; szőke, 1990:1-2; Felhívás!, 1989:8; Megalakult a PHRALIPE, 1990:8
1991	6,000 (100 in Budapest)	63 town and cities	Sánta, 1991:19; A megyeszékhely, 1991:3; szilvás, 1991:3; f.kováts, 1991:4
1992	7,800 -» 5,000	73 towns and cities	Osztojkán, 1992:16; T. Zselensky, 1993:31
1993	4,600	65 chapters	Osztojkán, 1993:2

Table A-3: Fluctuation of Phralipe's membership based on data provided by the organization in the media

Class

- A mix of Roma and non-Roma intellectuals, as well as low-income, working-class Roma people;
- The Budapest chapter comprised Roma intellectuals (often with a working-class background) and non-Roma intellectuals, whereas the local chapters outside Budapest were mostly organized by local low-income, working-class Roma people, or local Roma (and sometimes non-Roma) intellectuals (see Endnote *b* at the end of Chapter 4.3).

Appendix 4: AVM's membership

Year	Membership (individuals)				
	Directly impacted people in working groups	Allies	Directly impacted people outside working groups or in related communities	Directly impacted people + allies in local chapters	Total membership
2010	22	12			34
2011	24	13			37
2012	24	14	47 (incl. 4 communities in Budapest, and 1 in Debrecen)		85
2013	36	8	41 (incl. 3 communities in Budapest)		85
2014	27	10	35 (incl. 4 communities in Budapest)		72
2015	31	13	48 (incl. 2 communities in Budapest)		92
2016	29	11	90	9+3 (1 chapter in Pécs)	142
2017	35	11	26	10+3 (1 chapter in Pécs)	85
2018	22	12			34
2019	20	18			38

Table A-4: Fluctuation of AVM's membership based on the organization's membership lists in the first month of the year (organizational document). Directly impacted people could join if they attended the required number of organizational meetings, events, or actions. A chapter was a replica of the Budapest organization regarding mission and operation. Allies do not contain lawyers of Street Lawyers Association, who provided irreplaceable support during campaigns.

Class, age, gender, and ethnic composition

- Most of the directly impacted members were homeless people from Budapest in their 40s, 50s and 60s living in shelters (from low-threshold institutions to hostels) or shacks in forests;
- Their ethnic composition was a mix of Roma and non-Roma people, with non-Roma being the majority;
- Males outnumbered females among homeless members, while the opposite held for allies;

- Most allies were in their 20s and 30s and from lower- to upper-middle-class statuses. Most of them had social science or social work qualifications and were either students or working for civic organizations. In addition, they had experience in campaigning, training, or research and had a “new leftist” political and cultural orientation.

Appendix 5: Home Defenders' membership

Year	Membership (individuals)	Highest mobilizing capacity	Local chapters	Sources
2009-2011	No data	Few dozen	Several hundred in Budapest and other towns	Szalai, 2009:4
2012-2013	1,500-2,000	7,000-10,000	16 counties	Devizahitelesek tüntettek, 2013; Kásler Árpád Hősök, 2013; Gagyi & Jelinek, 2017:11
2014-2015	No data	Few hundred	0	Medvegy, 2015
2016-2017	No data	Few dozen	0	Devizahiteles tüntetés, 2016
2018	No data	10,000	0	Horváth, 2018

Table A-5: Fluctuation of membership and mobilizing capacity of movement organizations comprising Home Defenders. Scarcely available data come from media provided by the organizations. The 2009-2011 data belong to VÉSZ. The 2012-2013 data on membership and local chapters reflect the size of the base of the Koppány group. It was the leader of BAÉSZ who mobilized 7,000-10,000 directly impacted people to a demonstration in 2013, and 10,000 people for a petition in 2018. The rest of the data refers to the capacity of I Will Not Give Up My House.

Class

- Members of Home Defenders showed a working-class and a lower-middle-class character. Many had vocational school qualifications, worked in low-paying administrative jobs, or were first-generation intellectuals (Szabó, 2018:35).

Gender

- Although the top leaders of movement organizations were always males, there were several female leaders in mid- and lower-rank positions, such as Judit Stefánné Tóth, Andrea Dombóvári, and Ildikó Kraf, leaders of the Hajdú-Bihar, the 3rd district (of Budapest), and the Miskolc chapters of Koppány Group, respectively (ÉM-SZP, 2012:3; HBN-OCS, 2014:3). In addition, some smaller organizations in the Home Defenders' network, such as the Radical Anti-Bank Group (*Radikális Bankellenes Csoport*), had top female leaders.

Appendix 6: List of Hungarian governments

Name of government	Duration	Prime Minister	Parties involved
Németh	November 24, 1988 – May 23, 1990	Miklós Németh (MSZP)	MSZP
Antall	May 23, 1990 – December 12, 1993	József Antall (MDF)	MDF, FKgP, KDNP
Boross	December 12, 1993 – July 15, 1994	Péter Boross (MDF)	MDF, EKgP, KDNP
Horn	July 15, 1994 – July 6, 1998	Gyula Horn (MSZP)	MSZP, SZDSZ
Orbán I	July 6, 1998 – May 27, 2002	Viktor Orbán (Fidesz)	Fidesz, FKgP, MDF
Medgyessy	July 6, 1998 – May 27, 2002	Péter Medgyessy (Ind.)	MSZP, SZDSZ
Gyurcsány I	September 29, 2004 – June 9, 2006	Ferenc Gyurcsány (MSZP)	MSZP, SZDSZ
Gyurcsány II	June 9, 2006 – April 14, 2009	Ferenc Gyurcsány (MSZP)	MSZP, SZDSZ
Bajnai	April 14, 2009 – May 29, 2010	Gordon Bajnai (Ind.)	MSZP
Orbán II	May 29, 2010 – June 6, 2014	Viktor Orbán (Fidesz)	Fidesz, KDNP
Orbán III	June 6, 2014 – May 18, 2018	Viktor Orbán (Fidesz)	Fidesz, KDNP
Orbán IV	May 18, 2018 – May 24, 2022	Viktor Orbán (Fidesz)	Fidesz, KDNP
Orbán V	May 24, 2022 – present	Viktor Orbán (Fidesz)	Fidesz, KDNP

Table A-6: List of Hungarian governments. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_Hungary

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