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# Closing space for civil society

How western and non-western linkages explain  
restrictions on foreign funding to domestic civil  
society organizations

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# Abstract

This thesis seeks to answer *what causes some governments to restrict foreign funding to domestic civil society organizations while others do not*. These repressive measures have increased significantly in all regions of the globe recently and existing research has yet to provide an encompassing explanation for the trend. Considering that neither foreign funding or government repression are exactly novel phenomena urges for looking closer at the increase of restrictions. By elaborating on Levitsky and Way's theory on linkage and leverage (2010) and expanding on research gaps found in previous literature, the thesis argues that the issue is driven by a shift in geopolitical power relations. The thesis argues that governments implement restrictions depending on the country's linkages to western and non-western external powers, specifically by how their respective pressure and norm preferences raise or reduce the costs of repressive behavior. A comparative, qualitative analysis on Hungary and Georgia did not support this claim. Still, the findings highlight theoretical insights into the concept of linkages and provide recommendations for further studies.

*Key words:* civil society, foreign funding, autocracy, linkages, closing space

Words: 20.000

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Civil society has come under attack in recent years. In all regions of the world, government crackdowns on civil society's ability to organize, claim rights and influence public policy are increasing. Since 2012, over 100 laws aimed at restricting funding, operations and registration of civil society organizations (CSOs) have been passed in different countries (IHRG, 2016, p. 8-9). In 2014, the majority of the global population lived in restricted civil societies and serious threats against civic freedoms was noticed in 96 countries (Civicus, 2015, p. 53). In 2016, global freedom dropped for the eleventh year in a row and countries with declining political rights and civic liberties were double to those with gains (Freedom House, 2017).

This trend of civil society restrictions is referred to as closing space and has come to be held as a driver of state fragility, conflict and regional instability (Carothers, 2016, p.3; Kiai, 2013, p. 9). Current research on the subject is policy-oriented and somewhat incoherent but consensus has been reached on a few key factors. First, closing space is argued to be more common in hybrid and semi-democratic states and felt the most by CSOs engaged in democracy, human rights and advocacy (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2015, p. 6; Hayman et. al. 2013, p. 8; van der Borgh & Terwindt, 2014, p. 92). Second, measures related to closing space are being shared and replicated between governments to an ever larger extent and range from arbitrary laws, discriminatory policies to extra-judicial violence (Gershman & Allen, 2006, p. 40-45; Way, 2016, p. 65; Koesel & Bunce, 2013). Third, amongst these measures, restrictions against foreign funding is

considered the most wide-spread and effective strategy to undermine CSOs and civil society (Carothers, 2015, p. 1; Rutzen, 2015, p. 30; Kiai, 2013, p. 4-5). In turn, the impacts caused by restrictions against foreign funding have led them to be framed as “the leading edge of wider crackdowns on civil society” (Carothers, 2015, p. 1) that “undermine civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights as a whole” (Kiai, 2013, p. 5).

Looking closer at the spread of restrictions indicate that it is not only an issue about domestic repression, it also reflects a larger struggle between western and non-western powers and norms. This is clearly reflected by how foreign civil society support is closely connected to western liberal norms while the majority of restrictions are found in non-western countries, usually justified on the basis of state-sovereignty (Gershman & Allen, 2006; Rutzen, 2015; Claessen & de Lange, 2016). Considering that foreign funding has since long been an established international practice gives further weight for approaching the increase of restrictions in relation to changes in international power relations (Ishkanian, 2007; Wolff & Poppe, 2015). By connecting restrictions to this larger systemic struggle, the thesis aims to explain the increase of restrictions through the question *what causes some governments to restrict foreign funding to domestic civil society organizations while others do not?*

The thesis claims that the increase of restrictions is explained by shift in geopolitical power relations and norms between western and non-western states. This claim draws on two debates discussed in political science and development studies during the last decade. The first debate concerns whether the international political system is becoming more multipolar and whether this is threatening democracy (Cooley, 2015; Diamond, 2015; Levitsky & Way, 2015). Seemingly, geopolitical shift illustrated by the rise of new powerful states have come to challenge western hegemony in certain regions. In turn, the second debate focus on western international aid and its impact on democratic development (Wood 2016; Tandon & Brown, 2013; Howell et al., 2008; Carothers & de Gramont, 2013). Such discussions highlight power relations between the west and the ‘rest’ how this impact state sovereignty and civil society.

The thesis main claim about larger systemic changes is captured by the theory of linkage and leverage which explains how the interaction between domestic and external factors describes repressive government behavior and political outcomes (Levitsky & Way, 2010). To investigate the issue, the thesis assumes that governments are rational actors that consider domestic and external factors in their struggle to remain in power and hypothesizes that restrictions against foreign funding occur in countries dominated by non-western linkages as this decreases the dependence on western linkages and limit western pressure. Under such circumstances, the costs of restrictions are lowered since repressive behavior that violates western liberal norms are less likely to be sanctioned. The thesis tests this hypothesis by using the structured focused comparison in a cross-case analysis on Hungary and Georgia. The cases are selected based on their similarity across structural conditions, linkages, geopolitical power relations and to guarantee variance in the dependent variable of restrictions against foreign funding. Still, the empirical findings did not support the hypothesis. In Hungary, although non-western linkages clearly decreased dependence on western linkages and mitigated western pressure, it was in fact western linkages themselves that lowered the cost of restrictions. In Georgia, the government displayed repressive behavior in spite of strong western linkages as its strategic value for the west limited external pressure.

The thesis starts with a review of previous literature on state-society relations, the role of donors and foreign aid, and geopolitical power transition. This is followed by an outline of the theoretical framework that connects assumptions drawn from the literature together with an elaboration of Levitsky and Way's linkage and leverage theory before presenting the thesis' hypothesis. This is preceded by a description of the research design, method and case selection. The case analyses on Hungary and Georgia are then presented followed by a discussion on their findings. The thesis is concluded with a short summary and suggestions for further studies.

## 2 Previous Literature

In-depth studies on the recent restrictions against foreign funding are lacking in research but the topic can be linked to other theoretical discussions in political science and development studies. Three research areas are of particular importance to the thesis and will serve as the basis for the theoretical framework, namely state-society relations, the role of donors and foreign aid, and geopolitical power transitions.

### 2.1 State-Society Relations

In developing and democratizing countries, many CSOs depend on foreign funding in order to provide basic services and advocate for political change and protection of rights. However, domestic links with such and other external factors is much influenced by the state and its approach to civil society. In this sense, two main approaches are embedded in the understanding of state-society relations. The “Gramscian” idea of civil society regards it as an arena of political contestation while as the “Tocquevillian” interpret civil society as capturing the plurality and diversity of civic action organized around common public interests (Howell, 2012, p. 63). This reflect how civil society function both as a counterpart and complement to the state in the production of mutual benefits. However, the government’s approach to civil society is rarely unison and depend on contextual factors like the state’s institutional arrangements and the social composition of civil society (Bloodgood et al, 2014; Hahn-Fuhr & Worschech, 2014, p. 19). This can be seen in how the government repress or benefit groups in civil society to gain support (Tarrow & Tilly, 2007) or in how laws that control civil society often stem from the historic and socio-political context (Mayhew, 2005, p. 729).



CSOs that function as state counterparts are generally more challenging toward the government. However, even CSOs that complement the state, by for example providing basic services or attracting resources, may involve a number of domestic and external actors that the government must balance against its political control. In this sense, the government's approach to an autonomous and organized civil society is greatly dependent on its self-perceived legitimacy as potential threats to its power clearly outweigh CSO benefits (Bratton, 1989, p. 576). Government approach to civil society is also argued to be dependent on state capacity (Rahman, 2006, p. 456). In this sense, opinions differ whether a weak state empowers civil society or vice versa (Wang, 1999). Seemingly, both strong and weak states are equally likely to permit an independent civil society as they are to repress it (Jackson, 2010, p. 115; Rotberg, 2004). This emphasizes the importance of civil society's autonomy as it limits dependency and facilitates counterpart functions that are vital both for constraining state power and legitimizing its authority. However, overt autonomy might also undermine the state, and in turn also civil society, for example by weakening institutionalized protection of rights and freedoms (Diamond, 1994, p. 14). Still, as civil society and the state are connected, some level of autonomy must be guaranteed in order to protect rights and CSO functions (Hall, 1995, p. 16).

Although state-society relations serve as the basis for democratic development it may also be a source of conflict. In this sense, contention arises as civil society engages spaces under state control or when the state strives to reclaim or penetrate new spaces. Under such conditions, civil society space is a zero-sum game as the state or society benefits on behalf of the other. Positive-sum games require sufficient civil society and state interests to align or for civil society to assist in policy implementation (Bratton, 1989, p. 428-429). Still, both negative and positive changes in civil society space can lead to conflict as the former decrease civil society's autonomy while the latter may cause the government to perceive itself as threatened (Tandon & Brown, 2013, p. 789-790). Conflict due to positive changes can be seen during democratization processes as civil society engages the state by expanding collective claim-making (Tarrow & Tilly, 2009, p. 449).

### 2.1.1 The impact of foreign funding on state-society relations

State-society relations is an important factor for explaining domestic political conditions but as been touched upon, this is also subject to influence from external factors. In contexts of development and democratization, foreign civil society support can have significant impacts and may even re-define power relations between state and society. Seemingly, western foreign funding usually favors CSOs that function as state counterparts. This is often the case in western democracy promotion strategies but may also be used to avoid confiscation of funds by the government (Hahn-Fuhr & Worschech, 2014, p. 32-33; Gleditsch & Ward, 2006, p. 919). During the 1990s, foreign funding coupled with external pressure on developing and transitioning states triggered a rapid increase of CSOs in many developing countries (Reimann, 2006). This fostered strong links between domestic recipient CSOs and external, mainly western, donors. In turn, by drawing on these links and attracting international attention, this has made CSOs themselves capable of instigating external pressure on governments. Increased awareness of CSOs' capacity amongst governments may therefore be a potential explanation for the increase of restrictions against foreign funding (Dupuy, et al., 2014, p. 4-5, 10) and for how some governments have come to share and replicate restrictive policies amongst each other (Chenoweth, 2017, p. 95). Still, further factors must be weighed in. In Bangladesh for example, restrictive CSO-legislation stem from a period of instability when civil society challenged the political legitimacy of the government (Mayhew, 2005, p. 733-736). In Egypt on the other hand, the government implemented restrictions in line with the will of the electorate as the majority of Egyptians opposed U.S. funding to domestic CSOs (Rutzen, 2015, p. 41).

Seemingly, the main incentive for governments to restrict foreign support is to guarantee their hold on power (Wiktorowicz, 2002; Jackson, 2010). At the same time, governments must also consider their international reputation. Failing to do so can in fact threaten the power of the government since external reactions to repression can trigger domestic political changes (Burgerman, 2001). Thus, it

should be presumed that governments ought to consider the risk of both domestic and international retaliation when using of repression in order to protect power. Still, it seems problematic to assess whether such behavior indicate whether governments are under sufficient or insufficient pressure (Christensen & Weinstein, 2013; Dupuy et al., 2014). However, domestic and external pressure can also be undermined by the foreign funders themselves. Seemingly, external donors often favor geopolitical and economic interests when they clash with support to civil society (Ambrosio, 2014). In Honduras, the U.S. has allegedly prioritized security cooperation over defaming the government for repression (Hayman et al., 2013, p. 19). In Ethiopia, the government has been able to avoid international pressure following restrictions due to its status as a strategic western ally (Dupuy et. al., 2014, p. 26).

## 2.2 The role of donors and foreign aid

Restrictions against foreign funding are sometimes part of broader attacks against all forms of external influence. In some countries, this has even caused prominent actors like USAID, Freedom House and the Open Society Institute to seize their operations (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014, p. 13-14). Still, external actors are not only at the receiving end of restrictions. They may in fact be complicit in restrictions as their practices sometimes constitute as foreign intervention in domestic politics (Stuenkel, 2013, 341-342; Gleditsch & Ward, 2006, p. 919; Banks et al., 2015, p. 712). Even the relations between international donors, governments and CSOs can implicate foreign actors in restrictions. For example, donor-CSO alliances can trigger government hostility toward the latter while donor-government alliances may obstruct the former to protect CSOs. Also, donors can provide the government with reasons for restrictions since their demands can undermine the local accountability and legitimacy of CSOs (Wood, 2016, p. 535). Donor demands can also have negative impacts regardless of the government's involvement as it come at the expense of CSOs' "emancipatory and

political roles” (Howell et. al, 2008, p. 87-88). In this sense, studies have found a correlation between increase of restrictions and donor demands:

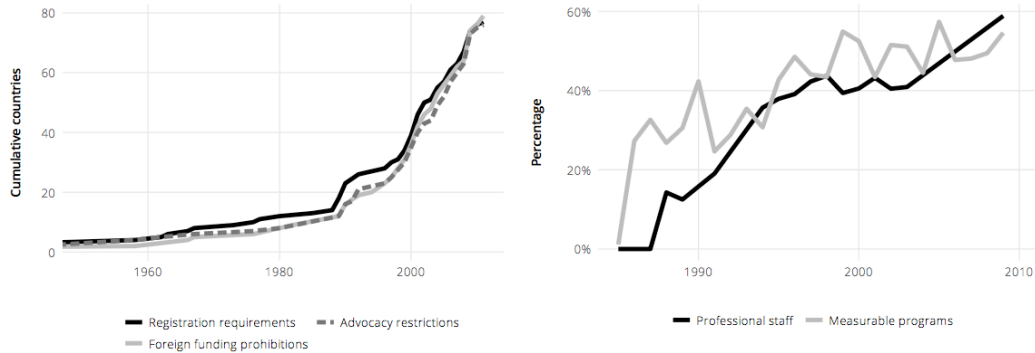


Figure 1. Restrictions-donor demands correlation (Heiss & Kelly, 2017, p. 3).

This touches upon international development’s inherent dilemma of having become an “anti-politics machine”, meaning that is overtly prone to technical rendering that fail to bring about substantial political change (Carothers & de Gramont, 2013, p. 176). Foreign funding has therefore been accused of undermining local grass-root mobilization, CSO accountability and civil society’s function as an advocate for social and political change (Chahim & Prakash, 2013, p. 508-509). Seemingly, foreign funding can even undermine political institutions by turning CSOs into professionalized and non-democratic organizations (Boussard, 2003, p. 122-123). Under such circumstance, governments have every reason to fear foreign funding and restrict CSOs on the basis of illegitimacy. To the least, this may be triggered by how donors deliberately bypass the government in domestic interventions (Dietrich, 2013). In this sense, research has found an inverse relationship between citizen’s level of confidence in CSOs vis-à-vis their government (Ron & Crow, 2015).

The impact of donors and foreign aid has and remains largely connected to western actors. However, this seems to be changing as non-traditional donor states (NTDS) are increasing their influence in the international arena. By providing governance and development models based on non-interference, NTDS out rival western alternatives and, allegedly, increase the spread of non-western norms (Cooley, 2015, p. 58; Lagerkvist, 2012, p. 153; Carothers & Samet-Marram, 2015,

p. 30). China, India and Brazil's unconditional development financing in Zambia have allegedly strengthened state sovereignty and eased the dependence on traditional donors (Kragelund, 2014, p. 158). Although some argue that both western and non-western donors' promote good governance and human rights amongst recipients' behavior (Petrikova, 2015), most seem to consider this shift to be negative for international development and civil society support (Fowler, 2016, p. 574, 576; Howell, 2012, p. 43; Hayman et. al. 2013, p. 8)

## 2.3 Competing Norms

The differences between western donors and NTDS capture an incompatibility between internationally established norms. This is evident in international development as foreign actors' promotion of human rights and democracy inevitably challenge state sovereignty and self-determination (Breen, 2015). In turn, foreign funding and restrictions reflect how non-negotiable claims on individual human rights clash with states' right to collective self-determination. At the level of international politics, these normative claims are often used to mask underlying interests. Seemingly, whether governments impose or oppose restrictions they highlight the norm that best justify their self-interests (Wolff & Poppe, 2015; Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010, p. 2). This is captured by Krasner's notion about sovereignty as organized hypocrisy. Seemingly, periods of political instability promote both state sovereignty and international protection of rights as domestic governments seek to remain in power while external actors seek to further influence and contain spill-over effects (Krasner, 1999). This is illustrated by the democratization wave during the 1990s as western powers and institutions pressured developing and transition states to open up political space and implement liberal regulations in domestic CSO sectors (Reimann, 2006, p. 59-62). However, some argue that this process also led to the current backlash against western norms as it caused a spread of partially democratized states (Gershman & Allen, 2006, p. 37). This can be explained by the concept of diffusion processes

which describes how transnational interaction between states cause transmission of norms (Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010, p. 5). This has been argued to explain the cause behind recent restrictions in Venezuela since the government, with the support from its new authoritarian allies, China and Russia, thus also aligned with their norms (Gill, 2016).

## 2.4 Ideological Struggle

Seemingly, the incompatibility between international norms is often framed as divided between western and non-western states, each propagating for democracy and human rights or state sovereignty and self-determination. This is captured by current debates on ideological struggles in the international arena and how this impact civil society repression, specifically in studies on authoritarianism and autocracy promotion. In such research, opinions differ whether there is a global surge in autocracies and if such states, like democracies, also engage in external promotion of government.

### 2.4.1 Rise of Authoritarianism?

Some argue that authoritarian governments are expanding their power in the international arena through own forms of soft-power and regional organizations. Supposedly, the shift towards a more multipolar global system has caused a rise of non-western and non-democratic counter-norms that are restructuring international politics. Stuenkel claims that this will have a great impact on western democracy promotion as “[t]he world’s decision-making elite is becoming less western, with fewer common interests, and more ideological diversity” (Stuenkel, 2013, p. 339). On a similar note, Cooley states that “[n]owhere is the contrast between the relatively democratization-friendly world of twenty years ago and today’s harsher international environment more apparent than in the NGO realm” (Cooley, 2015, p. 50-53). The progress is also manifested by non-western powers

growing tendency to accuse the west for supporting domestic upheaval, a rhetoric which is also used to justify restrictions against foreign funding (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 21).

The alleged advancement of anti-western and non-democratic powers has raised questions whether this is progressing on behalf of democracy. Some argue that the geopolitical shift and democratic decline are in fact caused by the passivity of democracies themselves. This is reasoned for by how autocracy has dominated throughout history, thus framing democracy as an exception of liberty in need of active protection (Kagan, 2015, p. 29-30). Democratic passivity has also been raised in relation to more progressive arguments, claiming that autocracies will eventually be unable to resist how globalization, economic development and spread of information technology increase demands for accountability, transparency and political freedom (Diamond, 2015, p. 153-154).

Nonetheless, the reasoning on passivity raises the question of why democratic governments would have stepped down from protecting democracy in the first place. In this sense, some argue that the pessimism toward the current situation of global democracy has wrongfully equated democratic recession with the absence of democratization. Seemingly, the post-cold war era of the 1990s was more a matter of autocratic crisis than a democratization wave. The re-consolidation of previously weak autocracies in the early 2000s should therefore not be interpreted as a decline of democracy as many governments were not even close to such a transition. Instead, democracy has proven highly resilient in spite of the recent financial crisis, the decline of EU and U.S.' influence and the growing assertiveness of Russia and China (Levitsky & Way, 2016, p. 48-52, 57). However, some argue that the same factors have halted global democratization and may eventually determine the outcome of the struggle between democracy and autocracy, for example by states like China and their ability to balance high economic growth without democratizing (Plattner, 2014, p. 15).

## 2.4.2 Autocracy Promotion

The ideological struggle between democracy and autocracy is also approached by studies on autocracy promotion. Those who see this as a deliberate practice usually lift regional power structures and spread of illiberal norms as the main driving forces (Jackson, 2010; Cooley, 2015; Demars, 2015, p. 252; Walker, 2016). Others raise the notion of confusing autocracy promotion with the opposing of democracy promotion as illiberal regimes only engage in the latter when they perceive themselves or their geopolitical interests as challenged (Babayan, 2015, p. 439). Thus, illiberal regimes may unintentionally enhance and stabilize autocracy in their regions when countering democracy promotion. Still, the same measures may also strengthen democracy by encouraging domestic liberal forces and western democracy promoters (Börzel, 2015, p. 525). Both outcomes are illustrated by Russia whose incentive as a regional power has caused stricter environment in some places while promoting western relations and democratization in others (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2014). As western democracy promotion also causes similar counter-productive effect, some explain the ambiguity behind external democratic and autocratic intervention by drawing attention to how their influence is channeled through domestic political competition (Sasse, 2013, p. 553-555). In this sense, the impact of external powers depends both on their respective counter-effect on each other and the domestic balance between liberal and illiberal forces (Börzel, 2015, p. 520). In general, outcomes of autocratic and democratic pressure show that the latter is more successful in preventing autocratic behavior than the former is in promoting it (Way, 2016, p. 73-74).

Those who see autocracy promotion as intentional claim that autocracies, just like democracies, have strong reasons to favor system convergence in their region. This is foremost due to the logic of rational choice and how foreign policy decisions are influenced by domestic conditions. Governments therefore weigh the costs and gains of external regime promotion against potential domestic effects. Although both democracies and autocracies prefer stability in foreign



relations, their differences in system convergence is caused by how autocracies base their legitimacy via provision of private goods, unlike democracies which secure this through provision of public goods (Bader et al., 2010). Autocracy promotion may also function through regional cooperation. However, while such collaborations often stave off domestic democratization in the region, they are driven by self-interest rather than ideology as the aim is to defend geopolitical interests and to uphold the respective power of regional governments (von Soest, 2015, p. 629; Chen & Kinzelbach, 2015, p. 412-413).

Regardless if autocracies promote autocracy or prevent democracy, they base their decisions on strategic rather than normative motives, which can be said about democracies as well. However, this assumption is challenged by Whitehead who argues that autocracy promotion is driven by the incentive to maintain status quo while as democracy promotion strives for change and is thus a more active and normative practice (Whitehead, 2015).

Existing research offers several points of departure for analyzing the issue of restrictions against foreign funding. At the same time, it fails to explain for the increase of restrictions. In this sense, some gaps need to be addressed in order to provide a systematic explanation. Seemingly, opinions differ on how state capacity influence governments approach to civil society; whether restrictions signal domestic weakness to external pressure; and whether autocracy is expanding on behalf of democracy. Common for all however is that they shed light on how the interaction between domestic and external factors shape domestic political conditions. The following chapter will develop this further.

## 3 Theoretical Framework

This section will develop the thesis' theoretical framework and the hypothesis that will be tested on the empirical material in order to answer the research question *what causes some governments to restrict foreign funding to domestic civil society organizations while others do not*. The theoretical framework is based on insights derived from the previous literature next to an elaboration of Levitsky and Way's theory on linkage and leverage. The section starts by conceptualizing the relationship between restrictions against foreign funding and the struggle between western and non-western powers. In order to fill in the previously mentioned research gaps, the conceptualization expands on the importance of rational choice, external pressure and regional power structures.

### 3.1 Conceptualizing restrictions

The thesis argues that the previous literature fails to provide a systemic explanation for the increase of restrictions against foreign funding since this must account for the influence of the ongoing geopolitical power shift. The found research gaps all pointed to how domestic political conditions are shaped by the interaction between domestic and external factors, often dividing external factors into western, democratic and liberal next to non-western, autocratic and illiberal. To expand on these insights and connect them to the increase of restrictions, the theoretical framework will start by drawing some underlying assumptions.

First, in order to account for reasons and incentives that drive restrictions and hold across various contexts, the framework assumes that actors base their decisions on the logic of rational choice, which for governments is guided by the incentive to remain in power (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003, p. 8). This also

explains governments' non-domestic behavior since rational choice assumes that foreign policy decisions depend on domestic conditions, determined by potential costs in the first hand and gains in the second (Tolstrup, 2015, p. 687; Odinius & Kuntz, 2015). The concept of sovereignty as organized hypocrisy further highlights the lack of difference between domestic and foreign actors since both act on basis of power, although justified by different international norms. In this sense, domestic governments draw on reasons related to state sovereignty to justify restrictions and maintain legitimacy (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2015, p. 24-25; Dupuy et. al., 2014, p. 2; Mayhew, 2005, p. 743). In turn, foreign actors' promotion of human rights and democracy are used to assert influence and fulfill strategic interests (Stuenkel, 2013, p. 340). Although non-western actors are strong advocates for state sovereignty, they will intervene externally if they perceive their power or geopolitical interests as threatened (Babayan, 2015, p. 439). In this aspect, the norms preferred by western actors do not make them more benign, rather their legitimacy and influence rests on their credible commitment to such norms. At the same time, non-western powers preference for state sovereignty and self-determination inevitably puts them in an opposing position. Non-western powers are thus less likely to sanction restrictions against foreign funding. In turn, rational choice also explains how governments may always bear the incentive to impose restrictions to protect power but that this depends on the costs of norm-violating behavior. This is argued to better explain governments' approach to civil society since restrictions are implemented regardless of weak or strong state capacity (van der Borgh & Terwindt, 2014, p. 134) and unrelated to whether the government perceives itself as legitimate or not (Bratton, 1989, p. 575; Rotberg, 2004). While this allows for making initial predictions about the conditions under which domestic governments and external actors exert top-down pressure, further assumptions are required to explain decision-making behind restrictions.

Second, the theoretical framework argues that domestic factors alone are not capable of explaining restrictions since they do not properly account for the potential costs of external pressure (Gershman & Allen, 2006, p. 48; Burgerman,

2001). Thus, the framework assumes that governments' calculations to restrict foreign funding to remain in power must take into account the costs of *both* external and domestic pressure. Imposed restrictions therefore indicate insufficient pressure since the government sees potential costs as negligible in comparison to regime survival. External pressure might come from foreign actors directly or via CSOs that alert their attention. Such boomerang effects have proven successful in raising the costs of regime repression (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Murdie & Davis, 2012). However, while external pressure may be sufficient, the impact might also depend on foreign actors' ability to empower domestic actors to exert bottom-up pressure. In cases involving several foreign actors, their struggle to influence domestic conditions is much dependent on the domestic power balance (Börzel, 2015, p. 524-525). Seemingly, this can imply lowering the costs of restrictions since the struggles between western democratic and non-democratic pressure "works through the (dis-)empowerment of liberal as well as illiberal forces" in the target country (Risse & Babayan, 2015, p. 389). Foreign actors can also lower the costs without (dis-)empowering domestic actors, for example due to the protection of geopolitical interests (Chen & Kinzelbach, 2015; Babayan, 2015) or the presence of strategic and economic agreements (Howell et. al, 2008, p. 87-89; Chahim & Prakash, 2013). In some cases, lowered costs are also related to outright protection or support (Dupuy et. al., 2014, p. 26).

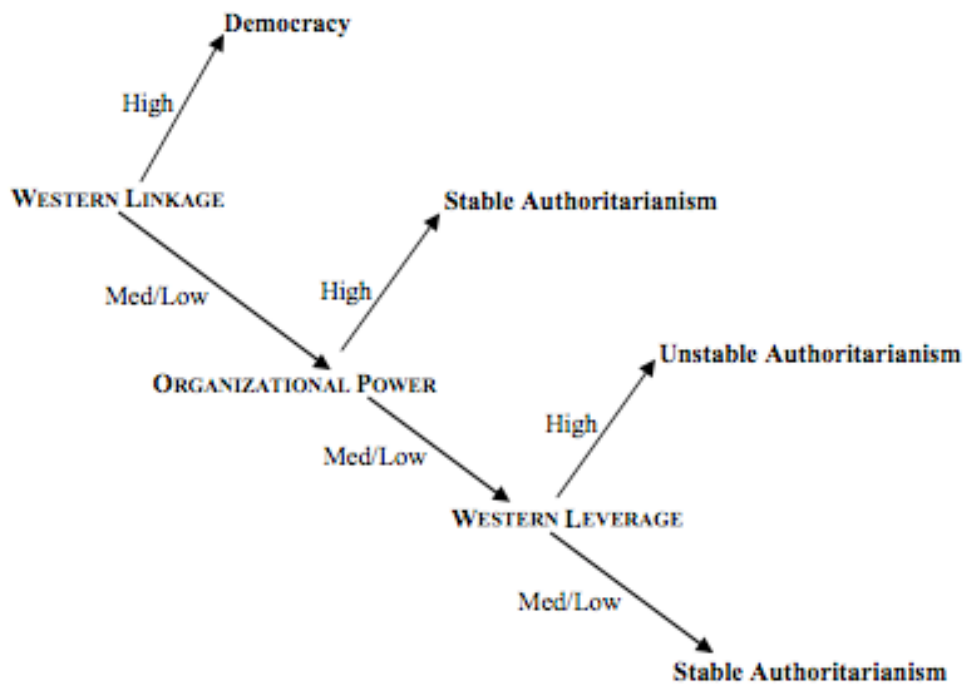
Third, based on the rise of new regional powers and the backlash against western norms, the framework argues that the geopolitical power relations between the west and the non-west are shifting. However, this impact clearly differs between regions, which can be seen in how restrictions seem to be more common in places where western influence and power is challenged the most (Buzan & Lawson, 2015, p. 293-294; Walker, 2016, p. 50-52; Börzel, 2015, p. 525). That geopolitical shifts mainly operate at regional levels are also argued elsewhere (Bader et al, 2010). Thus, as power relations are redefined, the effect of norm diffusion processes and external pressure intensifies (Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010, p. 5; Walker, 2016). Regional power transition may bear upon both domestic conditions and the struggle between foreign actors' external

pressure, which is indicated in regions where declining western influence and presence of rising powers often correlate (Jackson, 2010; von Soest, 2015; Whitehead, 2015). This shed further light on the assumption about the prevalence of restrictions in hybrid regimes and semi-democratic states since many of them lie in geographic proximity to rising or traditional regional powers (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2015, p. 6; Gershman & Allen, 2006, p. 37).

### 3.2 The theory of linkage and leverage

To capture the dynamic of the previous assumptions, the theoretical framework borrows from Levitsky & Way's theory on linkage and leverage (2010). While the theory seeks to explain regime outcomes, the theoretical framework is primarily interested in its attention to authoritarian behavior and domestic repression. In this sense, the theory help to describe the relation between a government's western and non-western linkages and the cost of restrictions. However, the theoretical framework elaborates on some aspects of the theory in order to adjust it to the contemporary context and make it more suitable to the thesis.

The linkage and leverage theory has furthered scholarly debates on democratization by arguing that explaining regime change should not give primacy to either domestic or international factors, rather their relative causal weight vary in predictable ways across contexts (Ibid, p. 38). Thus, based on a structural approach, the theory argues that a target government's linkage to the west, its organizational power and vulnerability to western leverage determine the impact of external influence and how this reduce or increase the cost of authoritarianism and government repression (Ibid, p. 70-71). The influence and outcome of each factor is ranked differently depending on its level:



*Figure 2. The three-step argument of linkage and leverage. (Ibid, p. 72)*

The theory’s definition of leverage “refers not to the exercise of external pressure, per se, but rather to a country’s vulnerability to such pressure”, which is determined by states’ comparative size and military and economic power; presence of competing western foreign policy objectives; and support from counter-hegemonic powers (Ibid, p. 42). Linkage on the other hand is based on historical factors, geopolitical treaties and geographic proximity. Linkages encompass several dimensions (economic, inter-governmental, technocratic, social, information and civil society) that operate through material mechanisms and diffusion of ideas and norms. Further factors also bear upon the impact of linkages. First, the diversity of linkages is critical in shaping political outcomes. Second, linkage and leverage may overlap so that linkages alone function as a form of pressure. Third, the existence of non-western linkages in a target country influences the impact of western pressure (Ibid, p. 50).

Thus, a country’s vulnerability and linkages with the west determines the impact of external pressure. This shapes the interests, incentives and capabilities of the domestic government through external monitoring of abuse, international

reverberation (boomerang effect) and triggering of domestic opposition (double boomerang effect) (Ibid, p. 43-45).

At the domestic level, the theory focus on the balance of power between the government and its opponents. In this aspect, the government's organizational power is the basis for domestic political stability and consists of the strength of the ruling party next to the economic control and coercive capacity of the state. Both party strength and coercive capacity are defined by their scope and cohesion. Party strength refers to the party's level of penetration in society (scope) and its ability to ensure cooperation from allied coalitions in the government, the legislature and at local or regional levels (cohesion). Coercive capacity on the other hand concerns the reach and quality of the state's internal security sector (scope) and the level of compliance within this apparatus (cohesion). In turn, economic control mainly enhances existing party strength and coercive capacity and provides effective substitute power (Ibid, p. 56-70). Organizational power thus determines the ruling party's ability to control the domestic opposition through legislative, economic and coercive power (Ibid, p. 68-70).

The linkage and leverage theory is not without weaknesses. In this sense, Sasse has stressed the need for further consideration of domestic conditions, finding that the impact of linkages can be subject to domestic political competition under certain circumstances (Sasse, 2013). Tolstrup on the other hand object to the theory's structural approach, showing how domestic elite agency may actively facilitate and constrain the impact of linkages (Tolstrup, 2011, p. 728-730). Both of these points are summarized by notions on how external pressure not only impact but also interact with domestic political factors, such as government coalitions or ethnic fractionalizations (Hahn-Fuhr & Worschech, 2014, p. 24-29). However, to some extent this is accounted for by the theory's attention to non-western linkages and party strength.

### 3.2.1 Adjusting linkage and leverage to the framework

This section outlines in detail the elaboration and adjustments made to the theory in order to align it with the reasoning of the theoretical framework. This is argued for by two reasons. First, the authors state that the logic of the theory is only relevant for periods of western liberal hegemony (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 34). Due to the shift in geopolitical power relations, the thesis argues that this is not descriptive of the contemporary period. Further consideration of the factors that the theory holds as counter-balancing western linkages is thus needed, namely the impact of counter-hegemonic power and non-western linkages. Along with the previously mentioned critique, this also demands adjusting the theory's assumption of linkages as fixed and external to governments (Ibid, p. 71-72) to be held as more subject to short-term change and the influence of domestic factors. In this sense, it could be argued that geopolitical power transition or norm preference will have a similar impact on linkages and the costs of repressive behavior, making the first a rather proximate cause for the latter. This is inevitable to some extent as certain linkages are grounded in historic and geographic factors and how external ties are, to at least some degree, always present in domestic conditions. However, the thesis argues that certain aspects of linkages make them exogenous to power transition or norm preference while still subject to short-term change. Primarily, this is due to the strategic and pragmatic feature of linkages which is foremost argued by how both domestic and external democracies and autocracies are driven by power and prone to alter norms in order to pursue strategic interests under certain conditions. In doing so, they may end up supporting counter-parts or cause costly outcomes that instead damage their interests (Petrikova, 2015; Reimann, 2006; Stuenkel, 2013; Krasner, 1999). This pragmatism also indicates the possibility that some ties withstand impacts of power transition and outweigh norms (Carothers & Youngs, 2011), while as the struggle between western and non-western external powers and their competition over influence make other ties subject to short-term change. This does not mean that linkages are capable of explaining most domestic political outcomes but that



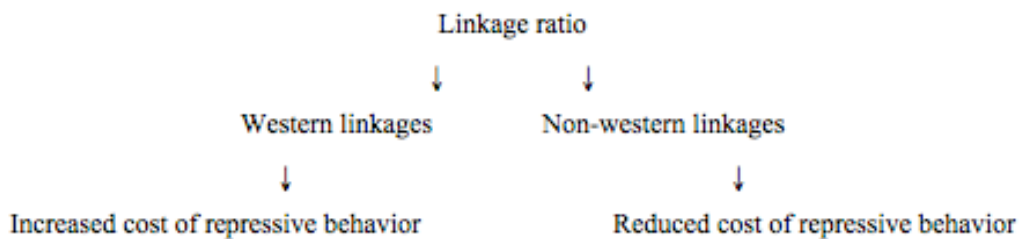
their function through pressure and costs allows for making predictions about the dynamic between western and non-western linkages, though not in the same way as assumed under the monopolar conditions analyzed by Levitsky and Way.

Second, the theory's consideration of the relative importance of external and domestic factors in explaining domestic political outcomes rests on a three-step argument that include several combinations of causal paths (Ibid, p. 70-74). Consideration of all variables, and thus causal paths, is unsuitable for the thesis' aim and beyond the thesis' scope due to the number of case analyses it would require. The framework will therefore not consider the influence of organizational power and leverage to the same extent. In this sense, the framework argues that the relation between a government's approach to civil society, state capacity and government legitimacy discussed by the previous literature is captured by the concept of organizational power. Thus, as restrictions occur regardless of weak or strong capacity and/or high or low levels of government legitimacy, organizational power hold little explanatory capability for this thesis unless seen in relation to linkages. Thus, like Levitsky and Way, the framework argues that the influence of organizational power is secondary to linkages. Also, organizational power is less considered by Levitsky and Way's earlier works where it is mainly influential during low levels of both linkage and leverage (Levitsky & Way, 2006). However, the factor will be controlled for between cases since the struggle between external actors is argued to operate through the balance between domestic forces. Thus, organizational power might influence restrictions if or when it is capable to control the impact of linkages

In terms of leverage, the inherent logic of the framework argues that this is subject to further consideration given the weight ascribed to the impact of non-western powers. The theory reasons that three factors influence a government's vulnerability to western leverage: the presence of competing foreign policy objectives; states' comparative size and military and economic power; and support from counter-hegemonic powers (Ibid, p. 41). Looking closer at these factors indicate that they are equally likely to influence a government vulnerability to non-western leverage. Since the theoretical framework underlines the balance

between western and non-western powers as significant for explaining restrictions, leverage must be considered in the same way. In this sense, leverage can easily be reframed in terms of both western and non-western external pressure. Further, the framework argues that, due to the logic of rational choice, the presence of competing foreign policy objectives also adheres to non-western powers. The same applies to states' comparative size and military and economic power, namely that it determines domestic vulnerability to both western and non-western pressure. Also, support from counter-hegemonic powers simply aligns opposite western or non-western linkages depending on which is held as counter-hegemonic. Given the attention to geopolitics and regional power structures, the framework argues that in this thesis, counter-hegemonic power is better defined as alternative regional power. This term is also used by Levitsky and Way in earlier works but then only include support to domestic governments (Levitsky & Way, 2006, p. 383). The framework argues that an alternative regional power's use of counter-pressure is capable of similar effects (Jackson, 2010; Tolstrup, 2015).

In sum, the previous adjustments mean that the theoretical framework differ from the original theory in two important ways. First, the framework considers linkages as more susceptible to short-term change and influence from domestic factors. Second, the variables of organizational power and leverage are argued to be better understood alongside western and non-western linkages. Aligning leverage this way also means that the level of linkages determines the impact of pressure and/or support from western and non-western powers.



*Figure 3. Elaborated version of linkage and leverage theory.*

The elaboration of Levitsky and Way's theory get at the core of the thesis main argument, namely that restrictions against foreign funding depend on the ratio between western and non-western linkages in a target country. In this sense, the theory's focus on regime change as the primary outcome includes the attention to authoritarian behavior and domestic repression and thus help to describe the relation between a government's western and non-western linkages and the cost of restrictions. According to the theory's central argument, high linkages mean high external pressure, and thus increased costs on a government. Where linkages are low, pressure is weak or intermittent, and costs for restrictions are reduced. (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 42-43). Thus, like Levitsky and Way, the theoretical framework considers linkages as the most influential external factor for explaining domestic political outcomes. However, due to the previous elaboration, the theoretical framework considers the counterbalancing impact of non-western linkages and counter-hegemonic power on western linkages to carry more weight than presumed by Levitsky and Way. Thus, the level of western linkages imposes sufficient costs on the domestic government *only* as long as it is higher than the level of non-western linkages. It is therefore the *ratio*, or balance, between western and non-western linkages that determines the domestic outcome, meaning restrictions on foreign funding.

### 3.3 Hypothesis

As highlighted by the theoretical framework, governments restrict foreign funding when they perceive civil society as a threat to power. CSOs targeted by restrictions are generally involved in politically-sensitive issues like democracy, human rights, transparency, accountability or other so called "government watchdog" functions. In turn, foreign funding and restrictions are argued to reflect a struggle between western and non-western powers. Thus, linkages describe the relationship between the two as it connects domestic state-society relations to the systemic competition between western and non-western powers and norms.

In this thesis, CSOs are defined as *non-governmental, non-profit and formally organized entities*. Besides CSOs, this includes nonprofit organizations, charities and public benefit organizations (Bloodgood et al., 2014, p. 721). In turn, foreign funding is defined as *funding whose main recipients are CSOs operating in the target country*. Foreign funding is sometimes used interchangeably with international aid or foreign support. However, foreign funding is the term commonly used in relation to closing space and restrictions (Wolff & Poppe, 2015). Lastly, both non-western and alternative regional powers are defined as *state actors that through pressure and alternative sources of support limit the impact of western pressure in a target country*. This is meant to capture the rising states, non-traditional donors and new regional hegemons highlighted by the literature (Carothers & Samet-Marram, 2015; Cooley, 2015; Kagan, 2015).

According to the framework, a higher level of western linkages increases the likelihood of western pressure to raise the costs for restrictions. In this sense, the extent of pressure from external monitoring, international reverberation and the domestic opposition may threaten the government's international reputation and hold on power. Under such circumstances, whether the government has the incentive or not to impose restrictions, the potential costs of taking such measures are enough to at least tolerate foreign funded CSOs.

On the other hand, a higher level of non-western linkages decreases the likelihood of western pressure to raise the costs for restrictions. In this sense, non-western linkages counterbalance western pressure by providing alternative sources of support that reduce the target country's dependence on the west or through pressure on the government. Under such circumstances, the potential costs of restrictions are negligible compared to the government's incentives to remain in power and the potential gains of imposing such measures.

Therefore, to impose sufficient costs on the domestic government, the level of western linkages, and thus pressure, must be high enough as to counter-act the pressure or support from non-western linkages. This still means that level of linkages can be high or low for both western and non-western powers, rather it is the ratio between linkages that determine the outcome. The main argument of the

hypothesis is therefore that governments restrict foreign funding to civil society when their linkages with western powers are outweighed by their linkages with non-western powers.

<i>Ratio of linkages</i>	<i>Amount of pressure</i>	<i>Cost of restrictions</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Western	Sufficient	Increased	Government tolerate foreign funded CSOs
Non-western	Insufficient	Reduced	Government restrict foreign funding to CSOs

### 3.3.1 Hypothesis for western dominated ratio

The thesis hypothesizes that in cases where western linkages outweigh non-western linkages, the government is less likely implement restrictions against foreign funding to CSOs since western pressure is sufficient to increase the cost of restrictions. Since the ratio favors western linkages both indicates that the domestic political balance supports liberal forces and increases the likelihood that western powers will respond with pressure to signal credible commitment. In turn, this makes the government more susceptible to western pressure both due to the gains of the linkages themselves and how the effect of norm diffusion ought to indicate the presence of a permissive approach to civil society. Thus, this increases both the potential impact of domestic bottom-up pressure and the likelihood that the government will commit or at least refrain from violating western liberal norms. Doing so would risk damaging the linkages with the west and result in external as well as domestic pressure that threaten government's international image and hold on power. At the same time, favor of western linkages also limits the cost-reducing effect of non-western linkages or alternative regional powers. Thus, the government is less likely decrease its dependence on the west, change norm preference and find the costs of restrictions negligible compared to the potential gains.

### 3.3.2 Hypothesis for non-western dominated ratio

In cases where non-western linkages outweigh western linkages, the government is more likely to implement restrictions due to lowered costs. Favor of non-western linkages indicate that illiberal domestic forces dominate the domestic political balance, thus increasing the likelihood of norms that favor state sovereignty and a government that is both less susceptible to western pressure and less permissive toward civil society. This reduces the potential impact of domestic bottom-up pressure. In turn, dominating non-western linkages limit the dependence on western linkages and the impact of western pressure due to alternative support and counter-pressure. This furthers the likelihood that the government will be less sanctioned for repressive behavior and perceive the gains of restrictions to outweigh potential costs. Strong presence of non-western linkages also increases the likelihood that an alternative regional power will seek to counter western pressure in order to protect its geopolitical interests.

# 4 Research Design

## 4.1 Method

The thesis investigates the research question through a qualitative comparative case analysis by using Mill's method of difference for selecting cases and the structured focus comparison method for analysis. The design is congruent with the thesis aim as comparison is required to describe variance in the dependent variable, *restrictions against foreign funding to CSOs*. A controlled and in-depth approach is also suitable in order to capture complex relationships and analysis of a specific aspect of larger phenomenon. Further, the lack of studies on closing space in general and restrictions against foreign funding in particular highlights the need for a broadened research agenda. This must start with in-depth studies that test existing theory and generate verifiable hypotheses for future research. However, qualitative case analysis inevitably suffers from the dilemma of favoring internal over external validity. While this decreases the possibility of making generalizations to the overall population, in-depth analysis allows for stronger claims about the eventual findings (Gerring, 2011, p. 1144).

The qualitative case analysis uses the structured focus comparison for testing the hypotheses. This method is strong when drawing causal inferences from a small number of cases as it allows for both in- and cross-case analysis (George & Bennet, 2005, p. 67-72). The structured focus comparison means collecting data on the same variables across cases by using a standardized set of general questions that reflect the aim of the thesis and its theoretical focus (King et al., 1994, p. 45). This means that focus will only be placed on the aspects deemed relevant according to the theoretical framework. Thus, to allow for cross-case

comparison and test the argument of the thesis, data will be collected on domestic politics, civil society and linkages in each case. In turn, providing thoroughly formulated questions improves the reliability of the analysis and strengthens the method's ability to link theory and empirical data. While the questions should be general as to apply to all cases in the population, this does not exclude the possibility of addressing some aspects more in-depth (George & Bennet, 2005, p. 286). In this sense, the questions systematize the data collection and ensure comparability between cases while the emphasis on thesis aim and theoretical focus defines the analytical scope of the method (Ibid, p. 235-241). The method's use of a disciplined focus on specific aspects is argued to account for qualitative case studies' inherent dilemma of richness-parsimony trade-off (Ibid, p. 85) but also to assist analysis of complex scenarios, such as the one studied in this thesis. Still, the disciplined focus put great demand on data collection as not to risk the analysis of being oversimplified or specific, thus undermining the comparability between cases and the theoretical contribution (van der Lijn, 2006, p. 42).

## 4.2 Case selection

In qualitative studies, selection of cases deserves utmost attention given the risk of selection bias. This argues for the use of a purposive method. While such methods are inherently weaker in terms of reliability, they are still able to select representative cases with relevant variation on key variables (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). In this sense, case selection is based on Mill's method of difference. This method is suitable for a controlled comparative analysis when cases need to be as similar as possible but still include variance in one independent and the dependent variable. Essentially, the method structure similarity across variables, thus assisting in outlining the sequential order and more importantly, account for the effect between the independent and dependent variable. In turn, comparable in-case analyses of causal paths and intermediary variables are made capable by the questions asked to each case, which also assist



in controlling for spurious inference (George & Bennet, 2005, p. 207).

The following control variables are based on what previous research consider influential in cases of closing space. These serve as criteria relating to the thesis objective and strive to ensure variation and limit selection bias (Ibid, p. 255). Cases that display similarity across these variables are argued to be fruitful for analysis and equally (in)vulnerable to external pressure, thus accounting for variance in the independent variable, and similar in permissive or restrictive approaches to civil society, thus controlling for bias in the dependent variable.

Cases are foremost selected on the possibility of variance in the dependent variable, meaning that domestic CSOs must be recipients of foreign funding.

Second, hybrid or semi-democratic regimes are one of the few concepts that are held as central in the growing literature on closing space. Thus, for the thesis to make a contribution to the discussion, this relation must be considered. This variable also holds instrumental value as such regimes often include linkages to both western and non-western powers (Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010). Avoiding cases that are categorized as strong or weak democratic or authoritarian states also limit bias against either one of the hypotheses as this risk including overly restrictive or generally permissive governments (George & Bennet, 2005, p. 123).

Third, in order to account for the geopolitical power shift as argued for by the theoretical framework and to control for its potential influence on domestic factors and western linkages, cases must both be in geographical proximity of an alternative regional power. Such powers protect political, economic and military interests outside its borders and influence states in its geographic proximity. The scope is based on existing studies where Brazil, India, Russia, China and Saudi-Arabia are common examples of powers that influence the state-society and foreign relations of their regional neighbors (Börzel, 2015; Stuenkel, 2013).

Based on these scope conditions, the cases selected for analysis are Hungary and Georgia, the former being the case with restrictions against foreign funding. Contextual similarities are supported by a number of indexes except for a few differences in relation to corruption, violence and the dependent variable. Hungary is more fraught by corruption while Georgia scores slightly worse in

terms of political stability and absence of violence/terrorism (World Bank, 2015; Transparency International, 2016; UNDP, 2015a; Ibid, 2015b). The V-Dem and Civicus Civic Space Monitor consider civil society as less open and more repressed in Hungary (V-Dem, 2012; Civicus, 2017).

Both governments are classified as nations in transit by Freedom House. While Georgia is defined as a hybrid regime and Hungary as a semi-consolidated democracy, the two display similar scores in democracy, political and civil liberties (Freedom House, 2016; 2017a, 2017b). Both countries are in geographic proximity of western and eastern Europe. Russia therefore constitutes for both non-western linkages and the alternative regional power in the analyses. This might affect the impact and level of linkages as Georgia is a neighboring country with Russia. Still, comparison with other case pairs during the selection process indicated Georgia and Hungary as most viable for analysis.

	<b>Linkages ratio</b>	<b>Hybrid or semi-democratic regime</b>	<b>Proximity to regional power</b>	<b>Restrictions on foreign funding</b>
Georgia	?	Yes	Yes	No
Hungary	?	Yes	Yes	Yes

## 4.3 Operationalization

### 4.3.1 Independent variable – Linkages

As outlined by the theoretical framework, linkages is the independent variable argued to hold the most causal influence in explaining outcome in the dependent variable. Levitsky and Way define linkages as the concentration of economic, political, diplomatic, organizational and social ties and the movement of capital, people, information, goods and services. In turn, U.S., EU and western-led

institutions constitutes as bases of western linkages (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 43). To account for the entire dimension of ties is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead the analysis will assess the level of western and non-western linkages based on:

- Economic linkages (trade, loans, state aid or funding)
- Inter-governmental linkages (ties with multilateral institutions, political ties)
- Civil society linkages (funding, ties with international organizations, sentiments)

These linkages are far from exhausting the variety of ties that may be present. However, the focus on economic, inter-governmental and civil society linkages is highly capable to assess for the impact of both material mechanisms and diffusion processes. (Ibid, p. 43-45). They also consist of a spectrum wide enough to control for the more exogenous aspects of linkages and indicate the larger diversity of ties that might exist in each case. All factors, besides the ones concerning state aid or funding, civil society sentiments and funding, are used by Levitsky and Way. The reason for adding these is to better capture foreign funding and the norm diffusion effect of linkages. Each factor is used to assess the level of western and non-western linkages. In turn, defining the ratio, or balance, between linkages is based on comparison between the factors' cumulative level.

<b>Linkage</b>	<b>General questions</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Economic	What is the target country's western and non-western ties in terms of trade, loans, state aid or funding?	What is the ratio of economic linkages?
Inter-governmental	What is the target country's ties with western and non-western multilateral institutions?	What is the ratio of inter-governmental linkages?
	What is the target country's political ties with western and non-western actors?	
Civil society	Are CSOs in the target country receiving funding from western and non-western actors?	What is the ratio of civil society linkages?

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Does civil society in the target country have ties with western and non-western political and religious organizations?

What is the public opinion in the target country toward the west and non-west?

#### 4.3.2 Causal mechanism – Pressure and costs

The influence of linkages is essentially measured in their respective success in raising or reducing the costs of restrictions. In turn, this means that the level of each linkage outweigh that of the other, thus determining the ratio between western and non-western pressure. However, if the analysis of the potential effect of linkages ratio is to be viable, the questions posed to each case must be general as to capture the onset of restrictions as well as alternative explanations. This is in line with the structured focus comparison as questions must be both clear and general in order to be applicable to all possible cases in the population. To account for the causal mechanism of pressure and costs, the following questions will be asked to each case:

- Is western pressure operating through external monitoring of government abuse, international reverberation (boomerang effect) or triggering of domestic opposition (double boomerang effect)? Is western pressure threatening the domestic government's international reputation or hold on power? Are western linkages successful in influencing the domestic government? Does the presence of an alternative regional power limit western pressure? Does competing foreign policy objectives limit western pressure?
- Is non-western pressure operating through external monitoring of government abuse, international reverberation (boomerang effect) or triggering of domestic opposition (double boomerang effect)? Are non-western linkages counter-balancing western pressure? Are non-western

linkages sanctioning repressive behavior by the government? Are non-western linkages successful in influencing the domestic government? Does competing foreign policy objectives limit non-western pressure?

- Does domestic elite agency strengthen or weaken linkages?
- Does domestic political competition strengthen or weaken linkages?

### 4.3.3 Dependent variable – Restrictions against foreign funding

The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law has listed the ten most common measures for restricting foreign funding to CSOs:

1. Requiring government approval to receive international funding
2. Passing ‘foreign agents’ legislation to stigmatize CSOs receiving international funding
3. Limiting the amount of international funding that CSOs can receive
4. Stipulating that international funding must be channeled through government-controlled bodies
5. Restricting activities that can be supported from international funding
6. Preventing CSOs from receiving funding from particular donors
7. Applying broad anti-terrorism and anti-money laundering measures to restrict international funding
8. Taxing international funding
9. Imposing high reporting requirements for international funding
10. Using other laws, including treason and defamation laws, to criminalize CSOs and CSO personnel who receive international funding (Rutzen, 2015, p. 9-10).

This list show that foreign funding can be restricted both *de jure* and *de facto* through measures that constrain the political, administrative and legal spaces for CSOs in various ways, including complete constraints, limitations, criminalization, stigmatization and administrative requirements. In order to capture the range of different measures in the analysis, the dependent variable is

defined as *government policies and laws that restrict foreign funding to CSOs or decrease their operational capacity and security due to their status as recipients of foreign funding*. Variance in the dependent variable is therefore based on the presence of at least one of the previously listed measures.

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>General questions</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Restrictions on foreign funding to CSOs	Has the government imposed any law or policy that restrict foreign funding to CSOs?	Did the government impose restrictions due to lowered costs?
	Has the government imposed any law or policy that decreases the capacity or security for recipients of foreign funding?	Did the government refrain from restrictions due to increased costs?

#### 4.4 Data and source criticism

Different kinds of secondary sources have been used to gather empirical material for the case analyses and the majority have been cross-referenced in order to ensure validation. To the largest extent possible, the data collection has gathered empirical material from well-known and reliable organizations (e.g. *Freedom House, Civicus, Human Rights Watch*) as well as peer-reviewed academic articles (e.g. *Journal of Civil Society, Eastern European Politics, Democratization*) and books (e.g. *Mitchell, 2012*). Government documents from U.S. and different bodies in the EU have also been consulted. Data requirements along with recent developments in Hungary also demanded for the use of news articles. In turn, material was gathered from large international and well-known news sources (e.g. *Washington Post, The Telegraph, Politico*). The regional focus of the thesis required that less established secondary sources to be used given their expertise on the respective cases. Some of these sources are of lesser methodical quality than the preferred sources but are advantageous due to their

proximity to the cases. Still, this consequence on the analysis is deemed minimal.

Control for bias has been the main challenge when gathering the empirical material. During the analyses it was quickly discovered that the contexts in the two cases were highly polarized and politicized. Adding to this is a divide between western and non-western sources, each being subjected to the risk of having limited access to opposing perspectives or incentives. In turn, consistent triangulation of several sources were used to limit the impact of bias and dependence. As an outcome, each answer to the standardized general questions rests on several sources. Still, the validity of the analyses is affected by the data, primarily due to the availability of data in English and from western sources and lack of reliable domestic and non-western sources.

# 5 Analysis

## 5.1 Georgia

Georgia's development as a post-soviet state has been characterized by unstable domestic politics, internal conflict, poor economic performance and high levels of corruption (Bader et al. 2010, p. 94; Fukuyama, 2015, p. 21). Georgia was among the first of the so called color revolutions in Eastern Europe and central Asia during the early 2000s. The country's own rose revolution was triggered by mass-protests after accusations of election fraud in the 2003 parliamentary elections. This led to the ousting of President Eduard Shevardnadze and was followed by a free and fairly held election that resulted in a landslide victory for the United National Movement (UNM), led by the former opposition and CSO leader Mikhail Saakashvili. This raised hopes about successful democratization of the country and since then Georgia has been set on integration with the west, aspiring for membership in both NATO and EU (Mitchell, 2009; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani, 2009).

The rose revolution has been held as a success by EU and U.S. Before and during the revolution, the two provided large amounts of funds to Georgian CSOs as part of their democracy promotion strategy in the region (Lutsevych, 2013, p. 2). Georgia's neighboring countries instead saw the revolution as a matter of political intervention, accusing western support to have aided the domestic opposition in its upheaval against the former government. This triggered strict measures against civil society among Georgia's neighbors and is believed to have obstructed similar democratic revolutions in Belarus, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan (Demars, 2015, p. 239). The toughest measures however took place in Russia



where Georgia's revolution was interpreted as a geopolitical confrontation by the west. Tensions were further heightened after the orange revolution in Ukraine as Russia's influence in the region seemed to decline even more. This contributed to Russia implementing severe restrictions on foreign funding to CSOs and in exporting similar practices to its neighboring post-soviet allies (Koesel & Bunce, 2013, p. 758; Demars, 2015, p. 252).

Western civil society funding to civil society has therefore been held as a contributing factor for bringing about the revolution in Georgia. However, the long-term prospect of this support is looked upon with increased skepticism. In hindsight, several factors indicate that western funding has had a rather limited impact on consolidating democratization in Georgia (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 464). The west has shifted its priorities toward strengthening the government, which in turn has responded rather undemocratic towards opposing views in the country. This has taken its toll on civil society and caused a stagnation of the democratic momentum in Georgia (USAIDb, 2016, p. 101ff; Cecire, 2016).

## Domestic politics

After winning the presidential elections in 2004, Saakashvili and the UNM coalition set out to build a western liberal democracy. Constitutional amendments were made in order to strengthen the executive power of the president in the fight against the corruption and clientelism that characterized Georgian politics at the time. The government's first period was fraught by media restrictions, lack of judicial independence and efforts to undermine the political opposition. Still, Georgians' hope for democratization and popular support for UNM remained strong. The party won the majority of seats in the 2008 parliamentary elections but under accusations of unfair elections and due to a rather fragmented opposition. UNM's second period merely exacerbated the democratic setbacks from the previous one and UNM's popularity declined. In an attempt to regain popular support, the government started to exploit Georgians' resentment against Russia by accusing the opposition for being closely tied to the northern neighbor (Mitchell, 2012, p. 127-135). UNM eventually lost the 2012 elections to a

coalition led by the Georgian Dream (GD) party. Despite the accusations, the new government has shown no signs of steering Georgia closer to Russia, rather it has reaffirmed the commitment to further western integration (Beacháin & Coene, 2016, 935-937).

Next to the government's centralization of power, Georgia's domestic politics after the revolution has been characterized by polarization. This combination has caused state capacity to be highly uneven across government institutions, most noticeable in rule of law and local government. Though reforms have been made, they are partial or largely undermined due to shortcomings in other areas (Cecire, 2016, p. 8-10). State-society relations suffer from similar setbacks. After the revolution, many CSO and civil society leaders moved on to take up positions in the government. Seemingly, western funding followed along and shifted its priorities to supporting the government and decreased funding to CSOs (Pinol Puig, 2016, p. 29-36). This trend has continued in Georgia but together with a reverse pattern of former government officials returning to civil society. In turn, this has maintained clientelist structures in Georgian politics and limited civil society's influence on public policy and its function as a state counterpart (Pinol Puig, 2016, p. 35; Broers, 2005, p. 345; Lidén et al., 2016, p. 287; EU, 2014, p. 6-7). To some extent this is facilitated by EU and U.S. policy to uphold a strong pro-western ally in Georgia, which thus supports the government's top-down decision-making. Also, close relations between the government and the west have limited CSOs' function as an intermediary and further undermined rather than strengthened democracy (Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani, 2009, p. 695). In turn, funding and support to CSOs is seemingly prone to benefit the government while undermining civil society's autonomy since access to policy- and decision-making relies on personal connections or even open support (Civicus, 2010, p. 63; Pinol Puig, 2016, p. 25, 50). While this may seem to benefit EU and U.S. purpose, it also risks Georgia's democratization since the structure has excluded most of civil society (Lutsevych, 2013).

Georgia's domestic politics also suffers from internal conflict with the northern secessionist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, both of which have strong

linkages to Russia. In this aspect, Russia has been accused of using the conflict in order to undermine the sovereign status of the Georgian government and destabilize domestic politics (Tolstrup, 2009, p. 937). In 2008, the situation escalated into a five-day war. After Georgia stepped up hostilities, Russia intervened in the regions under the claim of protecting its citizens as the majority of the regional population holds Russian passports. Shortly after winning the war, Russia increased its control over the regions and bolstered their legitimacy by recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states (Gerrits & Bader, 2016).

In spite of the lost war, pro-Russian and anti-western sentiments have been increasing in Georgia. Whether this bears on the public's support for western integration is unclear. For example, some state that western integration was supported by the majority in both 2014 and 2016 (Edilashvili, 2014; Cecire, 2016, p. 5) while others find that it had dropped to only 42 per cent in 2015 (USAID, 2016a, p. 102). In this sense, the 2016 parliamentary elections pointed out that the pro-western GD-coalition and the UNM are supported by most Georgians but are losing votes to anti-western parties. Still, only one openly pro-Russian party, the Patriots' Alliance of Georgia, managed to get seats in the parliament, passing the threshold with just 0.01 percent (Lomsadze, 2016; VOA, 2016). So far, the domestic aspirations for EU and NATO membership seem to mitigate dissent and safeguard the government against Russian mobilization efforts in Georgian politics (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2013, p. 471).

## Civil society

Although Georgian civil society is relatively open and unrestricted, state-society relations are defined by the centralized power of the government. Telling of this situation is that organized civil society is robust and diverse but constrained when it comes to influencing public policy (European Commission, 2013, p. 7; USAID, 2016b, p. 106). In this sense, CSOs participation in policy- and decision-making processes is largely superficial. CSO involvement often stops after consultations

and the government use participatory processes simply to legitimize legislation, often without including CSOs. Besides these constraints, CSOs are also subject to the government's use of state-owned media. Seemingly, CSOs that speak out against the government risk being denounced as confrontational or as part of the political opposition (Pinol Puig, 2016, p. 36-37). In this sense, the government's approach to CSOs indicates that it perceives civil society as threatening. This is not entirely unwarranted given the polarization of civil society and that many CSOs act under the influence of political parties or movements (Cecire, 2016, p. 6-7). This has even led to violent contention between CSOs where some instances show that this is driven by nationalism and anti-Russian sentiments (Strakes, 2015).

In terms of restrictions, the legal space for Georgian CSOs is largely permissive and without constraints. The administrative process of registering a CSO is easy and no restrictive legislation, government decree or policy exists in terms of funding, domestic or foreign. In this sense, the majority of CSO funding comes from foreign governments (USAID, 2016b, p. 101-102). In comparison, domestic government funding is marginal and CSOs often refrain from such funds due to the risk of becoming co-opted (Lutsevych, 2013, p. 12-15).

Western support to CSOs is often framed as essential for having fostered ties with the west and for growing a pro-democratic public discourse in Georgia (Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani, 2009, p. 689-690). Illustrative of this impact is how the government just months before the revolution proposed a bill that would suspend foreign funded CSOs but which it was forced to withdraw due to strong domestic pressure (Broers, 2005, p. 339). For the west, Georgia therefore demonstrates the positive impacts of civil society support. In this sense, funding has been framed as a necessary or critical condition for empowering civil society prior to the revolution (McFaul & Spector, 2010, p. 118; Jalali, 2013, p. 57). However, the current situation is rather different. Western foreign funding has turned many Georgian CSOs into professionalized organizations which are disconnected from their local constituents. Further obstructing is how the continuous movement of political figures between civil society and the

government has fostered suspiciously close relations between state officials and CSOs. This has caused many CSOs to lack legitimacy and accountability in civil society. This is reflected by public opinion which see CSOs as aligned with political parties and foreign funded organizations as unreliable (Lidén et al., 2016, p. 287-291; Pinol Puig, 2016, p. 22, 26, 52).

Distrust and polarization has also been furthered by the rise of pro-Russian sentiments in Georgian civil society in recent years. This has raised suspicion about Russia trying to influence and destabilize Georgia from the inside. Some suspect that this influence operates through pro-Russian and anti-western CSOs and media since information about their funding is largely concealed (Pinol Puig, 2016, 54). Georgian politics seems divided in how to handle this balancing act. The government has tried to downplay Russia as a potential threat but it is not unified in these efforts (Edilashvili, 2014). In this sense, some government officials have called for banning or sanctioning pro-Russian opinions, for example by criminalizing denials of Russian aggression and controlling the process of attaining Russian citizenship (Strakes, 2015). At the same time, the government may also be put to blame for the increase of pro-Russian sentiments due to the protraction of Georgia's integration with the west. In this sense, the latency of the process and the government's overt focus on NATO and EU membership has become increasingly questioned by the public (Cecire, 2015).

## Linkages

Following the revolution, Georgia's ties with U.S. and EU have remained strong while the relationship with Russia has grown increasingly tense. Besides seeking to join NATO and EU, Georgia has also detached itself from Russian-led institutions. Even before the revolution, Georgia had joined the World Trade Organization and left the Collective Security Treaty Organization. The latter is an inter-governmental military alliance that consist of post-soviet countries included in the larger Commonwealth of Independent States, which Georgia also left following the war in 2008 (Sasse, 2013, p. 570). In spite of this, Russia is resolute

on furthering its interests in Georgia. The country holds geopolitical interest for both sides due to its proximity with major oil-producing states and the middle-east. For U.S. and EU, this importance is furthered by strained relations with Russia, whose interests are furthered by control over the secessionist regions and Georgia's function as an economic corridor for Russian businesses (Mitchell, 2006, p. 669; Bader et al., 2010, p. 95).

In terms of trade, Georgia's main partner is the EU, followed by Turkey, Russia and China (European Commission, 2017, p. 9). Traditionally, Georgia has been vulnerable to Russian economic power due to its control over gas distribution. The tense relations between the two is noticeable in Russia's arbitrary gas pricing. In 2008, Georgia paid almost double compared to Belarus and Armenia (Tolstrup, 2009, p. 935). Following the revolution, trade flows between Georgia and Russia deteriorated along with most other linkages. As a result, Georgia was struck by a doubling of Russian gas prices in 2005 followed by severe trade embargos in 2006. Since then, Georgia has diversified its trade linkages but resumed trading with Russia (Sasse, 2013, p. 569; Delcour & Wolczuk, 2013, p. 470-471). In 2014, Russia imposed new trade embargos after Georgia signed a trade agreement with the EU (Fuller, 2014). Georgia's economic ties with Russia are also maintained by domestic oligarchs with ties to Russia and Russian companies invested in Georgia. Though, these ties are mitigated by Georgia's large public sector and large-scale financial assistance from the west (Civicus, 2010, p. 21).

Civil society ties are more divided. Seemingly, most Georgians identify themselves as European (Beacháin & Coene, 2014). A 2012 poll showed that a clear majority of Georgians trust EU more than the government and consider Georgia to have good relations with EU (Beacháin & Coene, 2014, p. 936). While most Georgians consider Russian influence to be negative, the support for joining the Eurasian Union, Russian-led alternative to EU, has grown steadily in recent years (Thornton & Sichinava, 2015; Thornton & Sichinava, 2016). Growing anti-western and pro-Russian sentiments calls for questioning the depth of the Georgians' ties with the west (Cecire, 2015). Seemingly, one influential source of

anti-western sentiments is the Orthodox Church. The majority of Georgians are Orthodox Christians and the church exerts strong political influence in the country. Although the church favors western integration, its protection of Christian morals and traditions draws on shared cultural values with Russia that opposes the influence of western liberalism (Makarychev, 2016; Rukhadze, 2016). The church's influence is further indicated by the government's passive approach toward it and in its capacity to mobilize the public against "threats" to Georgia's traditional values (Lutsevych, 2013, p. 9; Beacháin & Coene, 2014, p. 936).

In terms of funding, U.S. and EU are the two largest supporters of civil society in Georgia (USAID, 2016a; European Commission, 2016, p. 11). However, this parallels a strong priority on strengthening the Georgian state. In this sense, EU has diverted its support to political institutions and trade with the purpose of promoting good governance and rule of law (European Commission, 2013). U.S. state funding includes military assistance but also support to pro-government CSOs (Sasse, 2012, p. 589-590; Delcour & Wolczuk, 2013, p. 462-463; Stewart, 2009b, p. 810). In this sense, Georgia has seemingly especially strong ties with U.S. that include personalized relations stemming from the close interaction between Saakashvili and the former Bush administration (Mitchell, 2012, p. 173-174).

Russian state funding on the other hand is mainly targeted at the governments in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which outweighs other western linkages in the regions (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). Russia is suspected of funding to pro-Russian CSOs and political parties since such information is mostly concealed (Cecire, 2015; European Initiative, 2016). Though, some claim that the most prominent anti-western "lobby" in Georgia, the Eurasian institute, is in fact funded by Russian sources (Gilbreath, 2015; Kartte, 2016).

Seemingly, strong aid linkages have offset Georgia's democratization process as U.S. and EU are more focused on supporting the effectiveness of the government. In this sense, western support is seemingly unconditional, considering the government's illiberal behavior and the weak democratic progress in Georgia (Stewart, 2009a, p. 650). In one hand, the west's incentive for funding

is to maintain close ties with Georgia and further their integration with the west. On the other, Georgia is also a vital case for legitimizing western democracy promotion. In turn, this has caused western pressure to fluctuate over the years. After the UNM lost the parliamentary elections in 2012, EU and U.S. put strong pressure to ensure that Georgia would have its first free and fair transition of governments. However, this was followed by political tensions and the use of extra-judicial means against the former government and met by nothing but mere warnings from the EU. Overall, EU can be seen as having toned down its critique while U.S. has merely noted the government's democratic setbacks (Delcour & Wolczuk, p. 464-465). One example is the U.S. response to the government's harsh attacks against protesters in 2007. After the attacks, U.S. instead emphasized the government's decision to hold early elections rather than criticize the attacks (Mitchell, 2012, p. 173). Further problematic is how funding has stayed with certain groups in spite of them moving from civil society and into the government, thus favoring the political elite while weakening civil society (Stewart, 2009a, p. 650). One example of the consequences this has led to is seen in how CSO leaders which once promoted freedom of speech have sided with the government in deteriorating free media (Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani, 2009, p. 702).

## Conclusion

Although the conditions in Georgia indicate the presence of several factors believed to cause restrictions against foreign funding this has not led to implementation of such measures. One factor is the government's actions against civil society, indicated by accusations against the opposition, crackdown on protesters and the demands by government officials to sanction pro-Russian sentiments (Cecire, 2016, p. 7). Seemingly, both the political polarization and suspicions about Russian influence in Georgia could be reasons for the government perceiving civil society as threatening. However, the displayed



inability to balance different views in society also reflect the weakness of Georgia's democratic institutions.

The ratio of linkages was clearly in favor of the west. Whether western linkages explain the lack of restriction is obscured by how western pressure was relatively weak in spite of the government deviating from western and democratic norms. Seemingly, EU and U.S. had strong vested interests in making Georgian democracy work. This did both reduce pressure on the government and legitimized the deterioration of an enabling environment for civil society, which could be seen in how professionalization and clientelism undermined the public's trust in CSOs. Still, CSO illegitimacy was not exploited by the government to implement restrictions. However, the government was able to insulate CSOs through other means, such as co-option and limiting access to policy-making.

Russian linkages were strong in the secessionist regions but could not be seen as having any significant impact in Georgia overall in spite of alleged destabilization efforts. This proved to be mitigated by strong western linkages but also due to the war in 2008. However, while the policy to become further integrated with the west remained a political priority, the public support for this aim seemed ambiguous. Findings also indicated that the rise of anti-western and pro-Russian sentiments in Georgia could be explained by domestic dissent rather than non-western linkages, although suspicions existed regarding Russia trying to influence domestic politics through funding of pro-Russian CSOs.

## 5.2 Hungary

For long, Hungary was held as a forerunner among democratizing states in Eastern Europe. In recent years however, Hungarian democracy and rule of law have deteriorated. Since 2012, laws and constitutional amendments have centralized the power of the government and removed checks on the executive branch. This progress began after the Fidesz party and the smaller Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) secured two thirds of the parliamentary seats

in the 2010 general election (FIDH, 2016, p. 4). Fidesz's leader, Viktor Orban, has openly declared his intents to build an "illiberal" state by claiming that liberal democracies are not viable in the current global condition and instead championing Russia, China and Turkey as successful examples (Simon, 2014). In turn, the government has increased constraints on civil society and especially against foreign funded CSOs. Such organizations now run the risk of being framed as paid political activists that promote foreign interests. This stigmatization campaign is voiced both by government officials and pro-government media (Pickering & Holm, 2014; OHCHR, 2016). Further measures have included arbitrary administrative requirements, criminal charges, threats, raids and unlawful audits against foreign funded CSOs, mainly ones engaged in advocacy and human rights (Sherwood, 2015; OHCHR, 2016; Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2017). This has branded association with CSOs as dangerous and confronting and caused donors to withdraw their funding (Amnesty, 2015, p. 12; FIDH, 2016, p. 38-39).

The EU has remained relatively passive toward Hungary in spite of declining democracy, rule of law and human rights violations (FIDH, 2016, p. 5-6) while U.S. has been more assertive. In 2014, Obama called out the Hungarian government for being repressive and silencing dissent. This was later followed by imposing visa bans on six Hungarian officials after evidence of high-level corruption (HRF, 2017, p. 6), which in turn triggered wide-spread anti-government protests in Hungary (The Economist, 2014).

## Domestic politics

After winning two thirds of parliamentary seats in the government elections in 2010, the Fidesz-led coalition made several amendments to the Hungarian constitution. These changes occurred without the influence or involvement of the political opposition and civil society. Through these reforms, the government has centralized both legal and political power by undermining the independence of the court and other state institutions and removing checks and balances on the

executive branch. Implementation of further laws has weakened civil society and the opposition, restricted independent media and facilitated clientelism between the ruling coalition and the business elite in Hungary (FIDH, 2016). This progress has weakened state capacity in several aspects. Top-down decision-making and centralization of power have inherently undermined institutional coordination, regional governments and civil society's access to policy-making and public consultations (Ágh et al., 2016, p. 20-27). This has resulted in a situation of reverse state capture as politicians use their centralized power to set up corruption networks in order to benefit the political and business elite in Hungary (Hegedűs, 2017, p. 9-10).

Hungary's political landscape is highly polarized and consists mainly of Fidesz, the far right Jobbik party and a fragmented leftist wing (Enyedi, 2016, p. 212-213). Up until 2014, Fidesz remained relatively unchallenged as the constitutional amendments and restrictive laws curbed domestic pressure from the opposition, media and civil society. Lately, Fidesz has experienced internal conflicts and lost considerable support (Ágh et al., 2016, p. 2). While this has meant a slight loss in legislative power for the Fidesz coalition, it has increased its control over domestic media and market (Hegedűs, 2016a, p. 3, Hegedűs, 2017, p. 2). Simultaneously, Jobbik has gained political ground and become the second largest party in Hungary, going from two per cent in 2006 to 20 per cent in 2014. Both Fidesz and Jobbik have previously been harsh critiques of Russia but gradually changed this position. Though, Jobbik can easily be defined as far more anti-western and pro-Russian than Fidesz (Krekó et al., 2015, 5-6). Jobbik is also more right-wing, which has caused Fidesz to refrain from cooperating. Still, Jobbik's growing influence in Hungary has steered domestic politics further to the right. This could be seen both in the government adapting a nationalistic approach to Hungary's recent refugee crisis and how this resulted in regained support (Hegedűs, 2016a, 2-4).

The state-society relations in Hungary are characterized by a general lack of trust and accountability. A 2015 survey show that Hungarians are highly skeptic and distrustful of domestic institutions, media and the EU (European Commission,

2015). Besides the response to the refugee crisis, the government's populist rhetoric has not been able to improve its public image. This could be attributed to how high-level corruption, clientelism and lack of transparency have become standard features under Fidesz (Hegedűs, 2016b). On the other hand, the political opposition remains fragmented and has not been able to manifest as a political alternative. Although anti-government protests have increased in recent years, such sentiments have benefitted Jobbik instead of the left-wing opposition. Low voter turnouts also indicate that the public has grown apathetic toward domestic politics (Ágh et al., 2016, p. 3-4, 27). Although the government seems well under way in building an illiberal state, it is not completely immune to domestic pressure. An example of this is the government's proposal of an internet tax that would have further undermined access to information and freedom of expression. The proposal was withdrawn after meeting wide-spread demonstrations, which also caught the attention of international media (BBC, 2014).

## Civil society

CSOs operating in Hungary are not only challenged by the government. Seemingly, Hungarians display a relatively reserved approach towards CSO's and many suspect organizations to be co-opted by political parties. The public does however have some basis for such doubts. In fact, disguising party-affiliated "pseudo" CSOs as independent is a deliberate strategy used by Fidesz and other parties, thus undermining the credibility of all CSOs (Gerő & Kopper, 2013).

As been mentioned, the environment for CSOs has become increasingly constrained under Fidesz's rule. This is noticeable in legislation that has increased administrative burdens and furthered control over CSOs areas of operations and engagement in political activity (INGO, 2014, p. 31-32). Further measures include obligations for CSO executives to declare private assets, restricted access to public documents and complex registration processes (FIDH, 2016, p. 32, 38, 42). In sum, these restrictions have caused many CSOs to give up and refrain from

influencing public policy (USAID, 2015, p. 116; Kelemen-Varga et al., 2017, p. 39).

Parallel to these laws, the government has increased restrictions on funding, specifically for organizations engaged in human rights, democracy and accountability (Tanaka et al., 2014, p. 28). The government's control over EU funding in Hungary has allowed it to allocate funds arbitrarily and scale up eligibility criteria to include mainly long-term and sector-wide projects, which is beyond the capacity of most Hungarian CSOs. (Kelemen-Varga et al., 2017, p. 45; Ágh et al., 2016, p. 23). The government has also seized control over the CSO-managed National Civil Fund, which seems to have led to selective distribution of funds to pro-government organizations and exclusion of CSOs engaged in activities deemed as sensitive by the government. Also, CSOs that have expressed or published criticism against the government has had their funding suspended (Ágh et al., 2016, p. 30; FIDH, 2016, p. 38).

Due to this progress, several Hungarian CSOs have been forced to suspend their operations and become increasingly dependent on foreign funding. A substantial part of the government's strategy towards civil society has therefore been explicit harassment of foreign funded CSOs. Most noticeable is the hostile rhetoric used by government officials and pro-government media which has framed such CSOs as agents paid to serve foreign political interests. In 2013, the government listed CSOs deemed as particularly problematic and released their names to the media (FIDH, 2016, p. 39-40). The government has also initiated audits and criminal investigations to stigmatize and intimidate CSOs, (Amnesty, 2015).

The most noticeable case in the government's campaign is the attacks against the EEA/Norway Grants NGO Fund. The fund was an obvious target since it supported many government watchdog CSOs and was, at the time, the most significant source of funding outside of the government's control (GPP, 2016, p. 21; Keller-Alánt; 2016; Kelemen-Varga et al., 2017, p. 45). The government accused the Norwegian government and the CSOs connected to the fund for strengthening the political opposition and denouncing Fidesz and the Hungarian

government. The government took several measures that intimidated CSOs, drained their financial resources, and restricted their work. In this sense, the government initiated an audit into 58 of the funded organizations, opened criminal investigations, raided offices and homes and suspended tax numbers of the CSOs managing the distribution. The audit later extended to involve funds from the Swiss-Hungarian Cooperation Programme, which co-founded some of the targeted CSOs. This caused Switzerland to temporarily withdraw funding, affecting over 30 programs and forced several to shut down (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2017; Open Government Partnership, 2016). Although the criminal investigations have since been suspended and the tax numbers reinstated, the government has achieved its purpose as the CSOs connected to the fund have been deemed as too risky to cooperate or be associated with (Keller-Alánt; 2016; Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 2016, p. 5). Seemingly, foreign funded CSOs overall have self-censored due to the risk of similar measures (FIDH, 2016, p. 42).

A recently proposed bill indicates that the government is determined to go even further in their attacks. The proposed “law on the transparency of organizations funded from abroad” would demand CSOs which receive more than 24.000 EUR per year to re-register, publically declare themselves as foreign-funded organizations and bring further administrative burdens and demands on declaring received funding (Amnesty, 2017). EU funding controlled by the government is excluded from the law (FIDH, 2017). The proposed bill is widely recognized as a replication of Russia’s “foreign agents law” (Liberties.eu, 2017; Tait, 2017), which has been successful in dissolving or restricting the operations of CSOs unwanted by the Russian government and has served as a blueprint for anti-CSO laws in other countries (USAID, 2015, p. 203-204; Hooper & Frolov, 2016). The proposed bill, which has been hinted of for years by the Hungarian government, has been highlighted by international media and foundations have raised concerns over funding possibilities in Hungary (Byrne, 2017; EFC, 2014; Ross, 2017). Even before the proposal, CSOs stated that the threat of the new law is enough for some donors to withdraw their funding (HRF, 2017, p. 4).

## Linkages

Due to its geopolitical position, Hungary has maintained strong linkages with both EU and Russia. This can be noticed in a foreign policy that emphasizes Eastern trade and Russian relations next to commitments to EU and NATO (Lowe, 2014; Simon, 2014). However, recent progress indicates that the balance is shifting toward Russia (Juhász et al., 2015, p. 10). In 2010, the government expanded its relation with Russia while decreasing its dependence on the west. This progress was later furthered by the government's "Eastern opening" policy that aimed to provide Hungary with an alternative economic and ideological base that could counterbalance its western ties (Győri et al. 2015, p. 56). The ambiguity of this policy was made evident during the conflict in Ukraine in 2014 as the government formally aligned with EU's position against Russia while simultaneously suspending gas flows to Ukraine. At the same time, Orban criticized the EU in the council of the European Union for sanctioning Russia and advocated for further economic cooperation in Eurasia. In 2015, Hungary broke further ranks when inviting Putin to Budapest (Ibid, p. 57).

Besides improved relations with Russia, the Eastern opening policy has seemingly failed to deliver on its economic goals. On the other hand, the government has put further emphasis on non-western ideology, indicated by Fidesz's illiberal state-building project and increased statements over the crisis of western liberalism (Feledy, 2015, p. p. 72; Juhász et al., 2015, p. 13). Even more notable are Jobbik's aims to alter Hungary's balance between the west and Russia. Although Jobbik and Fidesz are almost identical in their pro-Russian policies, Jobbik is far more anti-western and its position as the second largest party has put increased pressure on the government to distance Hungary from EU and NATO (Krekó et al. 2015, p. 5-7). Jobbik's position towards Russia is much thanks to a few party officials and their facilitation of close relationships with the Kremlin. In 2014, Jobbik's party president, Gábor Vona, described Hungary as Russia's access to the west that would help counter unequal ties and exploitation by the

west and preserve the autonomy of Eurasian regions (Juhász et al., 2015, p. 25-26). Jobbik's aspirations have increased Russia's influence in Hungarian politics and have allowed Russia to further anti-western policies without jeopardizing Fidesz's more robust linkages with the west. For Russia, Hungary's value rests much on its membership in EU and NATO, which have provided Russia with channels to further its influence in Europe (Hegedűs, 2016b, p. 7-8; Krekó et al. 2015, p. 7).

In terms of trade, EU continues to hold a stable position as Hungary's primary trading partner. Hungary's trade with Russia has instead been characterized by fluctuation and imbalance between imports and exports, Russia being the third, respectively the 13<sup>th</sup> most important partner in this sense (Juhász et al., 2015, p. 12). Counter sanctions between EU and Russia following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 explain the fluctuations (Than & Dunai, 2017) while as the trade imbalance is due to Hungary's dependence on Russian export of gas, oil and nuclear fuel (Hegedűs, 2016b). Important in this aspect is Hungary and Russia's recent nuclear deal in which Russia secured monopoly on the supply of nuclear fuel and granted a loan of 10 billion Euro to Hungary (Hegedűs, 2016a, p. 10; Vegh, 2015, p. 60-61). Russia's interest in the deal was made very clear by Putin beforehand, stating that abandoning it would have "negative repercussions" and "damage Hungary's national interests" (Kesztelyi, 2015). Critics have framed the deal as actually concerning Russia buying influence into EU via Hungary (Than, 2015). Others have argued that the deal has kept Hungary silent over Russia's actions in Ukraine (Győri et al. 2015, p. 57). The nuclear deal is also part of several corruption scandals that have linked the government to Russia. These have involved the granting of monopolistic access or public tender contracts to Russian companies through unfair bidding processes (Hegedűs, 2016a, p. 4-7).

In terms of funding, Hungary's main donors are U.S. and EU. U.S. aid to Hungary decreased significantly between 2015 and 2016 and consisted almost entirely of administrative costs (U.S. Government, 2017). However, U.S. primary support is through security assistance with the purpose of strengthening Hungary's commitments to NATO (U.S. Department of State, 2016). In this



sense, the government has frequently stated its commitment to NATO and emphasized the alliance' strategic importance for Hungary. Still, Hungary's defense spending has not met NATO requirements during the last decade and the government's behavior in the Ukraine crisis have raised questions about whether its solidarity lie with the west or the east (Schmitt, 2016, p. 11, 22, 27).

In regards to EU funding, Hungary was the third largest recipient during 2008-2015 (CEP, 2016, p. 3). At times, this has been used by EU to put pressure on Hungary. In 2015 for example, EU's suspended a large amount of development funds to Hungary after an investigation found that such resources had been mismanaged and distributed selectively by the government (European Commission, 2016). EU funding is also a crucial factor behind Hungary's national growth in recent years. While the country is performing poorly in a number of economic and social sectors, the situation is deemed to have been much worse without EU's financial support (Kesztyei, 2017). Puzzling therefore is Fidesz's critique against EU. A telling example is Hungary's latest national consultation survey, carrying the motto "Let's stop Brussels", by which the government argues to gather support from the Hungarian population on harmful EU policies (Cerulus, 2017). Notable in this aspect is that, besides inquiries about EU's economic policies, two questions explicitly referred to the threat of foreign supported organizations against national security and sovereignty (Gotev, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, aid linkages are highly precarious. Among the three largest donors of foreign CSO funding (Open Society Foundation (OSF), the EEA/Norway Grants NGO Fund and the Swiss-Hungarian Cooperation Programme) only OSF seemed committed to provide support in 2016 (USAID, 2015, p.114). The government and pro-government media have long accused OSF and its founder, George Soros, of funding foreign agents and the political opposition and have called for CSOs receiving OSF support to be thrown out of the country (HRF, 2017, p. 4). Orban and other Fidesz officials have publically declared that 2017 will be about dealing with foreign funded CSOs, especially those supported by OSF. Fidesz's vice president, Szilard Nemeth, have stated that the opportunity for taking such measures has been enabled by the election of

Trump (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2017, 18-20). This commitment was made evident by the government's recent fast-tracking of legislation that imposed firm regulations on foreign universities operating in Hungary. The law has been accused of targeting the Soros-founded Central European University since it is the only foreign university not fulfilling one of the imposed requirements (Karasz, 2017).

Information regarding Russian non-state funding in Hungary is largely concealed. However, Jobbik is alleged of receiving funds from Russian sources. This has been suspected due to the party's close ties with the political elite in Russia and that Jobbik's expansion in Hungary occurred without receiving public funds. During this period, Jobbik was funded by a private donor accused of being a Russian spy (Juhász et al., 2015, p. 23-24; Foster, 2016).

In regard to civil society linkages, the Hungarian public expresses stronger sympathies with the west than with Russia. Due to historic reasons, the Hungarian public's view of Russia is generally negative and has left few social ties between the countries. One exception is the promotion of Turanism, the kinship between Eastern people, which is an important factor for far-right sympathizers, like Jobbik (Győri et al. 2015, p. 52-53). In spite of historic traumas, public support for Russian ties has grown in recent years (Juhász et al., 2015, p. 17-18). Still, the majority of Hungarians favor U.S. over Russia in regards to Hungary's foreign relations. Pro-western sentiments are also held by the majority of Fidesz and even Jobbik voters (Hegedűs, 2016b, 3). Most Hungarians also consider that "Hungary should not distance itself from Europe and develop closer ties with Russia." (Győri et al. 2015, p. 54). This is noticeable considering that the government's control over media has been accused of spreading state-propaganda (FIDH, 2016, p. 31).

In spite of the strong linkages, the west's response toward the conditions in Hungary has rarely moved beyond political debate or expressions of grave concern (FIDH, p. 6-7). However, affirmative measures are not completely lacking, illustrated by U.S.'s visa ban or EU's suspension of development funds. However, even the European Commission's use of one of its strongest measures,

country monitoring, has not been effective in strong-arming the government (Batory, 2016, p. 297-298). Hungary's unbending position was recently illustrated by how the law on foreign universities was signed amidst massive domestic protests and criticism from EU and U.S (Rankin, 2017). Some believe that U.S. pressure on Hungary will decrease with Trump as president (Foer, 2016) as Orban was the first leader of an EU and NATO member country to endorse Trump's campaign, allegedly considering Trump's political views to give carte blanche the Hungarian government (HRF, 2017, p. 6-7). In turn, Brexit and the European refugee crisis could be factors that limit EU pressure (HRF, 2017, p. 6). More credible however is Fidesz's association with center-right networks in EU, most evident being its membership in the largest political group in the European Parliament, EPP (Keleman, 2015). The membership has allowed Fidesz both political protection and the possibility to extend significant pressure over other influential countries in EU (Batory, 2016, p. 299; HRF, 2017, p. 6). This has previously constrained EU in using its strongest sanctioning mechanism, Article 7, against Hungary as EPP together with other center-right parties opposed or abstained voting on the resolution (Sedelmeier, 2014).

## Conclusion

No formal law against foreign funding to CSOs currently exists in Hungary. This also applies to the present draft bill as it does not explicitly restrict foreign funding but will, if implemented, expand the government's legal possibility to do so. Still, Hungary classifies as a case of restrictions against foreign funding since the government's policies *decreased the capacity and security for recipients of foreign funding*.

The linkages ratio indicated that western dominated non-western linkages. Still, western pressure was not sufficient in deterring the Hungarian government from restrictions. Notable in this aspect are the efforts taken or proposed by EU against Hungary in spite of being a member in EU and NATO. In this sense, Fidesz's ties with center-right parties under the EPP in the European parliament

indicated that western linkages worked in favor of the government and limited rather than furthered western pressure. In turn, Russian linkages operated both through material mechanisms and normative diffusion. The former could be seen in the nuclear deal while as the latter was evident in Orban’s admiration of Russian governance and in the current draft bill which had many resemblances with Russia’s foreign agents law.

Considering that the majority of Hungarians did not seem to share the government or Jobbik’s pro-Russian policies indicate the impact of elite agency. However, this should have meant loss of popular support. In this sense, the constitutional amendments provide a potential explanation for Fidesz’s ability to remain in power while as Jobbik seemed to gain support due to the weak and fragmented left-wing opposition. Also, each party’s incentive to maintain a pro-Russian position could be explained by economic ties with Russia, specifically the government’s corruption links and Jobbik’s alleged funding.

### 5.3 Discussion

<i>Case</i>	<i>Ratio of linkages</i>	<i>Amount of pressure</i>	<i>Cost of restrictions</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Georgia	Western	Insufficient	?	Government tolerated foreign funded CSOs
Hungary	Western	Insufficient	Reduced	Government restricted foreign funding to CSOs

The analyses indicated that the linkage ratio was dominated by the west in both cases, thus finding only partial support for the hypothesis. In spite of high levels of western linkages in Georgia and the government’s pro-western policy, the analysis found that instances of repressive government behavior were not met by western pressure. Instead, EU and U.S. prioritized their interest in maintaining a stable government in Georgia. Although the government’s behavior indicated that it perceived civil society as threatening, imposing restrictions on foreign funding

would have meant a clear escalation of repressive behavior. The thesis assumes that this would have most likely jeopardized Georgia's membership in EU and NATO, especially considering that the majority of foreign funding to CSOs came from the west. Still, some support for the hypothesis was found in the analysis, though in relation to the revolution. This was indicated by how western funding seemingly functioned as a contributing factor in creating domestic pressure on the government while similar outcomes were curbed in neighboring states, allegedly assisted by Russia's export of restrictive laws.

In Hungary, western pressure seemed largely ineffective both in spite and because of high level of western linkages. In this sense, Fidesz's ties with the EPP proved to have a mitigating impact on western pressure. This reverse effect of western linkages was not accounted for by the theoretical framework. The analysis also found that Russian linkages provided alternative support and pressure on Hungary. To some extent this was greatly facilitated by the government's own attempts to strengthen ties with Russia, indicated by the Eastern opening policy and the nuclear deal. However, Russia also had a vested interest in maintaining the government's western linkages in order to extend own influence into EU and NATO. This effect was also not accounted for by the theoretical framework and could further explain why western pressure was insufficient in spite of strong linkages.

In both cases, non-western linkages and the alternative regional power was represented by Russia. Interesting therefore is Hungary's historic and Georgia's recent experiences of Russia. In spite of this, pro-Russian sentiments were increasing in both cases, both in politics and civil society. The findings also indicated that this could be due to anti-western opinions, thus underlining how linkages are prone to short-term change and subject to the influence of domestic factors. In this sense, anti-western attitudes were seemingly stronger in Georgian civil society than in the government, while the situation was the opposite in Hungary. However, in Hungary, the public's skeptic approach toward EU next to negative views on ties with Russia show that pro-Russian and anti-western opinions do not necessarily go together.

This contrary shed light on Tolstrup's point regarding elite agency. In this aspect, each case indicated that further integration with the west vis-à-vis the east was an undertaking mainly concentrated amongst the political elite in each country. The impact of elite agency was perhaps most noticeable in Jobbik where the shift toward a pro-Russian position was facilitated by a handful of party officials. Elite agency was also found in Georgia's close ties with U.S., consisting of personalized relationships originating from close interaction between Saakashvili and the Bush administration.

In Hungary, the strongest non-western linkage consisted of economic ties, mainly through trade and the recent large-scale nuclear deal. Although level of these economic linkages can be attributed to Hungarian government itself, the nuclear deal gave proof of Russian pressure on the government. Closely behind was Hungary's political ties with Russia, which explain the government's pendulum politics and increased tendency to break ranks with EU policies, most noticeable during the Ukraine crisis. In Georgia, strong non-western linkages were found in the secessionist regions, where they also trumped all other western linkages. However, besides a five-day war, this did not seem to have any larger impact in the rest of Georgia in spite of Russia's interests in the country. Although, the Orthodox Church drew on shared values with Russia, this did not function as a ground for non-western linkages. Rather, the church furthered anti-western sentiments in spite of supporting western integration.

Western linkages were strong in both cases but differed most in terms of intergovernmental ties due to Hungary's membership in EU and NATO. According to the hypothesis, this would have furthered western pressure but did in fact lead to the opposite. In Georgia, any potential pressure that could be derived from the country's aspirations to join the EU and NATO was outweighed by competing foreign policy objectives, causing the west's interest of legitimizing its democracy promotion in Georgia to facilitate the government's non-democratic tendencies and top-down governance.

In terms of the research question *what causes some governments to restrict foreign funding to domestic civil society organizations while others do not,*

comparing the two cases indicate that their differences are connected to non-western linkages, thus lending some support the thesis main argument about geopolitical shift as a systemic explanation for the increase of restrictions. This is evident when comparing the cases on one important aspect. While the centralized power of both governments allowed them to limit the influence of CSOs, the government in Hungary still moved further to implement restrictions. In this sense, non-western linkages were clearly stronger in Hungary, restrictions seemingly copied Russia's foreign agents law and correlated with Fidesz's shift in position toward Russia. In Georgia, it could be assumed that the government did not resort to restrictions due to the lack of strong non-western linkages together with strong western ones. However, the west's competing foreign policy objectives in the country make it difficult to expect whether such measure would have been sanctioned. This conclusion demands a closer look at contextual factors and alternative explanations.

In Hungary, most of the targeted CSOs were government watchdogs or fulfilled other state counterpart functions, thus pointing to restrictions as driven by incentives to protect the hold on power. However, looking at what enabled the government to eventually take such measures must account for Fidesz's larger illiberal state-building project and the Eastern opening policy, which were pursued in spite of western pressure. Outwardly, this seemed clearly influenced by non-western linkages, evident in Hungary's overall extension toward Russia and away from the west. However, Fidesz's centralized power also facilitated a condition of reverse state capture that enabled high-level corruption and strong economic linkages with Russia. This point to the possibility that the government implemented restrictions in order to avoid accountability and protect economic interests, thus indicating autocratic behavior as such regimes rests on provision private goods in order to remain in power. Therefore, although non-western linkages decreased Hungary's dependency on western linkages, Fidesz's illiberal state-building project itself holds explanatory capability for the implementation of restrictions.

In Georgia, the government's repressive behavior was not fueled or permitted

by non-western linkages, rather UNM's accusations and the proposals to sanction pro-Russian sentiments indicate the opposite. Thus, together with the lack of both western and domestic pressure point out that any potential constraints that hindered restrictions are most likely due to the government itself, presumably incentives for maintaining good relations with the west. This could rest on both negative and positive motivation due the risk of jeopardizing EU and NATO membership and because of the protection and benefits inherited in the west's unconditional support. Still, whether this would have changed had the government implemented restrictions is only moderately assumed based on the findings.

However, comparing Hungary and Georgia points to a factor that provide alternative explanations in both cases, namely the influence of elections. In this sense, both cases indicated that while elections were not always free and fair they were able to alter the power of the ruling party. Important is that this showed how the governments drew on nationalist, anti-western or anti-Russian sentiments in order to gain support and/or defame the opposition. Accusations against foreign influence could be noticed in both cases, though referring to different sources. In Hungary this could mean that restrictions were used to gain support, thus indicating that such measure may be driven by other incentives than direct threat to power, like the possibility to expand power. However, although Fidesz remained in power, the large-scale domestic protests against the law on foreign universities argue against this conclusion.

A further and perhaps more credible alternative explanation for the outcomes in both cases is in fact the impact of organizational power. In Georgia, the centralized power of the government could explain how it could continue to propagate for western integration and limit itself against the impact of Russia's efforts to influence domestic politics. In Hungary, the government's centralization of power seemed to result in an overall invulnerability against western and domestic pressure while allowing the pursuit of further ties with Russia. However, it should be noted that the elections which granted the governments their hold on power in each case lacked a strong opposition, thus hinting of Sasse's argument about the importance of domestic political competition. In following elections,



UNM was eventually toppled while as Fidesz remained in power, much due to its ability to control state institutions but also because of the fragmented left-wing

The thesis has several limitations that must be noted. Obvious from the previous point is the cases themselves. Although much concern was put into the case selection, there are clear limitations to the generalizability of their findings as their representativeness of the overall population can be questioned. First, the way in which the government in Hungary actively sought to build an illiberal state and strengthen non-western linkages questions whether similar government efforts would be as active, and thus observable, in other cases. Also, both western and non-western linkages in Hungary did not operate as assumed by the theoretical framework. Thus, drawing any assumptions about whether these specific findings are typical or deviating for linkages are also undermined as Hungary's status as a representative case can be questioned. Second, Georgia proved to be held as one of few cases which demonstrate the positive impact of western democracy support and civil society funding. This could be grounds for considering Georgia as a rare case. This also contributed to the presence of western competing foreign policy objectives, resulting in unconditional support and almost complete lack of pressure. Thus, whether this would have occurred in other cases with the same level of western linkages can be questioned. Further, the data collection on some indicators found that many sources explicitly referred to the east/west geographic divide of the cases in relation to their recent developments and Russian influence. While this questions whether similar data would be as specific for other cases, it may also hint of Hungary and Georgia's representativeness as a case pair.

Further limitations stem from the operationalization of the independent variable. Categorizing the included ties as west or non-west proved to reflect the general direction of those not included, except for information linkages. Such ties were not accounted for but found to be significant for Russian influence in both cases. Several sources highlighted how anti-western propaganda was used by Russia or domestic pro-Russian actors to weaken western linkages. In sum, this could have affected the linkage ratio in Hungary had it been included. However, the sources discussing the use of anti-western propaganda could be suspected of

bias as they clearly reflected the highly politicized and polarized domestic conditions that characterized the cases. Further, the structured focus comparison proved mostly capable of determining the level and ratio of linkages. However, the lack of findings on some indicators questions whether the use of a different qualitative method would have led to the same conclusion, thus affecting the reliability of the thesis. This limitation was made evident when determining civil society ties with international organizations and the level of non-western funding and aid linkages. However, this proved problematic in both cases and similar efforts come across in the data collection supported the complexity of analyzing these specific ties. Nonetheless, lack of findings on civil society ties meant that it was largely left out while as conclusions about non-western funding and aid had to be based on suspicions.

Lastly, the thesis suffered from shortcomings of the theoretical framework. In this sense, the findings indicated that the relation between linkages and pressure are not necessarily one-directional or that the struggle over linkages function as a zero-sum game. This was noticeable in Hungary due to the reverse effect of strong western linkages and in how Russia used western linkages to further non-western influence. Findings from Georgia indicated that a government with strong western linkages can exert illiberal behavior, and that this can be directed explicitly toward non-western sentiments.

In spite of these limitations, the thesis' research design and theory was proven strong in other important aspects. For example, the structured focus comparison assisted in keeping the analyses centered on the proposed causal mechanism and in controlling for alternative influencing variables. The method also allowed for in-depth analyses into certain ties. Controlling for organizational power showed that state capacity and government legitimacy was characterized by centralization of power in both cases. Important in this aspect was that the findings indicated that linkages carried more weight as only Hungary decided to further limit the influence of CSOs by imposing restrictions. Also, if the Fidesz-coalition had not been able to secure the majority of parliamentary seats, which allowed them to amend the constitution, they might not have remained in power. Still, their

assertiveness to do so in spite of the risk of western pressure indicate that such incentives could be reinforced by an alternative source of support.

Asking a set of general questions to the same variables in each case proved essential considering the complexity of the contexts. In this aspect, the shortcoming in data collection correlated between the cases, which is therefore argued to limit any potential effect on the results. In turn, in-depth analyses showed that lack of data on the specific indicators could be an issue more related to Russia rather than non-western powers per se.

The operationalization of the variables proved to be valid and allowed for defining the linkage ratio and implementation of restrictions. In this sense, the indicators in the independent variable was capable of accounting for the impact of linkages through both material mechanisms and norm diffusion. Also, the variance between formal laws and informal restrictions of the dependent variable's proved significant, thus highlighting the *de facto* aspect of restrictions (Rutzen, 2015).

The main theoretical contribution of the thesis stems from its elaboration of the linkage and leverage framework. The adjustments proved highly capable of accounting for the balance between western and non-western linkages and their interaction with domestic factors. This also proved that linkages are subject to short-term change and the influence of domestic factors, which in turn highlighted how the west/non-west direction of linkages can differ significantly within a country. Although the analysis did not confirm the hypothesis, the findings underlined that the shift in geopolitical power relations and norms is an ongoing struggle observable in practice. The specific region under analysis therefore give some support the thesis' main claim. Lastly, the thesis argues that further adjustments to the theoretical framework will strengthen its use as a model for explaining how competition between external factors over domestic influence impacts civil society.

## 6 Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis was to answer *what causes some governments to restrict foreign funding to domestic civil society organizations while others do not* in order to explain the recent increase of such measures and further the understanding about the larger trend of closing space. The main claim of the thesis was that changes in geopolitical power relations explains repressive government behavior and domestic political outcomes. To test this claim, the thesis elaborated on Levitsky and Way's theory on linkage and leverage, arguing that the ratio between western and non-western linkages in a target country determines the costs of a governments repressive behavior, specifically restrictions on foreign funding. However, the findings from the case analyses on Georgia and Hungary did not support the thesis hypothesis although they indicated that the main argument could still serve as a possible explanation for outcomes in both cases. At the same time, alternative explanations together with some methodological and theoretical boundaries limit the the explanatory capability of the thesis.

That geopolitical power relations are in transition was evident in how the west and Russia struggled over linkages in the two cases. The linkage ratio favored the west in both cases but did not operate according to the hypothesis. In Hungary, Fidesz's ties within the European parliament limited rather than strengthened western pressure on the government while as Russia maintained Hungary's western linkages to gain further influence in EU and NATO. This showed that the relation between linkages and pressure are not necessarily one-directional or that the struggle over linkages function as a zero-sum game, even under conditions of power transition. In Georgia, the government did not implement restrictions but strong western linkages did not deter the government from illiberal behavior. Instead western pressure was limited due to EU and U.S. competing foreign policy objectives. However, the thesis assumes that implementation of restrictions

could have jeopardized the governments western linkages and their possibility of joining EU and NATO. Further findings showed that linkages are subject to short-term change, the influence of domestic factors and that the west/non-west direction of linkages can differ significantly within a country.

The thesis recommends further research to first and foremost look at further cases, specifically starting with non-post-soviet states and where non-western linkages are not manifested by Russia. Studies ought also to investigate contexts with restrictions where the target country's western and non-western linkages are less defined, that include strong domestic pressure or where the public majority holds a more positive approach toward CSOs. The thesis also recommends further research to test assumptions about the two-directional impact of linkages, specifically looking at how they may serve to function in favor of norm-violating domestic governments or external opposing powers. Lastly, to shed further light on the actual reasons behind restrictions, research should investigate how elections hold legitimizing function for repressive governments, if restrictions are implemented without strong non-western linkages and if restrictions explicitly target CSOs with non-western ties.

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