



MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

How to survive in a malestream environment – survival strategies of women's
organizations in Turkey

verfasst von | submitted by

Elène Anne Marine Denk

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science (MSc)

Wien | Vienna, 2026

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt |
Degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

UA 066 914

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium Internationale Betriebswirtschaft

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Mag. Mag. Dr. Gabriela Csulich PhD

Table of abbreviations	III
Abstract	IV
1. Introduction.....	6
2. Conceptualizing NGOs and their role in society.....	10
2.1. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs).....	10
2.2. NGOs and their role in society	13
2.3. NGOs under authoritarian regime	14
2.3.1 Conceptual framework of NGO – government relations.....	17
2.3.2 Coping strategies and resource mobilization.....	20
2.4. Resource mobilization theory	22
2.5. NGOs enabling female empowerment	28
3. NGOs in Turkey and their history	31
3.1. Historical overview.....	34
3.2. Legal framework.....	35
3.3. NGO - state relations	40
4. Women ‘s organizations in Turkey – an overview over their work and history	43
4.1. Feminism and female empowerment.....	43
4.2. Definition of women’s organizations	44
4.3. Brief historical overview	47
4.4. Development of gender policies in Turkey	49
4.5. Barriers	53
5. Methodology	58
5.1. Qualitative research and expert knowledge/ interviews	58
5.2. Study design and data collection procedure	60
5.3. Evaluation methods	63
5.3.1. PESTEL analysis	63

5.3.2. Qualitative content and document analysis.....	64
6. Results.....	67
6.1. Profile and NGO – state relationship.....	67
6.2. Challenges and threats under the AKP government.....	76
7. Coping and survival strategies	87
8. Conclusion.....	97
References	103
List of figures	I
List of tables	I
Annex	II
Annex A: Laws relevant for Turkish women’s organizations.....	II
Annex B: Research overview on NGOs and woman empowerment.....	III
Annex C: Excerpts from the Law on Association No. 5253	VII

Table of abbreviations

AKP= Adelet ve Kalkinma Partisi

CEDAW= Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women

CHP= Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)

ICNL= The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law

KSGM= Turkish General Directorate for the Status and Problems of Women (Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü)

LGBTI= Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersexual

UN= United Nations

UNDP= United Nations Development Programme

UNFPA= United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), formerly the United Nations Fund for Population Activities

Abstract

English

The study examines the survival strategies employed by feminist women's organizations in Turkey amidst a shrinking civic space, exacerbated by the country's neoliberal-conservative and authoritarian shift under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Women's organizations in Turkey play a crucial role in addressing gender-based violence, providing legal aid, and raising awareness about women's rights. However, they face significant challenges, including legal and financial restrictions, societal marginalization, and state repression. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of survival strategies for NGOs in authoritarian contexts and Resource Mobilization Theory, the research explores how Turkish women's organizations navigate resource scarcity, human resource management, and financial planning. Employing expert interviews analyzed through Mayring's qualitative content analysis and supported by document analysis, the study identifies diverse coping mechanisms such as compliance, simulation, informalization, and internationalization. It also emphasizes the necessity of solidarity among democratic actors. The research not only sheds light on the resilience of feminist organizations in Turkey but also contributes to the broader understanding of NGO survival strategies under authoritarian regimes, offering valuable insights for global feminist solidarity and resource allocation.

Deutsch

Diese Studie untersucht die Überlebensstrategien feministischer Frauenorganisationen in der Türkei angesichts des schrumpfenden zivilgesellschaftlichen Raums, der durch den neoliberalen-konservativen und autoritären Wandel des Landes unter Präsident Recep Tayyip Erdoğan und der regierenden AKP-Partei verschärft wird. Frauenorganisationen in der Türkei spielen eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Bekämpfung geschlechtsspezifischer Gewalt, der Bereitstellung rechtlicher Unterstützung und der Sensibilisierung für Frauenrechte. Sie stehen jedoch vor erheblichen Herausforderungen, darunter rechtliche und finanzielle Einschränkungen, gesellschaftliche Marginalisierung und staatliche Repression. Auf der Grundlage theoretischer Ansätze zu Überlebensstrategien von NGOs in autoritären Regimen und der Resource Mobilization Theory wird untersucht, wie türkische Frauenorganisationen unter anderem mit Ressourcenknappheit und Personalmanagement

umgehen. Anhand von Experteninterviews, die mithilfe von Mayrings qualitativer Inhaltsanalyse ausgewertet und durch Dokumentenanalysen ergänzt wurden, identifiziert die Studie vielfältige Strategien wie Compliance, Simulation, Informalisierung und Internationalisierung. Sie betont außerdem die Notwendigkeit von Solidarität unter demokratischen Akteuren. Diese Forschung beleuchtet nicht nur die Widerstandsfähigkeit feministischer Organisationen in der Türkei, sondern leistet auch einen Beitrag zum umfassenderen Verständnis von Überlebensstrategien von NGOs unter autoritären Regimen und bietet Erkenntnisse für globale feministische Solidarität und die Verteilung von Ressourcen.

1. Introduction

The phrase "Kadınlar Vardır!" – "Women are here!" – stands as a powerful testament to the resilience and determination of Turkish women in their ongoing fight for gender equality. In recent years, Turkey has experienced a dramatic political shift under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). This shift has brought about a significant transformation in the country's approach to gender equality, marked by a conservative agenda that seeks to confine women to traditional roles within the private sphere. This political climate has had far-reaching consequences for women in Turkey, culminating in the country's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021, a landmark international treaty aimed at combating gender-based violence. The withdrawal, which was justified by the government with claims that the Convention promotes homosexuality, has been widely condemned both domestically and internationally. It marks a significant setback in the fight for women's rights, with women's rights deteriorating even more since then. The rise in femicides and the increasing marginalization of women in Turkey highlight the urgency of the struggle for gender equality in the country.

However, it seems that the louder the anti-feminist, illiberal, and authoritarian voices become, the louder the voices of women grow. Feminist women's organizations are at the forefront to fight for legal reforms that sought to improve the status of women in Turkey. Women's organizations are particularly vital in this context, as they represent one of the few remaining voices advocating for gender equality and the protection of women's rights. These organizations provide essential services and support to women, particularly in areas where the state has failed to uphold its responsibilities. They are crucial in addressing issues such as gender-based violence, offering legal aid, and raising awareness about women's rights (Caglayan & Küçükirca, 2023). In many cases, these organizations are the only lifeline for women facing discrimination and violence, making their survival in this authoritarian context all the more important.

The political backlash since 2016 has placed women's organizations in a precarious position. Non-profit organizations (NGOs), particularly those advocating for gender equality, now face an increasingly hostile environment. Since 2013, freedom of expression in Turkey has been steadily eroding due to arbitrary and restrictive interpretations of legislation, coupled

with growing pressure, dismissals, and frequent legal actions against activists, journalists, academics, and social media users. Feminist NGOs are subject to intense scrutiny based on their political affiliations, advocacy work, and perceived proximity to the government or opposition, making them vulnerable to state repression (ICNL, 2023-2025; Human Rights Watch, 2023-2025). As a result, the civic space has dramatically shrunk, with NGOs struggling to maintain their operations and continue their advocacy in this challenging environment.

The study seeks to explore the survival strategies employed by feminist women's organizations in Turkey as they navigate the increasingly repressive political environment. The aim is to answer the following overarching research question: Which organizational strategies allow feminist women's organizations in Turkey to subvert and endure a repressive, malestream socio-political climate?

Several scholars identified coping strategies of NGOs in authoritarian regimes, such as Russia, China, Poland or Hungary. Only very few of them examined authoritarian Middle Eastern countries¹. In addition, the main focus was on human-rights NGOs or in a broader sense NGOs that stood in opposition to the authoritarian government. Donno and Russett (2004) examined the connection between Islamic states, autocratic politics and the repression of women's rights. Numerous academics and practitioners dealt with the topic of challenges and threats women's organizations face in Turkey, the history of the women's movement or policy recommendations. But until now no effort was made to understand how those women's organizations are still operational despite the legal, financial and societal barriers. What are their survival and coping strategies to navigate the patriarchal, illiberal and autocratic environment? Because the fight for gender equality and therefore feminist research is about solidarity, the study might help us to better understand the work of Turkish women's organization and how to support them adequately. The importance of the study extends beyond the immediate context of Turkey. Support in the form of financial or human resources is often distributed with a Eurocentric perspective, which can lead to misallocation of resources and a failure to address the specific needs of local NGOs. By providing a detailed analysis of the challenges and strategies of Turkish women's organizations, the

¹ Based on several studies such as Esen and Gumuscu (2016) Turkey is classified as authoritarian country.

research offers valuable insights that can inform more effective allocation of resources.

The theoretical framework of this research is rooted in the concept of survival strategies for NGOs operating in authoritarian states and Resource Mobilization Theory. The latter being chosen because of the direct connection between Turkish women's organization and the women's movement. The analysis will focus on key aspects such as dealing with resource scarcity, human resource management, and financial planning, all within the context of shrinking civic space.

The research is based on expert interviews analyzed with a qualitative content analysis methodology developed by Mayring (2015) and supported with a document analysis. The study period spanned from April 2023 until December 2024. Socio-political changes after December 2024 affecting women's rights, Turkish civil society and working conditions of feminist Turkish women's organizations are not included in the analysis, but a reflection on recent political changes is included in the conclusion of the thesis.

The literature review was conducted mainly on the Scopus database and Google Scholar. Some of the literature was found based on the snowball system. The empirical foundation of this study consists of interviews with representatives from ten women's organizations primarily based in Turkey's Marmara region (Ankara and Istanbul). These organizations, most of which emerged during the rise of the Turkish women's movement between 1990 and 2000, and identify as secular and feminist. To provide a comparative perspective, the government-aligned organization KADEM was included in the sample. The selection of experts was strategically guided by the need for deep knowledge, prioritizing NGO representatives over academic figures to capture first-hand insights into Turkey's socio-political environment. Given the sensitive political climate, the research design was informed by consultations with an employee of UN Women Austria, resulting in a participant-centered methodology. This approach emphasized trust and security by granting interviewees full autonomy over the communication medium and language, ensuring that the data collection process remained flexible and responsive to the safety needs of the participants. Therefore, all information regarding the feminist NGOs and their representatives are kept anonymous for security reasons and to avoid any negative repercussions.

The first part will define NGOs, their role in society and their relationship to governmental institutions. The next part (chapter 2.3) outlines different frameworks of NGOs under authoritarian regimes and their coping mechanisms, followed by a chapter on Resource Mobilization Theory. After laying the groundwork, Turkish NGOs and their history are covered. Chapter 4 describes the work of Turkish women's organizations and the barriers they face in their day-to-day work. The next section outlines the methodology of the study, followed by the data analysis. Chapter 6 and 7 describe and analyze the different strategies found that feminist women's organizations apply for survival. The conclusion summarizes the findings, discusses research limitations and further research questions.

2. Conceptualizing NGOs and their role in society

2.1. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

In a democratic country an independent and strong civil society with NGOs and other community activists play a crucial role in assisting and completing governmental actions. NGOs address challenges and improve public services by highlighting critical issues such as education quality, healthcare access, adherence to legal standards, and economic development. Academically speaking the third sector includes all non-state and non-market organizations and encompasses all organizations, actions and actions context representing civil society (Frantz & Martens, 2006: 18). The nonprofit and voluntary sector is contested between the state and the market where public and private concerns meet and where individual and social efforts are united. “They defend the pursuit of private individual aspiration while at the same time affirming the idea of a public sphere shaped by shared goals and values” (Frumkin, 2002: 1, 13).

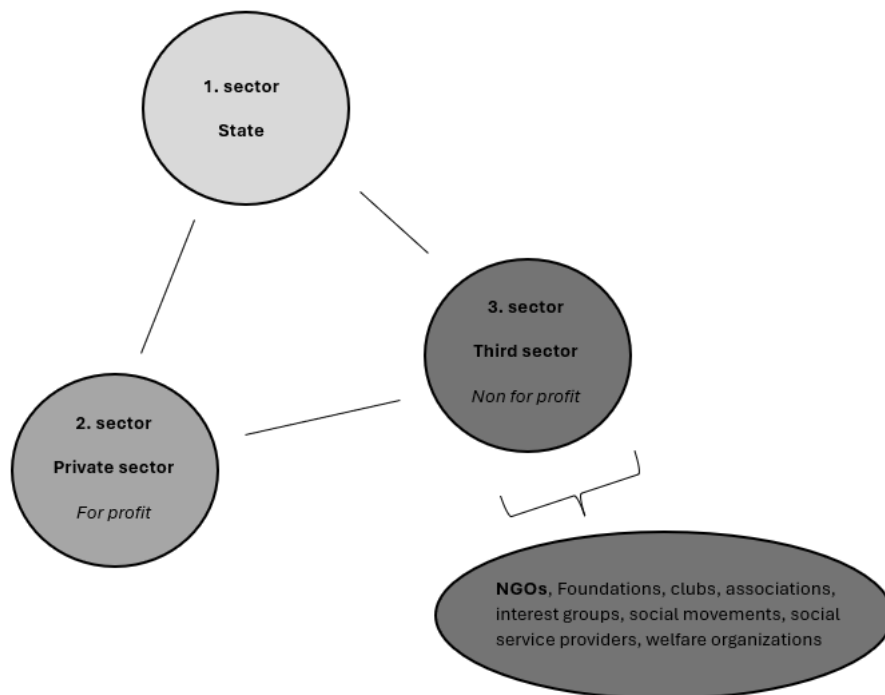


Figure 1: Three Sector Model (Frantz & Martens, 2006)

The *three sector model* (figure 1) based on Frantz and Martens (2006) illustrates the interplay between state, private and third sector organizations. Links between the sectors depict that

sectors do not function separately but rely on the services and expertise of each other.

The term NGO has been first introduced in 1945 with the founding of the United Nations (UN) primarily to consolidate the cooperation between the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and NGOs (Article 71 of the UN Charter; Frantz & Martens, 2006: 21). However, in Article 71 the UN definition focuses mainly on the collaboration between members of the UN and NGOs (Article 71, UN Charter, 2023). Partnerships with the private sector and national governments were not included in the original definition.

“The Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence. Such arrangements may be made with international organizations and, where appropriate, with national organizations after consultations with the Members of the United Nations concerned.” (Article 71, UN Charter)

In addition, the existence and work of NGOs independently of the United Nations or on national level was not covered. Since then, the term ‘emancipated’ itself from its original definition and covered the work of organizations, based on non-profit work on all state levels. The most recent official UN definition reads: “A civil society organization (CSO) or non-governmental organization (NGO) is any non-profit, voluntary citizens’ group which is organized on a local, national or international level.” (United Nations, 2023). Despite the increasing importance of non-governmental organizations as civil society organizations (CSO), there is a lack of standardization regarding this organizational type. Most academics focus on aspects that differentiate NGOs from other organizational typologies, such as non-governmentalism and non-profit (Lador-Lederer, 1963: 60) or according to Willetts (1996: 6) who expands the term with nonviolence and group orientation. These aspects are congruent with the current definition of the UN.

Based on the information above, the term NGO is often criticized to be a collective term for all non-governmental organizations and can be seen as ‘catch-all’ definition. Rucht (1996: 31) complements in his research that the given terminology is inaccurate and unilateral, as the definition is based on the perspective of international organizations and governments and not of the NGOs themselves. However, the main issue whilst defining NGOs is the large variety of organizations with different activities, backgrounds, and objectives (Frantz & Martens, 2006: 23). The heterogeneity raises the question if an ideal type of NGO exists.

On being non-profit

In contrast to organizations in the private or state sector, non-profits use surplus revenues to achieve their goal and mission rather than distributing the profit to employees or (external) stakeholders. In most cases, the revenue is generated through grants, donations, memberships, or program fees, and is tied to a particular social or public interest (Frantz & Martens, 2006: 24, 26). According to the academic definition, respective organizations are not allowed to pursue a direct client policy. Interests can solely be expressed through, for example, petitions, collecting signatures, donations, or voluntary work. Non-profitability includes free choice for stakeholders to offer their resources for the cause of an NGO. Clients decide freely if and which resources they want to provide, based on what the organization has to offer. Donations are made due to personal choices – NGOs do not demand anything from their stakeholders (Frumkin, 2022: 3). Due to the chosen and limited theoretical framework, the thesis does not incorporate donor-centricity into its analysis.

On being non-governmental

Non-governmentalism is a controversial aspect in NGO literature. Over the last years scholars have given different definitions and interpretations about what it means for organizations to be non-governmental. As representatives of civil society, the goal is to advocate for topics and gain civil society support and media presence. State power should not be acquired. However, NGOs might put pressure on political actors and politics. The narrow interpretation of state independence states that NGOs are not allowed to have state members or be under the control of governmental institutions. They should be financially and morally independent. In reality, NGOs can – and do – receive financial aid from state institutions, either directly or indirectly, and in the form of grants or contracts. The availability and terms of such funding can vary depending on the country and the specific policies and regulations in place. Therefore, some scholars differentiate NGOs based on the degree of non-governmentalism. The degree is measured on criteria such as membership, funding and the organizational development of the NGO. If the state is more influential, NGOs can be categorized as hybrid organizations. Hence, academics nowadays prefer the term non-institutional when talking about NGOs (e.g. Frantz & Martens, 2006; Frumkin, 2022).

Organizational structure

The organizational structure differentiates NGOs from social movements. The organizational structure might vary among NGOs but must consist of one headquarter with permanent staff and statues (Frantz & Martens, 2006). The workforce can be differentiated into permanent employees and volunteers. In both cases free choice and the willingness for social engagement drive people to work for third-sector organizations. Permanent employees in most cases actively seek employment in NGOs of their interest, accepting lower wages than in most private sector organizations. Volunteers donate their time without any remuneration due to their own volition and values and without remuneration (Frumkin, 2002: 3). Furthermore, one key factor is that NGOs should be designed for the long term as short-term NGOs might not be distinguished to social movements. Whether an NGO must have legal status in a country to be recognized as such is controversial. Modes and conditions of recognition vary greatly from country to country. More details about the legal status of NGOs in Turkey can be found in chapter 3. NGOs in Turkey and their history.

Variances

As mentioned above, NGO is a fuzzy concept that is not easy to translate to the empiric context. ‘NGO – variances’ might differ regarding their organizational structure or do not comply with all theoretical criteria. Those organizations can be categorized into two main groups called *QUANGOs* and *GONGOs*. *QUANGOs* (*quasi – NGOs*) stand for all hybrid NGOs that allow state members or government agencies to be part of the membership body. Another possibility represents NGOs that are founded through state and public funds. *GONGOS* (*Government Organized NGOS*), as their name already says, are founded by governmental initiative, and are largely funded by the state. Based on this, *GONGOs* are usually not considered as NGOs (Frantz & Martens, 2006, 43ff.).

2.2. NGOs and their role in society

Frumkin (2005) describes five aspects of NGOs when talking about the role of NGOs in society. The first aspect is identifying and drawing attention to issues meaning that they play a crucial role in shedding light on problems and societal matters that might otherwise go unnoticed. To raise awareness and awaken the public interest in government and businesses they publish reports, studies, and work with the media when possible. Not in all countries media might collaborate with NGOs based on challenges and threats they might face due to

the collaboration. Another societal role of NGOs is building international norms that guide policies and societal, economic, and political practices. With their work they create a culture and set of expectations that direct the behavior of public and private organizations and institutions, promoting ethical and responsible activities. One of NGOs' best-known role within society is enforcing public policies and norms through public information campaigns and boycotts. They mobilize people to become involved in their respective issues and take action. In addition, NGOs create linkages between individuals and organizations that provide people resources they would otherwise not have. The fourth aspect of NGOs role in society is resolving conflicts and mediating disputes. Due to being non-profit and non-governmental they can act as credible parties in international tensions and mediate in conflict resolution. Lastly, NGOs are supposed to mobilize civic and political engagement. Through their actions NGOs can mobilize people in great numbers to advocate and take action (Frumkin, 2005: 22, 68f).

While advocacy and collaboration with governmental and private organizations are powerful tools, there is a risk of it turning the other way round. Important stakeholders should not undermine the role of the third sector and NGOs as innovators, initiators and communicators of norms and values within society. Individual non-governmental organizations might not always perfectly match the most urgent needs of society or a community, however, the plurality and diversity of NGOs bring powerful benefits to society (Frumkin, 2005: 15, 87, 98, 124, 190).

2.3. NGOs under authoritarian regime

According to the Oxford dictionary (2023) the term survival is defined as “[...] the state of continuing to live or exist, often despite difficulty or danger”. Josefy et al. (2017:773) defined organizational survival as aptitude of an organization to stay in business, meeting set goals, whilst “remaining financially solvent” (Shah et al., 2019: 561). Even though NGOs are not profit-oriented, their ability to ‘remain afloat’ is defined by similar factors as organizations in the private sector. Considering the political situation in Turkey, one may question how women’s organizations are able to mobilize and survive under the authoritarian regime of the AKP. Inspired on previous papers published on women’s movement and women’s organizations under authoritarian regimes (Sidwell et al., 2006; Steward et al., 2023), this work approaches the research topic from the standpoint of social movement theory. The theoretical framework will offer three theories as explanations for this puzzle.

The first two theories emphasize the relationship between authoritarian states and NGOs. The third focuses on the organizations themselves and their strategies for resource mobilization based on their place in civil society.

To provide a better understanding of the situation of women's organizations and movements under authoritarian regimes such as Turkey, the following paragraph will present an excerpt of existing literature on NGOs and women's organizations in authoritarian environments. Throughout the literature, the topic is approached from various perspectives, for example, with a focus on political institutions and their procedures, as well as the challenges and strategies of the affected NGOs. Sidwell et al. (2006: 66) found that Latin America's women's movement and organizations could persist under a restrictive policy stream, due to unitedness by a cultural framework centered around motherhood. Women took advantage on the facilitation of mobilization at the community level and the space the political environment allowed. Steward et al. (2023: 404f.) examined especially the political threats women's organizations face in regimes, based on the example of China, Nicaragua and Russia. In all three countries, lack of resources such as funding and limited numbers of stakeholders are critical. Governments also adopted laws that restricted the "flow of ideas". However, policy restrictions depend also on the focus topic of NGOs, for example organizations advocating for women's welfare were often dissolved whereas "efforts opposed to violence against women" (Steward et al., 2023: 404) were allowed to operate. Based on the findings of Heurlin (2010) on NGO – state relations under dictatorships in East Asia, governments follow two strategies to repress NGOs, the first one incorporating respective NGOs into the state. The second strategy focuses on the oppression of NGOs and replacement of them through governmental institutions. Different strategies of governments vis-à-vis NGOs have been highlighted by Skokova et al. (2018: 28ff.) when examining the impact of Russia's law enforcement on the non-for-profit sector. The Russian state has followed the strategies of confrontation and co-optation, leading to increased instability and vulnerability of NGOs. Nonetheless, third sector organizations remained resilient and developed coping strategies using the few possibilities they have in the remaining space.

	Claims-making NGOs	Independent NPOs	Loyal NGOs
Functions (Kramer 1981)	Advocacy/social change Value guardianship (progressive)	Service provision Social innovation advocacy	Value guardianship (conservative) Service provision
Pillar of authoritarianism (Gerschewski 2013)	Repression	Co-optation Legitimization	Legitimization
Issues	Coping/survival strategies; Future of democratization efforts	Effects of Gov't support: collaboration or co-optation/de-politization	Counter-narratives to Western value discourses; Regime stabilization

Table 1: Overview of functions and challenges of different types of NGOs in authoritarian environments (Toepler et al., 2020).

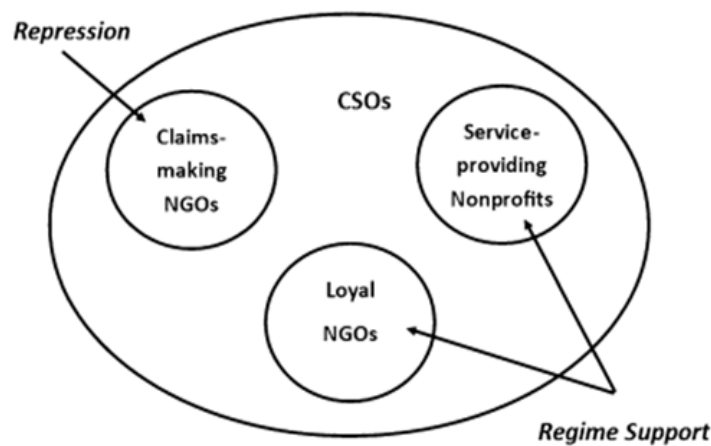


Figure 2: Typology of NGOs operating in authoritarian environments (Toepler et al., 2020).

As explained in Table 1 and Figure 2, Toepler et al. (2020) argue that the NGO-state relationship is influenced by the characteristics of NGOs, proposing a framework with three subgroups of CSOs: claims-making NGOs, non-profit service providers and regime-loyal NGOs.² This conceptual perspective will be used later on to answer the research question. The term claim-making NGOs includes organizations with a very political agenda such as human rights or environmental advocacy. In comparison to other types of NGOs, they are often the primary target of repressive actions of authoritarian governments, such as

² Toepler et al. (2020) use Gerschewski's (2013) *three pillars of authoritarianism* as underlying concept. Gerschewski argues that all autocracies must fulfill three conditions to survive, which he refers to as the three pillars of authoritarianism: co-opting key elites to secure loyalty, repressing dissent to maintain control, and ensuring some level of popular support to legitimize their rule. These strategies are considered essential for the long-term survival of autocracies.

restrictions on domestic and foreign funding. Loyal NGOs carry their definition in the name itself. The term is used for political or politicized organizations, which are on the one side supportive and on the other side supported by governmental institutions. Based on case studies for example in China and Russia, loyal NGOs have privileged access to governmental funding and support state institutions in the policy decision-making process. Doyle (2016: 15) states that loyal NGOs in Turkey often participate in the formation of draft laws. Service-providing nonprofits are usually apolitical groups benefiting from governmental policies as they are not perceived as a threat to the political system. Therefore, they are mostly spared from hostile state regulations. Compared to the other two types of NGOs, for independent NGOs the question rises how they want to engage with the government, for example collaboration or co-optation³. Even though this type of NGOs profits from the opening of civil space for them, they “can be used to create a façade of legitimacy” and “be part of power exercise”. Doyle’s case study on NGOs in Turkey shows that state institutions appear to give preference to Islamic organizations (2016: 11 ff.). Coping strategies of the above-mentioned NGOs are briefly mentioned but will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.4.

2.3.1 Conceptual framework of NGO – government relations

„Is this the ‘start of a beautiful friendship’ or are they already ‘too close for comfort’?“ (Najam, 2000: 375). Several scholars all over the world have studied the interaction between authoritarian regimes and non-for-profit organizations and NGO – state relations in the last decades (Smith & Lipsky, 1993; Salamon & Anheiner, 1996; Kumar, 1997; Fisher, 1998; Najam, 1999; Najam, 2000; Smilie & Helmich, 1999; Heurlin, 2010; Skokova et al., 2018; Toepler et al., 2020). For the underlying research the Four C’s Model from Najam (2000) has been chosen, since it does not put Turkish women’s organizations in a specific box. This is the first of three theories building the groundwork of the research.

Najam’s framework offers a simple and global understanding of the nature of NGO-governmental interactions (Najam, 2000: 376). The Four-C’s model assumes that actors – in this case political and non-for-profit organizations – seek certain goals and prioritize specific strategies. When operating in the same environment such as the policy stream, they interact

³ These terms will be explained in detail in 2.3.1 Conceptual framework of NGO – government relations.

and collide in four possible ways also called the Four C's: (1) Cooperation, (2) Co-optation, (3) Complementarity and (4) Confrontation. The possibility of nonengagement, meaning the two actors not interacting in any way on the policy stream, is also possible but "is beyond the scope of the model" (Najam, 2000: 384).

- (1) **Cooperation:** NGOs and governmental institutions pursue "similar ends with similar means" (Najam, 2000: 383). Compared to Coston's model (1998) this model does not require "perfect power symmetry" between two actors as condition for cooperation. The model emphasizes the absence of perceived peril regarding their work – on both sides (Najam, 2000: 384). Coston claims that NGOs' job is the implementation of governmental policies and strategies (Coston, 1998: 375).
- (2) **Co-optation:** In this combination, actors "share similar strategies but with different goals" (Najam, 2000: 388). However, NGOs and governmental institutions being in a state of co-optation remains rare, due to instability and the fact that most likely one of both parties will try selfishly manipulating each other. In contrast to cooperation, in the situation of co-optation power asymmetry plays a significant role, whereas NGOs are less likely to convert governmental institutions "to become more like them" than the other way around (Najam, 2000: 388f.). Several scholars have found that CSOs have a long history in successfully lobbying politics/governments (Hall, 1992; Bramble & Porter, 1992; Sands, 1992). Even though co-optation rarely occurs, Najam demonstrates it on the example of environmental NGOs in Pakistan. Large amounts of international funding go directly to the respective NGOs instead of ministries or other governmental actors. This provokes a scenario in which financial influence transitions from governmental bodies to non-governmental organizations. Even when implementing initiatives with similar strategies, these NGOs may be striving towards distinct objectives.
- (3) **Complementarity:** This relationship between NGOs and governmental institutions occurs when they have similar goals but employ different strategies. In comparison to Coston's (1998) or Young's (1999) models, this framework focuses on the function of goals, meaning that when NGOs and governments have convergent goals, there is a high probability for an arrangement (contractually or independently) to reach shared ends, but through different methods (Najam, 2000: 387). In some cases, complementarity can even lead to cooperation. Hussain (1992) identified two

projects in Pakistan that exemplify this phenomenon⁴. While government agencies favor top-down engineering and managerial approaches, the two NGOs opt for a bottom-up participatory community development strategy to achieve similar goals. This dynamic results in an enduring complementary relationship between the NGOs and government agencies, wherein they operate independently without conflict (Hussain, 1992).

- (4) **Confrontation:** Confrontation is likely when governments and NGOs have both divergent goals and strategies. Najam also uses the term ‘antithetical’ when describing the confrontational relationship, with a possibility to be implicit or explicit (Najam, 2000: 385). In the context of the Four-C’s model, the term confrontation extends beyond government's coercive control to encompass instances of policy defiance and opposition exhibited by NGOs. The crucial aspect lies not in determining the legitimacy of one form of confrontation over another but in recognizing that whenever the preferred objectives and strategies of governmental entities and NGOs diverge, a sense of threat emerges. There are several examples that demonstrate this, for example the harassment of specific NGOs in Pakistan in 1998 or the relationship between Greenpeace and several governments regarding the whaling policies in Antarctica (Bramble & Porter, 1992; Najam, 2000).

		Goals (Ends)	
		Similar	Dissimilar
Preferred Strategies (Means)	Similar	Cooperation	Co-optation
	Dissimilar	Complementarity	Confrontation

Figure 3: The Four-C's of NGO-Government Relations (Najam, 2000: 383)

When applying this framework to specific models, it is essential to consider certain premises. When examining the dynamics between two actors, both perspectives should be taken into account rather than solely looking at one. Furthermore, neither NGOs nor governments are monolithic. As articulated by Najam ("different agencies and actors within the same government can nurture different types of relationships with a given NGO, and vice versa"

⁴ Aga Khan Rural Support Programme and the Orangi Pilot Project align with government objectives, aiming to provide clean water, decent housing, and economic opportunities to people in need.

(2000: 391)). Advocacy, integral to the work and mission of NGOs, is not perceived as a distinct relationship but rather as a function. In each of the four relationships mentioned above, NGOs have the possibility to engage in advocacy work, which can be for example persuasive (cooperation) or activist (confrontation) (Najam, 2000: 390f.).

The categorization of NGO-state relations between Turkish women's organizations and governmental institution helps evaluating hindrances in their daily work and in a second step shows which strategies they employ to overcome the latter.

2.3.2 Coping strategies and resource mobilization

As second theoretical of the research, the following section will explain coping strategies of NGOs that scholars found whilst analyzing non-profit organizations in hybrid and authoritarian regimes such as Russia, China and Egypt.

During their research on NGOs under authoritarian and hybrid regimes, scholars identified several coping and survival mechanisms (Tysiachniouk et al., 2018; Moser & Skripchenko, 2018; Herrold, 2016; Herrold & Atia, 2016; Nimu, 2018). The following paragraph will highlight the framework of Tysiachniouk et al. (2018) as well as visualize and complement them with other empirical examples. Tysiachniouk et al. (2018) focused in their research on NGOs under pressure of the Russian Law No. 121 'On foreign Agents'⁵ and how the latter "disrupted and transformed resource mobilization strategies and transnational NGO networks" (2018: 616). Based on their research, several coping strategies were determined, such as (1) compliance strategy, (2) simulation, (3) informalization and (4) diversification (Tysiachniouk et al., 2018: 616-630, Nimu, 2018). All those strategies might cause restructuring of an organization. The respective NGOs did not change their mission and values but had to rethink their strategic approach. In addition, organizations that depended on foreign fundings (e.g. USAID), started to create new relationships with sources such as

⁵ The Russian Foreign Agents law, enacted in 2012, requires NGOs that engage in political activities and receive funding from abroad to register as so-called foreign agents. This term implies that the respective organizations are deemed to be acting on behalf of foreign interests, potentially undermining Russia's sovereignty. NGOs labeled as foreign agents are subject to increased scrutiny, reporting requirements, and potential stigmatization. The law has been criticized for its vague and broad definitions, which allow authorities to target a wide range of NGOs, including those engaged in legitimate civil society activities (Reeve, 2018).

programs by European Union, foreign embassies or the Russian federation (Tysiachniouk et al., 2018: 616). Some donors even modified their criteria, so that “NGOs that have re-registered as commercial organizations, changing their nonprofit status to avoid falling under the jurisdiction of the foreign agent law” (Tysiachniouk et al., 2018: 617).

- 1) **Compliance:** NGOs that pursue this strategy try to comply precisely with state requirements. Therefore, some organizations will also cease certain activities that might cause problems with the law.
- 2) **Simulation:** This strategy involves simulation, wherein NGOs comply with state regulations in a manner that adheres to the literal interpretation rather than the intended spirit of the law. This approach may entail the use of informal methods to create the appearance of adherence to legal standards.
- 3) **Informalization:** Informalization involves NGO members avoiding official/formal interactions with the government and choosing informality instead, sometimes even managing NGOs without legal registration. The line between informalization and simulation can often be blurred in practice.
- 4) **Diversification:** NGOs might also establish multiple independent organizations, each with its own function. For example, NGO leaders may create separate organizations to attract foreign funding or establish organizations abroad to continue their activities.

Adding to Tysiachniouk et al. (2018), Moser & Skripchenko (2018) identified similar survival strategies of Russian NGOs in their case studies on coping strategies of small ecologies under the Foreign Agents Law. As per their research, respective NGOs transferred their projects including their resources (e.g. finances and human resources) to other trustworthy NGOs while abandoning all their Russia-based projects. This strategy was introduced with the explanation that activists and projects could no longer be targeted by the government, allowing them to continue their core work from abroad. Additionally, NGOs relied on the strategy of virtualization and internationalization. Through their location abroad the embeddedness in global NGO networks was strengthened and resources could also be mobilized abroad, for example through foreign donors. The second case study resembles the compliance strategy of Tysiachniouk et al. (2018). The coping strategies can be summarized by financial rearrangements, depoliticization and local legitimacy, meaning that organizations adapt their working mechanisms to governmental requirements and narrow

their activities down to the point that they are no longer on the radar of the Russian government. Regarding financial resources, NGO leaders apply the strategy of diversification, for instance marketing to acquire also private domestic donors.

„To sum up, by choosing the transnational detour to exert political and social influence in combination with the transfer of ‘harmful’ activities and a narrowing-down to core activities, the NGO could realise an increased flexibility concerning its scope of action and its availability for foreign donors and cooperation partners. Moreover, its political and societal impact is strengthened due to leverage effects resulting from intensified international cooperation. It managed to survive and to adapt to the new circumstances without giving up its mission“ (Moser und Skripchenko, 2018: 16).

Herrold (2016) determined similar coping strategies of Egyptian NGOs under the Mubarak regime (1981-2011). According to her findings affected organizations adopted the strategy of depoliticization and compliance avoiding “all things political”, mostly converting from claim-making NGOs to purely service providing organizations (Herrold, 2016: 169). Whilst especially human rights organizations registered as social enterprises (e.g. civil companies, law firms) (Herrold, 2016: 196), the majority of the NGO sector “became a tool of the state” (Herrold & Atia, 2016: 391). What is important to consider are the differences in legislation within each regime. While the third sector is suppressed in many authoritarian countries there are various ways to do so.

„CSOs supporting government agendas and aligning with state-led legitimacy discourses not only enjoy privileged access to government funding, but also have the chance of participating, at least partly, in policy decision-making. Turkish government friendly CSOs, for instance, are participating in the formation of draft laws and in policy-making, and thus, contributing to the building of public consensus with state policy“ (Toepler et al., 2020: 9).

As seen above, NGOs had to diversify and change their access to critical resources such as donations and human resources. Several scholars have used resource mobilization theory to analyze and summarize the strategy NGOs employ in hostile environments.

2.4. Resource mobilization theory

The third theoretical pillar presents the *Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT)*, based on the assumption that resource scarcity is one of the major barriers for women’s organization in

Turkey. RMT can help us understand how these organizations mobilize and manage important resources such as external and internal funding or human resources. RMT being part of the *Social Movement Theory* has been chosen on the grounds that many Turkish women's organizations were founded with the rising of the Turkish women's movement, therefore falling into the category of *social movement organizations (SMO)*. This becomes clear when the Turkish government attacks not only single NGOs but also the entire women's movement, for example by banning demonstrations on the 8th of March⁶ (ICNL, 2023; Spiegel, 2023; Karasu, 2024).

Resource mobilization theory (RMT) emerged as scholars understood how rational yet often marginalized social actors effectively mobilize to pursue social change (Edwards & Gillham, 2013; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Jenkins, 1983). This theoretical approach focuses on the societal factors (including constraints) that influence social movements, considering the various resources needed, the connections of social movements to other groups, their reliance on external support for success, and the strategies used by "authorities to control or integrate movements" (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Understanding "the principles, applications, strengths, and weaknesses" of RMT is fundamental for scholars interested in the sociology of social movements and the sustainability of their organizations (Flynn, 2015: 11). Jenkins (1983) emphasizes the importance of resources, both internal and external to the movement, since they play a vital role in organizational success (Flynn, 2015:112), whilst other RMT theorists argue "that the outcome and success of a social movement is dependent on the larger political climate" (Flynn, 2015: 112) or the group strategy (Jenkins, 1983). RMT suggests that social movements prosper through effective resource mobilization and the cultivation of political opportunities for their members (Flynn, 2015). However, McCarthy and Zald (1977) argue that control or mobilization of resources is crucial for initiating action. Recent studies highlight the necessity for *social movement organizations (SMOs)* to manage the resource of legitimacy during crises to safeguard key exchange relationships and resource streams (Gillham & Edwards, 2011), emphasizing their essential role of prior acquisition of social-organizational and material resources in the development of moral resources (Pilny et al., 2014). Stakeholders can be categorized into three groups: adherents, constituents, and bystanders. Conscience constituents, both individual and

⁶ The 8th of March is globally recognized as International Women's Day. This day is dedicated to the fight of women worldwide for social, economic, cultural, and political equity. It serves as a platform to raise awareness about gender equality and advocate for women's rights.

organizational, often serve as significant sources of support, although supporters may contribute resources without necessarily sharing the movement's values (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Goodwin & Jasper, 2015). RMT underscores several key facets: It underscores the perpetual state of mobilization within social movements, explicitly focuses on organizational dynamics, acknowledges the representation of multiple SMOs within a single movement, and offers insights into the rise and decline of social movement initiatives beyond mere size or intensity of preferences (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). However, RMT faces limitations, notably its exclusive focus on explaining institutional change movements and its oversight of “psycho-social elements within social movements” (Jenkins, 1983; Klandermans, 1984). As mentioned above, Turkish women’s organizations will be defined as SMOs to answer the underlying research question. McCarthy and Zald (1977) define SMO as “a complex, or formal, organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a countermovement and attempts to implement those goals” (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Goodwin & Jasper, 2015: 162). At its core, a social movement organization (SMO) represents a named entity committed to advancing the goals of social change within a given movement (Edwards & Gillham, 2013). While some SMOs stand out for their expansive size, equipped with professional personnel and considerable resources, the SMO landscape also entails numerous smaller, less formally structured groups primarily “operating at [...] local levels” (Edwards & Foley, 2003: 88). Despite variations in size and organizational formalization, SMOs commonly rely on distributed organizing strategies, particularly leveraging the existence of influential and widely accessible social media platforms (Fisher, 2019). Furthermore, RMT highlights the strategic responsibilities of SMOs, including gathering support, shaping public opinion, and effecting institutional change, while recognizing the inherent dilemmas in tactical decision-making, influenced by interorganizational dynamics and cooperation. Within this scope interactions with authorities, no matter which role, are permitted (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Goodwin, 2015; Zald & Ash, 1966). Essential to the functioning of SMOs is the imperative to secure support and offer tangible benefits to their supporters, thereby maintaining momentum and the perception of progress toward movement objectives. Especially gaining support often leads to problems for movement organizations (Zald & Ash, 1966).

As previously stated, resources constitute a fundamental concept within Resource Mobilization Theory (RM), serving as the essential link between the aspiration for change

(i.e., grievances) and the capacity to mobilize support for that aspiration (Zald and McCarthy, 2002, cited in Edwards and Kane, 2014: 208). According to McCarthy and Zald's definition, resources encompass various elements necessary for the sustained operation of social movements. Material resources enclose financial assets, organizational structures, human capital, technological infrastructure, communication channels, and mass media platforms, while non-material resources encompass intangible assets such as legitimacy, loyalty, social connections, networks, personal relationships, public attention, authority, moral dedication, and solidarity (Fuchs, 2006, cited in Flynn, 2015: 118). Furthermore, resources are dynamic rather than static; activists continuously strive to expand their resource base, innovate within existing capabilities, and devise protest strategies that align with their means (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, cited in Goodwin, 2015: 161). Five distinct categories of resources are identified in current RMT literature: (1) material, (2) human, (3) social-organizational, (4) cultural, and (5) moral (Edwards & Kane, 2014; Edwards et al., 2019; Edwards & Gillham, 2013). Present-day research on social movements predominantly focuses on three primary types of (tangible) resources: material such as monetary assets, human (capital), and social - organizational (Edwards & Kane, 2014). This thesis will join this approach as delving into additional resource categories would exceed the scope and capacity of the study.

Within the social movement field there is an ongoing debate around whether a movement's external or internal sources serve as main supports and to what extent external stakeholders can constrain goals and strategies set by the movements and SMOs (Edwards & Gillham, 2013). Furthermore, four types of resource mobilization strategies are highlighted throughout RMT literature (Edwards & Gillham, 2013; Edwards & Kane, 2014): (1) Self-production, (2) Aggregation, (2) Co-optation, or also called Appropriation and (4) Patronage.

- (1) Self-production: „A fundamental mechanism by which social movements gain access to resources is to produce those resources themselves through the agency of existing organizations, activists, and participants“ (Edwards & Kane, 2014: 220). Therefore, social movements develop social-organizational resources in form of SMOs, ally networks, coalitions. Other examples include the creation of websites, Instagram or Twitter (now known as X) pages or sales items like posters or coffee mugs (Edwards & Kane, 2014; Edwards & McCarty, 2004).

- (2) Aggregation: „Resource aggregation refers to the ways a movement or specific SMO converts resources held by dispersed individuals or groups into collective resources that can be allocated by movement actors” (Edwards & Kane, 2014: 223). This can be for example in the form of collecting donations from numerous individuals or recruiting volunteers for projects (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004; Edwards & Kane, 2014).
- (3) Co-optation or Appropriation: Appropriation refers to the exploitation of “relationships [...] within existing forms of social organization that were not formed for explicit movement purposes. Co-optation refers to the transparent, permitted borrowing of resources already under the control of such groups “(Edwards & Kane, 2014: 223). An example of co-optation is the inclusion of other organizations with their resources in a SMO. This way the resources created by the other organization can be used by the respective SMO. This kind of strategy entails reciprocity and bilateral agreement. In contrast, appropriation means the exploitation of the other group’s resources without mutual understanding (Edwards & Kane, 2014: 223).
- (4) Patronage: “refers to the bestowal of resources by an individual or organization that often specializes in patronage “(Edwards & Kane, 2014: 224). In monetary patronage relations, patrons furnish significant financial backing to organizations. Often, patrons assert a level of control over the allocation of funds and may seek to influence operational and policy matters within an organization. Common sources of financial patronage include government contracts, foundation grants, and substantial private donations. These patrons often originate from outside the movement or SMO, providing crucial support while exerting influence over strategic decisions (Edwards & Kane, 2014: 224).

A summary of the four resource access strategies with examples can be found below in Figure 4 together with examples illustrating the tactics for better understanding.

Resource Types	Means of Access			
	Self-production	Aggregation	Co-optation/Appropriation	Patronage
Material	Grassroots fund-raising events Conducting 'reality tours' Producing and marketing movement music or art Creating items to sell at events (t-shirts, CDs, coffee mugs, etc.)	Member contributions Bundling financial contributions (Emily's list) Individual donations from non-members Crowd-sourcing, raising money through social media sites like Fundrazer.	Use of office space Gaining use of equipment (computers, buses, etc.) WiFi or internet access	Start-up grants Large donations Foundation grants Government grants Service contracts Corporate sponsorship
Human	Raising and socializing children Issue/movement-oriented summer camps Mentoring and training leaders Movement mentors Teaching of women's, environmental studies programs	Recruiting constituents Mobilizing large numbers of participants Recruiting activists with particular skills	Networked recruitment Acquiring a mailing list Having organizational members Bloc recruitment Drawing on members of coalition partners	Providing staff or volunteers Providing technical assistance
Social-organizational	Founding SMOs Starting a task force Launching web pages Maintaining Facebook pages Twitter feeds	Building networks Forming coalitions	Recruiting local affiliates from existing organizations Gaining access to congregations or civic groups for recruitment Mesomobilization	Being loaned the mailing lists and telephone lists of sympathetic individuals

Figure 4: resource access strategies based on Edwards and Kane (2014).

Exchange relationships, as described by several RMT scholars, denote the provision and utilization of resources between two entities. SMOs and associated stakeholders actively cultivate, sustain, and safeguard numerous exchange relations to access a diverse range of resources essential for their activities and goals (Edwards & Kane, 2014: 225). Not only can governmental policies complicate resource access, but (unforeseeable) events such as wars, economic shifts or natural catastrophes can influence resource access. (McCarthy & Zald, 1977: 1223). Lastly, exchange relationships vary in the utility of resources provided to SMOs, encompassing material, human, and other forms of support. According to the needed resource, urgency or subject area, other external stakeholders or experts might be requested. For instance, when seeking to influence conservative political elites, an SMO might prioritize partnerships with nationally recognized religious organizations capable of offering legitimacy, financial support, and committed members for advocacy efforts, over smaller entities with limited resources (Edwards & Gillham, 2013: 10). Concurrently, SMOs engage in multiple exchange relationships with various partners, each entailing reciprocal expectations and obligations. These relationships range in their potential for facilitating or constraining SMO activities, emphasizing the need for analysts to evaluate the diverse mix of facilitation and constraint across these exchanges (Edwards & Kane, 2014: 226).

2.5. NGOs enabling female empowerment

As written above, NGOs address important socio-political and economic issues and play a significant role in the economic and social development of marginal groups. Thus, NGOs were found to be essential when it comes to enabling women's empowerment, especially given the constraints within civil society in many countries across the world. Due to the limited scope of the underlying paper, only a brief overview of the existing literature will be given. A summary of relevant papers by Hakim et al. (2022) in the timeframe between 2004 and 2021 on this topic can be found in the Annex. The organizational concepts and understandings of female empowerment can be broken down into three categories: (1) gender mainstreaming, (2) educational and awareness raising, and (3) self-sustainability and efficacy.

These various concepts are translated into numerous strategies such as engaging women in decision making, micro-crediting, direct and indirect financial support, training programs, awareness raising, information sharing, NGO meetings, provision of space for women to speak with men, encouragement, helpline, institutional services for women, skill development, legal aid, counselling, and educational programs. This same can be categorized into process -, agency -, and resource elements. Al Hakim et al. (2022: 16) defines these elements as followed:

- 1) Process element: Creating rules and policies that empower women and girls to question and reshape existing norms and conditions.
- 2) Agency element: Women's capacity to make impactful decisions that shape their own lives.
- 3) Resource element: Women's opportunities to access education, employment, and income-generating activities.

Gupta (2021) illustrates in her case study the impact of NGOs on different aspects of rural women's life. Her findings support Al Hakims research highlighting the important role of NGOs on social and economic empowerment of women, especially in rural areas (Gupta, 2021). In addition, studies have shown that according to social learning theory, interaction

within and outside of communities such as NGOs helps to empower women by developing their confidence. The development of an own sense of self leads to higher morale and creativity, which can result again in innovative outcomes and higher creativity, thus social and economic empowerment (Gupta, 2021). Intrinsic motivation and determination of the respective women are crucial for the success of women empowerment through NGOs as it stimulates creativity and innovation (Gupta, 2021). Both aspects foster a sustainable competitive advantage and boost the economic independence and workforce participation of women. Figure 5 depicts a resume of the concepts and strategies of NGOs enabling women's empowerment.

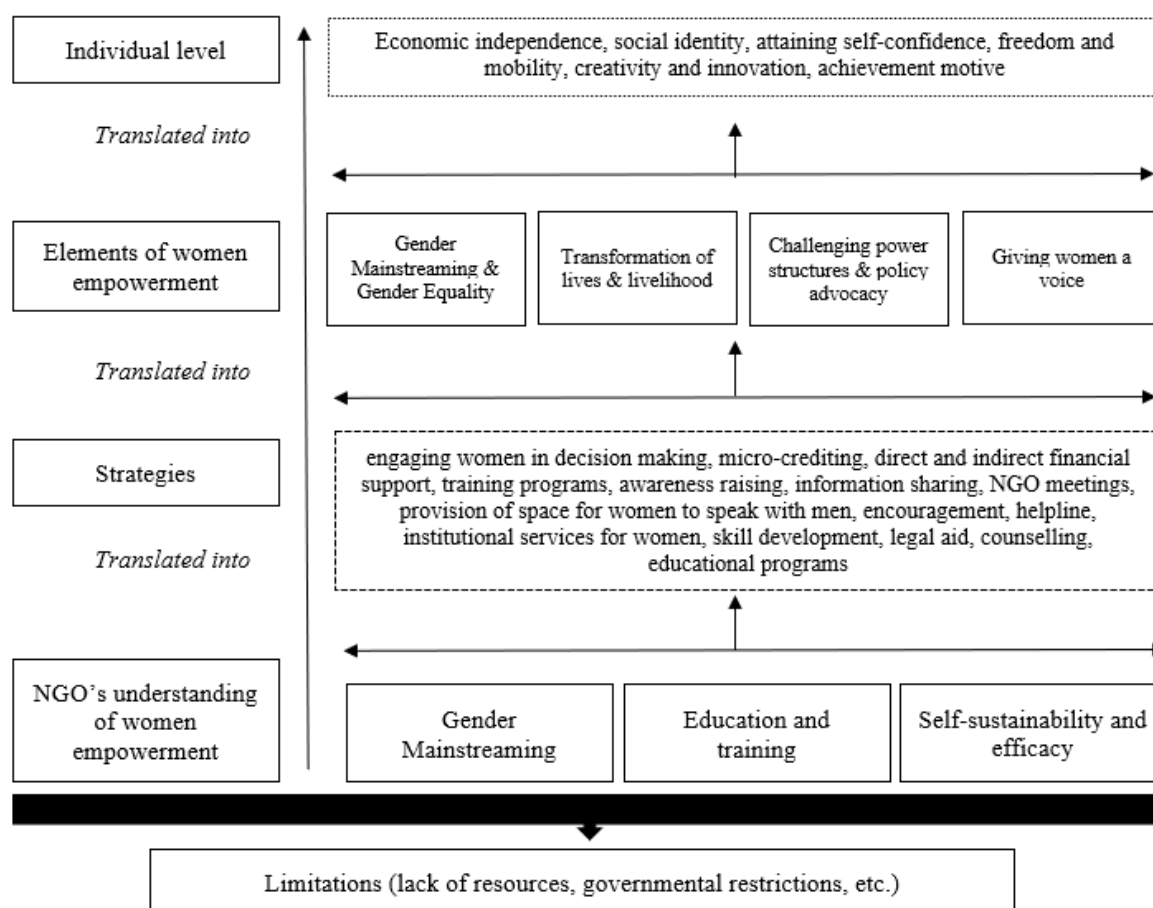


Figure 5: Conceptual framework of women empowerment enabled through NGO initiatives. Own illustration based on research by Gupta (2021) and Al Hakim et al. (2022).

NGOs enable a certain set of individual aspects and outcomes that are essential in the process of female empowerment such as economic independence, social identity, attaining self-confidence, freedom and mobility, creativity, and innovation and lastly achievement motive.

In conclusion, with the aid of NGOs, women learn about current government initiatives and regulations that support women's empowerment. This aid can be provided in various forms such as trainings, financial aid, workshops for entrepreneurship and many more (see above in Figure 5). As a result, women develop their own social identity and are no longer tied only to their role as mother and wife. However, the success of these programs and processes are hampered by a number of factors such as social limitations and lack of relevant resources (Gupta, 2021). Al Hakim et al. (2022) state that due to NGOs' partial understanding of what women's empowerment means, their activities and support is limited. In addition, NGO initiatives often emphasize more on enhancing women's individual freedom and talents than to advocate for necessary policy reforms to achieve gender equality. Systematic transformation and inclusion⁷ are necessary for sustainable socio-political empowerment. Yet, non-governmental organizations are often tied to their donors and are committed to their demands and interests, such as organizations from the Global North or governmental, political institutions. At this point, it should also be mentioned that the Global North often has an own interpretation of women's empowerment which might not align with the reality and needs of women in countries with different economic development, political structures, human development indicators and cultural and historical context. The last constraint mentioned points out that most studies in the underlying field focus on marginalized groups and underprivileged women, especially in rural areas (See Annex B) (Al Hakim, 2022: 16ff.). However, Gray & Finley-Hervey (2005) also show in their research on Moroccan female entrepreneurs that financial stability is not always linked to empowerment and independence.

⁷ Here it is crucial to differentiate between inclusion and integration. Inclusion means that every individual in society can participate equally by its own capabilities and does not have to adapt to the conditions of the majority group. Whereas integration means that marginal groups can participate in society but only when adapting to the conditions of the majority group.

3. NGOs in Turkey and their history

The following section highlights the environment in which Turkish non-governmental organizations and as such women's organizations operate. As of August 2023, there is no data regarding the number of NGOs and women's organizations as well as distribution of associations according to fields of activity available on the website of the Ministry of Interior and the Department of Association. According to data published on the website of the International Center for non-for-profit law 101.458 associations and 6.074 foundations are operating in Turkey (as of June 2023), playing an important role in providing services that neither private nor governmental organizations cover. Even though a new law in 2008 improved the legal environment for civil society, civil society actors became more and more aware of the deficiencies of the legal framework. CIVICUS Monitor⁸ ranked the civil space in Turkey in the year 2023 as repressed (27 from 100 points) among others because laws are incompatible with several international standards (ICNL, 2023). In comparison, Austria civil space score is 86 from 100 points and is therefore rated as open.

⁸ The CIVICUS Monitor, which began in 2017, tracks the state of freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and expression in 198 countries and territories. Their annual report rates the state of civic space conditions and freedom based on collected data. The latter is gathered over the year by CSOs, local research teams, international human rights indices and in-house experts.

Organizational Forms	Associations	Foundations
Registration Body	Ministry of Interior, General Directorate for Relations with Civil Society	The courts, with possible review made by the General Directorate of Foundations
Barriers to Entry	At least seven founders required to establish an association. Executive board of at least five people required. Majority of the board must reside in Türkiye. Foreigners can be members of board provided they reside in Türkiye.	The minimum endowment amount for foundations is 120,000 TL (approx. \$5,072).
Barriers to Activities	Despite the improvements in the Regulation on Associations, standard annual reporting forms and numerous mandatory books are still considered cumbersome and time consuming. All associations are obliged to obtain permission from the governorship of the city in which they will be conducting the fundraising activity and indicate the exact amount of money they aim to collect. Requirement to complete standard forms before receiving or using foreign funding or opening new branch offices.	Standard annual reporting forms considered cumbersome and time consuming. All foundations are obliged to obtain permission from the governorship of the city in which they will be conducting the fundraising activity and indicate the exact amount of money they aim to collect. Requirement to complete standard forms before receiving or using foreign funding or opening new branch offices.
Barriers to Speech and/or Advocacy	Different provisions set forth in the Constitution protect speech, regardless of its content, when expressed by a natural person or a legal entity or expressed individually or collectively. However, the Constitutional protections are diminished at a legal level. Many articles in the laws are sustained despite their apparent conflict with the Constitution. The internet regulation No. 5651 may increase censorship and pave the way for removing content without a court order.	Different provisions set forth in the Constitution protect speech, regardless of its content, when expressed by a natural person or a legal entity or expressed individually or collectively.

		However, Constitutional protections are diminished at a legal level. Many articles in the laws are sustained despite their apparent conflict with the Constitution. The internet regulation No. 5651 may increase censorship and pave the way for removing content without a court order.
Barriers to International Contact	Requirement to notify the government when receiving grants from international organizations and giving grants to organizations working abroad.	Requirement to notify the government when receiving grants from international organizations and giving grants to organizations working abroad.
Barriers to Resources	Requirement to notify the government before using foreign funding. A foreign association is required to notify the authorities about foreign funds even if the funds are received from the headquarters of the foreign association.	Requirement to notify the government within one month of receiving foreign funding. A foreign foundation is required to notify the authorities about foreign funds even if the funds are received from the headquarters of the foreign foundation.
Barriers to Assembly	Vague grounds to justify restrictions, excessive force on protesters, and advance notification requirement.	Vague grounds to justify restrictions, excessive force on protesters, and advance notification requirement.

Table 2: Differentiation between associations and foundations in Turkey.

Turkish NGOs are founded whether as association or foundation. Table 2 explains the legal differences between the two legal forms per Article 33 and Articles 56 – 117 of the Turkish Constitution (ICNL, 2023). More information about the legal status and framework of NGOs on Turkey can be found later in chapter 3.2. Legal framework.

3.1. Historical overview

Non-governmental organizations in Turkey have their origin in the Ahi-order⁹, a Turkish Islamic guild. These so-called *waqfs* were important civil society actors and were – similar to NGOs today – focused on charity activities than profit. As philanthropic institutions of the Ottoman Empire they contributed to the social and economic welfare. Waqfs did not resemble the Western-style civil society and were not entirely independent of the state, with members of the dynasty and high-ranking officials founding numerous waqfs for charity reasons and contribution to the welfare of society (Bahcecik & Turhan, 2022: 980-984; Turhan, 2023: 326, 334f).

Literature indicates that the formation of civil society, therefore NGOs and other similar associations faces multiple obstacles in Turkey, including limited room for non-state organizations and coup d'états. In the early Republican period starting around 1923, the government strongly supported the foundation of pro-regime organizations to promote state ideology and secularism (Bahcecik & Turhan, 2022: 980-984; Turhan, 2023: 326, 334f). The transition to a more independent civil society, where tied to the transition to the multiparty period in 1945, whereas the turning point for the formation of civil society came after the coup d'état on September 12th, 1980, and with it the formation of more CSOs, including NGOs (Bahcecik & Turhan, 2022: 980-984; Turhan, 2023: 326, 334f). The late 1990s were shaped by the proliferation of advocacy NGOs and transnationally active humanitarian associations. In the 2000s, with the accession process to the European Union, Turkey underwent a transformation in terms of NGOs. The ruling AKP party supported the easing of bureaucratic restriction and promotion of CSOs with the new Law on Associations No. 5253 (2004), which improved the quantity and quality of NGOs in 2005 onwards (more details on the Law can be found in the section below). Especially religious and humanitarian

⁹ The Ahi-Order can be characterized as a style of life and a system of thought that was created in order to integrate Turkish culture and Islamic principles into Islamic society.

NGOs gained prominence during those years (Turhan, 2023: 334, Bahcecik & Turhan, 2022: 980-984).

3.2. Legal framework

With the rise of NGOs in the 1990s and early 2000s, a legal framework was created that governs associations in Turkey. The following section highlights key laws on national and municipal level enacted to promote the establishment and operations of NGOs. The entire list of laws affecting NGOs and their work can be found in Annex A: Laws relevant for Turkish women's organizations. The respective legal framework focuses on enhancing participatory democracy, civic engagement, and accountability in the provision of public services. In addition, legislation impacts the relationship between NGOs and the state, shaping the civil society and governance dynamics. When reading the laws, there must be considered that there is no separation of power in Turkey. Hence all governmental institutions subordinate the president (Can, 2023).

A turning point for Turkish NGOs occurred in 2004 with the adoption of the Law on Associations No. 5253¹⁰. The text of law defines an association as “a legal entity formed by persons coming together voluntarily for a specific and legitimate purpose that is not aimed on making profit” (Ministry of Interior, Department of Associations, Law on Associations No. 5253). For NGOs other relevant aspects in the text of law are the following: (1) An association can be founded with a group of people consisting of at least seven “real or legal persons” with the aim to get involved in societal issues that are not criminalized, and without the intention of making profit out of it (Law on Associations No. 5253, Article 2a). The workforce of the organization can consist of volunteers and paid employees such as the administrative board (Article 13). If these criteria are met, an association can be founded without prior approval of the State Ministry (Law on Association, Article 3). (2) The respective organizations are entitled to engage in international activities and open representation offices abroad (Law on Association, Article 5). (3) Associations are authorized to “receive financial aid from associations serving for similar objectives, political

¹⁰ All citations from text of law are translated from Turkish into English for better understanding. Some of the Laws were already available in English language on the website of the Turkish Ministry of Interior, Department of Associations. Other have been translated by the writer with the help of the online translation tool Deepl.

parties, workers' trade unions and employers' associations and professional organizations, and may provide financial aid to the institutions mentioned hereinabove in order to achieve the objectives set out in their statutes." (Article 10).

In the same year, Law No. 5072 on the Relationship of Associations and Foundations with Public Institutions and Organizations came into force, regulating the support of public institutions organizations towards associations. Article 2.g states that "no appropriation, aid or any resources may be transferred from the budgets of public institutions and organizations to associations and foundations [...]". On a similar topic, the Aid Collection Law No. 2860 from 1983 imposes that "competent authorities" have to grant permission to persons and associations for aid collection. In July 2018 after the presidential elections the Ministry of Interior changed the paragraph specifying that only the Turkish president can determine "which of the associations, institutions and foundations working for the public benefit can collect aid without permission" (Article 6)¹¹. Aid collection initiatives "undertaken without permission are immediately banned by the security forces and the responsible persons are prosecuted." This paragraph is seen critically, especially for NGOs working for issues that go against the ideology and guidelines of the acting AKP government such as the majority of women's organizations. The statuses of "public benefit" for associations and "tax exemption" for foundations are vaguely defined, with decision-making processes heavily influenced by political considerations. Additionally, the benefits associated with these statuses are minimal. According to the latest data from public institutions, only 329 out of 60,905 foundations in Türkiye hold tax-exempt status, maintaining a similar proportion to previous years at 5.4%. As of June 2024, just 363 associations with public benefit status represented a mere 0.36% of the 100,760 active associations nationwide, most of them being Islamic charities close to the AKP. (Ketola, 2011; Keysan, 2019; ICNL, 2024).

Most laws and regulations on associations are based on different articles of the Turkish Civil Code (November 2001). Article 56 mentions that "an association cannot be established for purposes contrary to law or morality." The term morality is not defined in the context and is therefore a matter of interpretation and arbitrary of the governmental institutions. Articles 87 to 89 define reasons for closure of associations. Besides administrative issues like inability to pay debt or "failure to hold the ordinary general assembly meeting twice in a

¹¹ Article 77 of the Decree Law No. 700 dated 2/7/2018.

row”, an association can also be dissolved by decision of the court. Article 89 states that “[i]f the purpose of the association becomes contrary to the law or morality; Upon the request of the public prosecutor or a person concerned, the court decides on the dissolution of the association. The court shall take all necessary measures, including suspension from activity during the trial.” This legislative passage is important, as the Court and the independence of the Judiciary no longer exists since 2016 (Can, 2023).

In addition, there are several laws that regulate the participation of NGOs in the decision-making process at the local level such as Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 5216 (2004), Municipal Law No. 5393 (2005) and Municipal Law No. 6360 (2012). Contrary to the governmental laws above, they emphasize on the NGO involvement in local governance and their contributions to local expert committees (Eroğlu et al., 2023: 37–42).

By not complying with the laws above associations are fined. The table below shows the number of associations being penalized in the year 2022 and the amount of the administrative fine imposed. The numbers are derived directly from the Ministry of Interior, Department of Associations.

Law¹²	Quality	Number of associations for which admin. Fines were imposed (%)	Amount of admin. fine imposed (%)
32/a	Persons who have lost the right to be a member of associations should not be deleted from membership	5.69	3.47
32/b	Holding of general assembly meetings contrary to the law and the statutes of the association	19.49	10.83
32/c	Not receiving aid from abroad through banks	0.07	4.75
32/d	Failure to keep books and records properly; Revenue collection without authorization	28.14	27.52
32/g	Opening and cooperating with the representative offices of foreign non-profit organizations without the permission of the competent authorities	0.12	0.35
32/h	Failure to report receipts issued by printing houses	0.17	0.11
32/i	Despite being warned by the civil administrator, errors and deficiencies that do not constitute a crime are not corrected	2.78	0.96
32/k	Failure to report aid received from abroad or made abroad	3.6	19.91
32/l¹³	Failure to submit an annual return, failure to report the acquired immovables, failure to notify the opened representative offices	0.52	0.33

¹² The articles of law in this column; It refers to the articles related to administrative fines in Article 32 of the Law on Associations No. 5253.

¹³ 2) Some associations were also given administrative fines in 2022 for not submitting their declarations. The ratio of the total administrative fine applied to associations that do not submit their declarations to the total administrative fine imposed as a result of the audit is 31.07%.

32/m	Unauthorized opening of student dormitories and association halls	7.2	5.69
32/r	Failure to keep the records of the association in Turkish	0.15	0.19
32/s	Failure to notify the final notification of the General Assembly, the change of address of the association organs and the association	26.92	6.02
32/t	Regarding the audit; failure to provide the requested information and documents from real and legal persons, including banks	0.02	0.06
32/u	The income and expenses of the Association over TL 7,000 are not made through banks	3,75	%8,04
Other	Failure to comply with the provisions of the Aid Collection Law No. 2860	1,37	%11,78

Table 3: The number of associations fined administratively as a result of audits incl. amount of fined form 01.01.2022 to 31.12.2022. (Ministry of Interior, 2023)

Moreover, in July 2020, Türkiye's Parliament passed the Social Media Law or also known as the Censorship Law (Law No. 5651 on Regulating Internet Publications and Combating Crimes Committed by Means of Such Publications), followed by a new regulation in May 2022 aimed at combating disinformation. This legislation, adopted in October 2022, introduces penalties for spreading 'misleading information.' It threatens freedom of expression, leading to concerns among journalists, lawyers, and dissidents. Moreover, it restricts the work of NGOs, hindering their ability to advocate freely for societal issues. In conclusion, the NGOs face barriers due to the existing legislative framework, which can be highly political at times (Third Sector Foundation of Turkey, 2023).

3.3. NGO - state relations

The relation of governmental institutions and NGOs in Turkey have evolved over time and vary based on the different fields of activity, organizational characteristics, state characteristics and resource flows. Throughout the last two decades boundaries between civil society organizations and the state have become more ambiguous. Instead of cooperation, the interaction between state and NGOS can be characterized by competition, co-optation, and conflict (Bahcecik & Turhan, 2022: 980-984). Turkey is often seen as example for the failing civil society in state – society relations in Middle Eastern countries (Doyle, 2015). The progress made in the early 2000s due to the EU candidacy process has been interrupted by the failed coup attempt in July 2016. Since then, the shrinking of the civil space in Turkey cannot be denied. However, this does not imply that NGO – state relations are non-existent. Based on research of Bahcecik and Turhan (2022: 988) it seems that “personal connections between the government and the third sector can be strong catalysts in establishing cooperative relationships “. In addition, research shows that the Turkish government prefers to gain influence on established NGOs than found own civil society organizations, supporting especially conservative-leaning organizations. This has led to an uneven pattern of NGO – state relations within the country, with some NGOs experiencing closer ties with the AKP government than others (Bahcecik & Turhan, 2022: 985, 989).

On the topic of women's organizations, the relationship between state and organizations shows the effort of the government to create a “government-friendly NGO scene while stifling dissent” (Bahcecik & Turhan, 2022: 990; Keysan, 2019). Statistics on project federation by the Ministry of Interior from 2022 show what type of NGOs and issues are

financially and ideologically supported by the AKP government (Figure 6). Funding and number of projects for NGOs that address women's rights and violence against women are ranked in the middle of the scale.

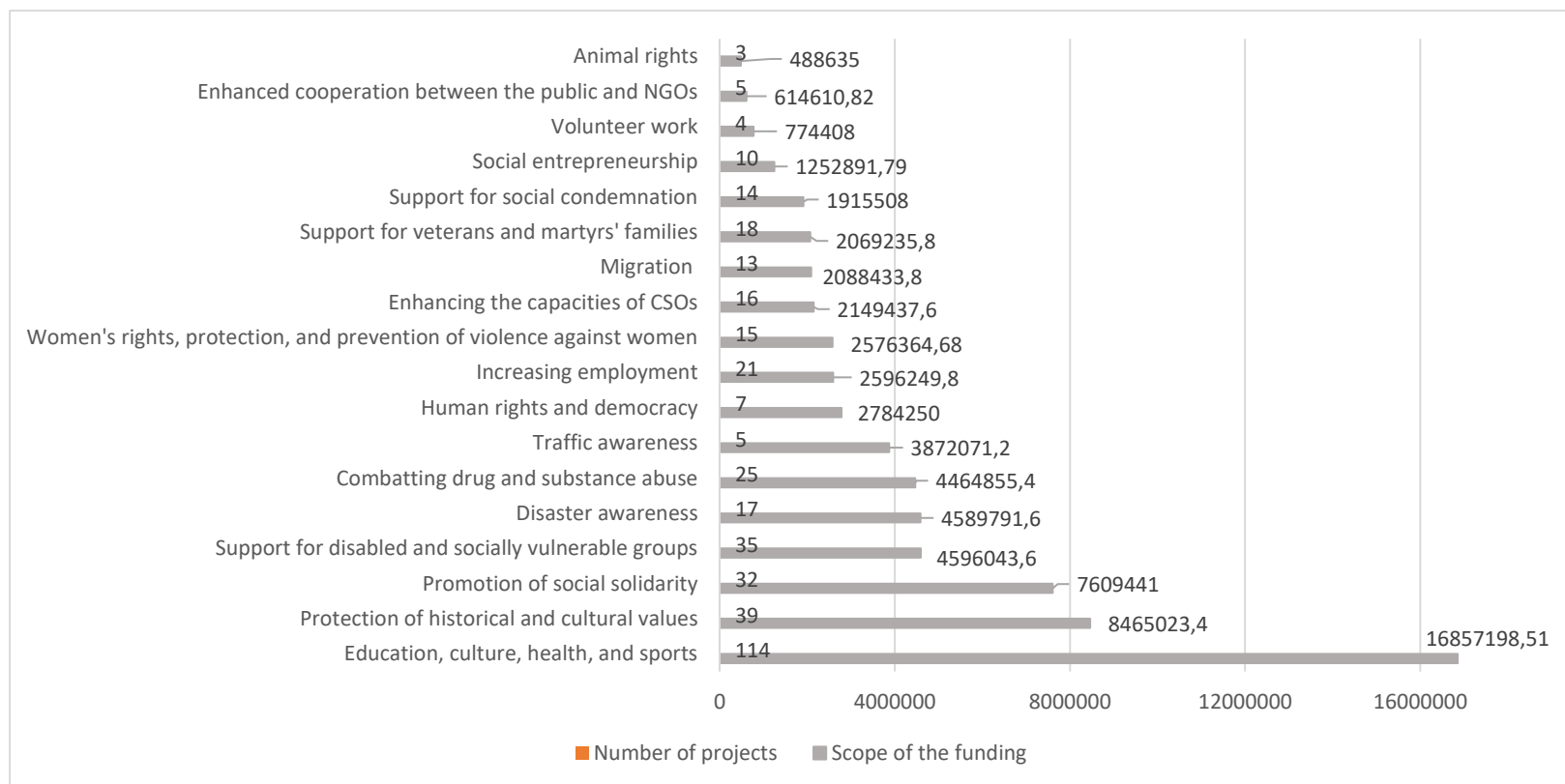


Figure 6: Project federation, Ministry of Interior 2023, period 2022.

4. Women 's organizations in Turkey – an overview over their work and history

4.1. Feminism and female empowerment

Without claiming to be exhaustive, this paragraph aims at enabling a good understanding of how feminism and female empowerment are defined. Over the course of the last three feminist waves the term has developed and gained in importance. Due to that, there is a multiplicity of definitions, sometimes tied to specific women's issues (Delmar, 1998: 13). For this paper, the following two definitions have been chosen to capture the meaning of feminism.

Bell hooks defines feminism and female empowerment as a movement that works towards the abolishment of sexism, sexist exploitation, and suppression (Hooks, 2022: 17). This definition sees sexism and not men per se as enemy. In her paper Rosalind Delmar (2002) states that “a feminist is someone who hold that women suffer discrimination because of their sex, that they have specific needs which remain negated and unsatisfied, and that the satisfaction of these needs would require a radical change [...] in the social, political and political order.” (Delmar, 2002: 2). Both authors' definitions not only explain the status quo but also point out an urgency to act against gender-based discrimination. One way to tackle patriarchy is through female empowerment for example by feminist NGOs (see Annex B: Research overview on NGOs and woman empowerment). Within the last decade, female empowerment has become more important and private organizations as well as NGOs integrate it into their strategy and mission. But what exactly is female empowerment? The term can be derived from political and social empowerment, which are often used when discussing about individuals and groups who are experiencing disadvantages and discrimination in terms of political power. This is often the case for (cultural) minorities within society (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Gilliam, 1996; High-Pippert & Comer, 1998: 54).

Political and social empowerment occurs at both the individual and collective levels, focusing on building autonomy, confidence, and the capacity for change to shape a better future. (Martinez, 2025)

At a collective level, social empowerment is exemplified by the presence of organizations and institutions that assist marginalized groups in acquiring the resources necessary for empowerment. These resources comprise material assets, good health, education, social

inclusion, self-worth, confidence, and economic prospects. The primary objective is to provide individuals lacking access to these resources with a sense of identity, community, and overall well-being. Concurrently, efforts are directed towards eradicating systemic barriers that withhold essential resources, thereby perpetuating marginalization. (Martinez, 2025) These efforts should also be reflected on political agendas and attitudes (High-Pippert & Comer, 1998: 54).

The *United Nation Development Found for Women* states that women empowerment is “having access to and control over the means to make a living on a sustainable and long-term basis and receiving material benefits for this access and control” (Gupta, 2020: 4).

In conclusion, women empowerment refers to a process of promoting and granting women the autonomy and power to participate fully in the social, economic, political, and personal sphere of life that they have been denied earlier. It involves challenging and dismantling societal barriers, gender-based discrimination and inequalities whilst creating an environment where women can exercise their rights and make independent decisions. Women empowerment advocates for social, political and economic advancement and recognizes women as equal members of society. Feminists and allies of all gender come together in women’s organizations and NGOs to support female empowerment, to speak up and to fight for their rights (Delmar, 2002: 11).

4.2. Definition of women’s organizations

As mentioned in the sections before, women’s organizations play a crucial part in evolving gender politics in Turkey but are also shaped by the socio-political approach of the government. Esim and Cindoglu (1999: 178, 182) define women’s organizations as

„Organizations whose founders and beneficiaries are women. [...] The founders of these organizations are mainly urban middle-class, professional women while the beneficiaries of these programs are mainly urban lower middle-class or squatter area women. “

Through collective action they advocate for women’s rights and influence Turkish policy making. At the macro level, women’s organizations reflect women’s influence in shaping the gender dynamics of Turkey’s political landscape. At the micro level, they function as change-agents enhancing the quality of life of Turkish women through different initiatives focused on healthcare, education, and economic independence (Esim und Cindoglu, 1999:

178).

Based on the Turkish legal framework, women's organizations are established as foundations or associations (see chapter 3.2. Legal framework). Associations are based on human resources and memberships, dating back to the traditional social institutions of the Ottoman Empire. Foundations concentrate on the distribution of resources and assets. In the light of this structure, the majority of women's organizations depend on external financial resources: associations generate income through memberships, whereas foundations rely on private donations. Both also depend on donations from relevant state ministries, international donors and institutions such as private foundations or other local NGOs (Esim und Cindoglu, 1999: 182).

	Kemalist	Islamist	Feminist	Kurdish
Gender needs	Strategic/practical	Practical	Strategic/practical	Strategic/practical
Development strategies	Emancipation, gender equality	Welfare	Gender equality, empowerment	Gender equality, empowerment of ethnic identity
Political agenda	Secularist, nationalist	Non-secularist (religious)	Secularist, feminist	Secularist, feminist
Target population	Urban/rural women	Urban poor families	Urban poor women	Kurdish women
Programs	Skills training, courses, seminars	Food aid, training, courses, seminars	Battered women and childcare centers	Advocacy, information publishing

Table 4: categorization of women's organizations in Turkey. Own summary.

To enable a better understanding of the organizations and their challenges, scholars have categorized Turkish women's organizations into different groups according to their political affiliation. Esim and Cindoglu (1999) apply the categories *Kemalist*, *Feminist* and *Islamist* to their research. Keysan (2019) follows the definition of Marshall (2009), Arat and Altinay

(2015), and Fisher Onar and Peker (2012) adding the category *Kurdish* or *Kurdish-feminist* to this first categorization by Esim and Cindoglu. The paper at hand follows the typology of Keysan (2019) for a better differentiation and intersectional view on the research object.

- 1) Kemalist NGOs make up the majority of the women's organizations in Turkey pursuing „a strictly nationalist and secularist agenda “(Esim und Cindoglu, 1999: 182). They believe in a secular state with women playing an important role for secularization and democracy. Their initiatives include workshops on income-generating activities and women's rights (Esim und Cindoglu, 1999: 183).
- 2) Islamic NGOs focus on the role of women within the Islamic family and the *Qur'an*¹⁴, mainly providing living aid for poor female lead households. The workshops they provide are not aimed at providing a long-lasting solution, but on the contrary create a dependency of women concerned on the programs. Contrary to expectations, research shows that the initiatives are not exclusively taken up by women opting for a conservative Islamic lifestyle (Esim & Cindoglu, 1999: 184f). „These religious Muslim women's NGOs are also challenging the lack of education, the lack of legal rights of women, and the poverty rate among women in Turkey.“ (Ozcetin, 2009: 113)
- 3) Feminist NGOs' overall goal are gender equality and female empowerment, distancing themselves from the conservative religious approach. Their initiatives target the issues of raising feminist consciousness (Esim & Cindoglu, 1999: 185).
- 4) Kurdish NGOs are like Kemalist and Feminist NGOs secularist organizations. They address issues related to gender inequality and discrimination within the context of their ethnic identity. Initiatives focus on advocacy and publishing resources to inform other women about these issues. Until the 2000s there has been little relation between Kurdish NGOs and other women's organizations. Nowadays some Kurdish NGOs that also identify as *Kurdish-feminist* cooperate with other women's organizations, mainly with the *Capital City Women's Platform* (Marshall, 2009: 373ff.).

The presented categorization impacts several relevant aspects of NGOs' (coping) strategies, such as funding, stakeholder management, state-NGO relations, and public media perception. Islamic NGOs often being GONGOs receive more funds from governmental

¹⁴ Koran

institutions and have easier access to stakeholders to influence the policy making process. Celebi (2022) describes this issue in her paper on the example of the Islamic (GO)NGO KADEM.

4.3. Brief historical overview

As stated in the chapter about Turkish gender policies, the history of women's organizations is deeply intertwined with the country's political and societal (power) struggles (Esim & Cindoglu, 1999: 180) and is marked by political turning points throughout the years. Sirman (1989) categorizes the 'bargaining with patriarchy' in his paper in three time periods¹⁵:

- (1) The first women's organization was founded during the 19th century Ottoman Empire. During the Tanzimat period of the Ottoman modernization, the struggle for women's rights began, gaining momentum after the revolution of 1908 when women emerged as activists, forming their own associations. Their work focused on charity work and appeal for women's education (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011: 558; Keysan, 2019: 4-5; Sirman, 1989: 4-9).
- (2) The second period started with the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and ended in the late 1980s with the emergence of independent feminist organizations. In the early years of the Turkish Republic, the women's organizations and movement were driven by developmental and modernist goals, distancing themselves from the Islamist roots and strengthening the secular ideology. With the beginning of the 1980s the women's organizations have undergone diversifications, witnessing the founding of feminist and Kurdish organizations in opposition to the Kemalist perspectives. Despite several challenges, many economic and political rights were obtained and women's rights gained public visibility (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011: 558; Keysan, 2019: 4; Sirman, 1989: 9-15). Although by this time feminism was nothing new in Turkey, the so-called "post-1983 feminist awakening" had the biggest impact on women's rights by date (Sirman, 1989: 27).
- (3) The post-1980s era can be defined as another period marker. However, Sirman's time frame is not very precise here as it overlaps with the second period. The development of women's organization in this final period is shaped by parallel feminist and

¹⁵ The periodization does not correspond with the periodization or waves in feminist theory.

political developments such as the institutionalization and emergence of the Muslim women's groups (Ozcetin, 2009:107; Sirman, 1989: 15ff.).

Sirman's categorization can be very helpful when looking at the early stages of Turkish women's organizations. However, his periodization does not cover the development of the organizations after 1989.

“‘A new generation of post-1980s feminists were no longer content to be the grateful daughters of the republic.’ Such women questioned ‘the modernist gender discourse promoted by secular state elites’, reconsidering women's position within society and challenging the public/private divide“ (Keysan, 2019: 5)

As written before, the history of women's organizations in Turkey following the 1980s is marked by diversification and a complex interplay of different ideologies and issues. Feminist and Kurdish women's organizations often stood in opposition to the traditional Kemalist voices (Keysan, 2019: 168). New issues like sexuality, the headscarf debate and class division came to the forefront, and criticism was directed at Kemalist groups for their perceived ethno-centric and exclusionary practices (Keysan, 2019:168). Especially the enforcement of the headscarf ban in the 1980s resulted in polarization within the women's movement, dividing the NGOs that supported from those that opposed the ban. This *schism* led to the rise of the religious Muslim women's organizations in the 1990s (Ozcetin, 2009: 107). Notable among these groups were *Baskent Kadin Platformu* (Capital Women's Platform), *Hazar Grubu* (Caspian Group), *Ayrimciliga Karsi Kadin Haklari Dernegi* (Women's Rights Association Against Discrimination), and *Hanimlar Egitim ve Kultur Vakfi* (Women Education and Culture Foundation). These organizations played a crucial role in reshaping the identities of religious Muslim women, advocating for participation over mere representation. Contrary to some assumptions, these NGOs not only focused on the headscarf ban but also on broader issues like education, legal rights, and poverty among Turkish women (Ozcetin, 2009: 110-113).

In 2005, women's organizations were included in the establishment of an advisory board on the status of women – together with various ministries and academic institutions. Women's organizations have been particularly active during that time, collaborating with each other on various occasions. 126 women's organizations partnered in the *Medeni Kanun Kadin Platformu* (The Civil Code Women Platform). Even more came together (220 women's

organizations) for the *Siddete Son Platformu*, fighting together to stop gender-based violence (European Commission, 2012: 7).

The attempted coup d'état in 2016 had a significant impact on civil society organizations, including women's NGOs. Various women's organizations have been closed, not just those linked to the Gülen movement¹⁶ but also those that were dissident in nature (Keysan, 2019: 168). Throughout their entire history, women's organizations in Turkey have faced challenges in dialoguing with the government. Since the AKP rules, they face a new form of patriarchy, integrating religious-conservative, nationalist, and liberal values. This creates challenges, including the unpredictable flow of funds, which leads to programs being constrained in their scope and lacking long-term continuity (Esim & Cindoglu, 1999: 182). Due to this rather complex dynamic, women's organizations must develop more nuanced approaches and strategies (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011: 557).

4.4. Development of gender policies in Turkey

„The history of women's organizations in Turkey needs to be seen within the context of power struggles among the country's political and social groups “(Esim & Cindoglu, 1999: 180). The development of gender policies and women's rights in Turkey has been an up and down throughout the last century, mainly influenced by the shift from Europeanization to De-Europeanization¹⁷ (Elsen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022; Çağlayan & Küçükkırca, 2023). Since the founding of the Turkish Republic under Mustafa Kemal in 1923, women's rights and gender “ha[ve] been the main yardstick of the Turkish modernization project”

¹⁶ The Gülen movement, also known as *Hizmet* ("service" in Turkish), is a transnational socio-religious movement led by Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen. the Turkish government has accused the movement of establishing a "parallel state" and orchestrating the 2016 coup attempt, designating it a terrorist organization (FETÖ). Since then, the movement has faced significant repression in Turkey, and its members and activities have largely relocated abroad.

¹⁷ The research adapts the definition of Elsen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu (2022). Therefore, de-Europeanization is described as process of de-democratization, the weakening of human rights. More specifically, the term defines the weakening of gender equality and women's rights, especially in (national) public discourses.

(Dedeoglu, 2012: 271). Politics and society distanced themselves from the *shar'ia* and with the Kemalist reforms promoted “sameness of women and men” (Dedeoglu, 2012: 271). In 1930, women’s right to vote has been introduced, many years before other European countries (Esim & Cindoglu, 1999: 183; European Commission, 2012: 4), and five years later (1935) the veil and the compulsion to the Islamic dress code for women were abolished (Esim & Cindoglu, 1999: 183). However, the new rights were beneficial only for a small group of women, above all urban bourgeois women (Dedeoglu, 2012: 271). Triggered by the coup d’état in 1980 inequalities between men and women - such as domestic violence, sexual harassment and virginity examinations - started and became more visible in Turkish politics beginning of the 1990s. Gender equality was not perceived as a private matter anymore but got formalized through policy changes in the legal framework and governmental bodies (Dedeoglu, 2012, 274f.). In 1985/86 the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* ¹⁸ got ratified and made the topic of gender discrimination and women’s rights more visible to public eye (Dedeoglu, 2012: 275; European Commission, 2012: 4). Following the ratification of the CEDAW, a division known as the *Advisory Board for policies concerning Women* (1987) was formed within the State Planning Organization. Its purpose was to enhance the recognition of gender-related issues in public policies. The board consisted of representatives from various public agencies, non-governmental organizations, and universities. Notably, this marked the first instance of establishing a dedicated unit for promoting gender equality within the public sector (European Commission, 2012: 6). In 1990, the *Turkish General Directorate for the Status and Problems of Women (Kadinin Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü, KSGM)* was founded (Dedeoglu, 2012: 275; European Commission, 2012: 6). With the foundation of the KSGM, Turkey experienced progress in gender policies in the 1990s and early 2000s. The policies on the agenda focused mainly on the topics of enhancing access to employment for women, increasing the share of women on the labor market, gender equality in families and domestic violence against women (European Commission, 2012). The change in attitude towards

¹⁸ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international treaty adopted by the United Nations in 1979 that defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. Often called an international bill of rights for women, CEDAW commits its signatories to promote gender equality in legal, political, economic, social, and cultural arenas.

gender equality policies in Turkey is evident through several legislative reforms. These reforms include constitutional amendments that have taken place since 2001, with a particular emphasis on the amendment made in 2004. Additionally, Turkey has adopted new legislation such as the new Civil Code in 2001, the new Labor Law in 2003, and the Penal Code in 2005. Furthermore, women benefit from improvements in the insurance and healthcare system. These reforms have brought about a shift in the perception of women in Turkish society, moving from viewing them as dependent citizens to recognizing them as independent and active participants. (Dedeoglu, 2012: 269f.) A development which has been seen critically by some academics. Dedeoglu (2012) states that even with the institutionalization and formalization of gender equality, the political agenda remained almost unchanged and sexism and gender-based discrimination were pushed back into the private space. Gender equality and the effort required to achieve it were still seen as a problem of modernization (p. 275).

Until the year 2011 the government party *Adelet ve Kalkinma Partisi (AKP)* with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as prime minister achieved continued legal and political progress on women's rights. These policy improvements were mainly motivated by Turkey's preparation for EU accession and the so-called Europeanization (European Commission, 2012: 4; Güneş & Ezikoglu, 2023: 14). With the adoption of the EU *acquis* and norms, a positive progress on women's rights and gender equality got unlocked (European Commission, 2012: 5). On March 12, 2012, the Turkish government – still under the majority of the AKP – was the first to ratify the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence*, also known as *Istanbul Convention*¹⁹.

The year 2011 marks the shift from Europeanization of the country to De-Europeanization

¹⁹ The European Parliament describes the so-called Istanbul convention as “a tool to tackle violence against women and girls” (2018) and has been signed by 38 European countries among them all member of the European Union. The convention sets legally binding standards and obligations for signatory countries to prevent violence against women, protect victims, and prosecute perpetrators. It defines gender-based violence as a violation of human rights and encompasses various forms of violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. The Istanbul Convention involves measures such as legal frameworks, support services for victims, prevention programs, and awareness campaigns. It also recognizes the need to address structural gender inequalities and stereotypes that contribute to violence against women (European Parliament, 2018).

and in consequence from liberalism to conservatism. This change in policy and paradigm had a significant impact on the situation of women in the Turkish society and women's rights (Güneş & Ezikoglu, 2023: 14f). The Ministry of women (short: KSGM) – established in the 1990s – was affiliated to the Ministry of Family and Social Policy in 2011 and the term women was removed from the official institutional name. (European Commission, 2012: 6). The decline of women's rights culminated in the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on the 1st of July 2021 – only 10 years after the ratification (Güneş & Ezikoglu, 2023: 14f). The withdrawal received much criticism from the Turkish society but also internationally due to the rise of femicides and domestic violence within Turkey over the past two decades²⁰ (Güneş & Ezikoglu, 2023: 15; Standard, 2021).

Coşar and Yeğenoğlu (2011:555) argue that with the entry of the AKP into government a new mode of patriarchy emerged, characterized by neo-liberalization and more conservative interpretation of the state-religion interface. The shift away from the secular state is not only due to the Islamist origins of the AKP party but can also be derived from patriarchal structures that occur in almost every social and political area (Engin & Pals, 2018; Azak, 2023). AKP's neo-liberalism can be characterized by three elements: nationalistic reflexes, socio-cultural conservatism, and liberal free-market discourse. Although there have been some advancements in terms of legal reforms (see above), there has been a gradual decline in women's participation in the economic domain and a push back into the role of traditional-dependent housewife. Even though the party consulted different Turkish women's organizations, the government stuck with their religious-nationalist understanding of family and conservative perspective on womanhood (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011: 557).

As of today, Turkey ranks 124th among 146 countries in the World Economic Forum Gender Equality Index 2022 (UN Women, 2023). Whilst important legal reforms - ranging from non-discrimination to better access to the labor market and from women's rights to separation of state and religion - have been established over the last decades, the reality is different. Yakin Ertürk, Turkish professor and former United Nations special rapporteur on violence against women, states in an interview with *UN Women*:

“[i]deological backdrop along with neo-liberal economic policies and a string

²⁰ Turkey experienced an increase of 78% in domestic violence and femicide during the Covid- 19 pandemic (Güneş & Ezikoglu, 2023: 15).

national security agenda, contravenes the three pillars of gender norms: equality, development and peace. In Turkey and in many other states these norms represent a global reality that contradicts an existing international order. Reality is based on exclusion, domination and exploitation.” (Ertürk, 2019).

The Turkish economic, social and state order is still based on the idea of women as mothers and wives (Dedeoglu, 2012: 269). Women are equal to men before the law, but de facto these laws have never been implemented or applied by Turkish institutions (Dedeoglu, 2012: 271; European Commission, 2012; Güneş & Ezikoglu, 2023: 16-17). Academics and practitioners agree that for their implementation an unwavering commitment to the principle of equality in all state policies and programs is crucial. Merely enacting equalization policies without challenging the existing gender ideology often leads to further discrimination against women. It is recognized that improving the position of women in society is closely intertwined with their participation in the labor market. Achieving true gender equality requires a broader social transformation that prevents societal barriers from impeding women's exercise of their rights. In this regard, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a significant role in advocating for women's rights and driving positive change (Ertürk, 2019; Dedeoglu, 2012: 280; Güneş & Ezikoglu, 2023: 14).

In Turkey, culture and religion justify acts against human rights and crimes against women. As in many other countries around the world such sexist and discriminating acts and norms have their origins in oppression, gender inequality and male-controlled systems (Ertürk, 2019; Güneş & Ezikoglu, 2023: 14).

4.5. Barriers

As seen in the previous chapter, women's rights have been progressively undermined by political measures, alongside increasing restrictions on NGOs whose values conflict with those of the AKP. As a result, women's organizations face obstacles on multiple levels. This chapter will give first insight into grievances women's organizations face in their daily work. Based on literature research and the legal analysis of the International Center of Non-Profit Law (ICNL), the barriers can be classified in the following categories:

Civil participation

The National Development Plan and Annual Presidential Program stress the importance of participation in decision-making but lack policies promoting cooperation. Although the

Regulation on Drafting Legislation outlines civil society involvement, it does not mandate consultation (ICNL, 2023). Marginalized groups face legal challenges, with a lawsuit aiming to shut it down. An example is the lawsuit against the *We Will Stop Femicides Platform* which is one of the most active Turkish feminist NGOs, on grounds of alleged “activities against laws and morality”. The Turkish court rejected the lawsuit End of September 2023 (Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu, 2023; Yasar & Duvar, 2023; Taştan & Sirri, 2023; Tahaoglu, 2023).

Organizational foundation and activities

The Law on Associations introduces vague limitations, such as those related to general morality and public order, giving excessive governmental discretion during CSO registration. Article 56 of the Turkish Civil Code prohibits associations formed against laws and morality, while Article 101 restricts foundations conflicting with constitutional principles, laws, ethics, national integrity, or aiming to support a distinctive race or community. Implementing regulations require associations seeking office space in residential buildings to obtain the consent of all residents. This can be an obstacle as women’s rights are still a controversial topic in Turkey and the risk of one resident not agreeing is always a possibility. The prohibition on shared offices lacks a statutory basis but stems from the Ministry of Interior's legal department opinion. These regulations may pose barriers to NGO registration (ICNL, 2023). While associations and foundations are not forbidden from directly participating in political activities (Law No. 4721 of the Civil Code), there are reports suggesting that rights-based organizations experience more governmental interventions compared to others.

In addition, associations are mandated to maintain statutory books²¹ to ensure proper record-keeping and compliance with regulations. These statutory books must be maintained in Turkish and can be kept either physically or electronically, provided they comply with the relevant legal standards. Proper certification of these books by a notary public is also required to ensure their legal validity (Karabiyik, 2024). Failure to maintain these books accurately or to have them properly certified can result in legal penalties for the association's executives, including fines or imprisonment (Venice Commission, 2024). Furthermore,

²¹ (1) Decision Book (Karar Defteri), (2) Member Registration Book (Üye Kayıt Defteri), (3) Document Registration Book (Evrak Kayıt Defteri) and (4) Operating Account Book (İşletme Hesabı Defteri).

associations and foundations must complete standard forms for foreign funding and when opening new branches. By reason of counter-terrorism measures (Law on Preventing Financing of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction No. 7262) numerous human rights-focused NGOs receiving foreign funds have undergone constant inspections, causing operational hindrances. Some governmental investigations resulted in minor penalties (see table 2) for some NGOs. However, others faced a court process, potentially leading to termination.

Monetary resources – foreign and domestic funding

As mentioned in chapter 3.2. Legal framework, NGOs encounter significant challenges in their fundraising endeavors, primarily attributed to the stringent and excessively bureaucratic Law on Collection of Aid (No 1983, 23/6/1983). This legislation mandates approval for each fundraising initiative by NGOs through an intricate application process, wherein detailed information, including the amount of money to be raised, utilization plans, activity timelines, and locations, must be provided. The decision to grant or deny approval rests with the local state authority. Associations and foundations are obligated to secure permission for collecting donations in public spaces and through the internet, encompassing street activities, public campaigns, and online fundraising efforts. While the Law on Collection of Aid excludes voluntary donations and does not necessitate an official permit for displaying a bank account number on NGOs' websites, various online donation solicitation methods are regulated, for example SMS donation campaigns, fundraising initiatives on websites or social media mandates. Several Human Rights organizations declare that the law “Preventing Financing of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction” (effective since December 2020) is utilized to „justify increased and more onerous government audits of organizations and associations focusing on human rights or topics otherwise sensitive to the ruling party” (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2022) making foreign funding more difficult. According to the then Turkish minister of interior Süleyman Soyulu by the end of the year 2022 25.000 audits have been expected. The actual number is not known at the time of writing. „Human rights and civil society organizations, groups promoting LGBTQI+ rights, and women’s groups in particular stated the government used regular and detailed audits to create administrative burdens and to intimidate them by threatening large fines” (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2022). Furthermore, there is a lack of strategic coordination among ministries, impacting public

funding for NGOs. The absence of a consistent public funding mechanism hinders support for the institutional infrastructure and activities of NGOs. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive data regarding the total annual public funding, with ministries having discretionary control over total budgets, funding modalities, and forms for NGOs.

Freedom of speech, advocacy and right to assembly

As mentioned in the introduction, freedom of expression has faced serious threats, marked by arbitrary legislative interpretation, pressure, dismissals, and frequent court cases against journalists, writers, and social media users (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024; ICNL, 2023). The number of individuals prosecuted for insulting the president has notably increased (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024). Repression and intimidation persist against human rights defenders, resulting in a significant deterioration of freedom of speech and advocacy space. Human rights defenders, journalists, academics, such as women's rights and LGBTQIAP+ rights advocates endure various reprisals, including threats, stigmatization, judicial harassment, prolonged arbitrary detention, and travel bans. These restrictions have led to self-censorship among activists, discouraging others from actively participating in civil society organizations and advocating for human rights.

Although the Turkish Constitution comprises “the right of citizens to organize an assembly and demonstration without having to obtain any prior authorization” (Article 34; ICNL, 2023), the right of assembly is vaguely restricted justifying it with “preservation of national security,” “public order,” “prevention of crime,” and protection of “public morality” as well as “public health”. Several sections of Article 10 of *Law on Meetings and Demonstrations* include hinderances for organizations to legally assembly, such as the need for a signed declaration of the entire organizing committee 48 hour prior to the assembly – submitted to the district governor's office during working hours. If missed, the assembly is considered illegal and authorizes governmental intervention including police interference. Such police interference has the right to detain participants without consulting the prosecutor's office. Another example is Law No. 7145 on the *Amendment of Some Laws and Emergency Decrees* stating that assemblies have to be ended one hour after the sunset of the sun, at the beginning of nighttime. Reports of the HRFT Documentation Center state that in 2022 at least 3.540 people were “subject to torture and other ill-treatment” due to penalties on protestors (HRFT Documentation Center, 2023). Moreover, between March 1-15, 2023, the local governorships of Mardin, Mersin, Siirt, Osmaniye, and Hakkari imposed a 15-day restriction

on the right to assemble, coinciding with the period when numerous women's organizations typically organize events, marches, and protests for International Women's Day on March 8. Additionally, on March 8, 2023, The Beyoğlu District Governor's Office prohibited the 21st Feminist Night March in Istanbul (United States Department of State, 2023).

5. Methodology

5.1. Qualitative research and expert knowledge/ interviews

Empirical social research pursues the goal to systematically analyze our social reality to then be able to make assumptions about it. In comparison to quantitative research, qualitative research is subject-related and aims at a deep and differentiated analysis of social phenomena. Research subjects are investigated from the inside out and try to determine individual perceptions, motives, needs and attitudes. For this purpose, the research procedure and analysis are mostly inductive and theory-based. Unlike quantitative research, representativity is not statistically but content-based - this is also referred to as generalization by type formation (Misoch, 2019: 1-3).

A qualitative approach was chosen for the underlying empirical study in order to create a space in which the interviewees could freely express and reflect on their problems and coping strategies. Moreover, the qualitative method qualifies best to analyze the current social phenomenon in Turkey. The research question, which explores the survival strategies of feminist Turkish women's organizations, inherently aligns with feminist principles, making the use of interviews particularly relevant as a method; this approach amplifies the voices of those at the center of the research, embodying the feminist commitment to inclusivity and empowerment (Keysan, 2019: 20). The research is centered on expert interviews. The decision to conduct expert interviews is based on the narrow definition stating that an expert is a person who has specific knowledge and competences in the research area (Misoch, 2019: 119; Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2021: 155).

“[...] we think it makes sense to use the term expert only for those persons who - sociologically speaking - have specific role knowledge, are attributed such knowledge, and claim this particular competence for themselves”. (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2021: 155)²²

The interviews follow the classification of Aglaja Przyborski and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr

²² Original citation in German: “Stattdessen halten wir es für sinnvoll, den Begriff Expertin nur für solche Personen zu verwenden, die – soziologisch gesprochen – über ein spezifisches Rollenwissen verfügen, solches zugeschrieben bekommen und diese besondere Kompetenz für sich selbst in Anspruch nehmen“ (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2021: 155).

(2021). Therefore, knowledge can be classified in three strategies: (1) operational knowledge, (2) interpretative knowledge and (3) contextual knowledge²³. Operational knowledge covers information about mechanisms, processes and institutionalized relationships in organizations, networks, administrations and politics whereby the expert provides access to those (inside) information. Due to an abundance of knowledge experts hold interpretative authority and shape our perspective on relevant issues. Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr call this the interpretative knowledge. Lastly, experts have contextual knowledge, providing the researcher with additional knowledge addressing third-party groups or circumstances (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2021: 156f.). During the data collection and evaluation for the underlying research all three types of knowledge have their justification and importance, due to the fact that interviewees will not only explain the management strategies within their organizations but also assess the socio-economic and political environment they operate in. Even though expert interviews are often criticized to not be a ‘real method’, the decision to use this method is based on the necessity of the knowledge the NGO representatives dispose of (Misoch, 2019: 125f.).

Next to expert interviews, online and E-Mail interviews have become more common during the last decade especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Misoch, 2019: 176; Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2021: 163). “[...] [T]here have been dramatic changes in communication technology and qualitative interviewing must adapt if it is to survive” (Edwards & Holland, 2013:94 in Misoch, 2019: 177).

Interviews via an online communication platform such as *Skype* or *Zoom* have some specialties compared to in person interviews. On the one hand, both parties need internet access and have installed the same communication software which is still a privilege not all world citizens have, for example in rural areas in Turkey or through governmental restrictions. On the other hand, interviews are no longer location-based, and researchers can reach geographically more dispersed groups as well as hard-to-reach people. Thereby, bigger sampling is possible and often the willingness for interviewees to participate higher. Other advantages are higher flexibility, easier contact, less time needed, better anonymity and the possibility of digital recordings. Even though technical problems might occur and liability

²³ The terms were translated from the German original terms: (1) Betriebswissen, (2) Deutungswissen and (3) Kontextwissen.

decreases, the advantages for empirical research prevail (Misoch, 2019: 177-181).

E-Mail interviews are used when writing and anonymity is especially important. This type of interview is often chosen when dealing with sensitive topics or people. Writing gives the interviewee more control over the situation and time to reflect on the content. Unlike e.g. Zoom-interviews, e-Mail interviews can be held synchronous or asynchronous (Misoch, 2019: 184-189). Zoom-interviews and asynchronous e-Mail interviews have been chosen to conduct the expert interviews due to lack of time and limited financial resources to realize the research project. However, this gave the NGO representatives the opportunity to conduct the interview in their safe-space and share information more anonymously than in an in-person interview. Due to governmental threats, they face in their everyday work, this was one of the safest options for data collection.

5.2. Study design and data collection procedure

The research design of the underlying paper is a combination of expert interviews conducted as Zoom and E-Mail interviews. In addition, decolonial and feminist research elements are taken into consideration. Decoloniality Europe states in the Charta of Decolonial Research Ethics from 2013 that to conduct research at eye level the research questions and – problems should ideally be formulated in cooperation with the research subject.

„The subjects of study have the right to (...) define what is the relevant social context to take into account in the research. This is the only way to start off in a way that erodes the privilege of the researcher to define what is relevant from what is irrelevant of research foci, themes or problems, and hence to direct the research to the problems that the research subjects prioritize.“ (Decolonialidad Europa 2013)

Drawing from feminist research the intention was to give the research subjects (women's organizations, NGOs, feminist activist) enough room for free expression though open and broadly formulated questions as conversation stimuli. Although the interview guide, pre-selected three focus areas of strategic management of NGOs, within these focal areas the questions served as conversation stimuli and should not pre-select the issues or topics. Thus, the final prioritization and deepening of the focus areas could be set by the mentioned aspects from the concerned/affected interviewees.

The interview was structured into different sections based on the above-mentioned focus

areas. In the beginning, the interviewer explained the research topic and the measures taken for privacy and data protection. After this basic information, the interviewee had the opportunity to voice concerns and ask for adjustments. The first section of the interview was focused on socio-demographic aspects of the interviewee and its organization. With an ‘ice-breaker question’ a relaxed atmosphere for conversation was created to enable good narrative flow and safe space. The latter was important, as the interviewees put themselves in a possible critical situation when criticizing the Turkish government and its gender policies. The following questions were focused on mission and strategy, organizational structure, environmental challenges and stakeholder management, especially political stakeholders, and funding. In the interest of interpretative knowledge, the interviewees were encouraged to openly voice their opinions throughout the interview.

The interviews were conducted bilingual in English and Turkish, whereas the text was translated from English into Turkish language by a Turkish native speaker and with the help of the online translator *Deepl.com*.

In addition, documentation in form of written form has been gathered. These included by-laws of the organizations, website materials, activity reports, leaflets, books, financial statements, journals, press statements and books.

Selection of interview partners

Representatives of women’s organizations (NGOs) have been selected as experts for the underlying research as they have the most operative, interpretative, and contextual knowledge about the research topic, more specific about the socio-political environment and challenges in Turkey as well as the applied strategies of NGOs. Experts from the academic field were not take into consideration as interview partners, as their data-based knowledge is already available through research papers and is incorporated in the literature review above.

Before reaching out to women’s organizations, a meeting was held with a representative of *United Nations Women Austria* to gain better understanding on how to approach this sensitive group. Based on past experience with similar research groups, the decision was made to leave the interview form/medium and language up to the interviewee. This way, maximum trust and safety should be secured. A list of NGOs was compiled using internet research as well as a list of Turkish women’s organizations listed in the book *Shaping*

Gender Policy in Turkey by Gül Aldikacti Marshall (2013). Moreover, the fit of the organizations was analyzed based on information found on their website and social media (*Twitter, Instagram, Facebook*). Particularly important was the status as non-governmental organizations, since some women's organizations belong to the private sector and therefore do not qualify for the underlying research. To ensure a certain comparability the area of activity should also be similar between the selected NGOs. Organizational size and location were not considered to broaden the sample size.

Selected women's organizations were contacted through e-mail and social media, whereas the response rate was higher via e-mail. Some organizations could only be reached via social media (*Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn*), but no organization responded to the contact request. In both scenarios the same inquiry text was sent written in English and Turkish, translated by a Turkish native speaker.

Four women's organizations responded to the inquiry and were available for an interview, one of them being a GONGO. The latter will be used as a counterexample.

Recordings and transcriptions

The term transcription denominates the transfer of audio, video and image documents to written form. This way, all observations are scientifically verifiable (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2021: 212-214). For the research only audio documents were written down since facial expressions and gestures are not scientifically relevant for answering the research question. Recordings were only made with the verbal or written consent of the respective interview partner. Depending on the interview form the recording was made with the recording function of the online platform. In the case of E-Mail interviews, the original text was used as sent. In addition, an interview-accompanied documentation was made directly after the interview, which includes contact information, place and time, as well as possible interfering factors, communication behavior and other external influences (Kuckartz, 2018: 171).

In the case of recordings, the audio files are transcribed using MAXQDA software. The conversations are transcribed according to Jefferson's (1984) transcription system (Kuckartz, 2018: 168f). Since the conversations can contain sensitive data and thus easily allow conclusions about individuals, the necessity of anonymization arises. In this process, all occurring sensitive names are replaced by pseudonyms. However, it is important that important characteristics remain recognizable for the evaluation (Kuckartz, 2018: 171). For simplicity and to safeguard against possible data loss, an overview table for research

purposes is created with the decryption. It will not be included in the data set available for the reader.

Since some of the online and e-mail interviews have been conducted in Turkish, the transcriptions have been translated to English so that a comparison between all interviews is possible and is comprehensible for readers.

5.3. Evaluation methods

5.3.1. PESTEL analysis

When analyzing different strategies of organizations, one often uses the PESTEL analysis to include environmental factors. There are different versions regarding the origin of the PESTEL analysis. Some date it back to Francis J. Aguilar, professor at the Harvard Business School, who established the PEST analysis in 1967, stating that economic, technological, political, and social influences are particularly important when scanning the business environment (Klein, 2024). Others ascribe it to the PEST analysis of Fahey and Narayanan (1986) (Kaufmann, 2021: 20). Either way, later the methodology was extended by two additional focus groups – environmental and legal influences (Klein, 2024; Kaufmann, 2021: 20). Nowadays, the basic framework of the PESTEL analysis is based on six main factors, that are also summarized in the acronym.

- (1) Political factors comprise the governmental stability, fiscal policies, foreign policy agreements, and laws that influence the activity of an organization.
- (2) Economic factors are all macroeconomic elements such as interest rates, employment rates, inflation, and exchange rates.
- (3) Social factors are often more difficult to grasp, but influence both politics and economy. The category summarizes factors such as demographic characteristics, lifestyle trends, consumer beliefs, and attitudes towards e.g. working conditions or social movements.
- (4) “T” in PESTEL stands for technological, such as technological infrastructure, automatization and digitalization of platforms and processes. But especially in 2024 artificial intelligence and machine learning get more important.
- (5) Environmental factors include elements that be a physical risk or opportunity to organizations, such as climate change with extreme weather events. But also, energy sustainability and resource management. The earthquake in the Southeast of Turkey

is one example. Overlapping with political and legal factors, environmental laws and regulations count also into this category.

- (6) Legal requirements are often intertwined with political factors and refer to all legal requirements concerning organizations, in this case all legal requirements regarding Turkish foundations and associations. But also, for example tax laws, data protection laws, labor laws etc.

In comparison to other methodologies, this analysis not only creates a holistic picture of the organizational environment but includes external elements that affect the organization and are beyond the control of the management. When applied correctly, the analysis helps to minimize risks and maximize, for example, economic opportunities. When analyzing coping and survival strategies of Turkish women's organizations the PESTEL analysis will lay the groundwork for the strategic analysis. In the first step, the perspective and relevant subject areas must be defined. In this case, the analysis will be conducted from the perspective of the NGO management and the (volunteer) staff. Given the literature review before the most important subject areas are the legal framework and restrictive socio-political environment. Further, the following questions will be answered for each main determinant and subject area: What is the current state of the situation? Why is the determinant so important for the organization? How will the organization's situation evolve under this influence? What external developments related to this factor do we need to address? To answer the questions, interviews and various documents such as financial statements are used, as well as information from the literature review above. The outcome of the analysis provides opportunities and threats embedded in the environment that NGOs face, necessitating strategic responses. The last step of the PESTEL analysis is not executed as no strategic recommendations are made. Instead, the coping strategies stated by NGOs will be interpreted.

5.3.2. Qualitative content and document analysis

To analyze interviews and documents such as annual financial statements, qualitative content analysis according to Mayring was used. This method is particularly suitable for texts such as interview transcripts which are analyzed in the context of social science projects (Mayring, 2015: 11f.). A special aspect of this method, according to Mayring (2015), is the

consideration of the material in the context of communication. This anchoring allows the text to always be understood within its context, and it must be specified which section of the text the interpretations refer to (Mayring 2015: 12, 50). Contrary to common criticism claiming non-scientific free and impressionistic interpretations, qualitative analysis is strictly rule-based, with the use of a category system being the main distinguishing criterion from other methods. This ensures intersubjective verifiability of results and Conclusions on certain aspects of communication for the reader (Mayring, 2015:12f.).

A significant advantage of qualitative content analysis is the detailed work on the text, ensuring that the interpretative knowledge of the experts interviewed becomes the core of the analysis rather than merely reflecting the author's perspective. At the same time, the method is very adaptable and "not a standard instrument that always looks the same" (Mayring 2015, p. 51). Mayring and Fenzl (2019: 634-635) define categories as analytical aspects in brief formulations, that only text passages that fit into a part of the category system are considered and analyzed. Respective categories are classified into a system of main and subcategories based on a combination of theory-guided (deductive) or material-based (inductive) method. As mentioned in chapter 5.1. research foci have been set based on stories and first interviews with Turkish feminist activist therefore the first draft of system of categories has been inductive, material-based. Winker and Degele also recommend the inductive openness of categories in their multi-level analysis to "consider different norms, values, and ideologies in their diversity" (Winker and Degele, 2010: 141). The final system of categories has been extended with deductive categories drawn from theoretical background. That way the following six main categories were formed: organizational features, NGO – state relations, environmental factors of Turkish NGOs, type of needed resources, challenges and threats, coping and survival strategies.

Main categories	Definition	Examples of sub-categories	Examples of theory and literature
Organizational features	Structural characteristics that define the composition and identity of the organization.	Size, age, year of foundation, type of Turkish women's organization.	Frantz & Martens, 2006; Frumkin, 2002, 2005, 2022; Esim & Cindoglu, 1999; Marshall, 2009.
NGO – state relations	The nature and quality of interaction between the women's organization and state institutions at local or national levels.	cooperation, co-optation, complementarity, confrontation.	Najam, 2000; Bahcecik & Turhan, 2022; Keysan, 2019; Toepler et al., 2020.
Environmental factors	External conditions that shape the operational context of the organization.	Legal framework, geographical location.	Turkish law on association, Dedeoglu, 2012; Ertürk, 2019; Günes & Ezikoglu, 2023.
Needed resources	The material and human assets required for the organization to function and achieve its goals.	Material resources, human resources.	Jenkins, 1983; Flynn, 2015; Fuchs, 2005; Edward & Kane, 2014; Edwards et al. 2019; Edwards & Gillham, 2013).
Challenges and threats	Internal or external barriers that restrict or jeopardize the organization's work and existence.	Legal restrictions, political environment, possibility of social participation.	Turkish law on associations, International Center of Non-Profit Law, CIVICUS Monitor 2023-2025.
Coping and survival strategies	Active measures and behaviors adopted by the organization to respond to challenges and ensure continuity.	Simulation, Virtualization, Diversification, etc.	Tysiachniouk et al., 2018; Moser & Skripchenko, 2018; Nimu, 2018.

Table 5: Categories for qualitative analysis

6. Results

This chapter presents the findings of qualitative research aimed at exploring the challenges feminist activists and their organizations face in their everyday work, as well as the coping and survival strategies they employ to sustain their efforts in an authoritative, male-dominated environment. These insights are drawn from interviews conducted with representatives of feminist organizations and written documents, revealing the complex interplay between systemic barriers, resource constraints, and strategies of resilience. The interviews were carried out before March 31, 2024, preceding the opposition's victory in the municipal elections, which may have introduced new dynamics to the political and social landscape.

A notable challenge, as emphasized during a phone conversation with a representative of the WAVE Network on April 5, 2024, is the difficulty in connecting with women's organizations due to their limited time capacities, lack of state funding, and often limited English proficiency. This highlights the resource and language barriers that further compound the operational challenges faced by feminist organizations. Steward et al. (2023: 404) also observed in their interviews for their Global Feminism Project²⁴ that women's movement activist and feminist scholars worldwide are threatened and must be careful about sharing their tactics and strategies, especially on national level. This insight has practical implications on the research as Turkey is no exception.

6.1. Profile and NGO – state relationship

Before sharing detailed information, the profiles of the analyzed organizations can be summarized as follows: The ten organizations are registered in the Marmara region, mostly operating in Ankara and Istanbul. More than half of the associations are also active internationally. Most organizations have been founded with the rising of the Turkish women's movement between 1990 and 2000. The women's organizations actively use social media with up to six-digit follower numbers and define themselves as secular and feminist. In comparison to the situation of these self-defined secular, feminist Turkish women's organizations, the governmental-loyal organization KADEM has been interviewed.

²⁴ Interviews were in conducted in China, Nicaragua and Russia.

	areas where organizations are actively conducting field work	Focus area of work	Social media account ownership	year of foundation	Type of NGO	type of Turkish women's organization	methods used by organizations on their work
NGO1	International, Turkey	advocacy work, women's shelter	Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Vimeo	1996	claims-making NGO, service providing NGO	Feminist	Counseling& Information & support, Service provision, Networking, Event, Advocacy & Campaigning & Policy Development
NGO2	International, Europe	advocacy work, educational trainings & programs for women	Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Spotify Podcast	2002	claims-making NGO, service providing NGO	Feminist	Capacity strengthening, Event, Networking, Education programs, Networking
NGO3	Turkey	Women's counseling center, advocacy work, women's shelter	Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube	1993	claims-making NGO, service providing NGO	Feminist	Counseling& Information & support, Service provision, Networking, Event, Research & Monitoring
NGO4	International, Turkey	Women's shelter, advocacy, educational trainings & programs	X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube	1990	claims-making NGO, service providing NGO	Feminist	Capacity strengthening, Networking, Service provision, educational programs, Advocacy & Campaigning & Policy Development, Events, Networking

	areas where organizations are actively conducting field work	Focus area of work	Social media account ownership	year of foundation	Type of NGO	type of Turkish women's organization	methods used by organizations on their work
NGO5	International, Turkey	advocacy work, shadow reporting, (international) policy making, educational trainings & & programs	Instagram	1993	claims-making NGO, service providing NGO	Feminist	Research & Monitoring, Advocacy & Campaigning & Policy Development, Networking, Educational programs, Events
NGO6	Turkey, International	advocacy work	X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube	2020	claims-making NGO	Feminist	Networking, Event, Advocacy & Campaigning & Policy Development, Research & Monitoring
NGO7	Turkey, International	advocacy work, educational trainings & programs, consultancy,	X, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram	1997	claims-making NGO, service providing NGO	Feminist	Capacity strengthening, Events, Networking, Educational programs, Advocacy & Campaigning & Policy Development
NGO8	Turkey	Women's shelter, educational trainings & programs, consultancy, advocacy work, violence hotline	No reference to social media on website	2012	claims-making NGO, service providing NGO	Feminist	Research & Monitoring, Advocacy & Campaigning & Policy Development, Service provision, Counseling & Information & Support, Capacity strengthening, Networking

	areas where organizations are actively conducting field work	Focus area of work	Social media account ownership	year of foundation	Type of NGO	type of Turkish women's organization	methods used by organizations on their work
NGO9	Turkey	advocacy work, policy making	Instagram, X, Facebook	2010	claims-making NGO	Feminist	Advocacy & Campaigning & Policy Development, Research & Monitoring, Networking, Street protests

Table 6: categorization of NGOs sampled in the study.

As described in Table 6, 100 % of the analyzed organizations focus their activities on operations within Turkey. In addition, around 7 % of women's organizations conduct active field work on European and 11 % on international level. These projects and activities are mainly based on cooperations with different United Nations agencies.

Most of the reviewed NGOs have been founded between 1990 and 2000/2002 which aligns with the rising of the women's movement in Turkey. During this period, women's organizations received support in various forms from national and local governmental institutions. Furthermore, NGO-state relations were more collaborative than shaped by confrontation. Women's organizations founded after the rising of the AKP and the associated political turnaround (in 2016), were mostly established in order to counteract the patriarchal politics and subsidize the missing protection and empowerment Turkish women needed.

This phenomenon is also reflected in the focus areas organizations worked in the last years (Figure 7).

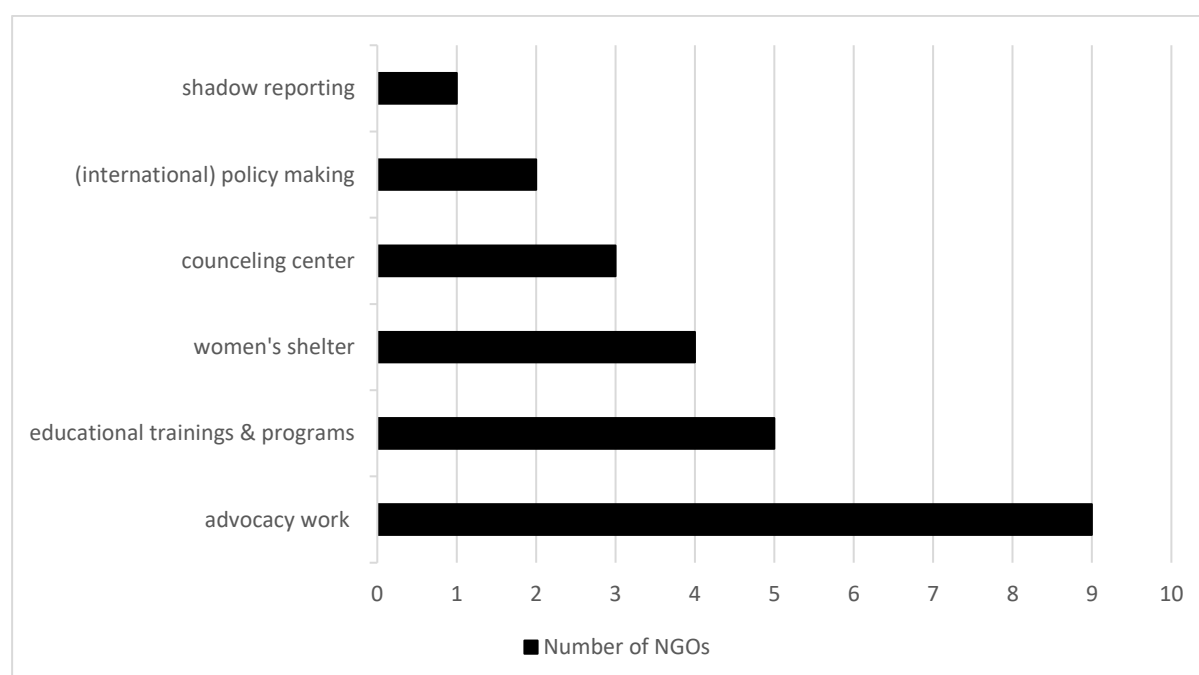


Figure 7: Number of NGOs per focus area of work.

Women's organizations mostly do not only focus on one specific area of work that defines their overall agenda but coordinate two or three focus areas. Therefore, four out of five organizations manage a women's shelter in addition to their advocacy work. Half of the surveyed organizations offer educational trainings and programs for women such as career trainings, communications skills but also programs educating about women's social and

economic rights, strategies against (domestic) violence, women's economic rights, reproductive rights and sexuality, and finally women in politics. Women's organizations involved in (international) policy making are mostly involved through UNO networks and participation at UNO women's rights summits.

As seen in Figure 7 all organizations mainly focus on advocacy work, as lobbying for the rights of Turkish women is their primary organizational goal. In recent years, traditional forms of lobbying and advocacy, such as demonstrations and street canvassing, have become increasingly difficult and dangerous due to government restrictions. As a result, nearly all women's organizations have shifted to alternative strategies, notably embracing e-advocacy and leveraging social media as a key tool for their efforts. More information about the concrete challenges and coping strategies can be found in chapter 4.5. and 6.2. Challenges and threats under the AKP government Figure 8 demonstrates which social media channels organizations use. In comparison to other authoritarian regimes no social media platforms are restricted or banned in Turkey which is to the advantage of organizations (current situation, august 2025).

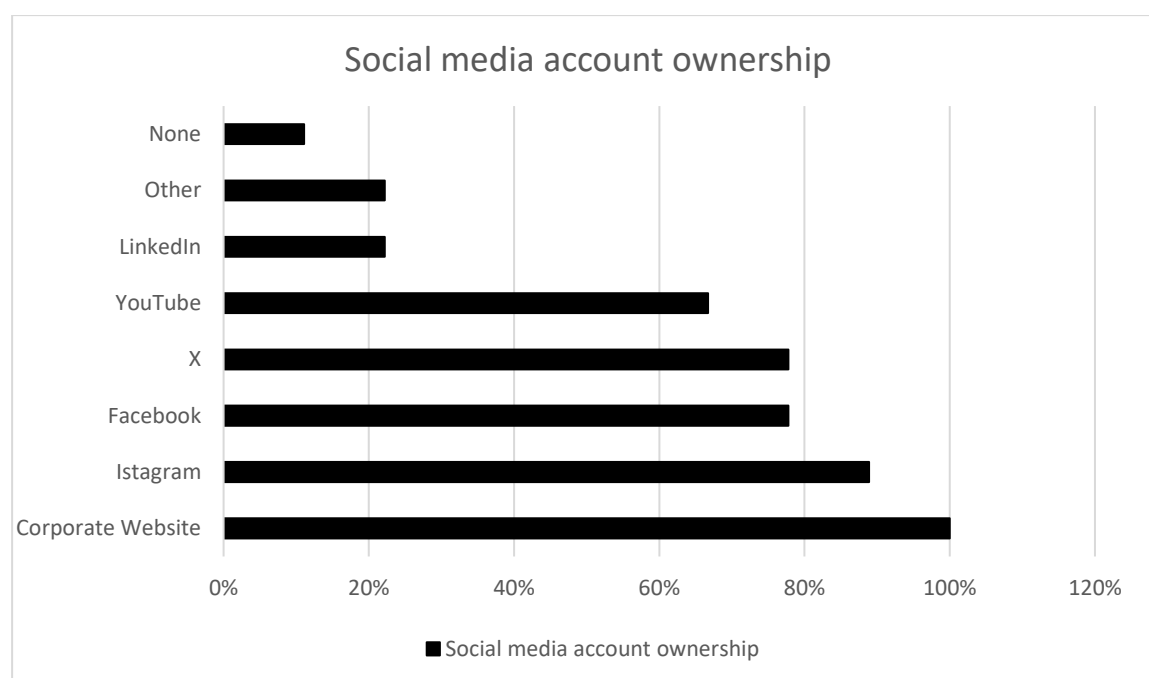


Figure 8: social media account ownership in percentage.

While 100% of the surveyed organizations have a corporate website, there is only one organization without any social media account. Half of the organizations provide an English version of their website. These are mostly organizations operating also on international or

European level. Most organizations focus on Instagram, Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) accounts, having there a four- to five-digit follower count. One NGO hosts a Podcast on Spotify, another one also uses the platform Vimeo (summarized in Figure 8 under the category ‘Other’).

Method	Percentage of organizations using this method
Advocacy & Campaigning & Policy Development	100.0 %
Networking	100.0 %
Event (panels, interviews, conferences, etc.)	77.8 %
Research & Monitoring (reporting, publication release)	55.6 %
Capacity strengthening (mentoring, workshops, etc.)	44.4 %
Education programs	44.4 %
Service provision (Health, education, culture, etc.)	44.4 %
Counseling & Information & Support	33.3 %
Street protests	11.1 %

Table 7: Methods used by organizations in their work.

Based on the focus area of their work, organizations use different methods to pursue their organizational goal. ‘Networking’ together with ‘Advocacy & Campaigning & Policy Development’ remain the most common methods, used by 100% of the women’s organizations. Events such as conferences or panels are the second most common method, used by approximately 77.8% of the NGOs, followed by ‘Research & Monitoring’ (55.6%). Service provision, educational programs and capacity building are also significant, used by 44.4% of the organizations. These categories are highly dependent on the focus area of work. For example, women’s organizations managing a women’s shelter use Counseling & Information & Support and Service provision as methods in addition to advocacy and campaigning. NGOs empowering and educating women in politics tend to resort to other methods such as capacity strengthening, events and education programs. Street protests

remain the least common method, openly and regularly used by only one organization. According to statements from interviews and document analysis, this is a result of increasingly more attacks on women right's activists on the street. This relates to the results presented by the Turkish women's organizations *SILVA*, which states that only 10.4% out of 30 Turkish women's organizations surveyed resort to this method.

As evident through methods used and focus areas of work, all organizations identify as feminist, secular and non-partisan. Seven out of nine women's organizations surveyed fall into the category of feminist Turkish women's organizations and two organizations can be classified as Kemalist Turkish women's organizations after Esim and Cindoglu (1999) and Marshall (2009). This identification and classification highly influence the relationship between NGOs and state institutions.

“The Turkish government [...] wants us to be gone so that it wouldn't provide any funds. And in, you know, in countries like ours, like Turkey, like [...] in spaces that democracy has not evolved that much. It is also [...] always a challenge, I think, to receive funds from the government, because if you receive funds from the government, the government can, you know, mingle with your work. You know, they can, you know, put pressure on you. There are, of course, women's organizations getting funds from the governments, which are called GONGOS [...]” (Interviewee, NGO 4)

The statement of this activist describes the current NGO-state relationship, defined by oppression and replacement of the organization's work or services through conservative-leaning institutions (Bahcecik & Turhan, 2022; Toepler et al., 2020).

Claims-making organizations such as feminist and Kemalist women's organizations that might even embody intersectional and LGBTQIA+ values are especially targeted by the AKP government. One women's organization campaigning against violence against women and femicides was accused in court to act against morality and faced a trial in 2023 requesting the organization to resolve. The closure of the NGO was prevented at the last minute, but this example remains one of many showcasing the confrontative approach of the AKP government.

According to Toepler et al. (2020) framework, seven out of nine women's organizations fall under the category of claims-making NGOs that are not receiving any support from the AKP government and operating in a confrontational relationship with state institutions. Contact between the state institutions and feminist NGOs is not existent as stated by an activist from

NGO 5. According to this interviewee, relationships with government institutions have steadily declined over the years, leaving their organization unable to establish any contact. Previously, there were systematic interactions with government officials, and the organization was regularly invited to meetings on women's rights, such as those organized by the Ministry of Family. However, since 2016, these invitations have ceased. While they initially attempted to reestablish contact by calling and emailing to inquire about their exclusion. These efforts are now ignored. By 2023, the organization's communication channels with government institutions have completely diminished. Instead, state institutions such as the Ministry of Family appear to favor anti-gender groups, fundamentalist organizations, and patriarchal individuals presented as experts or academics.

Two out of nine NGOs – namely the Kemalist women's organizations – can be classified as independent or service-providing NGOs as they define themselves as feminist, secular and non-partisan (See chapter 4.2.). In their statements based on document analysis, these NGOs do not position themselves openly against the AKP party, neither are they apolitical. As service-providing organizations, their work does not directly raise security or moral concerns, but the hostile environment vis a vis women's organizations might also spill over to them.

Data derived from annual financial statements and interviews provides information about funds and donors. Financial support is divided into the following donors. For privacy reasons exact names of individual and organizational donors are not provided.

- Foreign embassies
- United Nations (UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP, etc.)
- International development agencies & associations
- Governments of other countries
- European institutions (European Commission)
- Companies from the private sector
- Banks
- Foreign foundations
- Private individuals
- Public institutions
- Turkish ministries

The largest funding bodies are the European institutions such as the European Council (EUCO) or the United Nations (UNDP) with six-figure donations. Similarly high sums are granted by foreign embassies, mostly four- to five-figure sums. Financial statements of larger women's organizations show that high donations are often linked to projects that are in cooperation with UN agencies or companies from the private sector. However, two women's organizations also received financial support from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ministry of Finance and Foreign Trade Relations or other Turkish public institutions. However, corresponding application documents filled out by the respective women's organizations, 'Sport and Culture' was stated as the intended use instead of 'human rights and women's rights'. A comparison of today's financial statements with those of the years 2000 to 2010 illustrates the difference between donors and funding options then and now. Combined with insights from the interviews, this comparison points out the lack of financial resources and missing local support for women's rights.

6.2. Challenges and threats under the AKP government

The following section describes and classifies the external factors and respective developments based on the PESTEL analysis that the surveyed Turkish women's organizations must manage. All information is derived from interviews, reviewed documents and literature review.

Politics

Turkish women's organizations are highly subject to laws and guidelines. The ruling AKP party, with their right-wing conservatism and anti-feministic politics as described in chapter 4.4 and 4.5, poses a main obstacle. The party, which is known for its right-wing conservative stance, is opposed to women's and LGBTQIA+ rights. Feminist and secular women's organizations, which are part of the opposition and civil society, have very little legal protection from the judiciary since the separation of powers was dismantled in 2017. The separation of powers was significantly undermined by a constitutional amendment in 2017, through which the executive appoints the judiciary, thus placing all state institutions under the control of the Turkish president (see chapter 3.2. Legal framework and 4.5. Barriers). In the Turkish party system, the divide between right and left plays a central role, with

cultural and religious differences taking center stage. These differences include secularism versus religious conservatism, Turkish nationalism versus ethnic identity, particularly Kurdish, and military-bureaucratic governance versus civil society participation. Since 2010, the AKP has increasingly espoused the tenets of Sharia and has fostered anti-feminist and populist attitudes in society through its political stance (Yarar, 2023). The political system in Turkey is often described as a competitive autocracy (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016). Women's organizations and their members experience this in various aspects of their work, including attacks on volunteers (interviewee, NGO 1). There are restrictions on press freedom, violations of the rule of law (as noted above), and a repressive approach to the opposition. Demonstrations on March 8, International Women's Day, are banned. Other examples include the AKP's withdrawal from international agreements such as the Istanbul Convention. However, the 2024 municipal elections marked a shift and hope for the opposition and women's organizations: The opposition, particularly the CHP, won in the five largest cities, including Istanbul and Ankara. This has increased the representation of women in political offices, particularly within the CHP. However, feminist and independent NGOs have limited lobbying opportunities at the national level, as the government prefers to invite anti-gender and fundamentalist women's organizations. At the local level, on the other hand, particularly in regions governed by the opposition, there are more communication opportunities for local women's organizations. Particularly in regions and cities governed by the opposition (CHP) communication with women's organizations persists, also because personal connections often facilitate such interactions (interviewee, NGO 1).

At the same time, the Turkish government maintains government-affiliated NGOs (GONGOs) that support its policies, and secular women's organizations and are exploited in their expertise only for the benefit of AKP affiliated women's organizations. An interviewee from NGO 3 explained that state organizations seek to gather opinions and ideas from women's organizations but do not engage in genuine collaboration, instead using the input solely to serve their own organizational purposes.

On the global stage, women's organizations can rely on the support of the European Union or other democratic states who pursue a feminist foreign policy, such as the US, Scandinavian countries, or Germany.

Economic

Turkish women's organizations are dependent on financial resources and are therefore partly dependent on the economic situation of the Turkish state. The COVID-19 crisis, and the war in Ukraine have severely impacted the Turkish economy, with the government showing little consideration for private households. Rising costs outpaced moderate wage increases in 2022. According to interviews and comparisons of financial statements over the last years, inflation is a risk for the economic situation of women's organizations not only because women's organizations are dependent on the willingness of (private) organizations and donors to 'invest' their profit into their projects. Interviewees from NGO 2 and 3 highlighted that economic instability poses a significant threat, with soaring inflation and the continuous depreciation of the local currency against the Euro and USD, leading to increasing poverty. This environment makes it difficult for organizations operating on limited budgets to manage rising expenses effectively. Additionally, the high cost of living in cities like Istanbul exacerbates the situation, as housing rents often exceed twice the minimum wage, making it increasingly challenging to maintain the legally required office space (see 3.2.) or housing options for women's organizations offering shelter for women affected by domestic violence. Women's organizations that are already restricted in their funding options might be particularly affected

Social

Based on the analysis of the CIVICUS Monitor 2023 and the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report 2022, Turkish secular women's organizations operate in a highly restricted civil space characterized by patriarchal structures. Furthermore, the intertwining of religion and politics poses a major challenge to the efforts of secular and feminist women's organizations. The AKP has transformed the role of religion from a societal aspect to a political instrument, resulting in the instrumentalization of religion for obedience (see citation below).

“In well, the religion is used as a tool to, you know, to keep the power to, you know. To make people unaware of the things going around them. So, because, you know, what is being taught as religion, as Islam or, you know, like, whatever it's [...] being taught is, you know, you should obey to your mother, to your father, to your, you know, presidents. No, [...] they are teaching obedience. And, as far as we can see, they are using religion as such.” (Interviewee, NGO 1)

This shift has created an environment in which certain parts of the population are more receptive to populist rhetoric, such as that of the AKP. In addition, the media is infiltrated by the government, especially before important events such as the presidential election.

An interviewee highlighted the significant challenges civil society faces in making their voices heard, noting that the government controls the media and dominates public discourse by constantly reiterating its narrative. This control creates a barrier to countering misinformation, as alternative perspectives struggle to reach the public in what the interviewee described as a post-truth era. Additionally, the interviewee expressed concerns about the rising threats tied to the political climate, particularly during the election process. The government reportedly built its campaign on anti-LGBTI propaganda, labeling LGBTI individuals as terrorists and agents of the West, accused of undermining family structures. These false narratives have led to the targeting of LGBTI organizations, with fears that constitutional debates proposed by the government could be used to shut down such organizations entirely. The interviewee also warned that this attack could extend to intersectional feminist and women's rights organizations, further escalating the challenges faced by civil society in defending fundamental rights.

Consequently, the AKP's public stance against women's organizations and women's rights incites citizens and further constrains the work of these organizations, significantly influencing the civil space in Turkey. Furthermore, it creates an atmosphere of fear in which citizens no longer dare to get involved in feminist, anti-governmental NGOs. This leads to shrinking human resources in the organizations. Moreover, the regression of civil rights leads to migration of especially young people which makes it even harder for women's organizations to recruit people for their projects (see citation below).

“But as I said, the space is shrinking and people are leaving the country and, young people, especially younger people, they want to go or, you know, they feel reluctance(!) to, you know, be volunteers to the civil society organizations especially, you know, women's feminist, LGBTI [...], because of the ruling governments, pressure and criminalizing of the civic space. So, it's another challenge that we see. So, it gets harder and harder to find people to work for these organizations”.
(Interviewee, NGO 2)

On the other hand, young women in particular are resilient and are progressively fighting for

their rights despite the dangers. This shows that the current generation (Millennials, Generation Z) are positively receptive to the projects and advocacy work done by feminist organizations. This generation is and will be a huge support for the feminist movement and the affiliated NGOs. According to the activist from NGO 3, young women persist in joining the marches such as the March 8th demonstrations, despite facing restrictions on freedom of assembly and police violence. The increasing participation each year demonstrates both the growing public impact of feminist groups and the determination of especially young women to resist these pressures.

Technological

As reported in an interview, digitalization and the associated possibility for a transition to virtual meetings is a great advantage, as many members of women's organizations today might express concerns about in-person gatherings. The transition to a virtual organizational structure reduces the necessity for physical spaces, thereby facilitating nationwide networking and (advocacy) work with reduced financial resources. The majority of organizations have established social media platforms and are adept at e-advocacy, which is particularly effective in reaching young people and amplifying the reach of (online) campaigns. Nevertheless, the reliance on IT infrastructure poses challenges in rural areas where connectivity may be limited and not as accessible to the older generation. Despite these hurdles, online platforms facilitate easier and more effective global networking. Centralized online campaigns involve less risks for individuals, considering activists being attacked and harassed on the street (see paragraph above about political factors).

Environmental

The 2023 earthquake and the ongoing threat of earthquakes in Istanbul have also had an impact on women's organizations. In the context of such disasters, individuals who identify as female, lesbian, intersex, non-binary, trans, or agender (FLINTA) are particularly vulnerable to a range of risks, including homelessness and violence against women. This significantly increases the workload for NGOs. In addition, these organizations may experience a reduction in their resources, encounter greater difficulties in accessing them or lose their operating location. "There are feminist solidarity networks that tries (sic!) to recover from the effects of the earthquake in 11 cities." (Interviewee, NGO 1)

Legal

As mentioned before, Turkish women's organizations are affected by laws and regulations enforced by the government. Most of the laws on associations and foundations, as well as newer regulations like the internet regulation No. 5651 increase the barriers for women's organizations operating in Turkey. Non-compliance can lead to financial penalties or even closure. Vague criteria such as 'law and morality' are used deliberately against women activists and justify the excessive use of force against demonstrators. Increased censorship makes it harder for women's organizations to advocate for their rights due to the unannounced removal of their online content by government officials. As explained in more detail among others in chapters 3.2. Legal framework and 4.5.4.5. Barriers, regulations on funding have become more and more complex and restrictive in recent years. Organizations require a governmental permit for any fundraising activity, with the president being the only one to grant approval for fundraising without prior authorization. Foreign funding is controlled by counter-terrorism measures and even donations from Turkish public institutions are regulated. Strict book-keeping requirements and rules regarding meetings and demonstrations extend the governmental criteria. Moreover, even though all genders are equal before Turkish law, there is no gender equality in practice.

In summary, this analysis highlights the following key challenges and threats women's organizations face in their daily work. While in reality, they overlap and are intertwined, it is necessary for the analysis of coping and survival strategies to point them out individually. The following section will include several direct quotations from women's activists to voice their concerns and fears directly and not alter them through rewording.

Shrinking civic space and harassment of women's rights activist

The civil space NGOs and women's organizations operate in is marked by an absence of freedom of assembly and expression. The AKP government is fueling populism with false information and propaganda, banning demonstrations and criminalizing women's rights events. An interviewee observed that there is currently no freedom of expression in Turkey, a situation that affects everyone, not just women. Expressing an opinion is generally perceived as risky, contributing to a sense of danger in everyday life. Over the past three years, women's demonstrations have been prohibited, further highlighting the restrictive

environment. According to the interviewee, this prohibition has made organizing and participating in public protests particularly risky. Another interviewee noted that the Istanbul governor's prohibition of LGBTI+ events prevented their organization from conducting planned activities during that week. This aligns with reports of such bans in recent years; for instance, in June 2024, the governor's office banned the annual Pride Parade, leading to arrests of participants who defied the prohibition. This not only leads to harassment of women's rights activists by government officials and the police, but also to attacks by civilians. Police brutality, detentions, and judicial proceedings are only the tip of the iceberg (see citation below).

“One of our volunteers was investigated for displaying the poster of [the organization] about the general elections on the street. A closure lawsuit has been filed against one of our constituents. On November 25, the same component tried to intimidate the families of the women who participated in the street protest by calling them. Associations, family platforms, sects, political Islamist radicals and even political parties, social media trolls specially organized by these circles, and some media outlets attack women's and LGBTI rights and women's rights defenders in various ways. These are just a few examples that [...] people have encountered in the last 3.5 years.” (Interviewee, NGO 2)

Employees such as trainers supporting women's organizations in minority communities (for example Kurdish municipalities) got fired, making it hard for feminist organizations to operate in those regions (Interviewee, NGO 2). In addition, not only activists get attacked, but their family and confidants are also targeted (Interviewee, NGO 3). Due to all these barriers, one interviewee explained that their organization was hesitant to hold an event due to the criminalization of such activities. The potential for police intervention created an atmosphere of uncertainty and risk, making it difficult to proceed without fear of repercussions.

„And, they might be sued after these, you know, detentions because they do that. They detain people and then they sue people, for being, you know, against, being against the, you know, decision of not getting together by the state.“ (Interviewee, NGO 2)

Nevertheless, women keep fighting for their rights and coming to demonstrations and events such as the 8th of March demonstration. Despite the many restrictions imposed by the AKP government and risks associated with women's solidarity, a large part of the population legitimizes and supports the work and values of women's organizations (Interviewee, NGO

1).

Financial controls by government officials

Financial controls are one form of legal restrictions and implementations by the AKP government that threatens women's organizations and their work the most. Implementation and enforcement are easy for the government, and the organizations concerned can do nothing about it. Failure to fulfill financial requirements is one of the most common reasons for the closure of NGOs. One interview partner highlighted that the government uses financial audits as a pretext to shut down organizations, especially when they find any irregularities. They emphasized the difficulty of resisting such actions, as any opposition to the government often leads to immediate retaliation. Even legally operating organizations are vulnerable to these punitive measures. According to the interviewee, this tactic has become increasingly common in recent times, posing a constant threat to opposition groups. All opposition-aligned organizations reportedly face the risk of such financial scrutiny and subsequent consequences.

As seen in Table 3 on the number of associations fined by the Ministry of Interior as a result of audits (01.01.2022 to 31.12.2022), 28.14% of organizations got fined or closed due to failure of keeping books or records properly. Revenue collection without prior authorization or bookkeeping in a language other than Turkish are not even included in these statistics but would add up to more than one third of associations getting fined (36.42%).

Lack of resources

Women's organizations mostly struggle with the lack of material and human resources; however, the type and number of resources is not the same for every organization. The socio-organizational constituent is given with the existence and persistence of women's organizations. It depends on the focus area of work, year of foundation, size, and the methods they employ. Established NGOs, for example, face fewer issues in finding human resources or donors. As one interviewee explained that women often approach the organization because of its reliability and long-standing presence. As the only women's organization in Turkey operating for 33 years, it has become widely recognized and trusted across the country. This highlights how larger and more established NGOs suffer less from resource scarcity than smaller and younger women's organizations. The area of work also plays a significant role; in some cases, projects might be accounted for in different areas of work such as sports or culture, as seen in some financial statements where projects are not billed

under women's projects. More on this will be discussed in chapter 7. Intersectional NGOs are even more affected by a lack of resources, as they often advocate for queer rights or represent Kurdish rights, which adds layers of complexity to their work and makes them even more targeted by the AKP government. Intersectionality, queerness or Kurdish representation adds more barriers for organizations when for example seeking donors or getting approval for fundraising or public events. The relationship between the state and the NGO also plays an important role, particularly the difference between national and local governments. Some local governments are led by the opposition, which allows for smoother cooperation. As a result, these NGOs may receive more (financial) support, and their members might be less exposed to harassment.

Material resources: One NGO reports that they struggle with a lack of money for physical meetings. But as one interviewee states “Online dating alone is not enough; There are no budgets for physical meetings.” All analyzed NGOs must adjust their spending to fit their environments, often working with very low budgets.

“So, it is really hard for a civil society organization, to, you know, adjust its spendings in this environment, when everything is, you know, getting, really, really high, every, you know, all the expenditures are getting really, really high because we, generally work on low budgets, as you know, so this is another risk.” (Interviewee, NGO 2)

Another women’s activist explains that expenses for compulsory travel or communication tools must be covered by private donations of members since no funds are available. As already mentioned, the unstable economic situation in Turkey is leading to higher expenditure, e.g. for mandatory office space. According to the annual accounts of one NGO, the price of its office space increased by 100% in recent years.

Seven out of nine NGOs do not charge membership fees, which limits their income further. The financial statements of the two respective NGOs that charge membership fees²⁵ indicate that the percentage of income derived from these fees is very low. This means that they still require additional funding from donors to support their projects and programs.

As seen above, feminist and Kemalist women’s organizations rely heavily on donations from other countries, foreign associations or foreign embassies. However, applications for project

²⁵ Entry fee of 50 TL and annual membership fee of 120 TL.

funding, especially for EU funds, are very bureaucratic and tiring, which has a deterrent effect on applicants. In addition, most foreign funding applications must be issued in English, creating a language barrier for many Turkish women's organizations (interviewee, NGO 3). Stated by activists on several occasions, funds are more project-based nowadays and the duration of the funds got reduced. One activist explains that out of solidarity with smaller organizations, they only apply for EU fundings or foreign funding in North America or Scandinavia (see citation below).

“They [Turkish ministries and donors] have, small grants, they open term to term, but we haven't applied for them for years because there are lots of local women's organizations who do not have the money and who don't have the capacity, or the language to, you know, make communications with outside donors. Because of this, we, you know, provide space for those local organizations. Also, we don't, you know, necessarily get into every or, you know, submit to every grant opening because of this.” (Interviewee, NGO 3)

NGOs that rely heavily on foreign donations face significant challenges due to legal restrictions, making them vulnerable to errors in bookkeeping and increased government controls. This is particularly concerning as legislation similar to the foreign agency laws in Russia and Georgia has nearly been enacted.

On national level, the funds provided by the state for women's projects do not go to secular or feminist women's organizations but rather to GONGOs. Moreover, none of the NGOs have the status of a public benefit association, which requires them to seek approval from the relevant authorities for every fundraising event. This exposes them to the whims of officials and politicians. In comparison, KADEM – the women's organization founded and supported by the AKP – is officially classified as a public benefit organization (as derived from a statement on their corporate website).

In summary, the heavy reliance on donations underscores the precarious nature of the financial stability of women's organizations and the limitations in securing consistent funding sources.

Human resources: Statements on the lack of human resources are ambiguous. One women's activist shared the concern that a significant number of young people are emigrating to the West, resulting in a shortage of eligible individuals to work for their organizations. Even though this does not have an immediate impact on the work of all organizations, they are

quite concerned about the future development. Despite a certain degree of personnel stability achieved in most organizations between 2000-2015, the ongoing emigration trend poses a continuous challenge (interviewee, NGO 4). The demographic shift severely impacts the pool of available volunteers and staff, which is essential for the sustainability and effectiveness of NGOs (interviewee, NGO 4). In addition, the shrinking civil space including increasing harassment, police brutality, attacks on women's activists and "the climate of fear and oppression" leads to members being hesitant to use their means of visibility (interviewee, NGO 1). On the other hand, one member of an older NGO shared that especially young women keep joining their organization despite the challenges listed above (see 6.2.) (interviewee, NGO 3; interviewee, NGO 3). As previously noted, the size and popularity of women's organizations play a crucial role in shaping volunteers' choices regarding their involvement in women's rights and the specific organizations they decide to support.

7. Coping and survival strategies

Socio-organizational characteristics not only have an impact on challenges and threats (see 4.5., 6.1. Profile and NGO – state relationship., 6.2. Challenges and threats under the AKP government) but also on strategies to manage just these. Size and age of an organization can provide insides on the local legitimacy that women’s organizations receive from the population. Location of the organization and their branch can be crucial if the organizations have the possibility to communicate with the local government (CHP or AKP) or get support by local administrations. Geographical factors also play a major role. Surveyed interviews and documents show that NGOs whose headquarters are in large urban areas often have better access to media, politics, and other important networks. Organizations with multiple branches can achieve broader reach and greater flexibility in their work. As stated by an interview partner the national or international orientation of an organization can be crucial regarding grant applications (see Table 6: categorization of NGOs sampled in the study. Not only does the location impact the strategic possibilities but also the methods, focus areas and type of an NGO. As explained in an interview statement, women’s organizations in Kurdish municipalities (and other minority areas) do not have any human resources on site, which rules out certain strategies. Furthermore, an NGO that focuses solely on ‘Counseling & Information & Support’ shows different coping strategies than the women’s organization running street protest. To summarize, not only survival strategies but organizational survival of Turkish women’s organizations depend on the following aspects: size, age, typology, methods and focus areas of work, location and lastly relationship to local and national government.

Several coping and surviving strategies from literature were identified by the analysis of interviews and documents, and will be explained in the following.

1) Resource Aggregation

Resource aggregation involves converting resources from dispersed individuals or groups into collective assets managed by movements or specific social movement organizations (SMOs). This can include gathering donations from many individuals or recruiting volunteers for various projects (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004; Edwards & Kane, 2014).

All analyzed women’s organizations directly link donation options on their website and social media accounts to incentivize visitors of the website to donate. This direct donation

request is a common marketing strategy aimed at lowering the threshold for ‘customers’ and increasing feedback (Bennett, 2009; Andreasen, 2006; Sargeant & Jay, 2004). Women’s organizations also use this tool to facilitate funding from non-members and the pressing urgency for donations on the first place. One organization even links various bank accounts to enable donations in different currencies.

Regarding human resources most women’s organizations recruit and employ professional staff. Even though they are aware of possible future difficulties such as the lack of applications, it shows that the respective NGOs know which skills and resources they need to acquire to maintain their organization. The women demonstrate during the interviews that they have the skills and knowledge to adapt their human resources to external environment and challenges. “So we try to reach out to the people that we know that are in the movement first, that if, you know, they are interested in the positions here, we, you know, try to look at that is a very, very critical criteria.” (Interviewee, NGO 3) As cited, one of their strategies to tackle the lack of human resources is to reach out within their feminist network. One could also call it classic Active Sourcing, a strategy often employed in the private sector.

Lastly, resource aggregation entails on the socio-organizational level the building of networks and coalitions. All reviewed women’s organizations are members of one or more national and international networks. With the advancing political repression, these networks and platforms gained importance. However engaging in collaboration was always among the NGO’s working methods. Being part of feminist networks of the European Union and United Nations provides extra support for organizations threatened on national level. Examples of important networks are *Girls not Brides*, *CEDAW*, *UN Global Compact*, *Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE)* and *Beijing +25*.

2) Self-production

Self-production is a key strategy for social movements to access resources by creating them within the movement’s existing structures, involving the organization, activists, and participants (Edwards & Kane, 2014). Five women’s organizations carry out training programs for Turkish women or more specific for feminist political candidates. These trainings fall into the category of self-production of human resources, since expanding the pool of feminists and potential activists can enhance local legitimacy and attract new volunteers. Empowerment and training programs for female political candidates can further increase the number of feminist women in politics, aiding their sustainability and success.

In addition, self-production means that movements produce resources such as websites, social media pages, and merchandise like posters and coffee mugs (Edwards & Kane, 2014; Edwards & McCarty, 2004). Two surveyed women's organizations sell items such as e-Cards, branded T-Shirts, bags and other branded everyday items via their website creating a source of revenue disconnected from project funding and donors. Another organization mentioned members paying for mandatory trips and other important matters themselves, and therefore not financially burdening the organization. The activist specifies that this way their organization and work does not depend on external financial donations.

Lastly, one NGO is charging membership fees to cover the salary of their professional staff. Being (financially) self-sufficient can be very powerful when facing external challenges.

3) Co-optation or appropriation

Appropriation involves exploiting relationships within existing social organizations that were not created for the movement's purposes, while co-optation is the transparent, permitted borrowing of resources from these groups. For example, an SMO might include other organizations and use their resources, which involves reciprocity and agreement. In contrast, appropriation uses another group's resources without mutual consent (Edwards & Kane, 2014). Human or financial resources are not shared between Turkish women's organizations. However, the solidarity among feminist NGOs is strong, and none would deny resources to another for their own benefit. As stated earlier one NGOs intentionally only applies for international funds, leaving other for example only Turkish-speaking women's organizations a better chance when applying for local grant openings (see citation below).

“They have, small grants, they open term to term, but we haven't applied for them for years because there are lots of local women's organizations who don't have the money and who don't have the capacity, or the language to, you know, make communications with outside donors. Because of this, we, you know, provide space for those local organizations. Also, we don't, you know, necessarily get into every or, you know, submit to every grants opening because of this.” (interviewee, NGO 3)

4) Patronage

Patronage refers to the provision of resources by an individual or organization that specializes in offering support. In monetary patronage, patrons provide significant financial backing and often influence the allocation of funds and policy decisions within the organization. Sources of financial patronage typically include government contracts,

foundation grants, and large private donations, usually from entities outside the movement or social movement organization (Edwards & Kane, 2014).

As seen above, financial patronage in the form of funding from organizations outside the women's movement occur in Turkey. The existence of long-term sponsoring contracts is not evident from the financial statements. One NGO mentioned that its funding is not project-based and that it receives core funding from an organization in a European country. However, in general, the financial statements analyzed in this paper suggest that financial support from private sector sponsors and foreign embassies is mostly project-based, as the same donors do not appear consistently in the documents each year.

5) Diversification and legal arrangements

NGOs often employ a strategy of diversification by creating multiple independent entities, each fulfilling a distinct role. For example, leaders may establish separate organizations to secure foreign funding or maintain operations abroad. Diversification also involves broadening income sources to ensure that the organization does not rely on a limited number of donors (Tysiachniouk et al., 2018; Moser & Skripchenko, 2018). By integrating a mix of private donations, corporate sponsorships, and foreign funding, organizations can maintain financial stability even if one income stream is disrupted.

For instance, one women's organization operates a social enterprise that donates its profits to the women's organization, while the NGO secures grants and donations from international sources and corporate sponsors. Another women's organization, in particular, has developed a sustainable financial structure, with revenue streams including membership fees, project income, and sponsorships. Notably, membership fees account for around 25% of this revenue, primarily covering the costs of professional staff. The sponsorship resources have enabled the women's organization to implement impactful projects and contribute to overall expenses. The underlying analysis shows that larger and older NGOs receive funding from 15 to 20 different donors or sources of income, whereas smaller and younger women's organizations rely on funding from approximately three to four donors. As mentioned in chapter 6.1., the list of donors goes from foreign embassies to private domestic donors, corporate sponsors, international development agencies and EU and UN institutions. Donor and marketing diversification, as demonstrated, is a widely adopted strategy for achieving organizational stability among the reviewed NGOs.

6) Depolitization

Not one of the reviewed organizations depolitized as described for example by Herrold (2016), this might also be due to the fact that the degree of repression is not as progressed as in other authoritarian states such as Russia and China. However, financial statements of one organization show that projects have been billed not as women's or human rights matter, but as sport and culture. This way, they might get better chances of obtaining governmental support and the project might not be on the radar of the AKP. Through this approach the project could be rolled out with less governmental controls.

7) Local legitimacy

Local legitimacy is a powerful strategy especially regarding the lack of human resources and qualified comrades. While other women's organizations expressed their concern about an (upcoming) lack of volunteers and qualified professional staff, one activist explained that her NGO is well known and established within the Turkish feminist community and that women do not fear joining them.

"So, the women simply come by because it is a very reliable (pause) organization. Because it is very old, and it has been the only women's organization in Turkey for 33 years. Everyone already knows this organization." (interviewee, NGO 5)

Hence, the organization does not have to worry about (1) a lack of human resources and (2) support of their work by the Turkish population (Tysiachniouk et al., 2018; Moser & Skripchenko, 2018). The importance of public support becomes evident with the potential closure of one of the analyzed women's organizations. A petition to halt the proceedings garnered numerous signatures, protests were held, and several women publicly spoke out against the closure. While it can only be speculated whether this public outcry ultimately influenced the decision to prevent the closure, it can be assumed that the AKP would have faced significant backlash if the organization had been shut down.

As mentioned in interviews and surveyed documents prestige and reputation of an NGO can also have an impact on the relationship with the private sector and their sponsor relationships. Documents state that the respective NGO has leveraged its well-established public reputation to strengthen and expand sponsorship relations. Collaborations have been formed with prominent organizations, which view partnering with the NGO as mutually beneficial for enhancing their own brand image. Financial contributions totaling

approximately 2 million TL have been received from sponsors, including major corporations such as Akbank, Garanti Bank, Vodafone, Intel, Coca Cola, Oriflame, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Unilever, and Microsoft. Additionally, advertising support was provided by newspapers like Hürriyet, Milliyet, and Radikal. These partnerships have fostered sustainable relationships, enabling the organization to realize its goals while delivering value to all parties involved.

8) Digitalization or virtualization

Digitalization or virtualization is how some scholars call the strategy that enables women's organizations to shift their advocacy work online (Tysiachniouk et al., 2018; Moser & Skripchenko, 2018). Except for one, all women's organizations own at least one feministic social media account (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Vimeo, YouTube) accessible almost in every country. One organization even created a Spotify podcast about gender equality and women empowerment at the workplace. E-advocacy provides a platform for those women's organizations to engage in advocacy work with lower risk of physical harassment or the need for permits required for street protests. This digital approach allows NGOs to share their messages through their accounts, reducing the likelihood that individual members become direct targets, although it may expose the organization as a whole to online harassment.

One NGO reports that it operates entirely online, eliminating the need for a budget to cover in-person meetings, material resources for projects and campaigns, or rent for headquarters (more regarding this in section 'Informalization'). Through digitalization organizations can keep in touch with supporters more easily. In addition, future donors and allies can be reached abroad, and Turkish organizations can more easily connect with other networks and women's organizations all over the world. The digitalization strategy allows NGOs to implement internationalization strategies, reaching a wider audience without needing physical branches in other countries.

9) Internationalization

Two NGOs have established branches in other countries, such as Bonn (Germany) and Brussels (Belgium), allowing them to extend their advocacy efforts beyond Turkish borders and into the international and European arena. These NGOs are also actively involved in UN and European networks, which provide them with a global orientation. Another NGO even got supported by a famous UN Women ambassador for their project, joining them on site for

their project in Turkey. Yet another organization participated and co-organized events with foreign institutions and embassies such as *Embassy of the United Kingdom Empowerment of Women and Girls, from Education to Political Participation Meeting* or *Embassy of the United Kingdom November 25th International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women*. This demonstrates how international orientation can help women's organizations with networking and getting international support. A famous UN Women ambassador speaking up for Turkish women's organizations and women's rights in Turkey has a huge symbolic effect. Additionally, women's organizations have built strong and effective relationships through the internationalization strategy with the European Parliament and European Commission. Another women's organization extended their influence to political, civil society, business, and media relations in countries like Germany and Austria, as evident from a program involving a former German President. All these international connections create visibility for the challenges of women's organizations in Turkey and the decline of women's right. They can regularly reporting on Turkey's current situation. International partnerships help generate international support and pressure against the challenges faced domestically.

Regarding the lack of material resources, international collaborations and networks can help finding alternative grants. One activist highlighted the organization's collaboration with the Swedish development agency, which supports foreign feminist policies. Through this partnership, the organization receives core funding, which provides flexibility in managing programs and developing long-term strategies. This approach reduces reliance on following funding trends, allowing the organization to focus on its objectives more effectively. This grant not only solves short-term financial problems but enables a sustainable organizational development.

To summarize, an internationalization strategy helps to (1) create visibility, (2) raise awareness about the difficult situation of women's organizations in Turkey and repressed women's rights, (3) better embed the NGO into international and transnational networks and coalitions, (4) easier mobilize resources from abroad like funding from foreign development agencies, and (5) learn from advocacy and policies in other countries. Most of the analyzed organizations apply internationalization not only to engage with EU and UN institutions, European national governments but also with development agencies and NGOs from Europe or the US. "We received support from the private sector, the government and the state through a coordinated effort; we made our mark at international summits." (Document,

NGO7) With a commitment to strengthening international networks and fostering global connections, NGOs aim to continue engaging with and drawing attention from international feminist allies to support their cause. (Interviewee, NGO 4)

One last example demonstrates the relevance and success of this strategy: One surveyed NGO was awarded with the Finnish gender equality prize by Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin and their general representative was part of the 100 women's list of the BBC.

One interviewee said: "I think transnational solidarity, international solidarity is very, very important", and regarding the analysis of interviews and documents it's one of the most effective strategies for women's organizations as far as the Turkish government doesn't induce a law for example against foreign funding (based on the foreign agency law in Russia or Georgia).

10) Informalization

In this approach, NGO members avoid formal interactions with the government, and instead often operate informally or even without legal registration. The distinction between informalization and simulation can be unclear in practice (Tysiachniouk et al., 2018; Moser & Skripchenko, 2018). This strategy is only employed by one of the interviewed women's organizations. It is important to mention that this is the youngest organization which was as such founded under the most restricted legal framework. As a result, the women's organization decided not to legally register and instead only operate virtually. The advantage of informalization is that organizations become less visible to the government and are subjected to fewer or no oversight and (financial) control. In addition, non-formalized NGOs do not have to comply with the restrictive legal requirements of a physical headquarter and the rest of the legal framework.

"It's not an equal official structure, it's out of the question to shut it down. However, efforts are made to use a controlled communication language at certain rates in order not to harm its members." (Interviewee, NGO 2)

In combination with the digitalization (or virtualization) strategy this leads to a very low necessity for material and financial resources (see citation above).

11) Compliance and simulation

This strategy involves NGOs adhering to the literal wording of state regulations rather than

their legal spirit, sometimes using informal methods to give the appearance of legal compliance. NGOs adopting this strategy aim at strictly following state requirements, often avoiding activities that could potentially lead to legal issues.

Two NGOs employ a combination of compliance and simulation strategies, particularly with regard to legal requirements and language. One NGO adheres to the legal framework for civil society organizations, especially in terms of bookkeeping to avoid legal repercussions such as fines or lawsuits that could lead to its closure due to errors in financial records (see citation below).

"They pay close attention [...] to whether there is any financial oversight from the government. They are very attentive of this. They always want to remain stable [...]. But when it comes to political issues, if there is a political cause, then they can't do anything about it." (Interviewee, NGO 7)

Another NGO has adapted its language and expressions to ensure the safety of its volunteers. Moreover, most NGOs, with the exception of one, have largely ceased participating in street protests that have been banned by the government, due to the high risk of attacks, arrests, and police brutality. These shifts can be seen as an important measure for self-preservation.

12) Other strategies

Survival strategies that fall outside the previously mentioned categories include collaborative efforts and monitoring activities. Monitoring especially helps to foresee political changes and challenges. Another strategy involves engaging in dialogue with women affiliated with the AKP (interviewee, NGO4), specifically focusing on female politicians rather than the AKP government as a whole. An interviewee suggested engaging with women within the AKP, acknowledging that many may also be troubled by attacks on women's rights, as these issues affect them personally, not just feminists. They noted the potential for finding common ground and exploring opportunities for collaboration to counter patriarchal and fundamentalist challenges to women's rights. This approach reflects a strategy under consideration to build broader alliances. Additionally, there is a continued emphasis on strengthening cooperation and communication with opposition parties. Especially holding up communication on local level, because in local and rural areas places are small (interviewee, NGO 1). Also based on the idea of community, a women's organization build a feminist platform connecting feminist activist and organizations with each other. Better than one interview statement, this strategy can't be described:

“Because of this. We will hold events, meetings, you know, to, you know. To keep in solidarity with each other and, you know, strategize together because this time is very critical, and we need to move together. And, because of this, we have to have a joined strategy on how to go on in this new period where autocracy and authoritarian government is much more powerful right now and the more violent and brutal and we will be in solidarity” (interviewee, NGO 1)

In conclusion, the effectiveness of NGO survival strategies lies in the combination of multiple approaches, as relying on a single strategy alone is not sustainable in the long term. This chapter has demonstrated the necessity of employing a diverse range of tactics to navigate the challenges faced by organizations, from compliance and simulation to informalization and internationalization. Despite these efforts, the need for unity remains crucial. As one activist highlighted, “The only strategy that has been partially implemented is for all democratic segments to raise a common voice in the face of events. There are so many and varied attacks that it is becoming increasingly difficult to organize a complete solidarity in practice.” In the end, strength lies in standing together, even when it is difficult.

8. Conclusion

The thesis identifies the needs of feminist women's organizations to maintain a presence in the civil sphere. The positive and negative experiences expressed in interviews and other surveyed documents provides a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted environment in which feminist women's organizations in Turkey operate. It reveals a more restrictive legal and political framework than initially assumed, marked by significant barriers that women's organizations must navigate to survive and thrive. Despite these challenges, the research highlights not only the remarkable resilience and adaptability of these organizations but of the individuals within them, demonstrating not just organizational survival but the development of personal resilience among activists who face severe personal risks, including harassment, attacks, and imprisonment.

The strategic manoeuvrability and resilience of Turkish women's organizations is fundamentally shaped by their socio-organizational characteristics (see table 5). The results demonstrate that organizational age and size are primary determinants of organizational resilience. Older, larger organizations are already more established in their region and enjoy higher local, national, and international legitimacy which translates into broader donor networks. In contrast, younger and smaller NGOs operate with considerably higher vulnerability, often possessing tenfold fewer donors and a substantially more limited volunteer base.

Furthermore, geographical location serves as a critical variable in resource mobilization. All analyzed organizations maintain headquarters and bureaus in major metropolitan areas (Ankara and Istanbul) which secures proximity to media outlets, political actors, and influential networks. This urban location functions as a 'double-edged sword'. Despite the financial burden of higher overhead and rental costs in these hubs, the resulting gains have outweighed so far. In contrast, the strategic flexibility of women's organizations in rural areas and minority communities is often constrained by localized human resource shortages. The type and mission of an organization dictate its strategic possibilities. The data reveals a clear divergence in survival mechanisms based on focus: organizations centered on counselling and support employ different coping strategies (e.g. depoliticization, compliance) than those primarily engaged in advocacy work with high-visibility street protests (e.g. virtualization, diversification).

Ultimately, an NGO's structural DNA – size, age, geographical location, mission - defines its engagement with both national authorities, local administrations or international organizations, regardless of whether they are locally governed by the CHP or AKP.

The research analyses the survival and coping strategies employed by secular, feminist Turkish women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) amidst a restrictive socio-political environment, primarily focusing on the impact of the AKP government's authoritarian leanings. The research identifies a dynamic strategic portfolio rooted in organizational agility and transnational solidarity. The identified tactics can be summarized into four key strategic pillars of organizational resilience:

1. **Resource and financial diversification:** To counteract the risk of state control and potential negative stigmas, NGOs move away from singular funding sources. Through self-production and social entrepreneurship, they generate internal revenue streams for example through social media fundraising, merchandise sales, e-Cards, and membership fees to ensure greater financial autonomy and cover professional staff costs. Via the strategy of resource aggregation, NGOs actively source human resources by leveraging internal feminist networks, which can be compared to Active Sourcing.
2. **Internationalization & Digitalization:** Organizations effectively navigate the shrinking domestic civic space by moving their operations and advocacy upward (international) and online (digital). By employing the strategy of internationalization and establishing branches in European countries (e.g., Bonn, Brussels), they actively engage with international bodies (UN, EU) to generate external visibility. This global orientation can serve as a mechanism for external monitoring and pressure against domestic repression. Through virtualization/digitalization the NGOs shift their advocacy work to online platforms (social media, podcasts) which reduces the physical risk associated with street protests and can significantly lower overhead costs.
3. **Negotiation & Simulation (Strategic Compliance):** NGOs adopt a pragmatic approach to state regulations to avoid legal repercussions. By using strict adherence to the law, particularly in financial bookkeeping, they anticipate legal traps that the state could use for closure. Employing a tactical mask by framing human rights and

gender-focused projects as culture or sports to bypass intense AKP government scrutiny and secure necessary permissions, depoliticization is another strategic lever.

4. Solidarity & Informalization, meaning that transnational and local networks form the core of the movement's resilience. Through a process of co-optation, larger and more established NGOs (such as NGO 3) intentionally refrain from applying for local, Turkish-speaking grants. They do this to strategically allocate resources to smaller, more vulnerable local feminist groups, thereby supporting the movement's survival. While employing informalization as protection, the youngest organizations—founded under the most restricted legal frameworks—increasingly choose to operate without legal registration as virtual ‘ghost organizations’.

The research shows that the overall resilience of the Turkish women’s movement is defined by its agility, meaning the capacity to fluidly shift between formal compliance and informal resistance, and between localized grassroots work and international advocacy.

The data gathered suggests that the Turkish socio-political environment aligns with the emerging global trend of state repression also examined by several scholars in Russia and China. However, the analysis identifies a critical difference in Turkey. Because state repression is not yet absolute (i.e., lacking comprehensive measures like the foreign agent laws seen in Russia), Turkish feminist women’s organizations are able to engage in a process of adversarial adaptation, constantly evolving their tactics to stay ahead of shifting legal boundaries.

This localized adaptation relies on the simultaneity of diverse tactics and the cultivation of local municipal relationships (specifically with opposition-led CHP municipalities) to maintain an operational foothold, a tactic that is less viable in more rigidly closed authoritarian systems.

In summary, the findings showcase that Turkish women’s organizations adopt diverse coping-strategies to navigate their hostile environment. Drawing from the results, these strategies include compliance with restrictive regulations, simulation to appear aligned with government requirements while maintaining their mission, informalization to bypass formal scrutiny, and diversification of their funding sources and operational structures to reduce dependency on the state. Many organizations also strategically internationalize their

operations to access external support and resources, leveraging transnational networks to counteract domestic constraints. These strategies highlight the ingenuity of these organizations in balancing advocacy and survival.

The diversity of approaches also reflects the organizations' intersectional focus, addressing the specific needs of subgroups such as Kurdish women, queer communities, and migrants, while adapting their strategies based on their relationship with the state, the ruling AKP, and their specific areas of focus. Many NGOs, regardless of size or establishment period, have embraced internationalization and diversification to reduce dependence on governmental structures, aligning with global feminist networks like the WAVE Network, UN Women and Girls Not Brides to amplify their impact. The policy recommendations for improving the relationship between funding organizations and women+ organizations of the SILVA research report (2023) suggest measures that feminist women's organizations are already implementing.

From the perspective of feminist research, results of the study show a privileged access for less intersectional organization or NGOs representing already more privileged women in Turkish society. Also there appears to be an inequality between large and well-established women's organizations and smaller, younger NGOs regarding grant access and human resource management. Acknowledging these inequalities, for example in support programs and grant approvals could help those women's organizations who need it the most.

To the best knowledge of the author, this thesis is the first systematic assessment of survival and coping strategies employed by feminist women's organizations in Turkey. However, the study has its limitations. The short interview timeline and the absence of longitudinal research restrict the ability to observe changes over time. Language barriers and the inability to conduct on-site interviews further constrained the scope. Moreover, with a mixed-methods approach of quantitative and qualitative analysis results could be verified and provided deeper insights.

The repressive environment for Turkish civil society has significantly intensified since the end of the study period (by data from December 2025). According to a joint fact sheet by the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT) and Human Rights Association (HRA),

the first eleven months of 2025 saw at least 131 CSO members detained, with 60 arrested and dozens more placed under judicial control. Legal harassment remains a primary tool of the state, with over 400 individuals facing prosecution in nearly 100 ongoing cases, resulting in numerous prison sentences (ICNL, 2025). The freedom of assembly for feminist and intersectional women's organizations continues to erode, characterized by a pattern of systemic obstruction. For instance, during the 2025 International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the state utilized infrastructure shutdowns and police barricades to paralyze demonstrations in Istanbul. While protesters defied these bans, the risk of detention remains a constant threat. In addition, during the development of this thesis, the AKP has taken further steps to restrict civil space even more. These measures increase the barriers for women's organizations, requiring them to continuously adapt their strategies. For instance, the possible introduction of a law after the example of the Russian "foreign agent law" will make internationalization more challenging, particularly by complicating access to international grants and foreign funding. Resource scarcity will become an even bigger issue. Restrictions on digital platforms like Instagram further complicate outreach and e-advocacy strategies, essential for information dissemination and network-building in a constrained civic space. This legal shift represents a looming existential threat; it suggests that the simultaneous strategies previously employed by NGOs may become insufficient within the next few years. As the legal framework moves from restrictive to absolute, the movement's current survival strategies may reach their limits.

Furthermore, shifting geopolitics result in a weakening of the external support system for Turkish women's organizations and impede the effectiveness of their internationalization strategy: With Trump's return to government and his subsequent withdrawal from key international agreements and gender-equality frameworks, vital funding streams for global feminist movements are being drastically cut. Within the EU, being traditionally one of the largest donors, the rise of repressive and misogynistic political forces has further jeopardized the ideological and financial backing upon which Turkish NGOs rely.

Despite these challenges, the strategies of Turkish women's organizations offer valuable lessons not only for improving support mechanisms for these groups but also as a reference for similar organizations operating in authoritarian regimes worldwide. Their emphasis on solidarity – both nationally and transnationally – stands out as a key element of their resilience. As feminist organizations connect through platforms like the WAVE Network,

they fortify their capacity to advocate for women's rights in increasingly restrictive environments. Comparative studies within the Middle East could further contextualize and extend these findings, highlighting regional similarities and differences in strategies for survival.

Echoing former German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock's assertion that a nation's freedom is reflected in the freedom of its women, resilient and strong representation of women's voices is even more important in authoritarian, regressive state. The research reaffirms the indispensable role of NGOs in advocating for women's rights. The global feminist movement must continue to support these organizations, as their resilience and solidarity are vital for advancing gender equality and democratic values.

References

- Al Hakim, G., Bastian, B. L., Ng, P. Y., & Wood, B. P. (2022). Women's Empowerment as an Outcome of NGO Projects: Is the Current Approach Sustainable? *Administrative Sciences*, 12(2), 62. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci12020062>
- Andreasen, A. R. (2006). *Social Marketing in the 21st Century*. SAGE Publications.
- Arat, Y., & Altınay, A. G. (2015). KAMER, a women's center and an experiment in cultivating cosmopolitan norms. In *Women's Studies International Forum*. Vol. 49, pp. 12-19). Pergamon.
- Azak, U. (2023). Transformation of Secularism in Turkey. In: Arıkan, H., Alemdar, Z. (eds) *Turkey's Challenges and Transformation. Reform and Transition in the Mediterranean*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/10.1007/978-3-031-25799-5_6.
- Bahçecik, O. Ş., & Turhan, Y. (2022). Mapping relations between state and humanitarian NGOs: The case of Turkey. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(5), 979–996. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2040978>
- Bennett, R. (2009). Impulsive donation decisions during online browsing of charity websites. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 8(2–3), 116–134. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.275>
- Bobo, L., & Gilliam, F. D. (1990). Race, Sociopolitical Participation, and Black Empowerment. *The American Political Science Review*, 84(2), 377.
- Bramble, B., & Porter, G. (1992). *Non-Governmental Organization and the Making of US International Environmental Policy*.
- Caglayan H. & Küçükırcı (2023). *Frauenbewegungen in der Türkei. Eine historische und intersektionale Perspektive*. Orlanda Verlag GmbH. Berlin.
- Can, O. (2023). Die politisierte und personalisierte Justiz der Türkei. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. <https://www.bpb.de/themen/europa/tuerkei/520344/die-politisierte-und-personalisierte-justiz-der-tuerkei/>.

- Çelebi, E. (2022). How do women's GONGOs influence policymaking processes in Turkey? *Journal of Civil Society*, 18(3), 326–348. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2022.2125417>
- Civics Monitor (2023). People power under attack 2023. https://monitor.civics.org/globalfindings_2023/.
- Coşar, S., & Yeğenoğlu, M. (2011). New Grounds for Patriarchy in Turkey? Gender Policy in the Age of AKP. *South European Society and Politics*, 16(4), 555–573. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2011.571919>
- Coston, J. M. (1998). A model and typology of government-NGO relationships. *Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly*, 27(3), 358-382.
- Decoloniality Europe (2013). Charter of Decolonial Research Ethics. Decoloniality Europe network. <https://decolonialityeurope.wixsite.com/decoloniality/about>.
- Dedeoglu, S. (2012). Equality, Protection or Discrimination: Gender Equality Policies in Turkey. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 19(2), 269–290. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxs004>
- Delmar, R. (2002). What is feminism?. In Herrmann, A.C.; Stewart, A.J. (ed.) *Theorizing Feminism – parallel trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*. Routledge. 8-33.
- Donno, D., & Russett, B. (2004). Islam, Authoritarianism, and Female Empowerment: What Are the Linkages? *World Politics*, 56(4), 582–607. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2005.0003>
- Doyle, J. L. (2016). Civil Society as Ideology in the Middle East: A Critical Perspective. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 43(3), 403–422. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2015.1102713>
- Doyle, J. L. (2015). CIVIL SOCIETY AND WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS IN TURKEY: A SUMMARY OF KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS.
- Doyle, J. L. (2017). State control of civil society organizations: the case of Turkey." *Democratization*. 24(2), 244-264.
- Edwards, B., & Foley, M. (2003). Social Movement Organizations Beyond The Beltway: Understanding The Diversity Of One Social Movement Industry. *Mobilization: An*

- International Quarterly, 8(1), 87–107. <https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.8.1.ej215xx422863312>
- Edwards, B., & Gillham, P. F. (2013). Resource Mobilization Theory. In D. Della Porta, B. Klandermans, D. McAdam, & D. A. Snow (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* (1st ed.). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm447>.
- Edwards, B., & Kane, M. (2014). Resource mobilization and social and political movements. In H.-A. Van Der Heijden (Hrsg.), *Handbook of Political Citizenship and Social Movements*. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781954706.00018>.
- Engin, C., & Pals, H. (2018). Patriarchal Attitudes in Turkey 1990–2011: The Influence of Religion and Political Conservatism. *Social Politics*, 25(3), 383–409. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxx021>.
- Ertürk, Y. (2019). Feminist Advocacy for Family Law Reform: Cross-country overview. In Akhami, M.; Ertürk, Y. & Mayer A. M. (ed.) *Feminist Advocacy, Family Law and Violence against Women. International Perspectives*. Routledge.
- Eroğlu, E., Tunç, G., & Aydemir Dev, M. (2023). Measuring NGOs' Active Participation in Municipal Decision Making in Türkiye. *Siyasal: Journal of Political Sciences*, 32(1), 35–56. <https://doi.org/10.26650/siyasal.2023.32.1180238>.
- Esen, B., & Gumuscu, S. (2016). Rising competitive authoritarianism in Turkey. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(9), 1581–1606. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1135732>.
- Eslen-Ziya, H., & Kazanoğlu, N. (2022). De-democratization under the New Turkey? Challenges for women's organizations. *Mediterranean Politics*, 27(1), 101–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2020.1765524>.
- Fahey, L. & Narayanan, V. K. (1986). *Macroenvironmental Analysis for Strategic Management*. St. Paul (MN): West Publishing.
- Fisher, J. (1998). *Non-Governments: NGOs and the Political Development of the Third World*. West Hartford, Conn.: Kumarian Press.
- Flynn, S. I. (2015). Resource mobilization theory. *Sociology Reference Guide*, 111-121.

- Fuchs, C. (2006). The self-organization of social movements. *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, 19(1), 101-137.
- Frantz, C., & Martens, K. (Eds.). (2006). *Nichtregierungsorganisationen (NGOs)*. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-90461-0>.
- Frumkin, P. (2002). Between Nonprofit Management and Social Entrepreneurship. *Public Administration Review*, 73(2), 372–376. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12026>.
- Frumkin, P., & Von Schnurbein, G. (2022). Wirkungsmodelle: Theorien des Wandels, der Hebelwirkung und der Skalierung. In P. Frumkin & G. Von Schnurbein, *Strategische Philanthropie* (pp. 37–57). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-35813-6_3.
- Gerschewski, J. (2013). The three pillars of stability: Legitimation, repression, and co-optation in autocratic regimes. *Democratization*, 20(1), 13–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2013.738860>.
- Gilliam, F. D. (1996). Exploring Minority Empowerment: Symbolic Politics, Governing Coalitions and Traces of Political Style in Los Angeles. *American Journal of Political Science*, 40(1), 56–81. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111694>.
- Goodwin, J., Jasper, J. M., & Bloomsbury. (2004). *Rethinking social movements: structure, meaning, and emotion*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Gray, K. R., & Finley-Hervey, J. (2005). Women and Entrepreneurship in Morocco: Debunking Stereotypes and Discerning Strategies. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 1(2), 203–217. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-005-1129-3>.
- Gupta, M. (2021). Role of NGOs in women empowerment: Case studies from Uttarakhand, India. *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, 15(1), 26–41. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEC-04-2020-0066>.
- Gündüz, M., & Gençoğlu, F. (2024). Dissident women's organizations as a counter-hegemonic actor in Turkey. *Turkish Studies*, 25(2), 233–256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2023.2208270>.

- Güneş, A., & Ezikoğlu, Ç. (2023). Legal and Political Challenges of Gender Equality and Crimes Against Women in Turkey: The Question of Istanbul Convention. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 33(1), 14–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2022.2040695>.
- Hall, P. D (1992). *Inventing the Nonprofit Sector and other Essays on Philanthropy, Voluntarism, and Nonprofit Organizations*. Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore.
- Herrold, C., & Atia, M. (2016). Competing Rather than Collaborating: Egyptian Nongovernmental Organizations in Turbulence. *Nonprofit Policy Forum*, 7(3), 389–407. <https://doi.org/10.1515/npf-2015-0033>.
- Herrold, C. E. (2016). NGO Policy in Pre- and Post-Mubarak Egypt: Effects on NGOs’ Roles in Democracy Promotion. *Nonprofit Policy Forum*, 7(2), 189–212. <https://doi.org/10.1515/npf-2014-0034>.
- Heurlin, C. (2010). Governing Civil Society: The Political Logic of NGO–State Relations Under Dictatorship. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 21(2), 220–239. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-009-9103-2>.
- High-Pippert, A. & Comer, J. (1998). Female Empowerment: The influence of Women Representing Women. *Women and Politics*. 19(4), 53-66.
- Hooks, B. (2022). *Feminismus für alle*. UNRAST Verlag, Münster.
- Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT) Documentation Center (2003). *Torture and other ill-treatment in Turkey: 2022 documentation report*. Human Rights Foundation of Turkey. <https://www.tihv.org.tr>.
- Human Rights Watch. (2021). Turkey: Events of 2021. In *World Report 2022*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/turkey>.
- Human Rights Watch. (2023). Turkey: Events of 2022. In *World Report 2023*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/turkey>
- Hussain, T. (1992). *Community Participation: The First Principle*. Pakistan National Conservation Strategy Sector Paper no. 1. International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources—The World Conservation Union. Karachi, Pakistan.

- International Center for non-for-profit law (2023): Civic Freedom Monitor – Türkiye.
<https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/turkiye>.
- International Center for non-for-profit law (2024): Civic Freedom Monitor – Türkiye.
<https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/turkiye>.
- International Center for non-for-profit law (2025): Civic Freedom Monitor – Türkiye.
<https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/turkiye>.
- Jenkins, J. C. (1983). Resource Mobilization Theory and the study of social movements. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 9, 527–553.
- Josefy, M. A., Harrison, J. S., Sirmon, D. G., & Carnes, C. (2017). Living and Dying: Synthesizing the Literature on Firm Survival and Failure across Stages of Development. *Academy of Management Annals*, 11(2), 770–799.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2015.0148>.
- Karabıyık, C. (2024). Associations Regulation (English translation & commentary). Karabıyık Attorneys at Law. <https://www.karabiyiklaw.com/ngo-law/2199/>.
- Karasu, K. (2024): Weltfrauentag: Warum Frauenrechte in der Türkei zunehmend unter Druck sind. Vorwärts. <https://vorwaerts.de/frauentag-tuerkei-frauenrechte#:~:text=Demonstration%20zum%208.,der%20T%C3%BCrkei%20zunehmen,d%20unter%20Druck.&text=Die%20Angst%20vor%20dem%20Frauen,das%20Zentrum%20von%20Istanbul%20abriegeln>.
- Kaufmann, T. (2021). “PESTEL-Analyse” in Strategiewerkzeuge aus der Praxis. In: Traute Kaufmann (Ed.), *Strategiewerkzeuge aus der Praxis*, Springer, pp. 19–28. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-662-63105-8_3.
- Ketola, M. (2011). EU democracy promotion in Turkey: funding NGOs, funding conflict? *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 15(6), 787–800.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2011.572551>.
- Klein, P. (2024). PESTEL-Analyse: Erklärung, Durchführung und Praxisbeispiele.
<https://hrtalk.de/pestel-analyse-erklaerung/>.

- Kuckartz, Udo (2018). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Methoden, Praxis, Computerunterstützung*. 4th revised edition. Beltz Juventa. Weinheim & Basel.
- Lador-Lederer, J. J. (1963). *International non-governmental organizations and economic entities : a study in autonomous organization and ius gentium*. Sythoff.
- Macdonald, D. (2019). *Survive or die – critical management challenges in non-profit organisations. Innovation and Change in Non-Profit Organizations: Case Studies in Survival, Sustainability and Success*. Pavilion Publishing and Media Ltd.
- Marshall, G. A. (2013). *Shaping Gender Policy in Turkey: Grassroots Women Activists, the European Union, and the Turkish State*. State University of New York Press.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.18473000>.
- Martinez, H. (2025). What is social empowerment? Empowerment definition and theory.
<https://unitedwaynca.org/blog/social-empowerment/>.
- Mayring, P. (2015). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse: Grundlagen und Techniken*. Beltz.
- McCarthy, J. D., & Zald, M. N. (1977). Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory. 82(6), 1212–1241.
- Misoch, S. (2019). *Qualitative Interviews*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH. Berlin, Boston.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110545982-201>.
- Moser, E., & Skripchenko, A. (2018). Russian NGOs and Their Struggle for Legitimacy in the Face of the ‘Foreign Agents’ Law: Surviving in Small Ecologies. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70(4), 591–614. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1444145>.
- Najam, A. (1999). Citizen Organizations as Policy Entrepreneurs.” In D. Lewis (ed.), *International Perspectives on Voluntary Action*. London.
- Najam, A. (2000). The Four-C’s of Third Sector– Government Relations. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*. 10(4), 375-396.
- Nimu, A. (2018). Surviving Mechanisms and Strategies of Gender Equality NGOs in Romania and Poland. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 29(2), 310–332. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-018-9961-6>.

- Narumugai, P., & Kumar, J. L. (2017). Role Of NGOs Towards Women Empowerment. 3(4).
- Ozcetin, H. (2009). 'Breaking the Silence': The Religious Muslim Women's Movement in Turkey. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11, 106-119.
- Özgür Keysan, A., & Şentürk, B. (2021). Philanthropists, Professionals and Feminists: Refugee NGOs and the Empowerment of Syrian Women in Gaziantep, Turkey. *International Migration*, 59(1), 143–164. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12728>.
- Przyborski, A. & Wohlrab-Sahr, M. (2021). *Qualitative Sozialforschung*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH. Berlin, Boston.
- Reeve, B. (2018). Die "Agentengesetze", ihre Evolution und Konsequenzen. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. <https://www.bpb.de/themen/europa/russland/270715/die-agentengesetze-ihre-evolution-und-konsequenzen/>.
- Salamon, L. M. & Anheier, H. K. (1996). *The Emerging Nonprofit Sector: An Overview*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Sands, P. (1992). The Role of Environmental NGOs in International Environmental Law. *Development–Journal of SID*. 2, 28–31.
- Sargeant, A., & Jay, E. (2004). *Fundraising Management: Analysis, Planning and Practice*. Routledge.
- Shah, H. A., Yasir, M., Majid, A., & Javed, A. (2019). Impact of Networking Capability on Organizational Survival of SMEs: Mediating Role of Strategic Renewal. *Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences*, 13(3), 559–580.
- Sidwell, A., Hafen, E., & Evans, L. (2006). The Emergence of Women's Social Movements Under Authoritarian Regimes: Studies of Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. *Journal of Political and International Studies*, 24, 53–68.
- Skokova, Y., Pape, U., & Krasnopol'skaya, I. (2018). The Non-profit Sector in Today's Russia: Between Confrontation and Co-optation. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70(4), 531–563. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1447089>.

- Smillie, I. & Helmich, H. (eds.). (1999). *Stakeholders: Government-NGO Partnerships for International Development*. London: Earthscan Publications.
- Smith, P. S. & Lipsky, M. (1993). *Nonprofits for Hire: The Welfare State in the Age of Contracting*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London.
- Spiegel (2023). Türkische Polizei setzt Pfefferspray gegen Frauentagsdemo ein. Spiegel. <https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/tuerkei-polizei-setzt-pfefferspray-gegen-frauentags-demo-ein-a-8915f2b9-df31-478c-a8fd-5b63ee3c54a6>.
- Tahaoglu, C. (2023). The closure case against the we will stop femicides platform has been adjourned until September. MLSA Turkey. <https://www.mlsaturkey.com/en/the-closure-case-against-the-we-will-stop-femicides-platform-has-been-adjourned-until-september/>.
- Taştan, I. Ö. & Sirri, L. (2023). Against the Governments' Necropolitics: The "We will Stop Femicides Platform" in Turkey. Forum Transregionale Studien. Berlin. <https://www.eume-berlin.de/veranstaltungen/kalender/details/against-the-governments-necropolitics-the-we-will-stop-femicide-platform-in-turkey>.
- Toepler, S., Zimmer, A., Fröhlich, C., & Obuch, K. (2020). The Changing Space for NGOs: Civil Society in Authoritarian and Hybrid Regimes. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 31(4), 649–662. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-020-00240-7>.
- Turhan, Y. (2023). Turkey's Public Diplomacy: The Role of Turkish Non-Governmental Organisations. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 34(2), 325–342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2023.2213078>.
- Tysiachniouk, M., Tulaeva, S., & Henry, L. A. (2018). Civil Society under the Law 'On Foreign Agents': NGO Strategies and Network Transformation. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70(4), 615–637. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1463512>.
- United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (2023). Turkey (Türkiye) 2022 Human Rights Report. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/415610_TU%CC%88RKIYE-2022-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf.

- Venice Commission. (2024). Opinion on the compatibility with international human rights standards of Law No. 7262 and related amendments affecting freedom of association in Turkey. Council of Europe.
- Willetts, P. (1996). The conscience of the world: the influence of non-governmental organisations in the UN system. Brookings Institution Press.
- Winker, G. & Degele, N. (2010). Intersektionalität: Zur Analyse sozialer Ungleichheiten. transcript Verlag. Bielefeld.
- World Economic Forum (2022). Gender Gap Report 2022.
- Yarar, B. (2023). Gedanken zur illiberalen Politik der AKP und zur autoritären Wende in der Türkei. In: Frauenbewegungen in der Türkei. Eine historische und intersektionale Perspektive. Orlanda, 210-234.
- Yasar, F. & Duvar G. (2023). Turkish court rejects lawsuit to shut down we will stop femicide over immorality charges. duvaR.english. <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkish-court-rejects-lawsuit-to-shut-down-we-will-stop-femicide-platform-over-immorality-charges-news-62985>.
- Young, D. R. (1999). Complementary, Supplementary, or Adversarial? A Theoretical and Historical Examination of Nonprofit-Government Relations in the United States.” In E. T. Boris and C. E. Steuerle (eds.), Nonprofits and Government: Collaboration and Conflict. Urban Institute Press. Washington D.C..
- Zald, M. N., & Ash, R. (1966). Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay and Change. Social forces, 44(3), 327-341.

List of figures

Figure 1: Three Sector Model	10
Figure 2: Typology of NGOs operating in authoritarian environments.....	16
Figure 3: The Four-C's of NGO-Government Relations (Najam, 2000: XX).....	19
Figure 4: resource access strategies based on Edwards and Kane (2014).	27
Figure 5: Conceptual framework of women empowerment enabled through NGO initiatives. Own illustration based on research by Gupta (2021) and Al Hakim et al. (2022).	29
Figure 6: Project federation, Ministry of Interior 2023, period 2022.	42
Figure 7: Number of NGOs per focus area of work.....	71
Figure 8: social media account ownership in percentage.....	72

List of tables

Table 1: Overview of functions and challenges of different types of NGOs in authoritarian environments (Toepler et al., 2020)	16
Table 2: Differentiation between associations and foundations in Turkey.....	33
Table 3: The number of associations fined administratively as a result of audits incl. amount of fined form 01.01.2022 to 31.12.2022. (Ministry of Interior, 2023).....	39
Table 4: categorization of women's organizations in Turkey. Own summary.	45
Table 5: Categories for qualitative analysis	66
Table 6: categorization of NGOs sampled in the study.	70
Table 7: Methods used by organizations in their work.	73

Annex

Annex A: Laws relevant for Turkish women's organizations

- Law 5253: Associations Law on Associations
- Law 5737: Law on Foundations
- Law 4721: Civil Code
- Associations: Articles 56-100
- Foundations: Article 101-117
- Law 8965: Penal Code
- Law 5326: Law on Misdemeanor
- Law 2860: Law on Collection of Aid
- Law 2911: Law on Meetings and Demonstrations
- Law 4982: Law on Right to Information
- Law 4962: Law on the Amendment to Certain Laws and Tax Exemption for Law on Foundations
- Law 6102: Commercial Law
- Law 193: Income Tax Law
- Law 5520: Corporate Tax Law
- Law 213: Tax Procedure Law
- Law 1319: Property Tax law
- Law 488: Stamp Tax Law
- Law 3065: VAT Law
- Law 1606: Law on the Exemption of Certain Associations and Institutions from Certain Taxes, All Fees and Dues
- Law 5072: Law on the Relations of Public Institutions with Associations and Foundations
- Law 4641: Law on the Establishment and Functioning of the Economic and Social Council
- Law 3335: Law on Establishment of International Organizations
- Law 5018: Public Financial Administration and Control
- Law 3713: Prevention of Terrorism Law
- Law 6698: Law on Protection of Personal Data
- Law 7262: Law on Preventing Financing of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction

Annex B: Research overview on NGOs and woman empowerment

Table 2. Results of research studies on women's empowerment.

Study	Context	Sample	Understandings	Strategies	Key Results	Recommendations
Oyelude and Bamigbola (2013)	Nigeria-Africa	NGOs' chief executive and information officers	Women are empowered when they have access to information.	Radio-Television—person-to-person communication, word of mouth, and telephone.	Slow but steadily working towards educating women about their rights.	Collaboration with libraries and information centres, radio and television stations.
Nyataya (2018)	Rwanda-Gasabo District	Women Beneficiaries-NGO employees—employees of women's departments and other officials	Women are empowered through the provision of formal and informal training.	- Loans with low interest supported by business training. - Morality building, encouragement, and motivation. - Vocational training and provision of grants. - Direct and indirect financial support.	- Enhancing women's educational, economic, and social status in Rwanda. - Changing the living conditions of women. - Educating women and girls about their rights.	NGOs should continue their endeavours toward educating women on their rights and a clear policy for women who were abandoned by work partners should be set.
Hiremath (2021)	India	NGO "The Women's Welfare Society"	Women are empowered when they are empowered across the globe.	- Helpline and institutional services for women. - Counselling centres and self-help for women.	- Helpline and institutional services provide immediate assistance to needy women. - Employment opportunities for women.	NGOs' work should be encouraged by government departments, other NGOs and the local community.
Tiessen (2004)	Malawi	NGO staff members including men and women	Women are empowered through gender mainstreaming.	- Hiring more women staff. - Commitment to gender equality policies. - Awareness raising and gender equality training sessions.	NGOs committed to gender mainstreaming as part of policy requirements.	Commitment to gender equality as part of policy implementation is not sufficient, NGOs shall challenge societal norms about the perspective of men towards women and introduce awareness-raising and training sessions.

Table 2. *Cont.*

Study	Context	Sample	Understandings	Strategies	Key Results	Recommendations
Gupta (2021)	India	5 case studies of trained women	Women are empowered through venture creation and entrepreneurship.	Training and information sharing.	Motivation, effective leadership, and information sharing empower women.	Empowerment can be achieved through improving existing policies to address gender equality.
Mustahidul Mahamud et al. (2021)	Bangladesh	50 women members under the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee	Women are empowered through provision of training and awareness-raising.	Training and awareness-raising.	Women were empowered through having access to information.	Empowerment can be achieved through reforms that challenge the patriarchal thinking and cultural norms that undermine the role of women.
Arum (2010)	Nigeria	Women's NGOs	Women's NGOs empower women.	Training and awareness-raising.	Women's NGOs empower women through reducing trafficking, enhancing reproductive health, and others.	Empowerment can be achieved through challenging and changing the existing customs that hinder women's education.
Zafar (2016)	Pakistan	Three NGOs implementing economic empowerment programs	Women's understanding of their situation and self-determination.	Training and awareness-raising.	NGOs contributed, to some extent, to enhancing women's self-confidence.	Allowing women to recognize their weaknesses and turn them into opportunities to strengthen their role and empower themselves.
Kakakhel et al. (2016)	Pakistan	100 respondents from city Karak, KPK	Engaging of women entrepreneurs in the mainstream economy.	Engaging women in decision making.	NGOs contributed, to a good extent, to engaging women in decision making	NGOs shall work to combine all local and government media platforms to empower women.

Table 2. *Cont.*

Study	Context	Sample	Understandings	Strategies	Key Results	Recommendations
Desai (2005)	Mumbai	67 NGOs in 1994 and 40 NGOs in 2003	Women are empowered through gender mainstreaming.	- Commitment to gender equality policies. - Awareness-raising and counselling. - Legal aid and microfinance support.	NGOs are committed to gender mainstreaming as part of policy requirements.	Commitment to gender equality as part of policy implementation is not sufficient. NGOs shall tailor their interventions in light of effective understandings of the societal, cultural, and economic changes in the role of women
Narumugai and Kumar (2017)	India	NGOs in India	Women are empowered through a self-sustainable society.	Training and skills development, legal awareness and aid, self-help, and capacity building	NGOs are active in training and skills development, legal awareness and aid, self-help, and capacity building.	- NGOs shall specialize in specific areas. - NGOs shall educate young girls and not only adult women. - Transparent and accountable internal governance and strategic approaches.
Goldman and Little (2015)	Maasai villages-Northern Tanzania	Two grassroots NGOs	Women are empowered through understanding local power dynamics and the introduction of resources by NGOs.	- Educational programs. - NGO meetings. - Provision of space for women to engage and interact with men.	Women gaining the ability to exercise new forms of power.	Connections across societal, political, and economic pathways is necessary for empowerment to happen.
Abi Zeid Daou (2015)	Lebanon	330 women from 6 Lebanese governorates	Women are empowered through self-efficacy, microcredit, and vocational training.	Education, ICT usage, access to household-related income.	Interventions of women's NGOs have been perceived by the women beneficiaries but at a low effect size	Empowerment can be achieved through reforms that challenge the patriarchal thinking and cultural norms that undermine the role of women.

Table 2. *Cont.*

Study	Context	Sample	Understandings	Strategies	Key Results	Recommendations
Mafa and Kang'ethe (2019)	Zimbabwe	Sample of Women's NGOs	Women are empowered through women's NGOs.	Engaging women in decision making.	Women's NGOs are encountering financial sustainability due to dependency on donors.	The study recommended the endorsement of sensitive gender mainstreaming policies that could better address gender equality in light of the effective challenging of the existing political and economic structures.
Hossain et al. (2017)	Rangpur	Sample of Rural Women	Economic and political empowerment of women.	Microcredit and training programs.	NGOs empower women financially to become entrepreneurs. Through training, women become aware of their self-esteem and self-respect.	NGOs can play a significant role in changing laws and policies in favor of women and encouraging social trends that make males more cooperative with women.

List of studies on how NGOs enable women empowerment across the world (Al Hakim et al., 2021)

Annex C: Excerpts from the Law on Association No. 5253

LAW ON ASSOCIATIONS

Law No : 5253
Date of Enactment : 4/11/2004
Official Gazette Promulgated : Date : 23/11/2004 **No:25649**
Statute Book Promulgated : Order: 5 **Volume:44**

“Associations: Association: groups of people with legal personality formed by at least seven real or legal persons by means of constantly pooling their knowledge and activities to meet a specific and common objective that is not forbidden by the law, without the intention of sharing profit” (Law on Associations No. 5253, Article 2a).

“Natural persons or legal entities having legal capacity shall be entitled to found an association without prior authorization” (Article 3).

“Associations may engage in international activities or cooperation in order to achieve the objectives set forth in their statutes; open representation offices or branches abroad; establish associations or supreme organizations abroad; or participate in associations or organizations established abroad” (Article 5).

“Associations may receive financial aid from associations serving for similar objectives, political parties, workers’ trade unions and employers’ associations and professional organizations, and may provide financial aid to the institutions mentioned hereinabove in order to achieve the objectives set out in their statutes.

Without prejudice to the provisions of the Law No. 5072 on Associations and Foundations’ Relations with Public Institutions and Authorities, associations may carry out joint projects with public institutions and organizations in their respective fields. In these projects, public institutions and organizations may contribute in kind or in cash amounting up to fifty percent of the project costs.” (Article 10)

“(…)(1) association services shall be carried out through volunteers or paid workers who are recruited by the decision of the administrative board. […] No remuneration

shall be paid to members other than the members of the administrative board and board of auditors under the name of salary, attendance fee or under any other name.
(Article 13).

Own translation