Mobilizing Under Authoritarianism

A case study on state repression and individual motivations
for civil society engagement in Minsk, Belarus.

Vide Wassberg
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Abstract

Mobilizing for increased human rights and democratization in authoritarian states comes with great costs and risks. The post-soviet country of Belarus is often referred to as a textbook example of a consolidated authoritarian state. Despite several attempts, Belarusian society has yet to move towards a democratic transition. The incumbent regime seems to adapt to democratic challenges and stepped up its repressive measures to prevent any democratic movement to become a significant threat to the government.

This study shows a more nuanced view of political life in Belarus. Despite the repressive authoritarian environment, people still engage in democratic civil society organizations for the betterment of Belarus. Using a synthesized theoretical model of social movements theories, combining micro and macro perspectives, this qualitative case study aims at shedding light on civil society participation and the effects of authoritarian state repression on civil society actors in Minsk, Belarus.

The study found that individuals claim that collectivistic incentives, rather than selfish gains, motivate them to engage in civil society organizations. Furthermore, how actors frame the perceptions of repressive structures governs the incentives they produce. Hence, the argument that state repression always deters mobilization seems to not hold.

Keywords: Social movement, Participation, Civil society, Authoritarianism, Belarus

Words: 9998

Acknowledgments

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Abbreviations

EU – European Union

CSO – Civil Society Organization

GONGO – Government Organized Non-Governmental Organization

SCM – Structural-Cognitive Model

RCT – Rational Choice Theory

RMT – Resource Mobilization Theory

POS – Political Opportunity Structures

SMO – Social Movement Organization

CI – Collective Identity

FT – Framing Theory

1. Introduction

Belarus is a country which is infamous for the incumbent regime's unflattering human rights record. Wedged between the eastern border of Europe, and the western border of Russia, the geographical location of the country has literally placed Belarus in the crossfire between Russia and the European Union (EU). Since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Belarus has had minimal experience with democracy. The first duly elected president in 1994, Aljaksandr Lukašenka, became the first and only president of the country. During his time in office, Lukašenka has adopted numerous anti-democratic policies, amended the presidential term limit, and entrenched his hold of power and stepped up his repressive tactics towards dissidents and civil society (Silitski, 2005; 2010a). This has played out as heavy restrictions on civil liberties, freedom of assembly, and freedom of expression. As well as widespread vote-fraud and political violence (Ibid.).

People-driven, democratic revolutions in the neighboring countries Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and most recently Armenia, has provided real-life examples of the mobilizing potential of post-Soviet civil society, and democratic social movements against authoritarianism (Bunce & Wolchik 2010b). However, civil society and the domestic opposition (and western donors) has failed to produce similar outcomes in Belarus, despite several attempts (ibid). Lukašenka seems to possess a precarious legitimacy among the general Belarusian population, despite the paternalistic nature of his regime and its repressive, authoritarian practices (Korosteleva 2009, 2012, Ioffe 2007). Generally, there seem to be a passive acceptance towards the authoritarian political environment in Belarus. However, despite the hostile environment towards civil society in Belarus, and the large acceptance of the authoritarian hegemonic political culture, some people still engage in the democratization of the country despite the risks associated and the arguably small chances of progress.

2. Aims and Research Questions

There are a number of studies looking into the lack of success for social movements and the political opposition in Belarus (e.g Bunce and Wolchik 2010b, Korosteleva 2009, Pikulik and Bedford 2018), the existing unfavorable authoritarian structures (e.g Way, 2010; Silitski, 2005; 2010b; Hale, 2005), the lack of political opportunity within the country (e.g Silitski, 2005; Bunce and Wolchik, 2010a), or the lack of democratic nation-building in Belarus (e.g Ioffe, 2007; Korosteleva, 2012). However, no studies were found which explicitly investigated why people choose to engage in democratically oriented civil society organizations (CSOs) in Belarus. The study's overall aim is to shed light on how authoritarian state repression effect participation in CSOs in Minsk, Belarus. In order to do this, the study seeks to explore the claimed motivations behind engagement by individuals in democratically oriented CSOs in Minsk. The overarching research question of this study is:

- *How does authoritarian state repression effect interviewed individuals' engagement in democratically oriented civil society organizations in Minsk, Belarus?*

The sub-question which will guide the research is:

- *How do individual civil society actors motivate their engagement in democratically oriented civil society organizations in Minsk, Belarus?*

The case of Belarus arguably provides a unique research context of authoritarianism in Europe and civil society is particularly restricted and marginalized in comparison with other countries in the region (USAID, 2017). The study strives to contribute to the already existing body of literature on social movements and political mobilization in authoritarian states, as well as to add to the arguably limited body of research about civil society participation in the country of Belarus.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1 Authoritarianism

Recent studies argue for a re-conceptualization of authoritarian states. Previously authoritarian states have been viewed as monolithic, uniformly violent and cohesive, closed, and insular in their repressive dynamics (Chen and Moss, 2019:667). However, most regimes fall into a gray zone between completely totalitarian at one extreme, and completely democratic at the other (if such states exist) (ibid.). Totalitarian states, subordinating all aspects of society, is more repressive than authoritarian states, which could be seen as a subtype of non-democracies. Authoritarianism is a state system that is highly punitive of dissent and lacking a meaningful degree of political competition. A more liberalized authoritarian state is often referred to as a hybrid regime, or electoral authoritarianism, which provides some political competition (e.g elections) although on a heavily skewed, pro-regime institutional playing field (ibid:668). Levitsky and Way (2010) refer to these as competitive authoritarian states. Groups in society may voice their opinions and protest to a limited degree but still, risk significant prosecution. The state of Belarus is generally defined as a consolidated hybrid authoritarian regime (Johnston, 2015; Levtiski and Way, 2010; Silitski, 2010b).

3.2 Civil society

Civil society, often referred to as the third sector of society, is a sphere of interaction distinct from the state and the market (Burnell et.al 166). However, civil society is a broad concept. The broadest definitions range between "civil society comprises the realm of organizations that lie between the family, at one extreme, and the state, at the other" (Burnell et.al 2017:150) and "the space between the state and the individual" (Grugel and Bishop 2014:136). For the sake of clarity, one common definition of civil society provided by Gordon White will set the premises of the concept in this study. He defines it as:

> *"An intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organisations which are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend*

their interests or values*" (White 1994:379).

A CSO is formally constituted as an association were the participants share certain positive "civil" values. However, there is no consensus on what these positive, "civil" values are (Burnell et.al, 2017:151). This is problematic in the Belarusian case as there are several government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) disguised as democratic organizations, however, proclaiming the repressive state ideology, co-opting the democratic civil society (Matchanka, 2014). Civil society differ from the political society as their influences on policy decisions are supposed to be indirect without real aspirations to control the government. However, most civil society organizations are more or less politicized, some cooperating with political parties (Burnell et.al, 2017:151). CSOs included in this study all advocate for increased political rights in the state of Belarus, within their various fields of operation.

3.3 Social Movements

This study follows Opp's definition of social movements based on their activities (i.e forms of protest and goals), and degree of organization: *"A "social movement" is a type of protest group with several distinguishing characteristics such as size and degree of organization."* /.../ *"A protest group is defined as a collectivity of actors who want to achieve their shared goal or goals by influencing decisions of a target."* (Opp, 2009:44)

Civil society enables individuals and groups to form and advance ideas which challenge the market and the political society (Burnell et.al 2017:166). Social movements form part of civil society and seek to influence the way the political system and institutions operates through alternative politics, essentially described as political activity emerging from below, generally operating outside conventional formal political institutions (ibid). Social movements are commonly governed by socio-political goal/s. These goals are normatively driven, often for or against a change in the structures or values of a society. CSOs often support or form based on social movements and alternative politics, aiming at challenging the political status quo (ibid). Rather than participation-oriented groups, of primary benefit to the individual members, social movements instead serve the groups' larger goals (Flynn 2011:105).

Opp's definition encapsulates both the individual actor within a collective and the collective's degree of organization, as well as their targets and means. Which fits well with studied individuals and their respective CSOs.

4. Contextual Background

4.1 Belarusian Authoritarianism

The Color Revolutions, throughout the post-Soviet region, during the 2000s gave incumbent autocrats time to study regional democratic transitions and adopt tactics which would prevent such developments in their countries, before they arise (Silitski, 2010b). Silitski (2005; 2010b) highlight three levels of preemptive authoritarianism in Belarus. First, there is a tactical level: harassing and attacking the infrastructure of the opposition and civil society. Second, the institutional level: constructing the political institutions in the incumbents' favor, adopting tough media regulations, and restricting or criminalizing certain types of civil society activities, as well as having state control over university teaching. Thirdly, the cultural level: strategically manipulating the consciousness and collective memory of the public through propaganda to spread stereotypes and myths about the domestic opposition, the "West", democratic countries, and the democratic system of governing in general – especially democratic aid to domestic actors (Siltiski, 2005, 2010b:76).

The Belarusian state's coercive apparatus in combination with high state control over the economy and an extensive security apparatus allows Lukašenka's regime to deprive dissidents of momentum. Regime control over the economy bestows it with effective ways to buy support and muzzle political dissidents. Furthermore, state monopoly of the majority of the economy allows the regime to threaten the livelihood of large segments of society if they openly support the opposition, democratic civil society initiatives or protest (Way, 2010:251).

4.2 Belarusian Civil Society

Belarusian civil society is particularly marginalized compared to its Eurasian and European neighbors (USAID, 2017:266-276). The strongest resource of the Belarusian CSOs, in general, is their organizational capacity. Belarusian CSOs and activist continue to operate in a highly hostile legal and institutional environment, as well as facing low scores on advocacy, financial viability, service provision, infrastructure, and public image (USAID, 2017:43). However, showing relative improvements in financial viability, increased advocacy measures, and

public image campaigns (ibid).

In 1999 the government demanded that CSOs and public associations reregistered in a tedious process, on where many got "liquidated" on political or dubious grounds. Unregistered organizations can not formally operate and acquire bank accounts or venues. Many continued their operations unregistered, however, the regime made the operations of unregistered organizations illegal in 2005, punishable by heavy fines or even imprisonment (Uggla, 2014:94-95; Laputska, 2017). The Belarusian law states that any unlawful gathering of more than 3 individuals is categorized as organizational activities, severely hampering the operations of independent civil society activities. Furthermore, due to legislative restrictions, unregistered CSOs and political parties are prohibited from receiving off-shore financial support. Many CSOs thus reallocate their registration abroad to access bank accounts or office spaces (Laputska, 2017; USAID, 2017:43).

Unsurprisingly, the political environment has an enormous psychological impact on political dissidents in Belarus, imposing the perception that socio-political change is impossible (Silitski, 2005). However, protests and CSO operation continue. After the once again fraudulent election in 2010, up to 40 000 people protested the result in the capital Minsk, followed by mass arrests (Uggla, 2014:11). A recent victory for civil society was the mass protests against the proposed decree stated that anyone working less than 183 days/year, should pay a certain "laziness" tax, publicly branded the "parasite tax" (Laputska, 2017).

In recent years the government has opened up for greater cooperation with democratic CSOs. Reasons for this taw is argued to be that the human and social capital of civil society is needed in the government's hunt for foreign money (USAID 2017:50), and because of the recent rapprochement between the EU and the Belarusian state, following the Russian annexation of Crimea, and a struggling domestic economy (FreedomHouse, 2019). Furthermore, recent cosmetic changes to the law regulating public gatherings, by some argued to be flirtatious with the EU for funding (Ljungvall, 2019a). In reality, changes simplify protest applications but restrict them to predetermined spaces away from the public view. As protest organizers now have to pay for the presence of police, ambulances, and fire-fighters for legal protest events, it has become "too expensive to protest" (Ljungvall, 2019b).

5. Previous Studies - Civic Participation, and Social Movements in Authoritarian States.

Generally, individual participation in civil society is driven by the search for purpose (i.e fulfillment), empathy, awareness (e.g level of education), religious faith, moral formation (e.g the belief that people in need should receive help), and outside responsibilities and constraints (Streeter, 2018; Corrigall-Brown, 2012). Literature suggests that political party preferences, gender, age, employment status, wealth, degree of political interest, interpersonal trust, and level of democratic rights are factors influencing individual civic participation (Blomberg and Szöcsik, 2014:199).

Putnam et.al's (1993) work focuses on the phenomena of joining, belonging and volunteering collectively in the social realm. According to the authors, civic participation and collective action depend on the social context. Voluntary cooperation is easier in communities that have inherited a higher stock of social capital in the form of norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement (Putnam et.al, 1993:167). Accordingly, norms, trust, and networks facilitate cooperation within society. Moreover, norms of reciprocity, social trust, networks of civic engagement, and successful cooperation itself are mutually reinforcing and a public good (Ibid:180). Networks of civic engagement, e.g CSOs, are an essential form of social capital. According to Putnam et.al (1993:173): "the denser such networks in a community, the more likely that its citizens will be able to cooperate for mutual benefit".

Della Porta (2006) further argues that social networks matter not only for movement recruitment but also as an antidote towards defecting. Generally, the higher the costs and risks associated with action, the stronger and numerous ties between participating individuals need to be (della Porta, 2006:117;118).

In authoritarian governments, force, dependence, and exploitation are common features of the vertical interaction between the state and citizen. Such activities hamper the production of social capital and trumps collective cooperation. Individuals living under such institutional settings are generally inclined to "follow the rules of the game" (Putnam et.al, 1993:179). In Belarus, research has pointed towards relatively high levels of social capital and civic participation compared to neighboring countries. However, by the nature of the repressive regime, crucial horizontal human interactions (stressed by Putnam et.al

1993:175) are restricted which leaves little room but to resort to paternalistic vertical social institutions (Korosteleva, 2006).

Participating in social movements in authoritarian states involves different risks, cost, and results compared to democratic states but is not an uncommon feature of socio-political life under repressive governments (Chen and Moss, 2019:667). As mentioned in section 3.1 authoritarian states generally allows for some independent political action to occur. However, researchers argue that this is not generally driven out of generosity, but to avoid international sanctions or maintain the popular impression as legitimate (Ibid.). States often employ a mixed method of soft and hard repressive tactics to drain movements recourses, momentum and support, rather than to risk igniting the masses by illegitimate use of violence. Social movements thus often rely on international networks to lobby on their behalf and modern communication technologies to expose regime abuses (Ibid:670;674). In contrast to previous scholarly arguments, social movements in authoritarian states have been shown to be characterized by the same elements as social movements in more democratic states, however, they are influenced by, and adapts to, their restrictive surroundings (Johnston, 2015). Movements strategic actions have converted instances of repression into increased mobilization. Hence, the linear thinking of increased repression → higher costs/risks → decreased mobilization does not always hold (ibid.).

Mobilization tends to occur "underground", providing free spaces to express one's opinions, often disguised as seemingly apolitical associations (ibid.). Repressive tactics by the state create fear and the illusion that dissidents are alone in their dissatisfaction, small acts of protest have served as popular reminders that that is incorrect (Ibid.). Apart from the more traditional ways of influencing governments like petitions, marches, and protests, social movements in authoritarian regimes use various creative, subtle ways of showing discontent. Gay activists in Singapore has shown to adopt a pragmatic type of resistance towards restrictive laws, toeing the line of what is morally and legally acceptable within society, turning repressive laws into an asset (Chua, 2012). Similar protests forms have been used in Belarus, e.g the peculiar silent or clapping protests where people simply publicly gathered to show discontent by standing in silence or by applauding. However, absurdly, Belarusian law now forbids unauthorized public actions as well as inactions, practically criminalizing doing nothing (Uggla, 2014:112).

6. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study will be to a large extent based on the thoughts and discussions of Karl-Dieter Opp (2009). His book explicitly deals with theories that "... provide explanations of the rise and decline of protest, social movements, and other challenging groups" (Opp, 2009:xiv) which mirrors the aim of this study.

Opp's (2009:351-352) central arguments are that the macro (or structural) theoretical approaches neglect the prepositions of the micro (or individual) perspectives, and vice-versa. In other words, the interplay between structures and actors is not considered explicitly. Opp (2009) argues that all theories implicitly employ a micro model of explanation. He proposes that the factors the theoretical perspectives emphasize can be integrated into a holistic micro to the macro-theoretical framework he calls the *structural-cognitive model* (SCM) emphasizing the interplay between structure and agency using different bridge assumptions..

6.1 Theory of Collective Action

The SCM model's micro-macro theoretical background is based on the work of Mancur Olson's (2002) theory of collective action. According to Olson, applying micro-economics to collective action, individuals participate in collective action only if they personally gain something that they would not have if they did not participate, i.e individuals are rational and self-interested. Accordingly, behavior is goal oriented, governed by calculations of costs and benefits. Individuals do what is objectively best for them in line with the *rational choice theory* (RCT) (Olson, 2002;2). Joining a social movement in this aspect is referred to as the contribution to the production of a public good (sociopolitical benefits for all members of society to consume) (Opp, 2009:46). However, as individuals are perceived as self-interested, when the costs of participating are higher than the potential benefits, individuals will tend to "free-ride", i.e refraining from participating but enjoying the *potential* collective benefits attained by collective action (ibid:47). Without direct coercion, individuals need *selective incentives* to motivate participation in collective action (Olson, 2002:51). Olson further highlight the intensity of preference for the public good (the goal), costs, and to which extent an individual's contribution makes a difference in producing the public good, as important supplements to the selective incentives (ibid:50-51).

However, Opp (2009:63) emphasizes the importance of moving away from Olson's narrow version of RCT. Opp (2013) argues for a *wider* approach to rational choice. Accordingly, beliefs (including perceptions) and broader sorts of costs (informal sanctions) and benefits (altruism, solidarity and conforming to norms) also could govern collective action. Furthermore, people do what they *think* is best for them and not what objectively yields the highest possible benefits from the viewpoint of a third omniscient person (ibid). Hence, the wide version of RCT is much more applicable to the complex reality of social movements participation (ibid:63).

6.2 The Structural-Cognitive Model

Returning to Opp's (2009) *structural-cognitive model* (SCM). As mentioned, it merges the structural (macro) and the individual (micro) theoretical level, where individual behavior is explained through a *wide* version of RCT.

6.2.1 Structural Level

On the structural level, Opp (2009:327-50) merges two macro-theories: *resource mobilization theory* (RMT) and *political opportunity structures* (POS).

McCarthy and Zald's (1977) influential article gave rise to the RMT theory. The article focus on "the dynamics and tactics of social movement growth, decline, and change" (ibid:1213-1216). It introduced the notion of social movement organizations (SMO), accumulating resources like a firm which compete and cooperate in a larger social movement industry. Social movement industry is comprised of all the SMOs pursuing the same sociopolitical goal. Crucial in RMT are the resources available and how SMOs accumulate these recourses. Accordingly, the more recourses, the more influential a movement is. The types of resources could be material, cultural, moral, human, and social-organizational (Edwards and Gillham, 2013) as well as access to media, support by sympathizers, the loyalty of groups or members or third parties, and availability of venues and rights (Opp, 2009:139). These are of central importance to the key analytical question within RMT: how social movements turn bystanders to a cause into active agents from change (Edwards and Gillham, 2013). In essence, an increase of the recourses by citizens in society will increase the resources available to SMOs in a society (Opp, 2009:133). According to Opp (2009:155) the type of recourse, the transfer cost, goal preference, as well as

moral and social incentives govern individual recourse transfer to SMOs.

The second macro-theory, *political opportunity structures* (POS), recognizes the importance of the structural sociopolitical environment for social movements. The POS approach aims to explain why social movements occur in one context but not in another.

Essentially, POS focuses on the contextual barriers and opportunities social movements face to reach their goals (Burnell et al. 2017:168). While acknowledging structural constraints and opportunities, a key aspect of POS is to analyze how changes or "windows of opportunities" in theses structures brings about new dynamics which could produce social movements. Central factors, among others, are the availability of allies, state strength, civil society's strength, institutional setting, opponents and SMOs strategies, distribution of political power, public bureaucracy, and powers of the judiciary (della Porta, 2013). However, there is a lack of consensus on which of the political opportunities are most relevant (ibid).

Critics to POS argue that changes in the structural environment of a society only constitutes as an opportunity for social movements if the actors perceive it as being important, whereas closed opportunities can be perceived as opportunities (ibid). This argument is mirrored by Opp (2009:170). In line with his reasoning of the micro-macro relationship of Opp's model, POS has an indirect relationship with participation in social movements as the opportunities or constraints being *perceived* by actors only holds explanatory value towards the *incentives* they produce. Important in this research case as what could be objectively perceived as a negative POS, like state repression, could produce opposite incentives such as protest mobilization in cases where repression is perceived as illegitimate (ibid:185).

6.2.2 Individual Level

The discussion will now move on to SCM's micro-theoretical perspective. Here individual understanding and interpretation of a situation and their construction of meaning will be discussed. The two main theories are *collective identity* (CI) and *framing theory* (FT).

Based on Melucci (1988), Opp (2009:210) reaches the following definition of CI: "A collective identity exists, by definition, if there is a group (i.e. individuals with at least one common goal) with common beliefs, with common normative convictions, that is connected by social relationships (i.e. there is a social network) and by emotional bonds". Accordingly, individual identity dimensions like being member of a social category (e.g gender, nationality) or

having a position on a dimension (e.g. income), having a status or role (e.g profession), being member of a group (e.g CSO member), identifying toward a category or group, status or role aggregate with likeminded people, with similar cognitive perceptions, into a collective identity. This is shared views of group members on the social environment, goals, and limits and success of collective action (ibid:216).

Opp (2009:221) argues that viewing CI through collective action theory, it would be regarded as a kind of selective incentive (discussed in the previous section). Proponents of the collective identity approach generally reject the basis of rational choice arguing that there is more behind social movements participation than rational calculations. However, since Opp (2009) adopts a wide version of RCT, CI can be integrated into collective action theory. He argues that it is implausible that, in general, identification with a group does not deter bounded, rational calculations. Even if there are situations where group identification keeps individuals from calculating, the identifiers' behavior will still depend on the costs and benefits of that choice. In other words, there are situations where calculation is a needed process and others where it is less so, depending on the risks associated. However, cost and benefits (including soft ones as altruism and confining to norms) are always at least considered (ibid:225). Opp (2009:227) holds that: "The stronger individuals identify with a group, the more rewarding is action in support of the group and the more likely is participation in the interest of the group."

The last part of the SCMs micro-theoretical level is *framing theory* (FT). FT focuses on the importance of the creation of meaning by adherents to specific social movements (Snow, 2013). Accordingly, meaning arises by interpretive processes mediated by culture. Individual framing processes work through three core functions: *focus attention*, *articulation mechanism*, and t*ransformative function*. *Focus attention* essentially means identifying what is "in frame" and what is "out of frame", what is of focus to social movements adherents. *Articulation mechanisms* imply what "story is told", how issues or agency is narrated. Finally, the *transformative function* of frames are the ways in which objects of attention are perceived or understood, as relating to each other or to the actor herself. Thus how we see, what we make of, and how we act towards issues or objects constructs the basis of FT (ibid).

In relation to social movements, FT stresses that the mobilizations of grievances do not occur naturally, nor is it dependent on material factors, but the ways individuals perceive and acts upon grievances are inherently related to how they frame them (ibid). The core concepts within FT that deals with collective mobilization in social movements are: c*ollective action frames, frame alignment processes, and frame resonance*. Firstly, *collective action* frames have a mobilization function towards the bystanders, it turns movement adherents from

passive to active agents of change, Secondly, *frame alignment* relates to the ways which movement adherents influence and change the understanding of outside individuals to align their frames with that of the social movement. Finally, *frame resonance* facilitate mobilization through communicating the credibility of change, and the centrality of the claims of the movement to targets' own lives (ibid).

Opp (2009:273) argue that frames comprise, among many things, of incentives such as conforming to a norm. Hence Opp (2009:322) argues that: "the elements of frames that are conducive to protest do not have an effect on incentives, they are incentives themselves."

After this rather lengthy theoretical account and discussion, the reader is urged to take a step back and look at figure 1 and get the full picture of Opp's synthesized model.

Figure 1. The Structural-Cognitive model (Opp 2009:335).
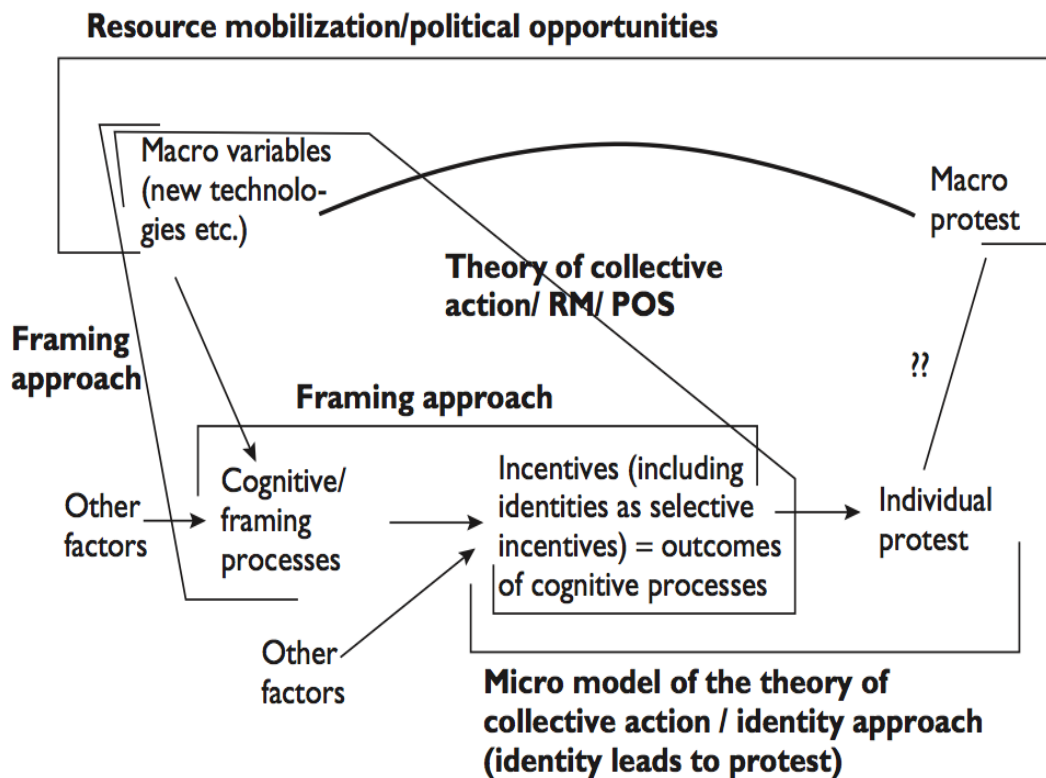
Figure 1 shows the intended macro-micro and micro-macro relationships between the structural and individual level of individual social movement participation. The bridge assumption is simply that individual participation aggregates into the collective through the processes discussed in previous sections. The strength of using Opp's model is that it gives a insight to scrutinize under what circumstances the structural prepositions hold, rather than just acknowledging their existence. Repression in the case of the studied CSO actors did not deter collective action. Data in this study will provide a basis for an attempt to answer why this unexpected effect occurred.

7. Methodology

7.1 Research Design

The study takes an idiographic, deductive approach. This in order to better understand the specific context of the research case, rather than producing new generalizations (Bryman 2012:69). The research is a single case study which allows the context to be studied closely and in-depth, and provides the research with precision (Bryman 2012:12,66, De Vaus 2001:221). The study follows Lijphart's (1971:692) definition of an *interpretive case study* as the interest is the research context of Belarus and the studied actors. The research takes a qualitative approach as such research seeks to gain a better understanding of people's attitudes, interpretations, behaviors, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture or lifestyle (Scheyvens, 2014:60). Furthermore, qualitative methods provide the ability to better produce meaning to actions of actors studied (Bryman 2012:408). This approach was therefore adopted as it suits the aim of this study. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with individual democratic CSO actors engaged in Minsk, Belarus. Qualitative interviews are regarded as particularly helpful in generating an intensive and a detailed examination of a research case, which is of preference within this study (Bryman 2012:68)

7.2 Sampling and Data Collection

Interview informants were sampled based on the following criteria: civil society actors in Minsk engaged within democratically oriented CSOs. The sampling framework followed a convenience sampling method at the start. This was possible as the researcher has contacts within CSOs engaged for civil rights improvements in Minsk. Furthermore, convenience sampling was fitting as initial interviewees were asked to recommend further sources through a snowball sampling (Bryman 2012:424). The broad sample criteria allowed more flexibility for the snowball sampling to find suitable interviewees.

7.2.1 Semi-structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with enough flexibility to discover un-thought-of issues and areas of interest to the research. The interviews followed an interview guide, which produced some consistency of themes between interviews (see appendix A) (Bryman 2012:471). With the consent of the interviewees, the interviews were recorded. Each informant will be referred to by a number, given to them randomly.

The qualitative data that was used in the study come from six semi-structured interviews, three interviewees were female and three were male in the age span of early twenties to late forties. Four interviews were done over online calling programs and two interviews were conducted in the traditional face-to-face manner. According to Bryman (2012:488) interviewing over the phone comes with both advantages and disadvantages. However, there is no clear discrepancy between the quality of answers over the phone compared to interviews conducted face-to-face. Costs and geographical distance are easier managed when conducting phone interviews. Furthermore, as the topic of democratic civil participation is sensitive in the Belarusian case, phone interviews increase the safety of the researcher (Ibid.:488). The informants are engaged in diverse fields: human and students rights, environment and gender issues, and one is a member of an umbrella organization facilitating and supporting various sub-organizations[1]. Apart from qualitative data, the research draws on official reports and academic literature.

7.3 Data Analysis

First, the data was transcribed. This is the basis for the coding process of the data, and to gain a sense of the linkages between the statements (Bryman 2012:580). The data was later analyzed through a thematic analysis: "... a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set. Through focusing on meaning across a data set, TA [thematic analysis] allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences." (Braun and Clarke, 2012:57). As this is a deductive study, the coding into themes was top-down and pre-selected through a set of pre-decided concepts from theory (Ibid.:58). Segments of the interview statements were coded top-down into the themes provided by Opp's (2009) SCM. The segments were thereafter coded a second time in-depth into different sub-themes. The initial coding was descriptive and interpretive, where the second was analytical in order to analyze the latent meanings of interviewees. The analysis followed the stages outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012:60-69) and thus used inductive elements as well to analyze unexpected codes.

1 For participants safety reasons, more details about the participants and their respective organization will not be disclosed.

7.4 Biases

Social science research requires the researcher to adhere to a degree of reflexivity, meaning, to be reflective about the implications of one's research methods, values, biases, and decisions (Bryman (2012:393). Thus it is of importance to exclude any preconceived values or beliefs into the interview questions and let the interviewee lead the conversation within the set conversation frame. Additionally, to be aware and open of the arguably inevitable intrusion of some biases when conducting such interviews.

There is a visible problem with the key informants being acquaintances of the researcher. Arguably, this can produce affiliation bias, motivating informants to give the answers they think the researcher wants to hear, rather than a more accurate description (Ibid:146). Conversely, this could be positive as being acquaintances could mean the confidence to speak more freely, rather than conforming to social desirability bias, where responses are contaminated by respondents' attempts to construct statements that follow socially acceptable values, norms, or behaviors (Ibid.:716). Having interviews conducted through online calls limit the researcher ability to interpret the body language of interviewees. However, as the interviewer is not physically present, could mean a less stressful environment for the interviewee (Ibid.:214).

7.5 Ethical Considerations

Bryman (2012:135) list 4 main areas of ethical concern which is of relevance to social science research: whether there is potential harm to participants, whether there is a lack of informed consent, whether there is an invasion of privacy, and whether deception is involved. There are risks associated with talking about being involved in democratically oriented SCOs in Belarus. Furthermore, according to FreedomHouse (2019), internet in Belarus is not independent of government control. Hence, extra attention needs to be put on participants anonymity and using interview software which is untraceable. Participants identity were not be saved in any written documents connected to their statements, nor in relation to the final study. Participants could and were urged to withdraw parts or their statements in whole, if they would see fit. On request, participants are provided with a copy of the study. Interviews were planned according to the time schedule of informants, who were briefed about the aim and purpose of the study as well as its voluntary basis before beginning. Lastly, there were no activities of deception within this study.

7.6 Limitations

The interviews were conducted in English since the researcher does not speak either Belarusian nor Russian, which limits the scope of interviewees ability to speak freely. Hence, language barriers are a visible issue. Since this research was done without any outside funding, hiring an interpreter was not a valid alternative. Convenience sampling hinders the research's ability to generalize. However, that is not a good enough reason not to use the method once an opportunity to generate good data presents itself (Bryman 2012:201). Lastly, using snowball sampling takes away control over the sampling to a large extent. However, with the recourses that were available for the study, the snowball sampling was the most suitable option. Moreover, the snowball sampling provided a smaller sample size than expected, due to lack of time and responses on interview requests which effects the study's ability to generalize. As emphasized earlier, that falls outside the scope of this study.

8. Analysis

8.1 Motivations for CSO Engagement in Minsk.

In relation to the research's sub-question, the researcher finds three relevant sub-themes: reasons for joining CSOs, reasons for staying within CSOs and the calculations of cost, risks, and benefits that were visible in participants statements.

8.1.1 Reasons for Joining CSOs

As mentioned, personal networks have been shown to play an important role in recruitment to social movements (della Porta, 2006:117). All except one interviewee (Informant1; Informant2; Informant3; Informant5; Informant6, 2019) expressed they had either been introduced or influenced by a friend, or met people through other social occasions which influenced them to join. In a majority of the interview statements were accounts of a change of perception, i.e a frame change (Informant:1; Informant:3; Informant:5; Informant:6, 2019). Some mentioned an "eye-opening" feeling (Informant:3; Informant:5, 2019) others changed their view regarding being active for change (Informant:6, 2019) or the view of the states ability to provide security (Informant:1, 2019). As one interviewee put it:

> "First of all civic education in schools are very poor. You don't really discuss what is happening in the country, why is it happening. But you still feel that a lot of things are bad. For example your parents have low salaries, you see that the development on the countryside is also very low, and you are asking the question "why is it so?". I was seeking for the answers, maybe not actively, but in the brain the question "why is it so?" always arose. And as soon i found the community that had the answers i joined without a doubt." (Informant:5, 2019)

As illustrated from the quote, the individual in question was introduced to a community which provided the "the answers" towards perceived inequalities or pre-existing grievances. Grievances were expressed in all the interviews, and joining a CSO were connected to acting, mitigating, or changing perceived socio-

political issues. However pre-existing grievances and a change of how you frame issues do not necessarily mean that it leads to participating in CSOs in Minsk. As noted by:

> "I noticed that many people supported the movement but they actually don't want to do something" (Informant:4, 2019).

There was generally an understanding of citizens that were not involved in CSOs. Informants claimed that low income (Informant:5; Informant:6, 2019), lack of time (Informant:4; Informant:5; Informant:6, 2019), lack of perceived influence (Informant:4; Informant:5; Informant:6, 2019), and the fear and risks associated with engaging (Informant:3; Informant:4; Informant:5, 2019) as possible explanations behind collective action problems. What is visible from the statements are that the explanations towards why others have not engaged in CSOs differs from the explanations towards why the interviewed claim to have engaged. The respondents expressed the importance of personal identity features and altruistic incentives for joining CSOs (Informant:1; Informant:2; Informant:3; Informant:4; Informant:5; Informant:6, 2019). E.g:

> "So I decided to join. Because I was always interested in the idea that we should change something, mutual assistant to each others. It was the perfect movement for the first step" (Informant:4, 2019) or "As background, I'm a lawyer. What motivates me is the need of people in Belarus. It does not matter who you are or what you have done, rights are universal" (Informant:2, 2019).

The reason for the discrepancy between their own motives and the argued barriers for others could either be that informants found these resource transfers and perceptions as a given regarding one's own engagement, or that they took the altruistic incentives as a given within the Belarusian society and thus only the resource investment itself was the issue. Or it could be a mere coincidence, since some acknowledged that being self-employed (Informant:6, 2019) or employed by the CSO helps their engagement (Informant:5, 2019). However, when asked about alternative action forms, a majority interviewees expressed less sympathy and a lack of valid options to choose from. The government was connected to repression, engaging in GONGOs one were "... supporting all the [state] violations they are connected with" (Informant:5, 2019), and the political opposition were connected with taking higher risks (Informant:4, 2019), ineffectiveness (Informant:1; Informant:2; Informant:3; Informant:4; Informant:5; Informant:6, 2019), or dishonesty (Informant:4; Informant:5, 2019).

In light of this, it seems as the motivations that were expressed for joining CSOs in Minsk goes well with research about civil society participation in

democratic states (section 5), how individuals frame their situation and how they relate to others through altruistic incentives were of importance for acting upon grievances among the interviewed individuals. However, their claimed reasons for joining did not mirror their claimed reasons why others did not engage in CSOs, which the data were unable to give a clear answer to.

8.1.2 Reasons for Staying in CSOs

Throughout the interviews, people stressed the importance of the civil society and their role as a "watchdog" towards the state (Informant:1 ; Informant:2; Informant:4 ; Informant:5 ; Informant:6, 2019), providers of justice and help (Informant:1 ; Informant:2 ; Informant:3 ; Informant:5 ; Informant:6, 2019), or providing "space" to express one's views (Informant:3; Informant:4; Informant:5; Informant:6, 2019). What is predominantly visible across the interviews towards staying engaged in CSOs were once again the altruistic incentives towards the citizens of Belarus (or the production of public goods) and identity fulfillment:

> "I want to have a better life here, I love Belarus so much, I want this country to be better because of this. We now have a better situation, more discussions about these issues, so our organization and civil society organizations are very important" (Informant:3, 2019) or "But as far as I have entered the civil society community, who are struggling to have a better future for the country, is a very motivating thing" /../ "I am a better person if I work in this field" (Informant:5, 2019).

Furthermore, the production of social and human capital, as well as increasing ones social network were mentioned, which according to the sources were unique for civil society in the country (Informant:3 ; Informant:4; Informant:5, 2019). Aside from the perceived personal gains from engaging in CSOs, there was a mixture of widespread fatigue, stress, hopelessness, fear and careful optimism within the interviews. As one individual put it:

> "Sometimes I feel responsible to the keep on going also, because they are doing it so I should do it also. The other thing is that the community that of people working in the field is very nice, if you want to be the complete part of this community it means that you have to work in the field on a more professional basis. Simply invest more time in it" (Informant:5 , 2019).

As above quote illustrates, the collective identity seems to play a crucial part within studied CSOs, where solidarity towards one's colleagues is an antidote

towards leaving (Informant:2; Informant:3; Informant:5; Informant:6, 2019). The respondent further stated:

> "I am completely demotivated. That's the truth, and you have already asked the question about motivations to stay in the civil society and its because I feel a little bit responsible" (ibid).

This follows what Opp (2009:227) argued: "The stronger individuals identify with a group, the more rewarding is action in support of the group and the more likely is participation in the interest of the group."

8.1.3 Calculating Cost, Risks, and Benefits

As shown in section 4, being engaged within democratically oriented CSOs in Belarus comes with great risks and costs. Judged by the obvious fact that the interviewees are still engaged within CSOs, one can assume that their rational choice to stay provided them with more benefits than costs. As pointed out in the previous section, apart from pre-existing grievances, individual and altruistic incentives, collective identity seemed to keep their benefits of engagement on a positive. To claim that the individuals interviewed did not weigh their options rationally would arguably reduce their engagement to spontaneous, uninformed and romanticized. As previously mentioned, the costs and benefits are more or less always present (Opp, 2009:225) while the risks associated with an action govern its level of spontaneity. In the interviews, conforming to norms or altruism was sown to produce strong incentives in high cost/risk choices of individuals e.g as illustrated:

> "It was a dilemma. Stay abroad and go into exile, or come back. You just have to ask yourself and no one else… I decided to come back because my colleague was in a very difficult situation, because our office was searched and our things confiscated, the head of the organization was in prison. I thought in that time i needed to be there, in Belarus, with my colleagues" (Informant:2, 2009).

Judging from the above quote, the benefits of one's action does not neatly have to correlate with one's own costs or risks. As argued in this study, solidarity or confiding to norms of altruism are incentives. Hence incentives do not have to translate into direct individual gains. Moreover, if the costs of defecting from the production of the public good (i.e the altruistic goal) are perceived as higher than the individual perceived benefit of leaving, the strength of the altruistic incentive

could outweigh the individual motives for leaving. As one interviewee stated:

> "I know that when the time pass and the regime will change we still need these people who understands these values, who promote these values. We are the future of this country, it's important to me to keep these values within the youth. If we just stop and say "ok guys lets just finish because we don't see any opportunity and we can get imprisoned" we would lose all this" (Informant:6, 2019).

Yet again, based on the interviewees' statements, altruistic and solidarity incentives seem to govern interviewees' choices to a large extent. It has been argued that informal sanctions towards leaving within groups are strong motivations for people to not defect. Although this could be a factor, it was not explicitly, or implicitly stated in the data gathered.

8.2 Authoritarian State Repression's Effects on CSO Engagement in Minsk

Analyzing the data in order to answer the overall research question, there were five sub-themes identified: effects of negative POS, coping with the effects of negative POS, lack of resource mobilization, effects of lack of resource mobilization, and framing of negative POS and lack of Resource Mobilization.

8.2.1 Effects of Negative POS

In Belarus, the rules of the game for civil society is almost entirely written by the state. It stands clear from the study, that state repression has been felt by the interviewed CSO actors extensively. The effect of the negative POS expressed by the interviewed individuals follows what has previously been said in section 4.2. Apart from the structural limitations, the CSOs faced, like lack of influence on the official political narrative, political freedom, freedom of assembly, they further expressed considerable demonization from state media and state institutions (Informant:1; Informant:2; Informant:6, 2019). All expressed a lack of access to state institutions and ways to influence governing bodies. However, as previously mentioned, the government sometimes needs the expertise of CSOs in their efforts to please the EU. Which sheds light on the peculiar relationship the regime has with representatives of CSOs. As one respondent stated:

"As i said yesterday, the new [government appointed] human rights group ask me to give them advice. But not as a representative from my organization, but representing myself as a citizen" (Informant:2, 2019).

Recognizing that regime representatives would meet with a CSO representative, from an organization officially not existing, on the sensitive topic of human rights, would arguably undermine the whole repressive bureaucratic structure of the state. However, this example argues against the traditional view of a total separation between authoritarian regimes and dissidents. As stated in Chen and Moss (2019:675) authoritarian states have shown to be less coherent and more penetrable than previously thought, holes can be found in its walls towards citizen participation. Informant:1 (2019) further noted that her CSO has used the few symbolic independent parliamentarians in Belarus in order to access more information as well as setting up meetings with government officials.

The repressive effects on the participants were however present throughout. Fear, paranoia, and feeling unsafe was expressed throughout the interviews. As one interviewee stated:

"The question of how people feel being part of CSOs, there is no instrument that can guarantee our safeness, no contacts could do that, nothing" (Informant:5, 2019) or "... I was feeling completely unsafe. You think that they [the government] are checking your telephone, that they are checking your computer, you're unsure. Maybe they are having something installed in the office and it's a little bit paranoia" (Informant:1, 2019)

However, half of the respondents (Informant:1; Informant:2; Informant:6, 2019) said fear and paranoia comes and goes and is often connected to hearing about legal charges against other CSO actors, journalists, or activists.

The major problem that was identified throughout the interviews was the politically motivated de-registration, or denial of registration, for organizations which want to be autonomous from the state and push a democratic agenda. As mentioned, being unregistered comes with great limitations like access to foreign financial support, office spaces or legitimacy. Continuing their operations unregistered, some experienced financial repression (Informant:1 ; Informant:2; Informant:6, 2019) such as state tax offices auditing them extensively. Furthermore, unregistration and participating in unlawful protests opens up for direct state threats, violence, and arrests. A majority of the respondents talked about experiencing some forms of threat, like being called to the KGB (Belarusian state intelligence service) meetings (Informant:5, 2019), threats from university

administration (Informant:4, 2019), detentions and violence either to themselves or colleagues (Informant:1 ; Informant:2 ; Informant:3 ; Informant:4 ; Informant:5 ; Informant:6, 2019). This reality sometimes conflicts with their perceived role as "watchdogs" while showing their conscious maneuvering through the hostile legal environment:

> "It's hard, when you want to do activities which is not in line with the government, you can only do things for the government." (Informant:3 , 2019)

Moreover, and less mentioned in the literature, according to respondents, being part of CSOs in Belarus comes with social exclusion as well (Informant:1; Informant:4; Informant:5; Informant:6, 2019) and pressure from concerned family members (Informant:4; Informant:6, 2019).

8.2.2 Coping with Negative POS

As previous studies have shown, the major way of coping with the negative POS in Belarus is to register the CSO abroad. Because of their democratic motives, all interviewees represent organizations registered outside Belarus. However, some interviewed individuals expressed that they try to de-politicize their activities (Informant:1 ; Informant:2 ; Informant:6, 2019) although "... things easily become political under this regime" (Informant:2, 2019). Furthermore, common with previous studies on social movements in authoritarian states (Chen and Moss, 2019:670), the respondents and their respective CSO relied on international attention and awareness raising in order to garner support for their cause, or to work for their goals (Informant:1 ; Informant:2 ; Informant:4 ; Informant:5; Informant:6, 2019). However, cooperation within the Belarusian civil society is a contested issue. While cooperation was generally seen as important, there were concerns of grant competition and lack of trust within civil society, e.g:

> "There are of course some examples of organizations who wants to cooperate with as many as possible. But that is also connected to the question of trust because many CSOs exist half-legally which means that you can not be open enough towards your partners, you have some things hidden, even within the organization. For example in our organization there is really only 3 people who know how we are really financed" (Informant:5, 2019).

As the previous quote illustrates, the coping, or adaptation, towards the negative structural environment in Belarus has led to a lack of transparency and a degree of self-censoring in CSO activities in connection with funding. Although the wish was expressed to be more transparent (Informant:2 ; Informant:5; Informant:6, 2019) it was not a viable option as:

> "Openly publish your budget for all the grants you have received from international donors, when you are not registered, you are putting yourself on a silver platter for the tax agency" (Informant:6, 2019).

This, on the other hand, creates a vicious circle as it leads to further demonization and smearing of CSOs by the regime:

> "We want to put all this information on our web page but we can't. The government also use this against human rights defenders saying "who are those, who supports them, nobody knows, people from foreign countries, don't trust them!" that's a tricky situation" (Informant:2, 2019)

8.2.3 Lack of Resource Mobilization

The interviewees expressed concerns about lack of access to people, media and domestic funding. Moreover, a central concern is the government institution for foreign aid which dictates who can use international funds or not:

> "In Belarus if your CSO receive a grant from abroad from any institution, even one dollar, you have to go to a special department of humanitarian aid and apply for registration of this money, and registration of your project. In my case i won a grant, and I applied at this department and I was declined tree times!" /../ "You can apply for grants from national embassies but all these projects need to be registered at this department so for [organization name] it is totally impossible because we are not registered and for [second organization name] it's impossible because we are blacklisted." (Informant:6, 2019).

The participants showed awareness of what activities were allowed in the eyes of the regime. However, this did not deter engagement but rather acted as a learning opportunity towards how to strategically act to achieve one's goal e.g:

"Our harassment started when we protested the construction of a nuclear power plant." /../ " as long as you don't confront the government you can use the [foreign] funds. But as you start confronting you cannot" (Informant:1, 2019).

Hence, lack of resource mobilization is not a clear deterrent, but could also be a source of goal adaptation within one's surrounding.

8.2.4 Coping With Lack of Resource Mobilization

In common with previous research, social media and the internet was generally mentioned to be a great asset in order to spread information, influence and recruit new members, despite it not being free from government control (FreedomHouse, 2019). Social media was also a way to interact with the wider population and create discussion and dialogue otherwise restricted in the "real world" (Informant:5, 2019). All respondents said that their organizations heavily relied on international funding in order to continue their operations, although some had increased their effort to be more self-financed (Informant:4 ; Informant:5; Informant:6, 2019). However, there was a general concern regarding aid-dependence, which to one respondent pushed them to follow the "softer" activities that donors wanted them to do, rather than to take a more direct approach (Informant:4, 2019). Furthermore, the lack of resources affects individual motivation and activities in a similar way, as one respondent stated:

"But i know that for some people this [lack of funds] is a big issue, so they are trying to move to to some organizations which are less critical of the government, even within civil society. So people are moving into more soft topic into civil society but still try to keep the connections with their mother organizations, and of course people are also leaving to regular businesses to make money" (Informant:6, 2019).

Hence, this quote sheds some light on why people leave CSO, material restrictions. It also shows that the softer repressive tactics of draining CSOs have a visible effect on both what people engage in and what activities CSOs do.

8.2.5 Framing of Negative POS and lack of Resource Mobilization

As noted by della Porta (2013) in section 6.2.1: negative opportunities can be perceived as opportunities depending on how the actors perceive or frame them. All respondents claimed to perceive the political environment in Belarus to be authoritarian, however, they all referred to its hybrid nature. Comparisons with other states were frequently occurring (North-Korea, Cuba, and Russia) to manifest that there is some civic space for action in Belarus. Based on the data gathered, grievances were often framed in relation to national or international law (Informant:1; Informant:2; Informant:4; Informant:5; Informant:6, 2019) e.g:

 "But we see it as our freedom of assembly, we have the right to have this support without any restrictions" (Informant:2, 2019) or "This is the situation, you don't violate any law but you protest against something that the government wants or against a government decision" /../ "Of c o u r s e we don't agree with this version of the freedom of assembly" (Informant:6, 2019).

In relation to framing theory (see section 6.2.2), this could be characterized as the participant's articulation mechanisms (what story is told). As the repressive laws are presented as unjust, the transformative function of the framing of the repressive laws could be interpreted as an illegitimate measure to hinder one's legitimate activities. Thus laws arguably are perceived in relation towards one's activities rather than their legal status. As one participant states:

"And well, you are violating the law and you need to talk to yourself honestly and say "am I ready to violate the law?" /../ "we are violating a lot of laws all the time because the law system is very strict. Even if you are not violating the law you understand that living in some authoritarian country you are under threat despite the fact whether you violate the law or not, and that means that you are simply always unsafe. Making something good is the way of making people better, and if you are employed by the organization that also makes you a bit safer to have some financial plan. So its a law violation with moral and financial benefits" (Informant:5 , 2019).

This mirrors what Opp (2009:322) argues: "the elements of frames that are conducive to protest do not have an effect on incentives, they are incentives themselves." Hence, these macro-frames of a repressive legal environment is arguably an incentive rather than solely a negative POS.

Having these perceptions towards restricting laws, in relation to their perceived illegitimacy, can further say something on the relationship between the respondents and the state, and their view on state repression. Since the repressive laws against CSOs are viewed as illegitimate, and the laws are adopted by the regime, the state itself is to some degree also framed as illegitimate. Hence a repressive act by an illegitimately framed state could by default render the activities of CSOs as legitimate, or even be a recognition of once's claims:

"Previously our complaint about the nuclear power plant it felt like no one noticed, but when we got arrested we thought that probably they [the state] know what we are doing, they know our arguments, It was like an acknowledgement *chuckles* " (Informant:1, 2019)

Furthermore, as another informant stated:

"But there is a second side to the medal, because sometimes i feel ashamed that i was never arrested because it means that I am not a true activists, I was not recognized by the government as an activist. It's completely irrational and even funny to say but that's how it feels! You feel that all my friends was arrested and i was not, what did I do wrong? Maybe I should too be more brave…" (Informant:5, 2019).

Hence, the relationship could work in the opposite direction. A lack of repression or reaction from an illegitimately framed state could push further action. This is a contrasting find in relation to the supposed effects of the linear relationship discussed in section 5 (Increased repression → higher costs/risks → less collective action). It is thus tempting to argue that repressive state laws give democratic CSO actors, not only substance for contention and adaptation (as argued by Chua (2012)), but motivation and internal legitimacy as well.

9. Concluding Remarks

Democratic CSOs in Belarus are operating in a highly hostile legal, social and political environment. However, there are still individuals willing to face the great risks and fear associated. Previous studies on civil society engagement in authoritarian states have argued for a more nuanced view of the conventional linear logic of increased repression → higher costs/risks → decreased mobilization. Social movements and protest are not uncommon events in authoritarian states, and Belarus is not an exception.

Based on Opp's (2009) synthesized model, merging micro and macro theories, using qualitative data, this study aimed at scrutinizing the effects of negative structural factors effects on individual participation in CSOs in Minsk, Belarus.

Motivations claimed by interviewed individuals for engaging in CSOs in Minsk, Belarus, seem to be dependent on several things. Firstly, people joined because of pre-existing grievances that through their frame alignment with social movements of the repressive situation in Belarus increased their preferences for acting collectively. Secondly, altruism was claimed as an important *selective incentive,* were individual identity features combined with goal preference, and being integrated into a network made them join. Thirdly, while material and social gains were beneficial, what made most stay under the repressive circumstances were the altruistic incentives behind their engagement and the responsibility and solidarity towards one's colleagues. Collective identity factors could be an underlying premises for such incentives. Conscious cost and benefit calculations were visible based on the interview statements. In informants' calculations, costs, risk, and benefits do not directly have to correlate with the effect of such on the individual doing the calculating. Once again altruism and solidarity were emphasized and arguably govern the individual calculations behind CSO engagement to a large extent, rather than the repressive risks associated. Furthermore, informants showed strategic goal adoption, coping and managing of repressive structures to continue their engagement. Most significant for this study was the fact that repressive acts from an illegitimately framed state could serve to legitimize democratic activities and incentivize further action.

Hence, this study argues that engagement in democratic CSOs in Minsk, Belarus, is primarily motivated by collectivistic incentives rather than selfish gains. How actors frame repressive structures govern the incentives they produce, rather than their direct repressive effects. Thus, repression can have a motivating effect when people in Belarusian CSOs are: mobilizing under authoritarianism.

9.1 Future studies

Based on this study's limited scope, future studies are urged to use bigger sample sizes in order to test these finding more generally. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to gather data from individuals who have left or have not joined any CSO activities as a comparison group. Lastly, future qualitative studies would benefit from interviewing participants in their native tongue.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Guide

- Introduce yourself
- Ask the participant how they are feeling

Read:

This is a interview for my Bachelor's thesis in Development Studies, majoring in Political science from Lund University. I first got interested in the political development of, and civil society actors in, Belarus after visiting Minsk during a student exchange in 2018. This thesis aims towards better understanding what motivates Belarusian people to engage in democratically oriented civil society organizations and/or activities, under an authoritarian political environment. This interview will be anonymous and your name or the name of your organization will not be mentioned during this interview, nor will it be documented in any form connected to your statement. If there is any questions you do not feel comfortable answering during this interview, you can always pass. It is accepted to end the interview during any point or retract parts or the whole interview statement, before May 29th. I will provide you with my contact information to facilitate this, if the need arises. With your consent, the interview will be recorded. Do you agree to participate under these conditions? Are there any further questions regarding me, this thesis or this interview before we begin?

*With Consent Start Recording *

"We will start the interview with some questions regarding some personal

<u>perceptions.”</u>

- Ask the participant to tell you more about what organization they are in

1. What made you get into your filed of work?

2. Can you tell me about your first engagement with your organization?

3. Why did you join a civil society organization?

4. Can you tell me about your experiences of being engaged in civil society in Belarus?

5. Can you tell me more about the challenges you face in your work?

6. What is your motivation to continue working for social and political change despite the challenges you face on a daily basis?

7. How do you view civil society actors and their role in Belarus?

8. How do you evaluate the cooperation among different civil society actors or organizations in Belarus?

(could you elaborate on if this cooperation is helpful in order to continue your engagement?)

9. Why did you join a civil society organization rather than formal politics?

<u>“Now we will move on to some of your perceptions about the political environment in Belarus.”</u>

8. How do you view your role in the political environment in Belarus in relation to your activities?

9. Can you describe your organization's relationship with governmental bodies?

10. Do you feel that there are members of parliament, politicians or opposition members that help you push your agenda?

11. Can you reflect about the perception of your activities by the Belarusian society?

(if it's indifferent or rather negative - Can you elaborate on your motivation to continue your work despite this?)

12. Do you feel that there is a general interest in Belarusian society of what you do?

(- if so, who are the main supporters of your activities? Other than international donors.)

13. Do you work or cooperate with any international actors or entities?

(If yes, what is your motivation in doing so in comparison with national actors, movements, government bodies?)

(can you evaluate if this cooperation is helpful in order to continue your engagement?)

14. What are the most important activities you do or have done in order to push for a more pluralistic, democratic environment in Belarus?

16. Do you think that in the nearest future the Belarusian political landscape will change for the better in terms of the ability of CSOs to operate and conduct their activities and advocate for change?

(if negative, what helps you stay motivated?)

17. Belarus is regarded as a specially unfavorable environment for civil society organizations with sensitive political agendas. How do you feel about the environment in Belarus?

Stop Recording

Tank you so much for your time, as you know the interview is anonymous, would you be comfortable recommending people you know to be interviewed?

Appendix B

Coding Scheme

Themes	Sub-themes	Indicators	Sample Quotes
Resource Mobilization (RM)	Lack of RM effects	Lack of access money	"I can add lack of access to resources we can not, there are not calls for projects inside Belarus" (informant:6)
		Aid-dependence	"But this [aid] create dependence" (Informant:2)
	Lack of RM Coping	International aid	"generally speaking we would not survive without the western money" (Informant:6)
Political Opportunity Structures (POS)	Negative POS effects	Fear, paranoia	"Well for some period after that I was feeling completely unsafe /../ it's a little bit paranoia (Informant:1)
		Learning, awareness	"It's hard, when you want to do activities which is not in line with the government, you can only do things for the government." (Informant:3)
	Negative POS coping	International attention	"we also think that getting attention from abroad also helps" (Informant:1)
		Self-censoring	""We want to put all this information on our web page but we can't. The

			government also use this against human rights defenders" (Informant:2)
Framing	Framing of Negative POS	Dictatorship but..	"But its a dictatorship, but not like North Korea, but a dictatorship" (Informant:1)
		Rights	"This is the situation, you don't violate any law but you protest against something that the government wants or against a government decision" (Informant6)
	Framing of lack of RM	Rights	But we see it as our freedom of assembly, we have the right to have this support without any restrictions (Informant:2)
	Individual Frames	repression → legitimacy	t felt like no one noticed, but when we got arrested we thought that probably they know what we are doing, they know our arguments, It was like an acknowledgement *Chuckle* (Informant:1)
		no repression → no legitimacy	"I was never arrested because it

		→ action	means that i am not a true activists, i was not recognized by the government as an activist" (Informant5)
Collective Action (Wide RCT + Identity as an incentive)	Incentives to join	Identity, altruism, benefit	As a background, i'm a lawyer. What motivates me is the need of people in Belarus. (Informant:2)
	Incentives to stay	Goal importance, altruism, network, collective identity	"But as far as i have entered the civil society community, who are struggling to have a better future for the country /../ i feel some responsibility towards those who are around me because they have gone through much bigger challenges than i have already but they are still keeping on struggling" (Informant:5).
	Calculations of cost, risks, and benefits	Costs risks high < Solidarity, altruism	"...You just have to ask yourself and no one else… I decided to come back because my colleague was in a very difficult situation because our office was searched and our things confiscated, the head of the organization was

			in prison i thought in that time i needed to be there, in Belarus, with my colleagues." (Informan:2)