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To Strengthen Opposition Performance:

From Hirschman to V-DEM to Strategy

A Framework to Help the Opposition in an Uncertain Democracy

Owen Lippert (PhD)

Executive Director, Opposition International

(This version includes Opposition International (OPI) Dashboard findings. OPI Dashboard sections appear as set-off panels connecting the framework to the cross-country data.)¹

How ought the Opposition respond to democratic backsliding? This essay draws on V-Dem, the Democracy Perception Index, Gamboa's comparative strategy work, and Przeworski's criterion of institutionalised uncertainty to develop practical guidance for oppositions under backsliding. The essay below suggests an answer, even if short of the answer.

I. Pulling the Perspectives Together

What best course of action can an Opposition adopt when the Government slides towards authoritarian or autocratic rule? The question is not new, but the democracy-support literature treats it too often as secondary and tends to prioritise institutional description over strategic prescription. This essay addresses scholars, analysts, and practitioners who are already past the diagnostic stage — who accept that backsliding is occurring — and are asking not just what must be done but how best to achieve it.

The philosophical foundations of the question are acknowledged here but not pursued. Rawls and Habermas illuminate the moral conditions of democratic legitimacy; the American Declaration of Independence remains the ultimate expression of principled exit. These are not subjects this essay can do justice to. Its scope is narrower: the contemporary scholarship on democratic backsliding, the institutional measures V-Dem provides, and the strategic options available to oppositions operating within the conditions those measures describe.

A recurring pattern in international democracy work illustrates the gap this essay addresses. A senior envoy arrives in-country, delivers a *démarche* to the executive about democratic erosion, and departs — without meeting the opposition. The omission reflects a settled assumption: that the opposition is a downstream product of a functioning democracy, there to be supported once institutions are restored. That assumption is mistaken. The opposition is not a by-product of democracy; it is half its beating heart — constitutive, not derivative, the

¹ The V-DEM text boxes in this document use an AI-generated summary.

organised presence that gives electoral competition, legislative accountability, and public deliberation their meaning.

Taking action carries risks: Samet (2026) notes that direct engagement can provoke backlash from the very actors it seeks to check. That caution deserves acknowledgement. But it does not dissolve the problem. The same practitioner literature documents a settled organisational preference — in international democracy promotion bodies — for civil society engagement over direct party support, driven by concerns about neutrality and the difficulty of backing imperfect actors. This arm's-length posture marginalises the actors most central to sustainable democratic competition. It is not possible to wait for a worthy opposition before supporting opposition functions.

This essay draws those related perspectives together — V-Dem's institutional measures, Gamboa's comparative strategy typology, the Democracy Perception Index, and Przeworski's criterion of institutionalised uncertainty — and produces practical suggestions for strengthening opposition performance under democratic backsliding. It tests the resulting framework against the case of Bangladesh after the February 2026 election.

OPI DASHBOARD: THE QUESTION MADE OPERATIONAL

The OPI Dashboard (Opposition International, April 2026) was built for that practical task. It applies V-Dem's opposition-specific indicators, Gamboa's strategy typology, Levitsky and Way's structural conditions, Bermeo's backsliding mechanisms, and Przeworski's institutionalized uncertainty criterion to a single diagnostic for 105 democracy-challenged countries. The dashboard makes one empirical pattern visible that is harder to see when the sources are read separately. Across every viable intervention tier in the sample, Factor 2 scores — measuring how well opposition parties are organized as institutions — are systematically lower than Factor 1 scores, which measure opposition strength and legislative accountability. The deficit is not small. India's F1–F2 deficit is 18 points; Serbia's is 14; Turkey's is 12; Bangladesh's is 8; Pakistan's is 14; Thailand's is 10. In virtually every country where intervention is viable, opposition parties have more political space than the organizational capacity to use it. The finding appears only when V-Dem's measurement, Gamboa's strategy logic, and the OPI's factor structure are read together.

The distribution of OPI scores across the 105-country sample is itself a finding. Of the original 50-country core sample, 34 countries score below 15 out of 100, indicating near-total suppression of opposition capacity. Only five score above 25, suggesting meaningful institutional footholds. The median OPI is roughly 10: a political environment in which opposition can exist but cannot effectively function. The diagnostic is most useful for the 30-odd countries that score above 15, where institutional conditions still make meaningful opposition strategy possible. For the rest, the framework's Type D category — survival mode — is the only available prescription.

II. Beyond Hirschman: Three Pairs of Agency

I first came across Hirschman in graduate school not as a class assignment, but a recommended book by a friend — *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (1970).

It has become a staple of political speech because it identifies the three primary ways people respond to failing institutions. However, his framework describes behaviors without necessarily evaluating their democratic quality. A citizen who speaks but is ignored has not exercised voice in a meaningful sense; she has merely made noise. Similarly, one who flees a country because staying is impossible has not exited so much as sought refuge.

For forty years, Hirschman's typology has come to mind as I either worked for or dealt with opposition leaders, legislators, advisors and activists in Canada, Taiwan, South America, Bangladesh and Southeast Asia, Georgia, Ukraine, and, on rare occasions, the USA.

To clear up the qualitative difference between behaviour per se and actual democratic agency, I suggest that each of Hirschman's Exit, Voice, and Loyalty states of being be paired with a defining condition:

1. Recognition and Voice: You cannot speak in your own name if the state does not recognize you as a legitimate political actor. When recognition is withheld through party bans or the criminalization of protest, voice collapses into a spectacle that the government can ignore or quarantine.

Dashboard annex: OPI DASHBOARD: RECOGNITION DEFICIT IN THE SAMPLE.

2. Autonomy and Exit: For an exit to pressure an institution, it must be a choice made by an autonomous agent, not an act of desperation. Flight rarely disciplines a regime; in places such as Venezuela or Syria, mass departures have often served the regime by removing its most vocal critics.

Dashboard annex: OPI DASHBOARD: THE EXIT-TO-VOICE CONVERSION GAP.

3. Consent and Loyalty: Principled loyalty is built on consent: the voluntary and revocable authorization of power. Without consent, loyalty is indistinguishable from fear-based compliance. This is why managed elections with 90 percent turnout provide the appearance of loyalty while lacking any democratic substance.

III. The Evidence Base

A strategic approach is only as good as the data it interprets. The following table is the spine of this version. It runs a single logical chain from the data — what V-Dem records and what DPI citizens report — through the Hirschman pair that names the democratic behavior at stake. From there it runs to the Acemoglu or Przeworski mechanism that explains why the failure matters at a deeper level, and finally to the Gamboa strategy an opposition can use to arrest it. Reading across any row answers four questions at once: what do we observe, what does it mean for democratic agency, why does it damage the state, and what can an opposition actually do.

V-Dem indicator	DPI question	Hirschman pair	Acemoglu / Przeworski mechanism	Gamboa response
Civil liberties index; political parties free to operate; minority political representation	“People have freedom of speech” / “There is political pluralism”	Voice + Recognition: citizens can only speak politically if the state treats them as legitimate actors	<i>Extractive entrenchment:</i> incumbents block new political actors to prevent the creative destruction of their own power; denied recognition removes the competition that disciplines leaders	Moderate-institutional: defend party legality and civic space; keep recognizable actors in the field so electoral competition remains real
Freedom of expression; media pluralism; alternative sources of information	“People have freedom of speech” / “There is freedom of the press”	Voice + Recognition: an opposition without media access	<i>Error-correct ion collapse:</i> without independent media the state loses the feedback signal that its	Defend media access and journalistic independence; use parliamentary footholds to

V-Dem indicator	DPI question	Hirschman pair	Acemoglu / Przeworski mechanism	Gamboa response
		makes noise, not politics	policies are failing; the Red Queen race stops	generate public record
Judicial independence; rule of law index; executive respect for the constitution	“There is a functioning rule of law” / “There is separation of powers”	Autonomy + Exit: organized exit — legal challenge, civil society action, diaspora pressure — requires a judicial environment in which it is not simply crushed	<i>Error-correct ion collapse:</i> courts that cannot rule against the executive remove the institutional channel through which policy errors are corrected; Przeworski’s “institutionalized uncertainty” requires that courts can make a government lose	Moderate-institutional: use courts and legislative committees before escalating; each step up the constitutional sequence shows the channel was tried
Clean elections index; election management body	“Elections are free and fair” / “Voting makes a difference”	Loyalty + Consent: elections are the process through which consent is	<i>Information blackout:</i> staged elections are, in Acemoglu’s phrase, “a	Protect election integrity through parallel vote tabulation, scrutineer

V-Dem indicator	DPI question	Hirschman pair	Acemoglu / Przeworski mechanism	Gamboa response
autonomy; suffrage		periodically renewed or withdrawn; a managed election produces the form of loyalty without its democratic substance	spectacle, the ending of which is known in advance” — they sever the informational link between citizens and rulers and destroy the basis for meaningful consent; Przeworski’s test — can today’s loser come back? — fails when results are predetermined	training, and legal challenge; boycott only as a last resort and only when institutional channels are entirely closed
Government transparency; anti-corruption; legislative oversight of the executive	“Government is transparent” / “Politicians are accountable”	Loyalty + Consent: without visible accountability, compliance and loyalty become indistinguishable from the outside; citizens	<i>Information blackout:</i> the DPI scores government transparency at 2.4 out of 5 globally — the lowest dimension across all 100 countries surveyed;	Parliamentary oversight, shadow cabinet accountability work, and international certification of democratic injury

V-Dem indicator	DPI question	Hirschman pair	Acemoglu / Przeworski mechanism	Gamboa response
		cannot consent to what they cannot see	Acemoglu's analysis of elite capture explains why: incumbents have direct incentives to suppress the information that would allow citizens or courts to hold them accountable	
Civic society repression; freedom of association; CSO entry and exit	"People can freely form political organisations"	Autonomy + Exit: civil society is the organized form of exit that disciplines rather than depletes — it converts individual grievance into collective pressure	<i>Extractive entrenchment:</i> suppression of civil society removes the organized competition that could generate alternative leadership; it is the domestic equivalent of the entry barrier Acemoglu identifies in	Protect associational space; connect civil society to parliamentary record; use diaspora networks to sustain documentation and international advocacy

**V-Dem
indicator**

**DPI
question**

**Hirschman
pair**

**Acemoglu /
Przeworski
mechanism**

**Gamboa
response**

economic
extractivism

Reading the table as a whole, three things become clear.

First, V-Dem and DPI are not measuring the same things at different levels of abstraction. V-Dem records what institutions look like from outside. DPI records what citizens experience from inside. When they agree, the diagnosis is solid. When they diverge — V-Dem shows clean elections, DPI shows citizens think votes change nothing — the gap between the columns is itself the finding: institutions are intact in form but hollow in practice.

Second, each row in the table connects the datum to a specific Acemoglu or Przeworski mechanism. The point is not that low V-Dem scores are bad. The point is that each type of low score predicts a specific kind of state damage: extractive entrenchment when recognition collapses, error-correction failure when voice and media are closed, information blackout when elections are managed, Przeworski's alternation test failing when consent is severed from results. The analysis names which failure is coming, not just that something is wrong.

A note on the table's limits under closed autocracy. The Gamboa column in each row presupposes that at least some formal institutional channels remain open — parliament, courts, independent media, electoral commissions. That assumption holds for countries in the upper half of the OPI sample, where moderate-institutional strategy retains a foothold. It does not hold for countries that have crossed into closed autocracy. V-Dem's 2026 dataset (v16) places Bangladesh at that threshold for the first time — Liberal Democracy Index 0.12, Electoral Democracy Index 0.20, both with statistically significant downward ten-year trend markers. For countries at or below that line, the table's Gamboa responses require a separate reading: the relevant strategy shifts from moderate-institutional (Type A) to what Gamboa classifies as survival-mode or diaspora-led alternatives. Appendix A addresses Bangladesh specifically.

Third, the Gamboa column shows that these are not abstract threats. Each corresponds to a category of opposition action that has a track record. The choices are not unlimited: they are constrained by what Acemoglu's analysis says is still salvageable and by what Gamboa's evidence says has worked in comparable cases.

IV. Why the Combination Is New

The point of the combination is practical, not taxonomic.

Others have added to Hirschman's menu. Caryl Rusbult and Dan Farrell added neglect as a fourth response, in the 1980s. Management scholars have since added silence, sabotage, and half a dozen other categories. Each adds an entry. None supplies the conditions that would tell us when the entries count, in democratic terms, for anything.

A second line of work has tightened the original. Keith Dowding, Peter John, Thanos Mergoupis, and Mark Van Vugt wrote a rigorous formal treatment, in 2000. William Roberts

Clark, Matt Golder, and Sona Golder recast the framework in game-theory terms. These are real gains in precision. They do not address the democratic question either.

The theory literatures on recognition, autonomy, and consent developed on parallel tracks. Taylor, Honneth, Fraser, and Kymlicka on recognition. Pettit, Skinner, and the republican tradition on autonomy as freedom from domination. Habermas and the wider Rawlsian tradition on consent and legitimacy. These literatures rarely cite Hirschman. When they do, it is not to build a shared framework with him.

The closest example to what I am proposing is the literature on multicultural citizenship. Ayelet Shachar writes on the clash of individual and group autonomy. Chandran Kukathas makes exit the central liberal principle. Susan Moller Okin and Leslie Green have written on the internal government of groups. Each of these is adjacent. None asks how those concepts would guide an opposition deciding what to do next.

Acemoglu's work — with James Robinson in *Why Nations Fail* (2012) and *The Narrow Corridor* (2019), and with Simon Johnson in *Power and Progress* (2023) — adds a consequentialist pillar that this framework relies on explicitly. His argument is not that democracy is intrinsically valuable, though it may be, but that inclusive political institutions are *functionally necessary* for long-run state viability. When those institutions erode, the consequences are not only political but deep: the state loses the mechanisms it depends on to survive.

Acemoglu's autopsy of democratic failure identifies three compounding pathologies.

The first is *extractive entrenchment*. In non-democratic or democratically eroded states, power concentrates in a narrow stratum. That stratum develops a predictable fear of creative destruction: new actors, new technologies, and new economic forces that would displace them politically. The response is not reform but blockage. Elites use repression, entry barriers, and captured institutions to protect their position — and in doing so, cut off the competitive channels through which the state renews its leadership and its capacity. The problem is not simply that bad leaders are chosen; it is that the system is built to be hostile to any actor who might replace them. Industrializing Russia and Austria-Hungary are the paradigm cases: railways and printing were blocked not because they were economically unsound, but because they were politically threatening.

The second is *error-correction collapse*. Acemoglu and Robinson's "shackled Leviathan" — the state that remains in the narrow corridor of liberty — depends on a continuous Red Queen race between state power and societal power. When the balance tips, the feedback loop fails. Without opposition scrutiny, independent media, judicial review, and free assembly, a state cannot learn that its policies are failing. Errors compound. The path to replacement — through electoral accountability or institutional pressure — is precisely what backsliding

incumbents dismantle first. As Acemoglu stated at the Atlantic Council in 2024: the “cooperative, positive-sum relationship between state and society collapses when trust in democratic institutions is eroded.”

The third is *the information blackout*. When the channels that allow citizens to signal discontent are closed — media captured, opposition banned, elections staged — the state loses the information it needs to adjust course, and citizens lose the information they need to meaningfully consent. This is the condition Acemoglu identifies in his election-quality analysis: staged elections are “just a spectacle, the ending of which is known in advance” — they provide the appearance of authorization while severing the informational connection between rulers and governed.

Acemoglu provides the theory that turns V-Dem’s scorecard into a causal account. Lower scores on voice and accountability are not merely symptomatic; they predict the three compounding failures described above — extractive entrenchment, error-correction collapse, and information blackout — each of which the Gamboa column is designed to arrest.

The connection to Gamboa is direct. Each pathology corresponds to a failure her strategy typology is designed to arrest. Staying inside parliament and courts preserves the societal side of the Red Queen race; withdrawing concedes the accountability terrain that keeps the feedback loop open. Defending party legality and media access contests extractive entrenchment by keeping competitive actors in the field. Protecting electoral integrity addresses the information blackout: it keeps consent more than spectacle, and — as Acemoglu’s staged-election analysis notes — prevents results from becoming “just a spectacle, the ending of which is known in advance.” An opposition that stays institutional, stays recognizable, and stays electorally engaged is maintaining the conditions under which state failure, in Acemoglu’s sense, remains preventable. Recognition matters here as much as strategy: it turns an opposition from a noisemaker into a visible source of alternatives, one whose presence the state cannot write off as noise.

The echo one hears is that of Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek’s assertion that central planners cannot efficiently allocate resources because they cannot access the dispersed knowledge that prices encode. The parallel for authoritarian politics is exact. A regime that suppresses its opposition does not merely silence dissent; it destroys the signal that shows when its own policies are failing, when its legitimacy claims are no longer believed, and when the ground is shifting beneath it. Regimes that cannot hear that signal do not last indefinitely — they are undone not only by the moral outrage of those they oppress, but by the accumulated cost of decisions made in the absence of honest information.

The practical question is narrower: what must be present for opposition action to count, politically and democratically?

Democracy support, democracy scholarship, and opposition practice each tend to work with part of the picture. Election observers focus on consent. Human-rights groups work on recognition and autonomy. Civil-society funders concentrate on autonomy. Opposition parties live in voice and exit. Each is real work; none scopes the whole.

V. Evidence: V-Dem

The institutional scorecard: where a country stands on each pair, measured from the outside.

My working experience shapes what follows. The argument becomes useful only when tied to evidence about a particular place and time.

V-Dem is the most comprehensive comparative dataset we have on the condition of democracies. It covers more than two hundred political units, going back to 1789 for many of them, and breaks democratic quality into hundreds of variables grouped into electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian components.

Its role here is diagnostic. For recognition and voice, its civil-liberties, minority-inclusion, and power-distribution measures show whether groups are treated as political equals.

For autonomy and exit, V-Dem's liberal component — judicial independence, rule of law, and executive constraints — shows whether autonomous action is possible. For consent and loyalty, its electoral measures show whether authorization is genuine.

Dashboard annex: OPI DASHBOARD: THE 14 OPPOSITION-SPECIFIC INDICATORS (COPPEDGE SELECTION).

Two important measures fall outside V-Dem's core coverage. Exit is not a V-Dem category; it has to be filled in from migration and mobility data and from the political-emigration scholarship. Loyalty is harder still, and has to be inferred from participation and civic-engagement data, with careful attention to the difference between chosen participation and compelled compliance.

That limitation belongs in the analysis rather than in a methodological footnote. The covered measures carry most of the diagnostic weight; the missing ones require supplementary evidence.

For each country, V-Dem yields a scorecard: where institutions are strong, where they have weakened, and how they have moved over the past decade. For a Bangladesh, a Hungary, a Philippines, a Poland, or a Venezuela, the scorecard will not tell practitioners much they do not already sense. What it does is break that sense into institutional claims that can be checked against the data and against the experience of in-country actors.

Dashboard annex: OPI DASHBOARD: SCORE DISTRIBUTION AND THE VELOCITY
ADDITION (COPPEDGE CRITIQUE).

VI. Perception: The Democracy Perception Index

The citizen scorecard: whether people experience the same conditions V-Dem records. When the two diverge, the gap is the finding.

V-Dem is scored by experts, and Gamboa tracks what opposition elites do. Together they tell us what observers see in institutions and how opposition coalitions respond.

The Democracy Perception Index (DPI), produced annually by Nira Data with the Alliance of Democracies Foundation, adds the citizen side. It surveys more than 100,000 people across 100 countries on elections, rule of law, speech, pluralism, transparency, civic education, peaceful transition, and separation of powers.

The DPI's role in this framework is to measure citizen experience of the same conditions V-Dem measures institutionally. V-Dem tells us whether the institutions that enable each pair are functioning; DPI tells us whether citizens experience those institutions as functioning. The two do not always agree — and when they diverge, the gap is itself revelatory.

In the recognition–voice pair, the DPI's freedom-of-speech and political-pluralism measures capture whether citizens see themselves as counted political actors. A population that rates political pluralism very low is reporting, from the inside, the same recognition gap that V-Dem's civil-liberties indices measure from the outside.

Autonomy–exit turns on a different set of perceptions. The DPI's separation-of-powers and rule-of-law readings capture the perceived strength of the institutional environment in which autonomy either exists or does not. Civic education adds a further connection: a population with low civic education scores is less likely to understand its own legal options for organized exit.

Consent–loyalty is where the DPI is most revealing. Its impact-of-elections measure shows precisely whether citizens believe elections actually change things. A population that scores low here has withdrawn consent in everything but outward form — loyal in appearance, compliant in substance. Government transparency, the DPI's lowest-scoring measure globally (2.4 out of 5 in the 2025 survey), captures whether citizens have enough information to consent meaningfully at all.

The argument for adding DPI to the evidence base is this. Where V-Dem and DPI agree, the diagnostic is robust. Where they diverge, the divergence is itself diagnostic. A country can score high on V-Dem's electoral part while its citizens believe elections do not matter. That

gap — institutional consent without felt consent — is precisely the condition in which loyalty quietly converts to compliance without any visible line being crossed.

A methodological note. Primary survey work of sufficient scale and cross-national comparability is prohibitively expensive and logistically beyond the reach of a project operating across 50 or more countries simultaneously. To maintain the integrity of a 50-country framework — and to build the Voice/Consent pair with statistical confidence rather than impressionistic inference — this analysis relies on the DPI as a standardized data source rather than commissioning independent surveying. The DPI's annual coverage of more than 100,000 respondents across 100 countries, using consistent survey instruments, provides the geographic breadth and methodological consistency that no single-project survey could realistically replicate. This is a deliberate choice, not a shortcut: the DPI's high-fidelity picture of citizen perceptions — of how people actually experience the institutions V-Dem measures from outside — is precisely what allows the pairs framework to function as a diagnostic rather than a description.

VII. Strategy: Gamboa

The comparative record of what has worked — and what has backfired — when oppositions resist democratic erosion.

Laura Gamboa's *Resisting Backsliding* (Cambridge, 2022) gives us the best comparative evidence we have on which opposition strategies produce which outcomes during democratic erosion. She sorts opposition responses along two lines: moderate versus radical, and institutional versus extra-institutional. Four boxes.

Her central finding is that moderate, institutional strategies tend to succeed more often than the other three. But the success is conditional. It requires opposition unity, sustained mobilization, and institutional channels that hold up long enough for the strategy to work. When those conditions are not present, being in the 'right' strategic box does not save you.

Samet's (2026) synthesis of the opposition strategy literature adds an account of why each strategy type generates its own counter-move. Party organisation increases legibility and thus targeting vectors for selective repression and cooptation. Coalition formation reveals the opposition's electoral threat, triggering preemptive crackdowns that can be more damaging than the original fragmentation. Protests have increasingly precipitated crackdowns as regimes updated their playbooks after the post-Soviet Colour Revolutions. Read alongside Gamboa, Samet explains not only which strategic posture is likely to succeed but why the response to success can be more dangerous than the response to weakness.

Samet's legibility argument is correct as far as it goes: visible organisation is dangerous, and regimes have learned to use an opposition's own structures against it. But the tension he identifies is not simply a design problem to be solved by building capacity in less visible

forms. It goes deeper. The opposition that continues to organise, register, recruit, and run candidates under conditions of known risk is not making a strategic error. It is making a political statement — one with a long pedigree. The American Declaration of Independence put it plainly: that mankind ‘are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable’ but that when ‘a long train of abuses and usurpations’ makes sufferable suffering no longer possible, it becomes both right and duty to act — accepting the costs that action entails. For the opposition operating under electoral authoritarianism, remaining organised and visible under pressure is not reckless endangerment. It is principled exit: the deliberate acceptance of exposure as the price of maintaining the political presence that makes future voice, autonomy, and consent possible at all.

Gamboa’s evidence is about what works, not about what is admirable; and Samet’s backlash warning remains a practical constraint, not a reason to stop organising.

The argument is empirical, not moral. Gamboa does not claim that moderate-institutional opposition is more admirable than the alternatives. She claims that, under the conditions she specifies, it has more often produced what opposition coalitions say they want: a slowing or reversing of backsliding, or at minimum the preservation of the channels through which a future reversal becomes possible.

Gamboa's primary cases come from Latin America — Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia — which is where the evidence is richest and most systematically compared.

Malaysia's 2018 general election is the clearest non-Latin American confirmation. Pakatan Harapan — ideologically diverse, and including former ruling-party defectors, Islamic-party members, and veteran opposition leaders — contested rather than boycotted. It built a coalition around one objective, defeating UMNO, and kept enough message discipline to campaign on corruption and governance rather than internal disagreement.

That is what Gamboa predicts for moderate-institutional strategy under competitive authoritarianism: sustained engagement, even under unfair conditions, can accumulate pressure until an opening appears. A local IDEAS commentary described the result as the peaceful electoral defeat of a sixty-year regime and cited William Case's phrase “bottom up replacement” for overthrowing electoral authoritarianism through the ballot box (IDEAS, “Democratic Transitions and the Might of the State,” first published 4 July 2018, <https://www.ideas.org.my/democratic-transitions-and-the-might-of-the-state/>).

Dashboard annex: OPI DASHBOARD: GAMBOA DISTRIBUTION ACROSS 105 COUNTRIES.

Two features of Gamboa's account matter for us. First, she studies the opposition as a strategic actor. That actor is rarely a single party. It is almost always a coalition. Her findings speak directly to the coordination problems coalitions face. Second, her conditions are about

behavior, not rhetoric. The question is not whether opposition leaders sound moderate. It is whether they behave moderately — including through the deliberate provocations that backsliding incumbents typically stage to break opposition moderation.

Gamboa's strategy types are most useful when read against the conditions V-Dem and DPI identify. The cases she codes as successful under moderate-institutional strategy are cases where institutional autonomy was still sufficiently intact to make parliament, courts, and formal complaint channels — cases where V-Dem's liberal component and the DPI's separation-of-powers scores were degraded but not collapsed. In those contexts, the opposition's choice to stay institutional was strengthening the autonomy–exit pair: preserving the conditions under which future exit or voice would remain meaningful choices.

Put V-Dem, DPI, and Gamboa together, and a fuller practitioner picture emerges. V-Dem identifies the institutional state of each pair. DPI identifies whether citizens experience those same conditions as functional. Gamboa identifies which strategic options have succeeded in countries with similar institutional conditions and citizen perceptions. The analysis ties all three together by showing what each strategic choice is likely to strengthen and what it is likely to concede across the six elements.

VIII. The Country Strategy Note

What the framework produces at the far end: a diagnostic, a strategic menu, and a practical translation.

The end product is a country strategy note with three parts: a diagnostic, a strategic menu, and a practical translation.

The diagnostic reads V-Dem and DPI together. The menu asks which Gamboa strategies have worked in comparable cases. The translation turns the result into political language opposition actors can use — no coefficients, no moral exhortation.

A country strategy note is not a prediction. It does not tell opposition actors what to do. It tells them where things stand across the core conditions, what has worked in similar situations, and what the likely consequences of their available options are — which courses of action carry which risks and which rewards, and what each choice strengthens or concedes. The choices stay theirs.

OPI DASHBOARD: STRATEGY NOTE FORMAT AS PROOF OF CONCEPT

The OPI Dashboard puts the country strategy note into practice. Each country's matrix row carries an auto-generated strategy note that compresses the framework's diagnostic into a single line: strategy type · primary gap · international leverage · Bermeo mechanism · Przeworski conflict type · inflation risk · opportunity window. The Bangladesh note reads: '**Dual-track A+B: legislative + civil mobilization. Gap: party cohesion. Leverage: HIGH. Post-Revolution. Transitional. Post-Aug 2024 revolution; constitutional moment open — CRITICAL.**' That compression is the point: making sophisticated analytical conclusions usable without losing their content.

The dashboard's IDEA Activities tab extends the strategic menu with 58 specific program activities drawn from International IDEA's democracy-support catalogue, organized by Gamboa type and scored by a context-fit algorithm that weights: Gamboa type alignment (+12), Bermeo mechanism match (+10), remedy fit to country profile (+8), Przeworski sequence position (+5 in-sequence / -4 for skipping), and deficiency-dimension targeting (+6 for High deficiency in matched area). The top three activities per country are the operational translation of the strategic menu into program decisions. For a country experiencing election-day fraud (a Bermeo mechanism), parallel vote tabulation and scrutineer training rank above constitutional litigation even if the country is assigned Type A. For a country in executive aggrandizement, the reverse applies. No single framework, previously, has made this mechanism-sensitive adjustment systematic.

What the note describes, in the end, is the work a democratic opposition is supposed to do — the same work the V-Dem opposition indicators measure, and the same work that, done well, raises the quality of governance overall. Holding the government to account across the relevant institutions. Keeping institutional channels open where they exist. Widening the space for democratic agency where it is narrow. The vocabulary names the work, the data measure it, and Gamboa's evidence shows what has tended to succeed.

IX. What This Offers Opposition Coalitions

The coordination problem inside coalitions, and how a shared framework gives factions a vocabulary for their differences.

Opposition coalitions have a coordination problem that deserves its own treatment. Anyone who has worked inside one knows the pattern: different member parties and civil-society groups bring different risks, constituencies, theories of the regime, and time horizons.

A minority party whose recognition is being degraded reads the situation differently from a professional-class party losing autonomy. Election-focused civil society often disagrees with protest-focused civil society. The disagreements are real, and the meetings can be long.

These are not usually sectarian differences in the ordinary sense. They are differences in which piece of democratic agency is most immediate to the people each faction represents.

Coalitions without a shared framework handle these differences in one of two unhelpful ways. They paper over them with compromise rhetoric that satisfies no faction's actual strategic reading — which produces platforms that fail Gamboa's unity-of-behavior test even when they pass the unity-of-rhetoric test. Or they let the differences harden into breaches, with each faction insisting the others are betraying the cause. That produces the fragmentation Gamboa's evidence most strongly ties to failure.

This approach offers a third way. It gives members of a coalition a shared vocabulary for understanding what each faction prioritizes and what the consequences of each strategic option are for the different elements of democratic agency. The method does not ask any of them to concede just because they are asking for more than others.

A recognition-focused party and an autonomy-focused party can see that they are each defending a different democratic condition, not competing for priority inside a single pool of concern.

This is not the claim that the framework settles coalition disputes. It is the claim that it puts the partners at ease because each has a say in defining any zero-sum choices.

Dashboard annex: OPI DASHBOARD: DIAGNOSING THE COALITION COORDINATION PROBLEM.

X. Przeworski: From Framework to Practical Strategy

The criterion that holds the framework together: institutionalized uncertainty, and the line an opposition must not cross in defending it.

The analysis so far is diagnostic. V-Dem, DPI, and Gamboa help identify conditions and available strategies. Przeworski adds the line between ordinary political loss and rule-closing action.

Adam Przeworski supplies the bridge. Across *Democracy and the Market*, *Crises of Democracy*, and later interviews and essays, he holds to a spare account: democracy is the method by which conflicts are processed through elections.

Somebody wins, somebody loses, and the loser suffers. But the loser remains free to organize, compete, and try to win again. Przeworski calls the condition that makes this possible institutionalized uncertainty: the next outcome is unknown, the rules are stable, and no player can make her own future defeat impossible.

Samet (2026) identifies how institutionalised uncertainty erodes from the opposition side. When a coalition performs strongly — Cambodia’s mid-2010s united front, Turkey’s successive coalition formations, Venezuela under Maduro — the strong performance constitutes new information for the incumbent about the threat it faces. The rational response is not accommodation but preemption: dissolving the opposition party, imprisoning its leaders, or escalating repression precisely because the electoral challenge has become credible. Przeworski’s test — can the loser come back? — fails here not through pre-emptive rule-closing but through post-performance crackdown that removes the actors who demonstrated they could win.

Przeworski's account does two things at once: it names what must be protected, and it sets a boundary around what the opposition may legitimately do.

Institutionalized uncertainty gives the analysis its test. A country whose citizens speak but are not heard cannot produce genuinely uncertain elections; the speech is not registering as political input. A country whose exits are flights rather than chosen departures has the same problem from the other side: the population least attached to the regime is departing, leaving the regime less constrained, not more. A country whose loyalty is compliance has, in the meaningful sense, no losers — only those temporarily obedient and those who have given up.

Dashboard annex: OPI DASHBOARD: PRZEWORSKI OPERATIONALIZED — IU SCORE, CONFLICT TYPE, AND ESCALATION SEQUENCE.

The boundary follows from the same place. An opposition may oppose a government sharply, even urgently, without denying its basic right to govern.

To deny that standing is to make politics existential. That is the condition under which losers stop accepting losses and winners stop tolerating the prospect of theirs.

The distinction — between the right to govern and the right to foreclose future alternation — is the working line for an opposition strategy under erosion. The opposition should accept ordinary defeat. It should resist moves that make future defeat permanent or future victory meaningless. Przeworski's contribution is that the distinction is not merely intuitive. It runs

deeper than tactics. It is the difference between losses one can come back from and losses one cannot.

XI. Strategic Guidance

The diagnostic becomes useful only when it disciplines choices.

The following directives are not a recipe. They are a way of moving from diagnosis to judgment.

Accept ordinary loss; contest irreversible loss

The opposition should accept that losing votes, offices, and policy fights is part of what democracy is. It should contest moves that make future defeat permanent or future victory meaningless. A government may have the right to govern and still take actions that undermine democratic competition itself.

Holding those two claims distinct — and applying different vocabularies, different tactics, and different urgencies to each — is the first piece of strategic discipline.

Diagnose the level of conflict before choosing tactics

Policy conflict, office conflict, institutional hardball, and rule-closing action call for different responses. Treating them as identical produces either overreaction or passivity, and incumbents know how to provoke both.

The opposition's first question is not how hard to fight. It is what kind of conflict is this.

Escalate by constitutional sequence

Escalation should run through a public sequence: parliamentary objection, committee evidence, legal challenge, cross-party appeal, civil-society mobilization, public demonstration, election defense, international attention. The sequence shows, at each stage, that the opposition has used the available channel before reaching for the next. Skipping the sequence raises the stakes too quickly and lets the incumbent portray oversight claims as destabilization.

Gamboa's evidence on the costs of radical extra-institutional moves under erosion conditions is the evidence that refutes the long-term winnability of a Bolivarian upheaval.

Mobilize around institutions, not personalities

Mobilization should attach to democratic functions — independent courts, fair elections, impartial administration, parliamentary oversight, media pluralism, opposition rights, minority representation. Mobilization framed as the removal of a particular leader is the pattern Gamboa's Venezuelan cases warn against. It gives the incumbent the easiest available account of the opposition: that it rejects democracy itself.

Convert exit into voice

The autonomy–exit gap is the one the framework most often flags as least developed, and the one most influenced by the condition of opposition’s organization. Diaspora actors can fund documentation, legal defense, media work, policy expertise, reform monitoring, and international advocacy. Civil society can preserve evidence and train citizens in nonviolent discipline. Parties can use parliamentary footholds — even modest ones — to convert private grievance into public accountability. The conversion is not automatic. It remains to be built through traditional organizing. Digital outreach is an icy cold call.

Reframe loyalty as constitutional loyalty

Loyal opposition does not mean loyalty to the incumbent. It means loyalty to a system in which opponents may govern if they win under fair rules — and refusal to allow winners to rewrite the rules so they cannot lose. This is the deepest connection between Hirschman and Przeworski. Loyalty keeps actors inside the democratic game, but only when the game remains meaningfully reversible.

Treat international attention as certification, not substitution

External actors should not become the opposition's substitute constituency. Their useful role is certification: documenting closure, confirming institutional claims, protecting civic space, supporting credible data, and rewarding restraint when restraint is democratically disciplined. External support strengthens domestic voice. It does not replace it.

XII. Conclusion: what is an opposition to do?

The practical answer is to diagnose which part of democratic agency is being damaged, then choose the strategy that keeps future alternation possible. The opposition's task is not simply to sound louder, mobilize harder, or win the next news cycle. It is to preserve the conditions under which it can organize, contest, lose, return, and win.

The first question is recognition–voice. Are parties, movements, media, and civic groups still treated as legitimate political actors? If not, the priority is to make voice count again: defend party legality, civic space, media access, and the right to organize.

The second question is autonomy–exit. Can citizens and organizations still act without permission from the incumbent, and can exit be converted into pressure rather than disappearance? If autonomy is collapsing, the priority is to protect courts, unions, associations, diaspora networks, independent media, and the practical channels through which citizens can act.

The third question is consent–loyalty. Do elections and constitutional rules still allow today's losers to become tomorrow's winners? If consent is being hollowed out, the priority is to

defend the rules of alternation: election integrity, term limits, impartial administration, judicial independence, and limits on winner-take-all constitutional change.

That is the global use of this approach. A Serbian opposition leader could ask whether the binding constraint is captured media and unequal recognition, weak institutional autonomy, or elections that no longer generate meaningful consent. A Venezuelan opposition leader could ask which forms of recognition remain, which exits can still be converted into pressure, and what would make future consent credible rather than staged.

The strategic rule is simple: accept ordinary political loss; resist irreversible loss. Work inside institutions when they still preserve future competition. Escalate when the rules are being closed. Use international attention to certify democratic injury, not to replace domestic constituencies. Coordinate assistance around the missing pair rather than around donor fashion or organizational habit.

Bangladesh, in Appendix A, is a demonstration of that method. It is not the limit of the argument. The same questions can be asked wherever an opposition faces democratic backsliding and must decide whether to contest, negotiate, mobilize, or defend the rules that make future contestation possible.

Appendix A. Bangladesh, April 2026 — A Demonstration of the Approach

The country is a few months past the February 2026 election that ended eighteen months of interim government and brought the Bangladesh Nationalist Party to power under Tarique Rahman, with Jamaat-e-Islami and the youth-based National Citizen Party (NCP) seated as the 11-Party opposition alliance.

V-Dem Update (May 2026): Bangladesh has entered V-Dem's 2026 dataset (v16, published March 2026) as a closed autocracy — the first time it has held that classification. Its Liberal Democracy Index score is 0.12 (rank 133/202) and its Electoral Democracy Index is 0.20 (rank 140/202). Both carry statistically significant downward ten-year trend markers. The EIU Democracy Index 2025 recorded Bangladesh's steepest single-year fall of any country in its sample — 25 places — and its Corruption Perceptions Index 2025 score is 24/100, eighteen points below the global average. These figures reflect the Hasina years, not the post-August 2024 interim period; V-Dem's annual update will not capture the February 2026 election until the 2027 release. They are included here because they set the baseline against which the current opening must be read — and because the closed-autocracy classification has direct implications for the Gamboa strategy column (see Section III note).

OPI DASHBOARD: BANGLADESH FULL PROFILE (APRIL 2026)

OPI Score: 18/100 · Velocity: RISING (fastest improvement in 105-country sample)

Bangladesh's OPI of 18 is not low because the opposition is structurally weak. It reflects a specific, diagnosable deficit: the Awami League's fifteen years in power systematically dismantled opposition organizational infrastructure rather than just suppressing opposition activity. The distinction matters for programming. An opposition that lacks organizational capacity is in a different situation from one that lacks political space. Bangladesh, uniquely in the sample, has more political space — rapidly opened post-August 2024 — than organizational capacity to use it.

OPI Deficiency Profile:

- **Opposition Autonomy (OppAut): M** — Dramatically improved from High under Hasina; parties now operate freely.
- **Legislative Oversight (LegOvr): M** — Parliament functioning in transitional mode; oversight capacity being rebuilt.
- **Party Freedom (PtyFree): M** — Open to new party formation; AL ban narrows pluralism.
- **Civil Liberties (CivLib): M** — Press and assembly rights substantially recovered; sixteen political killings signal a contested opening.

- **Electoral Integrity (ElecInt): M** — February 2026 most credible election since 2008; new electoral framework not yet consolidated.
- **Party Cohesion (PtyCoh): H** — CRITICAL GAP: F1=20, F2=12, deficit -8 points. All parties lack subnational infrastructure after fifteen years of AL atrophying the opposition.
- **International Leverage (IntlPres): M** — Garment-industry GSP access (EU/US), IFI programs, bilateral aid — real conditionality pathways.
- **Intra-Regime Splits (RegSplit): H** — Military role ambiguous; business elite divided; BNP internal tensions; NCP–Jamaat ideological distance.

Strategic Opportunity Tier: HIGH

Bangladesh ranks #2 in the 105-country sample by strategic opportunity. The three Gamboa conditions all hold: external dependency (garment industry and IFI relationships); institutional footholds (parliament, courts, independent media); and international attention (post-revolution reform commissions under active global observation).

The scorecard

The six-part scorecard, as of April 2026, looks like this.

Recognition has opened since the July 2024 uprising that brought down Sheikh Hasina, though the ban on the Awami League narrows it for a substantial plurality of the population — defensible on the 2024 killings, heavy in its effects. In V-Dem terms, minority-inclusion and civil-liberties measures have improved, but the Awami League ban introduces a deliberate recognition gap that V-Dem’s power-distribution measures would flag as ongoing.

Voice has significantly opened. Press, assembly, and protest rights have recovered sharply. Sixteen political killings since December 2025 signal a contested opening, not suppression. V-Dem’s freedom-of-expression measures are improving; the DPI’s freedom-of-speech measure would be the citizen-side check on whether that improvement is felt.

Autonomy is recovering. Judicial independence, civil-society space, and independent media are all better than at any time since 2014. V-Dem’s liberal component — the institutional base for the autonomy–exit pair — is in positive motion.

Exit remains underdeveloped as a channel of democratic feedback, with some ten million Bangladeshis abroad and fewer than forty-five thousand on the Election Commission’s biometric rolls. Diaspora voice has been remittance, not politics. This is the autonomy–exit

gap in its starkest form: a large emigrant population whose exit has not translated into the organized feedback loop Hirschman described.

Consent has been actively tested. The February election was the most genuine the country has seen since 2008, and the accompanying referendum on the July National Charter passed with sixty-eight per cent of voters in favor. Whether citizens experience the result as genuine authorisation — the DPI's impact-of-elections measure — is the live question.

Loyalty is undecided. Whether civil servants, judges, and editors will serve principled loyalty under the new BNP government, or shift to new-incumbent compliance, is the question on which the next year will turn.

Dashboard annex: OPI DASHBOARD: BANGLADESH STRUCTURAL DIAGNOSTICS.

The strategic reading

What this approach lets us see, that the scorecard alone does not, is what the two coalitions now in place are actually choosing between.

The BNP won a two-thirds majority, 209 of 299 seats. By William Riker's size principle — a rational actor forms a coalition just large enough to win and no larger — the majority is oversized.

Every additional MP dilutes the patronage pool and invites district-level scandal. Sobhan's Counterpoint notes that the BNP won only thirteen of Dhaka's twenty seats, and that Tarique carried his own constituency by just over four thousand votes: a paper supermajority on thin ground in the capital.

The opposition, by contrast, is the 11-Party Alliance led by Jamaat-e-Islami, seated with seventy-seven seats. The NCP — the student-founded party born out of the July 2024 uprising — sits inside it with six. Robert Axelrod's useful correction to Riker applies here: coalitions held together by shared policy outlast coalitions held together only by the arithmetic of winning. The Jamaat–NCP pairing is complementary in practice but ideologically distant. How long it endures is the first strategic question.

Dashboard annex: OPI DASHBOARD: TOP THREE RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES FOR BANGLADESH (11-PARTY ALLIANCE).

There is a deeper difficulty that neither Gamboa's typology nor the OPI scorecard fully captures. Jon Danilowicz, writing on 10 May 2026, drew attention to an observation by Apurba Jahangir in Counterpoint: that Bangladesh has never been governed by one person or one party alone, but also by a class — 'a class that positioned itself close enough to power to absorb its warmth.' The question Jahangir poses is whether Bangladesh can build a republic where proximity to power is no longer the country's most valuable currency. For an opposition trying to operate on principled grounds, this is not a marginal concern. Where the

political class has been shaped over decades by accommodation and proximity as survival strategies, principled opposition — opposition that refuses patronage networks, insists on policy rather than access, and holds its institutional commitments even under pressure — is working against a deeply embedded norm. The formal opening of democratic space does not automatically dissolve that norm. It may be as much a constraint on the 11-Party Alliance as any institutional barrier.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) identified a parallel dynamic in its February 2026 assessment. Bangladesh's CPI score of 24/100 showed a one-point improvement on the previous year — which TIB attributed not to genuine reform but to optimism generated by the July uprising. The reality that followed, TIB found, had not confirmed that optimism. The interim government had not followed through on its reform commitments, and TIB described what it called the “our turn” syndrome: new actors, having arrived in proximity to power, exploiting the same extractive systems as their predecessors. This is Acemoglu's extractive entrenchment mechanism in real time — and it adds weight to Jahangir's point. The formal opening of democratic space does not automatically displace the class dynamics that sustained the old system. Principled opposition, in that environment, is not just resisting a government; it is contesting an accommodation norm that runs well below the surface of institutional politics.

The 11-Party Alliance faces two Gamboa paths. The first is moderate-institutional: stay in parliament, use the shadow cabinet, and press for Charter implementation through formal channels. It preserves the institutional conditions from which future voice remains meaningful.

The closed-autocracy classification in V-Dem 2026 complicates both paths. It reflects the Hasina baseline, not the post-August 2024 reality, but it signals that the institutional fabric Bangladesh is trying to rebuild from was more thoroughly dismantled than even previous V-Dem scores suggested. For the moderate-institutional path to hold, the February 2026 election and the Charter process must constitute a genuine exit from that classification — not merely a temporary opening that the incoming government can reverse. The Gamboa evidence is clear that moderate-institutional strategy works when institutional channels are viable; if Bangladesh's V-Dem score in 2027 remains at closed-autocracy level, the second path becomes the only available one.

A second path is extra-institutional: street mobilization, civil disobedience, and possible parliamentary withdrawal. It bets that public pressure will force broader recognition of the opposition's standing, but at the cost of channels that are currently improving and not yet consolidated.

The Przeworskian test sharpens the choice: are the BNP's moves ordinary office-holding, or are they closing future alternation? A two-thirds majority puts constitutional rewrites within reach.

The slow-walking of Charter implementation, the BNP's lukewarm referendum endorsement, and the 17 February 2026 refusal by BNP MPs to take the oath as members of the new Constitution Reform Council — later partly reversed — all bear watching. None is rule-closing on its own. Together they suggest what Bermeo calls promissory rollback: reform commitments converted into inactivity.

The 11-Party rally of 4 April 2026 demanding Charter implementation is the moderate-institutional counter-move Gamboa's evidence would predict. It is a formal public event pressing for compliance, staying inside the institutional track rather than abandoning it, calibrated to the current state of the conflict rather than pre-committing to escalation.

Dashboard annex: OPI DASHBOARD: GAMBOA CRITERIA CHECK FOR BANGLADESH 11-PARTY ALLIANCE.

The spine: the July Charter

The July Charter is the spine of this reading. Fashioned and promoted by Professor Ali Riaz of Illinois State University — first as Chair of the Constitution Reform Commission and then as Vice-Chair of the National Consensus Commission — it brings together structural reforms: prime-ministerial term limits, a bicameral legislature, judicial-independence protections, expanded fundamental rights, and more.

It was signed by twenty-six political parties and passed at referendum with sixty-eight per cent. It strengthens consent through term limits and electoral architecture, autonomy through judicial independence and rights protections, and recognition through its broad signature base.

The Charter has yet to attract a firm consensus on implementation. Without it, the framework reading rests on a credible election alone. With it, on structural reform across all three pairs. In Przeworskian terms, the Charter is the device through which today's winners agree, in advance, that they may lose later.

What the demonstration shows

Three things about the framework come into view through the Bangladesh case that it alone cannot show.

First, on predictive power. The signals Sobhan's Counterpoint is reading — Tarique Rahman's early restraint, the BNP's Dhaka weakness, the 17 February oath refusal, and the 11-Party rally on 4 April — are the same signals this analysis would flag.

That convergence matters: if the framework and the experienced observer agree through different language, it is adding something; if they disagree systematically, it is wrong.

Second, on strategic suggestion. The analysis does not tell the 11-Party Alliance what to do; it maps the likely consequences of available choices. Because autonomy is recovering and institutional channels still hold, Gamboa's evidence supports the institutional path — as does Przeworski's criterion: accept ordinary loss, resist irreversible loss.

Third, on democratic strengthening. Different actors in Bangladesh are strengthening different parts of the same problem. Riaz's Charter work strengthens consent and autonomy. Sobhan's journalism strengthens voice. Jon Danilowicz's Right to Freedom work strengthens recognition and voice from outside.

Professor Nizam Ahmed's parliamentary-capacity work strengthens institutional autonomy. Professor Asif Shahan's accountability research bears on autonomy and consent. YPSA and Dr. Hasan Ali strengthen parliamentary–civil society dialogue. The value here is coordination: seeing how these contributions add up, and where the gaps remain.

Dashboard annex: OPI DASHBOARD: BANGLADESH — WHAT THE THREE PAIRS STILL NEED.

OPI Dashboard Annex I: Bangladesh Structural Diagnostics

V-Dem trend data, DPI citizen readings, and OPI factor breakdown for Bangladesh, 2018–2026

Bangladesh's V-Dem trajectory from 2018 to 2026 is one of the most dramatic in the 105-country sample. Under the Awami League government (2009–2024), the country's scores on every relevant indicator declined steadily. The clean elections index (*v2xel_frefair*) fell from 0.51 in 2012 to below 0.10 by 2023, reflecting the effective elimination of genuine electoral competition. The civil liberties index (*v2x_civlib*) fell from 0.62 to 0.41 over the same period. The CSO entry-exit indicator (*v2cseeorgs*) declined sharply after 2013, reflecting systematic restrictions on civil society registration and operation.

The August 2024 transition reversed this trajectory. By early 2026, V-Dem's liberal component (*v2x_liberal*) had improved materially, driven by gains in judicial-independence scores and freedom-of-expression measures. The opposition-parties-banned indicator (*v2psparban*) remains non-zero — the Awami League ban introduces a deliberate exclusion — but overall party-freedom scores have recovered substantially for all other parties.

OPI Factor breakdown for Bangladesh (April 2026): Factor 1 (opposition strength and legislative accountability) scores 20 out of 100, reflecting the newly elected parliament's

functioning oversight capacity and the 11-Party Alliance's 77-seat presence. Factor 2 (opposition organizational capacity) scores 12 out of 100, reflecting the fifteen-year systematic dismantling of opposition subnational infrastructure by the Awami League. The F1–F2 deficit of 8 points is the diagnostic: Bangladesh's opposition has more political space than organizational capacity to use it.

DPI citizen readings (most recent available): Bangladesh's DPI scores in the 2024 survey showed freedom-of-speech perceptions at 2.1 out of 5 — among the lowest in South Asia — and impact-of-elections at 1.8 out of 5, reflecting the accumulated effect of fifteen years of managed elections. These citizen-side readings lag the institutional improvements measured by V-Dem: citizens who experienced the 2014, 2018, and 2024 elections as predetermined do not immediately update their perceptions when institutional indicators improve. The gap between V-Dem's improving scores and DPI's still-depressed citizen readings is itself the diagnostic: institutional recovery without felt legitimacy.

The velocity reading is the most important structural signal. Bangladesh's OPI velocity is the highest in the 105-country sample — approximately 6 points per year of improvement since August 2024. This velocity, combined with a moderate score of 18, places Bangladesh in the 'window of opportunity' category: a moment when organizational investment can consolidate rapidly improving conditions before they stabilize at a suboptimal equilibrium.

OPI Dashboard Annex J: Top Three Recommended Activities for Bangladesh (11-Party Alliance)

Drawn from the IDEA Activities catalogue, scored by the OPI context-fit algorithm

The OPI Dashboard's IDEA Activities tab applies a context-fit algorithm to 58 specific program activities drawn from International IDEA's democracy-support catalogue. Activities are scored on five criteria: Gamboa type alignment (+12 for Type A/B match), Bermeo mechanism match (+10 for targeting the specific backsliding mechanism at work), remedy fit to country profile (+8 for addressing the specific V-Dem deficiency), Przeworski sequence position (+5 for in-sequence escalation, -4 for skipping steps), and deficiency-dimension targeting (+6 for addressing a High deficiency in a matched area). The three highest-scoring activities for Bangladesh's 11-Party Alliance as of April 2026 are as follows.

Activity 1: Parliamentary Shadow Cabinet Development (score: 41/55). Rationale: Bangladesh's Factor 1 score (20) reflects functioning legislative presence; the binding gap is Factor 2 organizational capacity. A structured shadow cabinet converts parliamentary seats into a governing-capacity demonstration, builds inter-party coordination discipline within the Alliance, and creates a credible alternative-government narrative that strengthens the moderate-institutional (Type A) strategy. Bermeo mechanism match: addresses promissory rollback by creating institutional pressure for Charter implementation through formal parliamentary accountability work. Przeworski sequence: fully in-sequence at Step 1–2 (parliamentary objection and legislative testimony).

Activity 2: Subnational Party Infrastructure Rebuilding Programme (score: 38/55). Rationale: The critical gap in Bangladesh's profile is subnational organizational capacity — fifteen years of Awami League attrition of opposition district and upazila infrastructure. Without subnational presence, the Alliance cannot convert the July National Charter's constitutional moment into durable organizational gains. This activity targets the F1–F2 deficit directly. Gamboa match: moderate-institutional, with explicit capacity-building rather than mobilizational framing. Deficiency targeting: Party Cohesion (PtyCoh) is rated High deficiency in the Bangladesh profile.

Activity 3: Diaspora-to-Domestic Voice Conversion Programme (score: 35/55). Rationale: Bangladesh's exit-to-voice conversion gap is among the starkest in the sample: ten million Bangladeshis abroad, fewer than 45,000 on the Election Commission's biometric rolls, and minimal organizational infrastructure linking diaspora resources to domestic advocacy. This activity builds the legal, financial, and communications infrastructure through which diaspora actors can fund documentation, media work, policy expertise, and reform monitoring — converting remittance flows into political capacity. Przeworski sequence:

supports Step 7 (election defense) and Step 8 (international certification of democratic injury) without skipping earlier sequence steps.

OPI Dashboard Annex K: Gamboa Criteria Check for Bangladesh 11-Party Alliance

Assessing the three conditions Gamboa identifies for moderate-institutional strategy success

Gamboa's comparative evidence identifies three conditions that determine whether a moderate-institutional (Type A) strategy is likely to succeed: (1) opposition unity sufficient to sustain a shared behavioral commitment to institutional engagement, even under deliberate incumbent provocation; (2) sustained mobilization capacity — the ability to keep public attention on institutional claims over multiple electoral cycles rather than just around specific events; and (3) institutional channels that remain viable — courts, parliament, and formal complaint mechanisms that have not been so thoroughly captured that they produce only legitimating outcomes for the incumbent.

Condition 1 — Opposition unity: Partially met. The 11-Party Alliance's Jamaat-NCP pairing is ideologically complementary in practice — Jamaat's organizational depth and NCP's youth-movement legitimacy create a coalition stronger than either alone. However, the ideological distance between Islamist conservatism and the secular-progressive youth politics of NCP creates latent fragility. Gamboa's most important finding on unity is behavioral: the question is not whether coalition partners agree on policy, but whether they agree to refrain from actions that break the coalition's institutional commitment — particularly under the deliberate provocations that the BNP government may stage. The 4 April 2026 rally demonstrated behavioral unity in one instance; sustaining it across eighteen to thirty-six months is the test.

Condition 2 — Sustained mobilization: Partially met. The July 2024 uprising demonstrated extraordinary mobilization capacity, particularly among NCP's youth base. The risk Gamboa identifies is mobilization that peaks around a transformative event and then declines, leaving the opposition without the sustained pressure needed for the moderate-institutional strategy to accumulate effect. The 11-Party Alliance's organizational infrastructure outside Dhaka — the Factor 2 gap — is the binding constraint on sustained mobilization: without subnational presence, mobilization is episodic rather than structural.

Condition 3 — Institutional channels viable: Met. Bangladesh's February 2026 election produced a functioning parliament. Courts have shown independence in several post-transition rulings. The National Consensus Commission and Constitution Reform Commission represent active institutional channels for Charter implementation advocacy. V-Dem's liberal component scores have improved materially. The BNP's 17 February oath refusal and subsequent partial reversal, and the slow-walking of Charter implementation, are

concerning signals — but they remain within Bermeo's 'promissory rollback' category rather than outright rule-closing action. Institutional channels are degraded but not foreclosed.

Dashboard verdict: All three Gamboa conditions are at least partially met. The moderate-institutional (Type A) strategy is viable and supported by the evidence. The primary risk is Condition 2 — sustaining mobilization beyond the initial constitutional moment — which requires the organizational infrastructure investment identified in Annex J.

OPI Dashboard Annex L: Bangladesh — What the Three Pairs Still Need

The remaining gaps across recognition–voice, autonomy–exit, and consent–loyalty as of April 2026

Recognition–Voice: The opening is real but incomplete. The Awami League ban removes a substantial plurality of the electorate's preferred party from formal political life — defensible on the grounds of accountability for the 2024 killings, but structurally problematic for any V-Dem indicator that measures the breadth of political representation. The gap is specific: recognition has been restored for BNP, Jamaat, NCP, and smaller parties, but withheld from AL supporters as a political community. What the recognition–voice pair still needs is a credible pathway to AL re-entry under conditions that address accountability without permanently foreclosing pluralism — likely requiring the kind of transitional-justice framework that converts criminal accountability for individuals into political re-entry for the broader party constituency.

Autonomy–Exit: The institutional base for autonomy is recovering — judicial independence, civil-society space, and independent media are all meaningfully better than at any point since 2014. The gap is organizational depth, not institutional permission. What the autonomy–exit pair still needs is the subnational infrastructure through which autonomous action becomes available to citizens outside Dhaka: district-level legal aid, upazila-level civil-society networks, and the organizational substrate through which the ten-million diaspora can convert exit into organized feedback. The biometric roll of fewer than 45,000 diaspora voters is the starkest single indicator of what remains undone.

Consent–Loyalty: The February 2026 election and the July National Charter referendum established a baseline of genuine consent that the country has not had since 2008. What the consent–loyalty pair still needs is Charter implementation: the structural reforms — prime-ministerial term limits, bicameral legislature, judicial-independence protections — that convert the referendum result into durable institutional architecture. Without implementation, the consent established at the ballot box rests on a procedural moment rather than structural change. The DPI's impact-of-elections dimension — whether citizens believe elections actually change things — is the leading indicator to watch. If Charter implementation stalls and the BNP government uses its two-thirds majority for constitutional self-entrenchment rather than structural reform, citizens' felt consent will lag institutional scores, and the loyalty-to-compliance conversion will resume.

Coordination note: The actors currently active in Bangladesh — Professor Riaz on constitutional reform, Zafar Sobhan on accountability journalism, Jon Danilowicz on civil liberties, Professor Nizam Ahmed on parliamentary capacity, Professor Asif Shahan on

accountability research, YPSA and Dr. Hasan Ali on parliamentary–civil-society dialogue — are each addressing one of the three pairs. The framework's value for coordination is precisely this: making visible which pair each actor is strengthening, where the coverage is thin, and what sequencing of support would produce the most reinforcing combination of gains across all three pairs simultaneously.

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OPI Dashboard Annexes

The following annexes contain the OPI Dashboard content referenced throughout the main text. Each annex explains how the Dashboard operationalizes the relevant V-Dem indicators, DPI citizen-side measures, and Gamboa strategy criteria for the corresponding analytical dimension. Annexes B–H are framework annexes; Annexes I–L are Bangladesh-specific.

OPI Dashboard Annex B: Recognition Deficit in the Sample

V-Dem indicators: Civil Liberties Index · Political Parties Free to Operate · Minority Political Representation

Recognition — the state's formal acknowledgment of political actors as legitimate participants — is the precondition for voice. V-Dem measures recognition through three interlocking indicators: the Civil Liberties Index (v2x_civlib), whether political parties are free to operate (v2psparban), and the degree of minority political representation (v2pepwrses, v2pepwrge, v2pepwrort).

In the OPI Dashboard's 105-country sample, recognition deficits cluster in two forms. The first is outright exclusion: party bans, deregistration, or the criminalization of organized opposition. The second is structural underrepresentation: formal inclusion of minority groups alongside systematic exclusion from consequential legislative positions. Both register on V-Dem's civil-liberties and pluralism measures, and both produce the same downstream effect — voice that makes noise without generating political input.

Across the sample, 34 of the 105 countries score below 15 on the OPI composite, and in nearly every case the recognition sub-indicators (v2psparban, v2x_civlib) are among the lowest-scoring dimensions. The pattern is consistent: where recognition collapses, Factor 1 scores (opposition strength and legislative accountability) follow within two to four years. Recognition is not merely a rights question; it is the structural precondition for any opposition strategy to generate the competitive pressure that disciplines incumbents.

DPI cross-check: The Democracy Perception Index's political-pluralism dimension ('There is political pluralism in this country') is the citizen-side mirror of V-Dem's party-freedom indicators. Where V-Dem's v2psparban registers constrained party operation and DPI's pluralism score is simultaneously low, the recognition deficit is confirmed from both inside and outside. Where they diverge — V-Dem shows formal party freedom, DPI shows citizens perceive no real pluralism — the gap itself is the diagnostic: de jure recognition without de facto standing.

OPI Dashboard Annex C: The Exit-to-Voice Conversion Gap

V-Dem indicators: Freedom of Movement · CSO Entry/Exit · Diaspora Political Engagement

Hirschman's exit becomes democratically productive only when it is converted back into organized pressure. Autonomous departure from a failing institution — leaving a party, emigrating, withdrawing from civic life — disciplines the institution only if the exiting actor retains the capacity to signal, organize, and return. When exit is permanent, involuntary, or organizationally disconnected, it depletes rather than disciplines.

V-Dem does not have a single 'exit' indicator; the concept must be assembled from freedom-of-movement data, CSO entry and exit conditions (v2cseeorgs), and the broader liberal component (v2x_liberal). The OPI Dashboard supplements these with migration data and political-emigration scholarship to estimate the exit-to-voice conversion rate: the proportion of political emigrants who remain engaged in documented advocacy, legal challenge, diaspora media, or international lobbying on behalf of their country of origin.

The conversion gap is the deficit between exit and voice: large emigrant populations whose departure has not translated into organized democratic feedback. Across the 105-country sample, the gap is widest in countries with high emigration rates and low diaspora organizational infrastructure — Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, Venezuela, and Myanmar are paradigm cases. In each, millions abroad have not converted their distance into the kind of organized pressure that alters the incumbent's cost-benefit calculation.

The gap is not fixed. Malaysia's pre-2018 diaspora community, Venezuela's post-2015 exile networks, and the Belarusian diaspora after 2020 all show conversion rates that rose sharply once organizational infrastructure was built. The OPI Dashboard's Factor 2 (opposition organizational capacity) is the key variable: exit-to-voice conversion requires the same organizational substrate as any other form of opposition work.

DPI cross-check: The DPI's civic-education dimension is the indirect measure here. A diaspora population with high civic-education scores is more likely to understand its legal and political options for organized engagement. Low civic-education scores in the origin country predict low conversion rates even where emigrant numbers are large.

OPI Dashboard Annex D: The 14 Opposition-Specific V-Dem Indicators (Coppedge Selection)

The full list of V-Dem variables used to construct the OPI composite score

The OPI Dashboard draws on 14 V-Dem indicators selected for their direct relevance to opposition capacity and democratic agency. The selection follows Coppedge et al.'s guidance on which V-Dem variables most precisely measure the institutional conditions under which opposition parties can function. The 14 are grouped into the three Hirschman pairs.

Recognition and Voice (5 indicators): (1) *v2x_civlib* — Civil Liberties Index: aggregate measure of freedoms of movement, religion, expression, and association. (2) *v2psparban* — Political parties banned or restricted: direct measure of whether opposition parties are legally permitted to operate. (3) *v2pepwrse* — Political power distributed by socioeconomic position: whether lower-income groups have political representation. (4) *v2psprlnks* — Party-society linkages: whether parties maintain organizational roots in civil society. (5) *v2elmulpar* — Multiparty elections: whether elections are genuinely competitive across multiple parties.

Autonomy and Exit (5 indicators): (6) *v2x_jucon* — Judicial constraints on the executive: whether courts can and do rule against the government. (7) *v2xlg_legcon* — Legislative constraints on the executive: whether parliament exercises meaningful oversight. (8) *v2x_rule* — Rule of law index: whether laws are applied consistently and impartially. (9) *v2cseeorgs* — CSO entry and exit: whether civil society organizations can form and operate without state interference. (10) *v2csprcpt* — CSO participatory environment: whether citizens can participate in civil society without reprisal.

Consent and Loyalty (4 indicators): (11) *v2xel_frefair* — Free and fair elections index: whether electoral processes meet international standards. (12) *v2elembaut* — Electoral management body autonomy: whether the body administering elections is independent. (13) *v2lgoppart* — Opposition parties' legislative participation: whether opposition MPs can participate meaningfully in parliamentary work. (14) *v2exrescon* — Executive respect for the constitution: whether the executive adheres to constitutional constraints.

These 14 indicators feed two OPI factors. Factor 1 (opposition strength and legislative accountability) loads primarily on *v2lgoppart*, *v2xlg_legcon*, *v2elmulpar*, *v2elembaut*, and *v2xel_frefair*. Factor 2 (opposition organizational capacity) loads primarily on *v2psprlnks*, *v2cseeorgs*, *v2csprcpt*, *v2psparban*, and *v2pepwrse*. The persistent F1–F2 deficit across the sample — opposition parties that have political space but not organizational depth — is visible only once these two factors are separated.

OPI Dashboard Annex E: Score Distribution and the Velocity Addition

Responding to the Coppedge critique: why static scores are insufficient and how velocity corrects them

Michael Coppedge and colleagues have made the methodological point that cross-sectional V-Dem scores, taken at a single moment, can mislead. A country scoring 45 on a democratic index may be improving rapidly from 30, or declining from 65. The score is the same; the situation is not. Static scores treat the floor and the ceiling identically.

The OPI Dashboard addresses this through a velocity addition: alongside each country's current OPI composite, the dashboard records the annualized rate of change over the preceding three years. Velocity is calculated as $(\text{OPI}_{\text{current}} - \text{OPI}_{t-3}) / 3$, expressed in points per year. Countries are then placed in one of four velocity categories: Rising Fast (>3 pts/yr), Rising Slowly (0–3 pts/yr), Stable (within ± 1 pt/yr), Declining (negative).

Score distribution in the 105-country sample: Of the 105 countries, 34 score below 15 (near-total suppression of opposition capacity), 36 score between 15 and 25 (constrained but functioning), 25 score between 25 and 40 (meaningful institutional footholds), and 10 score above 40 (competitive, if imperfect, democratic environments). The median OPI across the sample is approximately 10.

Velocity reveals what the static distribution conceals. Bangladesh, scoring 18, is the fastest-improving country in the sample — rising at approximately 6 points per year since the August 2024 transition. That velocity changes the strategic reading entirely. A score of 18 in a declining trajectory calls for defensive tactics; the same score in a rising trajectory calls for consolidation and institution-building. The Coppedge critique is that scores without velocity mislead practitioners. The velocity addition is the corrective.

The dashboard flags three categories of strategic concern: (a) countries with low scores and negative velocity (survival mode, Type D); (b) countries with moderate scores and high positive velocity (window of opportunity, prioritize consolidation); (c) countries with high scores and declining velocity (early warning, defend institutional gains before erosion accelerates). Each category calls for different programming.

OPI Dashboard Annex F: Gamboa Strategy Distribution Across 105 Countries

How the four Gamboa strategy types distribute across the OPI sample, and what predicts each

Laura Gamboa's four-box typology — moderate-institutional (Type A), moderate extra-institutional (Type B), radical institutional (Type C), and radical extra-institutional (Type D) — is the strategic classification system the OPI Dashboard applies to each of its 105 countries. The distribution across the sample is itself a finding.

Type A (moderate-institutional) is the dashboard's recommended strategy for 38 of the 105 countries — those where V-Dem's liberal component registers degraded but not collapsed institutional channels, and where OPI scores fall in the 15–40 range. These are countries where parliamentary participation, legal challenge, and formal complaint mechanisms are still viable, even if unfair. Gamboa's comparative evidence shows this strategy produces the best outcomes under these conditions. Bangladesh, Hungary, Georgia, Tunisia, and Malaysia pre-2018 are Type A assignments.

Type B (moderate extra-institutional) is recommended for 22 countries where institutional channels are degraded to the point where formal mechanisms produce no meaningful output, but where civil society and public mobilization retain organizational capacity. Street demonstration, organized civil disobedience, and diaspora-led international pressure campaigns are the primary tools. Serbia 2024–25 and Thailand 2010–14 are illustrative cases.

Type C (radical institutional) — working within formal structures while making maximalist constitutional claims — applies to 11 countries where the opposition retains legislative presence but the government is actively dismantling the rules of the game. This is the strategy of last institutional resort: use the floor of parliament, the constitutional court, and international treaty obligations as levers before any extra-institutional escalation. Venezuela 2015–17 is the cautionary case of Type C transitioning to Type D too quickly.

Type D (survival mode) covers 34 countries — those scoring below 15 on the OPI — where institutional channels are closed, civil society is suppressed, and the primary opposition task is organizational survival: documentation, diaspora network maintenance, cadre preservation, and international advocacy. This is not a passive category. It is the precondition for any future Type A or B strategy. Myanmar, Belarus, and Nicaragua are current Type D assignments.

OPI Dashboard Annex G: Diagnosing the Coalition Coordination Problem

How the three Hirschman pairs map onto intra-coalition disagreements — and how the framework resolves them

Opposition coalitions characteristically fragment along a predictable axis: factions that prioritize different elements of democratic agency talk past each other because they are, in effect, responding to different threats. The OPI Dashboard's coalition-coordination diagnostic makes this axis visible.

Recognition-focused factions (typically minority parties, ethnic or religious communities, and youth movements) experience the coalition's primary problem as political standing: they need legal existence, media access, and the right to organize before any strategic question becomes meaningful. Their horizon is immediate and existential. They are unlikely to accept 'wait for the election' arguments from partners whose legal standing is not in question.

Autonomy-focused factions (typically civil society organizations, professional associations, independent media, and reform-minded party wings) experience the primary problem as operational independence: courts, unions, and associations that can function without state interference. Their horizon is institutional. They are unlikely to accept purely electoral framings from partners who do not share their organizational infrastructure concerns.

Consent-focused factions (typically election-observation coalitions, parliamentary groups, and internationally connected party wings) experience the primary problem as procedural legitimacy: whether elections and constitutional mechanisms can produce genuine alternation. Their horizon is electoral. They may accept imperfect recognition and autonomy conditions if the electoral channel still produces meaningful outcomes.

The three-pairs framework converts this three-way disagreement from a zero-sum priority battle into a division of labor. Each faction is addressing a real and necessary democratic condition. The coalition's coordination task is to sequence and resource the three agendas in order of current urgency — as determined by V-Dem and DPI data — rather than by faction seniority or donor preference. The OPI Dashboard's deficiency profile (identifying which of the three pairs is the binding constraint in a given country) is designed precisely to inform this sequencing.

OPI Dashboard Annex H: Przeworski Operationalized — IU Score, Conflict Type, and Escalation Sequence

Translating institutionalized uncertainty into a measurable diagnostic and a conflict-type classification

Adam Przeworski's institutionalized uncertainty (IU) criterion — democracy as the system in which outcomes are uncertain and rules are stable — is operationalized in the OPI Dashboard through a three-variable composite. The IU score draws on V-Dem's clean elections index (v2xel_frefair), executive respect for the constitution (v2exrescon), and legislative constraints on the executive (v2xlg_legcon), averaged and scaled to 0–100.

An IU score above 50 indicates that the basic conditions for institutionalized uncertainty are present: elections can produce surprises, the constitution constrains the winner, and the legislature retains meaningful oversight authority. An IU score below 30 indicates that these conditions have substantially broken down. The 30–50 range is the contested zone — where the Przeworskian test is most analytically useful, because the outcome is genuinely in question.

Conflict-type classification: The OPI Dashboard applies Przeworski's distinction between ordinary political conflict and rule-closing action across four conflict types. Type 1 (policy conflict): disagreement about what the government should do within agreed rules. Type 2 (office conflict): competition for electoral or appointed positions within stable institutional arrangements. Type 3 (institutional hardball): aggressive but technically legal use of institutional powers to disadvantage opponents. Type 4 (rule-closing action): moves that, if successful, make future alternation impossible — constitutional revision, electoral law rewriting, court-packing, or media capture that removes the informational basis for genuine consent.

The escalation sequence operationalizes Gamboa's constraint: the opposition should exhaust each lower-conflict-type channel before escalating to the next. The sequence is: (1) parliamentary objection on the record; (2) committee evidence and legislative testimony; (3) legal challenge through available courts; (4) cross-party appeal for constitutional consensus; (5) civil-society mobilization and public statement; (6) public demonstration; (7) election-day defense through parallel vote tabulation and scrutineer deployment; (8) international attention and certification of democratic injury.

The incomplete information problem Samet (2026) identifies — that oppositions routinely face strategic choices without reliable knowledge of incumbent vulnerability — is the gap the IU score is designed to reduce. His Bangladesh 2014 example (a boycott that ceded

parliamentary footholds when the moment may have been contestable) and coalition errors in hegemonic regimes are both information failures. The Dashboard's IU score and conflict-type classification make the structural conditions legible before the strategic choice is made: an opposition in the 30–50 IU range is in a fundamentally different situation from one below 30, and the escalation sequence should differ accordingly. Reducing the opposition's information deficit is the first function of a strategic diagnostic.

The IU score determines which escalation steps are still viable. Where the IU score is above 50, all eight steps are available. Where it falls below 30, steps 1–4 are likely foreclosed, and the opposition's credible options compress to steps 5–8. The dashboard flags countries in the 30–50 IU range as the priority audience for escalation-sequence advice: they are the cases where strategic discipline about sequence matters most.