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**Dissonant Democracy:
Utopias, dystopias and backsliding
in democratic processes**





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Dissonant Democracy: Utopias, dystopias and backsliding in democratic processes

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Introduction

Karolina Czerska-Shaw

“No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time” Winston Churchill famously declared in 1947.

In 2021, the world watched as a fragile democracy in Afghanistan propped up for twenty years by Western democratic countries crumbled before its eyes. Only months before, media outlets ran headlines about the storming of the Capitol – the symbol of American democracy – in the country which De Tocqueville wrote so famously about almost 200 years earlier. In February 2022, in Europe’s own backyard, an autocratic leader embarked on a ‘special military operation’ against its democratic neighbour. The ravages of the full-scale invasion on Ukraine have laid bare the physical tragedies of war, as well as the cognitive dissonance that comes with disinformation, manipulation, and unabashed Orwellian doublespeak. At the time of publishing this edited volume in 2025, half a year into a second Trump presidency in the USA and a plethora of examples of the shameless disregard of liberal democratic principles and adherence to factual integrity, post-truth politics¹ have entered the academic lexicon and seems to be here to stay.

Meanwhile, we have seen ample evidence of democratic backsliding and so-called illiberal forms of democracy brewing, yet not only in the corners of Europe where it was so emphatically embraced only three decades before. There are loud debates over how elections and referenda have been meddled with by undemocratic forces in what were once called ‘mature’ democracies. It seems like everywhere we turn, talk about the undermining of democratic values or the need to reassert them are underway, as if the banal has suddenly become preciously rare – the rule of law, protection of minorities, tripartite division of power, individual rights, and transparent procedures and institutions.

While democracy has been touted as Europe’s most precious legacy, it is also a notoriously conflicting concept, offering no easy definitions. At its root is the tension between classical liberalism, with its focus on individual liberties and democratic theory based on the

¹ Conrad, G. Hálfðanarson, A. Michailidou, C. Galpin, & N. Pyrhönen (Eds.) (2023). *Europe in the Age of Post-Truth Politics: Populism, Disinformation and the Public Sphere* (Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology). Palgrave Macmillan.

common good, in what Chantal Mouffe calls the democratic paradox². What theory of justice and ideals of freedom are highlighted at each end? Are women and men free only when they enter the polis and work for the common good, or are they truly free whilst pursuing their own self-interests? How does this tension play out in contemporary contexts? This issue was none too clear at the height of the Covid pandemic, where individual liberties seemed to clash with the responsibility to act collectively for the common good.

If the root of this is the tension between individualism and the common good, then at the heart of democracy is the *demos*, or people, or *demoi*, peoples. Again, we come to conflicting definitions of who the people are and the boundaries of their belonging. Rogers Brubaker reveals at least three core meanings: the people as the common or ordinary people, or the ‘plebs’; the sovereign people, or the ‘demos’; and to the culturally or ethnically distinct people, or the nation or *ethnos*³. The boundaries in which the people are located – be it local, national, or supranational – provide the framework for the implementation of *kratos*, or power, laws, and institutions that ensure civil equality and the access to political rights and participation.

The making of those rules by the people, a plural, heterogeneous collection of individuals, is faced with yet another conundrum – how to reach a consensus. According to the contemporary political theorist Giovanni Sartori, the one thing we need to agree upon in a democracy is *how* we will disagree – through the framework of institutions and procedural consensus. Enter the public sphere. Now, however, even these building blocks are crumbling under the weight of polarisation, populism, and fragmentation. In John Eric Fossum’s view, some differentiation is needed to prevent concentrations of power, to balance majority views with the protection of minorities, and to provide citizens (and non-citizens) with access to rights and recognition. Yet too much differentiation leads to various bias, unaccountability and, ultimately, to various forms of dominance.⁴

Yet where there is dominance there is resistance, and new forms of participatory practices, bottom up and horizontal activism, localised community-building projects, a revival of the concept of the Commons, are flourishing, and a (still) new and ever changing medium, the virtual space, is showing both its power and potential at building (and breaking) democratic ideals. New and old media are co-creating and refracting the language of political discourse as if

² Mouffe, C. *The Democratic Paradox* (2000). Verso Books.

³ Brubaker, R. Why populism? (2017). *Theory and Society* 46, 357–385. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-017-9301-7>

⁴ Fossum, J. E. (2015). Democracy and differentiation in Europe. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 22(6), 799–815. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2015.1020838>

through a glass darkly, the broken mirror that is at once an eyeopener and catalyst for change, or harbinger of disinformation and disruption.

The 2022 Euroculture Intensive Programme on *Dissonant Democracy* aimed to critically examine the fundamental questions that are at the heart of what Europe has taken for granted and what seems to be unravelling far too quickly and without much resistance. What are the pillars of democratic values in contemporary Europe and how are they (not) being safeguarded? Who are the people, or the *demos*, to be ruled, and to rule in turn? Who is to be represented and how? Who funds democracy? How are information, disinformation and misinformation discursively constructed and what implications does this have for the proper functioning of democracy? How may new forms of participatory practices help to shape and redefine what democracy is in the 21st century?

In a first subtheme, entitled (Un)democratic Frameworks, Procedures and Institutions, there was room for exploration of the political, philosophical and legal frameworks of democracy, from historical perspectives on its rise (and fall), through the roads to (un)freedom, to the current debates on constitutional models of democratic functioning of the European Union (federalist, intergovernmentalist, cosmopolitan). In pluralist societies and larger entities like the EU, should we speak rather of *demoicracy* – the multifaceted governance of peoples, rather than just one people? Under what conditions can deliberative democracy, as outlined by Habermas, be exercised and at what scales of governance? What role does Europe play in exporting democratic values abroad – otherwise known as the use of soft power – and what benefits does it bring, to whom, and at what price? Can democracy be hegemonic?

We invited students to contemplate the frameworks for democratic functioning, under what conditions they are effective, transparent and reflective of principles of democracy and, conversely, under what conditions they falter. What happens when electoral frameworks are slightly redrawn, just enough for gerrymandering to occur and turn representative democracy into a game of electoral calculations? How are the scales of democracies organised at local, national, supranational and cosmopolitan levels, and how much differentiation can these levels sustain before democratic principles turn hegemonic? How do these different levels of democracy impact on citizens' rights and access to participation? How are borders constructed around them, defining the Others, the foreigners, denizens, those who do not belong? Who are the minorities, how are they protected, othered, ignored or undermined? How is political consensus forged? Importantly, what checks and balances are necessary for the rule of law and what happens when the *demos*, the people, overrule those structures and principles? How can we unpack the

oxymoron of illiberal democracy? Students are asked to take empirical examples through the use of case studies, comparative analyses, political / policy analysis, historical sources and other social science approaches and apply the appropriate methods to critically analyse their significance for contemporary Europe in a globalised context.

The second subtheme, (Un)Democratic Identities, Discourses and Public Spheres, tackled the ways in which democracy is discursively constructed, twisted, refracted through language, media, literature, social platforms and new forms of communication. Here we focus on the mediums – the vehicles – of (un)democratic processes, reflecting on their nature and power to sway votes, identities, attitudes and allegiances. The spread of democratic values or the stirring of old fears, xenophobia, and allure of safety in an age of increasing insecurity. We welcome students to explore the meaning of discourses, the use of tools of persuasion, and to critically assess the media – vehicles – through which information passes and spreads. What utopias/dystopias are we drawn to, what underpins them and how do they reflect our current state? Why, all of a sudden, are dystopic *Black Mirror* genres at the top of the charts, what do they have in common and dystopic futures are played out in the likes of the *Squid Game* and *Handmaid's Tale*? How do intersecting identities like gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity play out in these utopias/dystopias?

Students were encouraged to employ discourse analysis, media studies perspectives, netnography, visual analyses and more to ascertain the power and significance of communication, language, discourses and narratives and how they are used and reflected in (un)democratic processes.

In the third subtheme, (Un)democratic Mobilisations and Participation, we investigated participatory practices that mobilise people to act and react, to come together in communities with a purpose, to revolt and dissent against forms of power and oppression. Co-designing local communities, empowering marginalised groups, encouraging youth activism and creating a sense of belonging in an age of isolation, political apathy and individualism – how does it work and under what conditions? What is the role of dissent in democratic processes? What forms of e-democracy can help or hinder participatory practices? In this subtheme we encourage students to observe people – individuals, groups – and the governing structures in place that focus on action and mobilisation, keys to democratic processes. Are all forms of mobilisation for the common good of democracy? What new participatory practices can we observe? What fora, projects, calls to action have the power to move groups, or whole populations to action? Through sociological, anthropological and other social science perspectives, students are encouraged to collect

empirical data around them – in populations, social movements, actions and projects for democracy-building, and the sometimes reactionary counter-movements accompanying them. Foucault reminds us that where there is dominance there is always resistance, although sometimes it is not quite clear who is being dominated, and who is resisting.

What emerged in the IP publication was a selection of six outstanding texts spanning the three subthemes; from critical reflections on Europe's positioning in foreign relations, to analysing the fine lines between authoritarian and democratic censorship, to highlighting (un)democratic movements and their consequences, to providing some hope for a critical feminist foreign policy and the need for quality democratic education. The IP Publication itself is divided up into three sections which go beyond the subthemes to produce new cleavages and narratives that speak to each other through the texts.

In **Part 1, Mobilisations and Movements against Democracy**, the first author, **Annelou Snippe**, takes us into the world of far-right vigilante groups in Finland. These self-styled 'Soldiers of Odin' have fed on anti-immigrant rhetoric to spread fear and distrust of the Other, framing themselves as the protectors of the people. While they have not garnered much political success to date, Snippes' work underscores the importance of studying illiberal social movements as a litmus test for tolerance in democratic societies. Next, **Eva Wohlhage** examines the post-truth, conspiracy-based "Reichsbürger" movement in Germany. Her analysis of this movement, which denies the legitimacy of the state and its authorities, reflects a troubling distrust in democratic institutions. What we learn is that the key to prevention may be in the understanding of the underlying motives for these types of movements in the first place.

In **Part 2: Who's Dominating Whom?** **Alfred Häger** offers an interesting reflection on the blurred lines between authoritarian states and democracies when it comes to controlling information narratives. This provocative paper analyses the securitisation of disinformation in Europe, and prompts the question if censorship can be used without infringing on the democratic process. In a second contribution, **Clara Weber** invites us to critically reflect on Europe's dominant position in foreign policy, taking Kenya as a case study. The paper advocates for a decentering of European foreign policy in order to overcome Eurocentrism and allow for local voices to be heard, shifting power imbalances in the framework of geopolitics.

In **Part 3: We turn to a glimmer of hope: critical and inclusive approaches to politics and education**, where **Angela Boesen** outlines and analyses a fresh perspective on foreign policy in its critical, feminist version. While Feminist Foreign Policy was adopted in Sweden but revoked after the writing of her IP paper, this contribution is nonetheless important to highlight

a growing and much-needed change in approach to global affairs. It may also be a forerunner to research that would analyse why it does *not* hold in certain contexts. Finally, we turn to **Annabelle McLeod's** contribution exploring French and German approaches to citizenship education. It highlights how historical, political, and cultural narratives shape the approaches to the thinking and teaching about democracy, and may serve as a call to broader reflections on transnational approaches to democratic education.

In a final section the authors share their short biographies, which highlight the impact that their research and studies in Euroculture have had on their present work and global outlook. We hope that they may serve as inspiration for future cohorts of Euroculture students who dive deeply into the topics that inspire their curiosity and, in their small yet important way, work towards a better understanding of our uncertain and complex world.



Part 1

Mobilisations and movements against democracy

Seeking Security in Street Patrols: the Soldiers of Odin's Framing and Repertoires in Finland

Annelou Snippe

Abstract

With record numbers of migrants entering Europe in 2015, populist leaders took their chance and shifted the political landscape. Right-wing politics have also taken the streets, not only in the form of violent extreme right organizations but also by radical right grassroots groups. The way in which far-right parties operate and garner support has been likened to social movements in the past. However, the vast majority of social movement scholarship is concerned with left-wing or progressive mobilizations. When right-wing movements are studied within the context of social movement theory, there is often a focus on how these groups mobilize and why. This paper examines the framing processes taking place in and repertoires used by the Finnish section of the Soldiers of Odin. The Soldiers of Odin, a right-wing vigilante group, started in 2015, as a part of the anti-immigration movement. By analysing blog posts from their website and their youtube channel, this paper looks at how the Soldiers of Odin portray themselves and what frames are used in diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing. The repertoire is analyzed, showing that the groups actions' fit well into the idea of social movement action as a performance. The theme of security that flows from the framing process plays a key role in the group's repertoire, showing a clear link between framing and repertoire. The applicability of social movement theory to the Soldiers of Odin shows possible pathways for future analysis of other right-wing vigilante groups.

Keywords: right-wing movements, repertoire, framing process, social movements

1. Introduction

Since the migrant crisis of 2014-2015, right-wing populists have shifted the political landscape in Europe.¹ With record numbers of migrants entering Europe, populist political leaders saw their opportunity. In Germany, for example, the far-right AfD (Alternative for Germany) changed their narrative from being anti-Euro to being a populist anti-immigration party.² Political parties like these leave little space for pluralism, freedom of religion or minorities, as they are openly xenophobic, Islamophobic, and anti-immigration. Far right movements have gained ground as well. Nativism, the exclusionary form of nationalism, has taken to the streets. This has been done not only by violent extreme right organizations but also by radical right grassroots groups.³ These groups and parties have spurred an illiberal movement throughout Europe.

In the wake of the migrant crisis, the Soldiers of Odin (SOO) was established in the northern town of Kemi, Finland. According to some, it started as a spin-off from a facebook discussion group, founded by a truck driver from Kemi. SOO was a part of the anti-immigration movement in Finland, which had popularity in 2015, as a large number of migrants were entering Europe. In Kemi, the number of asylum applications rose to numbers 12 times higher than that before, and the number of hate crimes rose along with that number.⁴ A group that would later become the SOO came up with the idea of doing street patrols, something they had encountered through other groups before. At its peak, the SOO grew out to be a street patrol organization that had chapters in most Finnish cities, as well as chapters in 20 countries around the world. The SOO were not the only street patrol organization that spread after the start of the migrant crisis, as vigilante activities spread across the Nordic countries.⁵

¹ Lehne, Stefan and Heather Grabbe. "Could an Illiberal Europe Work?" Carnegie Europe, October 11, 2018. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/10/11/could-illiberal-europe-work-pub-77463>.

² Jäckle, Sebastian, and Pascal D. König. "The Dark Side of the German 'Welcome Culture': Investigating the Causes behind Attacks on Refugees in 2015." *West European Politics* 40, no. 2 (August 16, 2016): 223–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2016.1215614>

³ Castelli Gattinara, Pietro, and Andrea L. P. Pirro. "The Far Right as Social Movement." *European Societies* 21, no. 4 (July 17, 2018): 448–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2018.1494301>.

⁴ Pyrhönen, Niko, Gwenaëlle Bauvois, and Saga Rosenström. "Soldiers of Odin as Peril Or Protection? Hybrid Mediatization of Oppositional Framings on Anti-Immigration Responses to the 'Refugee Crisis'." *Nordiques* no. 40 (2021): 1-2, <http://journals.openedition.org/nordiques/1464>.

⁵ Kotonen, Tommi. "The Soldiers of Odin Finland." In *Vigilantism Against Migrants and Minorities*. 1st ed., 241-243: Routledge, 2019, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9780429485619/chapters/10.4324/9780429485619-15>, Archambault, Emil and Veilleux-Lepage, Yannick. "The Soldiers of Odin in Canada: The failure of a transnational ideology." In *Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities*. 1st ed., 272-73: Routledge, 2019, and Pyrhönen, Bauvois, and Rosenström, "Soldiers of Odin as Peril Or Protection?" 1-2.

Far-right movements outside of traditional party politics like the SOO have so far mostly been studied in light of party politics, even though these groups exist outside of that scope.⁶ These movements have sometimes been studied in light of social movement theory, but the vast majority of social movement scholarship is concerned with progressive or left-wing mobilizations, making it difficult at times to put concepts from social movement literature onto right-wing movements.⁷ However, as grassroots right-wing mobilizations have grown and spread over the years, social movement theory might be a valuable lens to analyze them through.

This paper uses a social movement lens to look at the SOO, aiming to find new perspectives on right-wing movements. This is done by answering the question “How do the frames the Soldiers of Odin use inform their repertoire?” Connecting concepts from social movement theory with this right-wing vigilante movement, this paper explores the applicability of social movement theory on right-wing movements. The next section summarizes the literature on right-wing movements as social movements and the literature on the SOO so far. Then, the methodology and theory used is elaborated on. After this, the analysis is split into two parts: one focusing on framing and the other on repertoire. Lastly, a conclusion is drawn answering the research question with suggestions for further research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Right-wing movements as social movements

Right-wing movements have sometimes been studied in light of social movement theory, but the vast majority of social movement scholarship is concerned with progressive or left-wing mobilizations.⁸ This makes it difficult at times to put concepts from social movement literature onto right-wing movements. As Gattinara and Pietro note, far-right movements have been likened to social movements, but social movement scholarship on these movements has been limited. However, concepts such as ‘framing’ and ‘political opportunity structure,’ have been

⁶ Gattinara and Pietro, “The Far Right as Social Movement,” 449.

⁷ Gattinara and Pietro, “The Far Right as Social Movement,” 453-454.

⁸ For an example of elaborate scholarship on right-wing movements in light of social movement theory, see: Dietrich, David. *Rebellious Conservatives: Social Movements in Defense of Privilege*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, or Tetrault, Justin Everett Cobain. “Thinking Beyond Extremism: A Critique of Counterterrorism Research on Right-Wing Nationalist and Far-Right Social Movements.” *British Journal of Criminology* 62, no. 2 (Jul 05, 2021): 431-449, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2548429890>.

found to be useful.⁹ Gattinara and Pietro argue the importance of studying far right movements from different perspectives, showing the possibilities of studying the far right as a social movement.¹⁰ Similarly, Kincaid further expands on this idea of social movement theory and right-wing movements, noting that right-wing movements use similar political tactics to their left-wing counterparts. However, he argues that whereas left-wing movements often seek to expand rights and privileges for members of disadvantaged groups, right-wing movements aim to preserve or restore the rights of members of relatively advantaged groups. This points to a specific uniqueness that right-wing movements may have, with importance lying in different areas than in left-wing movements. Placing this in the context of the American Republican Party, Kincaid argues that threat and political opportunity should be set in the center of analysis for right wing movements.¹¹

A few examples of right-wing movements being studied in light of concepts from social movements can be seen in the works of Munson, Bitschnau and Lichtenstein, as well as Fujdiak and Ocelik. Munson's book on Pro-Life activism shows how mobilization works in anti-abortion activism, looking at resource mobilization and frames used in the movement.¹² Using mobilization as a concept from social movement theory as well, Fujdiak and Ocelik argue that networks play an important part in mobilizing new activists, using hyperlinks on websites as their unit of analysis.¹³ Bitschnau and Lichtenstein, writing about PEGIDA, a German far right movement, analyze frames and master frames. They argue that two distinct frames could be found in PEGIDA.¹⁴ Although each of these works examines a different right-wing movement, they show that concepts from social movement theory could be useful in examining (parts of) right wing movements.

2.2. The Soldiers of Odin

⁹ Gattinara and Pietro, "The Far Right as Social Movement," 453-454

¹⁰ Gattinara and Pirro, "The Far Right as a Social Movement."

¹¹ Kincaid, John D. "Theorizing the Radical Right: Directions for Social Movements Research on the Right-Wing Social Movements." *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 5 (February 26, 2017): 2-4, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12469>.

¹² Munson, Ziad W. *The Making of Pro-Life Activists : How Social Movement Mobilization Works*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/univdeustosp/detail.action?docID=557575>.

¹³ Fujdiak, Ina and Petr Ocelik. "Hyperlink Networks as a Means of Mobilization used by Far-Right Movements," in *Central European Journal of Communication* 12, no 2 (2019): 134-149.

¹⁴ Bitschnau, Marco, Dennis Lichtenstein, and Birte Fähnrich. "The "refugee Crisis" as an Opportunity Structure for Right-Wing Populist Social Movements: The Case of PEGIDA." *Studies in Communication Sciences* 21, no. 2 (Oct 12, 2021): 1-13.

The SOO specifically, have been studied by several scholars before. For instance, Aharoni and Féron look at the gendered component of the vigilante group, arguing that the SOO use gender-based violence to perform a militarized version of white masculinity, identifying four themes that group members use to identify themselves as.¹⁵ Taking a different route, Pyrhönen, Bauvois and Rosenström examine and compare themes and framings of the SOO in the most important Finnish and Swedish newspapers. Focussing on safety and gender, they show the frames and opportunities the SOO had in the media, arguing that they entered at a perfect moment in time.¹⁶ Also in the media sphere, Nikunen, Hokka and Nelimarkka explore how visuals are shared and used amongst the SOO. They conclude that different themes were used for communication and to shape moral values of the group, playing an instrumental role in forming a collective identity.¹⁷ All three of these accounts touch upon identity, showing that this plays an important role in the SOO. More connected to social movement theory is Kotonen, who lays out the start and expansion of the group, along with the opportunities and resources used. Kotonen gives a mostly narrative account, with the last part of his chapter examining their communication.¹⁸ The larger volume Kotonen's chapter is in also gives valuable insight into vigilante groups in general, as Bjørge and Mareš conclude that vigilante groups mostly look to support the government and that their activities are often performances that do not actually achieve their goals, pointing towards further questions that could be asked about the SOO.

From the literature, it is clear that right-wing movements are able to be studied in light of current social movement theory, although emphasis may lay on different parts of social movement theory. In particular, framing and modes of mobilization are recurring themes that fit well with right-wing movements. At the same time, movement tactics and actions could be a good mode of analysis for vigilante groups, as vigilante groups have a specific repertoire they use. For the SOO, both the frames the group themselves use and movement tactics have not been analyzed in previous literature. Using one concept that has been proven useful in

¹⁵ Aharoni, Sarai B. and Élise Féron. "National Populism and Gendered Vigilantism: The Case of the Soldiers of Odin in Finland." *Cooperation and Conflict* 55, no. 1 (Mar, 2020): 86 -

106, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0010836719850207>.

¹⁶ Pyrhönen, Bauvois, and Rosenström, "Soldiers of Odin as Peril or Protection?"

¹⁷ Nikunen, Kaarina, Jenni Hokka, and Matti Nelimarkka. "Affective Practice of Soldiering: How Sharing Images is used to Spread Extremist and Racist Ethos on Soldiers of Odin Facebook Site." *Television & New Media* 22, no. 2 (Feb, 2021): 166-185, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1527476420982235>.

¹⁸ Kotonen, "The Soldiers of Odin Finland," p. 241-256.

analyzing right-wing movements (framing) and connecting it to a concept that could be specifically interesting in the case of a vigilante group (repertoires), this paper adds to the literature a perspective that could be highly relevant in other right-wing movements beyond the SOO.

3. Methodology

The SOO is understood through a discursive analysis of publicly available primary sources, focusing on blog posts on the SOO's website, but also including news articles and the SOO's YouTube channel. The focus is on sources from 2017 until 2022, as that is what is currently available on the website and YouTube channel. In total, 56 blog posts from the SOO's website across twelve pages have been analyzed, along with 4 youtube videos which have since been deleted. The focus will be on how the SOO present themselves to the outside world and what frames they use in this. Although it is acknowledged that this may differ from what they portray internally, this will show a picture of how the SOO hope the world sees them. As the website and YouTube are also used for recruitment purposes, the frames used there also show what they would like new members to see, implying that this is information they hope new members align with.

This paper will use concepts from social movement theory to attempt to understand the SOO. Particularly, the focus will be on (collective action) frames and repertoires of contention, with resource mobilization and political opportunity structures playing a secondary role. The aim of this paper will be to find the motivations behind what the SOO do in their actions.

Drawing from Benford and Snow's definition of frames, this paper sees framing processes and collective action frames as vital to understanding social movements. They give a movement a sense of agency, as the movement is able to generate its own construction of the world, rather than just being the vehicle of a certain ideology. Frames denote the way in which individuals interpret, identify, and classify the world. In social movements, this is done through collective action frames, which are formed when individuals negotiate a frame together.¹⁹ If everyday frames denote the way people interpret the world, collective action frames are the product of framing within social movements. Formed when a group of individual frames join within a social movement, collective action frames aim to also mobilize people and move them to

¹⁹ Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26, no. 1 (Jan 01, 2000): 611-639, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/223459> and Snow, David A. and Robert D. Benford. "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest." In *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, 133-155: Routledge, 1992.

action.²⁰ These elements can also be found in the framing process. This can be split into three parts: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing. In the diagnostic phase, a frame is constructed that identifies the problem. This denotes what the problem is that needs to change and who is to blame for this problem. Then, a prognostic frame is formed. The prognostic frame denotes how people should act or protest, usually along with a proposed solution. Sometimes, the protest or action can also be seen as the solution. Lastly, a motivational frame is developed to help mobilize people to join the movement. The motivational frame spells out why people should join, helping overcome the barriers that might hold people back from taking action. Sometimes this includes exaggerating the problem.²¹ Together, these frames guide participants in what needs change, how to change it and why to change it.

Social movement repertoires consist of the actions social movements take. Rallies, demonstrations, and protests are all part of a social movement's repertoire. These actions can also be called performances, in which social movements showcase their goal.²² Together, these performances form a repertoire that fits within that time and context. As outlined by Charles Tilly in *Regimes and Repertoires*, when people make performances to showcase their claims, they are shaped by the repertoire of the time and space they are in.²³ Summarized, repertoires and performances are what social movements *do*. Most actions taken by social movements are outside of the realm of daily life, disrupting what is normal.²⁴ There are several elements that can be observed in most social movement repertoires nowadays. Firstly, most performances show that their cause is *worthy* by for example the way they dress, the message they convey, by having large numbers join in or by having celebrities join in. Next to this, they also show *unity* of purpose and participants. Showing coordination and collective identity is seen as crucial to convey a message. Social movements often show *numbers* as well, showing that they

²⁰ Snow, David A., Rens Vliegenthart, and Pauline Ketelaars. "The Framing Perspective on Social Movements." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, 395. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2018, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781119168577.ch22>.

²¹ Johnston, Hank. *What Is a Social Movement?* Cambridge: Polity, 2017, p. 65, and Vliegenthart and Ketelaars, "The Framing Perspective," 396-397.

²² Johnston, *What is a social movement?*, p. 66.

²³ Tilly, Charles. *Regimes and Repertoires*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 34-35, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/univdeustosp/detail.action?docID=485999>

²⁴ Johnston, *What is a social movement?*, p. 95.

have broad support. Lastly, movement participants portray *commitment* to their cause.²⁵ Together, these are summarized in the term *WUNC*. With their repertoires, modern social movements look to disrupt the system, using different tactics to gain attention.²⁶

Political opportunity and/or threats and resource mobilization are both linked to frames and repertoires. Political opportunity and/or threats, referring to perceived changes in elites, regimes, media or culture that either motivate a movement to start or give a movement an opportunity to form/a (perceived) chance of success. Resource mobilization refers to both financial/material resources that group members may have access to, as well as prior networks that give space for new movements to form. This ties into both the performance aspect and framing, as certain resources are needed to form these.²⁷

4. Analysis

Originally starting as a street patrol organization, the SOO described themselves as “a patriotic organization fighting for a white Finland” on their former website, dating from 2015.²⁸ On their new website, published in 2017, they described themselves as “a patriotic street patrol association that opposes immigration, islamization, the EU and globalization, and we are working to combat the side effects of these problems, such as the deteriorating security situation.”²⁹ The group’s main principles, also posted on their renewed website, echo this mission statement. In 7 points, the group states that they oppose harmful immigration, multiculturalism, the EU and globalization and the transfer of Finnish funds to other countries or foreigners. The last two points touch upon their politics (not supporting any particular party) as well as their end goal of Finland remaining an independent welfare state with the aforementioned issues resolved.³⁰ In their mission statement and their main principles, they identify what they see as some of the main problems they seek to solve.

²⁵ Johnston, *What is a social movement?*, p. 97-99, but also Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires*, p. 35-40.

²⁶ Johnston, *What is a social movement?*, p. 99-103.

²⁷ Johnston, *What is a social movement?*, p. 66-68.

²⁸ Soldiers of Odin website from 2015, through Aharoni and Féron, “National populism and gendered vigilantism,” pp. 92.

²⁹ “Tietoa Meistä,” Soldiers of Odin, accessed May 26, 2022, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/tietoa-meista/>

³⁰ “Tietoa Meistä.”

4.1. Collective action frames

4.1.1. Diagnostic frame

As the SOO was born in the wake of a migrant crisis, it is likely that the crisis was a main driver for getting organized. Although members of the group may have had similar ideas prior to the migrant crisis, the direct aftermath of the 2014-2015 migrant crisis provided the group with an opportunity to form. Tied to this is the most dominant problem the SOO sees for Finland: multiculturalism and Islamization, stemming from immigration. This is a running theme throughout their outputs, directly naming this as their cause: “We believe that the resistance movement is a necessary countermeasure to the lobbying of forced multiculturalism, harmful immigration, the exterminators of national treasures and the unpatriotic, federalism- seeking monetary elite.”³¹

The same phrases as in their mission statement are repeated over time, in posts from 2017-2021. Regularly, the SOO mention specific incidents as examples they see as being caused by immigration, often with immigrants being the perpetrators of (sexual) assault or the cause of decreased feeling of security.³² They often post about their patrols in areas where this is the case. For example, they posted about patrolling in Eastern Helsinki after a Finn allegedly got attacked by a “group of people with an immigrant background”³³ and how Kerava has “a group of foreigners with mixed backgrounds disturbing the area.”³⁴

Where the SOO portray immigration as the main problem for Finland, they portray the government as the main actor to blame for this. Rather than just pointing out the problem they saw, they oftentimes demanded the parliament to take action, blaming them for failed policies and giving immigrants false hope.³⁵ Until 2019, Finland had had a center-right government in

³¹ “Isänmaallista toimintaa ja tekoja,” Soldiers of Odin, 20 April 2019, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/isanmaallista-toimintaa-ja-tekoja/>

³² A decreased feeling of security was specifically mentioned at multiple occasions, examples are: Various blog posts, Soldiers of Odin, 2019, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/page/10/> and 2020, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/page/6/>

³³ “SOO partio Itäkeskus – Puhos,” Soldiers of Odin, July 12, 2019, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/soo-partio-itakeskus-puhos/>

³⁴ “Kerava, jatko-osa,” Soldiers of Odin, October 11, 2020, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/kerava-jatko-osa/>

³⁵ For example: “Kerava, jatko-osa,” Soldiers of Odin, “Miikka siirtyi Valhallaan,” Soldiers of Odin, July 19, 2017, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/miikka-siirtyi-valhallaan/> and “Itsenäisyyspäivä tulee, mutta onko itsenäisyyttä enää?,” Soldiers of Odin, November 12, 2018, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/itsenaisyyspaiva-tulee-mutta-onko-itsenaisytta-enaa/>

power. After the 2019 elections, a center-left coalition took over, which is visible in the posts the SOO make. Whereas posts from before 2019 call out the government in general, after 2019 the SOO start mentioning the left-wing government in particular, for example calling it indifferent to its own people and stating that it does not come up with solutions.³⁶ Although the tone the SOO use to talk about the government with does not change, the political orientation of the government is added, showing that the SOO find this a relevant detail to add when describing who they see as the actor to blame. This reveals that the change in government was also a political threat to the SOO, as they see this new government specifically as a threat.

Along with the 2019 election, a child exploitation scandal in 2017 and the 2020 George Floyd protests influenced some of the diagnostic frames the SOO use. In the aftermath of a child abuse scandal, which occurred in Oulu in 2017, the SOO connected the child abuse scandal with a poor immigration policy.³⁷ Reacting to another current event, the SOO mention Antifa as a security threat after the George Floyd protests in 2020.³⁸ These instances show that when the SOO see political opportunity, they shift their narrative in order to fit within that opportunity.

Overall, the SOO's diagnostic frame is one that puts security threats due to immigration and multiculturalism at its core, blaming the government for allowing this to happen. At the same time, this frame is influenced and nuanced by current events, giving the SOO additional evidence that immigration and multiculturalism are security threats.

4.1.2. Prognostic frame

The solutions the SOO propose on their website can be split into separate call to actions, addressing the government, their members and the general public. Most solutions the SOO propose flow directly from the prognostic frame.

In addressing the government, the SOO often give concrete examples of what they would like changed:

- Easy, efficient, and inexpensive functions compared to other solutions are:
- Border control

³⁶ For example, "Kerava, jatko-osa," Soldiers of Odin, and "Tiedote," Soldiers of Odin, February 28, 2018, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/tiedote/>

³⁷ "4-year prison sentence in Oulu child sexual abuse case," *Yle News*, May 9, 2019, <https://yle.fi/news/3-10775828>, "Oulussa 26.01.2019 järjestetään kansallismielinen mielenosoitus," Soldiers of Odin, January 20, 2019, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/oulussa-26-01-2019-jarjestetaan-kansallismielinen-mielenosoitus/>

³⁸ "Patsaat eivät tule kaatumaan Suomessa," Soldiers of Odin, June 17, 2020, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/patsaat-eivat-tule-kaatumaan-suomessa/>

- A sensible immigration policy
- More efficient removal
- Compliance with international regulations for asylum seekers: Applications processed at the EU border, which must be closely monitored.³⁹

They ask the government to deport or repatriate immigrants “who are a threat to the security of our Finns.”⁴⁰ The SOO often refer to the government ‘taking responsibility’ for its policies.⁴¹ The SOO also call on the government to close the borders, most specifically the border with Sweden.⁴² Although there is some variety in what the SOO call for from the government, most of the solutions they propose are centered around limiting immigration, giving the SOO a very specific goal to push towards. Underlying these calls is the fear for security, as the SOO explain how multicultural countries are unstable and violent, stating that strict police supervision would be needed to form such a society and that Finland does not have enough police for that.⁴³

When addressing their own members, or writing about what they are contributing, the SOO point more towards the security problems they see. Rather than focusing solely on the goals they propose to the government (i.e. closing borders and removing immigrants from the country), the SOO focus on smaller scale security issues to solve. For example, they state: “the purpose of our operations is to secure a safe Finland,” and “We [...] are keeping the Finnish state safe for Finns when the authorities are no longer able or willing to do so.”⁴⁴ Tying in with their activities as a street patrol organization, the SOO see themselves as working to protect public places. Although this does not solve any of the main problems given in their diagnostic frame, patrolling does solve the security issues that they see as arising from immigration. In addition, the SOO mention that they will not stray from violence if the solutions they propose are not met by the government, stating that they will use force to protect the border “if

³⁹ “Kerava, jatko-osa,” Soldiers of Odin.

⁴⁰ “Soldiers of Odin tiedote!” Soldiers of Odin, December 6, 2018, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/soldiers-of-odin-tiedote/>

⁴¹ “Soldiers of Odin tiedote!” “Miika siirtyi Valhallaan,” and “Kukkavirta 188 tapahtumassa muisteltiin uhreja, mutta se muistutti myös siitä että oikeastaan mitään ei ole tehty” Soldiers of Odin, August 23, 2019, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/kukkavirta-188-tapahtumassa-muisteltiin-uhreja-mutta-se-muistutti-myo-siita-etta-oikeastaan-mitaan-ei-ole-tehty/>

⁴² “Tiedote,” Soldiers of Odin.

⁴³ “Nouse Suomi mielenosoitus, Hki 25.9.21,” Soldiers of Odin, September 29, 2021, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/nouse-suomi-mielenosoitus-hki-25-9-21/>

⁴⁴ “Nouse Suomi mielenosoitus,” and “Itsenäisyyspäivä tulee,” Soldiers of Odin.

necessary.”⁴⁵

Besides focusing on issues of security as a way for their members to contribute to solving the problems they outline, they also propose other activities for their members such as participating in protests.⁴⁶ Beyond their own members, the SOO call for all Finns to vote, both in national elections and EU elections. They write about how many decisions are made in Brussels, urging members and non-members to vote.⁴⁷ The SOO see voting as something that could help their cause. They state that “it would be time to consider introducing the obligation to vote,” mentioning that if more people voted, nationalist parties would have received different levels of support.⁴⁸ Adding the idea that voting could be a solution up with the diagnostic frame of the government making the wrong decisions points towards the idea that the SOO have some level of trust in the government to be able to do what they think is right, despite the government not doing so at that moment.

All in all, the prognostic frames the SOO paint are centered around the government and security more than anything else, with the SOO’s activities revolving around either making their government aware/changing their government (protests and voting) or taking action to solve security issues themselves.

4.1.3. Motivational frame

On their website, the SOO provide many calls to action: asking people to get involved, sign up to join the SOO or donate to their cause. In several posts, the SOO present their goals, afterwards asking the reader to join their cause by using the sign-up link. Asking questions such as “do you think Islamization threatens our culture?”, the SOO aim to find like-minded members to join.⁴⁹ Directly using points from their diagnostic frame related to the problems and perpetrator they see, they ask new members to join.

A specific motivational frame is used when calling for people to vote: the SOO try to appeal to a broader public by stating that even if people do not want to become a member, they

⁴⁵ “Rajavalvonta! Nyt!” Soldiers of Odin, October 22, 2019, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/rajavalvonta-nyt/>

⁴⁶ “Turha, turhempi, BLM-Suomi,” Soldiers of Odin, June 16, 2020, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/turha-turhempi-blm-suomi/>

⁴⁷ “Isänmaallista toimintaa ja tekoja,” Soldiers of Odin.

⁴⁸ “Suomen suurin puolue: Nukkuvien puolue,” Soldiers of Odin, June 14, 2019, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/suomen-suurin-puolue-nukkuvien-puolue/>

⁴⁹ “Liity joukkoon jolla on tarkoitus!” Soldiers of Odin, March 7, 2018, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/liity-joukkoon-jolla-on-tarkoitus/>

can still take action by voting in elections.⁵⁰ For different elections they use different reasoning, as for the European elections the SOO connect voting to patriotism and standing up for their own country, whereas in municipal elections they connect voting to specific measures against refugees that municipalities can take.⁵¹ In national elections, the SOO use more urgent pleas, stating that not voting is akin to voting for the Green Left party, pointing towards the idea that if more people would vote, nationalist parties would gain more seats.⁵² The SOO see having a Green Left government in power as a political threat, using this as an opportunity to gather more support.

When calling for new members, the SOO also do their best to portray themselves as a broad organization, open to different types of people. They emphasize that everyone can get involved according to their own capabilities, both men and women.⁵³ This contrasts with the videos they put out on their YouTube, which contains largely footage of white men between 25-50, with very little women involved. Whereas in text they try to appear to be “family friendly,” on video they put out a darker image.⁵⁴ In many YouTube videos, the SOO portray themselves with dark clothing, often with their back turned to the camera. Walking through streets in packs, this contrasts the openness with which they try to motivate people to join in their posts. This does, however, tie into another theme they use to motivate people to join: security.

The videos the SOO post of their patrolling shows what they do to protect citizens, which they mention on numerous occasions as a reason for joining. Asking people to take matters into their own hands, the SOO portray their organization as one that could secure the neighborhoods potential members live in. For example, when talking about how Vuosaari has been ‘restless,’ the SOO connect it directly to gaining new members: “Vuosaari residents, feel free to contact us and join in to protect your own residential area!”⁵⁵ This brings the call to action closer to the direct surroundings of the people they address, rather than sitcking to the

⁵⁰ “Isänmaallista toimintaa ja tekoja,” Soldiers of Odin.

⁵¹ European elections: “Isänmaallista toimintaa ja tekoja,” Soldiers of Odin, municipal elections: “Kuntavaalit tulevat, oletko valmis?” Soldiers of Odin, March 2, 2020, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/kuntavaalit-tulevat-oletko-valmis/>

⁵² “Suomen suurin puolue,” Soldiers of Odin.

⁵³ “Kansallismieliset naiset – aktivoitukaa!” Soldiers of Odin, March 13, 2018, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/kansallismieliset-naiset-aktivoitukaa/>

⁵⁴ “Friday’s papers: “Soldiers of Odin” patrol Kemi streets, paper claims “100s of Muslim extremists in Turku,” Finland to cut UNICEF funding by 75%” *Yle News*, October 9, 2015, <https://yle.fi/news/3-8367123>

⁵⁵ “SOO partio vuosaari,” Soldiers of Odin, August 16, 2019, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/soo-partio-vuosaari/>

broader goals they have in their diagnostic frame. Not only is security connected to specific instances, but also in general: the SOO ask readers directly what they think they can do to protect their safety and that of their communities, pushing them to join the SOO.⁵⁶

4.2 Repertoire

4.2.1 Performances

The SOO were founded with a specific repertoire in mind: street patrols. As Bjørge and Mareš explain in their volume, street patrols rarely reach their goals of actually stopping crime.⁵⁷ Although the SOO do mention that they have made an area ‘safer’ from time to time, or that residents have requested they come back, there are no reports of them actually stopping crime.⁵⁸ The videos the SOO put out on their YouTube are largely from these patrols as well, although they are edited with music in the background and effects added. Combined, the YouTube channel and the lack of effectiveness, points towards the idea of street patrols as performative action. The street patrols are seen as part of the solution to the problems the SOO pose in their diagnostic frame, however, the actions themselves do not necessarily contribute to solving any problems. Viewing street patrols as a performance, they do serve functions for the SOO: it gives members something concrete to do and allows them to put out an image that they are taking practical action. Street patrols fit well into the repertoire of the time the SOO were founded, as there were other street patrol groups in the Nordic countries as well.⁵⁹

The SOO also go beyond street patrols in their actions, as they hand out food, help others during the COVID pandemic and donate money to aid.⁶⁰ In each of these actions, they aim to help what they define as ‘Finnish’ citizens. Although these specific actions are not mentioned in the prognostic frame from the SOO, they are meant to counteract the failing government. The actions in line with helping citizens change over time, tying into the realities of the COVID pandemic, shifting from in-person food distribution to COVID support groups.

⁵⁶ For example, see: “Kukkavirta 188 tapahtumassa” and “”Rajavalvonta! Nyt!” Soldiers of Odin.

⁵⁷ Tore Bjørge, and Miroslav Mareš. *Vigilantism Against Migrants and Minorities*. Routledge Studies in Fascism and the Far Right. London: Routledge, 2019: p. 326-27, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9780429939259>.

⁵⁸ “Kerava, jatko-osa,” Soldiers of Odin.

⁵⁹ Kotonen, “The Soldiers of Odin Finland,” p. 243

⁶⁰ Handing out food: “Soppatyökkioffensiivi,” Soldiers of Odin, October 26, 2019, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/soppatykkioffensiivi/> and donating money: “Soldiers of Odin vietti itsenäisyyspäivää Oulussa,” Soldiers of Odin, December 7, 2021, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/soldiers-of-odin-vietti-itsenaisyyspaivaa-oulussa/>

This shows an adaptability of actions similar to the way their diagnostic frame shifted over time, reacting to current events and finding new opportunities. Again, these solution-oriented actions are mostly a performance rather than actual action.

Besides these solution-oriented actions, the SOO also organize protests and spread the word by hanging up stickers and banners. A recurring theme at the SOO's protests is their relationship with counter protesters and the police. On one account, the SOO specifically target what they describe as "violent left-wing supporters," who are set to visit a city on the same day as the SOO have an event.⁶¹ The SOO also take notice of how the authorities treat them versus other protestors, noting that although protesting is a fundamental right in Finland, they feel that the authorities treat different groups unequally.⁶² For the SOO, this forms a point of contention with the authorities that they usually aim to work together with for their patrols.

4.2.2. WUNC-displays

Most aspects of the SOO's repertoire fit into Tilly's description of repertoires, showing that they are worthy, have unity, have numbers and commitment from their members. Their worthiness is shown in the way they emphasize that they work together with the authorities, posing with the police on one occasion.⁶³ Their videos and blog posts show that although they would not stray from violence, they do not use it regularly or lightly, adding to the idea that they are a serious group looking to really 'protect' their country. Their unity is shown through the way they dress and the way they pose: wearing black moto jackets with their logo on the back, all walking at the same pace through the streets and posing with their backs to the camera. Many images the SOO put out are similar, and members have similar outfits and postures in their pictures and videos as well.⁶⁴ In posing for images and videos, the SOO put out the idea of numbers: posing in a long line or editing videos in a certain way makes it appear as if the group is quite large. In addition, they manage to have their activities spread out over Finland, emphasizing that they have support and members in different places. Lastly, although commitment is something that is mostly internal to members and cannot easily be observed

⁶¹ "Mediatedote: Jyväskylä 6.6.2020," Soldiers of Odin, May 30, 2020, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/mediatiedote-jyvaskyla-6-6-2020/>

⁶² "Elokapina ja mielenosoittaminen," Soldiers of Odin, June 22, 2021, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/elokapina-ja-mielenosoittaminen/>

⁶³ "Ei natsitella saa, ei maalittaa saa..." Soldiers of Odin, December 12, 2021, <https://soldiersofodin.fi/ei-natsitella-saa-ei-maalittaa-saa/>

⁶⁴ Soldiers of Odin, <https://www.youtube.com/c/SoldiersofOdinFinland/videos>

from the outside, the SOO attempt to show that their members are committed by the fact that they travel far, participate in protests and that they continue their activities despite the COVID pandemic.

5. Conclusion

The SOO's ideas and images that they put out on their website and YouTube fit well into social movement theory, having identifiable frames giving the movement clear goals. Overall, the dominant frame tying together the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames is that of security. The problems raised in the diagnostic frame are tied to concerns for security, the solutions the SOO come up with are there to solve security issues and the motivational frames used push for potential members to take security measures in their own hands. In addition, although the SOO see the government as failing to protect its citizens, the SOO see the government as part of the solution, and the government plays a key role in each part of the frame.

These frames continue on into their actions: looking to perform security, the SOO take to the streets in their street patrols. The main actions the SOO organize play directly into the proposed solutions from the prognostic frame, showing that the organization is pragmatic in their approach. Performing solutions for other problems beyond just security, the SOO also put out the idea that they are a group worthy of paying attention to. This implies that the SOO have the idea that they should be diverse in their actions, beyond what the frames they have spell out. By diversifying their activities, they simultaneously are able to expand their motivational frame, attracting more members and giving members more possible actions to take. As the SOO have formed a longstanding organization with a member's base, it can be concluded that these cohesive frames and actions that flow from them give a fruitful basis for a movement to continue over a period of time, regardless of their relative success.

Seeing as the SOO's actions and frames are tied together closely, with security and performance playing a central role, social movement theory gives a valuable mode of analysis for the SOO. Although this research was limited to output the SOO produced themselves, future research could focus on how the SOO use these frames internally to form a cohesive group. Empirical findings that point towards transnational movement diffusion and adaptability of actions show that tactical innovation and transnational diffusion could be worthwhile modes of study as well. More broadly, these links show how future research on right-wing groups can

find a useful base in social movement theory. It is possible that certain repertoires may differ from each other, but the basis of framing and protest as performance can stand also in right-wing groups. Rather than comparing right-wing movements with their left-wing counterparts, this research has shown that right-wing movements can be analyzed within social movement theory, without much contention of concepts whilst discovering valuable links that may be able to explain the trajectory and action of the movement.

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Ego-centred Sovereignism vs. Democracy: Motives for Participation in Antidemocratic and Conspiracy-based Movements

Eva Marie Wohlhage

Abstract

An increasing number of countries around the world are experiencing social movements of ego-centred sovereignism. Based on conspiracy ideologies, supporters of these antidemocratic groups deny the legitimacy of a state and its authorities and consider its foundations, practices and laws as illegitimate. Instead of adapting to the demands of a democratic order and society, they refuse to act in line with it, protest and reinterpret reality according to their expectations.

In Germany, the so-called *Reichsbürger* belong to this category. Supporters of this heterogeneous movement deny the legitimate existence of the Federal Republic of Germany and obstruct the work of government agencies in various ways. For example, they refuse to pay taxes and create fake documents and own territories. Often, they are dismissed as harmless maniacs, but they partly do not even shy away from violence in order to achieve their goals or tend to, especially right winged, extremism.

To counteract an amplification of these groups, it is crucial to comprehend why people believe in and support these conspiracy-driven groups. However, research of this phenomenon of ego-centred sovereignism has great gaps. Thus, by using a theoretical framework anchored in conspiracy theory research, this paper analyses the antidemocratic movement of the *Reichsbürger* in Germany and its supporters to understand the motives of people for their participation in these kinds of ego-centred sovereign groups.

Next to a coherent, individually pronounced tendency of people to believe in conspiracy theories, there are different existential, social, and epistemic motives that provoke a belief in conspiracy ideologies and support a participation in an antidemocratic group like the *Reichsbürger*. These motives are strongly connected with individual circumstances and successes in the members' lives, their self-perception and mental well-being as well as their general view on the world. By using them as the conceptual framework for the case study analysis and by examining statistical data, existing interviews with experts and supporters of the *Reichsbürger* as well as additional secondary literature, this paper will carry out an analysis of possible motivations for participation.

Keywords: Conspiracy ideologies; ego-centred sovereignism; “Reichsbürger”; participation motives; antidemocratic movement

1. Introduction

The German *Reichsbürger*¹ movement has been attracting public attention since the murder of a police officer in the Franconian town of Georgensgmünd by a *Reichsbürger*. On October 19, 2016, policemen stormed the man's home to confiscate his 31 firearms. The man, who had marked his property with a yellow line and a sign as "Regierungsbezirk Wolfgang"² shot at the officers, injuring several - one of them fatally.³ After this incident, the former German Federal Minister of the Interior, Thomas de Maizière, described the movement as a danger for the German society and democracy and since then, it has also been observed by the Constitutional Protection Agency.⁴

The *Reichsbürger* scene is part of a phenomenon with which more and more countries around the world are confronted with – for example in the form of the *Sovereign Citizens* (USA) or *Freemen on the Land* (UK, Canada, Australia): ego-centred sovereignism.⁵ Supporters of these antidemocratic groups subscribe to specific conspiracy ideologies as the foundation for their antidemocratic and anti-establishment attitudes and thus do not accept the state and its authorities as well as its foundations, practices and laws as legitimate. They refuse to comply with the rules and codes of a democratic order and society, often resorting to protests and refusal or even physical violence.

Thus, *Reichsbürger* deny the legitimate existence of the Federal Republic of Germany and obstruct the work of government agencies in various ways. For example, they refuse to pay taxes and create fake documents and own independent territories. Frequently, they are dismissed as harmless eccentrics, but some do not hesitate to resort to violence in order to

¹ The literal translation would be "Empire Citizens". This translation and all following translation from and to English are made by the author. It is assured that these have been prepared to the best knowledge and belief. this applies to both written and oral quotations.

² Translation: government district Wolfgang

³ Jan Rathje, "'Reichsbürger' Und Souveränismus," bpb.de, August 27, 2021, <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/verschwoerungstheorien-2021/339286/reichsbuerger-und-souveraenismus/>.

⁴ "Reichsbürger Werden Bundesweit von Verfassungsschutz Beobachtet," *Der Spiegel*, November 22, 2016. <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/reichsbuerger-werden-bundesweit-von-verfassungsschutz-beobachtet-a-1122571.html>.

⁵ Dennis Walkenhorst and Maximilian Ruf, "Violent ego-centred sovereignism as a global threat? The case of the German "Reichsbürger" and implications for P/CVE research" in *Researching The Evolution Of Countering Violent Extremism*, ed. Farangiz Atamuradova and Sara Zeiger, (Hedaya, 2021), <https://hedayahcenter.org/app/uploads/2021/09/Full-Edited-Volume-RC2019.pdf>, 223.

achieve their goals, and they partially overlap with the far-right and anti-Semitic extremist scene.

To counteract an amplification and expansion of this and similar movements, it is crucial to comprehend why people believe in and support these conspiracy-driven groups. However, research of this phenomenon of ego-centred sovereignism has great gaps.⁶ By analysing the antidemocratic movement of the *Reichsbürger* and its members, the research paper aims to understand the motives of people for their participation in these kinds of conspiracy-driven ego-centred sovereign groups under the following research question:

Why are people participating in antidemocratic and ego-centric sovereign movements like the German Reichsbürger-group?

The paper is separated in different sections. The first part contains the theory to deliver an overview over the existing scholarship and the core concepts of field of conspiracy theories. Here, a special focus lies on the three different theoretical motives of believing in and supporting conspiracy theories: existential, social and epistemic. Moreover, the methodology of this explanatory single-case study will be presented. Subsequently, the case of the German Reichsbürger is described and analysed. For this, the structure and the ideology of the group is introduced. Afterwards, the in-depth investigation of the participation motives is carried out. It is framed by the core concepts in form of the three main motives to believe in conspiracy theories. The paper closes with a conclusion to sum up the finding of the analysis.

2. Theory and Methodology

a. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The research in conspiracy theories and ideology is already extensive and intensive. Especially the article of Douglas et. al.⁷ from 2019 summarizes the research and core concepts of this area quite well. The authors make use of their own earlier works as well as of other scholars' findings to create a broad and complex analysis of the existing academic literature. In addition, Lamberty

⁶ Walkenhorst and Ruf, "Violent ego-centred sovereignism as a global threat? The case of the German "Reichsbürger" and implications for P/CVE research", 236.

⁷ Karen M. Douglas et al., "Understanding Conspiracy Theories," *Political Psychology* 40, no. S1 (February 2019): 3–35, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12568>.

and Rees⁸, among others, especially focus on the motives of the supporters to believe in and support them. Thus, these works also form an important foundation for the theoretical framework of this paper.

The *Reichsbürger* movement has been attracting media coverage and public attention only recently and thus, limited published scholarship reflects this novelty. Main sources here are the works of Schönberger und Schönberger⁹ and Wilking.¹⁰ In the latter, Keil's chapter¹¹ investigates primarily the psychosomatics of members in order to find possible motivations for participation. An analysis along the lines of conspiracy theory concepts has so far been lacking, and this paper deals with this research gap.

In general, a conspiracy can be identified as a secret plot between at least two powerful actors with the aim to gain more political or economic power. In order to achieve this, the actors violate rights and existing agreements, reconstruct institutions, withhold information and keep secrets¹². Conspiracy theories develop from this basic idea. They represent an attempt to deliver explanations for significant social and political events and circumstances that involve secret plots between powerful malevolent actors¹³. A rejection of their proposed theses through authorities and institutions is understood as proof of the correctness of the conspiracy theory by its supporters.¹⁴ On this basis, so-called conspiracy ideologies can arise, from which groups and even movements develop.¹⁵ A conspiracy belief becomes an ideology when a problematic

⁸ Pia Lamberty and Jonas H. Rees. "Gefährliche Mythen: Verschwörungserzählungen als Bedrohung für die Gesellschaft" in *Die Geforderte Mitte. Rechtsextreme und Demokratiegefährdende Einstellungen in Deutschland 2020/2021*, ed. Andreas Zick and Beate Küpper (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz Verlag, 2021).

⁹ Christoph Schönberger and Sophie Schöneberger, *Die Reichsbürger : Verfassungsfeinde Zwischen Staatsverweigerung Und Verschwörungstheorie* (Frankfurt ; New York Campus Verlag, 2020).

¹⁰ Dirk Wilking, *"Reichsbürger" : Ein Handbuch* (Potsdam Demos - Brandenburgisches Institut Für Gemeinwesenberatung, 2017).

¹¹ Jan-Gerrit Keil. "Zwischen Wahn und Rollenspiel – das Pfänomen der „Reichsbürger“ aus psychologischer Sicht" in *"Reichsbürger" : Ein Handbuch*, ed. Dirk Wilking (Potsdam Demos - Brandenburgisches Institut Für Gemeinwesenberatung, 2017).

¹² Charles Pigden, "Popper Revisited, or What Is Wrong with Conspiracy Theories?," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 25, no. 1 (March 1995): 3–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004839319502500101>.

¹³ Douglas et al., "Understanding Conspiracy Theories"; David Aaronovitch, *Voodoo Histories : The Role of the Conspiracy Theory in Shaping Modern History* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2011); Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy Theories : A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Matthew R. X. Dentith and Martin Orr, "SECRECY and CONSPIRACY," *Episteme* 15, no. 4 (April 17, 2017): 433–50, <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2017.9>.

¹⁴ Michael Barkun, "Conspiracy Theories as Stigmatized Knowledge," *Diogenes* 62, no. 3-4 (October 25, 2016): 039219211666928, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192116669288>.

¹⁵ Lamberty and Rees, "Gefährliche Mythen: Verschwörungserzählungen als Bedrohung für die Gesellschaft", 283f.

ideological component is added and when principles, regulations and ideas try to be enforced in a totalitarian way. Movements are then used by groups or players to spread the ideology.¹⁶ A particular kind of conspiracy ideology is what Walkenhorst and Ruf¹⁷ call “ego-centred sovereignism”.

In general, sovereignism describes an ideology that puts a nation-state’s sovereignty first and that embodies the idea of a supreme and autonomous authority about its territory.¹⁸ As the word “ego-centred” itself already implies, in this particular phenomenon, unlike the original idea of sovereignism, it is not the government or the nation that is at the centre, but the individual persons. Supporters of these conspiracy-driven groups deny the legitimacy of a state and its authorities and consider its foundations, practices and laws as illegitimate and thus, refuse to comply with the rules and codes of a democratic order and society, often resorting to protests and refusal or even physical violence. The group of the *Reichsbürger* which I use as case study in this research paper is classified as part of this phenomenon.¹⁹ In the following chapter, the beliefs and argumentation of the *Reichsbürger* will be presented more precisely.

There are different approaches to explain why people believe in conspiracy theories. An assumption based on personality psychology is that people differ fundamentally in their tendencies to believe in conspiracy theories. Thus, these tendencies seen as personality traits can be called a “conspiracy mentality”²⁰. The notion of a coherent, individually pronounced conspiracy mentality is built upon findings that people who already believe specific conspiracy

¹⁶ Oliver Koch and Matthias Blöser, “Verschwörungsideologien. Definitionen. Hintergründe. Praxistipps,” *Zentrum Oekumene der EKH und der EKKW* (February, 2021), <https://www.zentrum-oekumene.de/fileadmin/redaktion/Weltanschauungen/Verschwo%C3%B6rungsideologien.pdf>, 7.

¹⁷ Walkenhorst and Ruf, “Violent ego-centred sovereignism as a global threat? The case of the German “Reichsbürger” and implications for P/CVE research”, 229.

¹⁸ Stephan De Spiegeleire et. al. “Populist Sovereignism. In: *THE RISE OF POPULIST SOVEREIGNISM: What It Is, Where It Comes from, and What It Means for International Security and Defense*. Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12603.5>, 32.; Sean Mueller and Anja Heidelberger, “Should We Stay or Should We Join? 30 Years of Sovereignism and Direct Democracy in Switzerland,” *European Politics and Society* 79, no. 6 (July 2019): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2019.1632582>, 183f.

¹⁹ Walkenhorst and Ruf, “Violent ego-centred sovereignism as a global threat? The case of the German “Reichsbürger” and implications for P/CVE research”, 229.

²⁰ Douglas et al., “Understanding Conspiracy Theories”; Roland Imhoff and Martin Bruder, “Speaking (Un-)Truth to Power: Conspiracy Mentality as a Generalised Political Attitude,” *European Journal of Personality* 28, no. 1 (July 11, 2013): 25–43, <https://doi.org/10.1002/per.1930>; Joseph E Uscinski and Joseph M Parent, *American Conspiracy Theories* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

theories tend to believe in others as well.²¹ Wood, Douglas and Sutton²² were able to prove with their study results that this is even the case when the conspiracy theories are unrelated or mutually exclusive: Their research show that people who believe that Lady Diana was killed by the British secret service are also more likely to think that she only faked her own death.

Next to this, there are also social and cultural science approaches that refer to motives that strengthen people's tendencies to believe in conspiracies theories. These notions deal with the situations in which people believe in them, and the benefits that people derive from this worldview. In particular, they focus on existential, social, and epistemic motives.²³

Existential motives deal with the pursuit of control and safety in people's life. People who experience a feeling of loss of control or a threat to their existential needs are more likely to tend to conspiracy-driven thinking in order to compensate these sensations.²⁴ The subjective feeling of having no influence on society and a lack of understanding from the social and political world is central here. Especially invisible and abstract threats are often difficult for people to understand and categorize and reinforce the feeling of powerlessness and anxiety and thus, also the tendency to distrust the given circumstances and to believe in conspiracy theories.²⁵

Furthermore, social motives could be identified as influencing factors. Firstly, the desire for a positive self-perception and the striving for uniqueness. Conspiracy theories can assist believers to feel special by standing out from the broad mass, having crucial rare information, and thus realising the absolute truth and existing connections.²⁶ There is a deep mistrust of others, but also of the own self, which in turn makes an admiration from outside so important and leads to attempts to devalue others. Thus, characteristic traits of a narcissistic personality disorder are developed: Since the "ideal" and the "real" identity cannot (apparently) be reconciled with each other, a distorted perception of the own relevance and value arises.²⁷

²¹ Ted Goertzel, "Belief in Conspiracy Theories," *Political Psychology* 15, no. 4 (December 1994): 731–42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3791630>.

²² Michael J. Wood, Karen M. Douglas, and Robbie M. Sutton, "Dead and Alive: Beliefs in Contradictory Conspiracy Theories," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 3, no. 6 (January 25, 2012): 767–73, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550611434786>.

²³ Karen M. Douglas, Robbie M. Sutton, and Aleksandra Cichocka, "The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 26, no. 6 (December 2017): 538–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417718261>.

²⁴ Douglas et al., "Understanding Conspiracy Theories."

²⁵ Lamberty and Rees, "Gefährliche Mythen: Verschwörungserzählungen als Bedrohung für die Gesellschaft", 286.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.

²⁷ Keil. "Zwischen Wahn und Rollenspiel – das Phänomen der „Reichsbürger“ aus psychologischer Sicht", 86ff.

However, this pursuit is not limited to the own person, but this also applies for the belonging group. The feeling that the own group is under threat or other groups do not acknowledge and value the own relevance strengthens the conviction of conspiracies in the system.²⁸ Here emerges the phenomenon of the so-called “collective narcissism”,²⁹ “a form of ingroup positivity that reflects a belief in the ingroup’s greatness associated with a conviction that others do not acknowledge the ingroup’s worth enough.”³⁰ In order to explain their own status in the society, low-status groups rather tend to believe in conspiracy narratives than members of high-status groups.³¹

Finally, epistemic motives refer to how people understand the world. Conspiracy narratives offer explanations that may enable people to maintain faith and conviction in the face of uncertainty and contradiction so that belief in conspiracy theories is often stronger under uncertain circumstances.³² Often under an overestimation of their own ability to comprehend complex causal phenomena³³, conspiracy believers try to find (non-existent) causal links in randomness and tend to find patterns where most others do not. Also, they are more likely to perceive intentionality where none exists.³⁴ Through the construction of a dualistic good-evil order framework for what is in reality a more complex, the outside world is perceived in a filtered way: The complexity is reduced and the world re-explained according to own standards.³⁵ Overall, there is evidence that conspiracy theories seem to appeal to people who are looking for accuracy or meaning, but who may lack the cognitive tools or who have (psychological) problems that prevent them from finding accuracy and meaning by other, more rational means.³⁶

²⁸ Uscinski and Parent, *American Conspiracy Theories*.

²⁹ Agnieszka Golec de Zavala et al., “Collective Narcissism and Its Social Consequences,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 97, no. 6 (2009): 1074–96, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016904>.

³⁰ Douglas et al., “Understanding Conspiracy Theories.”

³¹ Ibid.; Goertzel, “Belief in Conspiracy Theories”; Uscinski and Parent, *American Conspiracy Theories*.

³² Jan-Willem van Prooijen and Nils B. Jostmann, “Belief in Conspiracy Theories: The Influence of Uncertainty and Perceived Morality,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 43, no. 1 (December 17, 2012): 109–15, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.1922>.

³³ Joseph A. Vitriol and Jesseca K. Marsh, “The Illusion of Explanatory Depth and Endorsement of Conspiracy Beliefs,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 48, no. 7 (June 15, 2018): 955–69, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2504>.

³⁴ Lamberty and Rees, “Gefährliche Mythen: Verschwörungserzählungen als Bedrohung für die Gesellschaft“, 287.

³⁵ Jan-Gerrit Keil, “Zur Abgrenzung Des Milieus Der „Reichsbürger“ – Pathologisierung Des Politischen Und Politisierung Des Pathologischen,” *Forensische Psychiatrie, Psychologie, Kriminologie* 15, no. 3 (June 21, 2021): 255–73, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11757-021-00668-7>.

³⁶ Douglas et al., “Understanding Conspiracy Theories”.

b. Methodology

In order to investigate the broad and complex phenomenon of ego-centric sovereignism and its member's participation motives with different kinds of materials and sources, an explanatory single-case study of the *Reichsbürger* is used as a qualitative research method. Thus, the analysis of the data focuses on explanation building, which means it aims to explain a case and to identify a set of connections between theory, concepts and results.³⁷ Hence, the analysis of the research paper will be framed, based on the theoretical research, within the existential, social, and epistemic motives of believing in conspiracy theories to examine if these motivations are also an explanation for people's participation in the group *Reichsbürger*.

For the analysis multiple sources with rich and in-depth data are used, as typical for case studies research, and includes both primary and secondary sources. Through this, the expressiveness and reliability of the investigation is ensured. The used sources range from documents like newspaper articles and academic literature over existing interviews, written or in documentaries, of experts in this field as well as participants in the *Reichsbürger* movement to statistical data according to the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution. Moreover, part of the analysis is the examination of an original written correspondence of a *Reichsbürger*. The recipient of the letters was the enforcement department of a German city administration as a reaction to the measures taken by the local authority to collect debts. Most of the sources are publicly accessible, except the original correspondence. These documents were put at my disposal by the according German city council for this research paper.³⁸

3. The Case of the German *Reichsbürger*

In the following chapter, the case of the German *Reichsbürger* movement will be investigated. Firstly, a brief overview of the ideology and the structure of the grouping will be illustrated. Afterwards, the participation motivations will be analysed along the above presented existential, social and epistemic motives.

a. Ideology and Structure

³⁷ Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research : Design and Methods*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2009).

³⁸ The disposal was in line with the disclosure rules within the city council and I was granted the right to use them for this publicly-accessible article.

The chapter starts with a concise explanation of who or what the *Reichsbürger* are in the actual sense and how their world view presents itself.

The *Reichsbürger* movement is an extremely heterogeny phenomenon. The majority of the scene is, if at all, very loosely united. Most of them are individuals who are not organisationally networked, or they are unstable small groups. The connection between the *Reichsbürger*, despite their many facets, is that they completely deny the legitimate existence of the Federal Republic of Germany. The existing state structures and constitutional order are simply regarded as non-existent. For them, the Federal Republic of Germany is not real, an illusion, created either by the Allies of the Second World War or, for example, the "BRD GmbH", a global business enterprise that disguises itself as a legitimate German state in order to satisfy its profit motive.³⁹ On the basis of these various conspiracy-driven arguments, they refuse to act in line with the order of a democratic society, and protest and commit violations of the legal system.⁴⁰ There are also often overlaps with right-wing extremist and antisemitic ideologies.⁴¹ To connect with each other and to spread their theories and political fantasies, the *Reichsbürger* use the internet, especially social media and YouTube. They mostly avoid objective dialogue, such as interviews with critical journalists.⁴²

The extent of the importance attached to the specific reference to the German Empire⁴³ as the real, actual state can vary greatly within the scene. For this reason, there are also fluid transitions to the milieu of the so-called self-governors, who are guided less by an abstract idea of the German Empire than by a concrete idea of freedom, embodying the notion that the non-existence of the Federal Republic of Germany means that every individual is free to declare his or her independence.⁴⁴ For reasons of linguistic simplicity, only the term *Reichsbürger* is used but it also refers to the contiguous and partly overlapping milieu of the self-governing citizens.

³⁹ Schöneberger and Schöneberger, *Die Reichsbürger : Verfassungsfeinde Zwischen Staatsverweigerung Und Verschwörungstheorie*, 11-12.

⁴⁰ Keil, "Zur Abgrenzung Des Milieus Der „Reichsbürger“ – Pathologisierung Des Politischen Und Politisierung Des Pathologischen."

⁴¹ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, "'Reichsbürger' und 'Selbstverwalter'. Staatsfeinde, Geschäftemacher, Verschwörungstheoretiker," (December 2018), https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/reichsbuerger-und-selbstverwalter/2018-12-reichsbuerger-und-selbstverwalter-staatsfeinde-geschaeftemacher-verschwörungstheoretiker.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=9, 12.

⁴² Andreas Speit and Christoph Links Verlag, *Reichsbürger Die Unterschätzte Gefahr* (Berlin Ch. Links Verlag September, 2017), 49ff.

⁴³ Translation in German: Deutsches Reich

⁴⁴ Schöneberger and Schöneberger, *Die Reichsbürger : Verfassungsfeinde Zwischen Staatsverweigerung Und Verschwörungstheorie*, 11-12.

The ideological spectrum of the *Reichsbürger* favours their high number of supporters. In 2020, it was estimated that around 20.000 people belong to the scene in Germany.⁴⁵ One year before, the number of members was 19.000 and at the beginning of the observation by the constitutional protection authorities in autumn 2016, the potential number of people was initially estimated at around 10.000.⁴⁶ However, according to Jan Rathje, more social science studies should be introduced in addition to the existing surveys in order to determine the actual size of the milieu, since, for example, there were more than 60,000 subscribers of popular *Reichsbürger* channels on the social media platform Telegram in June 2021.⁴⁷

Most of the *Reichsbürger* are male (around three-quarter), between 40 and 60 years old⁴⁸, single and socially distant or even isolated. They show mainly verbally aggressive behaviour and generally less physically aggressive tendencies than other extremist groups.⁴⁹ The numbers of the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution confirm this statement. In 2020, 599 (2019: 598) extremist offences were attributed to the *Reichsbürger* scene. Among these, a total of 125 (2019: 121) were violent offences, for example 78 of extortion (2019: 81) and 30 of resistance (2019: 30). Among the 474 (2019: 468) other offences, coercion and threats (148) predominate in particular (2019: 156).⁵⁰ The following statistic shows the development of extremist criminal and violent offences of *Reichsbürger* in the years 2017 to 2020. The red bar represents the total number of offences, whereas the black bar represents how many of these offences were also violent:

⁴⁵ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, "Zahlen Und Fakten," accessed June 1, 2022, https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/DE/themen/reichsbuerger-und-selbstverwalter/zahlen-und-fakten/zahlen-und-fakten_node.html.

⁴⁶ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, "'Reichsbürger' und 'Selbstverwalter'. Staatsfeinde, Geschäftemacher, Verschwörungstheoretiker", 13.

⁴⁷ Rathje, "'Reichsbürger' Und Souveränismus".

⁴⁸ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, "Zahlen Und Fakten."

⁴⁹ Keil. "Zwischen Wahn und Rollenspiel – das Pfänomen der „Reichsbürger“ aus psychologischer Sicht", 100.

⁵⁰ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, "Zahlen Und Fakten."

Entwicklung extremistischer Straf- und Gewalttaten in den Jahren 2017 bis 2020

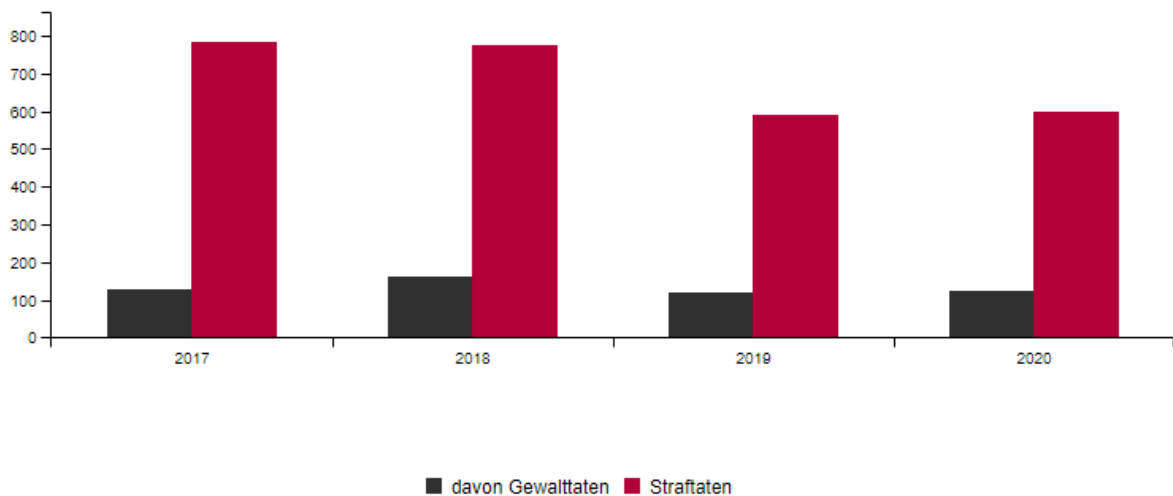


Fig. 1: Development of extremist criminal and violent offences in the years 2017 to 2020⁵¹

b. Participation Motives

In this section the participation motivations of *Reichsbürger* will be analysed along the three different motives which were elaborated in the theoretical part in chapter 2.1 of this paper. The motives are closely connected and complement and confirm each other. Of course, the members are all individuals so that the degree of the intensity of the motivations and the specific characteristics differ: “Some simply want to save taxes, save money, are hangers-on, but there are also some who we have already observed as the Office for the Protection of the Constitution: The historical revisionists, right-wing extremists, the antisemites.”⁵²

However, the recognizable similarities and overlaps in the participation motives, especially of the strongly involved and convinced supporters of the *Reichsbürger* movement will be examined in the following.

i. Existential Motives

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Martin Döring in: BILD, “Reichsbürger – Feinde Des Staates,” [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-e1EpKI8JU), January 10, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-e1EpKI8JU>, 7.27-7.43.

“Einige wollen einfach Steuern sparen, Geld sparen, sind Mitläufer, aber es gibt auch einige, die wir bereits vorher als Verfassungsschützer beobachtet haben: Die Geschichtsrevisionisten, die Rechtsextremisten, die Antisemiten.”

As in chapter 2.1 described, people aim for control and safety in life. Thus, when a feeling of loss of control or a threat to their existential needs occurs, they are more likely to tend to support conspiracy theories.

A strikingly large number of *Reichsbürger* biographies are characterised by a stroke of fate or an upheaval in life, for example due to professional or private failure or the loss of a loved one through illness, accident or separation.⁵³ This results in inner conflict and great insecurity, in terms of their own current social existence or when they look back on their own lives.⁵⁴ Thus, the origin often lies in the member's own dissatisfaction. Hereby, the causes are individual and different, since "every frustration has its own life story":⁵⁵ "Frustration over decades of unemployment, over discontinued bus routes, over perceived powerlessness."⁵⁶ This also explains why the tendencies towards the *Reichsbürger* movement, in contrast to other extremist movements,⁵⁷ usually appear later in life. Hence, the *Reichsbürger* ideology finds fertile ground especially among people in more unstable and insecure circumstances, for example in structurally weaker regions.⁵⁸

Furthermore, socio-political developments in which the supporters feel they cannot exert any influence also encourage them to turn to the *Reichsbürger* groups. In particular in East Germany, where the movement has a lot of members, these attitudes also arose due to changes brought by German reunification. For example, many followers have been found among people who have an identity problem and played probably leading roles during the German Democratic Republic times like ex-Stasi employees or people of the old Marxist-Leninist party SED. They tried to find a conclusive explanation to questions like: "Why did this happen to me? Why did this reunification simply pass us by? Why weren't we asked?"⁵⁹

⁵³ Keil. "Zwischen Wahn und Rollenspiel – das Phänomen der „Reichsbürger“ aus psychologischer Sicht“, 100.

⁵⁴ Interview with Michael Hüllen, "Reichsbürgerbewegung und Esoterik. 'Das Milieu schürt Heilserwartungen'," interviewed by Dieter Kassel. *Deutschlandfunk* (August 29, 2017). <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/reichsbuergerbewegung-und-esoterik-das-milieu-schuert-100.html>.

⁵⁵ Hans-Holger Büchler in: Vanja Budde, "Die 'Reichsbürger' - Der Schwierige Umgang Mit Den Staatsverdrossenen," *Deutschlandfunk*, October 1, 2016, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/die-reichsbuerger-der-schwierige-umgang-mit-den-100.html>.

„Und jede Frustration hat ihre eigene Lebensgeschichte“

⁵⁶ Budde, "Die 'Reichsbürger' - Der Schwierige Umgang Mit Den Staatsverdrossenen."

„Frust über Jahrzehnte der Arbeitslosigkeit, über eingestellte Buslinien, über vermeintliche Ohnmacht.“

⁵⁷ Walkenhorst and Ruf, "Violent ego-centred sovereignty as a global threat? The case of the German "Reichsbürger" and implications for P/CVE research", 226.

⁵⁸ Interview with Andreas Vorrath, "Sehr viel ist auf Unzufriedenheit begründet", interviewed by Jan Rathje. Amadeu-Antonio-Stiftung, 2014, https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/w/files/pdfs/reichsbuerger_web.pdf.

⁵⁹ Interview with Vorrath, "Sehr viel ist auf Unzufriedenheit begründet."

This feeling of passivity, lawlessness and loss of control, even if it is not necessarily the case, is dangerous and a fuelling factor for turning to the *Reichsbürger*.⁶⁰ This often creates a feeling of having no alternative.⁶¹ At the beginning, it is often used in order to get out of perhaps economic difficulties, for example by not paying parking tickets or taxes. However, the longer they stay with these feelings, or the more difficult their personal situation is perceived to be, the more they resort to the ideology. Instead of attempting to improve their real situation, they put all their energies into their ideological fight: "Do not tolerate this, FIGHT!!!!!"⁶²

Their opponents in this fight are the state and its authorities as the conspirators. They are identified as the culprits of their situation, as the political scientist Jan Rathje explains: "They believe that the state is an oppressive regime that they blame for personal defeats and grievances. The search for scapegoats also derives from this. [...] This is how structural problems get personified."⁶³ As different as the individual life stories may be, all *Reichsbürger* share their problems with the authorities. The stronger a follower identifies himself or herself with the ideology and the more he or she is active in the movement, the stronger the rejection of the state also becomes: "Disenchantment with the state becomes hatred against the state."⁶⁴ This also leads to a distinction between human and person within the *Reichsbürger* scene, with the word person standing for the enslavement of a human by the state.⁶⁵

Thus, *Reichsbürger* are aware of their political provocation and agitate quite deliberately out of a self-chosen attitude of protest and resistance.⁶⁶ Especially when they feel under pressure and a loss of control, they react with great resistance or rampage. Since

„Warum ist das gerade mir passiert? Warum ist diese Wiedervereinigung einfach an uns vorbei gegangen? Warum sind wir nicht gefragt worden?“

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Quotation in: Das Erste, "Reichsbürger Gegen Den Staat – Eine Parallelwelt Mitten in Deutschland," November 30, 2016, <https://carinahuppertz.de/reichsbuerger-gegen-den-staat-das-erste-ard/>, 33.21-33.27. "So viele Alternativen hat man nicht und wenn sich eine bietet, dann muss man denen eine Chance geben und mitmachen"

⁶² Quotation of a Facebook-Post in: Maximilian Amos, "Reichsbürger: Die Staatsleugner Und Die Justiz," Legal Tribune Online, November 22, 2016, <https://www.lto.de/recht/hintergruende/h/ideologie-reichsbuerger-deutschland-souveraenitaet-besatzung-staat-legitimation-rechtsextremismus/>.

"Lasst Euch das nicht gefallen KÄMPFT!!!!!"

⁶³ Jan Rathje in: Maximilian Amos, "Reichsbürger: Die Staatsleugner Und Die Justiz."

"Sie glauben, der Staat sei ein Unterdrückungsregime, das sie für persönliche Niederlagen und Kränkungen verantwortlich machen. Daraus leitet sich auch die Suche nach Sündenböcken ab [...] So werden strukturelle Probleme personifiziert."

⁶⁴ Burkhard Körner in: Frontal21, "'Überleben Im Unrechtsstaat' – Undercover Im Reichsbürger-Seminar," [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPNmmIrD0oc), November 28, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPNmmIrD0oc>, 3.36-3.39.

"Aus der Staatsverdrossenheit wird häufig Staatshass."

⁶⁵ BILD, "Reichsbürger – Feinde Des Staates, 15.24-15.32.

"Ein gängiges Motiv unter den Staatsleugnern ist die Unterscheidung zwischen Mensch und Person, wobei die Person als Symbol für die Versklavung durch den Staat steht."

⁶⁶ Keil. "Zwischen Wahn und Rollenspiel – das Phänomen der „Reichsbürger“ aus psychologischer Sicht", 63f.

interferences in their own lives are often caused by the authorities, their actions are directed against the organisations and their employees. Wilken summarizes the position of the state's authorities as following: "It is not the organisation's fault, but without it, such acts would not be conceivable either."⁶⁷

As shown in the chapter 3.1 and in the figure 1, *Reichsbürger* tend to act aggressively in this conspiracy-based fight and do not shy away from criminal offences either. Even if physical violence is sometimes resorted to, they try to counteract their perceived loss of control and influence mainly through verbal-aggressive behaviour. Examples for this behaviour are recordings of conversations with mobile phone cameras, long and aggressive letters, disciplinary complaints, but also very concrete and personal insults and threats. Hans-Holger Büchler⁶⁸ describes his and his colleagues' experiences of these intimidation attempts as follows: "Of course, this is to show: 'I know where you live. And if you act accordingly here, then I can also act accordingly'. Nothing physical, but much, much mental, much psychological pressure is built up, but this is supposed to create insecurity."⁶⁹

Especially when initial successes are achieved, for example by delaying of enforcement measures, *Reichsbürger* are confirmed in their ideology and this encourages them to engage with the movement even more intensively. Within the scene, they then encounter all the "legal fuss",⁷⁰ learn about the "Erste Kommissarische Reichsregierung"⁷¹ and tools to help them argue against bailiffs.⁷² In his interview, the former *Reichsbürger* Daniel S. explains that he also considered this *Reichsbürger*-group primarily as legal counsel for his problems with the German authorities.⁷³

⁶⁷ Interview with Dirk Wilking, "Reichsbürgern müsste man den Waffenbesitz verbieten," interviewed by Vassili Gold, *RP online* (October 20, 2016). https://rp-online.de/politik/deutschland/reichsbuergern-muesste-man-den-waffenbesitz-verbieten_aid-18217443.

"Es liegt nicht an der Organisation, aber ohne sie wären solche Taten auch nicht denkbar."

⁶⁸ Hans-Holger Büchler is chairman of the Brandenburg Regional Association of the German Tax Trade Union.

⁶⁹ Hans-Holger Büchler in: ⁶⁹ Budde, "Die 'Reichsbürger' - Der Schwierige Umgang Mit Den Staatsverdrossenen."

"Damit will man natürlich zeigen: ,Ich weiß, wo du wohnst. Und wenn du entsprechend hier agierst, dann kann ich auch entsprechend'. Nichts Körperliches, sondern viel, viel mental, viel psychischer Druck wird aufgebaut, aber das ist ja auch das, was Verunsicherung schaffen soll."

⁷⁰ Interview with Vorrath, "Sehr viel ist auf Unzufriedenheit begründet."

"Juristische Brimborium"

⁷¹ "First Commissarial Government of the German Empire"; founded by Wolfgang Gerhard Günter Ebel who is known as the first "Reichsbürger" in 1985.

⁷² Interview with Vorrath, "Sehr viel ist auf Unzufriedenheit begründet."

⁷³ Interview in: Das Erste, "Reichsbürger Gegen Den Staat – Eine Parallelwelt Mitten in Deutschland," 19.24-19.42.

The written correspondence with the city council underlines many of the aspects above. Firstly, the author himself points out his precarious financial situation by stating that he only receives a small pension and that, after deducting the costs, there is only a monthly budget of 180 € left (see appendix page 3).⁷⁴ The relation to existential fears is also made clear by the use of expressions such as "exploitation" and "enrichment on the people" (see appendix page 3).⁷⁵ There are also attempts to gain more control, such as issuing reminders and financial counterclaims to the authorities (see appendix page 1) and rejecting official demands by overwriting their letters with their own stamps and phrases (see appendix page 4). By underlining that he is a human (see appendix page 1) he aims to escape the authorities' reach (see previous analysis).

Moreover, the intimidation of the employees, especially of the bailiff, is aimed at strengthening the own position. He refers to various alleged violations of the law such as "forgery of documents" (see appendix page 4), "fraud" (see appendix page 5), "coercion" (see appendix page 23) or even violations of human dignity as a fundamental right (see appendix page 5).⁷⁶ He underlines the personal liability of the employees, also with their own liberty and property (see appendix page 23) and announces to file personal criminal charges against them in case of further actions (see appendix page 24). Especially the following statement, addressing directly the employee and written in capital letters to draw more attention, stands out in particular and emphasizes the attempt at intimidation: "YOU WILL BE BROUGHT TO TRIAL FOR 'WAR CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY' AND WILL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR IT" (Translation, "IHR WERDET VOR GERICHT GESTELLT MIT DER ANKLAGE 'KRIEGSVERBRECHEN GEGEN DIE MENSCHHEIT' UND WERDET DAFÜR ZUR VERANTWORTUNG GEZOGEN") (see appendix page 3).⁷⁷

ii. Social Motives

As already explained in the theoretical framework, social motives deal with people's desire for a positive perception of themselves and their group as well as the striving for uniqueness.

⁷⁴ Translation of: "Ich habe nur 890 EUR Rente, minus alle Abgaben [...] bleiben für meine Frau und mich ca. 180 EUR monatlich zum Überleben."

⁷⁵ Translation of: "Betrug" and "Bereicherung am Volk"

⁷⁶ Translation of: "Urkundenfälschung", "Betrug" and "Nötigung"

⁷⁷ Translation of: "IHR WERDET VOR GERICHT GESTELLT MIT DER ANKLAGE 'KRIEGSVERBRECHEN GEGEN DIE MENSCHHEIT' UND WERDET DAFÜR ZUR VERANTWORTUNG GEZOGEN"

Indeed, social motives are strongly connected with existential ones since the people's life stories and dissatisfaction play a great role here. The strokes of fate, upheavals and failures in the lives of most of the *Reichsbürger* are not only accompanied by insecurity and loss of control, but they also lead to a loss of social recognition and significance.⁷⁸ Hence, the positive self-perception is also weakened. Especially because they usually live in social isolation with just very few contacts outside of their close families, the feeling of societal failure is further reinforced. Since nearly all of their social interactions are limited to local authorities, the judicial system or law enforcement, they wage their ideological battle against these alleged guilty conspirators, instead of improving their real situation. As in chapter 3.2.1 described, the state and its organisations are blamed as the culprits of their own personal defeats and dissatisfaction in life.

Moreover, the significant preponderance of men within the *Reichsbürger* movement can be explained looking through the social lens. As already mentioned in chapter 3.1 and as the following figure of the German Office for the Protection of the Constitution shows, the proportion of men is almost three-quarters:

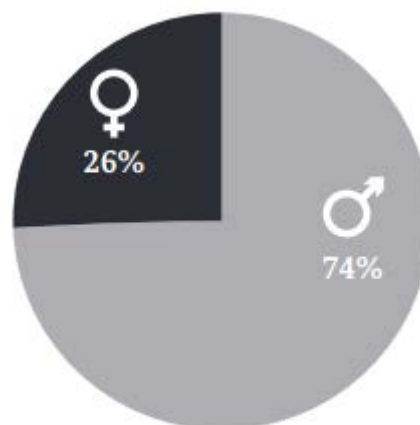


Fig. 2: Gender ratio in the *Reichsbürger* scene⁷⁹

Still today, the traditional gender images of men and women are anchored in greater parts of the German society and creates an ideal imagination of a strong, independent man with much success and power in life.⁸⁰ The loss of recognition and significance in the society through

⁷⁸ Keil. "Zwischen Wahn und Rollenspiel – das Pfänomen der „Reichsbürger“ aus psychologischer Sicht“, 102.

⁷⁹ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, "'Reichsbürger' und 'Selbstverwalter'. Staatsfeinde, Geschäftemacher, Verschwörungstheoretiker", 13.

⁸⁰ Sabine Böttcher, "Nachholende Modernisierung Im Westen: Der Wandel Der Geschlechterrolle Und Des Familienbildes," Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, October 15, 2020,

private or professional failure stands against this ideal and thus, often hits men especially hard. This patriarchal way of thinking is also represented in the structures of the *Reichsbürger* milieu. Even if there are some women in higher positions within it, the domain is significantly male-dominated and -controlled.⁸¹ By turning towards the *Reichsbürger* movement and its ideology, they see a chance to gain back success and a positive self-perception which is more in line with the (self-)expectations for their social status.

Even more, through the *Reichsbürger* ideology people who feel lost and failed in their lives try to find a (new) place in the society by creating a new identity for themselves.⁸² This search for identity and the escape from reality often happens gradually until it develops to their real world.⁸³ The example from chapter 3.2.1, people with former leading roles during the German Democratic Republic times, can also be analysed in this context and delivers an explanation why the *Reichsbürger* movement found a lot of followers in East Germany. After the German reunification, these former leaders lost their central status and significance in the society and thus, also a dimension of their own identities. According to Vorrath, this identity problem is for many persons “the crux”⁸⁴ The *Reichsbürger* ideology helps them to construct a new identity and gives them a new role in the society.

Through this new identity, the supporters try to differentiate themselves from the majority of the community and aim to achieve uniqueness. Thus, they describe themselves as “one of the mass that realised that something is not right”⁸⁵ and define their mission as a “historic thing [...] what we are starting to build up. And if it expands throughout Germany and globally, [...] then it will change the world.”⁸⁶ The targeted enhancement of the own person thereby takes place on different levels: they act like lawyers and even pass their own legal foundations,⁸⁷ entitle themselves as *Reichskanzler*⁸⁸ with an own state and official documents

<https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutsche-einheit/lange-wege-der-deutschen-einheit/316321/nachholende-modernisierung-im-westen-der-wandel-der-geschlechterrolle-und-des-familienbildes/>.

⁸¹ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, “Zahlen Und Fakten.”

⁸² Jan Rathje in: Maximilian Amos, “Reichsbürger: Die Staatsleugner Und Die Justiz.”

⁸³ Interview with Vorrath, “Sehr viel ist auf Unzufriedenheit begründet.”

⁸⁴ Ibid. “Der Knackpunkt”

⁸⁵ Peter Frühwald in: Das Erste, “Reichsbürger Gegen Den Staat – Eine Parallelwelt Mitten in Deutschland.” 22.00-22.07. “Einer von der Masse Menschen, die erkannt haben, dass was nicht stimmt.”

⁸⁶ Peter Fitzek in: ibd., 30.51-31.00.

„[...] eine geschichtsträchtige Sache, [...], was wir beginnen aufzubauen. Und wenn sich das auch deutschlandweit und weltweit durchsetzt, [...] dann wird es die Welt verändern“

⁸⁷ Christian Solmecke in: BILD, “Reichsbürger – Feinde Des Staates, 5.40-6.02.

⁸⁸ Translation: Chancellor of the Empire

like passports.⁸⁹ The following image shows an exemplary *Personenausweis* of a member of the movement:



Fig. 3: Exemplary *Personenausweis* of a *Reichsbürger*⁹⁰

Hence, the newly created social role becomes central in the people's lifestyle. In some cases, for example when they declare themselves as *Reichskanzler*, it completely merges with the own identity. Due to the centrality of the own ego and self-worth and the striving for uniqueness and power, reality and fiction blurs. Based on this, a distorted perception of their own social relevance and value arises. This is then not only anchored in the ego, but also demands admiration from outside. A good example for the desire for attention is the case of Peter Fitzek who proclaimed his own "Kingdom of Germany". He appointed himself as supreme sovereign, gathered followers, opened public institutions such as a health insurance fund and a bank, and planned others such as a university and a hospital. Hereby, he enjoyed the media exposure and gave public interviews even before and after his own court cases.⁹¹ As already explained in chapter 2.1, these are typical character traits of people with narcissistic personality disorders. And indeed, according to Walkenhorst and Ruf, diagnoses of narcissism are spread among the supporters of the *Reichsbürger* movement.⁹²

⁸⁹ Example Peter Fitzek in: Das Erste, "Reichsbürger Gegen Den Staat – Eine Parallelwelt Mitten in Deutschland", 31.03-31.12.

⁹⁰ Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, "'Reichsbürger' Und 'Selbstverwalter,'" Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/topthemen/DE/topthema-reichsbuerger/topthema-reichsbuerger.html>.

⁹¹ Das Erste, "Reichsbürger Gegen Den Staat – Eine Parallelwelt Mitten in Deutschland", 34:45-35.20.

⁹² Walkenhorst and Ruf, "Violent ego-centred sovereignism as a global threat? The case of the German "Reichsbürger" and implications for P/CVE research", 229.

Other described aspects of social motives in the theoretical framework are the mistrust towards others and attempts to devalue others in order to achieve and secure an even greater special status of the own ego. This also applies to the members of the *Reichsbürger* movement which is evident in the general social structure as well as in the behaviour in interactions with others. Firstly, the general belief in the conspiracy ideology and its argumentation proves the mistrust in the state and its actors. But also the fact that many *Reichsbürger* are older men who live in social isolation or distance (see above) suggests that they lack the necessary trust and social skills to build stable and deep relationships with others.

Thus, since nearly all of their social interactions are limited to the state's authorities, the mistrust and the devaluation particularly come to the fore here. Statements like "I am the official, you are the criminals!"⁹³, "That is not a constitutional state, that is pack!"⁹⁴ or "Here is no cozzier or something like that running around that can tell me something. I always let them blah, blah, blah [...] and finally I say [...]: I am your boss"⁹⁵ show the way of communication and the existing mistrust towards the German state's authorities. Especially the expressions "criminal", "pack", "cozzier" and "I am your boss" stress the attempts to devalue the officials in order to achieve a superior position and maintain a positive perception of their own social relevance and value.

The analysis of the original correspondence of a *Reichsbürger* to the city council confirms the presented results regarding social motives. Firstly, it can be said that the writer fulfils the typical gender- and age-related aspects. He is male and already in a higher age, since he is retired. When describing his financial situation, he only mentions receiving his small pension, which, after deducting all costs, leaves him and his wife together only 180 € to live on (see appendix page 3). It can therefore be assumed that he was the main or even the sole breadwinner for his family before retirement.

Furthermore, the (narcissistic) self-enhancement and self-manifestation come out clearly. The length of the letter⁹⁶ and the constant use of legal provisions, judgements, historical events and (self-produced) official documents shall emphasise the importance of the issue and the author's own expertise. In addition, by referring to their own personal general terms and

⁹³ Quotation in: Das Erste, "Reichsbürger Gegen Den Staat – Eine Parallelwelt Mitten in Deutschland", 42.20-42.21. "Ich bin der Amtsträger, sie sind die Verbecher."

⁹⁴ Quotation in: Ibd. "Das ist kein Rechtsstaat, das ist Pack."

⁹⁵ Norbert Schittke in: BILD, "Reichsbürger – Feinde Des Staates, 12.35-12.52.

"dass es hier also keinen Bullen o.Ä. gibt, was hier so rumläuft, das mir etwas zu sagen hat, ich lass die dann immer blablabla [...] und zum Schluss sage ich: [...] Ihr Chef bin ich"

⁹⁶ The whole document had 43 pages, in the appendix are just the analysed pages attached.

conditions, issuing self-generated reminders with a formal language demanding repayment with from the authorities (see appendix page 1) and giving them “benevolent deadlines”⁹⁷ (see appendix page 24), an attempt is made to create authority and be on a par with the local authorities and thus the alleged actors of the conspiracy. Also, the use of threatening means, such as personal liability and criminal charges against employees, further strengthens the own ego. Lastly, the self-given title “sovereign”⁹⁸ once again clearly emphasizes the goal of self-appreciation of the own social status (see appendix page 24).

At the same time, the writer also tries to devalue the position of the authorities by using terms like “thieves”, “fraudster”, “fascists” and “liar-construct” (see appendix page 3).⁹⁹ These terms and the whole conspiracy-driven argumentation expresses his mistrust towards them.

iii. Epistemic Motives

Epistemic motives deal with the way people understand the world. Attempts to find causal links and patterns around them is an approach to comprehend the surroundings and to construct a clear world view.

As already explained in chapter 2.1, many believers of conspiracy narratives perceive their environment in a filtered way to create a dualistic good-evil order framework in order to reduce the complexity of the reality and to understand the outside world. This is also the case for the German *Reichsbürger*. On the one hand, there are the conspirators, the powerful actors behind the German state and its authorities who want to take advantage of the German people. The political scientist Jan Rathje sees in the conviction of a plot supposedly directed against Germany and the Germans, an “anti-German world conspiracy”, the general ideological bracket of the various groupings of the milieu.¹⁰⁰

On the other hand, there are the German people who include the *Reichsbürger* in their role as resistance fighters. This begins in small ways with the idea of questioning circumstances and events, through the concrete rejection of certain measures and regulations, to the idea of saving the whole nation: “To survive as a folk [...] is too little, but to become capable of acting

⁹⁷ Translation of: “wohlgemeinte Frist“

⁹⁸ Translation of: “Der Souverän“

⁹⁹ Translation of: “Diebe“, “Betrüger“, “Faschisten“ and “Lügen-Konstrukt“

¹⁰⁰ Jan Rathje, “‘Reichsbürger’ - Verschwörungsideologie Mit Deutscher Spezifik,” in *Wissen Schafft Demokratie* (Institut für Demokratie und Zivilgesellschaft (IDZ) – Thüringer Dokumentations- und Forschungsstelle gegen Menschenfeindlichkeit, 2017), 241f.

again as the German Empire, to bring the spirit that surrounds us, the German national spirit, back into effect as a power in the world, as a spiritual power in the world."¹⁰¹

The basis for the construction of this framework is the tendency to find and believe in existing links and patterns within the occurrences around them. In the conviction of having secret knowledge and the overestimation of intentionality of the actors, Hüllen draws the line between the *Reichsbürger* movement and esoteric but also to the right-wing extremism scene.¹⁰² The recognition of these alleged connections and plots is then considered as an enlightenment by the *Reichsbürger*, as statements like “the Germans seem to be slowly waking up”¹⁰³ or “they have awakened, the state re-education by the Allies has not worked out”¹⁰⁴ underline.

As explained in the theoretical framework, this way of understanding the world especially falls on fertile ground in the face of uncertainty. Thus, also the epistemic motives stress the crucial role of the feeling of security, (social) stability and influence on the incidents. The supporters start to comprehend their turn towards the movement as an exit from their own crisis.¹⁰⁵ Step by step, the *Reichsbürger* ideology form the basis of a complete escape from reality, “first as a hobby, then as a closed world view”.¹⁰⁶

The correlation between supporting the *Reichsbürger* movement and mental health issues was already pointed on in the theory for epistemic motives and during the chapter 3.2.2 of social motives. A diagnosis that shares common features with the characteristics of many *Reichsbürger* is paranoia. It is defined as a personality disorder characterised by increased mistrust with delusions.¹⁰⁷ A delusion refers to a misjudgement of the real environment on which the affected person insists. Delusions can have very different contents, one form of which are delusions of persecution.¹⁰⁸ Affected persons are convinced that they are being persecuted,

¹⁰¹ Quotation in: BILD, “Reichsbürger – Feinde Des Staates, 14.25-14.30.

„um als Volk zu überleben, aber das ist zu wenig, sondern um als Deutsches Reich wieder handlungsfähig zu werde, um den Geist, der uns umragt, den deutschen Volksgeist als eine Macht in der Welt, als eine geistige Macht in der Welt, wieder zur wirkung zu bringen“

¹⁰² Interview with Hüllen, “Reichsbürgerbewegung und Esoterik. ‘Das Milieu schürt Heilserwartungen.”

¹⁰³ Quotation in: Das Erste, “Reichsbürger Gegen Den Staat – Eine Parallelwelt Mitten in Deutschland”, 33.35. “Die Deutschen scheinen langsam aufzuwachen.”

¹⁰⁴ Quotation in: ibd, 22.01-22.02. “Sie sind erwacht, staatliche Umerziehung der Alliierten hat nicht funktioniert“

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 32.35-32.40.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Vorrath, “Sehr viel ist auf Unzufriedenheit begründet.”

“Erst als Hobby, dann als geschlossenes Weltbild.”

¹⁰⁷ “Oxford Languages and Google - German | Oxford Languages,” [languages.oup.com](https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-de/), n.d., <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-de/>.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Heim and Susanne Meinrenken, “Wahnvorstellungen,” DEXIMED – Deutsche Experteninformation Medizin, March 27, 2020, <https://deximed.de/home/klinische-themen/psychische-stoerungen/patienteninformationen/was-kann-das-sein/wahnvorstellungen>.

threatened, harassed or deceived, even if that is not the case. Explanations and facts are developed according to own standards in order to justify the own behaviour. Often at the beginning of a persecutory delusion there is a real personal slight or a perceived injustice that gradually begins to take over the whole mind.¹⁰⁹

Among the supporters of the *Reichsbürger*, there can be found typical symptoms of this disorder. Firstly, the whole argumentation of the *Reichsbürger* ideology as a conspiracy ideology is based on the idea of secret plot and threat against themselves and the German people in general. For some members the extent of the felt threat can even go so far that they are convinced that the German government is about to "destroy the German nation in an open war of foreign infiltration."¹¹⁰ The foundation for these kinds of convictions is a strong mistrust towards others and the feeling of injustice or grievance. In the analysis of social participation motives regarding to narcissistic behaviour, it was already pointed out that mistrusting can be seen as typical character traits of many *Reichsbürger*. Furthermore, the former investigation showed that the member's lives are often marked by insecurity, failures, loss and missing social recognition.

The conspiracy-driven argumentation of the *Reichsbürger* ideology delivers the justification for the own behaviour so it is even classified as actions of self-defence.¹¹¹ Since the members only trust themselves and believe in their own stories, they lose the ability of a normal discourse.¹¹² This leads to an arbitrariness, as the conspiracy-theoretical convictions remain firmly anchored despite the fact that they are without any real evidence and can often be refuted. Then, a normal discussion becomes impossible.¹¹³

These characteristics are also reflected in the letters to the city council. The whole argumentation is based on finding (non-existent) connections between historical events, different court judgements, historical and current legal foundations and circumstances which makes the German government and all the authorities illegal (see appendix, especially pages 2,

¹⁰⁹ Werner Stangl, "Verfolgungswahn . Online Lexikon Für Psychologie Und Pädagogik," Online Lexikon für Psychologie und Pädagogik, 2022, <https://lexikon.stangl.eu/8465/verfolgungswahn>.

¹¹⁰ Gerhard Ittner, quoted in: Göran Schattauer, "Geheimdienst-Analyse Liefert Einblicke in Reichsbürger-Szene," FOCUS Online (FOCUS Online, December 18, 2018), https://www.focus.de/politik/sicherheitsreport/ueberraschende-einblicke-in-extremisten-bewegung-brisante-analyse-zu-reichsbuergern-wer-sie-sind-wie-sie-ticken-was-sie-so-gefaehrlich-macht_id_10080517.html. „in einem offenen Überfremdungskrieg das deutsche Volk zu vernichten.“

¹¹¹ Jan Stremmel, "'Reichsbürger': Freistaat Paranoia," Süddeutsche.de, October 21, 2016, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/reichsbuerger-freistaat-paranoia-1.3216249?reduced=true>.

¹¹² BILD, "Reichsbürger – Feinde Des Staates, 3.40.

¹¹³ Interview with Wilking, "'Reichsbürgern müsste man den Waffenbesitz verbieten."

3, 6-24). The roles in the writer's dualistic good-evil framework are clearly distributed between the "liar-construct-BRD GmbH"¹¹⁴ (see appendix page 3) and the people who need to stand up together "for justice and freedom for all"¹¹⁵ (see appendix page 3). Thus, the mistrust against the authorities is significant.

Additionally, tendencies towards typical symptoms of delusions of persecution can be recognised from the writing. He feels threatened from the German state and the "lying media"¹¹⁶ (see appendix page 1) with its "lies, truth-twisting, panic and fear-mongering, manipulations, propaganda"¹¹⁷ (see appendix page 3) everywhere in his environment. Words like "lies and deceit"¹¹⁸ (see appendix page 3), "arbitrariness and abuse"¹¹⁹ (see appendix page 10) or "mafia" (see appendix pages 1, 3, 10) are meant to highlight the malicious intentions of the conspirators. The statement "They are lurk - to lie to the folk, to cheat the little citizen, to exploit, to enrich themselves from the people and to rob them!"¹²⁰ sums up the way of thinking based on *Reichbürger* ideology. The writer himself calls this reality (see appendix page 3).

4. Conclusion

The movement of ego-centred sovereignism is becoming increasingly present in today's society and public discourse, but also in research. This is mainly due to the fact that it is spreading across the globe and the individual groups are gaining more members.¹²¹ For a long time, the dangers they pose for democratic societies were ignored and dismissed as harmless nonsense, but now academics and politicians are becoming more aware of them. However, there are still great gaps in the research of this phenomenon.

¹¹⁴ Translation of: „Lügenkonstrukt BRD GmbH“,

¹¹⁵ Translation of: "für Gerechtigkeit und Freiheit für alle"

¹¹⁶ Translation of: "Lügenmedien"

¹¹⁷ Translation of: "Lügen, Wahrheits-Verdreh, Panik- und Angst-Mache, Manipulationen, Propaganda"

¹¹⁸ Translation of: "Lug und Betrug"

¹¹⁹ Translation of: "Willkür und Missbrauch"

¹²⁰ Translation of: "Sie lauern darauf – das Volk, den kleinen Bürger zu belügen, zu betrügen, auszubeuten, sich am Volk zu bereichern und auszurauben!"

¹²¹ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, "Zahlen Und Fakten.", Anti-Defamation-League (ADL). "The Sovereign Citizen Movement in the United States", December 21, 2023.

https://extremismterms.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/sovereign-citizen-movement-united-states?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

As already mentioned in the introduction, it is crucial to comprehend why people believe in and support these conspiracy-driven groups in order to counteract an amplification and expansion of these movements. Thus, the aim of this research paper was to learn more about the motives of the supporters of ego-centred sovereign groups, using the case study of the German Reichsbürger scene as an example. And indeed, even if the group is heterogenous and hardly unified, three decisive basic motives could be identified on the foundation of conspiracy theory research results: existential, social and epistemic motives.

All of them have one common similarity: they are favoured by insecurities in life. The more they feel helpless and without control or influence in their own lives, the more they tend to believe in and support the conspiracy-based ideology. In addition, the setbacks and failures often make them feel less valued and seen socially. By joining the group, they try to build a new identity for themselves and strive for uniqueness and positive (self-)perception. Since they especially blame the state and its authorities as conspirators for their dissatisfaction and private situation, they mainly act against these actors, using the Reichsbürger movement and its ideology as the foundation. Additional mental problems such as narcissism and paranoia further increase the likelihood of joining conspiracy-based groups.

However, due to the scope of this paper, only the individual case of the Reichsbürger was examined more closely. For the future, it would certainly be interesting to see whether these motives are also found in similar groups and to take political and social countermeasures based on them.

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Part 2

Who's dominating whom? Critical approaches to Europe's democratic positioning

The Great Firewall of Europe: A comparative study between democratic and authoritarian censorship

Alfred Häger

Abstract

Censorship is a tool most associated with authoritarian states and dystopic novels. The European Union's decision to ban Russian state-owned media RT and Sputnik following the Russian invasion of Ukraine is an unprecedented decision that resembles that of an authoritarian government, such as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This essay seeks to compare authoritarian and democratic censorship by answering the following research question: What are the differences and similarities between the CCP's decision to censor BBC, ABC, CBC, and the censoring of RT and Sputnik by the EU in 2022?

Using flexible pattern matching, this essay finds that the greatest difference between the EU's and CCP's censorship is the transparency in the censorship process, while the greatest similarity is the reasoning for the ban; to protect regional stability and to punish another state for their actions. If the EU is to continue to use censorship without harming the democratic process, great consideration needs to be taken as they move forward.

Keywords: Censorship, Democracy, China, European Union

1. Introduction

On the 2nd of March 2022, the European Union suspended the broadcasting activities of Russian state-owned media RT and Sputnik after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, thus restricting EU citizens' access to both news sites. The actions taken disallowed all RT and Sputnik Europe-based branches to in any way broadcast, enable, facilitate, or contribute to broadcasting or distribution in any media channel. The EU has repeatedly¹ accused both RT and Sputnik of spreading propaganda through these channels, especially since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2015.² The measures taken against RT and Sputnik are, according to the EU, fully consistent with the rights recognized in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the right to freedom of expression and information.³ The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, legitimized the decision by arguing that the Russian media outlets were operational tools in a disinformation war and a threat to European security.⁴

Although the European Commission states that the measures taken against RT and Sputnik are following international law, by censoring media and news outlets the EU seems to directly contravene the foundations upon which Western democracy is built, free press, and freedom of information. While censorship in democracies is not unheard of,⁵ the EU's direct censorship of foreign media is unprecedented.⁶ Concurrently, the Russian invasion has been framed not only as an attack against Ukraine but also as an attack against Western democratic values.⁷ This raises urgent questions regarding press freedom, the usage of censorship, and whether the EU in its attempt to defend democracy harms the same democratic values they are trying to protect.⁸

¹ "Questions and Answers about the East StratCom Task Force | EEAS Website," accessed May 25, 2022, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/questions-and-answers-about-east-stratcom-task-force_en.

² Judit Bayer et al., "Disinformation and Propaganda – Impact on the Functioning of the Rule of Law in the EU and Its Member States," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3409279>.

³ "Council Regulation (EU) 2022/350". Official Journal of the European Union. (2 March, 2022) 65/1.

⁴ "Statement by President von Der Leyen on Ukraine," European Commission - European Commission, accessed May 25, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_22_1441.

⁵ R. W. Apple Jr Special to The New York Times, "In 2 Years, Watergate Scandal Brought Down President Who Had Wide Mandate," *The New York Times*, August 9, 1974, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/08/09/archives/in-2-years-watergate-scandal-brought-down-president-who-had-wide.html>.

⁶ Stephen A Meserve and Daniel Pemstein, "Terrorism and Internet Censorship," *Journal of Peace Research* 57, no. 6 (November 1, 2020): 752–63, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343320959369>.

⁷ "The Russian Attack on Ukraine Marks a New Era for Europe, MEPs Say | News | European Parliament," March 1, 2022, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20220227IPR24204/the-russian-attack-on-ukraine-marks-a-new-era-for-europe-meps-say>.

⁸ The EU has long been seen as a symbol of liberal and democratic values, using soft power to both locally and globally support democratic ideals, freedom of speech, and human rights. The EU has an outspoken goal to uphold media freedom and pluralism to enable free and open debate, and the citizen's right to both receive and convey information without public authority impinging. These are considered human rights to the EU, and these commitments are explicitly stated in both Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European

On the other side of the freedom-of-speech spectrum, we find a state which consistently places at the bottom of the rankings⁹ regarding global press freedom, and is widely considered to be one of the countries with the strictest controlled media in the world: China.¹⁰ For decades, China, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have been accused of using direct censorship to further their political agenda and alienate their population from liberal and democratic values.¹¹ The CCP's usage of censorship to ban foreign media and to hinder freedom of information are key aspects at all levels of China's Internet Infrastructure.¹²

Does media regulation and censorship have a place in a democratic society, or is the EU's decision to ban Russian media pushing the EU in the same direction as China, closer to establishing a dystopic Ministry of Truth? Censorship has historically been a tool used mainly by authoritarian regimes, but if it is now being used by democratic states to protect against disinformation, it is vital to understand how and if it can be used without harming democratic values. This essay aims to explore this topic by answering the following research question:

What are the differences and similarities between the CCP's decision to censor BBC, ABC, CBC, and the censoring of RT and Sputnik by the EU in 2022?

This research aims to gain insight into how democracies and authoritarian states use censorship in their political agenda and to gain a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between democracy, freedom of information, and censorship. To answer the research question, this thesis uses Flexible Pattern Matching (FPM). The process of FPM is partly deductive and partly inductive, identifying patterns from previous research and cases that are used to observe new empirical data. This essay develops patterns from research and cases of foreign media censorship by the CCP and compares these patterns to the case of the EU's ban on RT and Sputnik to find the differences and similarities between them. China practices

Union, and Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

⁹ "China: Freedom in the World 2022 Country Report," Freedom House, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/china/freedom-world/2022>.

¹⁰ Reporters Without Borders, "China | RSF," accessed May 26, 2022, <https://rsf.org/en/country/china>.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, "China's Global Threat to Human Rights," in *World Report 2020*, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/global>.

¹² China is the largest country engaging in state-led censorship and information control and the degree of censorship is topped only by a few other extreme authoritarian states such as North Korea and Turkmenistan. China has over one billion internet users, most of them using a heavily censored version of the internet which is tailor-made to the CCP narrative. In 2005, the Provisions on News Information Service were issued which explicitly stated that the main goal of news websites should not be to inform the public of facts, but instead to serve socialism and safeguard the nations and public interest. Officially, the Chinese constitution states that freedom of speech and press should be upheld in the country. However, the CCP uses censorship, surveillance, harassment, and coercion to suppress journalists and to fully control the narrative of the media landscape.

censorship in many ways, both domestically and foreign. However, the theoretical pattern is created by analyzing China's censorship of foreign *state* media. This allows the research to solely focus on the censorship of foreign state media, producing more similar and comparable cases while concurrently limiting the scope of the essay.

2. Method

This essay uses FPM to compare the CCP's use of censorship to silence foreign state media and the EU's censorship of RT and Sputnik. FPM is a popular qualitative research method that employs inductive reasoning to find patterns using existing research, and then deductively uses these patterns as a framework for observing data in a new case. The term pattern matching was coined by Donald T. Campbell in 1966¹³ and was used mainly in engineering and computer science.¹⁴ The method has since then been picked up by other academic fields and is now widely popular. FPM is used to find new patterns and to highlight where theoretical and empirical patterns do not synchronize. A pattern can be defined as a set of arrangements of entities or objects that can be described and are non-random.¹⁵ Patterns are the building blocks of theory, as all scientific theory is ultimately built on patterns. The difference between a theory and a pattern is that a theory is a more complete set of guidelines that contains structural relationships, which allow them to generate predicted patterns from empirical data. FPM can be used not only to acquire knowledge about a particular case but also to gain deeper insight into how political themes and aspects are connected and interplay with one another.¹⁶ FPM is used to answer the research question and to explore the case of the EU's censorship of RT and Sputnik, while also highlighting how censorship is used both by authoritarian and democratic political bodies. To understand how to conduct research using FPM and how it is used in this essay, two key components of the method are presented; theoretical and observed patterns.

Theoretical patterns are patterns that the researcher identifies and categorizes from previous cases and research on the subject. The theoretical pattern is needed before the researcher collects data on the observed pattern, as the theoretical pattern created from previous research will serve as the foundation for the data analysis while limiting which patterns can be identified

¹³ Campbell, Donald T. (1966), "Pattern matching as an essential in distal knowing," in *The psychology of ego* brunswik, Kenneth R. Hammond (Ed.). United States of America: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. , 81-106

¹⁴ Sinkovics, Noemi. "Pattern Matching in qualitative analysis". *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods* (pp.468-485) Chapter: 28.. (January 2018)

¹⁵ William M.K. Trochim, "Outcome Pattern Matching and Program Theory," *Evaluation and Program Planning* 12, no. 4 (January 1989): 355–66, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0149-7189\(89\)90052-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0149-7189(89)90052-9).

¹⁶ Ricarda B. Bouncken et al., "Qualitative Research: Extending the Range with Flexible Pattern Matching," *Review of Managerial Science* 15, no. 2 (February 2021): 251–73, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-021-00451-2>.

from the data in the second stage. If the theoretical patterns identified from previous research were ignored and instead the data were to be observed first, we would soon be lost in an ocean of patterns, most of which are irrelevant to our research question. The theoretical pattern is deduced using existing theories and research to form a frame around the research, in which new patterns from the empirical observations can be identified. In this essay, the theoretical pattern is constructed from previous research on censorship in China and the CCP's use of censorship to ban the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). These three outlets have been chosen since they are the most similar news outlets to RT and Sputnik in that they are state-sponsored. It is important to note that democratic state-sponsored media differs from authoritarian state media. Democratic state media like BBC, ABC, and CBC, although sponsored by the state at times host critical views towards their government, while RT and Sputnik don't. State-sponsored media is still autonomous, while state-run media is directly or indirectly controlled by the government. However, while the argument could be made that the news outlets cannot be compared since RT and Sputnik are "propaganda tools", the BBC has likewise been accused of spreading Western propaganda by the Kremlin. The outlets are, although not identical, both compatible and comparable.

To find the theoretical patterns, a slightly altered version of Laswell's model of Communication is used. Laswell developed the model in the 1940s, and it has since then become a key model in analyzing any type of communication with the help of five different questions, "Who, said what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect?"¹⁷ The model has received critique for its simplicity.¹⁸ However, it can be argued that this simplicity is the model's biggest strength, as it allows the researcher to modify and contextualize the model to fit the purpose of the research.¹⁹ The original model aims to understand the process and effects of communication.²⁰ However, in this essay, Laswell's model of Communication is paradoxically used to analyze and discover patterns in the suppression of communication; censorship. Altering two of five questions in the model, it takes on a whole other meaning; "Who, *censors* what, *why*, to whom, with what effect?"

¹⁷ Zachary S. Sapienza, Narayanan Iyer, and Aaron S. Veenstra, "Reading Lasswell's Model of Communication Backward: Three Scholarly Misconceptions," *Mass Communication and Society* 18, no. 5 (September 3, 2015): 599–622, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1063666>.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

Figure 1: Framework



Figure 1: Laswell's model of Communication altered to analyze censorship.

After the theoretical patterns in the previous research are identified, data from the case will be studied using this model to create the second key component of FPM: *observed patterns*. Theoretical and observed patterns differ in that theoretical patterns are deduced from theories, while observed patterns are found by continuously comparing the theoretical pattern to collected data.²¹ FPM can be used to analyze several different types of data,²² and in this essay, a total of sixteen documents from the EU, including statements, policy reports, and press releases have been analyzed, all related to the EU decision to censor RT and Sputnik. This essay uses purposeful sampling of data to answer the research question, and these documents were selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the EU's stance and action regarding media censorship. This technique is popular in qualitative research as it allows the researcher to identify and select the most information-rich data relevant to the case.²³ As the data is collected, it is concurrently analyzed and compared to the initial model, using the observed patterns to find potential similarities and differences between the two. A common critique of FPM is that the research is made through the lens of the researcher and therefore shaped by both the available information and their past experiences. However, this method also allows the reader to follow the researcher's reasoning step by step, and thereby reproduce the thought process of how conclusions were drawn.²⁴

²¹ Ricarda B. Bouncken et al., "Qualitative Research: Extending the Range with Flexible Pattern Matching," *Review of Managerial Science* 15, no. 2 (February 2021): 251–73, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-021-00451-2>.

²² *ibid*

²³ Michael Quinn Patton, "Two Decades of Developments in Qualitative Inquiry: A Personal, Experiential Perspective," *Qualitative Social Work* 1, no. 3 (September 1, 2002): 261–83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325002001003636>.

²⁴ Ricarda B. Bouncken et al., "Qualitative Research: Extending the Range with Flexible Pattern Matching," *Review of Managerial Science* 15, no. 2 (February 2021): 251–73, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-021-00451-2>.

3. Result

3.1 Theoretical Patterns

Before previous cases are approached, it is vital to understand how the CCP's censorship works practically; through what has come to be known as the Great Firewall of China. The Great Firewall of China is not as ancient as the Great Wall of China; however, it is almost as old as the Internet's lifetime in China. The Internet first arrived in China in January 1996, and it took six months until the CCP began methodically blocking foreign websites. The year after, in 1997, the magazine *Wired* coined the term "the Great Firewall".²⁵ The Great Firewall is an advanced system with multiple levels of both technical and legislative censorship which has officially gained the name "Golden Shield Project". The Golden Shield, or the Great Firewall, is used not only to silence all domestic critiques against the CCP but also foreign media that are not in line with the state narrative. This is done through several steps. First, users who attempt to enter a website that is blocked behind the Great Firewall receive an error 404 (page does not exist); there is no way of knowing if the website is censored or nonexistent.²⁶ The websites are directly censored by the Internet Service Providers (ISP), on the demand of the CCP. The second and third step is to hold both the ISPs and the Internet Content Providers²⁷ (ICP) directly liable for all "politically questionable" content hosted on their platforms. To host content in any way or form that is not in line with the narrative of the CCP can result in fines and jail sentences for the ICPs and the ISP.²⁸ This has resulted in the censors becoming the censorer, as several ISPs and ICPs now censor themselves more than what is legally required to avoid these punishments.²⁹

More proficient IT users can bypass the CCP's censorship and gain access to foreign media by using a VPN.³⁰ This service is used by a small percentage of internet users in China, however, research has shown that Chinese students who are given access to an uncensored

²⁵ Geremie Barme, R. and Sang Ye, "The Great Firewall of China | WIRED," June 1, 1997, <https://www.wired.com/1997/06/china-3/>.

²⁶ "'Race to the Bottom': Corporate Complicity in Chinese Internet Censorship: II. How Censorship Works in China: A Brief Overview," accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/china0806/3.htm>.

²⁷ ICPs are individuals or organizations who create content such as news, entertainment, and websites, or those who create social platforms which people use to chat, communicate, blog, post photos, and podcast.

²⁸ Hongmei Li, "New Trends in China's Media Control at Home and Public Diplomacy Abroad," *China Research Center* (blog), September 9, 2019, https://www.chinacenter.net/2019/china_currents/18-1/new-trends-in-chinas-media-control-at-home-and-public-diplomacy-abroad/.

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ A Virtual Private Network (VPN) is a program that can be used to tunnel under the Great Firewall by rerouting all your data to a proxy network in another part of the world. A VPN can protect the user's online integrity and data, but also allow the user to bypass domestic censorship by connecting to a router from another country, gaining access to that country's internet

internet do not of their own accord use it to browse foreign censored news if they are not directly encouraged to.³¹ Although the usage of a VPN is not officially illegal the CCP has banned several VPNs there have been reports of users being sentenced to prison for selling and using VPNs.³² The internet restrictions and the punishments for breaking them are even stricter in regions of China where the CCP fears protests, such as the province of Xinjiang in western China.³³ This seems to indicate that the CCP increased censorship in regions where they fear national security.

3.1.1 British Broadcasting Corporation

The BBC is the British public service station that is funded by the state, mostly through license fees paid by households. The BBC has found itself on the outside of the Great Firewall multiple times over the last decade,³⁴ as the CCP has banned the English news channel for short periods when major news events relating to China were aired.³⁵

The most recent and still-standing ban began in February 2021, a week after the Chinese state-owned China Global Television Network (CGTN) had its license revoked in the UK. The official reason given by China's National Radio and Television Administration³⁶ (NRTA), was that they accused the BBC of spreading disinformation through articles that "seriously violated"³⁷ broadcast guidelines and "harmed China's national interest".³⁸ The article that caused the ban reported systematic sexual abuse of Uyghurs, an ethnic minority group mainly

³¹ Yuyu Chen and David Y. Yang, "The Impact of Media Censorship: 1984 or Brave New World?," *American Economic Review* 109, no. 6 (June 1, 2019): 2294–2332, <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20171765>.

³² Benjamin Haas and China correspondent, "Man in China Sentenced to Five Years' Jail for Running VPN," *The Guardian*, December 22, 2017, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/22/man-in-china-sentenced-to-five-years-jail-for-running-vpn>.

³³ Simon Denyer, "China's Scary Lesson to the World: Censoring the Internet Works," *Washington Post*, May 23, 2016, sec. Asia & Pacific, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/chinas-scary-lesson-to-the-world-censoring-the-internet-works/2016/05/23/413afe78-fff3-11e5-8bb1-f124a43f84dc_story.html.

³⁴ Michael Bristow, "BBC Website Unblocked in China," *BBC News*, December 13, 2010, sec. Asia-Pacific, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11981014>.

³⁵ "BBC's Website Is Being Blocked across China," *BBC News*, October 15, 2014, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-29628356>.

³⁶ The NRTA is a state-owned agency that publishes regulations on media content, which the CCP uses to communicate when media is banned.

³⁷ "China NRTA's Decision on BBC Is Legitimate and Reasonable: Embassy - CGTN," accessed May 25, 2022, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-02-12/NRTA-BBC-World-News-barred-from-airing-in-China-XNQUXBQITa/index.html>.

³⁸ "国家广播电视总局 公告公示 简讯 (Translated)," accessed May 25, 2022, http://www.nrta.gov.cn/art/2021/2/12/art_113_55123.html.

residing in the Xinjiang province.³⁹ The ethnic and political tensions in Xinjiang are high,⁴⁰ as China has been accused of committing genocide of the Uyghur people.⁴¹ The direct effect of banning the BBC might not be that noticeable in China, as it is uncertain which group the ban is targeting. The BBC was already heavily censored and didn't broadcast news regarding China, and for those who are IT efficient, the BBC can still be accessed through a VPN.⁴²

The CCP uses the NRTA to communicate the terms of censorship, in this case, silencing all media of BBC broadcasts for reporting on human rights violations and arguing that the information is false, breaks guidelines, and damages state security. The ban also follows the UK's decision to ban the CGTN, which might suggest that the ban on BBC is foremost a way to retaliate against the UK and send a warning to other foreign media, not to shield the Chinese citizens from what they consider harmful information since BBC's news regarding China was already heavily censored.

3.1.2 Australian Broadcast Corporation

The ABC is the national broadcaster in Australia which is funded directly by the Australian state. In August 2018, ABC was banned in China without warning. After repeated requests from the ABC, a statement was made by a state official from the Cyberspace Affairs Commission⁴³ (CAC) that "China's internet is fully opened"⁴⁴ but that China had the right to shut down media that spread information and messages that are harmful to Chinese state security or which harm "national pride".⁴⁵ It was never clarified what this harmful information was. However, the ban took place just a day after the Australian Government announced that they would block two Chinese companies from deploying the 5G infrastructure network, a decision that would have

³⁹ David Campanale, Matthew Hill, and Joel Gunter, "'Their Goal Is to Destroy Everyone': Uighur Camp Detainees Allege Systematic Rape," *BBC News*, February 2, 2021, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55794071>.

⁴⁰ Mamtimin Ala Hudayar Salih, "Independence Is the Only Way Forward for East Turkestan," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed May 25, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/08/11/independence-east-turkistan-china-uyghurs-xinjiang/>.

⁴¹ "'Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots': China's Crimes against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs and Other Turkic Muslims" (Human Rights Watch, April 19, 2021), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/19/break-their-lineage-break-their-roots/chinas-crimes-against-humanity-targeting>.

⁴² Sam Shear, "Why China Banned the BBC, and Why It Matters," *CNBC*, February 16, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/16/china-blocks-bbc-world-news-after-uk-revokes-license-of-cgtn.html>.

⁴³ The CAC is a political body set up by the CCP to coordinate with state media on media and social media censorship.

⁴⁴ Bill Birtles and Matthew Carney, "China Officially Bans ABC Website, Claims Internet Is 'Fully Open,'" *ABC News*, September 2, 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-03/china-officially-bans-abc-website/10193158>.

⁴⁵ Ryan Fedasiuk, "Buying Silence: The Price of Internet Censorship in China," *Jamestown*, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://jamestown.org/program/buying-silence-the-price-of-internet-censorship-in-china/>.

direct effects on Chinese state-owned telecommunications companies.⁴⁶ Previous to this ban, it was possible to access both the website and apps of ABC in China. As of 2022, it is impossible to do so without using a VPN, which will result in fewer Chinese citizens accessing Australian news and culture. A potential risk of this censorship is that it will widen the already great divide between Australia and China, which have been in a geopolitical struggle in recent years.

The act of censoring is communicated by another Chinese state department, which is also governed by Xi Jinping. The spokesman states that ABC broadcast harms Chinese security and “national pride”, but in this case, there is no article that is responsible for the accusation. This ban also follows a decision made by the Australian Government that impedes the CCP-owned Huawei 5G expansion and harms the Chinese state. Just like when the BBC was banned, this could be seen as a retaliation move from the CCP. This ban likely had more effect in alienating Chinese citizens from the West than the ban on BBC, as ABC was before this ban accessible throughout China.

3.1.3 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

The CBC is the state-owned national broadcasting service in Canada that provides both television and radio broadcasts. The CBC suffered a ban in China for four months in 2008, which was then lifted after a formal complaint to the Chinese ambassador in Canada. However, six years later in January 2014, the CBC was once again blocked by the Great Firewall.⁴⁷ No official statement was or has since then been made from any Chinese political body on why the website was blocked. The day before the ban, the CBC had published an article that exposed how Chinese state officials, including President Xi Jinping’s family, had set up offshore accounts and shell corporations that could be used to hide illegal funds.⁴⁸ For a few hours, only the specific article was blocked, until it later became impossible to access all CBC channels from China. It is still possible to access the website using a VPN; however, the ban will affect most of the Chinese population's ability to find Canadian news. Here, no communicator of censorship can be found as in the case of BBC and ABC. However, the ban also followed an

⁴⁶ Byron Kaye and Tom Westbrook, “China’s Huawei Slams Australia 5G Mobile Network Ban as ‘Politically Motivated,’” *Reuters*, August 23, 2018, sec. UK Top News, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-australia-china-huawei-tech-idUKKCN1L801T>.

⁴⁷ C. B. C. News, “CBC Website Blocked in China after Story about Offshore Accounts | CBC News,” CBC, January 23, 2014, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/china-blocks-cbc-website-after-story-about-offshore-accounts-1.2507261>.

⁴⁸ the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists · CBC News, “Secret Offshore Assets of China’s Elite Exposed in Data Leak | CBC News,” CBC, January 21, 2014, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/offshore-assets-of-china-s-elite-revealed-in-leaked-records-1.2504987>.

article that could be considered to harm the “national pride” of China. The theoretical patterns identified using our framework are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2:

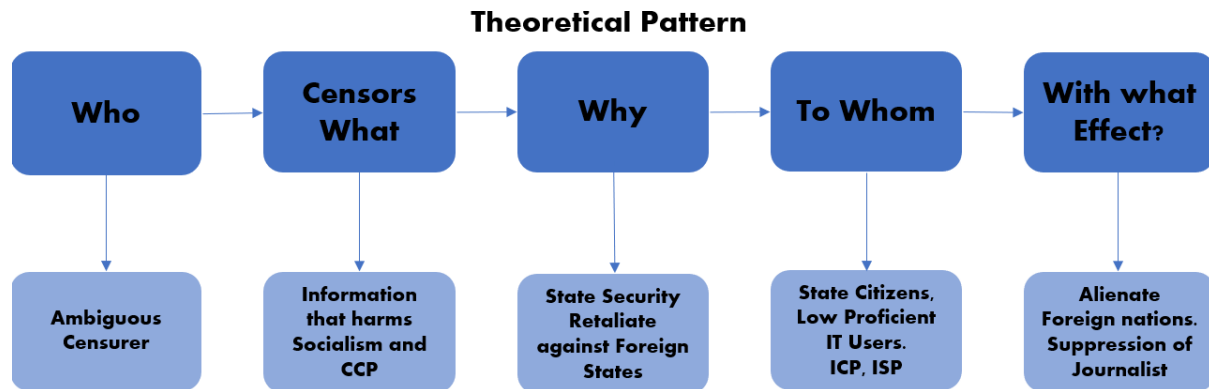


Figure 2: Theoretical framework identified from CCP censorship.

3.2 Observed Pattern

On the 27th of February, it was Ursula von der Leyen *who* made a statement on measures taken to respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, where she announced that the EU would ban Russian-owned media outlets RT and Sputnik; “The state-owned Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik, as well as their subsidiaries, will no longer be able to spread their lies to justify Putin’s war and to sow division in our union. So, we are developing tools to ban the toxic and harmful disinformation in Europe”.⁴⁹ The ban covers all RT subsidiaries and all broadcasting channels⁵⁰ and will last until Russia stops its aggression in Ukraine, and when they cease to “conduct disinformation and manipulation actions” against the EU.⁵¹ Compared to the Chinese censorship of foreign media which was communicated, if at all, through different ambiguous state agencies, both the actor and the reason for the EU’s use of censorship are more transparent.

The EU censors *what* they identify as disinformation, which they fear might be used to destabilize Europe and damage the European democratic process. Von der Leyen’s statement implies that RT and Sputnik use disinformation to push a pro-Russian narrative in the war against Ukraine, while also harming democracy and the unity of the European Union.

⁴⁹ Ursula von der Leyen [@vonderleyen], “We Are Stepping up Our Support for Ukraine. For the First Time, the EU Will Finance the Purchase and Delivery of Weapons and Equipment to a Country under Attack. We Are Also Strengthening Our Sanctions against the Kremlin. <https://t.co/QEBICNxYa1>,” Tweet, *Twitter*, February 27, 2022, <https://twitter.com/vonderleyen/status/1497972564634882048>.

⁵⁰ “Council Regulation (EU) 2022/350”. Official Journal of the European Union. (2 March, 2022) 65/1.

⁵¹ Council of the EU, “EU Imposes Sanctions on State-Owned Outlets RT/Russia Today and Sputnik’s Broadcasting in the EU,” accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/02/eu-imposes-sanctions-on-state-owned-outlets-rt-russia-today-and-sputnik-s-broadcasting-in-the-eu/>.

Disinformation has been identified by the EU as a direct threat to the union and the democratic process.⁵² This legitimizes their decision that instead of only censoring news reports related to the war in Ukraine, a complete ban of RT and Sputnik which both have been identified as propaganda tools is necessary to protect the democratic process and to avoid the risk of destabilizing the EU's unity.

The reason *why* the EU decided to censor RT and Sputnik was not only to defend against disinformation but also a part of the measures taken to punish Russia for the invasion of Ukraine. On March 2nd, the Council of the European Union released a press release where they argued that the ban is legitimate since Sputnik and RT are key to the Kremlin's goal to spread propaganda in support of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and disinformation to destabilize neighboring countries.⁵³ However, although the influence of Russian state media is explicitly stated to risk destabilizing European countries in proximity to Russia and Ukraine, the ban covers not only the neighboring but all European member states. EU's decision to ban RT and Sputnik came only three days after the invasion of Ukraine, and directly after Russian President Vladimir Putin put Russian nuclear forces on high alert. Here, the observed pattern mirrors the theoretical. Censorship is used not only to remove content that at the time is deemed to be misinformation, but also to retaliate against the political decisions of foreign states.

While the ban in theory prevents all EU citizens *who* attempt to access RT and Sputnik, the IT proficient citizen can still access both outlets with no repercussions. In practice, this censorship functions the same way as the first step in the Great Firewall, where ISPs directly censor RT and Sputnik, giving users an error 404 page when they attempt to enter the websites.⁵⁴ However, it is possible to work around the ban and browse both RT and Sputnik by using a VPN to connect to a network outside of the EU since VPNs are not illegal in the EU.⁵⁵ Those who are cut off from RT and Sputnik are foremost internet users with low-tech knowledge and who might have no prior knowledge of the news channels. This differs from how the CCP enforces censorship in China, targeting ISPs, and ICPs by holding them accountable for what is posted on their platforms and using fines and jail time to threaten its citizens, discouraging them from using VPNs.

⁵² "Disinformation as a threat on EU democracy - Lunch Briefing," accessed May 25, 2022, <https://cor.europa.eu/de/events/Pages/disinformation-threat-on-EU-democracy.aspx>.

⁵³ Council of the EU, "EU Imposes Sanctions on State-Owned Outlets RT/Russia Today and Sputnik's Broadcasting in the EU."

⁵⁴ Kalle Wiklund Ania Obminska, "Svenska operatörer blockerar ryska medier – är censur rätt metod?," Ny Teknik, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.nyteknik.se/sakerhet/svenska-operatorer-blockerar-ryska-medier-ar-censur-ratt-metod-7030156>.

⁵⁵ On the few rare occasions when a VPN service has been shut down in the EU, it has been directly linked to organized crime.

The direct *effect* of the EU's decision is that it might protect European citizens from disinformation, but it might also alienate Europe from Russia, while also normalizing censorship in Europe. Concurrently, it might also lead to further censorship in Russia. Soon after the EU announced its ban, the Kremlin banned several foreign media outlets from broadcasting in Russia, accusing them of disinformation.⁵⁶ This threatens to limit European journalists' ability to report from Russia, thus limiting the European public's insight into Russia. RT challenged the EU's decision in the European Court and urged them to lift the ban, this was however refused, as the European Court argued that the ban was "*related to the need to protect member states against disinformation and destabilization campaigns*".⁵⁷ *Although RT lost, the transparency of EU institutions allowed RT to take the case to court for an independent ruling, unlike in China where foreign media are powerless against the decision taken by the CCP. After the ban of RT and Sputnik, calls have been made from the European Parliament for the EU to censor Chinese state media.*⁵⁸ *Disinformation can be viewed as a direct threat to security by disrupting democratic discourse and enabling undermining diplomacy,*⁵⁹ *and a potential effect of the ban is that the EU could censor other foreign media to stabilize European regional security.*

4. Analysis

While the Chinese media and internet landscape is immensely stricter than in the EU, our comparison has shown that there are some notable similarities and differences between CCP censoring foreign state media and the EU censoring RT and Sputnik. The finalized model below (Figure 3) showcases the result.

Figure 3: Pattern Comparison

⁵⁶ Reuters, "Russia Blocks Access to BBC and Voice of America Websites," *Reuters*, March 4, 2022, sec. Media & Telecom, <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/russia-restricts-access-bbc-russian-service-radio-liberty-ria-2022-03-04/>.

⁵⁷ Akash Maurya, "EU Court Refuses to Lift RT France Suspension - The Press United | International News Analysis, Viewpoint," March 31, 2022, <https://thepressunited.com/updates/eu-court-refuses-to-lift-rt-france-suspension/>.

⁵⁸ Roman Haider, "EU Ban on Chinese State-Owned Media Outlets," March 14, 2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2022-000997_EN.html.

⁵⁹ Albrecht, S., Fielitz, M., & Thurston, N. (2019). Introduction. In M. Fielitz & N. Thurston (Eds.), *Post-Digital Cultures of the Far Right: Online Actions and Offline Consequences in Europe and the US* (pp. 7–22). Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

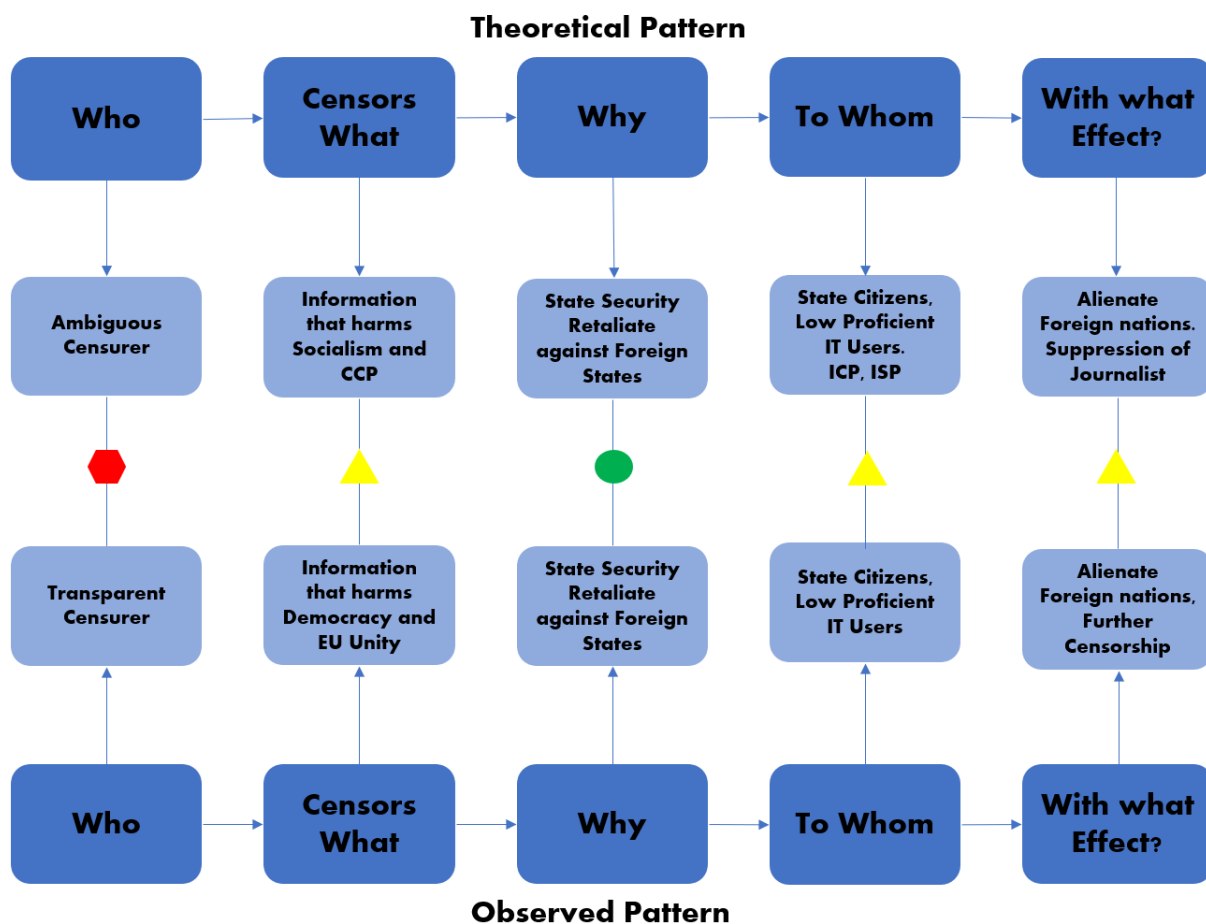


Figure 3: This model showcases the result of our pattern matching. The red hexagon indicates that the patterns don't match, the green circle that they do match, and the yellow triangle that they partially match.

The main difference between Chinese and EU censorship is the transparency of the censorship process. Foreign media outlets that are banned by the CCP are not always informed of the cause for the ban, other than that they break Chinese guidelines. Since the ban can be implemented without the media outlet knowing on which grounds, and since there is no possible instance to take the case to any court, it's impossible to challenge the ban. The EU clearly states why the ban was implemented, and the case can be taken to the European Court of Justice. This provides transparency which allows not only the censored but also the public to gain insight into the basis of the censorship, offering it legitimacy.

Both the EU and the CCP censor what they consider to be “disinformation” from foreign states, to protect their citizens from narratives they consider dangerous and false. The EU argues that censorship of RT and Sputnik is needed to protect its member states from disinformation campaigns, something which has been identified as a major threat to democracy,⁶⁰ and which

⁶⁰ Paul Butcher, “Disinformation and Democracy: The Home Front in the Information War,” *EUROPEAN POLITICS AND INSTITUTIONS PROGRAMME*, n.d., 24.

the EU fear might further destabilize member states in the proximity of Russia and Ukraine. Censorship is used in the name of democracy,⁶¹ implying that the disinformation and propaganda that is censored would impede the free discourse and exchange of truthful information. In China, the explicit goal of news reporting is to “serve socialism”⁶² and everything that the CCP considers harming the Chinese nation is considered a threat. Both the CCP and the EU use censorship to ban what they define as false information which might threaten regional stability and cause division. However, China's extreme media policy is that all critical voices and foreign broadcasts which are considered to not be in line with socialist values, risk censorship.

Although the CCP and the EU differ in how they enforce their censorship of foreign media, the aim of the censorship is the same: A tool used in foreign policy to punish states, or to restrict a narrative that could destabilize and harm regional security. The EU fears that the disinformation spread by RT and Sputnik could result in European citizens accepting the pro-Kremlin narrative, and cause division in Europe. Although the Great Firewall exists throughout all of China, the CCP most heavily enforces censorship in regions such as Xinjiang, which hosts ethnic tensions that could, if inflamed, threaten Chinese regional security. Censorship is also used as a tool in foreign policy to directly punish other states whose actions harm them. Although not stated explicitly by the CCP, the banning of foreign media has come directly after political decisions that harm China and Chinese businesses. The EU directly states that the ban is linked to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, adding more transparency to their decision of why the censorship was implemented.

While both the EU and the CCP's censorship share that it initially targets only low-proficient internet users which won't bypass the ban using a VPN, they differ in that the CCP directly targets ISPs and ICPs, denying them from hosting any censored media on their platforms. The CCP also punishes Chinese citizens who use VPNs, threatening jail time and fines. Although the initial ban targets the same group, the CCP maintains the censorship in a way that extends to VPN users in a way the EU doesn't. However, the effects of the EU's decision to ban RT and Sputnik might change this, and in the future target both ISPs and ICPs.

The decision to ban RT and Sputnik is only one of many that the EU is taking to curb the internet media landscape and battle disinformation. A new EU legislation under the name

⁶¹ Paul Sapper, “EU doubles down on social media censorship that ‘will not be confined to Europe’ following concerns about Musk’s free speech policy on X,” ADF International, January 25, 2025, <https://adfinternational.org/news/eu-social-media-censorship>.

⁶² “Provisions on the Administration of Internet News and Information Services - China.Org.Cn.”

Digital Services Act which enters into force in 2024 will allow governments of EU member states to force companies to take down content that they deem illegal or, risk facing huge fines.⁶³ The legislation balances the thin rope between battling disinformation and upholding free speech, as it allows the EU and member states to directly hold ICPs liable for what is posted on their platforms. One could argue that this brings EU censorship policy closer to the CCPs, as it effectively targets the ICPs and forces them to introduce censorship moderation on content that is deemed illegal. The censorship method becomes more like that used by the CCP, where the difference instead lies in the definition of which content is legal or illegal. The EU has accused China of using disinformation to harm the democratic process in Europe,⁶⁴ and proposals have been made by MEPs urging the EU to censor Chinese media in fear of disinformation.⁶⁵

If the EU continues to use censorship as a tool to combat disinformation and protect European unity there is a risk of gradually normalizing censorship as a tool, as well as potentially leading to a more insular information environment. This approach may be justified in the short term, as a defense against disinformation. However, it raises questions about the long-term implications for democratic values and media landscape, and whether such measures could unintentionally echo the isolation seen in highly controlled media environments. How long until we see a Great Firewall of Europe, raised in the name of democracy?

5. Conclusion

This essay attempts to find the similarities and differences between censorship used by authoritarian and democratic bodies, by using FPM to answer the research question: “What are the differences and similarities between the CCP's decision to censor BBC, ABC, and CBC, and the censoring of RT and Sputnik by the EU in 2022?”. Using an altered version of Laswell's Communication Model, this essay has identified theoretical patterns in Chinese censorship and compared these patterns with observed patterns from the EU's decision to ban Russian state-owned media RT and Sputnik.

The study finds that there are both similarities and differences between the usage of censorship in China and the EU. The most notable difference identified is the transparency in the censorship process from the EU, compared to the CCP's ambiguous and often elusive censorship policy. This transparency allows the censorer to take the case to court and receive

⁶³ The Associated Press, “EU Law Targets Big Tech over Hate Speech, Disinformation,” *NPR*, April 23, 2022, sec. Technology, <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/23/1094485542/eu-law-big-tech-hate-speech-disinformation>.

⁶⁴ “Spokesperson of the Chinese Mission to the EU Speaks on the European Parliament's ‘Report on Foreign Interference in All Democratic Processes in the European Union, Including Disinformation’ on China,” accessed May 26, 2022, http://eu.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/fyrjh/202203/t20220310_10650474.htm.

⁶⁵ Haider, “EU Ban on Chinese State-Owned Media Outlets.”

an independent judgment on their case but also allows the public to take part in the censorship process, legitimizing it. The most notable similarity is the reason why censorship is used, which is to control a narrative to protect regional stability, while also using censorship as a political tool to punish other states for foreign policy decisions. The partially connected patterns show that what the EU and CCP censor is somewhat similar; that which threatens political ideology and regional stability. However, what China defines as threats to Socialism is so sweeping, that it allows them to legally censor anything critical of the CCP.

Future research needs to be done on how disinformation has been securitized by the EU and allowed them to take extraordinary actions such as censorship to prevent disinformation, but also on how and if censorship can be used without infringing upon the democratic process. As the EU keeps legislating for stricter media control and an increased capacity to censor foreign media, they need to tread lightly so as not to sacrifice the citizen's right to information in the name of freedom of information. If censorship and democracy are to co-exist, it is key that the censorship process continuously remains transparent.

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Laudable Endeavour or Marks of Eurocentrism?

An analysis of the EU foreign policy of democracy promotion in Kenya

Clara Weber

Abstract

The European Union (EU) has a strong interest in maintaining its influence on the African continent. Therefore, the promotion of democracy is one of the main goals of its foreign policy. With the development of a worldwide backsliding in democratic processes and the EU increasingly emerging as an important global actor, it is essential to look closely at the EU's actions. Several authors criticise Eurocentric approaches in the foundation and development of the EU and its relationship with other countries and former colonies. To look at the contemporary context, this paper will discuss the extent to which Eurocentrism discourses evolved within official EU strategies addressing the democratisation of African states, particularly Kenya, in the years 2018-2024.

To do so, this paper examines official EU tools and strategies concerning the export of democracy. The content analysis relies on official EU publications, namely the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 and the European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018-2022. To identify a possible Eurocentric character of the EU foreign policy, the analytical framework of Sarah M. H. Nouwen is used. It builds on a concept designed to analyse instances of Eurocentrism by looking at signs of superiority, ways of knowing and doing and European/Western assumptions. Results indicate that even though the EU has several well-thought-out key principles in its strategy, its approach still shows specific marks of Eurocentrism. To further promote democracy in a decentred way without imposing superiority, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing debate by offering a prospective case study and thereby support European foreign policy to overcome Eurocentrism.

Keywords: Democracy Promotion; Eurocentrism; European Union; Foreign Policy; Kenya

1. Introduction

The sixth European Union (EU)-African Union (AU) Summit was held in February 2022 in Brussels after a pandemic disruption. While European leaders like Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, are looking forward to the joint vision of a new strategy and emphasize that the EU wants to be Africa's first partner of choice,¹ some African policymakers have stated in private conversations that they wish "more respect from the EU and an end to the bloc's Eurocentric approaches and post-colonial reflexes."² Several African commentators blame the EU for their development aid being dependent on norms and for "harbouring 'paternalistic' attitudes rather than working as 'true equals' with African states."³ The EU has a strong interest in keeping its influence on the African continent and maintaining peace in the region. Therefore, the promotion of democracy is at the heart of its official foreign policy toward Africa.⁴ Democracy promotion is a form of structural foreign policy activity which "aim[s] at fostering the transition to, consolidation of, or improvement of democracy in other states and their societies."⁵ Today's European democracy promotion is focused on a liberal model of democracy.⁶

As global democratic norms face increasing challenges and the EU takes on a more prominent and complex role on the world stage, it becomes essential to critically examine the EU's strategy for Africa. Several authors have criticised Eurocentric approaches in the foundation and the development of the EU in its relationship with other countries and former colonies, especially the African continent. According to J. Sundberg, "Eurocentrism has been variously defined as an attitude, conceptual apparatus, or set of empirical beliefs that frame

¹ European Commission, "Statement by the President Following the EU-AU Summit," news release, February 18, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_22_1181.

² Shada Islam, "Decolonising EU-Africa Relations Is a Pre-Condition for a True Partnership of Equals," accessed May 15, 2022, <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/decolonising-eu-africa-relations-pre-condition-true-partnership-equals>.

³ Islam, "Decolonising EU-Africa Relations Is A Pre-Condition For A True Partnership Of Equals."

⁴ Ainhua MARIN-EGOSCOZABAL, "A Comprehensive EU Strategy for Africa - Trade and Investments," 4, accessed May 15, 2022, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/603509/EXPO_BRI\(2020\)603509_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/603509/EXPO_BRI(2020)603509_EN.pdf); Felipe Gómez Isa, *EU Human Rights and Democratization Policies: Achievements and Challenges*, Routledge/UACES Contemporary European Studies (Milton: Routledge, 2018), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kxp/detail.action?docID=5394151>;

⁵ Daniela Huber, Mohamed Kerrou, and Asma Nouira and Maria Cristina Paciello, "The EU's Democracy, Human Rights and Resilience Discourse and Its Contestation," *Med Reset*, 2017, 22–23, accessed April 17, 2022, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/223180741.pdf>.

⁶ Daniela Huber, Mohamed Kerrou and Asma Nouira and Maria Cristina Paciello, "The EU's Democracy, Human Rights and Resilience Discourse and Its Contestation," 16.

Europe as the primary engine and architect of world history, the bearer of universal values and reason, and the pinnacle and therefore the model of progress and development. In Eurocentric narratives, the superiority of Europe is evident in its achievements in economic and political systems, technologies, and the high quality of life enjoyed by its societies.”⁷

This paper will discuss the EU strategy of promoting democracy in Kenya and more widely in Africa in order to ascertain how and to what extent Eurocentrism can be found in European foreign political development.

The focus will lie on this country since it is a former colony of the British Empire, a major powerhouse in Africa and it is among the African countries with the highest democratic standard since its new Constitution in 2010. Moreover, 2022 was the year of presidential elections in Kenya, which relates directly to the achievements and challenges of the implemented democratic system. Therefore, it will present particularly useful insights.⁸

For this reason, this paper problematises and gives attempt to answer the following research question: To what extent does the EU’s foreign policy of promoting democracy in Kenya from 2018 to 2024 show instances of Eurocentrism? To effectively respond to the research question, a content analysis based on the framework of Sarah M. H. Nouwen will be used. It will be examined if certain indicators of Eurocentrism are present in two selected EU documents about official strategies for democracy promotion.

The question of Eurocentrism in the EU’s foreign policy is of particular relevance in today’s world and is a very timely and controversial topic. At present, it is essential because of the EU-AU summit that took place in February 2022. However, compared to the field of democracy and development studies, the significance of Eurocentrism studies still only has a marginal role in the academic sphere. While the literature on the effectiveness and constraints of democracy promotion is well developed⁹, only a few scholars have questioned a Eurocentric approach to the promotion of democracy. Therefore, this work aims to contribute to changing this situation

⁷ J. Sundberg, “Eurocentrism,” in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, ed. Nigel Thrift and Rob Kitchin (Elsevier Science, 2009).

⁸ “EU Annual Reports on Human Rights and Democracy” (2021), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/2021-human-rights-and-democracy-world-country-reports_en, 113; Lorenzo Fioramonti, “African Perceptions of the European Union: Assessing the Work of the EU in the Field of Democracy Promotion and Peacekeeping” (Stockholm, 2009), <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/chapters/the-role-of-the-european-union-in-democracy-building/eu-democracy-building-discussion-paper-50.pdf>, 9.;

⁹ Daniela Huber, “What Is Democracy Promotion? The Explanandum,” in *Democracy Promotion and Foreign Policy* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015), https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137414472_3?noAccess=true, 30.

and is intended to complement existing research. In doing so, it can contribute to a better understanding of Eurocentrism and its entanglement with the export of democracy in Africa.

The first to mention the term Eurocentrism was Samir Amin in the 1970s.¹⁰ Writings about Eurocentrism started with Edward Said, who introduced in 1978 the concept of Orientalism, which critiqued the binary and very misleading and destructive opposition between the ‘superior Occident’ and the ‘inferior Orient’.¹¹ In the 1990s the term gained more attention and was regularly applied in discourses about decolonisation and humanitarian aid. More recently authors like John Hobson¹², Jan Nederveen Pieterse¹³ and Dipesh Chakrabarty¹⁴ have explored the topic in more detail and are important to mention. Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson put a special emphasis on Eurocentrism towards Africa in the history of European integration¹⁵.

The paper is structured in the following way: In the first part of the paper, the methodological framework of Sarah M. H. Nouwen will be explained, which will later be used to identify Eurocentrism in the EU’s foreign policy. In the second part, the background and challenges of EU democracy export will be described to better understand the concept. The third part will be the analysis and is divided into three parts: the selection of the documents, the empirical analysis, and the evaluation of the results. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the findings and examines possible ideas for future research and an outlook.

2. Methodology

Identifying Eurocentrism is a difficult task, and there are only very few frameworks or theories that can be used to do so. Sarah M. H. Nouwen explains the difficulties in addressing Eurocentrism in research and finding fitting indicators in the various understandings of the concept, which can be characterised by many different perspectives and even sometimes be diverging. She explains that for some researchers, a strategy would not be Eurocentric if

¹⁰ Samir Amin, *L'eurocentrisme: Critique D'une Ideologie* (Paris: Anthropos, 1988).

¹¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

¹² John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

¹³ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, “Eurocentrism and Development,” in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 119–22.

¹⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

perspectives from outside of Europe were included, whereas for others it is important to have an epistemology and concepts that are not only European or have the centre of knowledge production outside of Europe. Another important point to mention is that for some the fact of presenting European values as universal is Eurocentric, whereas others focus on the negligence of recognising how many European achievements are influenced and based on former achievements from outside of Europe.¹⁶

This matter poses various difficulties for this paper in the attempt to answer the research question. Even though the research focus has been narrowed down to one country, there would be many factors to look at to draw comprehensive conclusions. It would not only be necessary to analyse the content of selected documents but also how they have been created, to see if Kenyan stakeholders, scholars and researchers were involved, and what the different goals and perceptions of the EU and the Kenyan side were. Furthermore, it would be indispensable among other things to investigate on which information the documents are based and how they have been obtained, if they follow a European or Kenyan approach, and finally how the policies are implemented and perceived in Kenya. Moreover, there is no clear amount of one criterion to define a tipping point when a strategy starts being Eurocentric. This makes it important to mention that this research only looks at the content of the selected documents with instances of Eurocentrism as previously defined by other researchers and cannot account for the whole process of the promotion of democracy or different definitions or ways of defining Eurocentrism. Furthermore, the scope of research cannot include to what extent the content of the documents is non-Eurocentric or decentred. Therefore, the analysis of the content of the documents is only one piece of the puzzle in answering the bigger research question. Another difficulty is that the present research encounters some limitations and biases due to the researcher's nationality, European environment, educational experience in a European academic environment and place of living.

In order to still answer the research question in the best way possible, one framework could be found: Sarah M.H. Nouwen developed a concept to analyse instances of Eurocentrism in the EU's ambition of peace mediation in the world. To identify Eurocentrism, Nouwen looks for signs of superiority, ways of knowing and doing, and thirdly, European or 'Western' elements

¹⁶ Sarah M. Nouwen, "Exporting Peace? The EU Mediator's Normative Backpack," *European Law Open* 1, no. 1 2022: 26, 27, 32, <https://doi.org/10.1017/elo.2022.9>.

in selected documents.¹⁷ The research is conducted using the qualitative content analysis method and is explained in more detail below.

As a first step, it is indispensable to recognise the “ongoing contestation regarding the essence of Eurocentrism”.¹⁸ Nouwen refers to “a set of assumptions about the superiority of European (or ‘Western’) way of knowing and doing”.¹⁹ To make it possible to identify these three instances of Eurocentrism, they will be explained more comprehensively and unpacked hereafter. The first part of the definition of Eurocentrism refers to the assumption of superiority. Superiority, in Nouwen's analysis of Eurocentrism, refers to the implicit or explicit belief that European ways of knowing, governing, and legal reasoning are more legitimate, advanced, or universally applicable than others, and that international law should be built on and guided by those standards.²⁰ According to Samir Amin, on which Nouwen builds, the superiority as experienced in the concept of Eurocentrism surpasses the concept of Ethnocentrism. It is not merely the practice of determining another culture by one's standards,²¹ but what “sets Eurocentrism apart is that it is a sense of superiority combined with a drive to spread itself across, what it perceives to be, an inferior rest of the world”.²² There are several examples to show this superiority, one of the most important ones being the denial of non-European history and how it is intertwined with European history and development. The same counts for norms, values, ideas and sources of knowledge, whose outside-of-Europe existence, influence or relevance is often dismissed.²³ Additionally, the assumption of European superiority includes the viewpoint that inhabitants from outside of Europe and their history, development, knowledge, and beliefs are considered ‘inferior’ or ‘behind’, and therefore they have little to no agency. In contrast, European history, progress, knowledge, and values are considered universal and Europeans claim to be the ones to have found solutions which are not only valid for themselves but are universal for the whole world. This leads to the assumption that Europeans are legitimate to spread and implement their values to the non-European world which should, incapable of doing it, obey their moral order. The European version of morals, laws and good governance includes democracy and its promotion to reach the utopia of a collective universal

¹⁷ Nouwen, “Exporting peace? The EU mediator's normative backpack,” 26, 27, 32.

¹⁸ Nouwen, “Exporting peace? The EU mediator's normative backpack,” 27.

¹⁹ Nouwen, “Exporting peace? The EU mediator's normative backpack,” 32.

²⁰ Nouwen, “Exporting peace? The EU mediator's normative backpack,” 26-59.

²¹ Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism: Modernity, Religion and Democracy: A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism*, 2nd. edition (Monthly Review Press, 2009).

²² Nouwen, “Exporting peace? The EU mediator's normative backpack,” 32.

²³ Nouwen, “Exporting peace? The EU mediator's normative backpack,” 32.

good.²⁴ To conclude, Nouwen brings in the concept of Orientalism by Edward Said, which refers to a European identity through the distinction of a ‘superior European’ and an ‘inferior non-European’. This phenomenon became especially emphasized during colonial and imperial times.²⁵

The assumption of ways of knowing and doing refers to the epistemic and practical aspects. It criticises the fact that the two reinforce each other, that “European action allowed European ways of knowing to dominate, while assumptions about the superiority of European ways of thinking inspired and internally legitimised European action.”²⁶

The third assumption refers to the term ‘Western’ superiority and ways of knowing and doing instead of ‘only’ European ones, making it wider and more geographically extended. Nouwen explains that even North American or Australian approaches are seen or see themselves as inheritors of the European way and as a continuation of the “(assumedly superior) European tradition of doing and thinking.”²⁷ Before the selected documents are analysed with this methodological framework, the following chapter will explain the overall EU promotion of democracy in Kenya to give a better understanding.

3. EU promotion of democracy in Africa

EU democracy promotion has been especially enhanced in ambition since the 2007 Lisbon Treaty.²⁸ It is part of the EU development aid which aspires to promote certain values and norms, such as democracy, in Europe and the rest of the world.²⁹ This chapter will give a brief overview of the background of EU-Africa democracy promotion and its contested relationship, and explain the challenges, risks and goals of democracy promotion in Kenya.

Kenya has had a relatively stable democratic republic since its independence in 1963.³⁰ EU-Kenya relations began a few years later in 1968 and were primarily based on economic, trade and political relations, as outlined in the Lomé Conventions framework and the Cotonou

²⁴ Siba N’Zatioula Grovogui, *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: Memories of International Order and Institutions* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 29–31.

²⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 1–3.

²⁶ Nouwen, “Exporting peace? The EU mediator’s normative backpack,” 33.

²⁷ Nouwen, “Exporting peace? The EU mediator’s normative backpack,” 33.

²⁸ Nouwen, “Exporting peace? The EU mediator’s normative backpack,” 34.

²⁹ Alina Dobрева, “EU Support for Democracy and Peace in the World,” European parliamentary Research Service, accessed April 4, 2022,

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/628271/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)628271_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/628271/EPRS_BRI(2018)628271_EN.pdf), 1.

³⁰ Anneke Slob, “Evaluation of the European Union’s Co-operation with Kenya: Final Report” (European Commission, 2014), <https://www.oecd.org/derec/ec/Evaluation-of-the-European-Union-Cooperation-with-Kenya-Vol2-Annexes.pdf>, 11.

Partnership Agreement.³¹ The EU employs different mechanisms to promote democracy in Kenya, for example, EU electoral observation missions and legal assistance.³² This foreign policy serves multiple goals. Between pursuing their strategic interests like advancing business, preventing irregular migration, and maintaining peace and security in the EU and at its borders, the EU also seeks to export its normative backpack. This means the EU aims to also promote its values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in line with its own standards and ideals.³³

Moreover, the EU's prosperity and safety are increasingly intertwined with the future well-being of the African continent, and it needs Africa to tackle the challenges of the 21st century.³⁴ Additionally, European ambitions regarding technology and climate cannot be realised without Africa.³⁵

Critics of EU foreign policy in Africa question the motivations behind the promotion of democracy in this region, seeing it rather as a strategic and economic fulfilment of goals and interests than a laudable endeavour.

This criticism leads to several other challenges. In general, the EU-Africa relationship is difficult because it is haunted by its history, especially when it is about former colonies like Kenya. Therefore, the promotion of democracy is confronted with the context of colonialism and neo-colonialism,³⁶ and Europe's colonial legacy and Eurocentric approaches still hinder

³¹ Elseba Awur kokeyo, "Role of European Union in Kenya's democratization process (2010-2017)" (Unites States International University - Kenya, 2019), <http://erepo.usiu.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/11732/4985/ELSEBA%20AWUOR%20KOKEYO%20MAIR%202019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, 37.

³² Ionel Zamflir, "EU support to democracy and good governance in Africa: Briefing" (2017), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/614578/EPRS_BRI\(2017\)614578_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/614578/EPRS_BRI(2017)614578_EN.pdf), 12; Awur kokeyo, "Role of European Union in Kenya's democratization process (2010-2017)," 44–45.;

³³ Alfonso Medinilla and Chloe Teevan, "The new Beyond Good Intentions: The New EU-Africa Partnership," Discussion paper No. 267 (2020), <https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/Beyond-Good-Intentions-The-New-EU-Africa-Partnership-ECDPM-Discussion-Paper-267-2020.pdf>, 13–16.

³⁴ Mikaela Gavass and W. G. Moore, "The Make or Break EU-Africa Summit," <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/make-or-break-eu-africa-summit>; "JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL: Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa" (2020), https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/communication-eu-africa-strategy-join-2020-4-final_en.pdf, 1.;

³⁵ David McNair, "Why the EU-AU Summit Could Be a Turning Point—Even If the Headlines Disappoint," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 15, 2022, accessed May 31, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/02/15/why-eu-au-summit-could-be-turning-point-even-if-headlines-disappoint-pub-86448>.

³⁶ Medinilla and Teevan, "The new Beyond Good Intentions: The New EU-Africa Partnership," i; international Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *Democracy in Development: Global Consultations on the EU's Role in Democracy Building* (Sweden: International IDEA, 2009), accessed April 11, 2022,

EU-Africa relations.³⁷ As former EU Council President Charles Michel acknowledged, it is important to “free the relationship from the demons of the past.”³⁸ An important step in doing so would be the processing of Eurafrica and the EU’s “selective amnesia about its own origins, leading to a story of the virgin birth.”³⁹ Critics point out that the EU has to stop the ‘white saviour’ attitude and recognize Africa as an energetic and independent continent.⁴⁰ Besides, it can be questioned if the fact of the EU deciding to promote democracy in Africa is Eurocentric in general. Principally, the EU’s democracy promotion is seen positively. However, there is the suspicion that the “EU is trying to put its understanding of democratic principles on African peoples and cultures.”⁴¹, and critics challenge the EU’s belief in knowing what the world needs.

Several risks worth mentioning influence democracy promotion as well. Even though common interests and shared values are similar between the EU and the AU, which builds a good basis for promoting democracy, there is a rather one-sided approach. No real progress seems to be made with mixed results at best, and the question arises if democracy support truly supports democratisation. The EU is increasingly struggling to balance its promotion of democracy with a more pragmatic engagement in Kenya, which makes African leaders seem to be more and more frustrated and “have developed a certain normative fatigue when it comes to the EU.”⁴² Moreover, the EU is not the only player in the game. Next to China also India, Japan, Russia, Turkey, the US, and Saudi Arabia are trying to build influence in Africa.⁴³

After more general information about the promotion of democracy in Kenya, the following analysis focuses on two specific foreign EU policies to answer the research question.

4. Analysis

The following chapter consists of three sections. First, the selected documents are presented, and it is explained why they have been chosen. Second, the documents are analysed using the framework of Nouwen. Third, the results of the analysis are discussed.

<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/democracy-in-development-the-role-of-the-european-union-in-democracy-building.pdf>;

³⁷ Gavas and Moore, “The Make or Break EU-Africa Summit.”

³⁸ Islam, “Decolonising EU-Africa Relations Is A Pre-Condition For A True Partnership Of Equals.”

³⁹ Nouwen, “Exporting peace? The EU mediator’s normative backpack,” 54.

⁴⁰ Islam, “Decolonising EU-Africa Relations Is A Pre-Condition For A True Partnership Of Equals.”

⁴¹ Fioramonti, “African Perceptions of the European Union: Assessing the Work of the EU in the Field of Democracy Promotion and Peacekeeping,” 6.

⁴² Medinilla and Teevan, “The new Beyond Good Intentions: The New EU-Africa Partnership,” 13–16; Zamflir, “EU support to democracy and good governance in Africa,” 8;

⁴³ McNair, “Why the EU-AU Summit Could be a Turning Point—Even if the Headlines Disappoint.”

4.1 Presentation of the selected material for the analysis

This paper aims to challenge potential marks of Eurocentrism that can be found in the EU's promotion of democracy in Kenya. Therefore, two selected EU foreign policy documents regarding its ambitions to promote democracy in Kenya are analysed. The selection is based on documents officially published by the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Union Delegation to Kenya, as these are the two main institutions focusing on the promotion of democracy in Kenya. In these documents dating from 2018 to 2022, the EU sets its goal of strategically promoting democracy in Kenya by defining strategies, guiding principles and guidelines following the EU foreign policy strategy. Only the final reports are taken into account, whereas earlier versions, communication reports, briefings and evaluation reports are not considered.

The first selected document is the 'European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018-2022'⁴⁴, a 56-page report which was published by the European Union Delegation to the Republic of Kenya. The analysis focuses on the text of the document, which comprises 34 pages. The second document was presented by the EEAS and is the 36-page 'EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024', the part to be analysed consists of 29 pages.⁴⁵

4.2 Analysis

This section presents the analysis of the above-mentioned documents with a focus on the content, applying the framework of Nouwen. The parts of the quotations that the analysis refers to are highlighted in italics. The annexe presents an overview of the analysed indications of Eurocentrism. The first column indicates the page number in the report, whereas the other three columns represent each of the indicators of Eurocentrism.

⁴⁴ "European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018 - 2022" (2018), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kenya/european-joint-cooperation-strategy-kenya_en.

⁴⁵ "EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024" (2020), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu_action_plan_on_human_rights_and_democracy_2020-2024.pdf.

4.2.1. *European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018-2022*

The first document to be analysed is the European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018-2022, which consists of six main sections. The analysis includes only the sections of the paper that treat the topic of democracy.

Signs of superiority can be found six times throughout the document and are further explained in detail. The rationale provided at the end of the foreword by the EU ambassador to Kenya is that the strategy of developing Kenya in joint cooperation as partners is “based on the *universal values of the EU* which promote democracy, equality, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights.”⁴⁶ This statement fosters the Eurocentric idea of superiority that Europe’s values are universally applicable, in that specific case to Kenya. It implies that the EU’s vision of values is undoubtedly the objective to aim for in the rest of the world, ignoring the fact that values vary quite a lot between different countries, societies, cultures and religions.⁴⁷ Moreover, it demonstrates that the strategy is in fact about the EU actualising its identity and perspective. In the part about the Strategic objectives of EU joint programming in Kenya, the EU emphasizes again the presumed superior universality of its values with the same wording as in the foreword: “The development cooperation of the EU and its MS [member states] is based on the *universal values of the EU* which promote democracy, equality, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights.”⁴⁸

The last paragraph of the executive summary states that the framework for EU cooperation will “*reinforce the position of the EU* in Kenya by adapting the EU approach to best reflect Kenya’s lower middle-income status”.⁴⁹ According to the framework of Nouwen, this sentence reinforces the notion of European superiority and an intrusive approach by referring to the strong position of the EU in Kenya, which evokes the European drive to spread itself across. The second half of the sentence also shows another indication of Eurocentrism, which will be explained later.

Especially striking is the following sentence in chapter 1.2 The EU in Kenya: “Despite the fact that *Kenya has ‘graduated’ to the status of low middle-income country*, there is still sizeable development assistance delivered to Kenya by the EU and its MS”.⁵⁰ This implicates the

⁴⁶ European Delegation to Kenya, “European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018 - 2022,” iv.

⁴⁷ “Culture, Values, and Beliefs,” accessed May 28, 2022, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wm-introductiontosociology/chapter/values-and-beliefs/>.

⁴⁸ European Delegation to Kenya, “European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018 - 2022,” 2.

⁴⁹ European Delegation to Kenya, “European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018 - 2022,” v.

⁵⁰ European Delegation to Kenya, “European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018 - 2022,” 2.

European superior version of the development of a country, which implies that all countries have to develop in the same way following the same steps with the end goal of ‘graduating’ to the universal development status of the EU. This can be related to the growing criticism of development, for example by Teodor Shanin. He blames the Western version of development as an endless modernisation and economic growth, which implies that “all societies are advancing naturally and consistently ‘up’, on a route from poverty, barbarism, despotism and ignorance to riches, civilization, democracy and rationality, the highest expression of which is science.”⁵¹ Even though the EU recognises Kenya as an actor, it simultaneously suggests that it is not as developed and capable as the EU yet.

Another clear instance of Eurocentrism can be discovered in the third section about ‘Joint EU responses to change’, which is: “based on the *assumption* that sustainable *development* is not possible without effective and democratic governance at all levels.”⁵² In the EU, there is a common agreement that democracy is the best form of government and of organising a society. While this might be true within the EU context, it reflects a superior way of thinking to assume that the same holds true for all countries in the world and that they can only develop sustainably under the same governance model as that of the EU. In this context, one could also question why the EU positions itself as a model of sustainable development, given that, although it mostly succeeds in meeting the essential needs of its citizens, it simultaneously overshoots multiple planetary boundaries.⁵³

The statement to “develop a *partnership of equals* with Kenya”⁵⁴ in the part on ‘Other areas of EU joint support’ could be questioned as well. The relationship seems rather unequal if one partner is financially dependent on the other one, is considered an aid recipient and the partnership is governed by conditionality and potential sanctions towards Kenya. The financial dependence becomes evident when considering that the EU’s joint financial contribution amounts to over EUR 4,5 billion for the years 2018-2022.⁵⁵ This could be interpreted as an instance of superiority as described by Nouwen since the EU as the money-giver is the superior

⁵¹ Teodor Shanin, “The Idea of Progress,” in *The Post-Development Reader*, ed. Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree (London: Zed Books, 1997), 69.

⁵² European Delegation to Kenya, “European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018 - 2022,” 11.

⁵³ Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2017).

⁵⁴ European Delegation to Kenya, “European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018 - 2022,” 22.

⁵⁵ European Delegation to Kenya, “European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018 - 2022,” 24.

partner in this constellation, which resembles more of a donor-recipient relationship than true equals.

The second dimension of Eurocentrism, ways of knowing and doing, could be identified three times. The last paragraph of the executive summary states that the framework for EU cooperation will “reinforce the position of the EU in Kenya *by adapting the EU approach to best reflect Kenya’s lower middle-income status*”.⁵⁶ While the first part of the sentence can be interpreted as superiority, the second half implies the assumption that the adaptation of the EU approach should be used to best reflect the needs of another country. It implies that the EU approach is the ideal way of knowing, which then leads to its adaptation as the most desirable way of doing it.

Especially striking for another instance of Eurocentrism is the following sentence in chapter 1.2 The EU in Kenya: “Despite the fact that Kenya has ‘graduated’ to the status of low middle-income country, there is still *sizeable development assistance delivered to Kenya by the EU and its MS*”.⁵⁷ In the second half of the sentence, the EU asserts that it provides development assistance to Kenya, which shows a clear sign of the Eurocentric instance of ways of knowing and doing: the belief that the EU and its member states are the most suitable actors to show Kenya how to develop. Moreover, it is worth questioning whether the concept of development itself can be considered as a Eurocentric way of knowing and doing, representing a broader Westernisation of the world.

Subsequently, in a direct quotation, the Head of German Development Cooperation states that “*We in Kenya* are proud to be among the first countries to *agree on a EU joint country strategy and to engage in EU joint programming and EU joint work*”.⁵⁸ It is unclear why a representative of a German organisation is referring to ‘We in Kenya’, as though assuming that her perspective is representative of the entire Kenyan population. Does the pronoun ‘we’ only refer to European representatives in Kenya, or does it also include Kenyan actors, grassroots movements, and citizens? Besides, as it becomes evident from the headings of the initiatives and the structure of the sentence, the strategy places its importance on the EU. While it is expected that an EU policy document focuses on the EU, the way in which this is done can be seen as Eurocentric. One may get the impression that the EU is put first in these strategies and

⁵⁶ European Delegation to Kenya, “European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018 - 2022,” v.

⁵⁷ European Delegation to Kenya, “European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018 - 2022,” 2.

⁵⁸ European Delegation to Kenya, “European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018 - 2022,” 3.

that the initiatives are designed with the European way of knowing and doing, with the aim of applying them universally to other countries.

No examples of the third instance of European or ‘Western’ could be identified. Since the document focuses solely on the EU and Kenya, this result is not surprising.

4.2.2 *EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024*

The second document does not focus directly on Kenya but explains the general EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, which therefore also applies to Kenya. In the main part of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, no indicators of Eurocentrism as defined by Nouwen could be found, apart from interpreting the general idea of an action plan that promotes democracy as a sign of knowing and doing and superiority. The following results were therefore all found in the foreword of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Joseph Borrell Fontelles, and the introduction by Eamon Gilmore, the European Union’s Special Representative for Human Rights.

An instance of superiority could be found five times throughout the document, starting directly with the very first sentence of the foreword: “*EU leadership* on human rights and democracy is needed more than ever.”⁵⁹ A similar sentence a few paragraphs further indicates an almost identical statement: “*EU leadership* on human rights and the rule of law at home and abroad has never been more vital.”⁶⁰ Using a passive sentence structure, it is not mentioned who exactly thinks that the EU is needed or vital apart from the EU itself. Moreover, the supposed beneficiaries of this leadership remain invisible throughout the whole foreword. The idea of the EU being a leader in these fields clearly shows how it sees itself as superior to other actors.

A third Eurocentric feature of the content is the following statement of Gilmore: “That is why *no country or region does more to promote human rights and democracy around the world than the European Union.*”⁶¹ He positions the EU as the world leader in the promotion of human rights and democracy, superior to all other countries and regions around the world. Other important actors in that field are not mentioned.

⁵⁹ European External Action Service, “EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024,” 4.

⁶⁰ European External Action Service, “EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024,” 4.

⁶¹ European External Action Service, “EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024,” 5.

The following statement shows another instance of Eurocentrism: “It is clear that an EU foreign policy firmly grounded on human rights greatly *benefits EU security and prosperity*. Data demonstrates that governments that respect human rights are *more reliable allies, stronger trading partners*, and better stewards of regional peace and long-term international stability.”⁶² The superior thinking of putting the EU first becomes clear in this statement which focuses on the benefits for the EU through its foreign policy, namely EU security, prosperity and stronger trading partners, instead of possible advantages for the receiving country.

A final Eurocentric instance to highlight is the following paragraph, which shows two signs of superiority at the same time: “Some results will be more tangible in the short-term than others but implementing these actions will leave *Europeans safer and our alliances more durable*. Throughout its history, the *EU has served as a champion of human rights*.”⁶³ Saying that the implemented actions will leave Europeans safer and European alliances more durable shows the EU’s sense of superiority and again how it puts itself first. The second sentence mentions the EU as a self-proclaimed champion of human rights throughout history. The notion of ‘champion’ puts the EU in a superior light in comparison to others, who appear inferior.

Elements of Eurocentric ways of knowing and doing can be found in two examples in the introduction by Gilmore, which is used to present the EU as mastering the promotion of democracy and human rights. The first one states that: “Today, the *need for effective, coherent, strong collective action* on human rights and democracy is even more imperative.”⁶⁴ It is assumed that people across the world need an EU-led action, which implies that the EU knows best what this action should look like.

The second statement has a similar implication: “the objective is to *enhance and hone EU efforts* to promote human rights and democracy across the world.”⁶⁵ This statement implies that the EU knows best how to promote human rights and democracy across the world. Even though research has found that most people want democracy, even in autocratic regimes, there are very different associations of what democracy entails and there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.⁶⁶

⁶² European External Action Service, “EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024,” 4.

⁶³ European External Action Service, “EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024,” 4.

⁶⁴ European External Action Service, “EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024,” 5.

⁶⁵ European External Action Service, “EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024,” 5.

⁶⁶ international Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *Democracy in development*, 57; Tom Ulbricht, “Perceptions and Conceptions of Democracy: Applying Thick Concepts of Democracy to Reassess Desires for Democracy,” *SAGE Journals*, May 10, 2018; Christine Hackenesch, Julia Leininger, and Karina Mross, “What the EU Should Do for Democracy Support in Africa: Ten Proposals for a New Strategic Initiative in Times of Polarisation” (2020), <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/16275-20200615.pdf>, 6.;

Democracy is a rather subjective category with diverse versions, and its exact content lies in the eye of the beholder.⁶⁷ The population should have the freedom of choice regarding which constitutional form it wants to have. The EU can support the power to self-government, but to not act anti-democratic itself, the detailed democratic form must come from the inside of Kenya.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the EU assumes that its version is automatically the best one.

The third instance of Eurocentrism was again not found in the document.

4.3 Evaluation and discussion of the results

The scope of the research only focused on indicators of Eurocentrism. Therefore, it is important to mention that when criticising the EU documents, it does not mean that they are per se inherently Eurocentric or that there are no positive outcomes, but to highlight the instances of Eurocentrism according to the framework of Nouwen. This is essential to improve the foreign policy of the EU.

To begin with, the EU follows a balanced approach. While containing several Eurocentric instances, the paper also includes some self-reflexivity. The European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya mentions that “Support will be also given to help grassroots CSOs and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) to participate in the decision-making processes at county level and exercise their right to participate and supervise.”⁶⁹ Moreover, the monitoring and evaluation process will “rely on existing national processes and data.”⁷⁰ The same applies to the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, which states that „to translate the Action Plan from paper into practice, through a range of actions tailored for local needs and circumstances.”⁷¹ These statements can be seen as an important step towards overcoming Eurocentrism, relying on relevant perspectives other than the EU, working together with local actors, and grassroots organisations and decentring the EU strategy.⁷²

⁶⁷ Huber, “What Is Democracy Promotion? The Explanandum,” 23.

⁶⁸ Daniele Archibugi, “Democracy for Export: Principles, Practices, Lessons,” accessed April 12, 2022, <https://archive.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/173-sovereign/30427-democracy-for-export-principles-practices-lessons.html>.

⁶⁹ European Delegation to Kenya, “European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018 - 2022,” 13.

⁷⁰ European Delegation to Kenya, “European Joint Cooperation Strategy with Kenya 2018 - 2022,” 32.

⁷¹ European External Action Service, “EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024,” 6.

⁷² Richard Youngs and Kateryna Pishchikova, “A MORE PLURALIST APPROACH to EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY SUPPORT,” *Carnegie Europe*, 2, accessed April 4, 2022, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/euro_dem_supp1.pdf.

The heritage of Eurocentrism becomes evident if one reads these documents through the lens of Eurocentrism as described by Nouwen. Both documents envisage the EU as going into the ‘rest of the world’ with certain EU norms, and several examples demonstrate superiority and ways of knowing and doing. The third indicator as described by Nouwen could not be identified, but this is due to the fact that both documents focus only on official EU strategies. The rationale of the policy leads to the assumption that the EU wants to play a bigger role in the promotion of democracy just because it can and wants to; a very positive self-presentation compared to Kenya portrayed in an inferior way; the impression of the EU as a pinnacle of the best values which it declares as universal; and the presumption that the EU’s way and understanding of how to organise a society are also the best for the rest of the world. As recognised before, the fact that an official EU policy document focuses on the EU is not per se Eurocentric. What makes it Eurocentric is that the EU is described as the principal actor who paternalizes the rather passive rest of the world. It becomes apparent that the EU assumes that it is almost natural for itself to be a global actor that supports and serves as a role model and is in a good position to do so. An explanation of why this is the case and who would like the EU to have that role is not provided. It is taken as logical that EU concepts are of European origin but at the same time of universal application, with the EU being at the top of the value hierarchy. One could question to what extent these assumptions have changed since the ‘civilising’ missions during colonialism and today’s missions of development aid and the promotion of European concepts, norms and values that are seen as an export product.

As already mentioned in the methodology chapter, this research is limited and only answers one piece of the bigger puzzle of the promotion of democracy. Even though there are instances of Eurocentrism in the analysed documents, this does not provide any information about the basis of knowledge for the creation of the document or the actual implementation of the strategies and their relation to Eurocentrism.

Nevertheless, the documents still have an impact on the actual implementation of the policy and that is the moment when words lead to actions. If the guidelines are Eurocentric, the actions that follow might be as well, which can later lead to a repetition or internationalisation of Eurocentrism in foreign policy.

5. Conclusion

The paper outlines the methodological framework by Sarah M. H. Nouwen to analyse Eurocentrism in EU foreign policy and provides an overview of the EU’s promotion of

democracy in Kenya. Afterwards, two official EU documents are analysed to assess the extent to which they show predefined instances of Eurocentrism.

In evaluating the research question about the extent to which the EU's foreign policy of promoting democracy from 2018 to 2024 in Kenya is Eurocentric, the findings indicate that the EU pursues a balanced approach between trying to decentre its foreign policy, engaging in a critical self-reflection, while still carrying the heritage of Eurocentrism. The instances of superiority and European ways of knowing and doing can be identified in both documents, and there is no doubt that it is indispensable to decentre the EU in order to be open to the world. Both documents envisage the EU as going into the 'rest of the world' with certain EU norms, principles, values, and expected behaviour that they should promote.

This study aims to encourage research that has a more diverse, global, and differentiated approach and attempts to contribute to the research gap on Eurocentrism. The realisation that it is still very difficult to identify Eurocentrism should be a wake-up call for future researchers to spend more time on this field of research, so that hopefully in the future the recognition and relation thereto as well as the avoidance of Eurocentrism can be realised. What makes it so difficult to overcome Eurocentrism is the fact that it is embedded in the knowledge and the categories of Western culture and thoughts, rooted in European colonial culture.⁷³ Future research should therefore focus on creating more frameworks and indicators for identifying Eurocentrism. To complement this research, frameworks on decentring once a concept or strategy is recognised as Eurocentric are also needed. Future researchers could build on the work of Stephan Keukelaire and Sharon Lecocq, who refer to the fact that there is a call to decentre European foreign policy, but at the same time, there is also a lack of tools and conceptual lenses to do so. Therefore, they propose the first framework to overcome Eurocentrism.⁷⁴

To conclude, more in-depth reflexivity and self-questioning of the foreign policy of the EU and the character of the EU are fundamental. It is indispensable for a future EU to reflect on what it is and how it might be perceived outside of the EU. In order to work against the backsliding in democratic processes, the EU needs a broad understanding of democracy, long-

⁷³ Z. Sardar, *Critical Development Theory: Development and the Locations of Eurocentrism*, 2nd edition (New York: Zed Books), https://www.academia.edu/30467870/Is_development_Eurocentric_pdf.

⁷⁴ Stephan Keukeleire and Sharon Leococq, "Operationalising the Decentring Agenda," *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 53, No. 2 June 2018: 276, accessed April 17, 2022, https://www-jstor-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/stable/pdf/48512975.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A7f7ff4899a505907845e6fc91dda10b3&ab_segments=&origin=.

lasting commitments and honest partnerships. An EU-AU partnership must accept diverging views and norms and not be based on conditional approaches. To improve its role as a global actor and support the goal of Agenda 2063 to transform Africa into an autonomous “global powerhouse of the future”⁷⁵, the EU must finally free African states from European superiority. There is no reason for only scepticism, but some optimism: the Eurocentric critic of the export of democracy refers to the means, not to the end. The EU can learn from the past, consider outside perspectives for its foreign policy and eventually decentre Europe.

⁷⁵ McNair, “Why the EU-AU Summit Could be a Turning Point—Even if the Headlines Disappoint.”

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Part 3

Critical and inclusive approaches to politics and education

Against a Democratic Backlash: The Rise of Feminist Foreign Policy in Sweden

Angela Bösen

Abstract

Democracies worldwide have encountered serious backlashes in recent years. Yet, since the Habermasian theory on communication in the 80s, deliberative thinkers write about a further opening of the democratic model towards more participation, inclusion, and equality around the table of political decision-making. In the same way, the feminist movement established gender mainstreaming in international and national agendas, called for empowerment and inclusion, based on the general objective of gender equality. With surprise the world reacted when Swedish former foreign minister Margot Wallström introduced a feminist foreign policy (FFP) in 2014. Several countries followed this approach, most recently Germany. Why is there a need for feminist foreign policy if there is an agenda on gender equality already, one might ask. Wallström emphasizes the need of a feminist policy especially in current times when democratic backsliding and anti-gender movements go hand in hand. Therefore, this research conducts a policy analysis on the FFP in Sweden with a linkage to the theoretical framework of deliberative democracy, in order to show how the feminist approach entails democratic values and might be used as a tool to strengthen them. With persistence, Sweden puts its self-assigned role as norm entrepreneur into practice and promotes these values abroad. The aim of FFP to provoke norm change in other states encounters challenges in real politics that range from diplomatic crises to the larger clash between democratic and authoritarian regimes, and values of openness and repression.

Keywords: Feminist Foreign Policy, Deliberative Democracy, Sweden, Norm entrepreneur, Feminism

1. Introduction

Among other things, such as fair elections or freedom of assembly, a democracy needs critically thinking citizens. In times when democracies in the world encounter serious backlashes, it is worth considering which change helps to prevent any further losses in democratic principles. Former Swedish foreign minister Ann Linde states that a backlash in democracy correlates with a backlash in gender equality.¹ Within this paper, I will argue that the inclusion and empowerment of women on the most traditional and formal political arena – a state's foreign affairs – serves democratic principles according to the deliberative model. To do so, the focus will lay on the case of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) in Sweden, the world's first country to introduce this approach in 2014. The analysis later-on intends to link the concept of Swedish FFP to the characteristics and purposes deliberative thinkers established. Coming back to the point of critical citizenship, deliberative democracy requires it to realise its aim of making *good* decisions. Similarly, depending on this criterion, feminist foreign policy arose from a critical scholarship that deconstructs prevalent political and international relations theory through a gender perspective. The topic has been of increasing interest among political scientists since the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in 2000 and many countries established gender equality agendas. As it is reflected in the number of countries that have followed this policy change ever since and introduced feminist policy approaches – including Canada, Mexico, France, and Germany – this paper also takes Sweden's role as a norm entrepreneur under consideration to show how FFP is pushed forward as an asset to foreign politics.

1.1 A new trend in political science: The gender perspective

Scholars of the field of feminist international relations revise classical concepts of security, sovereignty, nationality and global politics.² Feminist international relations intends the deconstruction of traditional power concepts and replace the model of “power over” others by

¹ Ann Linde, ‘Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs on Wednesday 16 February 2022’ (Government of Sweden, 16 February 2022), 5, <https://www.government.se/globalassets/government/dokument/utrikesdepartementet/statement-of-foreign-policy-20222.pdf>.

² Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True, *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations* (Cambridge, UNITED KINGDOM: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/detail.action?docID=268249>.

“power with” others.³ Since so-called *gender mainstreaming* got prevalent on the legal and political scale through various law frameworks on women’s rights as provided by the United Nations for instance or the Council of Europe, the perspective of gender has gained popularity among scholarship and politicians.⁴ Important to note is that the women’s movement depends largely on a bottom-up approach on the level of the civil society and activists.⁵ Therefore, civil society actors carry special importance and non-governmental organizations are of great asset to the information about the topics. As such, the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP) was founded in 2016 and consistently lobbies for feminist ideas, stressing the inclusion of societal actors in politics as it is an inherent demand and necessity of feminism.⁶ To sum up, the practice of feminist international relations consists of decoding the prevalent functioning of institutions, which results in uncovering structures of masculine hegemony and gendered norms at last. More importantly, Kronsell identifies that the more women are present in institutions the more masculine norms turn visible after all.⁷

1. Methodological approach

After having elaborated on the new trend in political science which presents the basis for this research, the question remains what sort of a shift feminist foreign policy in particular means for democracy. As the FFP of Sweden so far has been the oldest and most elaborated one on an international scale, this policy shall serve as an empirical example to identify the linkage to deliberative democracy. In a first step, this paper presents a theoretical framework on deliberative democracy. This will be moreover linked to feminism and theory that focuses on connections between feminist theory and democracy through ideas on gender equality and concepts of active citizenship for women. Throughout the presentation of the theoretical framework, the paper will further clarify how FFP can constitute a condition for deliberative democracy under which it can be exercised. In a second step, the FFP in Sweden will be

³ Jane Mansbridge, ‘Feminism and Democracy’, in *Feminism and Politics*, ed. Anne Phillips (Oxford, UNITED KINGDOM: Oxford University Press, 1998), 149.

⁴ Rona Fitzgerald, ‘Active Citizenship: Gender Equality and Democracy’, in *Active Citizenship: What Could It Achieve and How?*, ed. Bernard Crick and Andrew Lockyer (Edinburgh, UNITED KINGDOM: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 75, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/detail.action?docID=615821>.

⁵ Kristina Lunz, *Die Zukunft Der Außenpolitik Ist Feministisch. Wie Globale Krisen Gelöst Werden Müssen*. (Berlin: Ullstein Buchverlage GmbH, 2022), 37.

⁶ ‘Our story – CFFP’, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 2021, <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/our-story>.

⁷ Annica Kronsell, ‘Methods for Studying Silences: Gender Analysis in Institutions of Hegemonic Masculinity’, in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, ed. Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 119, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/detail.action?docID=268249>.

introduced, followed by a policy analysis which will serve to uncover aspects of deliberative democracy therein. Both the theoretical framework of deliberative democracy and the concept of Sweden's FFP follow a normative perspective, and as such, the mentioning of normative stances remains a constant asset to the analysis. The role of Sweden as a norm entrepreneur in the context of the FFP will be elaborated upon, according to sources from the Swedish foreign ministry and scholars' research on the matter. Throughout the two legislative periods that the Swedish state has implemented FFP, mainly policy documents provided by the Swedish Foreign Office have served as the primary source for a content analysis. Further written communication consists of speeches by two foreign ministers, Margot Wallström and Ann Linde, who both promoted FFP during their mandates. Key variables for the content analysis are the criteria for deliberative democracy by Gutmann and Thompson: *reason-giving*, *accessibility*, *commitment/binding decisions*, and *dynamic* (see 2.1). The aspects of *empowerment* and *inclusion* are equally taken into account as they were introduced by Landemore and Hammond (see 2.2). An interpretative approach aims to uncover these variables in the given written documents and further reply to the research question of how the Swedish feminist foreign policy serves as a tool to implement a more open, deliberative democracy. In addition to the primary sources, evaluations by other scholars of Swedish FFP complement the analysis.

An important note is that this paper was first finished in mid-2022, when the FFP was still in place. Since the new Swedish government took office in October 2022, the content about FFP has been largely erased from the official website. Thus, several documents that serve as primary sources for this research, especially the Swedish Handbook on Feminist Foreign Policy, are no longer available on the official website of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

2. Theoretical Framework

[...] in politics, it is not only power that counts, but good decisions and arguments too.

– Steiner, *The Foundations of Deliberative Democracy*

The notion of “democracy” dates back to the Ancient Greeks as “*demos-kratos*”, which means power of the people.⁸ By the time the regime of democracy was defined, the Greek polis counted many fewer people than nowadays’ modern states. Certainly, this understanding of the power of the people might not be directly applicable from the Greek polis to nation states’ complex apparatuses. Therefore, even nowadays, modern democracies such as the United States and the ones within Europe, Landemore certifies, do not match the original meaning of people’s power but instead a power of certain elected elites.⁹ That remains a crucial aspect when different conceptualisations of democracy come into place. Within the following chapter, the description of combining democracy and deliberation seeks to define a shift in democratic theory towards a more normative-driven democratic practice.

3.1 Foundational and further understandings of Deliberative Democracy

As Steiner formulates in the quote above, politics entails “good decisions and arguments”. What are *good* decisions and arguments? Probably most political theorists and philosophers agonised over the question of how to achieve the best results through political decisions. The mainstream of thinkers has understood the way politics works for a long time as a strategic bargaining around actors’ interests, mostly defined as interests of power.¹⁰ The shift provoked by deliberative thinkers revolves around the core idea that politics consists not only of the bargaining of interests but also of discussion and the winning of the best argument.¹¹ As such, the term, originally coming from Latin as “*deliberare*”, means “[...] to ponder, to consider, and to reflect.”¹² Historically, the idea of discussion as politics’ essence goes back to ancient Greek times when political leaders considered discussion an “[...] indispensable preliminary

⁸ Hélène Landemore, *Open Democracy*, 2020, 3,
<https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691181998/open-democracy>.

⁹ Landemore, 3.

¹⁰ Jürg Steiner, *The Foundations of Deliberative Democracy: Empirical Research and Normative Implications* (Cambridge, UNITED KINGDOM: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5–6,
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/detail.action?docID=977179>.

¹¹ Steiner, 4.

¹² Steiner, 4.

to any wise action at all.”¹³ Throughout early modern times until the 19th century, the discussion as part of political decision-making and agenda-setting was assigned to a small group of political rulers or an educated elite, according to guiding theorists, amongst them was John Stuart Mill.¹⁴ In the 20th century, discussion was formulated as the “essential of democracy”, and Jürgen Habermas’ theory has held as a cornerstone of deliberative democracy since the 1980s.

Described as a revival of the deliberative idea and its linkage to democracy is Habermas’ theory, which describes an ideal “speech situation” based on the prerequisite of popular sovereignty.¹⁵ Therefore, the theory implies a strong participatory aspect, with the reason that “[...] all those affected by a political decision should be included in deliberation.”¹⁶ The importance of participation and, more specifically, public inclusion in political decision-making processes remains one that deliberative theorists agree on.¹⁷ Gutmann and Thompson elaborate on the idea of deliberative democracy and provide the following definition:

[...] [W]e can define deliberative democracy as a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives), justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in the future.”¹⁸

This definition assigns several characteristics to deliberative democracy. As a first and most important requirement, the authors determine *reason-giving*.¹⁹ With a similar justification as Habermas, the authors link the necessity of reason-giving to the purpose of legitimate collective decisions that affect a greater number of represented citizens.²⁰ Another characteristic to find in Gutmann’s and Thompson’s definition is *accessibility*, which is directly related to the previously mentioned aspect of citizen involvement in the process of deliberation. In other words, the public shall have access to the reasons given in the process, or at least the citizens who are affected by the respective outcome of the decision.²¹ Two other characteristics

¹³ Amy Gutmann and Dennis F. Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton, UNITED STATES: Princeton University Press, 2004), 8, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uu/detail.action?docID=445433>.

¹⁴ Gutmann and Thompson, 8–9.

¹⁵ Gutmann and Thompson, 9.

¹⁶ Steiner, *The Foundations of Deliberative Democracy*, 32.

¹⁷ Steiner, 36.

¹⁸ Gutmann and Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*, 7.

¹⁹ Gutmann and Thompson, 3.

²⁰ Gutmann and Thompson, 10.

²¹ Gutmann and Thompson, 4.

as moral-based deliberation play a role in political ruling. It remains crucial to replace the “power over” others with a “power with” others reality. Hammond speaks of empowerment that aims at increasing access to power to all different groups but a single elite, and finally abolishing the domination of one group over another.³⁰ Naming domination in that context also fits to Landemore’s idea to create a group of deliberators that consist of fair proportions of society’s groups, thereof half of it would be women.³¹

The opening of democracy that described by Landemore is based on three values: “[...] popular sovereignty, self-rule or autonomy, and equality.”³² Equality goes hand in hand with empowerment because it means not only having the right to vote but also equal access to the process leading up to it.³³ Empowering all people would lead to an adequate condition for a *good* decision:

[...] in a complex and uncertain world, empowering all members of the demos equally, and in particular giving them all an equal right of access to the deliberation shaping the laws and policies that govern us all, is overall the best method we have to figure out solutions to common problems.³⁴

The possibility of adjustments in decisions that result from deliberative processes is in accordance with the characteristic of *dynamic* described by Gutmann and Thompson. Similarly, both Hammond and Landemore bring up ideas of keeping the regime open to criticism and change.³⁵ It requires both a critical citizenship and the openness from the governmental side towards criticism. This understanding will also entail the ability to encounter the possible dangers of the new approach. As such, Hammond states the threat of misused empowerment of citizens that does not serve real empowerment but plays into the hands of the dominating group.³⁶ Furthermore, a new “we” understanding shall not be misinterpreted as it was historically in terms of “mankind.”³⁷

³⁰ Marit Hammond, ‘Democratic Innovations after the Post-Democratic Turn: Between Activation and Empowerment’, *Critical Policy Studies* 15, no. 2 (3 April 2021): 177–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2020.1733629>.

³¹ Landemore, *Open Democracy*, 18.

³² Landemore, 5.

³³ Landemore, 6.

³⁴ Landemore, 8.

³⁵ Landemore, 17; Hammond, ‘Democratic Innovations after the Post-Democratic Turn’, 185.

³⁶ Hammond, ‘Democratic Innovations after the Post-Democratic Turn’, 186–87.

³⁷ Mansbridge, ‘Feminism and Democracy’, 152.

2.3 Linkage between Feminism and Democracy

By sorting out the characteristics and fundamental aspects of deliberative democracy, the linkage to feminism is not far-fetched. Earlier scholars such as Dietz (1987), Gould (1993) and Mansbridge (1998) emphasised the contributions that feminist and deliberative thinkers made to each other.³⁸ The participatory and accessibility characteristics of the deliberative decision-making process are closely linked to the core aspects of equality and power in feminist theory. With the aforementioned shift in political theory to not exclusively determine politics as a bargaining of power and opening up the room for deliberation, feminist theorists came into place.³⁹ Feminism helps the deliberative purpose of equality and therefore mutual respect by the ability to unmask domination.⁴⁰ Gould even claims the critique of domination as an “institutional requirement for democracy.”⁴¹ Furthermore, the normative shift in deliberative conceptualisation and feminist strands collude in affirming that women’s perspectives as emotionally sensitive and intensified care towards others are an asset to deliberation.⁴²

Hence, the more recent elaboration by Rona Fitzgerald emphasises the means of gender equality in general for political life, as both women *and* men are influenced by gendered norms.⁴³ Mainstreaming gender more in politics would therefore generate better policy outcomes and serve women’s participation therein.⁴⁴ Towards the achievement of the full inclusion of women in political deliberation processes, it needs an activation of women’s citizenship.⁴⁵ This goes hand in hand with the argument that Dietz pointed out in 1987 already, that “equal access is not enough.”⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Cornwall and Goetz state: “Of course, getting more women into public office has always been connected to a wider project of deepening democracy.”⁴⁷

³⁸ Mary G. Dietz, ‘Context Is All: Feminism and Theories of Citizenship’, *Daedalus* 116, no. 4 (1987): 1–24; Carol C. Gould, ‘Feminism and Democratic Community Revisited’, *Nomos* 35 (1993): 397; Mansbridge, ‘Feminism and Democracy’.

³⁹ Mansbridge, ‘Feminism and Democracy’, 149.

⁴⁰ Mansbridge, 153.

⁴¹ Gould, ‘Feminism and Democratic Community Revisited’, 400.

⁴² Mansbridge, ‘Feminism and Democracy’, 148.

⁴³ Fitzgerald, ‘Active Citizenship: Gender Equality and Democracy’, 71.

⁴⁴ Fitzgerald, 75.

⁴⁵ Fitzgerald, 82.

⁴⁶ Dietz, ‘Context Is All’, 2.

⁴⁷ Andrea Cornwall and Anne Marie Goetz, ‘Democratizing Democracy: Feminist Perspectives’, *Democratization* 12, no. 5 (1 December 2005): 787, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340500322181>.

3. Feminist Foreign Policy in Sweden

Having traced back the literature on feminism and deliberative democracy until the most recent point, it remains the task to clarify how the Feminist Foreign Policy in Sweden fits into this framework. Therefore, the policy will be briefly introduced and described in its development. In a further step, the role of Sweden as a norm entrepreneur in the context of the FFP will be elaborated, according to sources of the Swedish foreign ministry and scholars' research on the matter.

5.2. Introduction to the Swedish FFP

The Swedish government has called itself a “feminist government” since 2014, when former foreign minister Margot Wallström introduced a feminist foreign policy. At the beginning, there was no definition given.⁴⁸ The policy has developed since its establishment like a process, which explains why a handbook serving as a manual was published in 2017, three years after the announcement. The term “feminism” needs to be defined in the particular understanding of the Swedish FFP. Firstly, it arises from the basic conception of *gender equality* which the Swedish political agenda has included since the second half of the 20th century. Gender equality is pointed out in general as an initiative early pursued by the Nordic countries, also called the “Nordic model.”⁴⁹ Using the “f-word” as a firm placeholder in the formal political arena since 2014 strengthens the ambitious agenda of gender equality beyond gender mainstreaming.⁵⁰ This will become more evident when explaining Sweden's normative role in the following.

That said, about what kind of feminism are we speaking in Sweden's FFP? Scholars assume that the Swedish case is built on liberal feminism, partially intersectional and market oriented which is visible in the emphasis on economic empowerment for women.⁵¹ As such,

⁴⁸ Victoria Scheyer and Marina Kumskova, ‘Feminist Foreign Policy: A Fine Line between “Adding Women” and Pursuing a Feminist Agenda’, *Journal of International Affairs* 72, no. 2 (2019): 60.

⁴⁹ R. Lister, ‘A Nordic Nirvana? Gender, Citizenship, and Social Justice in the Nordic Welfare States’, *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 16, no. 2 (1 June 2009): 243, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxp007>.

⁵⁰ Karin Aggestam and Annika Bergman-Rosamond, ‘Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy in the Making: Ethics, Politics, and Gender | Ethics & International Affairs | Cambridge Core’, 2016, 323, <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/core/journals/ethics-and-international-affairs/article/swedish-feminist-foreign-policy-in-the-making-ethics-politics-and-gender/FEE6103E38181D831DA1BEBE8861C289#article>.

⁵¹ Jennifer Thomson, ‘What's Feminist about Feminist Foreign Policy? Sweden's and Canada's Foreign Policy Agendas | International Studies Perspectives | Oxford Academic’, 2020, 429, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/ekz032>; Ekatherina Zhukova, Malena Rosén Sundström, and Ole Elgström,

Sweden refers to the fact that gender equality serves economic interests and strengthens wealth.⁵² This can also be justified by looking at the *Handbook*.⁵³ Furthermore, the FFP works with the framework of three R's: *Rights*, *Representation* and *Resources*. Altogether they are based on a fourth R, which means *Reality*.⁵⁴ As grounded in Sweden's promotion of gender equality, the FFP shall also serve the overall objective formulated as such: "Women and men shall have the same power to shape society and their own lives."⁵⁵ Besides promoting gender equality aims, the Swedish government introduced its FFP to tackle gender inequality in a more strategic and operational way.⁵⁶

Since 2014, the Swedish FFP has further developed. It has undertaken efforts to include various opinions of different actors, such as different departments of the ministry itself, civil society, academia, etc.⁵⁷ The development of action plans is conducted under consultation of all different entities of the Foreign Service, including the embassies and missions, to ensure internal coherence.⁵⁸ Besides that, several methods of assessment are provoked by the fourth R as a reality-check, such as the regularly published action plans.

5.3. Sweden as a norm entrepreneur

Sweden has called itself a world leader on the matter of FFP and aims to convince other states of its policy approach.⁵⁹ Scholars assign Sweden a reputation as an "ethical power"⁶⁰ and as a "pioneer and norm setter"⁶¹ about feminist foreign policy in international relations. This goes

'Feminist Foreign Policies (FFPs) as Strategic Narratives: Norm Translation in Sweden, Canada, France, and Mexico', *Review of International Studies* 48, no. 1 (January 2022): 204, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000413>.

⁵² Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Handbook of Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy' (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2019), 19, https://www.swedenabroad.se/globalassets/ambassador/zimbabwe-harare/documents/handbook_swedens-feminist-foreign-policy.pdf.

⁵³ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11.

⁵⁴ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11.

⁵⁵ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16.

⁵⁶ Thomson, 'What's Feminist about Feminist Foreign Policy? Sweden's and Canada's Foreign Policy Agendas | International Studies Perspectives | Oxford Academic', 429.

⁵⁷ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Handbook of Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy', 34.

⁵⁸ Sari Kouvo, 'A Challenging Agenda for Troubled Times: The Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy' 2019 (1 December 2019): 73.

⁵⁹ Zhukova, Sundström, and Elgström, 'Feminist Foreign Policies (FFPs) as Strategic Narratives', 205; Thomson, 'What's Feminist about Feminist Foreign Policy? Sweden's and Canada's Foreign Policy Agendas | International Studies Perspectives | Oxford Academic', 434.

⁶⁰ Zhukova, Sundström, and Elgström, 'Feminist Foreign Policies (FFPs) as Strategic Narratives', 198.

⁶¹ Scheyer and Kumskova, 'Feminist Foreign Policy', 64.

back to its status as the first feminist government in the world. Since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, Sweden considers itself a “front runner” in promoting it.⁶² The self-ascribed role as norm entrepreneur makes it clear that Sweden’s FFP is a norms-based approach. Aggestam and Berman-Rosamond outline that using the “f-word” shows a strong commitment to gender equality and “[...] elevates politics from a broader consensual orientation of gender mainstreaming toward more controversial politics [...]”⁶³ Furthermore, the term arouses interest and curiosity among other states in the arena of international relations.⁶⁴ The normatively reoriented FFP understands that both women and men are subjected to gender norms, which can impact citizens in a discriminatory way.⁶⁵

How does Sweden proceed in its aim to promote norms through its FFP? In its own words, the Foreign Service provides information on the methods used for norm change in the aforementioned *Handbook* of Sweden’s FFP. These methods revolve mainly around the key word *communication*. Communication means, on that matter, a whole scale of various initiatives, starting with providing information material, increasing its reach through social media strategies, and organising events.⁶⁶ These methods serve greatly to reach out to civil society and to generally intervene in public discourse in other countries. For instance, the Foreign Service launched the campaign #midwives4all in Uganda to highlight the importance of this job.⁶⁷ Aiming at a broader audience, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs organised the Stockholm Forum on Gender Equality in 2018, which brought together participants from more than 100 different countries.⁶⁸ Using the method of co-creation, the conference served as a platform to tackle and promote this new topic politically. The outcomes of the conference were published online and underlined by the online campaign with the hashtag #GenderEqualWorld, which made content easily accessible from all over the world. Certainly, the Swedish Foreign Service still proceeds in the traditional way of building partnerships and

⁶² Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘The Swedish Foreign Service Action Plan for Feminist Foreign Policy 2019-2022, Including Direction and Measures for 2021’ (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2018), 1, https://www.government.se/49700e/contentassets/9992f701ab40423bb7b37b2c455aed9a/utrikesforvaltning-ens-handlingsplan-for-feministisk-utrikespolitik-2021_eng.pdf.

⁶³ Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, ‘Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy in the Making: Ethics, Politics, and Gender | Ethics & International Affairs | Cambridge Core’, 323.

⁶⁴ Kouvo, ‘A Challenging Agenda for Troubled Times’, 66.

⁶⁵ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘The Swedish Foreign Service Action Plan for Feminist Foreign Policy 2019-2022, Including Direction and Measures for 2021’, 20.

⁶⁶ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Handbook of Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy’, 53.

⁶⁷ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 57p.

⁶⁸ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 58.

finding allies among its diplomatic corps. Yet, the FFP shows an emphasis on low-threshold communication strategies to reach out to civil society.

On the intergovernmental level, the Swedish government realises its leading role. In its latest action plan, it claims the EU's common foreign policy as a key instrument that shall serve for the implementation of the Swedish FFP.⁶⁹ Generally, within the EU, Sweden pushes forward its approach with persistence: "By systematically and continuously repeating the same message [...]" Sweden has influenced the responsible policymakers to mainstream gender.⁷⁰

6. Analysis: Deliberative Democracy in Sweden's FFP

The previous outline of the Swedish FFP's functioning internally and externally shall help to find the linkages to the theory of deliberative democracy. To recap, the key characteristics of deliberative democracy were *reason-giving*, *accessibility*, *commitment/binding decisions*, *dynamic*, and additionally, *empowerment*. Implementing these aspects in policymaking processes means the realisation of a more open and inclusive democracy built on the values of popular sovereignty, autonomy, and equality as envisaged by Landemore (see 2.2). Implementing those key aspects in practical decision-making processes serves the ideas of feminist as well as deliberative democracy theory.

6.2. Deliberative Characteristics in FFP

Sweden plays into the aim of feminist theory to provoke a normative shift regarding its self-assigned role as a norm entrepreneur on that matter. Sweden declares to use its FFP as a tool against democratic backlash:

Our efforts must be intensified, not least given the backlash against gender equality that we have seen in the wake of the pandemic. Violence against women and girls has increased all over the world. The pandemic, the climate crisis and shrinking

⁶⁹ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'The Swedish Foreign Service Action Plan for Feminist Foreign Policy 2019-2022, Including Direction and Measures for 2021', 20.

⁷⁰ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Handbook of Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy', 62.

democratic space are putting us at risk of a global gender equality recession. Feminist foreign policy is needed more than ever.⁷¹

At the Summit for Democracy in 2021, Sweden showed a strong voice to raise awareness of the shrinking rights of women as well as of LGBTIQ people in linkage to anti-democratic forces: “[...] the rule of law and women’s political and economic participation are crucial to democracy.”⁷² Given that, all deliberative characteristics find a place in the FFP’s three Rs defined by the Swedish foreign ministry. The first R (*Rights*) is based on human rights’ legal framework and serves as a foundation for *reason-giving*, which is the core of a deliberation process to find arguments that lead to policymaking and political decision-making. Sweden is therefore one of the first countries to implement the UN Women’s Peace and Security agenda.⁷³ The second R (*Representation*) entails the aspects of participation and inclusion, which means, in the words of the Swedish ministry, “[...] women’s participation and influence in decision-making processes at all levels and in all areas, and shall seek dialogue with women representatives at all levels, including in civil society.”⁷⁴ The third R (*Resources*) reflects the need for accessibility in deliberative democracy. Furthermore, the Swedish FFP regards the distribution of resources also in terms of land distribution and owning mobile phones, which both show unequal numbers and have an impact on either women’s autonomous power or their ability to participate and access information.⁷⁵

The aspect of power is already incorporated into Sweden’s gender equality objective. The objective that “[w]omen and men shall [both] have the same power to shape society and their own lives” mirrors all three values Landemore is grounding an open and inclusive democracy on. Popular sovereignty is given the power to shape the societal and political sphere. The autonomous aspect is found in shaping one’s own life. At last, equality is defined in feminist terms like gender equality. As stated earlier, the gender equality objective is Sweden’s FFP’s core, and therefore, the FFP further guides foreign policy towards a more democratic aim.

⁷¹ Linde, ‘Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs on Wednesday 16 February 2022’, 5.

⁷² Linde, 6.

⁷³ Thomson, ‘What’s Feminist about Feminist Foreign Policy? Sweden’s and Canada’s Foreign Policy Agendas | International Studies Perspectives | Oxford Academic’, 428.

⁷⁴ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Handbook of Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy’, 13.

⁷⁵ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15.

Furthermore, the construction of the Swedish FFP shows clear deliberative aspects. First and foremost, the fourth R (*Reality*) constitutes the openness that deliberative democracy requires in various ways. Elaborated in the Handbook's chapter called "Pursuing gender equality in the face of headwinds", the fourth R serves as an institutionalised *reality-check* through experiences made since the introduction of FFP, different arguments contributors bring up, and research.⁷⁶ The dimension *Reality* creates dynamics within the policy, opening it up towards change and adaptations that might be necessary. Therefore, the dimension establishes the understanding as a learning process within the policy. This realises the criterion of dynamic that Gutmann and Thompson assigned to deliberation processes. It also entails the openness to criticism and general reflection taken out under inclusive conditions, as it accepts voices of academia and other civil society actors, for instance. This is also shown in the communication methods for norm change that focus on civil society.⁷⁷ Moreover, the concept of *reality-check* potentially fulfils the first characteristic of *reason-giving* in deliberation because it is meant as a tool to raise constant awareness of counterarguments and resistant voices pushing policymakers to justify and reason their arguments. As such, the ministry supports the FFP's handbook consistently with the facts and numbers that research shows.

5.2 Challenges and criticism

What criticism has the Swedish FFP encountered? The current Swedish government withdrew the concept. There were efforts integrated into the policy to be aware of headwinds and criticism and the counterarguments detected through the fourth R. Yet, the government elected in September 2022 formed a centre-right coalition and did not pursue a feminist foreign policy anymore. Then-elected foreign minister Tobias Billström⁷⁸ emphasised that gender equality remains a core value for Sweden and refrained from the attribute 'feminist' because "labels on things have a tendency to cover up the content."⁷⁹ The labelling with the f-word was previously an amplifier of Sweden's positioning as a strong norm entrepreneur internationally, as pointed

⁷⁶ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 103.

⁷⁷ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 53.

⁷⁸ Note: Tobias Billström resigned in 2024: therefore, he served as Foreign Minister from 2022 until 2024.

⁷⁹ Merlyn, 19 October 2022, in: BBC News, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63311743>, last opened 05 May 2025.

out by scholars (see 3.2). At the same time, these scholars have been aware of the high criticality the attribute provokes; Sweden's withdrawal exemplifies this.

Other critiques came up while the FFP was in place. One main critical point remains the confrontation of a moral-based approach with *realpolitik*. Deliberative theorist Steiner states that in reality persists a mixture of both ideals, the deliberative one and the one of the bargaining of interests, a predominantly realist understanding of global power relations.⁸⁰ Given that, gender equality objectives and scholars of feminist international relations theory show that the feminist approach entails a rethinking of foreign policymaking. Sweden's role as a norm entrepreneur implies a rethinking of democratic institutions, as was also the intention of deliberative thinkers. However, Sweden's case got caught up in controversy of double standards, as it is among the world's biggest arms exporters while simultaneously promoting a feminist foreign policy that aims at conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In 2015, the diplomatic crisis between Sweden and Saudi Arabia over a renewal of their arms trade agreement exemplified this dilemma. Scholar Anne Marie Goetz calls feminist foreign policy, in its practice, undiplomatic because it disrupts diplomatic harmony by confronting actors in all spheres with their gendered biases.⁸¹ Therein lies a conflictual potential in the promotion of FFP, which is why feminist approaches never go without a fight.⁸² Kouvo mentions that the Swedish-Saudi-Arabian diplomatic crisis "[...] opened up for broader debates about democracy, human rights, and arms' exports."⁸³ However, this means that the controversy has not started with a feminist approach alone but with a human rights approach generally. It remains controversial to make certain trade deals between democratic and non-democratic regimes. Wallström dedicated herself to this nexus between feminism and the interrelationship of democratic and authoritarian regimes in her speech in 2019:

[...] [T]his is really part of a larger struggle, between democracy and authoritarianism; between openness and repression; between hope and fear: yes, one might even call it the struggle between good and evil. [...] We must always remind sceptics that gender equality is not a women's issue – it is a human rights

⁸⁰ Steiner, *The Foundations of Deliberative Democracy*, 3.

⁸¹ Anne Marie Goetz, 'Feminist Principles in Global Affairs: Undiplomatic Practice', in *The Future of Global Affairs: Managing Discontinuity, Disruption and Destruction*, ed. Christopher Ankersen and Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 167, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56470-4_7.

⁸² Kouvo, 'A Challenging Agenda for Troubled Times', 68.

⁸³ Kouvo, 79.

issue, a democracy and a peace and security issue. It improves life not only for one half of the population, but for both halves of the population.⁸⁴

Throughout the analysis of Sweden's FFP, it becomes quickly obvious that the texts focus to a high extent on *women and girls*. Even though the Swedish FFP mentions intersectionality and claims to defend rights of marginalised groups such as LGBTQ, it is important to stress that the core objective of the Swedish gender equality concept is based on the binary gender model. Furthermore, co-founder of the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, Kristina Lunz, stresses that FFP shall serve as a tool to abolish the domination of all societal groups experiencing this.⁸⁵ It shall lead to an inversion of a “power over” to a “power with” reality.

7. Conclusion

Are we coming closer to *good* decisions with a feminist foreign policy? The development of democracy models shows enormous changes since Jürgen Habermas' theory on communication, which relies on the best argument solely grounded in rationality. Deliberative thinkers build a new foundation by including the normative side of political decision-making. This goes hand in hand with a shift in the understanding of power in deliberative democracy because the dominance of one group over another must be replaced by an inclusive approach. Pioneer of FFP, Margot Wallström, also draws the link between feminism and democracy by highlighting the objective of gender equality in the abovementioned statement. Moreover, the Swedish FFP serves as a tool to increase the openness of the democratic model.

Swedish feminist foreign policy includes aspects of deliberative democracy in its steady process of conceptualising since 2014. The model of the four Rs reflects the aspects and values of popular sovereignty, autonomy, and equality, if understood as gender equality. The Swedish FFP acknowledges the understanding that representation is not enough, but a shift in the understanding of power is necessary. According to its gender equality objective, women shall be

⁸⁴ Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Speech by Margot Wallström at R.M. Salas Memorial Lecture in New York', Regeringskansliet (Regeringen och Regeringskansliet, 5 February 2019), <https://www.swedenabroad.se/en/embassies/un-new-york/current/news/speech-by-minister-for-foreign-affairs-margot-wallstr%C3%B6m/>.

⁸⁵ Lunz, *Die Zukunft Der Außenpolitik Ist Feministisch*, 206.

empowered to shape society as well as their own lives in the same way as men. Notably, this objective bares the potential for exclusivity because it is built on the binary gender model. The four Rs largely base themselves on communication tools that aim at the promotion of FFP on an international scale and in targeted third countries. The Swedish FFP aimed to counter democratic backsliding with its strong outward promotion. Other countries have followed: For example, the idea of Rights, Representation, and Resources was taken over in Germany's feminist foreign policy concept introduced in March 2023. It remains the question of the political will, which the survival of FFP agendas in countries depend on.

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The Potential of Citizenship Education for Promoting a Culture of Democracy: A Comparative Case Study of France & Germany

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Abstract

In the light of the enormous challenges that currently threaten the political stability of Europe, education can be a tool for upholding democratic values, and human rights and promoting inclusive societies, characterised by mutual respect, independence of thought and tolerance of differing perspectives. This paper focuses on the potential of citizenship education to foster a culture of democracy. Although there have been many cross-national studies, this paper will question how citizenship education is constructed in political discourse. This will be done through a comparative case study of the official recommendations given by the educational authorities in France and Germany. Both suggest the need to implement innovative learning methods in schools, which allow young people to experience and identify with the values of democracy through interactive, inclusive processes. The aim is to make transparent the main motivations for implementing citizenship education and to analyse to what extent the approaches differ despite both countries being based on the same fundamental democratic values and similar democratic constitutions. The research will show that the ideas and ideologies which frame national narratives of historic events play a central role in orienting action to promote democracy through education. With this in mind, and given the different versions of democracy across Europe, the paper concludes with the suggestion of implementing a more coherent and trans-national policy for democratic citizenship education for the EU member states.

Keywords: Citizenship Education, Youth Engagement, Culture of Democracy.

1. Introduction

In the last decade, European democracies have been facing enormous challenges with the rise of populism and increasing socio-political disengagement. The digital era creates an ideal breeding ground for disinformation, fake news, and conspiracy theories. This, in turn, leads to a growing distrust in democratic institutions and apathy towards politics. In the light of these challenges, young people are considered critical stakeholders for the “Future of Europe”.¹ 2022 has been designated as the “European year of the Youth”, which aims to “build a better future – greener, more inclusive and digital”² and provide more opportunities for young people to take part in discussions and decision-making processes. The question remains: How are young people being prepared for this? Democratic societies have the responsibility to prepare younger generations to become active, responsible and critically thinking citizens to revitalise a culture of democracy. In recent years, education has been seen as a vital tool for upholding and promoting democracy, human rights, and rule of law. This paper will focus on the role given to democratic citizenship in educational policies. First, the paper will briefly situate citizenship education within the larger field of research and policy. Then, this paper will focus on how citizenship education is discursively constructed in France and Germany. Key historical developments to citizenship education in the respective context will be identified to frame their current approaches. Finally, the official recommendations given by the educational authorities will be analysed to gain insight into their national strategies. The main questions are; what are the main motivations for implementing citizenship education? What is the focus of citizenship education? How do history and culture shine through the texts?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Conceptualization

In recent decades, the educational research community, together with policymakers, have made significant contributions to advancing citizenship education. For example, the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE), adopted in

¹ “Conference on the Future of Europe”, Accessed 12 May 2022. <https://futureu.europa.eu/?locale=en>.

² “What Is the European Year of Youth?”, *European Youth Portal*, Accessed 12 May 2022. https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en.

2010, presents a framework of recommendation for educating the fundamental values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law as well as preventing human rights violations.³ The 2015 Paris Declaration likewise encourages “promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education” which outlines numerous policy recommendations for the Member States after the terror attacks hit Copenhagen and Paris.⁴ UNESCO's strategies, along with Target 4.7 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, have advanced the notions of Global Citizenship education.⁵ There have also been numerous international comparative studies, for example, the 2017 Eurydice report, which provides a “comprehensive picture of national policies in the area of citizenship education in schools across Europe”⁶ as well as the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in 2009, 2016 and currently running its third cycle to be published in late 2023.⁷ These studies identified a correlation between citizenship education and social, civic and political participation and have concluded that schools play a vital role in developing democratic attitudes.

2.2 Definitions

This paper considers how young people are being supported to take on their role as citizens, cope with current and future challenges, and strengthen a culture of democracy.

The term ‘culture of democracy’ rather than ‘democracy’ is used in the present context to emphasise the fact that, while democracy cannot exist without democratic institutions

³ Council of Europe. “Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education” (EDC/HRE, 2010). Accessed 13 May 2022. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/edc/charter-on-education-for-democratic-citizenship-and-human-rights-education>.

⁴ Eurydice (European Education and Culture Executive Agency), *Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination through Education: Overview of Education Policy developments in Europe Following the Paris Declaration of 17 March 2015* (LU: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/396908>.

⁵ “Global Citizenship Education: Preparing Learners For The Challenges Of The Twenty-First Century”, UNESCO, accessed 13 May 2022, <https://en.unesco.org/news/global-citizenship-education-preparing-learners-challenges-twenty-first-century-0>. United Nations, “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Department of Economic and Social Affairs”, Accessed 13 May 2022. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

⁶ European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EECEA), *Citizenship Education at School in Europe*, (LU: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/536166>.

⁷ IEA, International Civic and Citizenship Education Study, Accessed 13 May 2022. <https://www.iea.nl/studies/iea/iccs>.

and laws, such institutions and laws cannot work in practice unless they are grounded in a culture of democracy, that is, in democratic values, attitudes and practices.⁸

Education for democratic citizenship goes by the principle that for a democratic society to flourish, it needs the open and active support of its citizens. This section will define some key terms to conceptualise what citizenship education is, or could be.

2.2.1 What is Citizenship Education?

Citizenship education refers to the acquisition of dispositions to comprehend and fulfil socio-political roles.⁹ This can be achieved in all educational settings: formal (i.e. structured educational establishments, such as school), non-formal (i.e. planned educational activities outside the formal setting) and informal (i.e. learning from daily encounters, such as family, media, religious communities...)¹⁰ Civic education and citizenship education are used interchangeably, however, the terms often remain ambiguous.¹¹ According to Buhovac's definition:

(...) whereas civic education or civics usually refers to the process of transmitting knowledge concerning a country's constitutional structure and political institutions, citizenship education covers additional competencies, such as social responsibility, as well as skills for ensuring effective interpersonal relations and successful personal development.¹²

The Council of the EU elaborates this: "Citizenship competence is the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life, based on understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability."¹³ Citizenship education can therefore be seen as a process of socialisation, which seeks not only to support the development of an individual's identity but also to bridge the gap between individual and community. Accordingly, it should be understood as a fluid

⁸ Martyn Barrett, *Competencies for Democratic Culture: Living Together as Equals in Culturally Diverse Democratic Societies*, (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2016), 15.

⁹ Wiel Veugelers, and Isolde de Groot, "Theory and Practice of Citizenship Education", (*Education for Democratic Intercultural Citizenship*, 2019) 14–41. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004411944_002.

¹⁰ Council of Europe, "EDC/HRE".

¹¹ Gistered Muleya, "Civic Education Versus Citizenship Education: Where Is the Point of Convergence?", 2018.

¹² Marko Buhovac, "Eurydice Brief: Citizenship Education at School in Europe – 2017" (European Commission, 2018), 7 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/eurydice-brief-citizenship-education-school-europe-%E2%80%93-2017_en.

¹³ Council of the European Union, "Key Competences for Lifelong Learning", (Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018), 10.

concept, given that the values, skills and knowledge relevant for membership in a community (be it local, national or global) will change over time and vary depending on the context and regime.¹⁴ Since citizenship education aims, in part, to teach future citizens to conform to the socio-political norms, and thus, “assimilate” to a given reality, notions of “conformity”, “uniformity”, “homogenization”, “indoctrination”, and the like are frequently cited in opposition.¹⁵ Crittenden and Levine argue, however, that “civic education in a democracy must prepare citizens to participate in and thereby perpetuate the system; at the same time, it must prepare them to challenge what they see as inequities and injustices within that system.”¹⁶ Therefore, citizenship education in liberal democracies not only includes teaching fundamental values but also the ability to exercise constructive criticism, evaluate different perspectives and respect pluralistic ways of life.

Hoskins has identified three key theoretical approaches for citizenship education: liberal model, civic republican model and critical model.¹⁷ The liberal approach is based on individualism and self-interest which focuses on creating autonomous citizens who have acquired the basic knowledge and skills to be able to exercise personal choice. The civic republican approach emphasises the need to see beyond one's self-interest and focuses on values of public spirit, solidarity and responsibility to engage with the community and contribute to the common good. The critical approach is based on improving social justice through a critical understanding of the status quo.

To conceptualise education for democratic citizenship in a more transparent manner, it is worth considering the four central competence areas (i.e. knowledge, skills, and attitudes) identified by the European Commission for teaching citizenship education at schools in Europe. These include: (i) interacting effectively and constructively with others, (ii) thinking critically, (iii) acting in a socially responsible manner, and (iv) acting democratically.¹⁸

¹⁴ Buhovac, “Eurydice Brief”, 3.

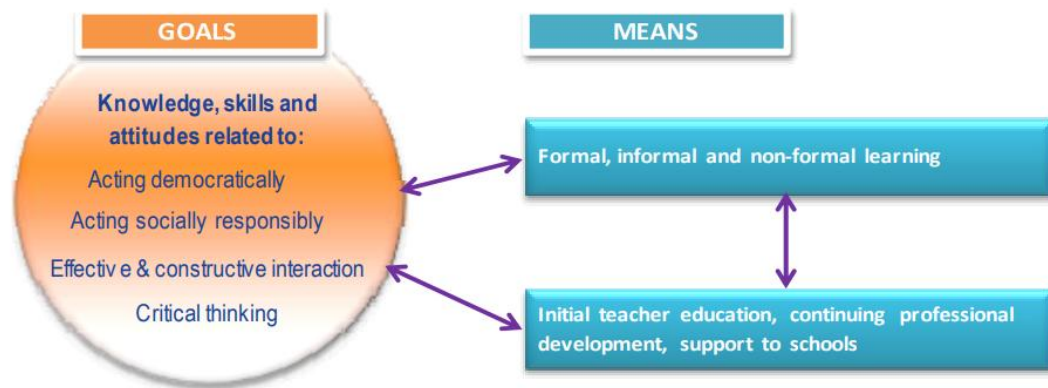
¹⁵ Jack Crittenden and Peter Levine, “Civic Education”, in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018).
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/civic-education/>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Bryony Hoskins, “What does democracy need from its citizens? Identifying the qualities needed for active citizenship and making the values explicit, In: *Schools, curriculum and citizenship education for building democratic citizens*, ed. Murray Print and Dirk Lange (Boston: SensePublishers, 2, 2013) 23–35.

¹⁸ EECEA, “*Citizenship Education*”, 24.

Graph 1. Teaching citizenship education in schools



Source: Eurydice.

3. Case Studies

Having developed a broad definition of citizenship education, this paper will now take a closer look at what citizenship education looks like in France and Germany. To understand the current framework for citizenship education, it is important to briefly consider the respective historical developments.

3.1 Germany: Background

In Germany, citizenship education is most often referred to as “Politische Bildung” (political education) or “Demokratie Pädagogik” (democracy pedagogy).¹⁹ Citizenship education has been central to Germany's education system since the Second World War. Buck and Geissel define three historical reference points concerning the development of citizenship education in Germany.²⁰ The first was in the 1950s when education was seen as key to developing democratic principles and systems after the Second World War: “The main objectives of

¹⁹ Steve Kenner, “Politische Bildung: Citizenship Education in Germany from Marginalisation to New Challenges”, (*Journal of Social Science Education* 19, no. 1. 2020), 120.

²⁰ Alexy Buck and Brigitte Geissel, “The Education Ideal of the Democratic Citizen in Germany Challenges and Changing Trends”, (*Education, Citizenship and Social Justice* 4, 2009), 225–43.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197909340870>.

education were to consolidate democracy and to anchor democratic institutions into the hearts and minds of German citizens: in short, to foster the support for democracy.”²¹ The second, was in the late 1960s when the left-wing movement, the so-called 68 Generation, marked a shift from political support to political criticism. “Political mistrust, dissatisfaction and willingness to be critical were no longer seen as threats, but as democratic virtues.”²² Finally, with reunification in the 1990s, citizenship education played a role in the integration of the so-called “obedient citizens” who had experienced years of indoctrination under the state-centred education from the totalitarian, communist regime.²³ This evolution suggests that citizenship education can be understood as a process of re-democratization, meaning to spread and consolidate democratic values amongst German citizens.

Due to Germany's federal structure, the *Länder* (federal states) have sovereignty regarding educational policy. This means that the school system and curriculum vary depending on the region. According to the data collected by Gökbudak et al., citizenship education takes up an average of only one school hour per week on the school curriculum and is often not initiated until the final three years of secondary education.²⁴ On top of this, only two federal states have anchored citizenship education as a separate teaching subject in their constitutions: “Gemeinschaftskunde” (social studies) in Baden Württemberg and “Staatsbürgerkunde” (civics) in Nordrhein-Westfalen.²⁵ Most alarming are the disparities among the federal states who place varying importance and time spent on citizenship education in the curricula, meaning that young people in Germany do not have equal access to the systematic acquisition of political competencies and democratic attitudes at school.²⁶

3.2 France: Background

Citizenship education has been part of a long tradition of formal school education in France. Key moments include reforms following the 1789 French Revolution. Christoph and Clair explain:

To stabilise the newly founded Republic, a different type of citizen was needed, people that actively supported and defended it, and that were aware of their rights and duties.

²¹ Ibid, 323.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Mahir Gökbudak, Reinhold Hedtke and Udo Hagedorn, “Ranking Politische Bildung. Politische Bildung In Der Sekundarstufe I Und In Der Berufsschule Im Bundesländervergleich 2020” (*Bielefeld Universität: Didaktik Der Sozialwissenschaften* 12, no. 4, 2021).

²⁵ Kenner, “Politische Bildung”, 123.

²⁶ Gökbudak et. al, “Ranking Politische Bildung”.

The *honnête homme*, considered as an unpolitical servant, turned more and more into a *citoyen utile*, incorporating the republican values and being ready to fulfil their role.²⁷

At this point, citizenship education was incorporated into history, geography and French lessons and was primarily intended to instil and consolidate support for new socio-political processes. Citizenship education officially appeared as a separate subject in 1882 when “instruction morale et religieuse” became “instruction civique et morale” (from moral and religious education to moral and civic education.).²⁸ Following the Second World War, citizenship education grew in importance (entitled different names over time) and was no longer only taught in primary education. However, the subject was temporarily removed from the French school system from the 1968 protests to 1985.

Unlike Germany, the administration of public institutions is highly centralised in France. This means that all state schools follow the same educational system governed by the Ministry of National Education. Citizenship education has been assigned as a compulsory separate subject entitled “Enseignement Moral et Civique” (Moral and Civic Education, EMC).²⁹ EMC is taught all through the school career, from primary school through secondary education which makes up for a total of around 300 hours of citizenship education.³⁰ In the 2017 comparative study on the approaches to teaching citizenship education in schools in Europe, France ranked particularly high and was well above the average in the number of teaching hours. Nevertheless, in 2020 Jean Michel Blanquer, the current Minister of National Education, announced the need to strengthen EMC, particularly in terms of the number of teaching hours.³¹ This was in response to the murder of the school teacher Samuel Paty, who was killed by one of his students after presenting cartoons, including those of Mohammad published in Charlie Hebdo, to explain the importance of “freedom of expression” in an EMC

²⁷ Christophe Straub and Claire Ravez, “Social science education in France a fragmented educational landscape in transition” (*Journal of Social Science Education: Outlining Similarities and Differences in Civics Education in Europe*, Vol 19, No 1, 2020), 137. <https://doi.org/10.4119/J SSE-1568>.

²⁸ Alain Mouniotte, *Les Débuts de l’instruction civique en France, Les Débuts de l’instruction civique en France*, Hors collection (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2021), <http://books.openedition.org/pul/16020>.

²⁹ Kéren Desmery, “Histoire de L’enseignement Moral et Civique de 2012 à Aujourd’hui” Réseau Canopé, 2020. <https://www.reseau-canope.fr/nouveaux-programmes/magazine/vie-scolaire/histoire-de-l-enseignement-moral-et-civique-de-2012-a-aujourd'hui.html>

³⁰ EECEA, “Citizenship Education”.

³¹ Euronews, “A Year on, How Is Samuel Paty’s Murder Being Felt in French Schools?”, 15 October 2021, <https://www.euronews.com/2021/10/15/samuel-paty-murder-one-year-on-what-impact-has-the-teacher-s-killing-had-in-french-schools>.

class. In 2022, President Emanuel Macron similarly announced being in favour of a new civic education which would focus on the precarious nature of democracy and shared French values.³² The importance of citizenship education is acknowledged in France, given the extensive media attention, public discourse, and directives given by authorities.

4. Methodological Framework

The methodology for this paper will consist of qualitative content analysis. The aim is to consider how citizenship education is being presented in political discourse in France and Germany.

4.1 Key documents

The following chosen documents are critical for the framework of citizenship education in the respective context. For France, the analysis will be based on the 2015 announcements for the “Grande mobilisation de l'École vers les Valeurs de la République”³³ (Great mobilisation of schools for the values of the Republic) by the French Ministry of Education. Although there have been a few minor reforms to citizenship education since then, the principle framework remains the one announced in 2015 which will be discussed in more detail.³⁴ For Germany, the Joint Declaration of the 2018 Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs in Germany on “Democracy as objective, subject and practice of historical and political education in schools” will be analysed.³⁵ Despite the varying approaches and disparities concerning citizenship education within the *Länder*, this document provides the overarching, official recommendations for teaching citizenship education across Germany.

4.2 Approach

This paper will take a closer look at the main goals, priorities and methods of implementation, defined by the governing bodies, regarding citizenship education in school. For this, Bartlett

³² Marion Durand, “Enseignement Moral Et Civique, Vers Une Nouvelle Réforme ?”, La Croix, 2022, <https://www.la-croix.com/Famille/Enseignement-moral-civique-vers-nouvelle-reforme-2022-01-17-1201195324>.

³³ Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, “Toutes les mesures pour une grande mobilisation de l'École pour les valeurs de la République”, 22 January 2015, <https://www.najat-vallaud-belkacem.com/2015/01/22/toutes-les-mesures-pour-une-grande-mobilisation-de-lecole-pour-les-valeurs-de-la-republique/>.

³⁴ [For details on reforms See: “Les Valeurs De La République À L'école”, Ministère De L'Education Nationale Et De La Jeunesse, 2022, <https://www.education.gouv.fr/les-valeurs-de-la-republique-l-ecole-1109>.]

³⁵ Kulturministerkonferenz (KMK), “Democracy as objective, subject and practice of historical and political education in schools”, (Resolution adopted by the KMK on 6 March 2009, as amended on 11 October 2018) https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2009/2009_03_06-Demokratiebildung-engl.pdf.pdf

and Vavrus comparative case study approach (CCS) will be used. They argue that comparing and contrasting, from the Greek word “*heuristic*”, allows us “to discover” and come to “unexpected conclusions”.³⁶ Indeed, comparison allows us to consider how France and Germany address citizenship education in their policy recommendations which are based on similar (yet different) democratic visions, values and ideologies.³⁷ This approach does not seek to “flatten the cases by ignoring valuable contextual information, such as historical circumstances, or imposing concepts or categories taken from one site onto another.”³⁸ but will draw on these elements to widen our understanding. For this, keywords, phrases and potential themes will be discussed by considering the similarities and particulates in each context.

<i>Content Analysis</i>	<i>Key questions</i>
Principles & priorities	What are the key enlisted motivations for implementing citizenship education? What are the main “action-guiding” <i>values, beliefs, attitudes</i> and <i>norms</i> presented for citizenship education?
Values	What values are being drawn on to frame citizenship education? How does history & culture shine through text?
Implementation	What is the suggested method of implementation?
Stakeholders	How are students, parents, teachers, and the wider community being addressed or positioned in the document?

5. Analysis

5.1 Context for documents

To understand the motivations for implementing citizenship education that are presented in the documents, it is important to first put them in context.

³⁶ Lesley Bartlett and Frances Vavrus, “Comparative Case Studies: An Innovative Approach”, *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education* 1 (November 2017), 6. <https://doi.org/10.7577/njcie.1929>.

³⁷ Ibid, 7.

³⁸ Ibid, 10.

5.1.1 Context Germany

In Germany, the Joint Declaration of the Standing Conference of the Ministers came as a reaction to the heated public debates, initiated by Germany's far-right political party, the AFD, who demanded that citizenship education be "neutral" and thus provide a balanced presentation of views, including right-wing views.³⁹ The AFD even set up a "denunciation platform" against teachers who presented the AFD in a "one-sided or negative way"⁴⁰. When opposition argued that right-wing views encouraged racism and antisemitism, the Declaration was set to provide a framework of recommendations for citizenship education in schools on a national level.⁴¹ The document is divided into the following sections: 1) Preliminary remarks, 2) Objectives and general principles, 3) Education policy and education system measures, 4) Implementation in schools 5) Support systems and extracurricular partners 6) Recommendations for further development.

5.1.2 Context France

The current framework for citizenship education in France was launched after the terror attacks on the satirical weekly "Charlie Hebdo", Montrouge, and the kosher supermarket "HyperCacher" in Paris in 2015. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, François Hollande, President at the time, made an address to the educators of France in which he announced the initiation of the new policies and programmes which would be implemented.⁴² Subsequently, the Ministry of Education set out eleven clearly defined measures to mobilise the whole school towards Republican values.⁴³ The document is in the format of a catalogue which presents a highly structured pathway through the different educational institutions from preschool through to higher education, research and teacher training. The eleven measures appear under four key sections: 1) Secularism and transmission of republican values, 2) citizenship and culture of commitment, 3) Reducing inequalities, social diversity: strengthening the sense of belonging to the republic, 4) Mobilising higher education and research.

³⁹ Inken Heldt, "Schule Im Menschenrechts-Auftrag? Die AfD- Aktion 'Neutrale Schule' als eine Warnung an die Menschenrechtsbildung", (*Pädagogische Rundschau*, no. 2, 2020) 323-334, [doi:10.3726/pr032020.0032](https://doi.org/10.3726/pr032020.0032).

⁴⁰ Guy Chazan, "AfD Asks German Schoolchildren to Inform on Teachers 'Bias'", *Financial Times*, 11 October 2018. <https://www.ft.com/content/baaec96-cd60-11e8-b276-b9069bde0956>.

⁴¹ Dirk Langen Heldt Inken, "Citizenship Education in Germany", bpb.de, accessed 16 May 2022. <https://www.bpb.de/die-bpb/partner/nece/328561/citizenship-education-in-germany/>.

⁴² François Hollande, "Déclaration de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur le rôle de l'Éducation nationale dans la transmission des savoirs et des valeurs de la République, à Paris le 21 janvier 2015." vie-publique.fr. Accessed 12 May 2022. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/193627-francois-hollande-21012015-transmission-des-savoirs-valeurs-republique>.

⁴³ Vallaud-Belkacem, "Mobilisation".

5.2 Points of convergence

Before considering the peculiarities, this section will briefly discuss some points of convergence. Citizenship education is foremost presented as a cross-curricular subject, integrated into different disciplines, and thus an overarching goal or whole school project. There are some recommendations for the curricula: Civic and Moral education in France, and, in Germany, the role of social science subjects. These include the teaching of political and legal systems and rights and responsibilities. However, both stress that democracy should be experienced in an active way: In Germany, “schools can, and should, be places where democracy is reflected and lived as a dynamic, constant organisational style”⁴⁴. France similarly states “values must live in concrete pedagogical acts, and not simply in the declaration of principles which, sometimes, are not embodied enough in the daily lives of students”.⁴⁵ This consists of project-based learning and participatory activities- such as class debates and student councils. In such, innovative teaching methods are considered vital for enhancing pupil commitment and developing their autonomy and independence, as opposed to the traditional top-down transmission of knowledge. Critical thinking and the need to improve media literacy takes a central role as both draw on the two sides of digitalisation; an opportunity for participation and expressing opinion, but also the dangers concerning fake news, restrictions of privacy, hate speech and misinformation. Both refer to improving tolerance towards diversity and inclusion of minorities and disadvantaged groups. Germany states “The special tasks of schools also include strengthening social cohesion, the participation of all members of, and cooperation between different ethnicities and cultures, especially in an era of migration and other global interdependencies”⁴⁶. France takes this a step further by developing strategies to combat school dropouts, and French language acquisition for newly arrived allophone students (and their parents) as essential elements for “combating inequalities and promoting social diversity to strengthen the sense of belonging to the Republic.”⁴⁷ Finally, both strive to improve contact with parents as well as involving the wider community through outreach and partnership programs and valorising extracurricular activities. In sum, citizenship education is

⁴⁴ KMK, “Democracy”, 2.

⁴⁵ Vallaud-Belkacem, “Mobilisation”, 8. Original quote : “Les valeurs doivent vivre dans des actes pédagogiques concrets, et pas simplement dans la déclamation de principes qui, parfois, ne s’incarnent pas assez dans le quotidien des élèves”.

⁴⁶ KMK, “Democracy”, 2.

⁴⁷ Vallaud-Belkacem, “Mobilisation”, 10. Original quote: “Combattre les inégalités et favoriser la mixité sociale pour renforcer le sentiment d’appartenance dans la République”.

considered essential for strengthening fundamental democratic values, improving social cohesion and thus beneficial for society.

5.3 Key Justifications

Having looked at some of the overarching shared themes, this section will move on to some striking differences. For this, the opening of the documents will be analysed as they present the key values, descriptions and prescriptions used to justify the implementation of citizenship education.

5.3.1 Germany: Justifications

The document opens with the “preliminary remarks” which introduce the important historic developments that led Germany to become a “free, democratic and unified legal state”⁴⁸. On numerous occasions, there is a reference to the atrocities of the 20th Century and the “crimes against humanity committed by the Nazis”⁴⁹. Within this context, human dignity is cited as the most important value which must be respected: “All humans are entitled to [dignity] by virtue of their humanity, and it is inviolable”⁵⁰. This sets a distinct sobering tone when referring to the fragility of democratic values which “must never be treated as disposable.”⁵¹ The past, therefore, serves as a clear justification for children and adolescents to learn basic democratic values. “We know this: A constitutional democracy cannot be taken for granted. Again and again, it must be learnt, fought for, lived and defended”⁵². In such, learning democracy is anchored in “historical, memory-focused learning”⁵³ which encourages critical confrontation with inhumane and anti-democratic pasts, present, and potential futures.

5.3.2 France: Justifications

The document opens with a very powerful address, which speaks of how the current social tensions and inequalities are reflected in schools.⁵⁴ France is presented as fragmented and polarised, without a clear sense of direction due to increasing disengagement and dwindling trust in the institutions and values of the Republic: “a society that is losing its reference points, which is characterised by a sort of general relativism that favours indifference and a lack of

⁴⁸ KMK, “Democracy”, 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 3.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, 5.

⁵² Ibid, 2.

⁵³ Ibid, 8.

⁵⁴ Vallaud-Belkacem, “Mobilisation”, 4.

clear distinctions.”⁵⁵ The terror attacks are referred to as having “targeted the heart of Republican values”.⁵⁶ Schools are then placed “at the front line” to address the societal changes and challenges by “responding with firmness” to “promote and disseminate secularism”.⁵⁷ Though implicit, the Republican motto is intertwined in the text on multiple occasions by presenting issues concerning liberty, equality and fraternity. The word choice “faire vivre” suggests that the core values of the Republic should not only be transmitted but also be brought to life. In such, the opening passage frames the “great mobilisation” as an essential resurrection, the need to come out of the “sentiments of despair” and revitalise and unify society by reaffirming secular Republican values. What is particularly striking, is the strict, militaristic tone through the word choice “mission” “mobilisation” “front line” “fight against” “combat” and “reinforcement” which makes citizenship education seem like a military operation.⁵⁸

5.4 Guiding Principles for Implementation

This section will look at how notions of neutrality are guided by different ideas and ideologies which are anchored in historic experiences.

5.4.1 Germany: Key principle

The declaration frequently specifies that schools are not to be value-neutral locations and that all pedagogical action intended to guide children and adolescents must adhere to the constitution's Basic Law. The document underscore that citizenship education is required to follow the framework of the so-called “Beutelsbacher Konsens” (Beutelsbacher Consensus) which is based on three key principles:

1. Überwältigungsverbot (Prohibition against overwhelming the student)
2. Kontroversitätsgebot (Treating controversial subjects as controversial)
3. Befähigung zur Selbstbestimmung (Enabling self-determination of the students)⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Ibid. Original quote : “Dans une société en perte de repères et caractérisée par une forme de relativisme ambiant qui favorise amalgames et indifférences.”

⁵⁶ Ibid. Original quote : “Après les attentats qui ont visé le cœur des valeurs républicaines”.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Original quote: “L’École est, et sera en première ligne, avec fermeté, discernement et pédagogie, pour répondre au défi républicain, parce que c’est son identité et sa mission profonde.” “l’École dont le rôle et la place dans la République sont inséparables de sa capacité à faire vivre et à transmettre la laïcité.”

⁵⁸ Ibid. Original quote: “mission”, “mobilisation” “en première ligne” “lutter contre” “combattre”, “renforcer”.

⁵⁹ Kenner, “Politische Bildung”, 121.

The Consensus dates back to 1976 when educational specialists came together to set guidelines for an “objective” teaching of (political) education in pluralistic democracies.⁶⁰ Despite various approaches to citizenship education in Germany, the Consensus remains the dominant framework across the federal states. Indoctrination is a particularly sensitive topic in Germany, with memories of authoritarian and totalitarian forms of government. This is reflected in the framing of citizenship education by which the declaration states:

In order to avoid indoctrination, we must not fail to mention different standpoints, must not ignore options, nor fail to discuss alternatives. Therefore, the requirement to treat controversial subjects as controversial is intertwined with the prohibition against overwhelming the students. Both imperatives point to the duty to show, and allow, different perspectives of a topic. This means that conflicting or contentious positions must be included.⁶¹

Self-reflection, critically evaluating one's own position, and considering other positions are stated as key competencies. “Learning democracy includes the skill to comprehend, understand and reflect on another’s position. However, respecting the freedom of opinions of others does not mean arbitrariness and neutrality”⁶². Fostering controversial debates by including multiple perspectives is framed as essential for students to learn to tolerate and respect other people's opinions, however, teachers are expected to set clear boundaries and guide discussions in which “exclusionary, inhumane and antidemocratic positions” are to be challenged.⁶³ Given Germany's unique history it is understandable that developing the ability to exercise critical judgement and see through a given social order is at the centre of citizenship education.

5.4.2 France: Key principle

“Laïcité” seems to be the key principle for citizenship education in France. Laïcité” is translated as “secular” or “secularism” in English and refers to the separation of Church and State. The very first section is entitled: “Putting secularism and the transmission of Republican values at the heart of school mobilisation”.⁶⁴ The document cites the establishment of free, mandatory and secular education in France (under the 1802 Jules Ferry Laws) as the beginning of a “virtuous cycle” whereby schools transfer the knowledge and culture of reasoning based on

⁶⁰ Hans-Georg Wehling, “Konsens à la Beutelsbach? Nachlese zu einem Expertengespräch”, in: Siegfried Schiele, Herbert Schneider. *Das Konsensproblem in der politischen Bildung*, Stuttgart 1977, p.178 ff. [For an extensive translation and explanation in English See: “Beutelsbacher Konsens”, Lpb-Bw.De, accessed 15 May 2022, <https://www.lpb-bw.de/beutelsbacher-konsens>.]

⁶¹ KMK, “Democracy”, 4.

⁶² Ibid, 5.

⁶³ Ibid, 2.

⁶⁴ Vallaud-Belkacem, “Mobilisation”, 4. Original quote : “Mettre la laïcité et la transmission des valeurs républicaines au cœur de la mobilisation de l’École.”

secular, humanist values.⁶⁵ The declaration subsequently insists on the reinforcement of secular or factual teaching of religion “l’enseignement laïque du fait religieux”, that students and their parents respect the Charter of Secularism “la Charte de la laïcité” along with introducing a day to celebrate secularism “Journée de Laïcité” on December 9th.⁶⁶ One must understand that “laïcité” is linked to the so-called ‘colour-blind’ Republican ideology which emphasises that for society to be egalitarian, individuals must be seen as citizens and not defined by their ethnoreligious identities. Sealy and Modood explain:

The French model [of secularism] emphasises social cohesion founded in a civic nationhood, where recognizing ‘difference’ is seen as antithetical to citizenship and the state is officially colour and ethnicity ‘blind’. This is based on a form of republican egalitarian individualism which the ranting of group rights is seen to undermine, and religious difference is therefore restricted to the private sphere.”⁶⁷

In France, secularism has a long-standing tradition with its roots in the 1789 Revolution and the abolishment of the Monarchy. It was further developed in the Third Republic under the 1905 Law which officially established state secularism as the basis for guaranteeing freedom, equality and fraternity. Today, secularism remains a key principle of the Constitution:

France is an indivisible, secular [laïc], democratic and social Republic, guaranteeing that all citizens regardless of their origin, race or religion are treated as equals before the law and respecting all religious beliefs.⁶⁸

Whilst in the French Declaration, secularism takes a central role in teaching democratic citizenship, in Germany notions of religion are somewhat absent. This can be explained by the fact that there is not the same strict separation of Church and State in German. Although the state has to adhere to the principles of neutrality; that being not in favour nor discriminating against a certain confession, the Basic law allows a “constructive neutrality” which supports certain cooperation between the state and religious groups.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Thomas Sealy and Tariq Modood, “France: From Laïcité to Laicism”. In Anna Triandafyllidou, and Tina Magazzini, *Routledge Handbook on the Governance of Religious Diversity*, (Routledge, 2020), 24.

⁶⁸ “Secularism and Religious Freedom in France”, France Diplomacy - Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, accessed 31 May 2022, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/france-facts/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france-63815/article/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france>.

⁶⁹ Jenny Gesley, “The Relationship Between Church and State in Germany” In Custodia Legis: Law Librarians of Congress, webpage, 6 December 2017, <https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2017/12/the-relationship-between-church-and-state-in-germany/>.

5.5 Stakeholders

This section will look at the positioning of teachers. Teachers are placed at the forefront of promoting democratic citizenship in France, with the argument that all educational staff regardless of their discipline must be equipped with the knowledge and essential skills to be able to “explain and share the values of the Republic”, have the competencies to deal with issues related to citizenship (on a French- and European level), secularism and the fight against prejudice.⁷⁰ The second measure is entitled “re-establish the authority of teachers and republican rituals”.⁷¹ In the French version the use of the word “maitre” (master) instead of “professeur.e (teacher) establishes a certain superiority and commands respect towards teachers. Enforcing “rules of civility and politeness” in the classroom, especially towards teachers, is presented as essential in the preparation for “good” citizenship which includes the reinforcement of strict “responsibilisation measures” to tackle any misbehaviour which “challenges” the authority of teachers or the values of the Republic.⁷² In such, self-reflection and accountability for actions are seen as key for students to learn about their rights and duties.⁷³

The German declaration insists that democracy is a key principle that should also be reflected in the schooling and teaching style, and thus does not enforce the same hierarchical structures as in France. The position of teachers is not so prominent in the German declaration other than the requirement that staff take on an “active, pro-democracy attitude”⁷⁴ and that “all teachers and staff are obliged to promote our democracy based on freedom and the rule of law in their teaching and actions”⁷⁵. The German declaration insists that free and democratic states are “dependent on citizens voluntarily acting democratically based on their own convictions”⁷⁶ which serves as a principle for guiding children and adolescents to “experience and identify the advantages, achievements and opportunities of a democracy”⁷⁷ from an early age. In the German document, learning to become a responsible citizen, willing to shape the democracy we live in by experiencing an engaging educational environment that promotes active

⁷⁰ Vallaud-Belkacem, “Mobilisation”, 4. Original quote : “expliquer et à faire partager les valeurs de la République”.

⁷¹ Ibid, 5. Original quote: “Rétablir l’autorité des maitres et les rites Républicains”.

⁷² Ibid. Original quote: “Les règles de civilité et de politesse”, “Mesures de responsabilisation”, “Tout comportement mettant en cause les valeurs de la République ou l’autorité du maître (...)”.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ KMK, “Democracy”, 7.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 8.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 4.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 5.

participation, is key. There is no need for enforced allegiance through rituals which, in the German context, would have negative historic connotations.

5.6 Patriotism: The French Exception

One aspect which is unique to the French context is patriotism. The second measure introduces the “reinforcement of celebrating Republican rituals and symbols” such as “La Marseillaise” national anthem, the “Tricolore” flag, the allegorical figure of Marianne wearing the Phrygian cap, and the unifying motto “Liberté, égalité, fraternité”.⁷⁸ Schools are expected to initiate projects which encourage the active participation of students in patriotic commemorations and organise special events throughout the school year. In such, citizenship education takes on a role of increasing loyalty towards and identification with the nation-state. Notions of patriotism are completely absent in the German declaration. Whilst France is very nation oriented, Germany situated itself within the larger framework by referring to its status as a member of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations and thus commitments to the European education strategy ET 2020, fostering active democracy “relating to human rights, and explicitly, to the rights of children, gender equality and inclusion.” based on the Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) and Global Citizenship Education.⁷⁹

6. Discussion

The analysis of these documents has shown that there are certain commonalities regarding citizenship education in France and Germany. Foremost, education is used to promote fundamental democratic values anchored in the French Constitution and the German Basic Law. Both documents comprise elements of the central competencies for citizenship education including interacting effectively and constructively with others, thinking critically, acting in a socially responsible manner, and acting democratically. However, as Bartlett and Vavrus argue: “No ‘place’ is unaffected by history and politics; any specific location is influenced by economic, political, and social processes well beyond its physical and temporal boundaries.”⁸⁰ It is clear that the educational policies mirror the political set-up of the countries: the centralised system in France allows for a more prescriptive, precise catalogue of measures which are to be

⁷⁸ Vallaud-Belkacem, “Mobilisation”, 6. Original quote : “la célébration des rites républicains et des symboles de la République (hymne national, drapeau, devise)”.

⁷⁹ KMK, “Democracy”, 2.

⁸⁰ Bartlett & Vavrus, “Comparative Case Studies”, 12.

imposed nationwide, whereas the German document provides a looser set of recommendations which can be adapted to the educational systems of the 16 Bundesländer. The documents show how education is used to address current issues: In France, the measures for citizenship education were implemented as a response to domestic terrorist threats and growing fears of radicalisation and disengagement from education as well as from politics, whereas in Germany the recommendations were responded to right-wing pressures regarding a cancel culture and a perceived lack of neutrality in educational settings. France is guided by the principle of secularism, the strict separation of Church and State, whereas Germany focuses on the anti-indoctrination framework of the Beutelsbach Consensus. Given Germany's unique history, neutrality is a particularly sensitive topic due to the memories of communist and nazi indoctrination. France on the other hand seeks to reinforce unity by teaching allegiance to national norms, enforcing national values, and promoting loyalty to the Republic through commemorations and symbols. Whereas France presents a somewhat nostalgic view of the past in comparison to its fragmented present as motivation for promoting citizenship education, Germany draws on the past to emphasise the fragility of democracy and the need to be critical to fully comprehend a given social order. It can therefore be said that the approach to citizenship education in France follows the civic republican model, whereas Germany focuses more on the critical model. To conclude, the analysis has shown how the national narrative of historic events and culture plays a central role in the approach to citizenship education.

6.1 Proposals for Further Research

Due to the practical constraints of this research paper, the analysis has been limited to a comparison of only two key documents. Stake warns that comparison runs the risk of “fixing attention upon the few attributes being compared and obscuring other knowledge about the case” which in hindsight may have been the case for this research.⁸¹ To gain a broader and more in-depth understanding, one would have to expand the study. It would be necessary to see how theory is put into practice, that is to evaluate how the measures are implemented in schools. It would also be interesting to see how citizenship education is received by key stakeholders: educational professionals, students, parents and members of the local community. Interviews could expose the experiences and attitudes towards citizenship education and help identify the main challenges. Another follow up study could be to analyse the impact of citizenship education: does citizenship education foster a culture of democracy?

⁸¹ Stake, R. E, “Case Studies” 1994, 242, As cited in: Bartlett & Vavrus, “Comparative Case Studies”, 14

Do former students of a participatory model of citizenship education become more actively involved citizens? A survey could be used to assess levels of engagement in areas such as community volunteering, social activities, political participation, and environmental protection.

6.2 Broadening the Scope: A European Perspective

This paper has focused on two major European democracies. It would be worth comparing how certain “illiberal” democracies, or countries suffering from a radical democratic deficit, are framing and implementing citizenship education. Furthermore, given the disparities of citizenship education across Europe, it would be advantageous to implement a more coherent, overarching policy on citizenship education for the EU member states, as proposed by several scholars, including the European Agency for Citizenship Education.⁸² Undoubtedly, building a common value system would be challenging but it is worth opening a dialogue with the potential of learning from each other.

7. Conclusion

Revitalizing citizenship can be considered one possible answer to societal issues; be it lack of trust in democratic processes, low voter turnout, political polarization, societal fragmentation, hostility, extremism, or terrorism... To preserve a viable and sustainable culture of democracy, one must renew the democratic foundations and fundamental values from one generation to the next. Therefore, it is in the interest of public good to develop the democratic competencies of young people to form active, engaged citizens. This is the role of citizenship education. This paper has focused on the systematic acquisition of democratic citizenship through education at school in the French and German contexts. Despite being neighbouring countries the research has exposed how history and culture play a key role in the different approaches to citizenship education. The comparison did not seek to affirm national differences but look at ways in which we can learn from different contexts. The global nature of modern living and the impact of multiculturalism have expanded traditional dimensions of citizenship in recent decades, however, the rise of populism and regression to exclusionary forms of citizenship based on

⁸² [See for example: Sophie Pornschlegel, Susanne Zels, “Safeguarding European Values: The Case for a European Agency for Citizenship Education”, European Policy Centre: Discussion Paper. 7 December 2020. OR: Hermann J Abs, “Options for Developing European Strategies on Citizenship Education,” European Educational Research Journal 20, no. 3 (May 2021) 329–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904121994418>.]

ethnonational identities is posing increasing challenges. This suggests that, if we strive to strengthen democracy on a European level, citizenship education should shift its focus towards a more transnational approach and aim to incorporate aspects of global responsibilities, in line with the UNCRC and the agenda 2030, including the 17 STGs. We are, after all, as the Greek term suggests, “*kosmopolitês*”, citizens of the world.⁸³ There is a lot of research scope for this topic and many have already given great contributions to this field; however, given the importance of upholding democracy today, it would be worth investigating the role of citizenship education further, to evaluate its true impact, suggest changes, implement new policies and assist key stakeholders in the process.

⁸³ Pauline Kleingeld and Eric Brown, “Cosmopolitanism”, in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/cosmopolitanism/>.

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About the Contributors

Angela Bösen

My IP paper about Sweden's feminist foreign policy inspired me to write my thesis on Germany's then newly adopted feminist foreign policy. After graduation, I worked for one year as a communication assistant at a German company, but I missed international politics too much. I quit my job and moved for a few months to Uzbekistan, leaving the EU for the first time in my life. At first, I was a voluntary German teacher in the region, and then I interned at the OSCE mission in Tashkent. Questions of gender equality and women's empowerment can be asked everywhere, and I constantly enter spaces with them in mind. Enriched by this experience, I moved to Brussels for my current traineeship at the European External Action Service, Unit for Strategic Communication.

Alfred Häger

Since graduating from the Euroculture programme, I've been working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Sweden. I started out at the Ukraine unit, working directly with Sweden's foreign policy towards Ukraine. For my Euroculture master's thesis I analyzed the European Peace Facility and the EU's military aid to Ukraine, which was a great opportunity to bridge my academic and professional experience. I then transferred to the European Correspondent Unit. There, I was responsible for coordinating the Swedish policy and output in the Political and Security Committee (PSC). While the IP paper has not had a direct impact on my current work situation, it has helped me evolve my project planning and presentation skills. The Euroculture programme also improved my language skills and cultural understanding, which assisted me when I worked as a liaison officer during the Swedish EU Presidency.

Annabelle McLeod

Following my studies, I was motivated to encourage young people to critically engage with global issues and connect with European values through interactive and inclusive approaches. This led me to take part in the EuropaMobil project, where I joined 20 students from across Europe to deliver EU-focused workshops in schools across France's Grand Est region. Topics included EU climate policy, European institutions, identity, and democratic processes. I also worked with the European Academy for Political Education (gGmbH), where I organized youth seminars that promote cooperation and intercultural understanding. I led workshops, excursions, and simulations on themes such as sustainability, youth participation, and civic education. Alongside civic education, I have a strong interest in human rights, especially migration and asylum. I currently teach at a Federal Asylum Centre in Switzerland, where I aim to create inclusive and empowering learning experiences for displaced learners.

Annelou Snippe

After completing the Euroculture master's programme at Uppsala University and the University of Deusto, I moved to Berlin, where I work as a Project Manager at the European Youth Parliament. The European Youth Parliament is one of Europe's biggest platforms for civic education. I am currently responsible for a project that fosters dialogue and collaboration between Arctic and European youth, aiming to build mutual understanding and strengthen democratic youth engagement across regions. Working actively on youth participation, I am passionate about creating inclusive spaces where young people can explore and shape the future of Europe, supporting values deeply rooted in the interdisciplinary and international spirit of Euroculture.

Clara Weber

Inspired by the international and hypermobile nature of the Euroculture programme, I have continued to follow a professional path in that direction. After graduating, I spent several months in The Gambia and Senegal, working with a local environmental and gender-focused youth NGO in collaboration with a German development cooperation programme. Afterwards, I returned to the EU sphere through a Schuman traineeship at the European Parliament Liaison Office in Berlin during the exciting run up to the 2024 elections. To broaden my experience with international organizations, I then joined UNESCO in Paris through a German programme as a trainee in environmental sustainability management. I have continued working there as a consultant, enjoying collaboration with people from around the world on international topics, which reminds me of the Euroculture spirit. Reinforced by my IP paper, I have had a longstanding interest in Kenya, which continues to shape my current plans. I am now looking to pursue professional opportunities in Nairobi.

Eva Wohlhage

After completing my dual Bachelor of Laws in Public Administration in Münster, Germany, I gained five years of professional experience working for a city council. Throughout my academic and professional journey, I developed a strong interest in societal and cultural issues within an international context. This passion led me to pursue further studies in Euroculture starting in 2021, attending the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen in the Netherlands and the Universidad de Deusto in Bilbao, Spain. My professional encounters and experiences related to the Reichsbürger movement during my time at the city council inspired the focus of my research paper published in this edition. After my graduation, I remained committed to working in an international environment. My Euroculture studies complemented both my Bachelor's degree and professional experience, enabling me to pursue this aspiration. I am now employed at the German Embassy, where I continue to engage in work with an international scope.