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*School of Education and
Communication*

Has the pandemic affected democracy?

A qualitative study on the COVID-19's impact on
democracy in the European Union

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Abstract

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During its years, the European Union (EU) has experienced several different crises that have challenged its association and put democracy at risk. The financial crisis in 2009 and the migration crisis in 2015 are two difficult periods that caused a split between the member states. In 2020, the Union faced another crisis when the world witnessed the birth of the COVID-19 pandemic. To protect public health, states have introduced state of emergency (SoE) that gives the political government more power to make quick decisions and restrict residents' democratic freedoms. Discussions about how the pandemic affects democracy in the EU have been raised. This study aims to examine different views on how EU democracy is affected by the pandemic. The purpose is to identify how five different representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and intuitions reason about the pandemic's effect on EU democracy. In addition, the purpose is to compare differences and similarities between their different points of view. To generate a result, the interviews were analyzed through previous research and a theoretical framework of Utilitarianism and Consequentialism. The theories analyze through a normative ethics perspective that determines what action is morally right based on the consequences of it.

The results show that the pandemic has caused an acceleration of anti-democratic development and a higher concentration of power within the governments. The respondents in the study believe that the pandemic has acted as an accelerator of anti-democratic development in countries where this was already going on before the pandemic struck. Moreover, SoE has caused practical changes in democratic processes, such as restricting participation and democratic freedoms, increasing disinformation, and limiting trust-building between countries. The difference identified was that respondents from institutions did not consider that SoE harms EU's democracy, but instead is morally right to implement. However, respondents from NGOs defined the implementation of SoE as detrimental to democracy in the EU and questioned whether it is morally right in terms of its consequences for democracy.

Keywords: Democracy, European Union, Pandemic, State of Emergency, Institutions, NGOs, Development.

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Den Europeiska unionen (EU) har under sina år genomgått flera olika kriser som utmanat dess association och satt demokratin på spel. Finanskrisen 2009 och Migrationskrisen 2015 är två svåra perioder som orsakade ett splittrat EU. År 2020 ställdes unionen inför ännu en kris när världen bevittnade födelsen av COVID-19 pandemin. För att skydda folkhälsan har stater infört undantagstillstånd som ger det politiska styret mer makt för att ta snabba beslut och begränsar invånares demokratiska friheter. Diskussioner kring hur pandemin påverkar demokratin i EU har lyfts. Denna studie ämnar till att granska olika synvinklar på hur EU:s demokrati påverkas av pandemin. Syftet är att identifiera hur fem olika företrädare för icke-statliga organisationer och institutioner resonerar kring pandemins effekt på EU:s demokrati. Dessutom är syftet att jämföra skillnader och likheter mellan deras olika synvinklar. För att generera ett resultat analyserades intervjuerna genom tidigare forskning och ett teoretiskt ramverk av Utilitarism och Konsekventialism. Teorierna analyserar utifrån normativ etik som bestämmer vad som är moraliskt rätt genom konsekvenser av handlingar.

Resultatet visar att pandemin har orsakat en accelerering av antidemokratisk utveckling och en högre koncentration av makt. Respondenterna i studien anser att pandemin har fungerat som en accelerator av antidemokratisk utveckling i länder där detta redan pågick innan pandemin. Sedermera har undantagstillstånd orsakat praktiska förändringar i demokratiska processer så som begränsning av deltagande och demokratiska friheter, ökning av desinformation och begränsning av förtroendeskapande mellan länder. Skillnaden som identifierades var att företrädare från institutioner inte ansåg att undantagstillstånd skadar EU:s demokrati utan i stället är moraliskt rätt. Företrädare för icke-statliga organisationer definierade däremot implementeringen som skadlig för demokratin i EU och ifrågasatte om det är moraliskt rätt utifrån dess konsekvenser som skapas för demokratin.

Nyckelord: Demokrati, Europeiska unionen, Pandemi, Undantagstillstånd, Institutioner, NGOs, Utveckling.

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Linn & Adni

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Abbreviations

EU - European Union

ICCPR - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

NGO - Non-governmental organization

SoE - State of Emergency

UN - United Nations

WHO - World Health organization

1. Introduction

I am afraid that democracy will be different. Which is not necessarily backsliding, but I am afraid that built into the changes that we may see, it has the potential of backsliding or strengthen[ing] to the backsliding we are already see. (Illon)

The European Union (EU) has faced several crises in the past, which have challenged the Union and its democracy¹. The economic crisis in 2009 and the migration crisis in 2015 are two crises that put the EU and its legacy at stake. In the year 2020, the EU faced another crisis when the world witnessed the birth of a new pandemic² which has caused an economic crisis, death, and put life out of balance. The coronavirus, also called COVID-19, was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a global pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO 2020).

The outbreak of the coronavirus has taken Europe as well as the rest of the world by surprise. During the year of the COVID-19's presence, discussions about the pandemic's impact on democracy have been lifted when countries' actions differ on battling the virus. Questioning what measures are necessary to achieve the protection of public health has been discussed (Lindvall 2020). However, perspectives on how the democracy in the EU is affected is divided according to previous researchers (Roccato, Cavazza, Colloca & Russo, 2020: 2201; Wojtas & Walecka, 2020: 200; Hong, Hwang & Park, 2021; Rak, 2020; Lundgren, Klamberg, Sundström & Dahlgvist, 2021; Bol, Giani, Blais & Loewen, 2020). As a result of the pandemic, State of Emergencies³ (SoE) have been implemented in numerous EU member states, which have led to the restriction of power and ultimately limited several democratic freedoms (Lundgren, Klamberg, Sundström & Dahlgvist, 2021). Some researchers identify COVID-19 as a cause for the diminishment of democracy regardless of the political climate before the pandemic. Others identify the political climate as a dependent variable for how COVID-19 will affect democracy, meaning that the pandemic will only affect democracy in countries already heading in an anti-democratic direction. Lastly, some researchers believe the opposite, that COVID-19 works as a strengthening mechanism for democracy (Engler et al., 2021; Roccato Cavazza, Colloca & Russo, 2020: 2201; Wojtas & Walecka, 2020: 200; Hong, Hwang & Park, 2021; Lundgren, Klamberg, Sundström & Dahlgvist, 2021; Bol, Giani, Blais & Loewen, 2020). What consequences can the pandemic result? What effect does the outcome of the pandemic have on the EU's democracy?

What impact the COVID-19 will ultimately have on democracy can only be identified when the crisis is over. Although, it is crucial to follow the development during the pandemic as previous crises that the EU has undergone have affected democracy in the past. Accordingly, it

¹"[...] an environment which respects human rights and fundamental freedoms and in which the free will of the people is exercised". It also refers to politicians in power having emerged through citizens' elections (UN, 2021).

² Who (2011) define a pandemic as a widespread disease among people found throughout the world or in a large area that crosses international borders and can affect high numbers of people (WHO 2011).

³Lundgren, Klamberg, Sundström and Dahlgvist (2021) define SoE as a measure to provide authorities with extraordinary resources and capacity to protect the nation and public health.

is important to analyze different views on how COVID-19 has influenced democracy in the EU. Hence, this study will examine what impact the pandemic has had on democracy in the EU according to representatives of international actors working with European democracy.

2. Purpose and research questions

This study aims to examine different views on how COVID-19 influence the EU's democracy according to representatives from international institutions and non-governmental organizations. Additionally, the purpose is to identify similarities and differences between the viewpoints.

- In what way has the pandemic affected democracy in the EU?
- What are the differences or similarities between their viewpoints?

3. Previous research

This section presents aspects of previous researchers' perspectives on what impact COVID-19 has on democracy. Additionally, it includes previous research on the implementation of SoE.

3.1 COVID-19: A game-changer, accelerator, or a facilitator?

Perspectives on how COVID-19 affects democracy are divided according to previous research. Roccato, Cavazza, Colloca & Russo (2020) stated that the support for anti-democratic actions and behaviors increases in the event of societal threats and crises and that "An authoritarian personality is not a necessary precondition for individual anti-democracy [...]" (Roccato Cavazza, Colloca & Russo, 2020: 2201). From an analysis of online surveys of Italian adult population, result show that people have started to accept anti-democratic behaviors due to the pandemic. The researchers explained that the sense of losing control led people to seek security with the governments. Consequently, if a government begins to behave in an authoritarian way, citizens may accept it (Ibid, 2020: 2201). Thus, previous research suggests that regardless of the political climate of states before the pandemic, states can turn from the democracy they once worked for (Ibid, 2020: 2194, 2201). Hence, Roccato, Cavazza, Colloca & Russo (2020) identified the pandemic as game-changer and a threat to democracy and individual beliefs, but there is a disagreement on the statement.

Wojtas and Walecka (2020) examined whether the pandemic has weakened or strengthened the development in central European countries, such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, in the aspect of social, political, and economic spheres. By analyzing economic, social and political components and the scope of governments' implementation of measures, the researchers identify states' development paths (p.185). When discussing how democracy is affected, previous research identified the political climate pre-pandemic as a dependent variable on how a state will progress. They concluded that violations of democracy can be categorized into two different groups "those interfering with the rights and liberties of citizens, but not affecting the chosen development path: and those complementing the process of building hybrid

[non-democratic] regimes which were initiated before the pandemic” (Ibid, 2020: 200). Based on their conclusion, they presented that the liberal democracy model has not been questioned in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, while Hungary only has deepened its backslide of democracy that eroded before the pandemic (Ibid, 2020: 200). Thus, the pandemic was not identified as a catalyst for a shift in democracy according to the research but as a facilitator for the development that happened before the crisis, “[...] or in some cases just brought some corrections to the development path” (Ibid, 2020: 200). Rak (2020) further proposed that COVID-19 only facilitates governments that aim to develop countries in an anti-democratic direction. In the researcher’s study of Poland, a qualitative document analysis show that the already ongoing repression of democracy intensified due to COVID-19. The pandemic legitimizes actions implemented by the government because the intention to reduce the spread of the virus works as a foundation for it. The democratic principles such as freedom of expression, gatherings, and movement are confined due to SoE (p.123).

Bol, Giani, Blais, and Loewen (2020) identified another perspective on the COVID-19’s effect on democracy, which contradicts what prior researchers have stated. Based on online-surveys, the research evidenced the rise of trust in government and democracy in west European countries because of the pandemic outbreak. The researchers showed that lockdowns had a good impact on voting participation in elections and a ‘rally-around-the-flag’ effect. In other words, the pandemic increased higher support for governments temporarily. Even though research intimated the pandemic has an indirect effect on institutions and democracies, it remains uncertain for how long the support will withhold (p. 502).

In summary, there are divided opinions on how the pandemic affects democracy. Some identify the pandemic as a risk for democracy regardless of the political development before the crisis (Roccato, Cavazza, Colloca & Russo, 2020). On the contrary, other researchers believe the pandemic only accelerates anti-democratic development in countries that endured before the pandemic (Wojtas & Walecka, 2020; Rak, 2020). Lastly, one researcher identified the COVID-19 as an opportunity to strengthen the democracy (Bol, Giani, Blais & Loewen, 2020). The main arguments in previous research are that the pandemic either acts as a game-changer of political development, an accelerator of anti-democratic development or as a facilitator of democracy.

3.2 The implementation of State of Emergency

Governments have a repertoire of policy options to implement when emergencies or pandemics such as the COVID-19 afflict states. Thus, this restricts and intrigues various freedoms, such as freedom of movement and of assembly. The rationale for SoE is to protect the nation and provide authorities with extraordinary resources and capacity. Emergency powers such as SoE may be legitimate and necessary for states’ survival, yet they may also be corrupted and unfair (Lundgren, Klamberg, Sundström & Dahlqvist, 2021: 306). There are requirements to the implementation of SoE according to article four of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as the implementation of SoE inflicts with international laws. Firstly, to introduce SoE officially, must the emergency prerequisites be a threat against the nation's

and its citizens' lives. Further on, the Covenant states that the implementation should be time-limited and agree with other requirements of international law. It may not include any discrimination of any sort regardless of gender, religion, and other things. Moreover, states that implement SoE accordingly to article four must inform other states by reporting their grounds for a derogation to the Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) (Ibid, 2021: 308). In the first six months of 2020 did half of the world's states introduce SoE to combat the virus of COVID-19. Why did some countries introduce such emergency measures while others did not? Lundgren, Klamberg, Sundström, and Dahlqvist (2021) identified three factors, including external and internal, which determine whether states implement SoE or not. First, the governments' level of preparedness for a pandemic affects the willingness to implement SoE. Second, the regional surroundings of a state inspire them to introduce emergency powers or not, meaning that countries are affected by their neighboring countries' actions. Lastly, they identified that weak or newer democracies are more inclined to implement SoE than robust democracies or autocracies (p. 305 – 306).

Further on, the research indicated most states which implemented SoE did not follow the ICCPR requirements on reporting to the secretary-general. It also conveyed that states enforced emergency powers proactively, meaning that countries implemented SoE before the disease started to spread or used the pandemic to indulge further power (Ibid, 2021: 31). In accordance with previous research, Engler et al. (2021) stated that the distinct differentiation cannot completely be explained out by pandemic-related variables. Moreover, the researcher argued that “strong protection of democratic principles already established in ‘normal’ times makes governments more reluctant to opt for restrictive policies” (Engler et al., 2021: 1). Democracies and governments are put in a difficult position as COVID-19 pressures them to insert measures that would oppose democratic principles during ‘normal’ times, in times where nothing is threatening public health. However, governments are, as mentioned earlier, entitled to introduce such measures if conditions with the ICCPR are met (Ibid, 2021: 6). To understand why states act differently, did Engler et al. (2021) contribute with research that confirms domestic factors as a solid variable to the choice of policymaking in different states. It is not narrowly whether a state is a democracy or an autocracy which previous researchers mentioned, but differentiation within democratic systems. For example, states on which devotion relies on individual liberties will favor this even in times of crisis (p.19). Hong, Hwang, and Park's (2021) research identified emergency power as an effective method to contain the virus, although it risks interfering with individual freedoms when not necessary (p.9). The researchers fear that the implementations of measures may get exaggerated to a point where reducing the spread of the virus is not helping anymore but only interfering with democratic values, such as freedom of movement. The states' motivation of combating the virus influences democratic preferences, which makes it crucial to investigate what measures are effective and what is only hurting democracy (Hong, Hwang & Park 2021: 9 – 12).

In summary, previous research recognize that the implementation of SoE is dependent on external and internal factors for a state to act. SoE is acknowledged as necessary to protect the nation but it is also risky since the implementation may lead to corruption when states inherit more executive power. There are several requirements to follow according to the ICCPR when

invoking such policy, although previous research explain that some states have not followed them. Consequently, there is an agreement on how states act depending on more variables than only the pandemic. Yet, the question of how the SoE may affect democracies in the future remains uncertain.

4. Theoretical framework

In this section are the applied theories of utilitarianism and consequentialism presented. This theoretical framework analyzes the perspectives and how the respondents reason in their answers and subsequently identifies similarities and differences between the respondents. Additionally, the theoretical framework facilitates an analysis on the implementation of SoE.

4.1 Consequentialism

The objective of consequentialism is to consider whether an act is morally right depending on the consequences of an action. The theory examines whether an act is good or bad depending on its outcomes, meaning that there are consequences even though the intention is of goodwill. “An act's moral force is the product of its degree of rightness and its ‘strength’, that is, the amount of value at stake” (Peterson, 2013: 1).

Every action that we might perform has a number of possible outcomes. The likelihood of those outcomes varies, but each can be assumed to have a certain probability of happening. In addition, each possible outcome of a given action has a certain value; that is, it is good or bad to some specified degree. (Drier, 2006: 2)

Consequentialism explains that an act is beneficial only if the consequences are good. Further on, institutional consequentialism is one of many approaches within consequentialism that “requires institutional systems, and not individuals, to follow the consequentialist principle” (Miklós & Tanti, 2017: 281). This approach is supported when addressing global issues and challenges (ibid, 2017: 285). Hence, this approach of consequentialism motivates to use the theory of consequentialism principally in this study. This to facilitate to the analysis and investigate how the respondents reason in their answers.

4.2 Utilitarianism

There are many different philosophical approaches to the theory of utilitarianism. This research relates to the interpretation of John Stuart Mill’s approach. Utilitarianism is considered a consequentialist-oriented theory as it defines a rightness of an action to depend on what expected consequences it conveys. Actions are justified if they maximize the benefit and minimize the suffering (Mill, 1998: 17,14, 55). Dimmock and Fisher (2017) explain “If more pleasure follows as a consequence of ‘Action A’ rather than ‘Action B’, then according to the fundamental axiom of Utilitarianism ‘Action A’ should be undertaken and is morally right; choosing ‘Action B’ would be morally wrong” (p. 15). By weighing which action will promote the most goodness in people’s lives, decide what is morally right or wrong to do (Ibid, 2017: 11).

Utilitarianism includes two different approaches, the act of utilitarianism and the rule of utilitarianism. Act of utilitarianism defines an act as right if it expects to produce the "greatest overall balance of pleasure over pain" (Mill, 1998: 14). The rule of utilitarianism defines the rightness or wrongness of an action depending on the rules. One act that matches the universally or generally accepted rules and maximizes utility complies with the rule of utilitarianism (Ibid, 1998: 16 – 18). Furthermore, one should establish a set of rules, and if these are followed, Mill argues that this "[...] would produce the greatest amount of total happiness" (Dimmock & Fisher, 2017: 22). Hence, these approaches are included in this study. Moreover, the utilitarian perspective in political philosophy argues that an intervention is justified if there is a mutual advantage for everyone involved. Thus, utilitarians "[...] allow the imposition of unreasonable sacrifices on the few in order to promote the welfare of the many [...]" (Bird, 2006: 48).

The theories are used to investigate how the respondents reason about SoE's impact on democracy in the EU and later identify how they view the pandemic's impact. Furthermore, the theories of consequentialism and utilitarianism help to determine how the implementation of SoE affects EU democracy by the respondents answers on what the pandemic has resulted in.

5. Methodology

This section provides an outline of the research process for the study. It includes a description of this study's research design, collection of data material, and analysis process. Furthermore is methodological critiques and problems that appeared during the work embedded in each section.

5.1 Research design

This research was based on a qualitative approach, including semi-structured interviews to identify perspectives on the pandemic's effect on EU's democracy. A qualitative approach was found most applicable as it focuses on phenomenology and has an inductive approach rather than a deductive (Bryman, 2018: 476 – 477). Previous research has examined the pandemic's effect on democracy both through quantitative and qualitative research (Roccato, Cavazza, Colloca & Russo al., 2020; Wojtas & Walecka, 2020; Rak, 2020; Lundgren, Klamborg, Sundström & Dahlqvist, 2021; Hong Hwang, & Park, 2021; Engler et al., 2021; Bol, Giani, Blais & Loewen, 2020). However, neither of the previous research has included interviews as methods. This study has consequently contributed to more in-depth aspects of the pandemic's impact on democracy in the EU.

5.2 Selection of respondents and limitation

The respondents were selected based on two criteria, (1) working for an international organization or institution and (2) working in the field of democracy and within Europe (Bryman, 2018: 496). Preferably, representatives were contacted through their work email, but if not accessible, was their organization's or institution's public email reached. In some cases, the representatives facilitated the sampling by providing contact information to other suitable candidates and

subsequently led to a snowball sampling (Ibid, 2018: 496, 498). We conducted six interviews, although was one of the interviews eliminated since the respondent chose to withdraw their participation. Evidently, five respondents representing different NGOs and institutions represent the data material for this study (see Table.1). The respondents' positions in each organization or institution and their work experience in the field varied. Yet, each respondent contributed with valuable perspectives on the matter. Although their years of work experience within the criteria varied between 10 to 30 years, they possessed an expertise in the field that contributed important points of view to the purpose of the study.

The NGOs interviewed for this study works with democracy in Europe through different ways. They work with democratic assistance, examine how democratic development is going, and work to improve democracy in Europe. Furthermore, the institutions in which the two remaining respondents worked for, are institutions that critically monitor the development of democracy in Europe, including the EU, through surveys and then work out proposals to improve international peace. In summary, the organizations as well as the institutions work in different ways to review democracy in Europe, but their common denominator is that everyone works with democracy and has knowledge about Europe with the EU included. The respondents who shared their views on how the pandemic affects democracy in the EU do not represent the full approach of their organizations or institutions' perspectives on this matter but discuss important viewpoints they work with.

Bryman (2018) problematizes the qualitative approach as it is difficult to replicate and generalize and might lack transparency. It is difficult to attain transparency in a qualitative study. Thence, the research's process is explained in as much detail as possible throughout the methodology (Bryman, 2018: 484 – 486). However, the purpose was to identify different or similar viewpoints on the pandemic's impact on democracy in the EU. Thus, this study does not represent all organizations or institutions that fit the criterion mentioned. However, the research contributed to a deeper understanding of how different actors view the pandemic's impact on EU's democracy.

Respondents	Organization type & geographic location	Pseudonyms	Position of respondent	Date of interview	Interview type
R1	Institution, Sweden.	Thanh	Senior Research fellow	April 23 rd 2021	Video call
R2	Institution, Belgium	Denver	Scholar	April 29 th 2021	Video call
R3	NGO, Germany	Rio	Project Manager	April 30 th 2021	video call
R4	NGO, Norway	Illon	Senior advisor	April 30 th 2021	Video call
R5	NGO, South Africa	Aden	Researcher	May 7 th 2021	Email

Table 1. Presentation of respondents

5.3 Collection of data material

The interviews were collected through video meetings and by email. An interview guide was designed in advance to organize the question formulations that would be addressed. The interview guide was divided into three themes to arrange the questions in a specific order. Although we were attentive that this order could change during the interviews. The interview questions were openly formulated to avoid influencing the respondents to any alternative perspectives or ideas. Delimited questions were used but preferred as follow-up questions if needed as this type of question is not favorable in semi-structured interviews. Thus, delimited questions were asked to clarify the respondents' sometimes long answers (Bryman 2018: 565). The interview guide included ten questions which two consisted of warm-up questions. The interview questions were designed based on previous research and the purpose of the study.

Due to the time pressure was the number of questions limited. Furthermore, the interview guide was sent beforehand for the interviewees to review in advance. Based on this research's purpose and time limit, was it appropriate to give the respondents time to reflect on the questions. One concern about conducting online interviews was the risk of poor internet connection, which we could not influence or prevent. This problem only occurred during one interview, but the respondent could repeat their answers when needed. In comparison with qualitative studies, online meetings are more useful in quantitative methods. However, the current situation of the pandemic obstructed the possibility of having interviews in person, which made online meetings most appropriate to still be able to generate a qualitative study. Even though respondents tend to be more thoughtful in online interviews than in direct interviews, it was not perceived as a disadvantage since our respondents had more time to consider their answers and contribute to more data material for this research. Moreover, online interviews are more effective, which was advantageous for this research (Bryman, 2018: 596 – 597).

5.4 Interviews

The data material was accumulated through semi-structured interviews with four different organizations and institutions. It was considered the most applicable method due to its emphasis on open-ended questions and analysis of the respondents' answers (Wengraf, 2001: 1 – 16, 162). The interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews enabled our respondents to share their perspectives on the subject and formulate their answers as wished without interference. Through this, the semi-structured interviews provided depth to the research, hence an advantage for this research's purpose (Bryman, 2018: 56). According to Wengraf (2001), the interviewer must avoid interrupting the interviewee although the response is rather long. We did not interrupt any of the respondents except one, as their answers started to move out of context. It was not considered a risk to interrupt the respondent as the person began to ask us personal questions that could not be linked to the study. Thus, the interviewer is still in control over the process (Bryman, 2018: 564; Wengraf, 2001: 160). Other forms of interviews were considered but found inapplicable. A non-structured interview would complicate the collection of data and obstruct the possibility to answer the research questions. Subsequently, a structured interview would limit respondents to formulate their answers freely

(Bryman, 2018: 562 – 563). However, a semi-structured interview is not unproblematic. It was crucial to treat the respondents' answers critically (Wengraf, 2001: 60).

Moreover, the interviews were held in English. As the language was not anyone's native language, were we prepared for the risk of language barriers. The language was an obstacle for one of the respondents who had difficulties to nuance the answers and required the questions to be rephrased and repeated. However, their message still came through, although it took more time to find words or express themselves grammatically correct.

The fifth interview was conducted through email as the respondent was unable to schedule a meeting. All questions were sent in advance, even though Bryman (2018) claims that there is a risk that respondents exclude answering some questions or not putting effort into all questions. For this research, did the advantages of sending all questions at once outweighed the disadvantages. It was deemed beneficial that they, like the other respondents, had time to analyze the questions all at once. Although, there was no guarantee they had put as much effort into each question (p.590). However, due to time limitations, this method was less time-consuming and consequently more beneficial than disadvantageous.

5.5 Transcript and recording

All respondents were informed about the recording in the consent form, which was signed and agreed on. According to Bryman (2008) is recording interviews beneficial as it makes it easier to remember what has been said during the interview. For this study, the recording made it possible to go back and listen to the interviewee's thoughts and answers repeatedly. To avoid complications such as loss of the recorded material, were three different recording devices used. The interviews were transcribed within two days after the interview while the memory was fresh (Bryman, 2008: 428). The time consumption of writing transcripts was inevitable, which was a disadvantage. However, the transcription was beneficial to maintain what interviewees have said verbatim, as no information disappeared.

5.6 Reliability

The criterion of reliability is used preferably in quantitative studies. However, it is crucial to define methods and terms to assess the quality of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Bryman, 2018: 466). Instead of basing the study on alternative concepts, the criterion of reliability was selected as best applied for this study (Ibid, 2018: 466). The study took three out of four criteria into account for this research. The fourth criterion transferability was excluded as it is impossible to repeat this qualitative study in detail.

To generate a credible method, were all interviewees offered to have their finalized transcript emailed for them to review. The ambition of this was to ensure that the description provided by us was correct to the interviewee's answers (Ibid, 2018: 466). Out of five organizations, one respondent wanted to receive their finalized transcript. Another criterion presented by Bryman (2018) is dependability which refers to the necessity of transparency and demonstrating the

research process in every step. The dependability criterion was considered throughout the whole study by presenting the research design, discussing the most applicable interview style, and describing the process of sampling (Ibid, 2018: 468). Lastly, it was crucial to recognize that this study was not completely objective, which the confirmability criterion recognizes. According to Bryman (2018), it is impossible to accomplish (p.470). Consequently, it is crucial to confirm that it has not been our intention to implement any values throughout the research, even though this was unavoidable since it is "impossible to obtain complete objectivity in social research" (Ibid, 2018: 470).

5.7 Ethical concerns

Due to the fact that the study involved people's participation, we obtained ethical principles to protect human value according to the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Swedish Council, 2018). To attain the utilization requirement was the collected data material only used for this research's purpose. Additionally, personal information which could identify the respondents was treated with confidentiality. Nobody but us had access to this information. For the collection of the data-material were ethical principles by Bryman (2018) strictly followed to achieve confidentiality (p. 170). First, all respondents signed a consent form before participating in this study. The consent form included information about the respondents' rights, that the participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw their participation at any time. Furthermore, it informed the respondents that pseudonyms would replace their real names, with their transcripts included. In the consent form, the respondents had the opportunity to tick in if they allowed their organization to be mentioned in this study. However, due to the risk of trespassing the principle of confidentiality, we chose not to include it. Instead, we presented information about their organizations' type, geographical location, and work titles. Considering other information was coded, this was not a risk for confidentiality. When signing the form, the respondents confirmed they had given consent to the interview and had read and approved the principles. Furthermore, information about the study's process was provided verbally. Hence, the ethical principles of utilization, information, confidentiality, and consent requirements were accomplished (Ibid, 2018: 170 – 171).

5.8 Thematic Analysis

The conducted material from the interviews was transcribed and analyzed according to Bryman's (2018) thematic analysis approach to qualitative data. Firstly, was each transcribed interview read through carefully. Secondly, the transcripts were coded widely based on previous research, the interview guide, and the purpose of this research. Further on, the codes were categorized into six sub-themes and furtherly constricted into three themes (p. 707 – 709). This method facilitated an examination of how each organization and institution discussed perspectives on the pandemic's effect on democracy. Through this, was research question one identified. Subsequently, to find similarities and differences between the organizations and institutions' perspectives, each transcription was color-coded where the one color represented one respondent. The answers were arranged according to each theme to identify different perspectives and answer research question two (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012: 3; Bryman, 2018:

702, 706). The themes identified for this research were “COVID-19: An accelerator”, “The concentration of power” and “The future for democracy in the EU”. The respondents contributed with perspectives on all themes besides Rio (R3), who did not contribute to the first theme.

6. Results and analysis

In the following section is the result of the collected data material introduced. It is disposed of by the three themes identified through the coding process. The themes represent in what ways the pandemic affects democracy in the EU. The organizations’ and institutions’ perspectives are included within all themes. First, “COVID-19: An accelerator” describes in what way the pandemic affects the EU’s democracy. Second, “The concentration of power” explains what way the SoE, as a result of the pandemic, affects democracy, following with two sub-themes “Practical changes” and “Has state of emergency done more good than harm for democracy in the EU?”. The last theme “The future for democracy in the EU” presents perspectives on the pandemic’s potential aftermath as well as future development. Additionally, the result is related to the theoretical framework as well as previous research.

6.1 COVID-19: An accelerator

Previous research from Roccato, Cavazza, Colloca, and Russo (2020) and Hong, Hwang, and Park (2021) identified the pandemic as a threat to any democracy. The researchers believed the SoE might be exaggerated and that citizens accept anti-democratic behaviors due to feeling unsafe in the crisis (Roccato, Cavazza, Colloca & Russo, 2020; Hong, Hwang & Park, 2021). In contrast, the result demonstrated that most of the respondents identified the pandemic as an accelerator for a change that already occurred before COVID-19 (Denver; Aden; Illon; Thanh).

Denver explained it was a regression in terms of democracy in some countries before the pandemic and further exemplified Hungary and Poland as such states. Furthermore, governments tend to use the situation to strengthen the process. Additionally, the respondent believed it is clear that well-established democracies before the pandemic will get out of the crisis without democratic problems (Denver). Thanh further addressed this aspect and emphasized that the development of regression does not appear in too many countries but a few. For example, Thanh named Poland and Hungary as two electoral autocracies that have been strengthened due to the pandemic. The respondent explained that one cannot say if their opposition has a fair chance at winning since the elections are manipulated and structurally influenced by the government. In Poland for example, they struggle with the rule of law and the freedom of the judiciary. In some states, democratic development is more concerning than in others. Thanh concluded that democracy is robust in the EU, and many countries in the Union have not been affected by the pandemic. Most European countries have been in line with international standards. Although due to SoE, freedoms have been limited, however, none has violated the democratic principles.

The respondents’ perspectives of how democracy erodes in the EU agreed with Wojta's and Walecka's (2020) and Rak's (2020) research on the subject. Furthermore, the perspective is supported among the other respondents who stated:

[...] It depends on which country we are looking at and which country we are discussing.
[...] For some countries, it has moved in a not so very positive direction lately, [...] I seem to observe that it is not going in the most positive direction as we saw some years ago.
(Illon)

According to Illon, democracy was already backsliding before the pandemic, and now the crisis only strengthens this backslide further. There are patterns and signs of a democratic decline within the EU, specifically in states where democracy is under pressure (Illon). In addition to the previous statements, Aden mentioned that there has been a decline in civic space in both Poland and Hungary, and overall, fewer citizens are living in open societies today.

The development for civil liberties is negative, which in turn adds to a decline in democracy progress (Aden). Furthermore, this agreed with Illon's previous perspective, that the direction of progress in some states has not been good for democracy (Illon). In accordance with the respondents, most previous researchers did not identify the pandemic as a catalyst for change but as an accelerator for development already happening before the pandemic. To exemplify, Rak (2020: 123) argued that the COVID-19 only facilitates anti-democratic governments, for example, Hungary and Poland, which both Thanh and Denver addressed.

Additionally, Wojtas and Walecka (2020) identified two groups in which one can categorize the countries. Group one included countries where political development is not affected due to interference of civil liberties, and the second group includes countries "complementing the process of building hybrid [non-democratic] regimes which were initiated before the pandemic" (p.200). In contrast, none of the respondents agreed with previous researchers who identified the pandemic as a threat to all democracies regardless of their political development before the crisis (Hong, Hwang & Park, 2020; Roccato, Cavazza, Colloca & Russo, 2020).

The result indicated that all respondents acknowledged that the pandemic only worked as an accelerator for changes already taking place before the pandemic. Furthermore, this perspective is mutual by some of the previous researchers (Denver; Aden; Thanh; Illon; Wojtas & Walecka, 2020; Rak, 2020).

6.2 The concentration of power

"[...] the power is even on a lesser number of hands" (Illon).

The perspectives on SoE differed among the respondents in the sense of what risks SoE brings. The respondents' reasoning also diverged compared to the theories.

In the previous research, one finding was the dependence on political factors that motivates the implementation of SoE. Engler et al. (2021) explained that domestic factors such as differentiation of political systems are crucial for how SoE is imposed. Some states are more reluctant for such policies while others are not (p. 6, 19). This statement aligned with Denver's perspective of SoE, who believed it is important to study different democratic systems. States with

robust democracies have hesitated to impose lockdowns compared to democracies with slight authoritarian tendencies. The respondent exemplified the United Kingdom with its prime minister, who was slower to impose lockdowns, whereas France and its president did it sooner. It is a question of two democracies where the latter had more power to introduce such restrictions without necessarily hurting democracy. Both states are democracies in some sense and not necessarily threatening their democracies. Instead, it has to do with the political culture of the states. “[...] it is impossible to say that any type of particular political system is more successful than another, it's just a question of many other factors” (Denver). The respondent further exemplified Sweden and Norway as two strong democracies who differently regarding SoE:

Sweden is the country that has least restrictions in terms of pandemic fighting, but if you look at Norway it has a much stronger regime in terms of lockdowns. But you cannot say that Norway is a weaker democracy than Sweden. (Denver)

However, Denver problematized SoE as “[...] there is on the one hand more executive power, and on the other hand restrictions of rights of the population so that in [*sic*] itself is a problem for democracy” (Denver). Although the respondent further added that robust democracies will pull through the crisis without a problem (Denver).

When analyzing the statement, Denver included a utilitarian perspective as well as a consequentialist aspect. According to utilitarianism, actions are justifiable if they maximize benefit and minimize suffering (Mill, 1998: 17, 55). Thus, the respondent's reasoning on political culture identified that countries' choice of SoE is motivated by utilitarianism as they choose what expects to benefit the states' population the most. Denver's statement included a rule of utilitarian approach as some democracies can implement SoE faster as they have more power to do it, while others have different systems and jurisdictions to consider (Dimmock & Fisher, 2017: 22). However, the respondent also emphasized that SoE causes negative consequences since it leads to more executive power on the one hand, and on the other, it restricts democratic rights for the population. Consequently, this is a problem for democracy, which ultimately indicates a negative consequence of SoE even if the intention is in goodwill (Denver; Peterson, 2013: 1).

Similar to Denver's previous statement, Illon identified SoE as something good as well as bad for democracy. The measure implies that executive power is strengthened and hinders the 'normal' democratic process of policies which is a problem for democracy. However, there are not necessarily ill intentions when implementing these measures “it is just where we are” (Illon). The respondent further explained that the meaning of SoE depends on the leaders by saying:

And you know, some have said a dictator is very very good as long as he or she is a good dictator. So a state of emergency is not necessarily very wrong or very bad, it depends on the leader or the leaders. If they still do and still perform as they used to, if they still do have their people at their hearts, if they still believe in serving and not ruling, state of emergency is not very dramatic. But there are states where state of emergency and these measures, without maybe the intentions even, limits the democratic space. (Illon)

Moreover, Illon affirmed that SoE in itself is not dramatic. Yet, in certain states where states have implemented SoE without ill intentions, it still limits democratic space. It is worrying if

people acquire this as the ‘new normal’. When the pandemic is over, some delimitations might be the ‘new normal’ without anyone reacting to it, which is concerning. Furthermore, this is a new perspective that has not been mentioned in previous research or by other respondents. Illon further explained that governments make decisions without their parliaments, and this may also occur at an EU level, “[...] decisions being made at the EU in Brussels without the consultations with the member states as frequent or as in-depth as it would have been” (Illon). Decisions have to be quick, which concentrates the power in a small group of leaders and:

[...] state of emergency [...] pushes all of the principles [...] into the smallest space. I think the next one is when we move into almost autocracy and dictatorship, so it is very very very limited and the powers are in very very few hands. (Illon)

Illon’s perspective on the measure included consequentialist thinking since the respondent emphasized the aftermath the SoE may result. For example, Illon discussed that as a result of the implementation of SoE is the democratic process obstructed and executive power strengthened. Even if there is no ill-intention, it is bad for democracy (Illon). Consequently, SoE is right if the outcomes are good, regardless of whether the motive is good- or badwill (Peterson, 2013: 166).

According to Rio, the implementation of SoE is necessary and justifiable in countries where the public health systems are weak as it is the only opportunity to save the lives of the citizens. Compared to the theoretical framework, the statement involved a utilitarian perspective and included an act of utilitarian approach as Rio implied that for some states, the action of SoE produces the greatest outcome by saving lives. Moreover, the respondent did not refer to any rules which the rule of utilitarian approach embraces. In accordance with Mill (1998), this approach act upon what will produce the greatest “ overall balance of pleasure over pain” (p. 14). Furthermore, Rio’s statement is too associated with consequentialism through the emphasis that SoE is justifiable as it saves lives which is a good consequence (Rio; Peterson, 2013: 1). Thanh explained that a concentrated power the SoE invokes is not an issue for democratic development as long the emergency powers are time-limited, proportionate, and necessary. Moreover, Thanh deemed that if SoE follows the ICCPR’s requirements, it is not a problem for democracy. One must consider what is acceptable for a democracy to do in a crisis which there are documents to follow. The respondent furtherly referred to the ICCPR (Thanh). However, previous research indicated that states did not follow the requirements, which is a problem for democracy (Lundgren, Klamberg, Sundström & Dahlgvist, 2021: 31; Thanh). Continuously, the respondent explained that SoE is constructed for states to prepare for potential crises where the government and its opposition process to an agreement together. If the SoE is proportionate, justifiable, and vital is the measure is good. Even though SoE temporarily limits certain democratic freedoms, it will not diminish democracy when it is correctly established. This perspective is too explained by Lundgren, Klamberg, Sundström, and Dahlgvist (2021), who discussed that SoE either might be necessary for states’ survival while it can be unfair and corrupted as well. The measure is a risk but is also crucial (ibid, 21: 306).

Aden elaborated further that because of the pandemic, governments have more authority than before, these enacted laws and instruments are challenging, and the process of removal may

take time. However, SoE is only considered a risk for democracy if they are not proportionate or do not have an explicit sunset clause. Otherwise, this limitation of freedoms may change countries' democracies, meaning that if the emergency powers remain, it is a risk that governments use it as an excuse to continue undermining democratic processes (Aden).

When analyzing Aden and Thanh's statement, it indicates the respondents reasoned from a utilitarian perspective, including a rule of utilitarian approach. The theory defines SoE as morally right if the requirements are followed. Thus, if the SoE is implemented in accordance with the ICCPR and leads to the greatest results, the emergency power is right according to the theory (Dimmock & Fisher, 2017: 22; Thanh; Aden). Furthermore, it will not risk democracy in the EU.

As mentioned in previous research, there are established requirements according to the ICCPR that states must follow (Lundgren, Klamberg, Sundström, & Dahlqvist, 2021: 31). The respondents' perspectives on the measure aligned with the rule of utilitarian approach as they stated that a measure's risk depends on the implementation of SoE. Thanh and Aden did not identify any problems with this measure if it agrees with the ICCPR requirements. For example, Thanh emphasized the justification, limitation, and proportion included in article four that previous research presented, while Aden highlighted the importance concerning the distribution of SoE to have a sunset clause (Ibid, 2021: 306; Aden; Thanh). However, this statement clashes with previous research that claimed countries did not follow the requirements (Ibid, 2021: 31).

Hence, the results indicated SoE itself is not problematic but how it is implemented (Aden; Thanh; Denver). Although, the perspectives on which factors are decisive varied among the respondents. Denver emphasized the domestic political culture in alignment with Engler et al. (2021), while Thanh and Aden underlined from a utilitarian perspective that the need for correct implementation regarding the necessity, proportions, and judiciary, which Lundgren, Klamberg, Sundström, and Dahlqvist (2021) stated in previous research. Rio contributed with consequentialist perspectives on how some states must implement measures to maximize utility, while Illon asserted concerns of how these measures may be normalized, meaning that states will withhold these limitations when the pandemic is over. Thus, this may be a negative consequence for democracies regardless of their intentions according to consequentialism.

6.2.1 Practical changes

As a result of SoE, participants emphasized the practical changes which affect both the democratic process and principles. The perspective is something previous research did not stress. However, the respondents addressed different changes and argued from a consequentialist and utilitarian perspective.

Illon explained that the pandemic affects EU principles regarding practical changes, for example, participation. Now, meetings and discussions are carried out through video conferences. Democracy is dependent on building trust to counteract misunderstandings and mistrust. The respondent further explained that "I believe in a democracy where we compete but at the same

time work together and that one is much more difficult in the current situation because we do not meet personally” (Illon). Trust-building is complex to accomplish without personal meetings. There are no informal meetings where trust-building can come through, and it is unmanageable to build online. The pandemic obstructs trust-building between institutions and people within the EU, which will affect democracy negatively (Illon). Subsequently, according to Illon, the consequences that SoE results in are unfortunate, which implies that SoE brings more harm than benefits for democracy regarding consequentialism (Peterson 2013: 1; Illon). In similar, Denver stated that the democratic principles have been changed or seriously affected, as it impacts how democracy is lifted in the EU differently now compared to before the pandemic. Parliaments cannot meet due to restrictions, neither are demonstrations possible, which changes the democratic life. Such things as one should be able to do in a democracy are not possible during the pandemic. However, the respondent also indicated that it is not necessarily a change for democracy (Denver). As previously mentioned, Thanh again aligned with utilitarianism when discussing SoE and the diminishment of democratic principles due to the pandemic. The respondent believed there was a disagreement on the subject. It is a question of what is acceptable and what is not during a crisis and referred to the ICCPR. The covenant includes information about what countries can and cannot do during crises and requirements for not violating democracy. The majority of the EU member states have implemented restrictions that limit democratic principles including freedoms and rights. Freedom of movement and freedom of assembly were stressed as two practical changes that have been restricted drastically. However, according to Thanh have all these measures a time limit under the ICCPR. Regarding the practical changes, the respondent discussed the approach of the rule of utilitarianism. If the rules are followed and expects to maximize utility, in this case protecting public health, it is a good measure (Thanh; Dimmock & Fisher, 2017: 22).

Further on, Rio discussed practical changes such as freedom of expression because of SoE. The respondent identified that disinformation has increased and been used disproportionately during SoE. Hence, this indicates SoE has resulted in another negative consequence for democracy according to the consequentialist theory. Even though the intention of SoE is of goodwill, it has, according to Rio, resulted in disproportionate use of disinformation which ultimately hurt democracy (Peterson, 2013: 1; Rio).

Regarding the theories, has the SoE resulted in negative practical consequences such as hindering trust-building, demonstrations, increasing disinformation and changing how democracy is lifted according to the consequentialist theory (Illon; Denver; Rio; Peterson 2013: 1). Yet, in a utilitarian perspective, many countries have followed the requirements of the ICCPR, and through that, consequences are positive to protect public health (Thanh; Dimmock & Fisher, 2017: 22; Mill, 1998: 55).

6.2.2 Has State of Emergency done more good than harm for democracy in the EU?

In the interviews, were the respondents asked if the implementation of SoE has done more good than harm in the aspect of democracy, and the answers varied extensively. One respondent underlined that to protect and help the citizens in the pandemic democracies had to deliver. If they did not, the support for democracy would decline either way. It was good that states declared an SoE when it was proportionately, more specifically, when SoE matched the universally accepted rules for implementation (ICCPR) and maximized utility, the measure did more good than harm to democracy (Thanh; Dimmock & Fisher, 2017: 16 – 18). Furthermore, previous research also claimed that trust in governments and democracy arises due to lockdowns (Bol, Giani, Blais & Loewen, 2020: 502).

Denver acceded to Thanh and the utilitarian perspective. The respondent explained that if the population trusts governments and the implementation is applied correctly, SoE positively impacts democracy. It is worrying if there is no trust or the SoE is incorrect in some way. The respondent further stated that “[...] trust is the key thing here right, as long as the trust is there, the lockdown can be used for a good thing, if the trust is down, the lockdown will become a big mess” (Denver).

In contrast, Illon stated that concerning protecting public health, it has done good in many states, although, in the bigger picture, it has done more harm than good for democracy. Rio adhered to Illon by affirming that in terms of democracy, SoE has a negative impact as it has done more harm than good. As mentioned in previous chapters, the two respondents conceded with a consequentialist perspective on the phenomena. Accordingly, the intentions of SoE may be in goodwill although, the consequences for democracy are negative (Illon; Rio; Peterson, 2013: 1).

One respondent, however, dodged the question of whether SoE has done more good than harm for democracy, thus not speculating the motives behind the implementation. Nonetheless, the respondent identified that some punishments for violating restrictions have been disproportionate. The respondent discussed the disproportion of punishments which is a result of SoE. In the statement, the respondent reasoned through the theory of consequentialism. As consequentialism investigates if the action is morally right or wrong depending on its consequences, one can identify the act of SoE as wrong when it causes disproportionate punishments and not maximizes the good (Mill, 1998:14 285; Aden).

6.3 The future for democracy in the EU

Lastly, the third theme discussed by the respondents was how democracy will progress in the future. In agreement with previous research, the respondents’ perspectives disunited considering how democracy will develop after the pandemic. Rio, Aden, Denver, Thanh, and Illon recognized different variables, including economic recovery, people’s reaction to the pandemic, and the rise of populist parties as dependent factors on how the development will proceed. Aden, however, stated that as the pandemic is still present, conclusions about the future cannot

be drawn (Aden). Thanh considered the democracy's future rests on factors not necessarily connected to the pandemic:

If the recession is to be avoided, I think most countries will sort of grow out of this crisis sort of similarly. Because also, at the same time, the crisis has shown to people that we actually need the state [...] to combat the virus. So, this is also something that is good for interest in public affairs and interest is always good to get all of the support. (Thanh)

Thanh further explained that factors such as the support for populist authorities were considered one challenge for future development. This perspective was supported by Rio that also claimed right-wing populist parties as a negative inducer for democracy. Previous research too identified this perspective. They demonstrated that anti-democratic parties might increase due to the pandemic (Roccato, Cavazza, Colloca & Russo 2020; 2201). Further on, Rio emphasized that every challenge the pandemic has caused needs to be encountered to strengthen democracy. Although, the respondent added that there are other factors not related to the pandemic that will affect the development of democracy in the EU, such as the climate. Following Thanh, Rio too concluded there are possibilities democracy will not have a backslide when the pandemic is over if the EU emphasizes solidarity and inclusive politics. In summary, there are risks but also opportunities in this matter (Rio).

On the contrary, Denver contradicted Thanh's and Rio's statements on how populist parties challenge the future of democracy due to the pandemic. Compared to other crises the EU has undergone, populist parties have not benefited from the pandemic. It is the opposite. Mainstreaming parties have profited more than populists. Although, there are populist parties in charge in some countries which concerns, according to Denver, for example, Poland and Hungary. Yet, "[...] the rise of populism did not [benefit]" due to the crisis (Denver). During the financial crisis in 2009 and the migration crisis in 2015, they benefited greatly, which is not the case now. The populist parties are no longer the biggest worry for the EU (Denver).

Denver and Illon emphasized the economic recovery and the public reaction to the pandemic as two dependent factors for how democracy will proceed. Denver affirmed that the economic recovery determines if there will be a backslide or strengthening of democracy. "If the economic recovery is strong as some experts believe and people live more normally, and the unemployment goes down, and more money is invested. I think that generally, you would not expect problems for democracy" (Denver). The respondent further expressed that according to experts, the pandemic will continue for a while. People will adapt to a 'new normal', meaning that measures will become institutionalized, and consequently, people will comply with it (Denver). This perspective is lifted in previous research by Roccato, Cavazza, Colloca, and Russo (2020) that indicated an authoritarian government might increase its support on account of a crisis like the pandemic has created (p. 2201).

According to Illon, democracies' future development depends on the reaction and response from the citizens in the EU and how politicians continue to restrict democratic freedoms. The respondent further stated that democracy was threatened even before the pandemic, and this trend

seemingly will not turn as a result of the COVID-19. Illon expressed some worries for the future, thence the democracy may become different, not necessarily backslide in democracy, but it will be affected in ways we do not know yet. How democracy will emerge rests on the people:

[...] We have seen in quite some countries in the EU, people going to the streets because of the measures taken. They are angry and they demonstrate and they think the decision-makers have been too tough and too rough and gone too far. And if leaders in a number of countries either continue to create that kind of reaction among the people, or the people have already crossed the line of mistrust to the leaders [...] people will strengthen democracy from the point of view that they want a bigger say going forward than they had in the last one of two years or if and when the pandemic is over. So it really depends on the people's response to this, and the reaction and how long the pandemic will last and how the leaders will continue to restrict the spaces for the individuals and how they react [...]. (Illon)

Moreover, Illon identified a shrinking space of democracy in the EU as the pandemic continues. However, there are opportunities to strengthen what the pandemic is weakening “[...] we can do something which we are not doing now” (Illon).

7. Discussion

First, all respondents identified the pandemic as an accelerator for the change already happening in the EU regarding democratic recession and backsliding. Additionally, there is a consensus with what previous research has shown. All respondents acknowledged that there are changes in some countries due to the pandemic. However, these changes were already occurring before the crisis struck. Hungary and Poland were mentioned frequently by respondents and previous research as two member states where this change is proceeding (Thanh; Denver; Aden; Wojtas & Walecka, 2020; 185; Rak, 2020: 123). However, the respondents contributed with different perspectives to the agreement. Two other common aspects identified for the deterioration of the democratic process were the decline in civic space and political development.

Second, when discussing the implementation of SoE, the perspectives differed on the consequences and how they reasoned according to the theoretical framework. One perspective identified the implementation of SoE as a risk for democracy only if the measures are not proportionate, justifiable, or necessary. Consequently, the respondents aligned with utilitarianism as they emphasized the necessity of following the rules according to the rule of utilitarianistic approach. If the rules are followed and maximize utility, the action is right. In accordance with previous research, the perspective underlined the requirements of the ICCPR, yet, Lundgren, Klamberg, Sundström, and Dahlqvist (2021) indicated that states did not follow the rules by not reporting their implementation to the UN's secretary-general, which is a problem for democracy. Thus, it may be questioned whether European Member States have been part of the countries that have actually violated the ICCPR. Furthermore, the researchers conveyed that emergency measures introduced proactively either signify SoE was established before the COVID-19 started to spread or used to indulge more power to decision-makers (Ibid, 2021:

31). Thus, the result indicated that the implementation of SoE did not maximize utility if member states in the EU have not followed the requirements.

Consequently, the action has not been beneficial for democracy. In the perspective of the consequentialist principle, Miklós and Tanti (2017: 285) presented that an act is only advantageous if the consequences are good, but the question is if the results will be good for democracy if the states have not followed the requirements?

Another perspective identified the political culture as a dependent factor for how the pandemic and SoE affect a state (Denver). Supported by Engler et al. (2021), it explains that implementing SoE does not necessarily threaten democracies. It is only a question of how the system works. Furthermore, Denver could not say one democratic system was better than another, one democracy can choose to implement SoE while another does not, yet the respondent believed it is impossible to determine if one country is more democratic than the other. According to Denver, it is a question of the possibilities and beliefs of states on what is best for a country to implement in a crisis, which ultimately has a rule of utilitarian approach accordingly to Mill's (1998) perspective of utilitarianism (p.15). According to the political philosophy of utilitarianism, Bird (2006) argues that an intervention is legitimate when the outcome expects to be an advantage for everyone. This approach is applicable in this matter since the implementation of SoE sacrifices some freedoms for individuals to promote public health (p.48). Another perspective identified that regardless of the intentions with SoE, the action has consequences for democracy, good or bad (Illon). The consequentialist theory questions if SoE is beneficial for democracy to implement since it may result in bad outcomes. The action of SoE may be good as it saves lives or bad as it hinders the democratic process. It questions whether the protection of public health is greater than the protection of democracy. This interrogation can be related to Denver's statement because it is a question of what states believe is right for them.

A common aspect among the respondents was their emphasis on practical changes although, their perspectives varied. Freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and freedom of assembly were identified frequently as practical changes that seemed to be limited in consonance with two respondents (Rio; Thanh).

The aspects connect both to utilitarianism and consequentialism as the practical changes are a consequence of the implementation of SoE. The effectuation of SoE can be correctly applied according to the ICCPR and thus maximize utility. Yet still, cause effects on the practical changes according to the utilitaristic approach of rule of utilitarianism. However, the benefits outweigh the practical changes that arise due to SoE that agrees with both Bird's (2006) definition of utilitarianism and Mill's (1998) approach to the rule of utilitarianism. In contrast, even if the implementation is correct and the intention is good, it may cause consequences both good and bad for democracy according to consequentialism. Again, the theory questions if the limitations of freedoms are more hurtful than protecting public health. Thanh argued that the good consequences outweigh the bad when referring to the time limit as this is only temporary to protect public health in the long term. If democracies did not introduce measures, the support for democracy would decline. Furthermore, Rio too argued there are more good consequences

since the implementation is the only way to protect public health for some countries with weak health systems. Although, the statement included more of an act of utilitarian approach since the action is morally right if it produces the most excellent "overall balance of pleasure over pain" and not relating to any specific rules (Mill, 1998: 14).

Moreover, two respondents stated that the pandemic and implementation of SoE hindered participation politically and how democracy is uplift in the EU. Thus, SoE and the pandemic distracts from discussing other important democratic issues. Additionally, participation is limited when meetings are held online, and decisions must be rapid, which jeopardizes democracy (Illon; Denver). Illon also added the trust-building for democracies is delimited as a result of the implementation of SoE. Accordingly, the perspectives identified the practical changes as negative impacts for democracy. Even though the application of SoE has been of goodwill, this harms the democratic process. However, it did not appear if whether the negative consequences for democracy are sufficient to question the implementation of SoE, "it is just where we are" (Illon).

An interesting finding in this study was that some respondents considered the application of SoE as further advantageous than hurtful, while others believed that SoE did more harm than good to democracy in the EU. Some respondents contemplated that the implementation of SoE was further advantageous as long as it followed the ICCPR, preserved public health, and maximized utility. Without the SoE, the support for democracy would decline (utilitarianism). Contrarily, some respondents argued that the consequences of SoE were more hurtful than advantageous for democracy. Furthermore, the motives with SoE may be in goodwill, but the negative issues for democracy may be too damaging (consequentialism). When comparing three respondents' answers, one can relate them to the previous research, their approach to the theoretical framework and if they worked for an institution or NGO. When discussing the question, the respondent from an NGO that mainly included a consequentialist perspective in earlier chapters perceived the implementation as more harmful than doing good for democracy (Illon). While the two other respondents, who discussed predominantly from a utilitarian approach and worked for an institution, found that the application of SoE did more good than harm in the aspect of democracy (Thanh, Denver). Lastly, the fourth respondent who discussed the issue could not be associated with their previous approach to the theoretical framework. Furthermore, in the result and analysis, the respondent included both consequentialism and utilitarianism in their reasoning. However, the respondent considered that the implementation harms democracy (Rio). The fifth respondent is not included in this aspect since they chose to not answer the question further.

When discussing the future of democracy in the EU, the perspectives distinguished among the respondents. The results identified three different aspects, including the rise of populism, the economy, and the reaction of the citizens. According to Illon, the future for how democracy will emerge relies on the reaction and response of the citizens. Denver identified the economic recovery as a dependent factor for how democracy in the EU will develop. If the economy recovers, the democracy in the EU will too, but if the economy does not, democracy will follow. Lastly, Rio and Thanh mentioned the rise of populism as a negative indicator of democracy. As

a result of the pandemic, anti-democratic parties may increase. However, the statement contradicts Denver's previous statement that populist parties have not benefited from the pandemic. Further on, Rio added that if the EU works in solidarity to overcome the challenges the pandemic has created, there are opportunities for the future of democracy to be strengthened.

Previous crises in the past have challenged the EU democracy before, and the results of this study show that the pandemic is another crisis that is challenging democracy in the EU once again. The restriction of the democratic process through more concentrated power and practical change risks that the pandemic already has and will further affect democracy in the EU. To answer the purpose if the pandemic has affected EU's democracy, one can conclude the pandemic has certainly done that. However, there are questions in regard to the theoretical framework and the perspectives. Will the implementation of SoE be good if the requirements of the ICCPR are not followed, according to a utilitarian approach? From a rule of utilitarian aspect, the application will not maximize utility since states have not followed the established universal accepted rules.

Even though it maximizes utility for protecting public health, what protects democracy when the requirements are not followed accordingly to the ICCPR? The act of utilitarianism's answer to this is that SoE is upright if the action results in more pleasure than pain. However, as mentioned in previous research, it is a risk that SoE will be unfair and corrupted if one violates the rules (Lundgren, Klamberg, Sundström, & Dahlqvist, 2021: 31). Subsequently, the consequentialist approach questioned which one is more important to protect for a state, public health, or democracy which is problematic for the Union's democracy. Regardless of the theoretical framework, it indicates that the pandemic has affected democracy in the EU and its member states. When discussing the impact on EU's democracy, the respondents contributed with different perspectives on the matter. The results of the interviews indicate that the respondents aligned with some of the previous research. Furthermore, they deliberated according to utilitarianism and consequentialism. Moreover, there are similarities and differences between the respondents' reasoning on how democracy in the EU is affected.

8. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to identify different views on the pandemic's impact on the EU's democracy. Moreover, the aim was to identify similarities and differences between these viewpoints. Through 5 in-depth interviews were the purpose and research questions answered. In what way has the pandemic affected EU's democracy according to the respondents? The results conclude that the pandemic affects democracy in the EU in two ways: acceleration and concentration of power.

Additionally, another theme recognized as an aspect of how the pandemic will further challenge democracy was the future for democracy in the EU. The analysis identified that the respondents included both utilitarian and consequentialist approaches in their reasoning. In conclusion, the respondents identified several ways the pandemic affect EU's democracy. A common determinant identified by the respondents was that the pandemic only accelerates changes that were

already taking place in some countries before the pandemic. Moreover, the concentration of power was also commonly identified by the respondents. However, the perspectives contributed to different aspects on the matter. The different perspectives emphasized were political culture, distraction, how democracy is lifted, limitation in participation and demonstration, the rise of disinformation, and the hindrance of several freedoms.

Another conclusion is that the respondents differed from each other in their reasoning according to the theoretical framework. Respondents from NGOs identified the pandemic and implementations as a high-risk for the Union's democracy, whereas respondents from institutions did not. Furthermore, some respondents considered SoE as doing more harm than good for democracy, while others believed the opposite depending on which theoretical approach the respondents had. The difference lies between those who reasoned from a utilitarian perspective and a consequentialist perspective. Respondents from institutions argued from a utilitarian viewpoint believed the SoE does more good. On the contrary, respondents from NGOs believed it risks hurting democracy according to the theory of consequentialism.

As mentioned, three different perspectives emphasized how democracy will erode after the pandemic. One emphasized on citizens' reaction explained that democracy depends on how the people react. If no one complains about the restrictions, they might become the 'new normal', while others identified the economic recovery as a crucial factor. The last aspect found the rise of populism after the crisis as a dependent factor for how democracy in the EU will develop in the future.

Further on, in the analysis, it was explained how the results aligned with previous research. The results of this study are not a representation of all organizations and institutions working with democracy in Europe but important viewpoints of representatives working with democracy. Thus, the study contributed with crucial in-depth perspectives on the subject and the current development.

9. Future research

As the pandemic is still ongoing, it is crucial to follow the development. Continuously, it is of relevance to further investigate the use of SoE and its effect. Both qualitative and quantitative studies are crucial to continuing to broaden the understanding and follow the process since "[...] democracy is not a station it is a journey, it is not an event it is a process, it is ongoing" (Illon). This research examined how representatives of organizations and institutions identify the pandemic's impact on democracy. Future research on the subject should investigate the issue from other actors, including governments and intergovernmental organizations. Moreover, it is crucial to follow the development for the future of democracy. What will democracy look like when the pandemic is over? Will it ever be over?

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Appendix I Interview guide

Introduction

- Could you tell us about your work and the organization you are working for?
- What motivates you to work on this topic?

Current situation in the European union

2. Which direction is the democratic development of the EU member states currently heading?
3. Do you see any change of democratic principles in EU member countries due to COVID-19?
4. How does your organization perceive the development of democratic values in the EU?

Challenges

5. In what way is COVID-19 challenging democratic values?
6. What is the greatest challenge COVID-19 poses against democratic principles?

Measures effect on democracy

7. How can State of emergency (SoE) influence EU (member states') democratic principles?
8. SoE measures have been imposed by many member states in the Union, which prohibit freedom of movement among other things, do you think that these measures have been instrumentalized to dismantle democratic principles?
9. Has the implementation of SoE done more good than harm in the aspect of democracy?

Future

10. Will we see a strengthening or a backslide of democracy when the pandemic is over?

Concluding remarks

11. Do you have any further comments or thoughts you want to add to this interview?

Appendix II Consent form

Research Project Thesis:

Research Investigator:

Research Respondent:

This interview will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes. We do not anticipate that there is any risk associated with participating in this interview. However, you may withdraw from the interview if needed. All information provided in this interview will be treated with confidentiality which means one will not be able to identify you in the study.

We guarantee that the interview will only be used for this research.

This consent form is important to us to guarantee that you accept the conditions and understand the purpose of your participation. Please read the following information sheet and sign the form to confirm that you accept the research's conditions:

As a respondent, you will remain anonymous (pseudonym will replace your real name).
Care will be taken to ensure that any information provided in the interview will be anonymized, including direct quotations.
The interview will be recorded, and a transcript will be produced.
The recording will be kept throughout the whole research process until the thesis has been examined and published.

Concerning this agreement, please initial next to the statements below that you agree with:

	I agree that research investigators use direct quotations by me (pseudonym will be used).
	I want to review the transcript of my interview to edit any factual error
	I agree that my organization's name is mentioned

By signing this paper, I agree that:

I have read all the information and conditions.
I am voluntarily taking part in this research. I may withdraw at any time.
I do not expect any payment or benefit from participating in this interview.
I can contact the researchers with any questions regarding the interview and research.