



BACHELOR THESIS

**The influence of citizens' protest movements on  
policymaking: A study in the context of COVID-19-  
related border restrictions at the German-Polish and  
German-Swiss borders**

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## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic that dominated the year 2020 posed new challenges to policymakers and citizens. Containment measures against the spread of the pandemic across borders led to border restrictions that affected not only the economy but also citizens and their work, social, and daily lives. As a result of these massive restrictions, there were protest movements against the COVID-19-related border restrictions. This study examines the influence that the protest movements at the German-Polish and German-Swiss borders had on policy making during the first COVID-19 wave from March to mid-June. The theoretical basis for this is the elaboration of possibilities of political influence that citizens can use, as well as a theoretical basis of protest movements and their characterizations. The research design features a secondary data analysis of policy documents, newspaper articles and journals that provide data on the applied restraints at the borders under study, protest movements and resulting policy responses.

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### List of abbreviations

COVID-19 – Coronavirus

GER- Germany

PL- Poland

CH- Switzerland

## 1. Introduction

In democratic states, citizens enjoy a wide range of opportunities to influence political processes and express their opinions. However, there are still situations in which citizens disagree with policies, situations in which implemented decisions are challenged, and situations in which citizens come together to protest against these policies. Protest movements are a form of influencing policy making, which, depending on many factors and characterised by diverse expressions, can have the power to bring about significant change in policy making (Kolb & Tarrow, 2007).

With the global spread of the Corona virus (COVID-19), political borders and boundaries were subjected to dynamic processes of change, which were ultimately the starting point for protest movements (Böhm, 2020). The measures to contain the pandemic essentially consisted of tightening existing boundaries and drawing new ones. These measures had to evolve rapidly, especially in the course of the first wave of the pandemic (Ulrich & Cyrus, 2020). The most recent massive (re)drawing of borders in the course of the COVID- 19 pandemic concerned, among other areas, the German-Polish border. A border that (before COVID-19) was a place of European integration where all problems were a matter of the past (Jańczak, 2020). The Polish "Patient Zero"<sup>1</sup> returned to Poland from Germany at the beginning of March. Eleven days later, the Polish government effectively closed the borders, meaning that travellers and commuters could no longer cross them (Gov.pl, 2020). As a result, protest movements quickly developed among commuters demanding adjustments to the measures (Jańczak, 2020). However, the border restrictions associated with COVID-19 continued to change in the following months, with both the German and Polish governments adapting new measures and changing the conditions under which the borders could be crossed. This led to confusion problems for border commuters and other border actors; once again, citizens made their displeasure clear (Ulrich & Cyrus, 2020). The situation at the German-Swiss borders was similar to the border closure at the German-Polish borders with regard to COVID-19-related border restrictions: Switzerland declared a national state of emergency

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<sup>1</sup> First patient infected with COVID-19 virus; index patient

on March 16, 2020 (Swiss Confederation, 2020). All borders were closed at 8 a.m. on March 16 and only people with a valid reason were allowed to cross the border. These reasons included medical emergencies and certain professional groups such as diplomats. Smaller border crossings were closed completely (Jud, 2020). In the following weeks, the Swiss border policy remained more strictly closed than the German-Polish borders, but here too, due to protests by German and Swiss citizens, there were adjustments, exceptions and additions that were difficult for citizens to understand and implement (Sueddeutsche, 2020).

In the context of protest movements and their influence on border policies, studies on the influence of border protests on refugee policies in Europe already exist, such as "In Search of Sanctuary: Border Closures, 'Safe' Zones and Refugee Protection" (Long, 2013), but there is a gap in research about COVID-19 protest movements and its influence to policy making. This study aims to fulfill this gap.

Despite a large number of recent studies and contributions on the topic of COVID-19 and restrictions in general, it is difficult to find coherent data or chronological listings of COVID-19-related border restrictions and resulting protest movements. Finding the individual components of actions on border closure measures and resulting protest movements is something of a patchwork quilt, and this research aims to help sort through the events so that they can be compared. This kind of overview can ultimately help to identify causal relationships that can be informative for further research in the field of border politics. This is done in this study by embedding the above case study approaches in a theoretical context. For the future, in all contexts, it is important to learn from past COVID-19-related decisions and conclude which policies have proven successful, what role citizens' opinions have played in decision-making, and which strategies have been ineffective in political border closures.

In this context, the research question to be answered in this study is: "To what extent did citizen protest movements influence COVID-19-related border closures at the German-Polish and German-Swiss borders during the Corona pandemic in the first wave period?" Ultimately, answering this research question could ideally help to develop a strategy or at least recommendations for action for future border restriction measures.

The time frame of the study refers to the period from January 2020 to mid-June 2020, when the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) first registered numerous new infections in Germany on a daily basis, so that this period can be referred to as the first (infection) wave (RKI, 2020). The countries to be compared were chosen because they represent particularly important hubs in a globalised modern Europe. They share borders that were no longer perceived as such before the pandemic and were routinely crossed daily by many thousands of commuters and travellers (Hynek, 2020). Even though 2020 was marked by many protest movements against COVID-19 policies, there were not many borders where resentment against COVID-19-related border restrictions culminated in public protests as at the German-Polish and German-Swiss borders.

In order to adequately answer the research question – “To what extent did citizen protest movements influence COVID-19-related border closures at the German-Polish and German-Swiss borders during the Corona pandemic in the first wave period?” -in the context of this study, three sub-questions are posed, the first of which is: "What possibilities do citizens have to regulate political decision-making?" This question is intended to provide a theoretical entry point into the research. The second sub-question is: "What types of COVID-19-related border restrictions were used on the German-Polish and German-Swiss borders during the period of the first wave?" This question aims to describe which measures were implemented at the borders in order to get a first overview of the restriction's citizens were exposed to and the time periods during which these measures varied. The third sub-question is: "What types of protest movements could be observed at the German-Polish and German-Swiss borders?" This sub-question aims to show in what form and at what time protest movements appeared and with what aim they turned to politics.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

There are a variety of ways that citizens can participate politically, influence policy decisions, and voice their opinions such as collaborative governance, participatory councils, and participatory budgeting. From a democratic perspective, citizen participation is seen as a valuable element of democratic citizenship and democratic decision-making (Michels & De Graaf, 2010). Involving citizens in policymaking allows policymakers to tap into broader sources of information, perspectives, and potential solutions, and ultimately improve the quality of decisions made (Michels & De Graaf, 2010).

Citizens in a democratic society have the opportunity to react to politics by elections, and thus to influence policy making, for example, if they no longer vote for a certain party which, in their opinion, has not made the correct political decisions. There is also the possibility of becoming active oneself and getting involved in parties and associations (Gabriel, 2020). Another and usually more direct way of allowing citizens to influence decisions that have already been made are protest movements. Growing political protest signals to political leaders that their policies are missing the needs of certain sections of the population (Gabriel, 2020). There are several forms of protest movements, but they all have in common that they aim to challenge, change, support, or resist state authority (Encyclopedia of Sociology, 2021). Protest movements are forms of participation such as boycotts of certain products, occupations of buildings and spaces - sometimes on private property, traffic blockades and signature campaigns (Gabriel, 2020). In recent decades, many protest movements have formed, but demonstrations still attract a lot of attention. They involve large numbers of people gathering and often loudly and conspicuously signalling their demands. Not all of these protests are legal and recognised by the state, and some protest movements are banned or only take place with great police intervention (Gabriel, 2020). Protest movements which take place as demonstrations are defined by individuals engaging in collective action on behalf of their group, through which participants seek to gain prestige and other benefits (Jasper, 2014). Although protest movements are not exclusively limited to influencing policy making, for most movements their policy outcomes are most important in judging their success or failure. Many, such as the civil rights, women's, environmental and

peace movements, have had primarily - though not exclusively - political objectives (Kolb & Tarrow, 2007). The starting point has been that they have targeted the state either because they held it directly responsible for their grievances or as the institution best able to address them (Kolb & Tarrow, 2007). Protest movements can take place in a violent or non-violent way, they can operate in both online worlds and as collective action in the 'real world'. The protest continuum ranges from localised groups and crowds organising around specific and short-term grievances to mass protest movements over social conditions and perceived injustices (Encyclopedia of Sociology, 2021).

Protest movements that aim to influence policy making are often formed and organised out of emotions. These emotions are instrumentalised to coordinate actions, attract and retain participants, and put pressure on political actors to respond (Jasper, 2014). Protest movements with this aim are usually triggered by emotions such as anger and indignation about decisions that have not been made or decisions that have already been made and are being contested (Jasper, 2014). These emotions are not only often the starting point and motivation for participation, but also the reason why protest movements are often associated with aggression (Jasper, 2014).

Protest movements frequently involve unintended results, which in some cases even contradict their goals, as not all protesters are always peaceful, sometimes the police are forced to arrest people, sometimes private property is vandalised, or public buildings are destroyed (Kolb & Tarrow, 2007). These movements can thus be categorised as illegal. The chances of success of illegal protest movements, movements that oppose state intervention and involve vandalism and police involvement, are in most cases less likely to be considered successful, as these outcomes ultimately lead to politicians rejecting the protest movement (Gabriel, 2020). Such a movement cannot be seen as effectively influencing policy (table 1). However, even in situations where success in influencing policy seems unlikely, people often join movements simply to assert their dignity as human beings and to be able to make some noise to draw attention to grievances (Jasper, 2014). Various stakeholders play a role in the success of protest movements. These include public opinion about the movement, the media, and its reporting (positive or negative), other (economic-) interest groups, political



parties, all of which influence the success or failure of protest movements (Kolb & Tarrow, 2007).

Successful influence of policy making is achieved when the goals of the protest movements are partially or even fully achieved. This happens primarily when widespread public support ultimately enables protest movements to persuade governments to give the movement political legitimacy to adapt to the movement's challenge, to capture it, or to change the state of affairs that preceded the movement (Encyclopaedia of Sociology, 2021). The more public attention and support a protest movement receives, the more likely it is to be heard and recognised by the government. These movements mostly fulfil the criteria of legal protest movements, i.e., they do not violate state regulations and requirements, arrests by the police are not regularly recorded, and regulations for demonstration spaces are adhered to.

It can therefore be said that protest movements are usually successful in influencing policymaking when certain framework conditions are met (table 1). On the one hand, a broad mobilisation of citizens should occur, which conveys to the target groups in an organised way that they are making justified political demands (Gabriel, 2020). The willingness to limit oneself, to respect legal boundaries and to compromise is a necessary prerequisite for broadly accepted political decisions (Gabriel, 2020). In contrast, protest movements that engage in vandalism and violence are more likely to be under scrutiny than to be successful in achieving their goals (Kolb & Tarrow, 2007). Movements that cannot create sympathy with other stakeholders such as the public, media or interest groups are rarely able to gain political legitimacy and influence policy making (Kolb, 2007). In summary, the hypothesis derived from this theory section is that legal protest movements are generally more likely to have an impact on policy making than illegal protest movements.

**Table 1***Types of protest movements and their influence on policy making*

<b>Successful influencing policymaking</b>	<b>Unsuccessful influencing policymaking</b>
Legal protests	Illegal protests
Meeting certain framework conditions	Deviate from certain framework conditions

Source: Authors own contribution

### 3. Methodology

The aim of this study is to examine the influence of protest movements on policy making. More specifically, the study investigates protests against COVID-19- related border restrictions on the German-Polish and German-Swiss borders during the first wave of COVID-19. Those country borders were chosen because they represent particularly important hubs in the Schengen area. The Schengen Implementing Convention was signed on June 19, 1990, and entails the definitive abolition of internal border controls between Schengen states and the strengthening of external border controls (between a Schengen and a non-Schengen state). Today, the Schengen area comprises 26 European states, including the states examined in this study (Kohls, 2020). They share borderlines that were no longer perceived as such before the pandemic and were routinely crossed by many thousands of commuters and private individuals every day. Even though 2020 was marked by many protest movements against COVID-19 policies, there were not many borders where the resentment against COVID-19-related border restrictions was as explicit as on the German-Polish and German-Swiss borders.

It is also important to note that in the course of the first COVID-19 wave, there were numerous protests in the border areas and in the countries examined in the context of this study. However, not all of these protest movements can be clearly understood as protests against the border restrictions as many of the protest movements did not call for adjustments to the COVID-19 related border

restrictions, but rather for general adjustments to the overall COVID-19 policy pursued. Demonstrations often took place as protests against the overall COVID-19 policy. An example of this is the "Querdenker" demonstrations in Germany. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the organizers of "Querdenken" in Germany have mobilized tens of thousands of people nationwide. They repeatedly take to the streets protesting against the federal government's COVID-19 policy, often in violation of the conditions imposed by the government (Hippert & Saul, 2021). Therefore, in the course of this study, only protest movements that came together exclusively under the aspect of dissatisfaction with the COVID-19-related border restrictions will be examined. These are also clearly mentioned in the newspaper articles and reports used as protests against these very restrictions. Moreover, it is to note that this study only examines protest movements that have taken place on a medium or larger scale and have therefore attracted media attention, i.e., protest movements that were not initiated by individuals or small groups, but with which many hundreds or thousands of people showed support. This is because only protest movements that have been officially reported can be evaluated. Which is not the case with the smallest protest movements since media attention is focused only on movements that can attract a broader mass of support, and the smallest movements do not meet this criterion. This Methodology chapter is divided into three steps to facilitate understanding of the research design and operationalizations. First, the access and filter criteria to the literature is explained. Second, the categorization and operationalization are presented. Third, the evaluation criteria for the data analysis are described.

### 3.1 Literature search

The theoretical basis of this paper is the hypothesis that legal protest movements are usually more successful than illegal ones. This is based on the literature collected and analysed through different filters and forms the basis of this study. The filter criteria for this literature, which provides theoretical background on the types and influences of protest movements, are:

- Literature found via the "Google scholar" search engine, as this search engine offers a wide range of academic and freely accessible literature.

- Literature that is up to date, meaning that it was specifically searched for literature from 2015 onwards, as this represents the influence of protest movements on current policy (the present democratic system).
- Literature that provides a general overview of protest movements in a theoretical context and is not specifically tied to particular political protest phenomena.
- Literature related to the keywords “protest movements influence policy making” and “protest movements outcome”

The theoretical literature searched through these filters provides, on the one hand, basic insights into the possibilities of policy influence that citizens can perceive. Furthermore, this literature also provides information about the characterizations of different protest movements and subsequently the hypothesis presented above is derived from this literature. The characterization into legal and illegal protest movements is based on the criteria described in the literature. These are derived from the theoretical foundations of Kolb and Tarrow (2007), as well as Gabriel (2020) and Jasper (2014), and can be described as follows:

Legal protest movements are movements that:

- Do not express themselves in a violent/vandalizing way
- Are usually organized
- Adhere to guidelines (in the context of COVID-19 masks and distance regulations)
- Do not demand police intervention

Illegal protest movements:

- Are movements that also take place against state guidelines
- Do not respect the guidelines (in the context of COVID-19 masks and distance regulations)
- Demand police intervention
- Are accompanied by vandalism/violence

Further, information will be collected from political documents (overviews of the COVID-19 events which have been made available on the official government

websites of the countries) more specifically from political documents of the foreign offices published in Switzerland, Poland, and Germany, as well as newspaper articles and reports, and are examined for data on COVID-19-related border restrictions in the course of the first wave. A small-scale compilation of this available secondary data enables secondary analysis as a research strategy that uses existing quantitative data to answer the research question posed. Various filtering criteria were applied:

- Literature from the year 2020, since the restrictions to be investigated are to be placed in the context of March 2020 to mid-June 2020.
- Literature according to the keywords "border restrictions COVID-19 Germany" "border restrictions COVID-19 Switzerland" "border restrictions COVID-19 Poland" and "adjustments border restrictions protest movements".

At this point it should be noted that in the course of the literature search two different filter criteria were applied for the timeframe. One for the theoretical classification of protest movements, which is the timeframe 2015 onwards, and another for the COVID-19 conditional border restrictions, which is the year 2020. The keyword search could generate about 15,000-20,000 hits each, which is why the search focused primarily on the hits that were in the context of the two affected national borders. For example, the search for "border restrictions COVID-19 Switzerland" included restraints in the Swiss-German border area, while the search for "border restrictions COVID-19 Poland" included restraints in the Polish-German border area. Other excluding criteria were hits that referred to the general COVID-19 related restrictions and not to the specific border restrictions. Furthermore, publications in English and German language were searched for to avoid time-consuming translations.

### 3.2 Categorization/Systemizing

The data collected through the literature on restrictions and protest movements is used to formulate an overview of events within the first wave at the borders under study. This is done through these categories: (1) border restriction, (2) date of restriction, (3) date of protest movement, (4) date of adjustment/cancellation. The analysis begins with a description of the restrictions used at the

borders and the points in time at which they came into force. It then goes on to describe the points in time of the protest movements and classifies the characteristics of these protests in legal and illegal protest movements. It finally goes on to describe which measures were reversed at which point in time, or whether there was no reaction on the part of the political authorities.

### 3.3 Evaluation criteria for the data analysis

Finally, the data is analysed with regard to the influence of protest movements on policy making. The data is analysed for information on political reactions to these protest movements. A successful influence of protest movements on policy making can be seen when restrictions are relaxed, lifted, or shortened. For this purpose, the times at which the protest movements took place and the times at which changes in the restrictions took place are compared. An unsuccessful impact of policy making is determined when restrictions are tightened, or protest movements are unable to achieve success in any of their demands.

Lastly, the data on the protest movements and the adjustments of the restrictions are compared to show which protest movements were successful in politics. At the end of the sections that examine the national borders, the hypothesis is taken up in each case and examined to see whether it can be confirmed or must be falsified on the basis of the data collected.

## 4. Analysis: COVID-19-related border restrictions

From China 2019, the neurovirus COVID-19 reached Europe within a few weeks. Due to the health risk posed by the virus, border controls were reintroduced in the Schengen area in mid-March 2020 for containment purposes, borders were closed, curfews were imposed, and freedom of movement and interpersonal contacts were restricted (Wille & Kanesu, 2020). This had the immediate effect of making borders relevant again, on both, political and private levels. In the course of the first wave, various COVID-19-related border restrictions were implemented and adjusted at the German-Polish and German-Swiss borders. The following is an overview of the restrictions that temporarily applied to citizens living in these countries, and the resulting protests in the

course of the first wave between January and mid-June 2020. It is essential to note that the borders are viewed and analysed from two sides, as the respective national governments have different policies and thus the border crossings are dominated by two policy approaches.

#### 4.1 Restrictions and reactions at the German-Swiss border

On March 13, 2020, the German government implemented stricter border controls at the German-Swiss border for the first time, this means that the random controls at the border which were partly carried out have been replaced by regular controls (Auswärtiges Amt, 2021). Two days later on March 15, 2020, there was a hard break, which was implemented by the German government. The borders were almost completely closed, and only those with a valid reason were allowed to cross. In addition to the border closures, further random checks by German and Swiss authorities were introduced. Rail traffic between Germany and Switzerland also came to a temporary standstill from March 15, 2020, onwards (Auswärtiges Amt, 2021). Anyone entering Germany from Switzerland had to undergo a 14-day quarantine from April 10, 2020 (Jarosław, 2020). At the time of the first wave, no negative COVID-19 tests were required for entry. To control pedestrian traffic, an additional border fence was erected on April 03, 2020, so that physical contact through a fence was no longer possible (Jud, 2020). As a result of the side effects of the restrictions, traffic jams stretched for kilometres, mainly affecting commuters who had to take long detours to avoid the border controls. There are also reports of many irregularities in the checks by German customs and the Federal Police (Jarosław, 2020). Couples and close family members were able to meet again for the first time on April 25, 2020, after weeks of waiting, and legally only on Swiss land (Jud, 2020).

The protests at the German-Swiss border were legal, as most protests were held quietly by individual families and couples who met at the border fences. The minimum distance was guaranteed by the additional border fences, no physical contact could take place. Fact is, that there is no secondary data reporting police intervention during the protests at the German-Swiss border. There were no instructions from the government not to protest at the border fences. Thus, most of the protests that were explicitly directed against the border fences were legal

because they did not violate state regulations, COVID-19-related distance rules were observed, and no police presence was required. Many people expressed their displeasure as a protest through emotional posters hung on the border fences (Jud, 2020). Some people laid flowers and personal items like stuffed animals at the fence. Throughout the whole month of April there were silent demonstrations by separated couples and families on the German side of the border. Especially over the Easter weekend on April 14, 2020, many citizens gathered peacefully to express their displeasure. This was also observed on April 21, 2020, as there were even more citizens than usual protesting at the border fence.

There are no reports of illegal protests related to the COVID-19-related border restrictions at the German-Swiss border. Apparently, there were no riots, vandalism or violence during the protests that would characterize them as illegal. Also, there were no reports of police intervention.

The table below (table 2) lists not only the various restrictions that Germany introduced for the Swiss border, but also the dates of implementation of these restrictions, the times when protest movements took place in the context of the COVID-19-related border restrictions and dates of adjustments/tightening's/liftings of these restrictions. The table is intended to provide an orderly overview of the timing of the most important events. It shows how quickly the protest movements had an impact on the restrictions or whether the restrictions remained unaffected.

As can be seen from the dates in the table (table 2), that despite the legal protest movements, the German government remained relatively strict with the measures implemented. Although some politicians as well as demonstrators demanded relaxations, the border was not fully reopened until mid-June. But there was a clear reaction to the protest movements when, in mid-May - a few weeks after many citizens had protested at the border fences - the additionally erected fences were removed by the German authorities. It can also be seen that cross-border public transport in both directions resumed earlier than planned (originally June), on May 16, 2020. Likewise, the reinforced border controls on the German side were relaxed on this date, despite the fact that the border remained closed. To what extent this is related to the protest movements is unclear, as the available



literature does not provide any information on the policy rationale for lifting the high border control measures.

The hypothesis of the influence of legal protest movements to policy making can thus be confirmed in the context of the German-Swiss border and thus corresponds to the assumptions.

**Table 2**

*COVID-19-related border restrictions and resulting protest movements at the German-Swiss borders*

<b>Border restriction (GER-CH)</b>	<b>Date of Restriction (GER-CH)</b>	<b>Date Protest movement (GER-CH)</b>	<b>Date of adjustment/cancellation (GER-CH)</b>
<b>Borders closed</b>	March 15, 2020	April 14, 2020 April 21, 2020	June 16, 2020
<b>Tighter border controls</b>	March 13, 2020	April 14, 2020 April 21, 2020	May 16, 2020
<b>Additional border fences</b>	April 3, 2020	April 14, 2020 April 21, 2020	May 15, 2020
<b>Standstill of the public cross-border transport</b>	March 15, 2020	April 14, 2020 April 21, 2020	May 16, 2020
<b>14-day quarantine</b>	April 10, 2020	April 14, 2020 April 21, 2020	May 15, 2020

Source: Authors own contribution

## 4.2 Restrictions and reactions at the Swiss-German borders

On March 15, 2020, Switzerland responded to the German border closure with increased border controls. The public transport to Germany came also to a standstill on this date. On April 03, 2020, the Swiss government erected additional fences at certain borders to prevent physical contact between border crossers.

During the first wave, there were no quarantine regulations from the Swiss side for incoming Germans.

The protests on the Swiss-German side were mostly peaceful and legal. The form of protest was largely the same as with the protests on the German side of the border: Couples, friends and families met at the border fences by arrangement and protested silently with posters and their presence. The minimum distance restrictions were guaranteed by the border fences, no physical contact could take place. Also, on the Swiss side, many concerned citizens gathered on April 14, 2020, for a silent protest at the borders, again it remained peaceful, and the police did not have to intervene. The same scenario occurred a week later on April 21, 2020, when again many people met at the border fence.

Illegal or partially illegal protest movements at the Swiss-German border were registered on May 09, 2020 (Büiring, 2020). Due to a large number of demonstrators protesting not only against the border restrictions but also explicitly against the tightened border controls at the Swiss-German border, there was a police presence from the beginning. The police asked the participants in vain to keep the security distances. However, they did not break up the protests, as elderly people and children were also present (Büiring, 2020). Nevertheless, the demonstration also violated the ban on assemblies in force in Switzerland at the time. Theoretically, a maximum of gatherings of up to five people were allowed. Most of the illegal protests that took place in Switzerland in the form of demonstrations against government measures cannot be explicitly traced back to protests against border restrictions. These protests were mostly directed against the suspension of political rights and the powers the government granted itself to fight the virus in the exceptional situation (Ammann, 2020).

From the Swiss government, there were fewer restrictions towards Germany during the period of the first wave than vice versa. Also, the Swiss authorities were often the ones who voted for relaxations of the COVID-19 conditional border restrictions. As shown in the table below (table 3), Swiss policy reacted strongly to the legal protest movements at the border that took place in mid and late April. The table also shows, that as a result, only two days after the protests on April 17, 2020, the increased border controls towards Germany were lifted. Furthermore, in mid-May, Switzerland also dismantled the additional border

fences that had been erected. A special regulation for unmarried couples came into effect at the end of April, enable relaxing border controls for affected persons, a few days after the protests at the border fences (Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 2020). A few weeks later, in mid-May, the Swiss foreign authorities decided on another special regulation that allowed relatives and unmarried couples to meet on Swiss territory, even though Switzerland had not completely closed the border, but German regulations made it impossible for affected citizens to cross into Germany. Secondary literature explicitly indicates that these decisions resulted from the protest movements, as the Swiss government was influenced by the emotional protests (Jud, 2020).

The hypothesis that legally characterized protest movements can indeed have an influence on policy making can thus be confirmed in accordance with the expectations at the Swiss-German border.

**Table 3**

*COVID-19-related border restrictions and resulting protest movements at the Swiss-German borders*

<b>Border restriction (CH-GER)</b>	<b>Date of Restriction (CH-GER)</b>	<b>Date Protest movement (CH-GER)</b>	<b>Date of adjustment/cancellation (CH-GER)</b>
<b>Tight border controls</b>	March 15, 2020	April 14, 2020 April 21, 2020 May 09, 2020	April 17, 2020
<b>Additional border fences</b>	April 3, 2020	April 14, 2020 April 21, 2020	May 15, 2020
<b>Standstill of the public cross-border transport</b>	March 15, 2020	April 14, 2020 April 21, 2020	May 16, 2020

Source: Authors own contribution

#### 4.3 Restrictions and reactions at the German-Polish border

In mid-March, the German government decided to introduce controls at Germany's internal borders, which also affected the German-Polish border. Anyone who wanted to cross the border from March 16, 2020, was specifically checked to see if they had a valid reason for entering the country. Private interests and travel were not considered a valid reason, commuters, diplomats, and some other exceptions could pass. Public train, bus and air transport to Poland also came to an almost complete halt on March 16, 2020. On April 10, 2020, the German government decided to introduce a 14-day quarantine requirement for anyone who had spent several days outside of Germany; again, there were some exceptions, including those that excluded commuters. In mid-

May, Germany suspended the 14-day quarantine requirement for the Schengen area and thus also for Polish entrants. A month later, on June 15, 2020, the containment measures of border controls and the standstill of public transport between the countries were also lifted.

Legal protests on the German-Polish border took place mainly at the end of April. On April 24, 2020, for example, exactly 20 people protested on the German side in Frankfurt (Oder) in accordance with state requirements (Kunze, 2020). In Frankfurt (Oder), organizers and police did not detect any violations of COVID-19 regulations, such as the requirement to mask and the distance regulations (Kunze, 2020). Protesters also gathered in many other towns near the border that day. The protests were announced in advance and took place under the slogan "Let's go to work, let's go home." The organizers assured in preparation that the safety distance of 1.50 meters would be maintained in all actions (Kunze, 2020). Open protest with speeches and the motto song "Ode to Joy" could legally take place only on the German side.

Protest movements that took place during the first wave involving vandalism and disregarding, though illegal considered protests, COVID-19 rules were not directly related to protest movements against border restrictions. There were many police interventions in border regions such as Berlin where, for example, large protests of "Querdenker" took place, but these were directed against the entire COVID-19 policy and not specifically against the border restrictions.

The German government's reaction to the protests first came in the wake of the protests against the 14-day quarantine restriction in Poland, as can be read from the table below (table 4). However, it is unclear whether the government acted solely because of the protests or whether it was a reaction to strengthen the economy, as Germany relies on many workers from Poland. Clearly, the adjustments to the restrictions can be attributed to the German quarantine regulation, as the table shows, which was lifted about three weeks after the protests at the end of April, on May 15, 2020. The general border controls, which prohibited entry into and exit from Poland, were not lifted by the German government until June, as planned, and the protestors had no influence here.

The hypothesis cannot be confirmed at this point in the context of the German-Polish border because of the lack of data on the background of political decisions.

On the other hand, the hypothesis cannot be rejected either because there are no data to the contrary.

**Table 4**

*COVID-19-related border restrictions and resulting protest movements at the German-Polish borders*

<b>Border restriction (GER-PL)</b>	<b>Date of announcement (GER-PL)</b>	<b>Date of Protest-movement (GER-PL)</b>	<b>Date of Adjustment (GER-PL)</b>
<b>14-day quarantine</b>	April 10, 2020	April 24, 2020	May 15, 2020
<b>Standstill of the public cross-border transport</b>	March 16, 2020	April 24, 2020	June 15, 2020
<b>Border controls, entry with valid reason only</b>	March 16, 2020	April 24, 2020	June 15, 2020

Source: Authors own contribution

#### 4.4 Restrictions and reactions at the Polish-German border

The Polish-German border was effectively closed by the Polish government on the night of April 15, 2020 (Jańczak, 2020). The Polish government announced that border controls had been introduced. Further containment measures imposed on March 15, 2020, meant that Polish citizens could return to their home country from Germany, but they had to remain in quarantine for 14 days (Gov.pl, 2020). Foreigners, on the other hand, were only allowed into the country in exceptional cases. These apply to people with permanent residence permits, truck drivers and diplomats (Westdeutsche

Zeitung, 2020). Passenger transport by train and bus connections between the two states was temporarily shut down and the number of border crossings available for private cars was limited to six (Jańczak, 2020). On March 27, 2020, the Polish government imposed a ban on border crossings and a 14-day quarantine for returnees, including commuters (Jańczak, 2020). The German government reacted immediately to these measures and offered financial support to those affected, so that they could stay in Germany. Nevertheless, many of those affected were insecure and stayed in Poland as a result, just to be on the safe side (Jańczak, 2020). An estimated 150,000 Polish commuters were affected by these measures. Until mid-June, the Polish government largely maintained its restrictions, and it was not until June 15, 2020, that rail traffic to and from Germany resumed. On May 13, 2020, the government announced that the entry restrictions to Poland would remain unchanged until June 12, 2020.

In the wake of the quarantine regulations for cross-border commuters, there were massive protests on the Polish side at the end of March and April demanding a revision of the tightened regulations on the quarantine of commuters (Kunze & Polat, 2020). The heads of the regional level of the German states also participated in these demonstrations with a petition to the Polish government (Jańczak, 2020). On May 04, 2020, the Polish government responded with an exemption that exempted certain professional groups and students who must commute from the quarantine requirement (Kunze, 2020).

Legal protests at the Polish border occurred primarily in late April. On April 24, 2020, exactly 20 people protested on the Polish side in accordance with state requirements (Kunze, 2020). In Rosow (Uckermark), the organizers and the police could not find any violations of the COVID-19 regulations such as the obligation to mumber and the distance regulations (Kunze, 2020). There were protests in many cities near the border, partly with several hundred participants (Berliner Zeitung, 2020). The protests took place under the slogan "Let's go to work, let's go home." Again, the organizers assured in advance that the safety distance of 1.50 meters would be observed in all actions (Kunze, 2020). The initiators of the protests on the Polish side called on citizens on April 29, 2020, to "Protest Korespondencynie," i.e., to protest by letter to the government in Warsaw, which was followed by several thousand citizens (Kunze, 2020). Most

of the protests were related to the quarantine obligation for the Polish border commuters, and most of the protesters on the German side were also present out of solidarity with the commuters (Berliner Zeitung, 2020).

Illegal protests occurred sporadically in Poland. For example, on May 09, 2020, criminal charges were filed in Warsaw, where people from all over Poland demonstrated and some of the protests turned violent (Büring, 2020). Again, the protests were directed against the closed borders, but most importantly, the participants demanded state support for small and medium enterprises to cushion the financial consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. Police arrested dozens of participants for not wearing masks or maintaining a safe distance (Büring, 2020). Nevertheless, this protest movement cannot be clearly counted among movements against COVID-19-related border restrictions and has no bearing on the evaluation of Polish protest movements in the context of this study.

As shown in the table (table 5), the Polish government first reacted to the protest movements against the 14-day quarantine regime for border crossers when the German authorities intervened alongside the demonstrators. Due to the demands of several tens of thousands of affected persons and the continuing demonstrations at the borders, Poland reacted on May 04, 2020, about a week after the largest protests, and lifted the quarantine regulation. At the same time, the government introduced a special regulation for commuters and other affected persons such as students and families. However, this adjustment was the only one that the Polish government implemented in response to the protest movements; all other measures remained in place as planned or were even extended. The border to Germany was freely passable again for the first time in mid-June.

Even though it were legal protest movements that took place for the most part at the national borders during the analysis of this study, the illegal protest movements that took place at the time of the first wave, most of which were directed against the entire COVID-19 policy, were not seen as successful influencers of the restrictions. In the broadest sense, they did not influence the restrictions.



At this point, the hypothesis can be confirmed, since the legal protest movements on the Polish-German border and the other borders studied had an influence on policy making in some points that were important for the protestants.

**Table 5**

*COVID-19-related border restrictions and resulting protest movements at the Polish-German borders*

<b>Border restriction (PL-GER)</b>	<b>Date of Restriction (PL-GER)</b>	<b>Date Protest movement (PL-GER)</b>	<b>Date of adjustment/cancellation (PL-GER)</b>
<b>Borders closed</b>	March 15, 2020	April 24, 2020 April 29, 2020 May 09, 2020	June 12, 2020
<b>14-day quarantine</b>	March 15, 2020	April 24, 2020	June 12, 2020
<b>Standstill of the public cross-border transport</b>	March 15, 2020	April 24, 2020	June 15, 2020
<b>14-day quarantine for commuters</b>	March 27, 2020	April 24, 2020 April 29, 2020	May 04, 2020

Source: Authors own contribution

## **5. Conclusion: Protest movements and their influence on policymaking**

This study provides an insight into the possibilities of influencing policy making which citizens can perceive via protest movements. This is done explicitly by examining the COVID-19 related border restrictions that occurred at the German-Swiss and German-Polish borders during the first wave, and the protest movements that resulted. In the course of the protest movements at the studied borders, in some cases a certain influence of the protest movements on the COVID-19-related border measures could be detected. This was found out in the preceding analysis by comparing secondary data in the form of official policy documents and newspaper articles, on restrictions, protest movements and adjustments of restrictions at different points in time.

The research question: “To what extent did citizen protest movements influence COVID-19-related border closures at the German-Polish and German-Swiss borders during the Corona pandemic in the first wave period?” can thus be answered based on the findings of this study. Citizens have the power to influence political decisions on a broad scale if some external circumstances are met.

The protests that arose in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting border restrictions show that not every form of protest movement is necessarily influenced by huge gatherings of people. In addition to the organization of protest movements, for example, that these movements take place under a certain slogan, real emotions also play a role in influencing political decisions, as the example of the German-Swiss border shows. Silent, emotional protest can also have an impact. The example of the Polish border commuters shows how much protest can unite across national borders. On both, the German and the Polish side, there was a united demonstration for the repeal of the commuters' quarantine obligation.

This study has shown that even if the external circumstances have made it difficult due to minimum distances and assembly bans, citizens who want to change something find ways to express their opinion. Thus, this study provides

an important contribution to the understanding that protest movements are an important reflection of public opinion and provide opportunities for legitimacy.

On the part of politics, this study has shown that even if not always all demands of the protestants can be implemented, citizens are seen when they express their opinions in a certain manner. In today's globalised society, and in a Schengen area where borders have faded, it no longer seems possible to separate countries. Complete border closures affect not only the economy, but also social and family life, which in our everyday lives takes place across borders as a matter of course.

It can be confirmed from the data collected in this study on legal protest movements that a willingness to constrain, respect legal boundaries, and compromise is a necessary condition for successful protest movements (Gabriel, 2020), as these protests have had an impact on policy making in the context of COVID-19-related border restrictions. In some cases, politicians became aware of grievances and were urged to adjust the restrictions by means of protest meetings and, in the case of Switzerland, poster campaigns.

A classification in the state of research is only possible to a limited extent, as there are already studies on the influence of border protests regarding refugee policy in Europe, but no research that addresses the topic of COVID-19 protest movements. This was to be expected, as COVID-19 and the resulting pandemic are a very new phenomenon that is still ongoing at this point in time and thus, with reference to this study, will certainly provide new results.

It is possible, that the results can not only be attributed to the external characterization of the protest movements as legal and illegal. Possible alternative explanations and influences could also lie in the economic interests pursued by the border policy. In the case of Polish border commuters, it is not surprising that the German state supported the commuters financially when the 14-day quarantine requirement for commuters was introduced in Poland. Since Germany has a strong economic interest in the many thousands of border commuters. Thus, economic interests could also have a strong influence on policymaking. This would mean that the protest movements were not the only trigger of the political reactions and that economic interests also played a role. There are other alternative and complementary explanations for the data found

on adjustments to border restrictions that can only be conjecture at this point. For example, the adjustments of the restrictions could also be due to a decline in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases.

### 5.1 Limitations

For reasons of practicality, this study cannot provide a comprehensive overview of every single protest movement that has taken place in connection with COVID 19-related border restrictions, as not every movement has been documented. Therefore, the study focuses on protest movements that have taken place on a medium to larger scale and have attracted media attention such that they have been documented in the form of newspaper articles or academic literature. It should be noted that this work is based on the data provided for the first wave period in 2020. A large number of datasets and protest movements at the borders studied only emerged later in the pandemic and in the next waves of infection. These datasets cannot be considered as this would go beyond the scope of this work.

### 5.2 Future Research

Future studies on this topic should focus on the further course of the pandemic, i.e., on the period from July 2020 onwards, in order to be able to guarantee a comprehensive representation. This would be of interest as many protest movements still arose in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic in the countries studied and further border restrictions were implemented and adapted. Furthermore, it would be useful for future studies to conduct interviews with those affected in order to find out to what extent the protest movements took place in an organized manner and to obtain further individual first-hand insights.

The most important impact that this study can offer is the visible influence of protest movements that have certain character traits. Furthermore, this study has significantly contributed to the clear presentation of the implemented restrictions, data of the protest movements, and of the adjustments of the restrictions, for which there are no secondary sources that offer overviews so far. For future pandemics, this study can provide approaches for successful policy influence. Through this study, it is possible to understand which border restrictions were so

valuable that they were maintained, and which had to be adjusted because, for example, they restricted citizens too much in their private and working lives.

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## 7. Data Appendix

### Detailed summaries of the events

#### German-Swiss border:

15.03.2020: Germany announces the border closures of the German-Swiss borders

16.03.2021: At 08 o'clock sharp, the borders were closed for all those who do not have a valid reason for crossing. Border fences were positioned.

18.03.2021: Commuters will have to endure kilometre-long traffic jams.

29.03.2020: Many couples, families and friends meet at the border fences

10.04.2020: Quarantine requirements – Returners have to quarantine for 14 days

14.04.2020: More and more citizens demand easier access for families and couples and protest at the borders.

20.04.2020: Berlin decides- no loosening's at the border

24.04.2021: Confusion at the borders. According to a press release of the members of the federal parliament (A. Jung, F. Schreiner and A. Schuster) Swiss, German couples and couples registered as such should have the possibility to meet in Germany. At the borders, however, they will be turned away.

27.04.2020: The federal police in South-Baden are still not implementing the new entry regulations. The border remains closed.

28.04.2020: The federal police are unsure who will be allowed to enter. No way through for unregistered partners.

29.04.2020: Members of the German Bundestag express their displeasure. Disputes arise over exceptions to the entry ban.

30.04.2020: While federal interior minister Seehofer plans to extend the border measures until 15.05, other members of parliament speak out clearly against them.s

06.05.2020: Protests against the measures also become louder and louder among regional politicians, who call for the borders to be opened.

13.05.2020: The federal government decides to relax border controls.

16.05.2020: Gradual relaxation of border controls comes into force. By 15.06.2020, these are to be completely abolished.

15.05.2020: The fences at the borders are dismantled.

17.05.2020: Rail traffic at the borders also gets back on track.



28.05.2020: German representatives call for further easing of the border restrictions. The abolition of the requirement for a triform justification for crossing the border is demanded.

15.06.2020: The border can be crossed again without restrictions.

#### Swiss-German border:

6.03.2020: Switzerland starts with the first controls at the borders to Germany.

17.03.2020; Switzerland closes various border crossings to channel traffic, which continues to be allowed in both directions under Swiss regulations.

29.03.2020: On the Swiss side of the fence to Germany in Konstanz/Kreuzlingen more and more protesters.

03.04.2020: Switzerland erects a second fence on the border with Kreuzlingen.

14.04.2020: Local politicians demand relaxations

17.04.2020: Switzerland surprisingly issues new exemptions in the entry ban for families with children.

22.04.2020: Commuters residing in Germany are once again allowed to drive through Swiss territory to their place of work in Germany.

25.04.2020: Couples are allowed to meet again, but not in Germany, only on Swiss territory.

30.04.2020: Confusion among couples, it is unclear whether the relaxation just made has been taken back.

07.05.2020: The majority of the Swiss parliament demands a plan from its government to gradually open the borders. But Germany poses problems with implementation.

15.05.2020: The border fences are dismantled.

17.05.2020: Rail traffic to Germany starts rolling in

28.05.2020: Switzerland announces relaxation of entry requirements from 08.06.2020

15.06.2020: No more entry requirements

#### Polish-German border:

15.04.2020. The Polish government closes the borders with Germany and other countries, train and bus traffic come to a standstill, a 14-day quarantine requirement for returnees is introduced, cross-border commuters may still cross the border in exceptional cases

10.04.2020: Closure of borders extended until 03.05.2020 with some exceptions

27.04.2020: The border is closed even more strictly, even commuters are no longer allowed to enter and leave Germany, even commuters must go into a 14-day quarantine

13.05.2020: Announcement of the extensions of border controls, entry bans and quarantine obligations until 12.06.2020

13.06.2020. Poland opens borders

#### German-Polish border

16.03.2020: Besides many border closures, the German government also introduces border controls to Poland, the railroad traffic comes to a standstill, but not because the German government requests it, but because the traffic is no longer approved from the polish side

10.04.2020: Germany introduces a 14-day quarantine requirement for all returnees from Poland, initially the regulation is to apply until 19.04.2020

19.04.2020: The quarantine regulation is extended until 15.05.2020

24.04.2020: Especially in the border areas there are organized protests against the introduced restrictions

15.05.2020: The German government lifts the quarantine obligation for returnees

15.06.2020: Border controls are lifted; border traffic gets rolling again