

Sacrifice Freedom for Freedom

A qualitative content analysis of the freedom definition used by party families during the
COVID-19 pandemic

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science European Studies

University of Twente (UT)

and

Master of Arts Comparative Public Governance

University of Münster (WWU)

September 2023

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Abstract

This study analyses the freedom definition used by party families in Germany and the Netherlands. The COVID-19 pandemic led to many restrictions on citizens' basic rights to protect public health. That sparked debates in the German and Dutch parliaments, where parties openly discussed trade-offs between different freedoms. This frame makes it possible to analyse the freedom definition used by parties in both countries. It is assumed that each party family has a preferred set of freedom dimensions, emphasising them more prominently than other freedoms. So far, there has been no research on the freedom definition used by party families, and there has also been very little research connecting party families and the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study a qualitative content analysis is performed to grasp the latent meaning of the parliamentary speeches. Based on purposive sampling, five parliamentary debates per country during the COVID-19 pandemic, covering the time period 2020–2022, were chosen. The freedom definition used for coding is derived from the Human Freedom Index by the Cato Institute and adjusted to the setting of a public health crisis. This resulted in the following dimensions of freedom: Rule of Law; Safety and Health; Association and Assembly; Expression and Information; Movement; and Economic Freedom. The analysis shows that the freedom definition used per party is in line with the overall ideology associated with the respective party family. It also shows that the freedom definition is consistent over time. This change only occurs when parties switch between roles in government and opposition. This explorative study contributes to the academic field of party research by combining the yet unlinked concepts of party family and freedom.

Keywords: Party Families, COVID-19 Pandemic, Parliamentary Debates, Freedom Dimensions, Qualitative Content Analysis, Netherlands, Germany

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List of Abbreviations

AfD	Alternative für Deutschland
CDA	Christen-Democratisch Appèl
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union
CHES	Chapel Hill Expert Survey
CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union
D66	Democraten 66
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei
FvD	Forum voor Democratie
GAL	Green/Alternative/Libertarian
GER	Germany
HFI	Human Freedom Index
JRC	Joint Research Centre
MP	Member of Parliament
NPI	non-pharmaceutical interventions
NL	The Netherlands
PvdA	Partij van de Arbeid
PVdD	Partij voor de Dieren
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid
RMD	Response Measures Database
RoL	Rule of Law
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
SP	Socialistische Partij
TAN	Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist
VVD	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was, for many Europeans, the period of the strongest limitations to their freedoms they have experienced in recent decades. Governments were caught in a battle between preventing public health hazards and upholding civil liberties and citizens' everyday lives. Measures that impacted the economy, like border closures within the Schengen area and factory shut-downs due to a COVID-19 outbreak, were debated but quickly accepted by the individuals and groups affected. However, numerous more far-reaching and intrusive measures were introduced to ensure the stability of the health system and slow down the spread of the COVID-19 virus: mask mandates, curfews, sharing of private medical information in the form of vaccination QR codes (COVID Pass), quarantine rules, and more. All of these restrict the fundamental freedom of movement, the right to personal freedom, the right to privacy, and other fundamental rights and human rights. Naturally, this has also inspired many discussions in parliaments, led to protests against these measures and the implementing government, and asked for rulings by constitutional courts.

The protest movements were thoroughly studied on different sociological dimensions. Some researchers looked at the mobilisation potential and polarisation of anti-COVID protests (Hunger et al., 2023; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019), radicalization potential and knowledge sharing within COVID-19 Telegram groups (Staudt, 2020; Zehring & Domahidi, 2023), how populists fared during the pandemic (Bobba & Hubé, 2021), the demographics and other background factors of the protesters (El-Menouar, 2021; Frei & Nachtwey, 2021), and many other issues. However, the amount of research into the parliamentary perspective on the pandemic is modest. Naturally, there was some research done with regards to parliamentary debates and COVID-19. Louwerse et al. (2021) found that opposition parties were moderately positive towards government measures taken at the beginning of the pandemic but became more critical over time. Or another study where it was found that the far-right parties were the strongest defenders of human rights in Slovakia (Steuer, 2022). Regardless, it appears as if the topics of COVID-19 and parliamentary debate did not inspire much academic interest. A similar conclusion can be drawn when looking at the literature on party families during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Rovny et al. (2022), there has been no other research on party families in the COVID-19 pandemic besides theirs. This research covers this research gap by looking at party families in parliamentary debates during COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic is used as a timeframe, parliamentary debates as the political arena, and party families as an independent variable in this research. The dependent variable is freedom, which adds another yet unlinked dimension to this research gap.

As mentioned before, the different definitions of freedom were hotly contested issues throughout the pandemic. Every actor emphasised different aspects of it. The same applies to parties. Interestingly enough, there has been no in-depth research on party families and their understanding of freedom yet. Broad scales, like economic left-right or GAL-TAN, are frequently used to assess party positions. These scales can give an indication of what dimension of freedom party families might promote, but they still draw a very vague picture. This surprising gap offers plenty of room for combination with the other gap (party families during the COVID-19 pandemic) identified before. Therefore, this is a great opportunity to look into party families and see if and

how they refer to freedom. This thesis will look at how parliamentary groups defined freedom, alluded to basic rights, and how that potentially collides with the freedom definition used by other party families. The following research question was drafted:

How did different party families define freedom during the parliamentary debate on COVID-19 in Germany and Netherlands in the years 2020 - 2022?

1. What dimensions of freedom did the party family refer to?
2. How did the freedom definition used by the party families change over time?

This research is based on the assumption that each party family has a preferred set of freedoms. This preferred freedom dimension became more visible in parliamentary debates during the COVID-19 pandemic. For that reason, a qualitative content analysis is conducted based on a review of five plenary sessions in the German and Dutch national parliaments. The semi-structured coding approach used is rooted in the Human Freedom Index by the Cato Institute and adjusted to the setting of this research. The outcomes of this study show that the freedom definitions used by party families can be connected to their ideology and remain stable over time. To arrive at this conclusion, this paper continues with a brief description of the situation in both countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is followed by a literature review defining the dependent variable freedom in political science and the independent variable party families. After that, the methodology and case selection are explained. In the results section, the freedom dimensions for each party family are discussed. The discussion sets out the implications of this research in the bigger picture, including in the policymaking process. In the conclusion, this thesis will end with a brief description of potential limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The research question asks for the definition of freedom used by party families. In this section, the dependent variable freedom and the independent variable party families are reviewed to better answer the research question. To do so, first the theoretical debate surrounding freedom and then empirical approaches to freedom are studied. The same is done for the independent variable, where first the theory of party families is explored and then each party family individually. For every family, expectations of their freedom definition are formulated. Before delving into the the independent and dependent variable, a short description of the pandemic in Germany and the Netherlands is given, to clarify the context.

2.1 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE NETHERLANDS AND GERMANY

To answer this research question with a qualitative approach, it is essential to understand what happened at the given time in the two countries. In this section, a short overview of the pandemic developments in Germany and the Netherlands is given, with the goal of better understanding the parliamentary debates in the respective country.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the European continent in the first half of 2020, the lives of many people changed with unforeseen abruptness. States, organisations, and individuals took measures that shaped daily life and made space for a 'new normal' (Yardim, 2021). In March 2020, the Netherlands and Germany took the first drastic measures restricting international travel, school closures, prohibiting big events, and advising employees to work from home (Bosen & Thureau, 2021; Rijksoverheid, n.d.). This was just the beginning of three years of COVID-19 containment measures coming and going according to the pandemic situation, which officially ended in March 2023 for the Netherlands and April 2023 for Germany (Bundesregierung, 2023; Rijksoverheid, 2023). The measures taken can be assigned to the group of risk regulation, which means reducing the risks of occurrences that are probable to happen (Hood et al., 2001). In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, the risk on an individual level was infection with the virus, and on a system level, the collapse of the public health system (Greer et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic was a public health crisis (WHO R&D Blue Print, 2020). Public health is concerned with the safety of individuals and the public (Gostin & Wiley, 2018). As visible throughout the pandemic, public health is a constant ethical question of what liberties can be infringed on and when it turns into excessive limitations of the basic rights of citizens. The bandwidth of responses taken ranged from recommendations to keep physical distance from other people ("social distancing") to war-like measures such as curfews, all with the same goal of slowing down the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Spadaro, 2020). The key way to bring about this slowdown was to use non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) that altered the contact patterns of citizens (Greer et al., 2021). Later in the pandemic, vaccinations became the second big leverage used by governments around the world. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the Joint Research Centre (JRC) (2022) created the Response Measures Database (RMD), entailing and categorising all NPIs introduced in the EU between January 1, 2020, and September 30, 2022. According to the dataset, the Netherlands introduced 266 NPIs and Germany introduced 91 NPIs in the same timeframe. Measurements regarding the physical distance between individuals were the most common (175 in NL and 57 in GER), which included public gathering restrictions and closures of public spaces such as gyms, places of worship, and schools. The list of interventions the governments and their advisory bodies came up with to counter this pandemic is long and creative.

Toshkov et al. (2021) found that factors such as government trust and freedom within a country impact the measures and timing of intervention initiated by the government. Countries with more freedom and higher trust in the government among the public tend to rely more on self-compliance by the citizens instead of restrictive measures. This also applies to Germany and the Netherlands, which sometimes only hesitantly introduce more restrictive measures (Toshkov et al., 2021). Research looking at how party ideology informs COVID-related policy decisions found that right-wing political groups advocate prioritising maintaining the economy over limiting the outbreak (Rovny et al., 2022). When looking at the cultural left-right dimension (GAL-TAN), parties associated with the cultural left were more likely to base their policies on science. Some countries with a strong TAN government seized the chance to increase their power and engage in a more illiberal course of politics (Drinóczi & Bień-Kacała, 2020; Rovny et al., 2022).

As previously explained, to protect public health, measures were introduced that limited the personal freedom and human rights of citizens. Article 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights describes that in situations “threatening the life of the nation” (European Court of Human Rights, 2022, p.1) a derogation of human rights is justified. Often times, the measures taken by the states were still somehow in the frame of proportionality, but sometimes public health was just used as a cover for despotic decisions (Seyhan, 2020). According to Seyhan (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic and the ways the state of emergency was exercised by governments around the world by means of police brutality, surveillance of civic spaces, and unlawful prosecution of asylum seekers, minorities, and human rights activists show how easily people can lose their freedom. Even though this happened to a lesser extent in western European countries, many citizens felt restricted in their personal freedom throughout the pandemic and took to the streets to protest against containment measurements by governments (Kriesi & Oana, 2022). This was shown in various protests against many non-pharmaceutical measures (NPI) like curfews, face masks, and social distancing, as well as against the pharmaceutical measure of vaccination. After having established a basis, it is time to look at the dependent and independent variables of this research.

2.2 DEFINING THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE: FREEDOM

During the pandemic, the political leadership claimed to take drastic measures to ensure public health, thereby ensuring that fundamental basic rights were in place. Basic rights and freedom are not the same, but in Western society, they are deeply interwoven concepts. Therefore, discussing freedom also means discussing basic rights. In the upcoming section, the concept of freedom and its connection to basic rights will be discussed.

2.2.1 FREEDOM IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Public health is a balancing act between what health issues should be tackled and where the state goes too far in its responsibilities and becomes paternalistic. Bayer and Fairchild (2004) explain this using the example of smoking. It is a cause for bad health among the public, but the risks coming from these bad habits primarily affect the individual. For that reason, it might not be viewed as an issue of public health. However, since the percentage of smokers among the public was so vast at the end of the 1980s and smoking also turned out to affect the immediate environment, many states decided to categorise it as a public health issue that required "paternalist" intervention (Bayer & Fairchild, 2004). The framing of paternalist intervention is strong in the USA and is present in many other western cultures. John S. Mill (2011) wrote at the end of the 19th century about one of the key pieces on liberty in which he describes paternalism as a limitation of a person's or group's liberty with the intention of improving their good. Mill (2011) states that individuality and freedom in a group context should be guided by certain rules, but that the life of the individual and decisions only impacting them should be left to their judgement without external intervention. Mill (2011) goes even further, criticising behavioural norms and politenesses in society since the judgement resulting from these conventions partly oppresses the manifestation of the individual self. However, Mill (2011) draws a line when actions not only affect the individual's own good but also affect others. In that case, interference with their rights and

liberties is appropriate and morally justified. In short, Mill says that the state or society should not intervene in the life of an individual, even if it engages in self-destructive behaviour such as drunkenness or gambling. However, when the behaviour affects other people as well, state intervention is acceptable.

Mill's perspective on paternalism can be read as restricting the state from excessive involvement in citizens' lives. Isaiah Berlin, with his well-known essay on the "two concepts of liberty" (Berlin, 2002), took this idea further. He described the concepts of positive and negative liberty. This Kant-inspired idea (Baum & Nichols, 2014) focuses on external and internal factors guiding a person's life. External factors such as laws prohibiting certain behaviours, other individuals occupying spaces, or simply a wall blocking the way can be seen as infringements of negative freedom. This means that individuals can act without any external constraints (Baum & Nichols, 2014). This results in the notion that the less a person is interfered with, the more freedom that person enjoys. Dimova-Cookson (2012) describes it as a desire to be unhindered, free from censorship in any form or judgement by society. Marshall (2009) labels negative liberty as a very individualistic perspective on freedom, which can be reduced to the phrase "free from..." (p. 16). In the realm of negative freedom, the state has no right to intervene in an individual's path. Still, regulation of some sort coming from the state or other sources is needed to ensure negative freedom (Pennington, 2018).

While negative liberty is quite uncomplicated in its definition, positive liberty is a more open concept (Dimova-Cookson, 2012). It is not the direct opposite of negative freedom. It asks the question "Am I free to..." and thereby refers to the internal guidance and self-realisation of an individual (Christman, 2016; Marshall, 2009). Thinkers following this school of thought believe that only a person who can follow their preferences to realise their potential and achieve their ideal self is truly free (Green, 1895). Compared to negative freedom, positive freedom is much more focused on the internal development of an individual. Positive liberty also asks who is the source of control and thereby touches upon the topics of self-control and self-determination (Dimova-Cookson, 2012). Supporters of positive freedom agree that the conditions of negative freedom are a good foundation, but that for a person to be free, other conditions also need to be established (Christman, 2016; Crowder, 2012). A common example is that of a person who, in theory, has all the rights in the negative sense but, in practice, cannot claim them because of a lack of resources, societal constructs, or other forms of oppression, is not fully free (Gould, 2012). That means, to enable everybody to use their freedom, individuals must have access to the necessary conditions. Hobhouse (1964) sees the states in the role of enabling citizens to fully enjoy their freedom. Opposed to Berlin, Hobhouse (1964) believes that freedom and equality are closely related, and he also emphasises that positive freedom should be perceived as an optional offer from the state or authorities for the citizens. To ensure the freedom of personal well-being, a state builds a hospital, and the citizens can decide for themselves if they want to use it or seek other options for medical attention. In political science, the debate around positive freedom often surrounds itself with the topic of state intervention to support or protect individuals "to act as authentic, self-governing agents" (Christman, 2016, p. 7). Green (1895) even says that only a state that supports its citizens to seize their potential and exercise autonomy can call itself a free state. However, since the term positive freedom has the connotation of self-realisation, Hirschmann

(1989) suggests talking about effective freedom instead in a political science context. Nevertheless, in this research, the term positive freedom will be used.

Human rights and constitutions can be seen as tools to ensure freedom. Marshall (2009) argues that they can be viewed from a positive and negative freedom standpoint. In the negative sense, human rights protect the individual from state interference like torture or enforced disappearance. On the other hand, Marshall (2009) says that the rights to health and well-being can be interpreted as positive freedom. The state is responsible for supplying these goods to the citizens to enable them to enjoy their freedom.

Rawls (1971) does not differentiate between positive and negative freedom because he believes that both are simply focused on different liberties. For Rawls, definitions of freedom are rather additional and do not add much value to the political philosophy debate around this topic. That is probably also because there are different types of freedom. Rawls (1971) says that every (complete) explanation of freedom should include at least (1) an actor (person(s), organisations, etc.) who is free, (2) the restraints that they are (not) free from, and (3) what they are free to do or not to do. While aspects 1 and 3 are fairly easy to detect, aspect 2, the limitations of freedom, needs some more thorough analysis. Rawls elaborates and sees two ways in which limitations can affect the freedom of an actor. The first is the limitation through laws, rules, regulations, or social norms that prohibits an individual from acting the way it wants to act. Another constraint that can be included here is interference. Even when there is no law permitting an individual to engage in a certain activity, interference by others can hinder them from enjoying this freedom. Rawls (1971) says that, therefore, legal duties to not obstruct should be put in place. When filling in the three aspects suggested by Rawls with information, it becomes evident that there are different types of liberty. They are all connected to each other. Most of the time, different liberties collide with each other and therefore need to be balanced so that all actors are equal in the sense of the freedom they can enjoy (Rawls, 1971). For that reason, it can be said that all liberties are interdependent, promoting and obstructing each other.

The concept of interdependency is also applicable to human rights (Bennoune, 2020). The right to health can only be established if that person has the right to safe drinking water and sanitation. There are also rights that might contradict or interfere with each other, just as Rawls described the relationship between liberties (Rawls, 1971). This became especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when some human rights were assigned priority over other rights, such as the right to health, which limited the right to assembly. The UN is aware of these limitations as well as of the costs connected to guaranteeing human rights, which is why economic, social, and cultural rights should be fulfilled based on progressive realisation (Van Boven, 2014). That means states should guarantee these rights to the maximum extent of the resources available.

Brenkert (1991) distances himself from the traditional differentiation of freedom into positive and negative by creating the concept of freedom as empowerment. According to him, for a person to be free, they need entitlement, involvement, and enablement. Entitlement means that individuals are their own agents and can freely choose from a range of reasonable options with no interference (Brenkert, 1991). A key concept here is self-determination, which, according to Brenkert (1991), is essential to freedom and is related to the notion of positive freedom. However,

he also acknowledges that self-determination has little value for the individual if there is interference with its exercise. That is where the negative freedom comes in, in saying that an individual is free when it is not interfered with. Opposed to other writers, like Christman (2016) or Crowder (2012), Brenkert turns the relation between positive freedom (self-realisation and self-determination) and negative freedom (non-interference) around by saying that negative freedom is only meaningful when positive freedom is granted. That is called the right to self-determination. The second element of freedom as empowerment, is involvement. Brenkert (1991) says that in the current societal setting, individuals need possibilities to determine, control, and influence the direction of the state or other institutions they are part of to be called free. For Brenkert, this is an extended form of self-determination that balances the limitations of being part of an institution with the enhancing aspects of it. When looking at the example of being a citizen of a state, it becomes evident that the individual has responsibilities towards the state in the form of adhering to laws, thereby limiting the room for living self-determined. In exchange, the individuals receive options to shape the institution they are part of through elections and other forms of participation, as well as other guarantees, which will be discussed in the third part, enablement. Like Rawls, Brenkert sees here a trade-off between freedoms. In his case, it is a trade-off between self-determination on an individual level and self-determination on a societal level, which limits but also enhances the options for the individual. The last element of freedom of empowerment is enablement. For people to make use of the dimensions of entitlement and involvement, it is necessary to equip them with the needed material, financial, and cognitive resources (Brenkert, 1991). Therefore, several positive rights have to be established to enable individuals to seize opportunities for self-determination and participation. Brenkert (1991) emphasises that individuals also need education and access to other forms of cognitive resources (e.g., information about current political decisions or developments in society) to effectively make use of their freedom. The conditions for the enablements should be provided by the institution. This can also be found at Green and Hirschmann, who, as explained above, see every state that proclaims to be free as having the responsibility to enable its citizens by supplying them with the needed provisions to engage in self-realisation.

All in all, freedom in the political-philosophical realm can be defined in many different ways. Regardless of the differences, they all appear to have a simple triadic relationship in common, as suggested by Rawls (1971). Freedom is always about an agent, the constraints or enablements they experience, and what they are (or are not) free to do. This can be applied to negative freedom as well as positive freedom since it can incorporate external constraints and support. According to Rawls (1971), every logical argument referring to the freedom of actors should mention at least these three elements. Other ways in which this theoretical debate can be turned into more feasible concepts will be explained in the upcoming section.

2.2.2 TURNING FREEDOM EMPIRICAL

After having looked at the political-philosophical discussion of freedom, it is time to explore how freedom is used in empirical studies and how this can be applied in this research. Despite the fact that there is no universal definition of freedom, there are many approaches to measuring it.

According to Carter (1995), this is inevitable since many people ask for "more freedom", and to define what "more" means, freedom has to be made measurable. Even though this study is mostly concerned with what types of freedom the parties refer to, it is also expected that the parties will refer to degrees of freedom and weight freedoms against each other. For that reason, it is sensible to look at approaches to measuring freedom.

It can be measured on a qualitative and quantitative level (Rosenbaum, 2000), and the measurement can either be focused on positive freedom or on negative freedom (Graeff, 2012). Rosenbaum (2000), who is a firm supporter of a quantitative approach towards measuring freedom, says that overall freedom should be viewed as a construct of many particular freedoms. Therefore, freedom in a given situation should be assessed based on the aggregates of the degrees of individual freedoms, e.g., freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. The challenge is that there needs to be one universal element present in all dimensions of freedom to be able to compare them (Rosenbaum, 2000). Most measures use opportunities or choices as indicators. They often take the options available to an individual and set them in relation to what options are not feasible (Graeff, 2012). Basic formulas can look like this:

$$\frac{F_R}{F_R + U_R}$$

(Steiner, 2010, p. 74)

Here, F represents all actions an individual is free to do, and U stands for unfree (not available) actions. In this case, freedom is defined in the negative sense, meaning that every action without external interference is counted as being free (Carter, 1992). This formula simply counts every action as a value of 1 and inserts the total sum into the calculation (Steiner, 2010). This is called a choice set, and instead of actions, this can also be done with opportunities or choices. This approach is solely concerned with the availability of actions or choices (Bavetta, 2004). Regardless of what unit is chosen, this approach fails to address the different quality of actions and options, meaning that speaking one's mind in a despotic state has a different value than in a liberal state, and to differentiate between basic options, which lead to more opportunities, and non-basic options, which are the results of basic options (Carter, 1992). In addition, it can be difficult to define when to stop adding options or actions to the free and unfree scales (Rosenbaum, 2000). Other critics emphasise that measuring freedom alone does not add any value to the political debate because it is too abstract, taken out of context, and thereby has little meaning (Kymlicka, 2002).

The second approach to measuring freedom is based on preferences and tackles most of the criticism. Instead of the number of choices, the number of preferred options is counted. Here, choice sets are compared based on the freedom preferences the individual assigns to the elements of each set (Bavetta, 2004). Basing the freedom definition on relevant options decreases the size of choice sets by only considering meaningful options. It also makes freedom more graspable and relevant for societal discourse since it is more focused on the desires of the people (Kymlicka, 2002). Including the desire dimension is more natural since freedom always happens in a wider context of other values and options, and therefore the freedom experienced by someone

is highly dependent on the context they are currently in (Arneson, 1985). However, this makes it harder to measure the validity aspect because many people tend to mix up freedom with its outcomes, like protest or travelling (Graeff, 2012). In addition, it does make it harder to use in comparative studies since every individual has different desires (Arneson, 1985).

The last quantitative measure to be introduced here is one based on autonomy. As opposed to the two previous measures, it puts more emphasis on positive freedom, but it also builds on the previous perspectives (Bavetta, 2004). An individual enjoys greater freedom when they can autonomously build and decide between choice sets according to their preferences. Just like in approach one, the wider the perspective, the more freedom the individual enjoys (Bavetta, 2004). This makes it even harder and more complicated to measure because, as shown above in the section on positive freedom, limiting factors can be diverse and therefore hard to measure.

All three approaches are used to greater or lesser degrees in freedom indices. Irrespective of whether the index is concerned with economic, personal, media, or another type of freedom, the majority of freedom indices use a negative perspective (Graeff, 2012). That is because it is easier to measure and generalise on larger scales than other approaches (Carter, 1992; Graeff, 2012). Well-known indices are the World Press Freedom Index and the Civil Liberties Index. One of the few global indices covering several dimensions of freedom is the Human Freedom Index (HFI) by the Cato Institute. It has measured freedom on multiple dimensions in 165 countries since 2000. The HFI is a predominantly quantitative assessment based on components like the rule of law, the size of the government, the legal system, and other areas, consisting of 83 indicators (Vásquez et al., 2022). It will be explained in more detail in the operationalization. First, another way to conceptualise freedom will be explored.

In Western societies, human rights are a symbol of freedom. As already mentioned above in one of the examples, human rights can enable individuals and protect them from state interference (Ssenyonjo, 2009). Therefore, human rights can be linked to positive (enable) and negative (protect) freedom. Valentini (2012) describes human rights as the core of what enables a person to lead a self-determining life. She refers to aspects like a sphere of non-interference, opportunities and resources needed, and a reasonable demarcation of a person's freedom (Valentini, 2012), all of which were already mentioned in the political-philosophical discussion above. That is also one of the reasons why Graeff (2012) views rights as a potential indicator of freedom. Another reason that shows the relevance of rights for the conceptualization of freedom is that in society, freedom is first connected to rights and entitlements before action (one of the measuring units in the previous section) (Hanke & Walters, 1997).

The measures introduced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic affected several human rights, like the right to move freely, the right to privacy, and the right to peaceful assembly (Yardim, 2021). However, not all rights were infringed, e.g., the right to a nationality, and some were even promoted by infringing other rights (Chiozza & King, 2022). Especially the right to health was enabled by restricting other human rights. There have been several attempts to give human rights a hierarchy, but because they are interdependent and overlap, this is not easily done and also depends on the cultural and societal context (Bennoune, 2020; Van Boven, 2014). The HFI already

categorises human rights and other freedom dimensions, respecting their interdependence and without assigning a hierarchy to them. For that reason, and because a multitude of rights were affected by the pandemic, this research uses the HFI by the Cato Institute as the foundation for the conceptual model of freedom. The HFI differentiates between personal freedom and economic freedom. Each group has multiple sub-dimensions and even more indicators. Personal freedom is concerned with aspects like freedom of movement, equal treatment of different groups, press freedom, and more that influence daily societal life. This dimension resembles many human rights and civil liberties. The group of economic freedoms includes business and labour market regulation, freedom to trade (internationally), currency-related matters, and other characteristics influencing the economic freedom of individuals and organisations (Vásquez et al., 2022). Economic freedom and personal freedom are just the higher-level groups, with some overlap and interdependency between the sub-groups. Broken down into more detail and adjusted to this research, this will eventually result in guidelines for coding, which can be found in Section 3.2 of this paper. Until then, this broad differentiation between personal and economic freedom will suffice. Another relevant concept in this research that is also used in the coding scheme is party family. In the next section, the theory behind party families will be explained, and for this research, relevant families will be introduced.

2.3.1 DEFINING THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLE: PARTY FAMILY

Party family is the independent variable in this research. To better answer the research question, this section explores the notion of party families. The concept of party families is not new and has existed for more than seventy years (Beyme, 2000). It is based on the notion that different political parties can be grouped based on shared characteristics. A common reason to do that can be to engage in comparative studies across parties and national borders with different party systems (Mair & Mudde, 1998). Assembling different parties under one tag makes it possible to compare their voters, legislation, or, as in this study, their stands on certain issues. Other authors call the concept of party families a mere product of the urge to order parties with little actual purpose or relevance (Höhne, 2012). They underline this by stating that there is no agreement on how party families should be defined, nor is there agreement on what families exist. That is a problem that was also perceived by Mair and Mudde (1998), who, in their now standard paper on party families, discussed four approaches on how to categorise parties: origin and sociology; transnational federation; policy ideology; name. Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages and can help in understanding the emergence and existence of the different party families. For that reason, each approach will be explained briefly.

"Origins and Sociology" is based on the concept of cleavages that emerged in society (Mair & Mudde, 1998). For that reason, the cleavage theory will be briefly explained here. This famous concept by Lipset and Rokkan discusses how parties arise and stabilise within countries. This theory was based on the belief that parties emerge and pertain to a set of cleavages that are based on historical societal conflicts. The term for these cases is "critical juncture". There are four fundamental conflicts that shaped the western European political landscape and societies. The first is the worker vs. capitalist cleavage, which is also the most relevant cleavage. It resulted in an economic left-right division (von Schoultz, 2017). The second cleavage is based on the

agricultural against industrial society conflict, sometimes also referred to as rural vs. urban (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). The other two cleavages are based on the conflict between a secularised state opposed to a strong unity of church and state and between a strong central state and its peripheral communities (von Schoultz, 2017). Voters identify with and vote for parties that represent a certain position in these cleavages. Traditionally, an individual from the working class would then cast their vote for a labour party. This created stability in the political landscape. Since the 1980s, the traditional cleavage-based parties have experienced less stable electorates, which has caused much discussion about the relevance of the traditional cleavages (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). Throughout the academic debate, two notions emerged: dealignment and realignment. Dealignment means that individuals do not adhere to old cleavages anymore, the overall concept of cleavages has lost its relevance, and voting behaviour is less predictable. Realignment basically assumes that there is a new cleavage and voters are reorienting themselves (von Schoultz, 2017). There are many different proposals for new cleavages, like Hooghe and Marks' (2018) transnational cleavage. However, so far, there is no widely accepted critical juncture, and there is also no agreement on whether the cleavage theory experiences dealignment or realignment. Regardless of that, Mair and Mudde (1998) identified the origin and sociology of parties as suitable characteristics to define party families. As will be shown in the upcoming section, this works well for older party families like the Social Democrats or Liberals but does not apply that well to the Radical Right or the Greens. Another limitation is that it is a very Western European-centred concept, which cannot account for party creation in Eastern Europe or other parts of the world (Fagerholm, 2016).

Party families based on transnational federations were created with the assumption that parties from different countries join international networks or umbrella organisations and that, based on these associations, party groupings can be identified (Mair & Mudde, 1998). Looking at transnational federations can be especially insightful at the EU level because many national parties are part of groups in the European Parliament (Ennser, 2012). The thought behind this is that parties know their own ideology best and are best at choosing a network that fits them (Beume, 2000). In addition, the network has to accept the party, which leads to some sort of checks and balances. This is a straightforward approach for party families. However, some of its weaknesses are that there are federations with ideological overlap, that parties can be members of several federations, and that some (especially younger) parties might not have joined a network or that there is no network yet (Ennser, 2012; Mair & Mudde, 1998).

The third suggested criterion by Mair and Mudde (1998) is policy and ideology. This is often seen as the most difficult categorisation because it heavily depends on the sources, measurement scales, and methods used. Sources can be party manifestos or election manifestos, depending on the country researched, or, as in Rovny et al. (2022), expert opinions and policy decisions. The scales used can also differ per research, but the most commonly used dimensions are (1) the economic role of the government and distributional preferences; and (2) cultural aspects and value-related issues (Freire & Tsatsanis, 2015). On the first scale, more government involvement in economic issues and distributional questions is associated with left politics. On the second scale, it is a question of being libertarian and rather progressive on moral issues, or rather traditional, law and order-minded, and nationalist (Close, 2019). Well-known research initiatives that are

concerned with this criterion of party families are the Manifesto Project, currently run by Lehmann et al. (2023), which focuses on election manifestos, and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), where experts place parties regarding ideology and policy issues (Close, 2019).

Distinguishing party families based on the names of parties is often perceived as inappropriate because some parties or ideologies might not have similar terms or concepts they use as names (Mair & Mudde, 1998). Radical right parties, for example, use many different names in different countries, like "List Pim Fortuijn" in the Netherlands and "Alternative für Deutschland" in Germany (Ennsner, 2012). Two very different names, which could also be associated with other political orientations.

Mair and Mudde (1998) suggest using a mix of origin and ideology for assessing a party's family association. The origin would give insights about the reason for the party's formation, and the ideology would indicate the current orientation of the party. This research will not engage in defining party families but will rely on the party grouping by the CHES (Rovny et al., 2022) and the Political Party Database Round 2 (Scarrows et al., 2022). Which results in the party family association that is used in this research and can be seen in Table 1. The smaller and partly less established political parties in the Dutch parliament, Volt, SGP, BBB, BIJ1, and JA21, are sometimes associated with other party families. So did, for example, the manifesto workgroup Lehmann et al. (2023) categorise Volt Netherlands as a socialist or left party, which would correspond with the radical left in the naming scheme used here. That just underlines the difficulties when using party families and the different results when reviewing different sorts of data. The rest of this section is dedicated to discussing the major party families in detail. This is done to better understand the families and formulate expectations based on their stances towards freedom.

Table 1

Parties Categorised according to Party Family per Country

Family	Germany	Netherlands
Liberal	FDP	VVD, D66, (VOLT)
Social Democrats	SPD	PvdA
Christian Democrats	CDU, CSU	CDA
Green	Bündnis90/Die Grünen	GroenLinks, PVdD
Radical Left	DIE LINKE	SP
Radical Right	AfD	FvD, PVV
Conservatives		Ja 21
Others		50PLUS, BBB, BIJ1
Confessional		CU, SGP
Ethnic		DENK

Note: Here the party family names by Rovny et al. (2022) were used.

2.3.2 PARTY FAMILY DESCRIPTION AND EXPECTATIONS

After reviewing the concepts of freedom and party family, it is time to combine the two and formulate expectations for this research. The party family approach chosen is based on ideology and only party families present in both countries are studied in this research. As mentioned above, a common approach to categorising parties is the concept of economic left-right and cultural left-right (GAL-TAN). This fits very well with the higher-level freedom dimensions of economic freedom and personal freedom. More economic freedom would mean being stronger oriented at the economic right and supporting free markets (Close, 2019). Personal freedom is less straightforward, but it is assumed that parties favour different personal freedoms depending on their ideology, for example, Christian Democrats putting more emphasis on religious freedom. In the frame of the CHES, Jolly et al. (2022) defined that cultural left-leaning parties favoured more personal liberties, whereas TAN tendencies, like in Christian Democratic parties, suggest more emphasis on government authority formulating (traditional) social and cultural norms. In this section, these broad freedom categories will be paired with party families to formulate expectations for this study.

The **Liberal Family** is one of the oldest party families (Beyme, 2000). The ideology of the liberal family is based on the notion that individuals should be granted the freedom to develop themselves, and boundaries only need to be developed where they could threaten the freedom of others (Franzmann, 2012). Based on this foundation, the liberal parties in Europe formed around the spheres of individualism and mistrust of the state regarding economic issues. That is the reason why liberal parties developed strong profiles around the topics of freedom, innovation, and rationality on a cultural level on the one hand and industry and technology on an economic level on the other (Franzmann, 2012). Relating this to the common notion of economic left-right policies, liberal parties are commonly placed on the right for promoting lower taxes and less state intervention in the market (Close, 2019). In the cultural domain, liberal parties often support rather progressive issues like same-sex marriage or euthanasia. Due to these two foci, liberal parties are frequently seen as being ambivalent and sometimes even opportunistic (Franzmann, 2012). This is all reflected in the high internal heterogeneity of this family. Some parties are labelled as liberal and support rather left-wing policy issues, and some liberal parties promote rather right-wing or conservative policies (Ennser, 2012; Freire & Tsatsanis, 2015). That is why some researchers suggested categorising the liberal family into sub-groups (Close, 2019; Ennser, 2012; Franzmann, 2012). Close (2019), one of the most recent studies concerning this party family, found three sub-groups: (1) Classical Liberals; (2) Social Liberals; (3) Conservative Liberals. For this study, the first and second groups are of interest. The classical liberals are parties that are right-wing on economic issues and centrist on the cultural dimension (Close, 2019). In the Netherlands, the VVD and, in Germany, the FDP would fall into this category. Social liberals take a left-wing position on cultural questions and a centrist one regarding economic issues. Close (2019) assigned the Dutch party D66 to this.

When connecting this party family to the notion of freedom, their stance on economic policy and state non-intervention indicate that this group is a promoter of negative freedom. This strong position of freedom is based on a lack of constraint. In combination with the general

heterogeneity of this party family, it is expected (1a) that there is no coherent definition of freedom. However, it is anticipated that (1b) this family will strongly promote economic freedom. It is also assumed that they (1c) tend to promote the freedom of the individual from a negative freedom standpoint.

The **Social Democrats** emerged in the 19th century due to the cleavage between workers and capitalist owners (Ennsner, 2012). Even though the exact historical happenings differ per country, across Europe, social democrats asked for freedom, equality, and solidarity. They were and are devoted to promoting social rights and empowering workers (Jun, 2012). Even though the strong emphasis of the party exclusively on workers has faded since the 1960s, it is still associated with the party family that promotes workers' rights (Keman & Pennings, 2006). After the Second World War, the social democrats had a high time in Europe, being frequently involved in governments and establishing their key policy product: the welfare state. It is the symbol for social democratic parties promoting the collective, redistribution, and positioning the state as the provider of equal chances in terms of, e.g., educational opportunities (Jun, 2012). The increased wealth of citizens and the rise of neoliberalism have led to a change in the Social Democrats' orientation towards supporting and empowering people, putting more emphasis on individual responsibility (Jun, 2012; Keman & Pennings, 2006). This self-responsibility is still much stronger marked by the welfare state than with the liberal party family, and the state is still seen as responsible for providing a safety net for its citizens.

Classically, the Social Democrats are to be situated on the left side of the political spectrum. However, some researchers found these parties to be moving more to the centre to gain more votes (Keman & Pennings, 2006). In a recent study, Trastulli (2022) found that this does not apply to the economic left-right dimension. Especially since the financial crisis in the 2000s, Social Democratic parties have turned their economic profile more left on issues like the welfare state and market regulation, while still favouring neoliberalism on some other aspects (Trastulli, 2022). In general, this party family is fairly homogenous across Europe, supporting liberal and economic left policies (Freire & Tsatsanis, 2015). In this study, the German SPD and Dutch PvdA fall into this category. Since this party family has a left profile, but still less than the Green or Radical Left parties, it is hypothesised that the parties (2a) tend to favour personal freedom established by self-enforcement but also (2b) a stronger limitation of economic freedoms by asking for more containment by closing down the economy to protect workers.

The **Christian Democrats** have a lot in common with the Social Democrats (Keman & Pennings, 2006). They were the other dominant party after the Second World War in Europe, the welfare state is also one of their key policies, and they too have been declining in vote shares since the 1990s. Together with the Social Democrats, Christian Democrats are often seen as the big centre parties (Hanley, 2002). As stated in their name, this party family is based on Christian values (e.g., human dignity, human rights, etc.). However, it is not religious anymore and also follows the trend of secularisation that happened in societies all over Europe during the past century (Frey, 2009). Christian democratic parties are usually described as mediators who

represent different social classes in their positions and negotiate between diverse party positions (Liedhegener & Oppelland, 2012).

In general, this party family is very heterogeneous regarding their position on the economic and cultural scales. It partly overlaps with the Radical Right and Liberal family in terms of ideology and policy preferences and is sometimes grouped with the conservatives (Ennser, 2012). There also appears to be a regional pattern influencing the party position on different scales (Freire & Tsatsanis, 2015). In general, Christian Democrats tend to agree with liberals and conservatives on issues of security and foreign affairs, as well as on issues regarding market regulation (Hanley, 2002). For that reason, Christian Democrats can be placed on the economic spectrum in the right sphere, promoting, amongst other things, less regulation of the market and lower taxes. On the cultural dimension, this family is to be located on the rather traditional, authoritarian, and nationalistic side, favouring law and order or moral authority based on Christian values (Freire & Tsatsanis, 2015). In this research, the German CDU, CSU, and Dutch CDA fall into this group. It is expected (3a) that Christian Democrats promote law and order and thereby tend to impose stronger restrictions. That means they are assumed to be willing to restrict individual freedoms that are not connected to Christian values or practices. Based on their economic profile, it is expected (3b) that they do not support restricting economic freedom.

The **Green party family** is one of the youngest party families. It emerged across Europe in the 70s and 80s, when environmental and post-materialist movements increased the salience of issues like environmentalism, feminism, pacifism, and more (Belchior, 2010). This break away from old politics came due to a shift in values, especially for the younger generation (Ennser, 2012), and coincided with a time when Social Democrats and Christian Democrats were moving closer to the political centre, thereby leaving space on the left and right for new parties to emerge (Keman & Pennings, 2006). Even though the Greens at first did not claim any traditional political orientation, their standpoints towards redistribution, liberalism, and individualism indicate a left orientation (Charalambous & Lamprianou, 2015; Keman & Pennings, 2006). Over the years, the focus on environmental issues in the party programmes of Green parties has decreased and made space for other issues. However, it remained the key concern for them and the uniting base of Greens across Europe (van Haute, 2016). Over the past forty years, Green parties have been more successful in northern and western European countries than in other parts of Europe.

All in all, the Greens are described as a very homogenous group, which is easy to recognise with their environmental profile (Ennser, 2012). Even though some national parties start orienting stronger towards the political centre, like the German Greens (van Haute, 2016), it can still be said that this part of the family has a left profile on the economic scale and also a very libertarian profile on the cultural dimension (Freire & Tsatsanis, 2015). Therefore, it is expected that the Green parties looked at in this research placed themselves somewhere between the Social Democrats and Liberals in terms of the freedoms they referred to during debates. That means (4a) restriction of economic freedom for the sake of social equality, as well as (4b) more emphasis on self-enforcement of COVID measures and thereby granting more individual freedoms.

The **Radical Left party family** emerged from the workers-capitalist cleavage in the 19th century. Unlike the Social Democrats, this group followed the vision of a revolution to bring down the capitalist system and its elites (Charalambous & Lamprianou, 2015). Over the past hundred years, the Radical Left has taken on different shapes in different countries, sometimes being the leading communist party or, in some cases, just being a radical version of the Social Democrats (Spier, 2012). That is also visible in different indices where this family is sometimes called "Radical Left" (see Rovny et al., 2022), "Socialist Left" (see Lehmann et al., 2023), or "Communist/Socialist Left" (see Scarrow et al., 2022). The current Radical Left is a party family that advocates against capitalism and neoliberalism. Its main goal is social equality; everything else is secondary and varies among the radical left parties (Charalambous & Lamprianou, 2015). With its strong anti-elitism, some research also assigned populist tendencies to the Radical Left (Mouffe, 2018).

When looking at their orientation on the economic scale, which is very homogenous on the far left, their social equality standpoint becomes evident. On the cultural dimension, they are more spread out (Spier, 2012). The Radical Left parties included in this study (Die Linke and SP) are far left/libertarian on both dimensions, being the most extreme left parties represented here (Jolly et al., 2022). In combination with the findings of Rovny et al. (2022), this results in the expectation that (5a) parties belonging to this family are sceptical towards restrictions on personal freedom, but to ensure social equality, they also request government enforcement of health regulations. It is also hypothesised that (5b) economic freedom is not of high relevance for this family and that it is very willing to restrict it.

The **Radical Right family**, sometimes also referred to as the New Radical Right, started to emerge in Europe sometime during the 1980s and quickly became one of the most successful party families founded after the Second World War (Mudde, 2013). It is important to mention that the Radical Right is a family that is hard to define, even though it has been subject to extensive scholarly scrutiny (Decker & Lewandowsky, 2012). It is sometimes described as the mirror image of the Green family since it emerged roughly around the same time but on the opposite end of the liberal and socio-economic spectrum (Zaslove, 2009). Even though there is no universal cleavage, time of origin, ideology (authoritarianism, fascism, neoconservatism, etc.), or electorate shared by Radical Right parties (Zaslove, 2009), there are some common characteristics members of this family share (Ennser, 2012). Radical Right parties are nativist, nationalist, authoritarian, and usually also strongly populist (Ennser, 2012; Mudde, 2013; Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2015). One policy field that unites these parties is 'immigration' (Ennser, 2012), which also helped these parties grow during so-called migration crises (Mudde, 2013). The authoritarian appeal can be seen in the demand of many Radical Right parties for a stronger state, which is often coupled with an anti-pluralist tendency (Keman & Pennings, 2006).

All in all, this party family can be described as equally heterogeneous as the Christian Democratic family. On the economic left-right scale, the Radical Right is to be placed on the right spectrum, with a similar spread to the Liberals. On the cultural dimension, they are the most authoritarian and traditional (Freire & Tsatsanis, 2015). In this research, the German AfD and the Dutch parties PVV and FvD are assigned to this group. Based on the description, it could be

assumed that these parties are willing to agree to strong limitations on freedoms to ensure law and order. However, all of them are opposition parties with strong populist tendencies. For that reason, it can also be expected that they reject any freedom-limiting proposals and present themselves as guardians of freedom, as was the case in Slovakia (Steuer, 2022). Therefore, the expectation is (6a) that this party family promotes all types of freedom that fit into their nativist-traditionalist paradigm and (6b) opposes the government's direction.

The literature review shows that there are different expectations for how parties define freedom throughout the pandemic. It also shows how difficult it is to clearly define the concept of freedom, the dependent variable of this research. How these two yet unlinked concepts are connected and operationalised in this research will be explained in more detail in the upcoming section.

3. Methodology

This research aims to find out how different political party families represented in national parliaments defined freedom throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As discussed in the introduction, the notions of party families and freedom are rarely connected, but freedom on different dimensions was a major friction point between political parties during the pandemic. For that reason, this research looks into parliamentary debates in the Netherlands and Germany in the time frame of 2020–2022. Since this time frame lies in the past, alternative options like conducting surveys or interviews might not be a true representation of the freedom definition the actors supported during the pandemic. Another consideration is that reaching Members of Parliament (MPs) might prove challenging due to a lack of contacts and other resources. However, there is well-documented communication covering the aforementioned period. MPs had parliamentary debates, public appearances on talk shows, or social media communication. Parliamentary debates are deemed to be the most suitable balance between standardised communication, which makes the speeches comparable, accessibility of data, and freedom of speech for the MPs. Therefore, a qualitative content analysis approach, looking into the latent meaning of the speeches held during plenary sessions, is regarded as most appropriate and fruitful.

3.1 CASE SELECTION

Since qualitative content analysis is only concerned with the analysis of communication and not with its collection, special attention needs to be paid to the selection and collection of data (Prior, 2014). This research takes debates from the Dutch second chamber and the German federal parliament. The European context is chosen because the concept of party families works well there (Ennser, 2012). Germany and the Netherlands are selected because they are neighbouring countries with sufficient cultural similarities and differences, which makes a comparative study feasible but not predictable. The fact that they are neighbouring countries led to similar timelines throughout the pandemic, which makes comparison even more appropriate. Due to their membership to the EU and the Schengen agreement, they are governed by similar

rules and agreements regarding international trade, basic rights, and, for example, the licencing of vaccinations, a very relevant issue during the COVID-19 pandemic. That gives more grounds for comparison. Besides that, the researcher has lived in both countries, experienced the pandemic in both, and is fluent in both languages. Therefore, understanding the debates and the latent meaning behind them is more feasible compared to choosing a country the researcher is less acquainted with. Parliamentary debates are chosen because they enable MPs to display their position to the outside world on an emotional, more free, but still official platform, as opposed to social media or election manifestos (Treib et al., 2023; Truan, 2019).

During the chosen time frame (spring 2020 until summer 2022), the majority of the debates were somehow related to the pandemic. The parliaments discussed pandemic policies regarding, for example, development aid, economic relief packages, child mental health, and COVID-19 measures. In Germany and the Netherlands, most measures taken were directives by the governments and therefore did not need to be discussed by the parliaments. Still, the MPs voiced their opinions towards the measures and plenary sessions or weaved their criticism into debates on law proposals. Discussing all debates would exceed the scope of this research. For that reason, the focus is on key debates on major measures in both countries, namely vaccination, freedom of movement (lockdown, curfew, etc.), and laws expanding government powers. This type of purposive sampling is chosen with the assumption that the debates on these issues offer room for references to different dimensions of freedom. In total, five debates per country are chosen. A list with a short explanation can be found below in Table 2.

These debates are selected using timeline overviews, which are publicly accessible on government websites and display the most relevant occurrences during the pandemic (see for example Bundesministerium Für Gesundheit, 2023; Rijksoverheid, n.d.). Events mentioned in the timelines are new vaccination campaigns, fundamental policies, protests, and other pandemic-related happenings. Within the timelines, all events connected to the topics of vaccination and freedom of movement are selected. After that, debates on the topics are searched for in the directories of both parliaments. The ones closest to the dates of these key events are selected. In the next step, the selected debates are again reviewed, and only those with a dedicated debate on that topic and sufficient length and participation by the MPs are selected. In addition, the events are selected in such a way that they spread along the time frame set for this study (2020–2022) to answer the second sub-question regarding the development of freedom definition over time. This results in five debates per country.

Table 2

Debates Selected

Country	Date	Grounds for Selection
Germany	23/04/2020	- First explicit Debate on freedom and leaving lockdown - First larger protests against measures took place shortly before that
	18/11/2020	- Revised law granting government more power - One month before vaccinations campaign started - A considerable protest happened in close proximity to the parliament during that debate and protesters entered the parliament on that day
	21/04/2021	- Revised law granting powers to the government for measures like a curfew, which was supposed to be introduced after the passing of this law
	18/11/2021	- General debate on vaccination and freedom of movement - Beginning of fourth COVID-19 wave
	07/04/2022	- Final debate on the highly contested mandatory vaccination law proposal
Netherlands	02/06/2020	- Debate on protests and adherence to COVID-19 measures
	07/10/2020 + 08/10/2020	- Revised law granting powers to the government for measures and establishing a legal base for future measures*
	21/01/2021	- First debate on curfew
	18/02/2021	- Second debate on curfew after a short judicial intervention on that measure
	03/11/2021	- discussion on vaccination with reference to mandatory vaccination - Vaccination in NL were plateauing at a lower level than the government wanted to reach

Notes: * this debate extended over the course of two days, but was still counted as one debate

3.2 OPERATIONALISATION OF THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE IN THIS RESEARCH

To answer the research question, the concept of freedom has to be operationalised, so that it can be measured per party family. To do so, this research uses the Human Freedom Index of the Cato Institute as a guideline for conceptualising freedom. As already mentioned above, the HFI consists of a total of 83 indicators. Even though this is too extensive for the goals of this study, with some adjustments, the HFI is a good starting point for a qualitative coding scheme. Under the dimension of personal freedom, the categories Rule of Law; Security and Safety, Movement; Religion; Association, Assembly, and Civil Society; Expression and Information; and Relationships are gathered. For this study, the categories 'Security and Safety' are adjusted to 'Health and Safety', and 'Religion' and 'Relationship' will be omitted because they are believed to not add

enough value to be independent categories. Under the dimension of economic freedom, the HFI assembles the categories: Size of government; Legal system and property rights; Sound money; Freedom to trade internationally; Regulation. Whereas for the HFI all of these categories are relevant, this study merges 'Freedom to trade internationally' and 'Regulation' under the title 'economic freedom'. Since this study is focused on freedom in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the selected categories of the HFI are too broad. In this section, it will be explained how the dimensions are adjusted for the pandemic context in Germany and the Netherlands.

Rule of law (RoL) is the first category of the HFI. It is concerned with predictability, the reduction of arbitrary behaviour by authorities, and fair and equal treatment. For Vásquez et al. (2022), the rule of law "facilitates an environment in which freedoms are safeguarded" (p. 13). That means the rule of law has an enabling function for other freedoms. By establishing in the first place aspects of negative freedom but also positive freedom by providing every citizen with equal treatment and conditions for self-determination. This can also be connected to the above-mentioned concept of freedom as empowerment by Brenkert. RoL, as it is conceptualised in the HIF, does entitle, involve, and enable citizens. During the pandemic, a connection between RoL and freedom or enjoyment of human rights could be seen. In countries like Czechia, Bulgaria, and Hungary, where the RoL was already under pressure before the pandemic, the situation got worse over the course of the pandemic. The consequences were more arbitrary measures limiting the freedoms of citizens or threatening their health (Greer et al., 2021).

Vásquez et al. (2022) used "Security and Safety" as the second dimension of personal freedom in the HFI. It is concerned with issues related to terrorism, conflicts, homicides, and more. Since the COVID-19 pandemic was primarily a health crisis, this view on security is not of direct value to this research. However, it can be adjusted for safety and health, focusing on aspects of bodily integrity and physical and mental health. As stated in Article 12 of the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, every state should provide the individual with the "highest attainable standard of physical and mental health" (UN General Assembly, 1966). The human right to health does not mean that the state has to ensure that every person is healthy, but that it enables every individual to live a healthy life by providing health-related entitlements like education, clean water, health care, and more (Ooms et al., 2019). In addition, Nampewo et al. (2022) emphasise that this right ensures that everyone, no matter their social class, should receive the same health provision. Based on that, it is clear that this is a positive right. The state is obliged to respect, protect, and fulfil this right. Third parties like citizens and non-public organisations are, in the first place, expected to respect this right (Nampewo et al., 2022). For a long time, health was rather a backseat issue in human rights, connected to torture or other human rights abuses but rarely seen as an independent right. That is due to the traditional notion of health as an individual and medical issue, which changed to a broader societal view, perceiving it as a necessity to ensure other freedoms (Mann et al., 1994). During the pandemic, already vulnerable groups were even more exposed to health threats on a physical and mental dimension (Song et al., 2022). Nevertheless, it is expected that the freedom debate in this research will frequently refer to the right to health and its impact on other freedoms.

In the HFI, the Cato Institute combines freedom of association and assembly under one dimension. That is also done in Article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, 1948)), and according to Hamilton (2020), this is a reasonable connection. Both freedoms are concerned with a group of individuals. When looking at freedom of association, this group pursues a common goal or shares a belief and, based on that, cooperates multiple times (Mazzone, 2002). It extends the possibilities of self-determination for the individual with other like-minded people (Butler, 2015; Emerson, 1964). For Mazzone (2002), this group is a formalised non-governmental connection, whereas Butler (2015) agrees with it being non-governmental but does not assign the label "formalised" to it. Freedom of association can happen on different levels. The association can be intimate, like with families or close friends; personal, like with colleagues in an office; or tertiary, where the association is so big that individuals do not know each other (Mazzone, 2002).

The freedom of assembly is used when a group of people gathers, but the individuals do not necessarily share the same attitudes and do not have any meaningful relationships with each other (Butler, 2015; Hamilton, 2020). Enjoying the freedom of assembly is an act of performance, which, unlike association, does not happen if an individual does not actively engage. For that reason, freedom of assembly in practice is visible, tangible, and often audible (Butler, 2015; Hamilton, 2020). Assemblies can take private or public forms, like protests or demonstrations. COVID-19 restrictions, like social distancing or group limits, made it harder to enjoy this freedom during the pandemic (Buyse, 2021). This led to new forms of protest like online or balcony protests, which some might rather categorise as a case of freedom of expression since people did not gather. This just shows how deeply interwoven civil liberties are. As mentioned above, there is a great overlap between the freedom of association and the freedom of assembly. For example, protest camps, like occupations of woods by environmental movements, combine freedom of assembly and association by adding a time dimension and ideological unity to the group of individuals gathered (Hamilton, 2020). Also, other forms of assembly, like religious ceremonies, show that, in reality, the enjoyment of these freedoms often occurs together. For that reason, the combination of association and assembly used in HFI is also used in this research.

Under freedom of expression and information, all forms of communication, regardless of the way of communication or the contents of communication, ought to be protected (Howie, 2018). This includes, under Art. 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the freedom "to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any medium" (UN General Assembly, 1948). The expression can happen verbally and non-verbally and can take many different forms, as shown during the COVID-19 pandemic (Buyse, 2021). Freedom of expression and information is seen as a foundation for an open and free society, which has ramifications on personal as well as societal dimensions (Masferrer, 2023). That is because expression and public discourse shape society. In this case, people are not allowed to voice their ideas anymore, and a key element of democracy, the steering by the public, vanishes (Howie, 2018). Masferrer (2023) emphasises that freedom of expression also means tolerating dissenting opinions and not silencing them, except if

they are non-conforming in unacceptable ways, like hate speech. Freedom of expression also safeguards other dimensions of freedom by enabling individuals to point out shortcomings in the implementation of other liberties (Howie, 2018). In the HFI, press freedom and the use of the internet are included in this dimension. This is reasonable since the internet and the media are key sources of information and are also outlets for people to express themselves. For that, this study follows the example of Vásquez et al. (2022) and includes them as well.

Freedom of movement is a human right that people in the USA and EU often forget about because it is so natural to their daily lives (Hyltén-Cavallius, 2020; Wilhelm, 2010). Another reason is that, unlike freedom of speech or association, freedom of movement is less often at the centre of public debate (Wilhelm, 2010). Therefore, its relevance is most often felt as soon as freedom of movement is restricted. Article 13(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines freedom of movement as follows: "Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state" (UN General Assembly, 1948). Other treaties, like the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, further specify this right by adding the dimension of the lawful presence of an individual in a country, which is especially relevant for the migration debate (Beyani, 2000). Wellman (2016) adds that freedom of movement does not allow any (legally present) individual to wander around everywhere they want in a country, but that there are also boundaries. Determining how much freedom of movement is sufficient for a person's self-determination is a balancing act with other freedoms like privacy or health (Wellman, 2016). On a legal basis, states are allowed to tilt this balance and restrict freedom of movement for reasons like national security, public interest, or public health (Beyani, 2000). The latter was the ground on which many states restricted international and national freedom of movement (Bennoune, 2020). For that reason, freedom of movement in this research looks at the national and international scope.

The last dimension of freedom of the HFI that will be used in this research is 'Economic Freedom'. Economic aspects are related to freedom in two ways. It enables people in their process of self-determination and also makes other freedoms easier to achieve. Secondly, it is concerned with the freedom to make independent and self-determined economic decisions. Due to the fact that economic aspects influence the possibilities of self-determination, the wilful limitation of economic decisions is also a form of coercion and deprivation of freedom (Vásquez et al., 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the many measures taken affected the second dimension of economic freedom: businesses were affected by government decisions regarding opening times, maximum number of customers, or export restrictions (Greer et al., 2021). In the HFI, this is described as regulation, concerned with business and labour regulations, and freedom to trade internationally, covering, amongst others, the international movement of people, services, and goods.

In short, this research uses the operationalisation of freedom in the categories: Rule of Law; Safety and Health; Association and Assembly; Expression and Information; Movement; and Economic Freedom. Table 3 gives a summarised overview of the freedom dimension used in this

research, including examples. There are still many other possibilities on how to define freedom, but for this research, this categorisation based on the HIF, in addition to the traditional negative and positive freedom categorisations, is expected to cover a broad range of different freedom definitions that party families could touch on during the parliamentary debate. How this construct is further used in this study will be explained in the upcoming section.

Table 3

Operationalised freedom dimensions of this research

	Examples Elements of the Dimension
Rule of Law	Fair and equal treatment; lawfulness of measures; boundaries of the state; etc.
Health & Safety	Bodily integrity; provisions for mental and physical health; vulnerable groups; etc.
Association & Assembly	Belonging to a group; meeting people; protest; religious gatherings; etc.
Expression & Information	Press freedom; distribution of information; accessibility of information; etc.
Movement	Travel; moving in public spaces; choosing place of residence; etc.
Economic Freedom	Own economic decisions; no intervention by state; free international trade; etc.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH IN THIS STUDY

A qualitative approach instead of a quantitative one is chosen because, as shown in the theoretical background, freedom is a concept open to many interpretations. Therefore, it is assumed that looking at the latent meaning politicians convey in their speeches is necessary to capture their definition of freedom. It is also believed that the in-depth results this research aims to achieve are not possible with a quantitative focus on, for example, the frequencies of themes and words. Thus, a qualitative approach is chosen. Since this research is concerned with the parliamentary debate, a key institution of the state in Germany and the Netherlands that shapes social reality (Graeff, 2012; Hell, 2005), using discourse analysis might be the obvious choice. It is a great method for gaining a broader and deeper understanding of how social realities are constructed based on document analysis (Herrera & Braumoeller, 2004). The notions of discourse coalitions, which form to challenge the current dominant discourse (Kerchner, 2006), or the fluidity of discourses over time, meaning that discourses are always temporary and never lasting (Weber, 2013), are of interest to this study. However, the aspect of power relations based on discourses, which is very important to critical discourse analysis (Kerchner, 2006), is not relevant to this study. But there is another type of discourse analysis-related approach that is more suitable: qualitative content analysis (Kerchner, 2006). It is an alternative form of textual analysis that will be briefly explained here.

Qualitative content analysis is still a fairly new qualitative research approach that is sometimes placed independently of discourse analysis and sometimes as part of it (Drisko &

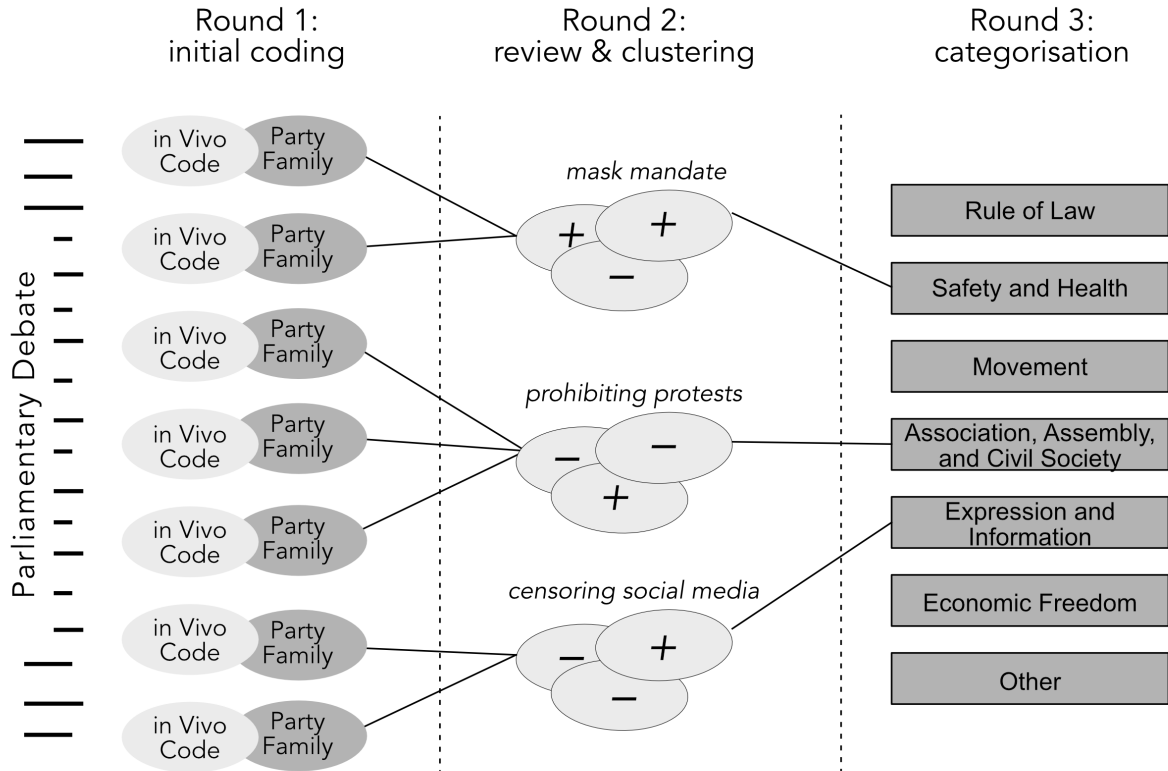
Maschi, 2015). That is probably because it emerged from quantitative content analysis (Diaz-Bone & Weischer, 2015) and tried to address the criticisms researchers from discourse analysis voiced towards quantitative discourse analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2015; Herrera & Braumoeller, 2004). Qualitative content analysis also follows a constructivist epistemology (Schreier, 2012). Just like discourse analysis, qualitative content analysis views the units of analysis in the context in which they were voiced and tries to understand the 'latent' (underlying) meaning of a text (Ritsert, 1975). Even though documents analysed in qualitative content analysis are also seen as part of a wider environment of communication (macro level) (Mayring, 2015), it is narrower than discourse analysis, which, for example, also looks at the historical roots of discourses and extends the analysis beyond the meaning of a text (Drisko & Maschi, 2015; Herrera & Braumoeller, 2004). That is done by also considering the speakers, gestures, and linguistics. Another aspect in which qualitative content analysis distinguishes itself from other forms of discourse analysis is the systematic and partly deductive approach, the latter being foreign to other discourse analysis approaches (Schreier, 2012). Qualitative content analysis can range from being partly deductive with a basic coding scheme that is further extended throughout the analysis to being fully inductive following a rather grounded theory and explorative approach (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). For the rest, qualitative content analysis has much overlap with other discourse analysis approaches, to the extent that they are often mixed up (Baxter, 2020).

3.4 QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS APPLIED IN THIS RESEARCH

This research predominantly uses a qualitative content analysis approach, with some elements from other discourse analysis approaches, as suggested by Hardy, Harley, and Philips (2004). The main focus of this study is the content and meaning of the debates, while still considering the context in which they took place. A basic coding scheme is constructed based on the literature review on party families and the operationalisation of freedom. This is extended and refined throughout the analysis. For this research, a three-step approach is chosen where each iteration reduces the number of codes, with the codes eventually being assigned to the freedom dimensions mentioned above. In the initial round, in Vivo coding is used as an inductive approach. This is done to ensure that the codes stay as true as possible to the meaning and tone of the MPs voicing their viewpoint. Coding units are single or multiple sentences communicating one idea. As suggested by Saldaña (2016), this is done to keep the codes small enough to catch all nuances while not getting lost in details, as can happen when following a line-by-line approach. In this first round, all references to freedom are coded, as are the party-family associations and government or MP's positions. In the second round, the codes are reviewed and coded with the dummy variables of negative and positive freedom. Round two also includes the clustering of data per debate according to common themes. Whereas the initial in Vivo codes are in the language of the respective debate, the categories are defined in English. In the last round, the code clusters of all debates of one country are grouped again and assigned to the dimensions defined in the previous section. Figure 1 visualises this process. After the final categorisation the results are analysed regarding the two sub-questions.

Figure 1

Schematic Visualisation of Analysis Approach used in this Research



4. Analysis

4.1 RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of this research are presented. First, some general statements are made before going into detail with every party family. Throughout the years 2020 and 2022, all freedom dimensions were (indirectly) referred to, but not equally, by all party families. As shown in Table 4, the dimensions of 'Health and Safety', 'Rule of Law' and 'Movement' were the most prominent in quantitative terms in the debates analysed. In the majority of the debates, the agents that were referred to by the MPs and that were limited or enabled through the measures were the citizens or economic sectors. Sometimes societal groups like children or churches were also named as agents. On very rare occasions, MPs referred to themselves. Even though not all references to freedom could be assigned to positive or negative freedom, parties indirectly mentioned them. Some parties had a stronger negative profile, whereas others tended to refer more strongly to positive freedom. This is explained, if applicable, per party in the upcoming section. There, the results are presented per party family, including the development of the freedom definition over time and representative or outstanding quotes.

Table 4

Quantitative Counts of Freedom Dimensions per Party Family

	Liberals	Social Democrats	Christian Democrats	Greens	Radical Left	Radical Right	Total
Rule of Law	37	16	38	39	20	48	198
Health & Safety	36	38	62	33	12	33	214
Association & Assembly	9	4	23	5	1	14	56
Expression & Information	12	3	8	1	0	3	27
Movement	38	12	22	16	4	48	140
Economic	33	15	21	19	18	9	115
Other	40	10	38	12	8	55	163
Total	205	98	212	125	63	210	913

4.1.1 LIBERAL PARTY FAMILY

In quantitative terms, the liberal party family mentioned all freedom dimensions, except for 'Association and Assembly' and 'Expression and Information', nearly equally many times, ranging from 33 to 38 counts (see Table 4). In qualitative terms, the liberals emphasised economic freedom and promoted giving companies and individuals the freedom to choose for themselves (e.g., if they want to get vaccinated or open their business), as long as they bear the responsibility for the consequences. In the dimension of 'Rule of Law' it becomes evident that liberals only agreed to restrictions if they were proportional, proven to be working, and necessary. They usually requested alternative and softer measures or tried to negotiate to lessen the restriction on freedom. A good example of their approach to proportionality is the following from the Dutch debate on the curfew:

“In addition there is the question of effectiveness of a curfew. Will it help us, getting our freedom back?”

(Jetten (D66), Tweede Kamer, 47th plenary session, 21 January 2021)

For liberals, 'Health and Safety' had limited importance. They did not explicitly mention that health is more relevant than other rights or freedoms. In the first German debate analysed from April 2020, the party leader of the FDP even said that the course of valuing health higher than other freedoms is outdated.

“We must not play freedom off against health. The country is further than that.”

(Linder (FDP), Bundestag plenary session 19-156, p. 19304 B)

For the rest, they acknowledged that the COVID-19 vaccination can bring more freedom, and for that reason, they promoted voluntary vaccination. Again, every individual is responsible for their choices and their lives. Not only in regards to vaccination but also when it is about preventive measures and living a healthy life, liberals did not perceive the state as responsible for this task. In the debates analysed, the liberal parties did not take a particular position on freedom of association and assembly. However, they were vocal on issues regarding the freedoms of information and expression. In both countries, MPs pointed at disinformation and even communicated that it is a part of freedom of expression but that it should be removed from the discourse. This combination of granting freedom but only to a certain degree was repeated in the German debate in April 2022, when mandatory consulting sessions on vaccination were discussed. The vaccination would remain voluntary, but the consultation is mandatory. Freedom of movement is a high value for liberals. They opposed the curfew, and in the Netherlands, they only agreed with it after it was set to start at a later time. The COVID Pass also restricted the freedom of movement for some people, but it also granted more freedom to many who fulfilled the conditions. The liberal parties supported this measure. Again, referring to the responsibility of every individual for the consequences of their choices. One group that the liberals were less strict with were businesses and companies. The liberal parties in the Netherlands did not support the idea that workplaces would have to check the COVID Pass of employees, stating that employers should decide together with employees the best way of guaranteeing a safe work environment. In Germany, the FDP also requested more freedom for store owners or restaurant businesses to decide on their own measures in consultation with public authorities. They also made the importance of economic freedom more clear:

“But at some point we will also have to bind the chains of intervention in our free economic order. Because the state is certainly not the better entrepreneur.”

(Linder (FDP), Bundestag plenary session 19-156, p. 19306 A)

When talking about economic freedom, the liberals also clearly referred to negative freedom, as can be seen in the quote above. In general, the liberal parties mentioned the economic sector first when talking about lifting restrictions, vulnerable groups (entrepreneurs), or freedom of movement. Over time, the definition of freedom did not change much. The Dutch liberals' position stayed the same, whereas the German liberals became less expressive over time when talking about freedom. Especially their demand for economic negative freedom became less. There is a slight increase in in-group diversity, but overall economic freedom, freedom of movement, and the responsibility of the individual for their choices are liberal red threads through the debates analysed.

4.1.2 SOCIAL DEMOCRATS

In the debates analysed, **Social Democrats** in both countries were rather moderate and less outspoken on freedom. That applies to the content of their speeches as well as to the numeric dimension with 98 counts, as visible in Table 4. That is the second-lowest total among all

party families. Their main freedom dimension was 'Health and Safety'. Especially the aspects of protecting children and enabling them to go to school again were returning issues in the debates for them. The Social Democrats supported most measures. They also questioned freedom-restricting measures but put a stronger emphasis on protecting the health and safety of citizens. In the first dimension of freedom, the concern of this party family was that the measures had to be appropriate and necessary. The Social Democrats acknowledged that freedom is a balancing act.

“Imposing a curfew is not a nice measure, but we do it. We do it because we think it is necessary to relieve the burden of care, because we think it is necessary to bring down infection rates.”

(Kuiken (PvdA), Tweede Kamer, 57th plenary session, 18 February 2021)

As visible in the quote, the parties in this family agreed on freedom restrictions because they perceived them as necessary to ensure health and safety on a larger scale. That was also their key concern throughout the debates: protecting vulnerable groups and keeping the public health sector running. Health was to them more important than the economy, as can be seen by their rather cautious approach to opening stores and businesses. The priority of public health over individual freedoms was also visible in the mandatory vaccination debate in the German parliament.

“Take the best possible precautions before next winter; vaccination is irreplaceable, especially for the elderly. Let's do everything we can to avoid overburdening the health system”

(Schwartzke (SDP), Bundestag plenary session 20-028, p. 2352 C)

The dimension of 'Association and Assembly' does not include any specific comments besides the wish to meet people again. Similar can be said about the dimension 'Expression and Information', which was more present in the German debates. Here is one of the few remarks on press freedom:

“But freedom of the press is restricted by the lateral thinkers, not by the state!”

(Hendricks (SDP), Bundestag plenary session 19-223, p. 28212 D)

Looking at freedom of movement, the Social Democrats did again take the position that infringements on individual freedoms are a harsh measure, but if instruments like curfews or COVID Pass are needed, they approve them. For example, the introduction of COVID Passes in public transport was defended by ensuring a safe journey for everyone. On the dimension of economic freedom, this party family saw and discussed the freedom restrictions of businesses or cultural institutions but did not formulate strong demands. Regarding workers' rights, they were slightly more direct but still did not put much pressure on companies.

Throughout the debates, the Social Democratic family focused on health and safety for everyone and made sure that the measures were legally and morally sound. That did not change much over time. Only the German branch referred to the relevance of economic freedom in the plenary sessions after the 2021 elections without directly promoting economic freedom.

4.1.3 CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS

The **Christian Democrats** put much emphasis on 'Health and Safety' and 'Rule of Law'. Table 4 shows that 'Health and Safety' is by far the most frequently mentioned dimension (62 times), with almost twice as many counts as the 'Rule of Law' dimension (38 times). They hardly used the term 'freedom', but rather referred to it as rights. Christian Democrats also valued the rights of the collective, or society, higher than the rights of the individual. They had a slight tendency to refer to negative freedom. The Christian Democrats were the only family that explicitly defined freedom. In a debate on the curfew in the Dutch parliament, the following definition was given:

“How do you understand the word "freedom"? Freedom can be understood as an I-word: it is about "my" freedom. But in the Christian Democratic tradition, which I stand for, it is more of a we-word. My freedom is never something that only governs me. It is about the space I can share with others. In that space, I also encounter people who have poor health, for example, who are chronically ill or who are worried about what the coronavirus means for them. In that balancing of these different aspects, I think the concept of freedom emerges. When I weigh that up, once again I think: I can stand for this curfew, even in terms of curtailing my freedom.”

(Van Dam (CDA), Tweede Kamer, 57th plenary session, 18 February 2021)

In the 'Rule of Law' dimension, Christian Democrats explained and defended the measures taken based on proportionality and legal concerns in eight out of ten debates. This consideration for proportionality also returns to the second freedom dimension, 'Health and Safety'. Christian Democrats in general supported the notion that health is a superior right to other freedoms, but the alternative options and consequences should be weighed. In both countries, the parties stated that it is an active decision to make health relatively stronger.

“The protection of health does not apply absolutely; but we have decided that the protection of health will be given a relatively stronger weight in this pandemic.”

(Minister Spahn (CDU/CSU), Bundestag plenary session 19-191, p. 24058 C)

However, it is not absolute, and for that reason, this family also opposed mandatory vaccination because, in the debates analysed, it was perceived as the wrong timing. Nevertheless, they described the vaccination as a way to freedom and strongly advised it. Concerning the freedom of assembly and association, examples that this party family used come from a Christian setting, like visiting the church. In that regard, the Dutch branch also discussed

equal treatment of different groups. At the same time, it promoted the freedom of religious gatherings without strict rules but did not approve of protests taking place that did not follow advice like social distancing. Requests for more freedom, like in the quote below, were rarely that explicit, but it gives a good impression of the relevance of Christian values.

“There are lots of people who also want to exercise the fundamental right to go to church, but they are capped to this day; that just happens to be inside. Would it not be logical and would the minister not insist that the number of demonstrators is indeed capped?”

(Van Dam (CDA), Tweede Kamer, 77e plenary session, 02 June 2020)

Even though the dimension "Freedom of Expression and Information" is small on a quantitative scale, the emphasis with which freedom of speech and the press were defended in reaction to other party comments shows that it is relevant to Christian Democrats. They also positioned themselves against disinformation and its spread but still acknowledged freedom of expression.

“And yes, being loud, being against, even denying the obvious - all this is possible and must be possible in a free, open country.”

(Minister Spahn (CDU/CSU), Bundestag plenary session 19-191, p. 24059 B)

Christian Democrats generally supported the restriction of the freedom movement based on health reasons and did not refer to it in noteworthy ways. Economic freedom, on the other hand, was of greater importance to them. Discussions on measures often started with economic concerns before diving into social concerns or other freedom restrictions.

We must continue to realise that, for example, closing the borders completely to car traffic could have huge economic consequences for freight traffic and cause huge delays.

(Minister Grapperhaus (CDA), Tweede Kamer, 47th plenary session, 21 January 2021)

For the rest of the debates analysed, this party did not support workers' rights or state intervention in economic processes. The latter even got called "poison for growth, wealth, and employment" (Nüßlein (CDU/CSU), Bundestag plenary session 19-156, p. 19320 D). Their promotion of economic freedom did not include cultural institutions.

In the debates analysed, the Christian Democrats also showed a willingness to infringe on the sanctity of the home of private citizens and the right to privacy by collecting health data. On the time dimension, this party family kept their focus on health and economic freedom throughout the pandemic. Nonetheless, the criticism of anti-covid measures increased in the German branch in the last two debates.

4.1.4 GREEN PARTY FAMILY

The **Green party family** had a strong focus on the fair distribution of benefits and disadvantages caused by the pandemic and the measures taken, as well as on the well-being of youth. The PvdD (Party for the Animals) also emphasised animal rights in addition to human rights. In the 'Rule of Law' dimension, the most frequently mentioned aspect by this family (see Table 4), the Greens emphasised the importance of a steady legal footing, effectiveness, and proportionality by critically questioning new measures and referring to the democratic order. Fair and equal treatment was a key aspect for them in the first freedom dimension. During the Dutch debate in October 2020, one MP continuously pointed out the imbalance in how churches are treated compared to other associations that might have the same relevance to people.

“in Staphorst, there are voluntary agreements with communities on how many people can sit in the church at a time. These are voluntary agreements. At the same time, cultural institutions as well as associations face imposed measures.”

(Buitenweg (GroenLinks), Tweede Kamer, 11th plenary session, 07 October 2020)

In the Dimensions of 'Health and Safety', the Greens agreed that restricting measures had to be taken to protect this good. They suggested taking more preventive measures to protect society on different levels. Also, preventive measures that extend beyond the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure this right in the long term were suggested by this family. Their stance towards mandatory vaccination was mixed, based on a conflict between individual self-determination and the protections of the collective. The Greens put extra emphasis on the mental and physical well-being of children and youth. They criticised the measures as being too restrictive for this group.

“Indeed, protecting us from covid is as important as the mental health of our young people.”

(Klaver (GroenLinks), Tweede Kamer, 47th plenary session, 21 January 2021)

In the debates analysed, this party family did not make many references regarding the dimension of 'Association and Assembly'. The ones they made were more general, stating that a minimum number of contacts should be allowed, that the right to protest is important, and other similar statements. For the dimension of 'Expression and Information' even less can be said because only the German party made one statement supporting the freedom of speech. On freedom of movement, the Green party family was more vocal. They opposed the curfew because it is too intrusive from a social viewpoint and questionable from a constitutional angle. Still, one of the Dutch parties (GroenLinks) eventually supported the introduction of the curfew. The same divide can be seen with the introduction of the COVID Pass; the PvdD called it a repressive tool, whereas the other two family members approved the measure. An example where freedom of movement and party ideology are connected is the questioning of exceptions to the curfew. The

PvdD criticised the fact that hunters were excluded from following the curfew rules and described that as unnecessary discrimination.

“Indeed, we are already seeing very dubious categories being designated for exemptions. For example, hunters who go shooting at night for fun are already being exempted.”

(Van Esch (PvdD), Tweede Kamer, 57th plenary session, 18 February 2021)

In the dimension of 'Economic Freedom', green parties promoted the rights of cultural institutions to be opened, supported workers' rights against economic interests, and criticised that certain economic branches experience fewer restrictions than other parts of society. The PvdD took a more extreme stand on the latter and combined it with animal rights demands.

“I mention slaughterhouses and aviation, where this has been the case recently, yet civil rights have often been and are easily pushed aside.”

(Van Esch (PvdD), Tweede Kamer, 17th plenary session, 03 November 2021)

The Green party family did acknowledge that freedoms have to be balanced to ensure security and safety for society. They weighed social freedoms more than economic freedoms, especially with the focus on youth and, for the PvdD, also animals. Overall, the Greens also showed a strong orientation towards equal treatment. Throughout the pandemic, this did not change, and they referred to the same freedom dimension.

4.1.5 RADICAL LEFT

The **Radical Left** parties had a strong focus on people, weighting their needs more than economic freedom. Throughout all the debates analysed, this family made the fewest statements regarding freedom, with only 63 codes detected in total (see Table 4). They frequently referred to positive freedom, saying that the state is responsible for enabling citizens to enjoy their freedoms. In the 'Rule of Law' dimension, the parties focused on equal treatment of citizens compared to companies and, in the Dutch debate, the church. They were also sceptical of the way the government adopted new measures and perceived them as a threat to the democratic order.

“Restrictions on fundamental rights are being introduced virtually on the fly and without a time limit, and the powers of the government are being massively expanded. This is and remains intolerable. And I can assure you: Die Linke will never accept this.”

(Mohamed Ali (Die Linke), Bundestag plenary session 19-223, p. 28215 D)

In the second dimension, the Radical Left spoke of vulnerable groups like the elderly, children, and lower-income individuals, who were all especially threatened by the pandemic. The parties also opposed mandatory vaccination and were more sceptical of the COVID Pass. They preferred less coercive approaches.

“Go to people and explain to them the importance of vaccination. We see a lot more [potential] in that than in threats.”

(Hijink (SP), Tweede Kamer, 17th plenary session, 03 November 2021)

The freedom dimensions of "Association and Assembly" and "Expression and Information" were hardly or not mentioned by this party family. Regarding the Freedom Movement, the Radical Left preferred less intrusive measures and opposed the COVID Pass and curfew. Regardless of that, the Dutch SP still agreed to the curfew but criticised the government for not making an effort to prevent this from happening. The Radical Left put people before economic interests and therefore supported limitations on economic freedom. They supported stricter measures and the supervision of companies to ensure workers' rights and protection. The parties also criticised the fact that companies and the economy were granted more freedom than citizens.

“We, Die Linke, will reject this bill for reasons of content, namely because it treats entrepreneurs with kid gloves while imposing the most severe restrictions on others.”

(Korte (Die Linke), Bundestag plenary session 19-223, p. 28207 B)

All in all, the key focus of the Radical Left party family lay in ensuring equal treatment between economic and social interests and the freedoms of less wealthy individuals. This focus remained steady over the period analysed, as did the stance towards other freedom dimensions. Only in the German Left Party did fragmentation and less engagement become visible in the latter debates.

4.1.6 RADICAL RIGHT

The **Radical Right** parties described themselves as defenders of freedom and also mentioned the term "freedom" frequently. In quantitative terms, this family is, with 210 codes, the biggest opposition party. Especially strong is the emphasis on 'Rule of Law' and the 'Freedom of Movement' dimension (see Table 4). They opposed all measures suggested by the government and used negative freedom as the main construct for their argumentation. That was also evident when they referred to the rule of law and basic rights. Here, the government was described as an overly intrusive force that cuts off citizens' rights.

“Ladies and gentlemen, fundamental rights are defensive rights of the citizen against the state. The state is always encroaching; that is its nature.”

(Gauland (AfD), Bundestag plenary session 19-223, p. 28212 D)

On the dimension 'Health and Safety', it did not support the notion that health is a superior right to other basic rights. Therefore, the Radical Right did not support any preventive measures, like mandatory vaccination or face masks, to ensure health and safety on a collective scale. Instead, they frequently referred to the individual's right to make their own choice. It can be seen

that every time they talked about vaccination, the term 'voluntary' was included one way or another.

“It is moving agonisingly slowly, when of course voluntary vaccination is the solution to regaining our freedom.”

(Wilders (PVV), Tweede Kamer, 47th plenary session, 21 January 2021)

This freedom of choice was not granted to every group of the population. That becomes evident when looking at a comment by the PVV on the lower percentage of vaccination among people with a migration background, where Wilders hinted towards a vaccination mandate for these people.

“Wouldn't it be sensible if those people [non-native Dutch] would voluntarily reach the same percentage [of vaccination] as the Dutch native population? Then we would have one less big problem in hospitals.”

(Wilders (PVV), Tweede Kamer, 17th plenary session, 03 November 2021)

Looking at the freedom dimension of 'Association and Assembly' the Radical Right sometimes promoted the right to protest (e.g., against COVID restrictions) and sometimes asked for more restrictions on protests (e.g., Black Lives Matter protests). This party family referred even less to freedom of expression and information. Here, it only criticises the government for not sharing enough data with the parliament and the public. More statements can be found when looking at freedom of movement. The Radical Right parties opposed all restrictions on freedom of movement on a national and international scale because they were disproportionate, according to them. They also opposed the use of the COVID Pass because, according to them, it is not effective and only serves to coerce citizens to get vaccinated.

“2 G and 3 G serve to turn citizens into willing subjects through massive pressure. We, the AfD, do not go along with this.”

(Sichert (AfD), Bundestag plenary session 20-003, p. 130 B)

In regards to economic freedom, the Radical Right supported more economic freedom. All comments on easing restrictions on the economic sector were made with references to small businesses and retail stores. They requested to open all stores under certain conditions. The Radical Right family puts emphasis on the freedom of the individual and calls the state too invasive. That is a pattern that has continued through all debates by the Radical Right.

4.2 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how different party families define freedom. This was achieved using different dimensions of freedom based on the Human Freedom Index. This study shows that party families refer to freedoms directly and indirectly and

also show preferences for certain freedoms according to their party ideology. The frequent mentioning of 'Rule of Law', 'Health and Safety', and 'Movement' is due to the fact that this was a public health crisis and the debates analysed discussed predominantly issues from these dimensions. Based on that, it is assumed that the other dimensions are, in general, not less relevant but are just not in the spotlight of the selection of this research.

After these general conclusions, it is time to move on to answer sub-question one on the freedom dimension referred to per party family. The Christian - and Social Democrats have the least specific profiles and allude to all freedoms though mostly to the right to health. That becomes also evident from the code counts, where this dimension is by far the largest. Compared to other party families, the difference between 'Health and Safety' and the second biggest group, 'Rule of Law', visible in Table 4, is noteworthy on a quantitative dimension (Christian Democrats: 62 to 38; Social Democrats: 38 to 16). That underlines the relevance of this dimension to the Christian - and Social Democrats. Both party families were less sceptical about limiting freedoms for the sake of health and a running health system. This does not come as a surprise since both are major centre parties and try to keep a broad profile, as described by Keman and Pennings (2006). Looking back at the expectations formulated for the Christian Democrats, it can be said that they have been fulfilled. Christian Democrats indeed restricted individual freedoms, and in the Netherlands, they also treated Christian groups slightly differently in a positive sense. That is in line with expectation 3a. This preference treatment of Christian groups explains the surprisingly high count code in the dimension 'Association and Assemble'. They did not support the restriction of economic freedoms, fulfilling assumption 3b. However, their opposition to restrictions on economic freedom was not expected to the extent that was found in the debates. For the Social Democrats, the expectations set for this family are partly fulfilled. They referred less to self-enforcement than expected (expectation 2a) but did promote the limitation of economic freedom and suggest protective measures for workers (2b). So, also in regards to the expectations, the results for the two centre party families are in line with the descriptions by Keman and Pennings (2006).

The Liberal family strongly supported economic freedom and placed responsibility at the individual level. This finding is consistent with the finding by Rovny et al. (2022), who found that economic right parties tended to support opening the economy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first expectation (1a) formulated for this family, a heterogeneous definition of freedom among the family members, is not fulfilled. All parties swayed in a similar direction, just with different intensities. The second expectation (1b) formulated, which was that liberals would promote economic freedom and the freedom of the individual, is fulfilled. However, the reference to negative freedom was not consistent and was mostly used when promoting economic freedom. Therefore, the third expectation (1c) is only partly fulfilled. On a quantitative dimension, the liberal parties show the most balanced picture when looking at the mentions of the different freedom dimensions (see Table 4). It is remarkable that economic freedom was one of the less frequently mentioned but most fiercely defended freedoms. That shows that, despite its economic-centred focus, this party family is concerned with all freedom dimension. In addition, this discrepancy between quantitative and qualitative results shows the relevance of the research approach chosen in this study.

The opposite of the liberal's economic freedom approach is represented by the Radical Left. They requested stronger limitations of companies throughout all debates and supported government intervention to ensure workers' health. That fulfils the second expectation (5b) formulated for this party family. It is also in line with the findings of Rovny et al. (2022) and the description as anti-capitalist given by Charalambous and Lamprianou (2015). By demanding more enablement of workers through the state, they did have some of the most specific notions of positive freedom. The Radical Left was sceptical regarding the limitation of individual freedom, but they also opposed measures that could enable people to enjoy more rights, like the COVID Pass. Therefore, it cannot be clearly said if the expectation 5a on scepticism combined with the promotion of government intervention is fulfilled.

The Greens did predominantly refer to freedom as connected to fair and equal treatment, which ensures that everyone enjoys the same freedom. They did tend to restrict economic freedom for the sake of social equality. Therefore, expectation 4a is fulfilled. Regarding the second expectation (4b) of granting the individual more freedom by emphasising self-enforcement, this cannot be confirmed or rejected. They did not emphasise self-enforcement by individuals but rather by cultural and societal organisations. For that reason, the second expectation cannot be fully rejected. Another interesting aspect is that at times the Greens merged their environmentalist agenda with their freedom demands, which corresponds with the description by Ennsner (2012), who found that environmentalism is the key link between green parties. Especially the smaller PvdD tended to make more radical demands for protection for humans and animals to safeguard freedom for both. However, the high homogeneity Ennsner (2012) found in this group was not visible in this study. Just like the Liberals, the Greens were rather sceptical about restricting the freedoms of citizens but tended to agree after being supplied with sufficient proof. That means that to them, freedom is an important good, but that there are still aspects that weigh heavier than freedom, e.g., health.

Whereas the other party families (sometimes) agreed to restrict the freedoms of citizens, the Radical Right always opposed all measures. All expectations for this party family are fulfilled. They promoted freedoms that fit into the nativist-traditionalist paradigm (6a) and opposed freedom restrictions that were suggested by the government (6b). They frequently displayed themselves as protectors of freedom and blamed other parties for not doing the same. This pattern was also observed by Steuer (2022) in the Slovak debate. There, the extreme right took ownership of the human rights language and denied the severity of COVID-19. Something similar happened in the debates analysed, but with freedom instead of human rights, which are closely linked, as shown in the literature review. The Radical Right also referred massively to negative freedom, with a populist' style of blaming the state for stealing freedom from the common citizens. However, not all citizens appear to be equal in the view of the Radical Right. The Dutch Radical Right, for example, did hint that migrants might lose their freedom of choice regarding the vaccination. Immigration is another key issue for the Radical Right party family (see Ennsner, 2012), and therefore this shows again that the freedom definition is influenced by the ideology of a party family. Another aspect in which the Radical Right differs from the other party families is the little attention paid to economic freedom. As shown in Table 4, they mention it even less frequently than 'Association and Assembly', which with most other families was not a popular dimension.

They did mention aspects of economic freedom, but often as secondary freedom to other dimensions.

For all parties, the definition of freedom remained the same over the course of the pandemic. Depending on the debate, some aspects were highlighted stronger than others, but the bottom line remained the same. Only in the German parliament was a break visible in the last two debates, as the liberals took a slightly more social stand, the Christian Democrats became more sceptical towards suggested freedom restrictions, and the Radical Left made fewer comments on freedom. This is probably due to the elections and the new distribution of roles. The FDP, as the new coalition party, took a more moderate position, and the Christian Democrats, as the new opposition, put more emphasis on challenging the government and freedom-restricting measures. That explanation is supported by Rovny et al. (2022), who found that governments are more proactive in taking protective, thereby freedom-limiting, measures. That shift can as well be explained with the general notion of opposition parties as challengers of the government and presenters of alternative options and information to the voters (Demirkaya, 2019). Based on that, it is assumed that the opposition takes a more pronounced stance towards freedom because it calls into question the government's decision. The government, on the other hand, is focused on discipline across the coalition members to stay in power (Giannetti & Laver, 2009). That can be seen with the FDP, which, after forming a coalition with the German Greens and Social Democratic Party, moved closer to the more protection-focused position of the coalition partners. However, there was no shift in freedom definition observed with the German Greens. That is probably because they were sceptical but less critical of freedom restrictions compared to the FDP and already had a tendency towards restricting individual freedoms for the sake of health and safety. That resulted in a less extreme perceived change of approach towards freedom. The elections in the Netherlands did not lead to any new divisions of government or opposition positions, which could explain why no relevant changes in positioning towards freedom were observed after the election. This does not oppose the aforementioned theory, nor is it substantial proof of its accuracy. The observed shift in position of the FDP and the CDU towards freedom based on government or opposition roles should be taken with caution since it was only detected with two parties and the case selection does not allow for more observations going in that direction. Other factors may also play a role, as can be seen with the German Radical Left, which also showed a different position towards freedom after the election. It is not clear why they referred less to freedom, but one option might be that they shrank so much after the election and focused on other issues. Alternatively, an increased internal divide could have led to this.

4.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Almost all parliamentary debates analysed were concerned with concrete policies. Since parliamentary debates are a key aspect of the regulatory process, this section will look at ways in which the results of this research can be applied to the field of public administration. This section will focus especially on the risk assessment applied by parties and the regulatory instruments promoted by them.

All policies discussed during the plenary sessions studied had a strong focus on the government as the key regulator, defining the policy design with input from the parliament. That is not surprising since crises usually call for stronger centralised approaches in policy design (Howlett, 2009). That, combined with the intrusiveness of the policies selected, which resulted in legal as well as democratic hurdles (accountability, legitimacy, etc.) that had to be overcome, can explain why the policies studied in this research have a strong centralised profile. Another uniting factor across all debates is the policy goal in relation to freedom, which in the first place was securing health and safety. That becomes evident from the contents of the debates and also the counts of codes visible in Table 4, where it is shown that this freedom dimension was the most frequently mentioned aspect. It was pushed by the government as a key actor in issuing directives and proposing protective laws during the pandemic. The parliamentary groups embraced this emphasis on “Health and Safety” to certain degrees. The radical right has done so the least, and the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats the most. This difference in perceived importance of securing this freedom might come from the risk assessment done and promoted by the parties.

As previously mentioned, policymaking during the COVID-19 pandemic was mostly concerned with risk regulation. As explained by Hood et al. (2001), the intrusiveness of risk regulation depends on the perceived level of threat. This can be seen in the results of this research as well. Looking at, for example, the first Dutch debate on the curfew, it was visible that the party groups that agreed to the regulation stated their disapproval of invasive freedom restrictions but eventually agreed with the high-risk assessment and interventions proposed by the government. That was also visible in other debates. However, the risk assessment was not uniform within party families. As described in the results section, the more radical part of the Green party family did, for example, not support the curfew. Throughout all debates, the Radical Right party family did not agree with any of the risk assessments and tended to downplay the risk of COVID-19. Since the success of this particular regulation did not depend on their support, this was not of high relevance for adopting the policy. However, if the risk assessment on which a policy is based is not widely shared, intrusive measures are not approved by opposition parties. That became evident during the mandatory vaccination debates in Germany. There, the perceived severity of the threat was not shared by a sufficient number of MPs, and therefore the policy proposal was rejected. Based on that, it is proposed that risk assessment is a key determining factor for the success of an intrusive and freedom-restricting policy proposal. An alternative explanation for this different outcome for the Germany vaccination debate might be too little urgency. Baldwin et al. (2012) stated that risk assessment is never value free. However, most of the COVID-19 policymaking in Germany and the Netherlands was ad hoc and rather reactive (Toshkov et al., 2021). This time pressure might not have granted the freedom for great debates on the political dimension of what exactly the real risk is. The unsuccessful German policy proposal was a rather long-term precautionary regulation. That potentially took away the government's leverage.

Even though the risk assessment that “Health and Safety” is in danger and the notion that securing it is the overarching policy goal of higher importance than other freedom dimensions was shared by most party families, the view on the policy design differed amongst them. As shown in the result section Party families emphasised certain freedoms more than others in line with their

ideology. The Liberals emphasised economic freedom; the Greens and Social Democrats promoted the rights of youth; and the Radical Left promoted the freedoms of workers. Policy design is not a rational process but often a political one (Peters, 2018), and therefore it is not surprising that the different party families have different views on what policy output the public demands. Even though the government's risk assessment was created by expert committees, the resulting policies were still informed by political ideology (Rovny et al., 2022). Junjan (2020) indirectly promotes that by stating that policy design processes should not be entirely technocratic but should acknowledge societal values like equality, fairness, or democracy. This research looked at freedom as a value and what dimensions of freedom different parties promote. That is where this research adds to the field of public policymaking. In general, the regulations discussed during debates analysed in the frame of this research are typical command-and-control regulations. The state issued a regulation and penalised the infringement of the rules with fines. However, in certain sectors, parties pushed for enforced self-regulation or entirely voluntary regulation. The former is a regulatory concept where organisations and companies are allowed to draft their own regulations in accordance with a framework set by public authorities. If companies fail to comply with their regulations, the state jumps in and enforces the rules. This regulatory concept falls somewhere in between authoritative regulation and self-regulation (Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992). As a consequence organisations have more freedom and regulations tailored to their needs, but public authorities are still allowed to exercise some degree of control. As stated in the results, the liberal party family supported more economic freedom. As part of it, they requested that restaurants and retail businesses be allowed to create their own regulations to start operating again. Thereby, they would have been exempted from the general lockdown regulation and granted more freedom compared to other groups. In the Netherlands, they requested complete self-regulation, and in Germany, they demanded enforced self-regulation for economic actors. Another example of regulatory freedom for certain groups is the Dutch branch of the Christian Democrats. In the Netherlands, churches were allowed to exercise enforced self-regulation. The Christian Democratic ministers and party supported this approach. The Dutch Green Party family opposed this and requested equal treatment for all forms of association. That would have meant either enforced self-regulation or a command-and-control approach for all groups, spiritual and non-spiritual. The most extreme example is the Radical Right, which, as mentioned above, had a different risk assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic and, for that reason, demanded in the debates analysed a self-regulatory approach with a focus on the citizens. They wanted to enable citizens to make informed choices without any resulting obligations. That would have meant self-regulation and shifting all responsibility to the individual. An aspect omitted by the parties requesting more regulatory freedom are the negative externalities resulting from behaviour by individuals and companies, which are then borne by society (Howlett et al., 2009). These examples show that ideology and freedom are connected and influence not only the position of party families during parliamentary debates but also the regulatory design or demands of policies. The more freedom a party requests for a certain group, the less regulation it wants to confront them with. That also works the other way around, as shown with the Greens and the example of the churches. The fact that tradeoff considerations on a political value dimension (e.g., economic left-right) also happen in urgent risk regulation

processes was already described by Aven and Renn (2018). This research adds that party family ideology on freedom influences the policy instrument chosen and the control exercised by the government over this instrument.

In practice, this means that policymakers should be aware of the risk assessment embraced by the parties and how the degree to which it is shared across them influences the success of a policy. Another aspect is that the freedom definition used by parties influences the regulatory instruments of choice, often only benefiting the core electorate. Therefore, policymakers should be prepared to anticipate this inclination when drafting risk regulations during crises.

5. Conclusion

Coming back to the central research question: "How did different party families define freedom during the parliamentary debate on COVID-19 in Germany and the Netherlands in the years 2020 - 2022?", it can be said that the freedom definition per party family can be connected to their core ideology. There might be minor differences within families regarding specific freedoms, but the overall orientation is coherent. Regarding the temporal dimension, parties also steadily supported the same freedoms over time. Despite that, it is assumed that the degree to which a party defends a freedom also depends on their governing or opposition status. When that changes, the style of promoting freedom changes too. However, due to the case selection, this result should be taken with caution, and more research should be conducted.

This research shows two important implications. In the first place, there is a coherent freedom definition within party families based on their ideology. Until now, these two notions were not actively connected. In academic practice, this means two things: Firstly, freedom can be used as an additional dimension for defining and categorising party families. For example, this understanding can be helpful when conducting a cross-European comparative policy analysis looking at legislative debates on human rights. Secondly, the results confirm that defining party families based on ideology is a sound approach to categorising parties. This adds more certainty to the application of this concept in comparative public governance research in the European context. That links to the second implication of this study. The research gap detected beforehand was on the applicability of the concept of party families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this study confirm that, at least in the Netherlands and Germany, parties behave similarly to their ideological counterparts in the other country, despite the priority of national interests in the pandemic situation. This underlines the stability and usability of the concept of party families, even in extraordinary circumstances.

Setting the results in a bigger context, they can potentially be used for future crises or extraordinary circumstances that require freedom restrictions. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic was a short- to medium-long health crisis, it is believed that the findings can help understand decisions by parties in other types of crises. As visible in the results of this research, parties had a preference for certain freedoms and referred to non-health-related freedoms like economic freedom and freedom of assembly. Similar developments are imaginable in other than public health-related crises as well. Additionally, it was also shown that the risk assessment and

freedom definition used by party families influenced the regulatory design during the pandemic. This dynamic likely extends to the policy-making process beyond crisis situations.

Although the results of this research are in line with other research findings, it is sensible to acknowledge several potential limitations. The first limitation is the definition of freedom. As shown in the literature review, freedom is a big and contested philosophical concept. There are many ways to define freedom, and this research used a very broad conceptualisation based on a quantitative index. This decision was made because there was no conceptualisation of freedom for party families yet. Using a broad conceptualisation made the definition of freedom a bit blurry while still leaving out aspects like freedom of choice. In addition, including HFI dimensions like 'Rule of Law' appears reasonable for people who know the Human Freedom Index but might be surprising to others. Despite these shortcomings, the broad conceptualisation was very useful for getting a first impression of how parties refer to freedom and was more than sufficient for this research. Closely related to that, a second potential limitation could be the use of inductive coding. The multi-stage coding process in this research funnelled broader freedom codes into previously set freedom dimensions. This was not only a very capacity-consuming approach but also needed good intuition and a knowledgeable coder to correctly cluster the codes into groups. A certain degree of coder bias cannot be ruled out, but it was tried to compensate for it by including a reviewer at the second stage of code clusters, where the first clusters are grouped again and assigned to the six freedom dimensions. Also included in the research was a review of the codes to ensure their fit with the research question. A third potential limitation of this research could be the choice of debates. Even though the debates were carefully selected to ensure sufficient representativeness of parties and issues in the years 2020 to 2022, it is still just a glimpse of the debates that were held during the chosen time frame. Even though a certain degree of saturation was reached, looking at more debates might have shown outliers like the statement by the Radical Right that freedom of choice to get vaccinated might not apply to people with a migration background. Unfortunately, the scope of this research did not allow for more data analysis. Still, it is confidently believed that this research found the overall freedom definition used by party families.

Since this was just the first research looking specifically into the definition of freedom by party families, there is still a great variety of other intriguing research that can be done in this direction. One avenue would be to focus stronger on one freedom dimension. This research tried to give a broad picture of the definition of freedom per party. Narrowing this down to one dimension and maybe also focusing on only one discourse might give a more accurate picture per party family. Especially the less discussed freedoms like expression and information would be a good starting point. Another future research project that would be useful to extend the current findings would be to look at more countries. The patterns detected here may simply be due to similar cultural aspects in Germany and the Netherlands. It is possible that in other cultural and political settings the freedom definition per party family differs. The last suggestion for future research that will be given here is to look at different communication channels. Looking at the online communication on social media would enable researchers to look at the freedom definition of multiple politicians at once, not just the ones speaking in parliament. Talk shows or media

interviews could be another alternative. Here, politicians have more freedom to talk about other issues than just policies, like an explicit elaboration on the meaning of freedom to them.

In conclusion, this study succeeded in combining the yet unlinked concepts of freedom and party families. This was just a first endeavour in doing so, and as just shown, this field still offers plenty of questions to study, also going in the direction of public administration. It is hoped that this research will inspire more investigation into that topic

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Appendix

APPENDIX A

Extract of Final Coding Iteration

This shows the last stage of the coding process, where the codes are already associated with a freedom dimension. The **bold** categories are code clusters per country, which contain clusters from different debates. Not all clusters are shown here. The numbers in front of the code cluster associated them with a specific debate.

Code		Comment
○ 1 Rule of Law		
○ NL Considering what measures should be taken		
	○ 5 Include social dimension when considering different measures	On the relevance of including societal dimension when considering new measures and not only epidemiological aspects Anchor: maatschappelijke kant moet ook in beeld gebracht worden [als het gaat om vrijheidsbeperkingen]
○ NL Equal treatment of different groups or sectors		
	○ 2 Equal treatment protests	That all protests should be treated equal and not a certain topic be favoured compared to others Example: Aard van demonstratie onderdeel van afweging
	○ 3 treatment Church opposed to other organisations	On the different (preference) treatment of churches compared to other organisations. Example: ongelijk behandeling kerk en vereniging
	○ 6 Vaccinated = right to more freedom?	This is about the question if people who are vaccinated should still be restricted in their freedoms Example: moeilijk dat gevaccineerde meerderheid toch weer in vrijheid beperkt wordt
○ NL Law perspective on freedom restrictions		
	○ 3 Legal basis for freedom restrictions	Limiting freedoms needs to have a steady legal basis Example: inperken van grondrechten heeft wettelijke basis nodig
	○ 5 Duration restriction when creating measures	Statements that underlining that measures always should have a time restriction Example: verder maatregel duurt hoe meer eisen
○ NL made to measure policies		
	○ 3 made-to-measure policies	Policy/measures should be adjusted to the local circumstances Example: maatwerk en verschillen religie

Code		Comment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 6 regional made to measure policies 	Proposals to make measures adjustable to local situations and thereby grant more freedom or isolate regions Example: regionale maatregelen om brandhaarden te kunnen isoleren
○ NL Proportionality of measures		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 3 Disproportionality of proposed law 	The proposed law is disproportionate and grants the minister of health too much power or has too strong measures Example: klinkt noodzakelijk en onschuldig maar is het niet
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 5 Proportionality consideration in relation to the curfew 	How proportionality is considered especially in connection to the curfew Example: proportionaliteit iedere keer in vraag stellen
○ NL questioning power of government		
	5 criticism against government	Freedom related criticism against the government. Example: kabinet doet veel moeite om Nederlanders gevangen te houden en hun vrijheden te beperken
○ GER arbitrary decision making		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9 Arbitrariness of cut off points 	Criticism that the law does not have proper scientific base but is rather arbitrary.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Z arbitrary decision making by Government 	On the (allegedly) arbitrary decision making by the government Example: beschlüsse Bundesregierung sind willkürlich
○ GER criteria for measures		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 7 restrictions needed to be well-reasoned 	On the well-reasoned base needed for freedom restrictions Example: alle freiheitsbeschränkten Maßnahmen müssen besonders begründet sein
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9 criteria measures should fulfill 	What kind of legal and quality standards measures should fulfill to be adequate. Example: hoffen das Grundrecht Eingriff was bringt reicht nicht aus -- wissenschaftliche evidenz
○ GER criticising government as unlawful or intrusive		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10 Government against wellbeing of citizens 	Statements on a too intrusive state that bends basic rights, breaks promises, and takes measures against the good of the country Example: wer als Politiker mit solchen Mitteln gegen das eigene Volk kämpft, überschreitet maßlos die eigenen Kompetenzen und beugt wieder unser Grundgesetz.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Z shortcomings of government led to freedom restriction 	Codes in which the inaction of the government is blamed Example: Anstatt Kinder und Ungeimpfte mit dem Infektionsschutzgesetz zu gängeln, müssen wir endlich die Attraktivität der Pflege massiv steigern.

Code		Comment
	○ GER more regional flexibility in measures	
	○ 10 move responsibility to state level	On granting state more power for deciding on measures fitting to their current pandemic situation. Example: weil es richtig ist, dass regionale und länderspezifische Maßnahmen von Landesparlamenten zu beschließen sind, wenn sie einschneidend sind.
	○ Z Regional restrictions	That restrictions should be or are adjusted to the needs of the states and local conditions Example: Trauen den Ländern das zu mit experimentierklauseln und vielen anderen Sachen
	○ GER positive discrimination of vaccinated	
	○ 9 granting vaccinated and cured individuals more freedoms	That vaccinated and cured people should receive more freedom, as well as that from a legal viewpoint they have receive more right. Example: keine rechtliche oder moralische Rechtfertigung in Grundrechtsausübung [2G] Personen einzugreifen
	○ GER relevance of courts	
	○ 7 independence of courts	How independent courts guarantee lawfulness of measures Example: unabhängige Justiz lässt sich nicht einschüchtern
	○ 8 criticising law as infringement of RoL and separation of powers	New law dissolves separation of powers and infringes legal procedures. Example: Jetzt schaffen Sie die Grundlage dafür, dass die Gerichte uns zukünftig nicht weiter vor dieser Politik schützen können.
	○ GER unfair unequal treatment	
	○ 7 unequal treatment of different actors	Why certain groups/sectors are treated better compared to others Example: Lokal unternehmen unfair behandelt gegenüber Großunternehmen
	○ 8 criticising the preferred treatment of business compared to normal citizens	Criticism that businesses are treated better than vulnerable groups or every day citizens Example: Ich will auch eines sagen: Ein Ziel in den nächsten Tagen muss doch sein, dass jeder Schüler, jeder Lehrer, jede Pflegekraft so schnell einen Test und ein Testergebnis bekommt wie jeder Bundesligaspieler.
	○ 2 Health and Safety	
	○ NL Freedom of choice Vaccination	
	○ 3 Vaccination not mandatory	That the vaccination will not be mandatory Example: niet voor vaccinatieplicht, ondermijnt draagvlak
	○ 5 Relevance of voluntary vaccinations	Is about VOLUNTARY vaccination Example: enig echt effectieve middel sneller vrijwillig vaccineren

Code		Comment
	○ 6 respect for unvaccinated and their choice	Codes that state that the choice to not get vaccinated should be respected, also when making policies Example: vaccinatie is een recht, geen plicht.
○ NL Preventive health measures		
	○ 4 preventive measures for the future	Concerned with long term prevention to secure health Example: bereid wezenlijke behoeften van mensen ingrijpen, maar weglopen van brede bescherming
○ NL Protecting (mental) health of vulnerable and youth		
	○ 3 protecting vulnerable people	About the relevance of protecting vulnerable groups Example: bescherming bieden aan de zwakken
	○ 5 relevance of schools and attention for youth	5 Underlining the relevance of schools and the youth for the parties, sometimes valuing it higher than the curfew itself Example: openen van middelbare scholen en jongeren ruimte geven
○ NL Restricting freedoms is adequate based on health concerns		
	○ 2 Reasons to restrict related to health	Public health is the reason why measures are taken Example: Vrijheidbeperkende om te winnen
	○ 3 balancing health and proportionality	Only measure should be taken that are supporting the public health. Other freedoms/rights should not be unnecessarily restricted Example Code: naast volksgezondheid ook andere belangen recht doen
	○ 6 see the need for new measures based on healthcare	Example: vrijheidsbeperking omdat te weinig zorg capaciteit
○ NL Vaccination as a way to freedom		
	○ 4 Vaccination as key to freedom	Statements where voluntary vaccination is described as the key to freedom and the end of the pandemic Example: vrijwillig vaccineren oplossing om vrijheid terug te krijgen
○ GER coercion to get vaccinated		
	○ 10 pressure on getting vaccinated	Codes that state that pressure and coercion is exercised on individuals to get vaccinated Example: sollen die Bürger immer stärker unter Druck setzen, sich impfen zu lassen.
	○ 11 Vaccination campaign without pressure	That the vaccination should happen without (societal) pressure or coercion. Example: denn eine Pflicht baut normativen Druck auf. Ich halte diesen normativen Druck für den falsche Weg, liebe Kol- leginnen und Kollegen
○ GER emphasising the individuals rights to health without Government interference		

Code		Comment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10 freedom of choice to get vaccinated 	It is up to the citizens to decide if they want to get vaccinated or not Example: Eine Impfentscheidung muss die individuelle Entscheidung eines jeden Bürgers bleiben.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 11 protecting bodily integrity 	On the right of bodily integrity and that it is a right the state should never infringe Example: Nach unserer Freiheit ist jetzt unser Körper an der Reihe.
○ GER exceptions to mandatory vaccination		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 11 exception from mandatory vaccination 	Cases when mandatory vaccination does not apply Example: eine Impfpflicht mit Ausnahmen für menschen mit körperlichen und psychischen Schäden
○ GER opposing mandatory vaccination		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8 no mandatory vaccinations 	Statements that vaccination will not become mandatory, but just an offer to people Example: geimpft werden ist keine pflicht sonder ein grundrecht
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 11 opposing mandatory vaccination based on health concerns 	Opposition on mandatory vaccination because the risks of the side effects are greater than the risks of COVID-19 Example: sie Wollen entscheiden dass jemand sich impfen lassen muss und dadurch unter Umständen stirbt
○ GER Right of health is not superior to other rights		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8 health is no superior basic right and should always be weighted against other rights 	Example: Schutz der Gesundheit nicht absolut und mit andere Grundrechten abzuwägen
○ GER right to health and life is superior to other freedoms/rights		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 7 the relevance Health compared to other rights 	On the balancing act of freedom and health Example: harte Einschränkungen notwendig um Lebens und Würde des einzelnen zu schützen
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10 public health is the top priority 	Public health is more important than other rights. All measures possible should be able to be used to guarantee this right Example: Deswegen will ich, dass wir das ganze Instru- mentarium zur Verfügung haben, das wir brauchen, um weitere Infektionen und damit Tote zu verhindern. Das ist der Punkt, um den es geht.
○ GER special protection of physical and mental wellbeing of children, youth, and families		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8 special position of families, children, and vulnerable people 	protection of the family, children and other vulnerable groups should receive priority Example: Kinderwohl muss einen viel höheren Stellenwert haben

Code		Comment
	○ 10 against school closures	Stating the school closures are against basic rights or are too far reaching measures Example: wir wollen keine pauschalen Grundrechtsreingriffe wie Schulschließungen.
	○ 11 impact on children and families	Stating that this
○ GER supporting mandatory/preventive measures		
	○ 11 mandatory vaccination to protect freedoms	Introducing mandatory vaccination to prevent future infringements of basic rights or freedoms. Example: besonders vulnerable Gruppen sind verpflichtet einen Impfnachweis. vorzuzeigen und verhindern damit weiter Grundrechteingriffe
	○ 11 preventive measures to ensure freedom	Put in place preventive measures now, to ensure freedom in future Example: Vorsorge heißt, heute zu handeln, um die Freiheit von morgen zu sichern.
○ GER vaccination as key to freedom		
	○ 10 relevance of vaccination to end restrictions	Showing how important vaccinations are to end the pandemic Example: impfen ist das wichtigste um aus dieser Lage raus zu kommen
	○ 11 vaccination leads to freedom	Vaccinations are the key to freedom and without it, restrictions will come back Example: Grundrechts Einschränkung können mit diesem Mittel [Impfpflicht] beendet werden
○ GER vulnerable groups need protection		
	○ Z focus on diverse vulnerable groups	Focus on groups that are either vulnerable or frequently forgotten (people with lower income or developing countries) Example: Auch Ältere waren eingeschränkt, waren manchmal sehr einsam, Kranke konnten nicht ausreichend behandelt werden
○ 3 Freedom of assembly and association		
○ NL Guaranteeing freedom to protest		
	○ 2 Guarantee freedom to protest	Statements that ensure that the right to protest is protected Example: Maximal mogelijk maken om te protesteren
○ NL Limits to freedom to protest		
	○ 2 Support right to protest but with restrictions	Right to protest is important, but in this moment of time this can only happen under conditions. Example: Natuurlijk is het demonstratierecht een grondrecht dat geldt voor iedereen, maar in deze tijd is het van belang dat te allen tijde, dus ook bij demonstraties en betogingen, wel die 1,5

Code		Comment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 6 boundaries to freedom of association 	Codes that are concerned with escalating demonstration or other threats towards individuals Example: als je mensen intimideert dan gaan we stevig op in
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NL social distancing 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 3 social distancing 	General comments to social distancing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NL visit limitations 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2 Visiting dear ones 	On the freedom to visit dear ones Example: (klein)kinder niet zien
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GER freedom to protest 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8 on freedom to protest 	Example: heute treten menschen für Ihre Grundrechte ein und werden überwacht
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GER religious gatherings 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 7 gathering in Churches 	A mix of freedom of religion and freedom of assembly, where individulas mentioned how they miss the church gatherings Example: Osterfest konnte für viele nicht in der Kirche Stattfinden
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GER restriction on freedom of assembly 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 7 on the wish or right the meet other people 	Different codes stating with relation to the option to assemble and how it is (not) restricted Example: versammlungsrecht kann nicht pauschal eingeschränkt werden
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8 meeting people is not possible anymore 	Statements on experiences that freedom of assembly is currently not guaranteed Example: Einschränkungen erfahren bei Versammlungsfreiheit
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GER securing freedom to assembly 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8 more guarantees for freedom of assembly 	Statmens that the new law ensures that freedom of assembly is better protected, now. Example: Hürden in Eingriffe des Versammlungsrecht sehr hoch gesetzt
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 4 Freedom of Expression and Information 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NL accessibility of Information 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 6 On sharing of sensitive data 	Codes that are concerned with privacy going both directions breaching and protecting Example: privacy schendend en een breach van veiligheid
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 6 Withholding information 	About (not) sharing information Example: U houdt ook de primaire ziekenhuisdata tegen
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NL Freedom of speech of MPs 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 6 Freedom of speech in parliament 	Is about the freedom of speech in the parliamneray setting and the dangers of abusing it by spreading fake news Example: vrijheid van meningsuiting heel groot en goed, maar proberen biinen de ruime interpretatie met techbdrijven tegen aan te gaan
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GER forced information 	

Code		Comment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 11 forced information intake 	Forcing people to get informed about vaccinations (through official channels) Example: Erstens. Wir geben der Beratung, der Aufklärung und der direkten Ansprache eine Chance und führen eine Beratungsnachweispflicht für alle ab 18 ein.
o GER freedom of expression as sign of free country		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 8 free country has to enable freedom of expression 	Example: lautsein, dagegen sein, leugnen muss möglich sein in einem freien Land
o GER freedom of media		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 7 freedom of media and speech 	Statements that underline the importance and value of press freedom and freedom of speech Example: mit freien Medien und kritischer Berichterstattung diese Krise bewältigen können.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 9 press freedom restriction by demonstrators 	How demonstrators or COVID-19 denier attack the press freedom Example: Aber die Pressefreiheit wird durch die Querdenker einge- schränkt, nicht durch den Staat!
o GER handling disinformation		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 11 dealing with false facts 	Codes that point out or discuss how to handle false facts. Example: Sie können Ihre Lügen hier wider besseres Wissen verbreiten.
o GER Right to access information		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 7 citizens have the right to this information 	On the importance of sharing information and make it accessible to citizens Example: Bürger haben Recht auf [info] erfahren
o 5 Freedom of Movement		
o NL Exceptions to Curfew		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 4 Exceptions from Curfew 	Cases when the curfew can be ignored Example: aangeliijnd hond uit laten
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 5 exceptions from curfew (including criticism) 	Exceptions from the curfew (freedoms that are valued high/relevant enough) including criticism against these exceptions Example: uitzondering avondklok jacht onaanvaardbaar
o NL Methods instead of Curfew		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 4 measures that could be taken instead of curfew 	Measures parliamentarians would have preferred over the curfew - Or measures they would have wished stronger implementation Example: eerst andere maatregelen dan avondklok
o NL Opposing Restrictions on Freedom of Movement		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 4 Rejection of Curfew (inacceptable and disproportionate) 	Descriptions of curfew as going too far, being ineffective, or disproportional Example: buitenproportionele maatregel met marginale effecten

Code		Comment
	○ 5 opposing the curfew	Statements showing that the respective party does not agree with curfew: sometimes with reasons Example: Forum voor Democratie is tegen de avondklok in welke vorm dan ook
	○ NL Restricting International movement	
	○ 4 restrictions on air travel	Codes regarding the announced flight restrictions and to what extent they are too late or not far reaching enough Example: Al heel lang voor vliegverbod
	○ Y international movement and potential restrictions	Example: zodra adviseren komt vliegverbod andere landen
	○ NL Supporting restrictions on Freedom of Movement	
	○ 4 Change of mind towards curfew	About the struggle parties have/had to wrap their heads around the idea of a curfew Example: Vorig week tegen, nu niet meer
	○ 5 Curfew as means to get more freedom	Curfew as an option to create more possibilities Example: avondklok om anderen mogelijkheden te creëren, bijv. scholen openen
	○ 6 Covidpass as a mean to give more freedom	Describe COVID pass as way to grant more freedoms to certain group of people Example: [QR-Code] geeft meer ruimte aan mensen en ondernemers voor een normaal als mogelijk leven
	○ GER general notion of freedom of movement	
	○ 7 on limitations of freedom of movement	Limitations on freedom of movement national and international Example: Es geht um die Freiheit, überall dort hinzugehen, wo man hingehen möchte,
	○ GER limitations to freedom to travel	
	○ Z restricting freedom to travel	On restrictions of the freedom to travel. Example: Einschnitt in die Reisefreiheit
	○ GER opposing restriction of Freedom of Movement	
	○ 9 opposing curfew	Opposing curfew because it is unjust, illegal, not effective and other reasons. Example: Ausgangssperren bringen gar nichts und schränken Grundrechte in unzulässiger Weise ein
	○ 10 opposing 2 G and 3 G rules	Opposing the 2 G and 3 G, because they are seen as unnecessary or too intrusive Example: Sie [2 G und 3 G] sind ein Lockdown auf Raten
	○ GER supporting Limitations on freedom of movement	
	○ 9 supporting the curfew	Support for curfew Example: zwei drittel der infektion finden im privaten Bereich statt, deswegen Kontakt- und ausgangsbeschränkungen

Code		Comment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10 support 3 G in public transport 	About the relevance of 3 G at in public transport to ensure public health Example: Wir schützen den öffentlichen Verkehr mit 3 G in den Zügen.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10 supporting 2 G and 3 G 	Statements that support the introduction of 2 G and 3 G rules Example: mehr und flächendeckend 2G
○ 6 Economic Freedom		
○ NL Closing of economic and cultural locations		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2 Closing down Companies 	That people had to shut down their company Example: bedrijven sluiten horeca regels
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 3 Freedom within health care sector 	Is about freedom measures within the health care sector
○ NL Economic freedom over other freedoms		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 4 economic considerations when drafting measures 	Codes where it was explicitly mentioned that economic concerns are weighted when discussing freedom restricting measures Example: sluiten van grenzen economische volgen
○ NL Pushing working from home		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 3 Economic restrictions to ensure freedom 	Economy should be restricted to ensure freedom. It does as well include concrete suggestions on what economic aspects should be limited Example: verbod beroepsmatig fokken
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 6 making working from home as mandatory as possible 	Enable everyone to work as much from home as possible Example: mensen die nu verplicht op kantoor werken, meer ruimte geven om thuis te werken
○ GER keep places of culture open		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10 supporting new law on cultural places and events 	Statements that the new law is not too weak and strikes a good balance between keeping cultural places open and being able to close them Example: Sie wollen es ermöglichen, Gottesdienste in der Adventszeit und in der Weihnachtszeit zu verbieten.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Z relevance of cultural places 	Statements underlining the importance of places for cultural expression and experiences. Also on granting these spaces more freedom. Example: Nur so schaffen wir Perspektiven für Öffnungen, für Kultur, für Begegnungen.
○ GER opposing the forced shutdown of businesses		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10 opposing general close down of businesses 	Opposing the measure of closing businesses and retail stores Example: Sie wollen flächendeckend Betriebe schließen können, obwohl das massive negative Auswirkungen hatte.

Code		Comment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 11 shutting down businesses 	The fear that businesses will have to shut down again if the next pandemic wave comes Example: wieder Schließungen in der Gastronomie auf den Weg zu bringen
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GER places of culture should be closed for safety 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10 cultural places should be closed 	Criticism that bars, clubs, muse etc. are more difficult to close based on pandemic reasoning with the new law Example: Bars und Klubs sind die Hotspots, das sind die Pandemietreiber, die müssen geschlossen werden können.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GER promoting free markets 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 7 opposition towards state intervention in markets 	Codes that totally oppose interventions by the state in the market or economy Example: staat in Wirtschaft ist Gift für wachstum, wohlstand, und Beschäftigung
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GER supporting economic restrictions 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 7 supporting stronger economic restrictions 	Statements that ask for restricting the economy a bit longer or more to ensure health and safety Example: können viele im wirtschaftlichen Bereich wieder korrigieren, aber nicht den Verlust von leben
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8 opposition towards economic freedom and capitalist mindest 	Codes that communicate that free market are harmful for freedom or safety of society Example: die Marktlogik muss raus aus unserer Gesellschaft
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GER tentatively open some economic sectors 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 7 opening economy under some COVID restrictions 	Suggestions to open business, but under health protections regulations Example: Auflagen bei Anzahl von tische und maskenpflicht [ways to open restaurant business]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8 grant businesses opening opportunities 	That businesses should not be closed unconditionally, but that some receive the freedom to open under certain conditions or after approval by local laws. Example: fehlt möglichkeit Betriebe behördlich genehmigt von Beschränkungen zu befreien
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GER workers rights 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 7 Protecting workers more important than economy 	Saying that if companies open again, it should be done with greatest care for the health of the employees Example: Gesundheitsschutz der Arbeitnehmer
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9 more restriction in the work context 	Discussing that restrictions in the work context are becoming mandatory or are intensified. All in order to protect employees. Example: Brauchen endlich Schutz für Arbeitnehmer

Code		Comment
○ Other Freedom related references		
○ NL General references to freedom		
	○ 3 Current state of freedom	Description by the parties of the current state of freedom Example: vrijheden staan onder druk
	○ 3 General basic rights reference	A reference to (a) basic right(s) in general Example: recht op vereniging
	○ 3 party specifics	Certain freedom positions assigned to certain parties Example: PVV altijd opkomen voor geiligheid en vrijheid van NL
	○ 5 fight for freedom	Codes that state the willingness to fight for freedom Example: iedereen in dit huis is voor vrijheid
	○ Y collective freedom over individual	Example: Niet het individuele belang staat voorop, maar het collectieve belang
○ NL Other measures and Freedom		
	○ 3 Establish other measures before introducing heavy restrictions	Other measure, like National wide availability of covid tests, should be introduced properly, before limiting freedoms Example: burgerlijke vrijheden beperken alleen alles andere is ook gedaan
	○ 3 restrictions (were) needed	About the necessity of (certain) measures. Necessity is often used as argument. Example: dingen hebben omdat nou eenmaal moeten tegengaan
	○ 6 no stronger restriction of freedom	Statements that show disapproval of stronger measures especially of lockdowns Example: willen geen lockdowns of sluiting van sectoren
	• avondklok alternatief voor helemaal thuis blijven	
	• lockdown erger dan avondklok	
○ NL Trust people and give them more freedom		
	○ 4 trusting people to follow measures	No need for hard rules, but rather advices to stick to measures because the citizens can be trusted Example: vertrouwen op verantwoordelijkheidsgevoel van de Nederlanders
○ NL Other freedoms		
	○ 3 ensuring sanctity of home	The basic right of sanctity of the home should be protected and infringing on it would be disproportionate Example: inbreuk van vrijheid en privé-leven
	○ 3 non-human freedom concerns	Referring to freedom of animals Example: dierhoudsector ingrijpen als risico's voor gezondheid ontstaan
○ GER collective over the individual		

Code		Comment
	○ 11 collective needs over individual freedom	Freedom or needs of the collective are more important than individual freedoms. The measures are about protecting society. Example: Doch auch die persönliche Freiheit ist ein hohes Gut, genauso wie das gesellschaftliche Miteinander und ein funktionierendes Gesundheitssystem, und zwar für alle, die es brauchen.
	○ Z protection of the collective	Protecting the collective is more important than the rights of the individuals. As well as it is a task of the collective. Example: Gesundheitsschutz aufgabe für staatliche verantwortung und nicht individuelle
	○ GER giving responsibility to the individual	
	○ 7 Giving the individuals more responsibility	The citizens are trustworthy and reliable and can get more responsibility. That state should be taking on less responsibility Example: Der Staat ist überflüssig, alles läuft von selbst
	○ 11 liberty of the individual	The state has no right to interfere with the authority and decisions of the individual. Example: Wer gibt Ihnen nun das Recht, mich nach einem so langen, erfolgreichen Leben zu entmündigen?
	○ GER infringing right to privacy	
	○ 8 references to privacy	Concerns on the privacy aspect of some covid measures Example: Corona-App, Kontaktverfolgung, digi- tale Gesundheitskontrolle
	○ 11 mandatro sharing of health data	Wanting a mandatory registry of the vaccination status of citizens Example: Wir möchten erstens ein Impfregis- ter, um zu wissen, wer denn überhaupt in unserem Land geimpft ist.
	○ GER other codes	
	○ 7 Current state of economy under restrictions	The effect the current measures have on the economy Example: die wirtschaftlichen Kosten sind hoch [nennt Beispiele]
	○ 7 general references on easing restrcition without clear relation to any freedom	Statements where people asked for easing restrictions but did not make a clear link to any freedom and kept it rather vague Example: schrittweise lockering ist gesundheitlich geboten

Code		Comment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9 current restrictions example for future restrictions to come 	Concerns that the restrictions that are in place now, will be used in future scenarios again. Some also fear that it is just a try out to improve the measures. Example: aktuelle Grundrechtseinschränkungen als Blaupause für zukünftige Katastrophen. Klimakrise u.A. wo nicht mehr gesellschaftliche diskutiert wird und politik ausgeschlossen wird
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9 far ranging measures are never acceptable 	That these are measures the parties would never accept, because that state is too intrusive Example: Grundrechte sind abwehrrechte gegen den Staat - Der Staat ist immer übergriffig
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Z party self-description 	Self-descriptions parties voiced that are connected to freedom Example: Als eine der Freiheit der Bürger verpflichtete Partei
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GER reference to instutions of basic rights and freedoms 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 7 notions on basic rights 	Some general remarks on basic rights with relation to freedom Example: Es gibt kein Grundrecht das über anderen steht
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GER sanctity of home 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8 sanctity of home 	Example: Einschränkungen erfahren bei unverletzlichkeit der Wohnung
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 - negative freedom 	Example: Meine Damen und Herren, die Grundrechte sind Abwehrrechte des Bürgers gegen den Staat. Der Staat ist immer übergriffig; das ist seine Natur.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 - positive freedom 	Enable individuals to make use of their freedoms. Example: Er zijn meer demonstraties op komst over het onderwerp waarover in Amsterdam werd gedemonstreerd, maar ook over andere onderwerpen. Ik zal er altijd voor staan dat we maximaal mogelijk maken dat mensen kunnen demonstreren.

Statutory Declaration

I hereby affirm that I am the sole author of this thesis, that I have not previously submitted it for examination to any other university or degree programme, and that I have not consulted any sources or tools other than those listed. The work clearly marks any passages that were taken literally or analogously from publications or other remarks made by third parties.

Münster, 18 September 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Karsten Debrück". The signature is written in a cursive style with a distinct loop at the end of the last name.