

Proposal Part B: technical description

DEMOCRACY BETWEEN COMPLACENCY AND EROSION (DEMCORE)

List of participants

Participant No. *	Participant organisation name	Short name	Country
1 (Coordinator)	University of Amsterdam	UVA	Netherlands
2	SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities	SWPS	Poland
3	University of Newcastle Upon Tyne	UNCL	UK
4	London School of Economics and Political Science	LSE	UK
5	GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences	GESIS	Germany
6	Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi	UCLB	Italy
7	University of Southern Denmark	SDU	Denmark
8	Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques	FNSP	France
9	Centre for European Policy Studies	CEPS	Belgium

Summary

Liberal democracy is under pressure in Europe. We have witnessed the rise of political parties that challenge core aspects of liberal democracy, such as an independent judiciary, a free press, gender equality and minority rights. While the EU champions the norms and principles of liberal democracy, this has not prevented democratic backsliding among some of its members, and elections to the European Parliament have provided a platform for vocal opposition to liberal democracy by challenger parties. This raises the question of the resilience of liberal democracy in Europe. How have the challenges to liberal democracy and support for core liberal democratic norms evolved over time? What is the electoral appeal of the messages by populist politicians opposing liberal democracy? And, importantly, how can we most effectively counter illiberal tendencies in European politics?

DEMCORE brings together world-leading scholars of political science, communication science, political psychology and data science to produce novel evidence to answer these important questions. It examines the challenges to liberal democracy by exploring the interactions between citizens and political elites both at the national and the European level. DEMCORE uniquely combines longitudinal data with the analysis of novel survey data, social media analysis and innovative experimental work to shed light on the key mechanisms driving support for, and challenges to, liberal democracy. By doing so, DEMCORE places recent developments of democratic backsliding in a long-term perspective, while at the same time mapping current challenges to liberal democratic norms and values and exploring how they can be effectively countered. In close collaboration with societal stakeholders, DEMCORE will develop evidence-based strategies to counter the appeal of illiberal democrats and thus contribute to liberal democratic resilience across Europe in the long run.

1. EXCELLENCE

DEMCORE studies **challenges to liberal democracy in the European Union (EU)**. While the EU aspires to defend core liberal democratic norms, including civil liberties and constitutional constraints on excessive executive power, and liberal democratic values such as gender equality, it has seen signs of democratic backsliding among some of its member states. While much of the scholarly focus has thus far dealt with the actions of political leaders that lead to **erosion of democracy** at the national level, DEMCORE offers a novel contribution by arguing that the resilience of European liberal democracies depends largely upon whether democratic governments and citizens express **complacency for the democratic institutions** that are designed to constrain their power.

DEMCORE's particular focus lies on the **interactions between citizens and political elites**. European citizens' support for liberal democratic norms and values are crucial for ensuring the legitimacy and resilience of liberal democracy across the continent. Political parties and politicians play a key role as they can both strengthen and uphold, but also seek to undermine, those same norms and values.

DEMCORE's second innovative approach is its explicit focus on the role of the EU. On the one hand, the European Commission and the European Parliament have taken several measures to prevent further democratic backsliding. On the other hand, this leads to a further politicisation of EU integration, which might inadvertently provide a platform for political agents to challenge liberal democracy within and across the EU. DEMCORE will unpack this **interplay between the supranational and national level in the EU**.

In doing so, DEMCORE's core objectives are:

- 1) To create an **in-depth understanding of the long-term trends** of support for liberal democracy among European citizens and political parties and the extent to which these are shaped by contextual factors and institutions.
- 2) To provide a **comprehensive account of the challenges that liberal democracy in Europe is currently facing** – both in terms of contestation of ideals in public discourse and in the electoral marketplace – and the role of historic, political and economic factors in this contestation.
- 3) To develop **strategies to counter illiberal democrats and ensure liberal democratic resilience** across Europe in the long run.

DEMCORE is designed by an interdisciplinary consortium of world-leading scholars and the first project to provide an **integrated account of long-term trends, current challenges and future implications with respect to liberal democracy in the EU**. Its theoretical innovation, analytical precision, open science approach, and evidence-based policy recommendations will provide for a lasting impact towards fostering a resilient liberal democracy within and across the EU. DEMCORE's key features are that it:

- **Develops an analytical framework** of the way historic, political and economic contexts shape past and future developments and current challenges to liberal democratic norms and values across time and space in the EU.
- **Goes beyond the state of the art** by arguing that the **interaction between political parties and citizens** within and across countries is imperative in shaping and defending civil liberties and liberal democratic institutions in the EU.
- Is **inclusive** by considering the gender dimension in the substance of the project, as well as in the composition of the consortium.
- Is **ambitious in its scope** through studying long-term trends of and current challenges to liberal democracy **across all EU member states**, while an **additional subsample of carefully selected countries** serves to evaluate the effect of different strategies to consolidate liberal democratic norms and values.
- **Breaks new ground through methodological innovation** with respect to measuring attitudes towards and preferences for liberal democratic norms and values among citizens and voters, in party manifestos, in public discourse and in political messages and offers all innovation to relevant stakeholders for re-use.
- **Stands out with its multi-method approach**, combining (automated) content analyses of political communication and social media content with representative surveys alongside experimental methods, and generates **novel data** with respect to support for liberal democratic norms and values in the EU.
- **Actively engages with key stakeholders from politics, media and civil society throughout the project** to learn from, test our ideas with and inform these communities, thereby proactively supporting the reinstating of the legitimacy and effectiveness of European liberal democracy.

1.1 Objectives and ambition

Defining features of liberal democracy are respect for and protection of core civil liberties and constitutional constraints on excessive executive power. These constitutional constraints consist of various procedures and institutions that are designed to limit the power of the executive, often referred to as ‘checks and balances’. Thereby, liberal democracy extends the elementary definition of electoral democracy (e.g. Coppedge et al. 2016). The ‘liberal’ components of democracy do not only ensure that elections remain free, fair, and competitive in the long run, they also protect the rights of individuals and minority groups against the abuse of government power, even if that government has an electoral mandate (e.g. Dahl 1956; Sartori 1995). Consequently, there is an *inherent tension* between the electoral pillar (based on majoritarian principles) and the constitutional pillar (designed to protect basic rights) of liberal democracy. The tension exists when civil liberties, such as minority rights and press freedom, constrain the executive’s ability to enforce ‘the will of the people’. It is captured in the distinction between ‘electoral democracies’ and ‘liberal democracies’, also found in the Varieties of Democracy classification (V-Dem, Coppedge et al. 2016). Both electoral and liberal democracies organise competitive elections, but liberal democracies also seek to protect “the rule of law ensuring respect for civil liberties, judicial constraints on the executive branch, and legislative checks and oversight of the executive” (Mechkova et al. 2017: 162).

The EU aspires to be a defender of liberal democracy: “The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities” (Art. 2, TEU). However, in several EU member states, most particularly Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia, we observe processes of ‘democratic backsliding’, which is the gradual erosion of the institutions designed to protect citizens’ civil liberties, to guarantee the rule of law, and to constrain the power of the executive (e.g. Bermeo 2016; Mechkova et al. 2017; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Freedom House 2020). These processes occur alongside political attacks on supranational institutions that seek to promote democracy and protect minority rights (De Vries and Hobolt 2020). As the EU is founded on the principles of liberal democracy, democratic backsliding in these member states leads increasingly to conflicts between the European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament (EP) on the one hand, and the national governments of these countries on the other. Thus, conflicts about the future of liberal democracy are increasingly waged at different levels; national, supranational and transnationally between these levels. Supporters of liberal democratic norms and values expect the EU to take measures against authoritarian tendencies in some of its member states. Yet, by interfering in the internal affairs of these countries, the EU inadvertently provides a platform for nationalistic agents who claim national sovereignty. As a result, Euroscepticism becomes increasingly aligned with challenges to liberal democracy, particularly in countries where the institutions of liberal democracy are under siege (Van der Brug et al. 2021a). **This dilemma constitutes the core of DEMCORE** and makes it a perfect fit with the EC’s ambition to fuel innovative research on democratic governance (‘Destination 1’ – Work Programme 2021-22 ‘Culture, creativity & inclusive society’).

Questions pertaining to challenges of liberal democracy within the EU have thus far been prominently addressed by scholars of political theory (e.g. Wolkenstein 2019), law (e.g. Castillo-Ortiz 2019; Halmai 2019; Kelemen 2017), international relations (e.g. Buzogány 2017; Sedelmeier 2014), and comparative politics (e.g. Bušítková and Guasti 2017; Cianetti et al. 2018; Schlipphak and Treib 2017). Among these kinds of scholars there is also a new interest in relation to the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for civil liberties as well as for checks and balances in democratic governance (e.g. Drinóczi and Bień-Kacała 2020; Engler et al. 2021; Guasti 2020). While all of these contributions are important and insightful, **DEMCORE argues that the interaction between political elites and citizens within and across countries is imperative in shaping and defending civil liberties and liberal democratic institutions in the EU**. After all, when democratic backsliding occurs, it happens gradually over a long period of time during which it will be subject to contestation of ideals of liberal democracy in public discourse and in the electoral marketplace (see also Bermeo 2016). Yet, this notion has received relatively little attention in extant research, which is why the interaction between citizens and political elites lies at the core of DEMCORE.

There is, of course, a large body of research into populism, a phenomenon which is often considered illiberal in itself (e.g. Mudde 2016). Populist claims tend to focus on the ‘will of the people’, anti-elitism and illiberal attitudes, such as against minorities, when brought to a fore in public discourse or in the electoral arena and have been therefore widely studied as such (e.g. Aalberg et al. 2016; Rooduijn et al. 2014; Stanley 2019). However, the contestation of civil liberties and the undermining of democratic institutions become more salient only once populist parties are in government (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012), which is when these particular phenomena are also subject to empirical research (e.g. Bartha et al. 2020; Grzymala-Busse 2019). However, in order **to understand key mechanisms and identify warning signs to ultimately counter illiberal tendencies**, it is key to focus both on countries with *and* without populist governments (i.e. different European political contexts) when considering how liberal democratic norms, including civil liberties and constitutional elements, and liberal democratic values, such as gender equality, are challenged by political agents and their supporters (see also Van der

Brug et al. 2021b). After all, illiberal tendencies are not only discernible in young democracies (e.g. Hungary, Poland), but also pose a threat to consolidated democracies (Levitsky and Way 2020). This is why the scope of DEMCORE is wide and the project focuses on all EU member states in studying long-term trends of and current challenges to liberal democracy. In addition, a carefully selected subsample of crucial EU countries allows the project to also evaluate the effect of different strategies to consolidate liberal democratic norms and values. This approach then enables DEMCORE to deliver key new insights into the way **historic, political and economic contexts** impact past and future developments alongside current challenges to liberal democratic norms and values across time and space in the EU. It not only makes the project unique, but also of critical importance for reinstating the legitimacy and effectiveness of European liberal democracy.

In doing so, DEMCORE will accomplish three ambitious objectives, of which the first is to provide:

1) An **in-depth understanding of the long-term trends** of support for liberal democracy among European citizens and political parties and the extent to which these are shaped by contextual factors and institutions.

Citizens' attitudes towards democracy have thus far covered a breadth of concepts, including support for democracy in general (e.g. Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Inglehart 2003), satisfaction with democracy (e.g. Hobolt 2012; Karp et al. 2003), attitudes towards and support for the current system of government (Almond and Verba 1963) and trust in democratic institutions (e.g. Hakhverdian and Mayne 2012; Mauk 2020) to mention the major ones. However, there is **little research into specific support for liberal democratic values and norms**, bar two exceptions: Schedler and Sarsfield (2007) define liberal democratic attitudes by the combination of support for democracy and liberal values, expressed in support for female emancipation and tolerance towards homosexuals and ethnic minorities. Ferrin and Kriesi (2016) measure liberal democratic values by means of items included in the European Social Survey (ESS) of 2014 on the "relative importance of various democratic norms", including independent courts, minority protection and freedom of the press. While we consider both approaches valuable because these items tap important aspects of liberal democracy, they miss one of its core features: the *inherent tension* between majoritarian principles and support for the 'constitutional pillar' when measuring popular support for liberal democracy. **DEMCORE innovates by studying longitudinal trends in this inherent tension in European citizens' attitudes towards liberal democracy** by taking the consortium members' pioneering work in this respect (Van der Brug et al. 2021a, 2021b) as a crucial starting point.

Within the European party politics literature, there are two major strands that are relevant to us, namely research into patterns, antecedents and consequences of Euroscepticism (e.g. De Vries and Edwards 2009; Taggart 1998) and populism (e.g. Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012; Rooduijn et al. 2014), respectively. Yet, although the rhetoric of political elites can play a crucial role in undermining public support for liberal democracy, **we still lack systematic evidence on how political parties have sought to challenge, or defend, liberal democracy in the EU over time**. Manifesto research, for example, has mostly studied the extent to which parties employ populist rhetoric or engage in Euroscepticism (e.g. Braun et al. 2019; Gabel and Hix 2002; Rooduijn et al. 2014). A significant amount of studies using election manifestos or the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) assesses party positions on liberal-vs-authoritarian dimension as well as civil liberties (e.g. Jungar and Jupskås 2014; Norris and Inglehart 2019; Rovny and Edwards 2012). However, these studies rarely deal with preferences for maintaining or reforming the 'constitutional pillar' of liberal democracy, such as questions pertaining to the independence of public broadcasters or checks-and-balances in democratic governance. Likewise, the extent to which political parties attack liberal democratic values such as gender equality and how this varies across member states and over time remains largely unexplored. DEMCORE is therefore **the first research project conducting a thorough longitudinal analysis of European parties' positions towards liberal democratic norms and values** by relying on the outstanding conceptual and methodological expertise of the consortium's leading scholars in the field of party politics.

Understanding longitudinal trends in support for liberal democratic values and norms allows DEMCORE to **reflect upon and actualise what liberal democracy means in the 21st century in Europe** – thereby delivering one of the key expected outcomes upon which the call *HORIZON-CL2-2021-DEMOCRACY-01-01: The future of liberal democracy in Europe* is based. This leads us to DEMCORE's second objective, which will provide:

2) A **comprehensive account of the challenges that liberal democracy in Europe is currently facing** – both in terms of contestation of ideals in the public discourse and in the electoral marketplace – and what role historic, political and economic contexts play for this contestation.

Given the lack of knowledge about longitudinal developments in both citizen attitudes and party positions towards liberal democracy, there is also a **considerable gap in the literature when it comes to understanding the inter-play between citizens and political elites in the contestation of liberal democratic norms and values**. We argue that this contestation is especially relevant in public discourse and the electoral market place. While recent studies

investigate EP members' reactions to anti-democratic developments in EU member states (Herman et al. 2021; Meijers and Van der Veer 2019; Norman 2021), their exchange with citizens on these issues remains under-explored. Public discourse has thus far been empirically investigated only with respect to populist discourse (e.g. Aalberg et al. 2016; Wodak et al. 2013) or Eurosceptic discourse (e.g. De Wilde and Trenz 2012; Michailidou 2015). However, we cannot ignore that the political rhetoric of challengers of liberal democracy become appealing transnationally (Levitsky and Way 2020) and that there are opportunities for both opponents and supporters of liberal democracy to distribute (il)liberal appeals across the EU. **DEMCORE therefore is the first to study how and with what consequences (il)liberal appeals spread across Europe** in the public discourse on social media. Given the rapidly changing information environment that facilitates the spread of disinformation and populist appeals (Tucker et al. 2018) as well as the potential of social media to provide exposure to counter-attitudinal views (Barberá et al. 2015), such study is now **more important than ever**; and members of the consortium possess the ideal expertise and experience to study the contestation of liberal democratic norms and values by politicians and citizens on social media (Fazekas et al. 2021; Kruikemeier et al. 2018; Theocharis et al. 2020).

When it comes to the electoral market place, challenges to liberal democracy often emerge from within a political system when voters are willing to vote for, or turn a blind eye to, politicians who seek to undermine core liberal democratic norms and values. While research has examined liberal democratic attitudes of European voters (Van der Brug et al. 2021a, 2021b), we still do not know the extent to which these attitudes guide their voting behaviour. This same discrepancy also holds for the relationship between populist attitudes and support for liberal and anti-liberal parties (Stanley 2019; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel 2018), although not for Eurosceptic attitudes and related preferences for Eurosceptic parties (e.g. De Vries 2018; Van Spanje and De Vreese 2011). On the 'supply side' of the electoral market, we do not know whether political parties act strategically in either promoting or undermining core liberal democratic norms and values in their election campaigns in order to gain votes, although such strategies are empirically recognised with respect to EU positions (e.g. Hooghe et al. 2002; Van de Wardt et al. 2014) and populism (e.g. Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012; Vachudova 2021). Thus, in order to understand the challenges that European liberal democracy is facing today, it is imperative that we investigate voter and party behaviour in the electoral marketplace. Since our consortium comprises core members of the European Election Study (EES), DEMCORE is well-placed to **advance the field by shedding light onto the extent to which liberal democracy is anchored in European citizens' voting choices for parties with (il)liberal political platforms**.

Understanding the contestation of liberal democratic ideals in the EU ultimately provides us with the conceptual and methodological tools to **contribute to producing forward-looking perspective of how institutions of democratic governance can be made more resilient to illiberal narratives**, which is another key expected outcome of *HORIZON-CL2-2021-DEMOCRACY-01-01: The future of liberal democracy in Europe*, and paves the way for DEMCORE's third objective, that is to develop:

3) Strategies to **counter illiberal democrats and ensure liberal democratic resilience** across Europe in the long run.

For exploring future visions of European liberal democracy and making them theoretically robust, we also need to go beyond the analyses of past developments and current challenges. What is needed, is insight into two additional dynamics. First, we **require comprehensive knowledge about the mechanisms that underpin preferences for (il)liberal democratic norms and values**. Understanding citizen preferences for different conceptions of democracy have received relatively little attention in the related literatures on populism and Euroscepticism (Goldberg et al. 2021; Jurado et al. 2018), let alone in research on liberal democracy itself. A recent US study shows that political polarisation there plays a significant role in disrupting the connection between normative support for liberal democracy and willingness to punish parties that depart from those norms (Graham and Svobik 2020). However, European cases remain conspicuously understudied in this regard, particularly in a comparative perspective. There is an important exception provided by members of our consortium: Arceneaux et al. (2020) shed light onto preferences for easing or restricting measures that affect civil liberties during the Covid-19 pandemic arguing that these are conditional upon the type of civil liberties at stake and – importantly – on the endorsement of political parties. The empirical insights and methodological innovations of these studies will inform **DEMCORE's ground-breaking research into the distribution and motivations of preferences for various for (il)liberal democratic norms and values among European citizens**.

Having identified the factors that increase the risk of illiberal democracy, and established the attitudes, values, socio-demographic factors and contextual factors that cause certain citizens to be more susceptible than others to illiberal appeals, we also **require methods to pre-emptively counter the spread of illiberal messages**. Scholars once thought that public education was a primary means to teach liberal democratic values before citizens reach adulthood (Almond and Verba 1963). However, more recent research shows that education does not have a causal

effect on increasing people's understanding of politics (e.g. Highton 2009; Hooghe and Dassonneville 2011). It is therefore **imperative that we develop effective strategies to 'inoculate the vulnerable' against illiberal appeals**. Inoculation messages, which have been shown to be effective in other domains, such as getting people to adopt healthy lifestyles, have not yet been well-integrated into the study of political persuasion. DEMCORE closes this gap and **offers a key innovation in using this persuasive tactic to strengthen the health of liberal democratic foundations in Europe**. In doing so, we will rely on consortium members' expertise on the 'illiberal playbook' (Pirro and Stanley 2021) to devise messages that dissuade citizens who have adopted illiberal attitudes and beliefs.

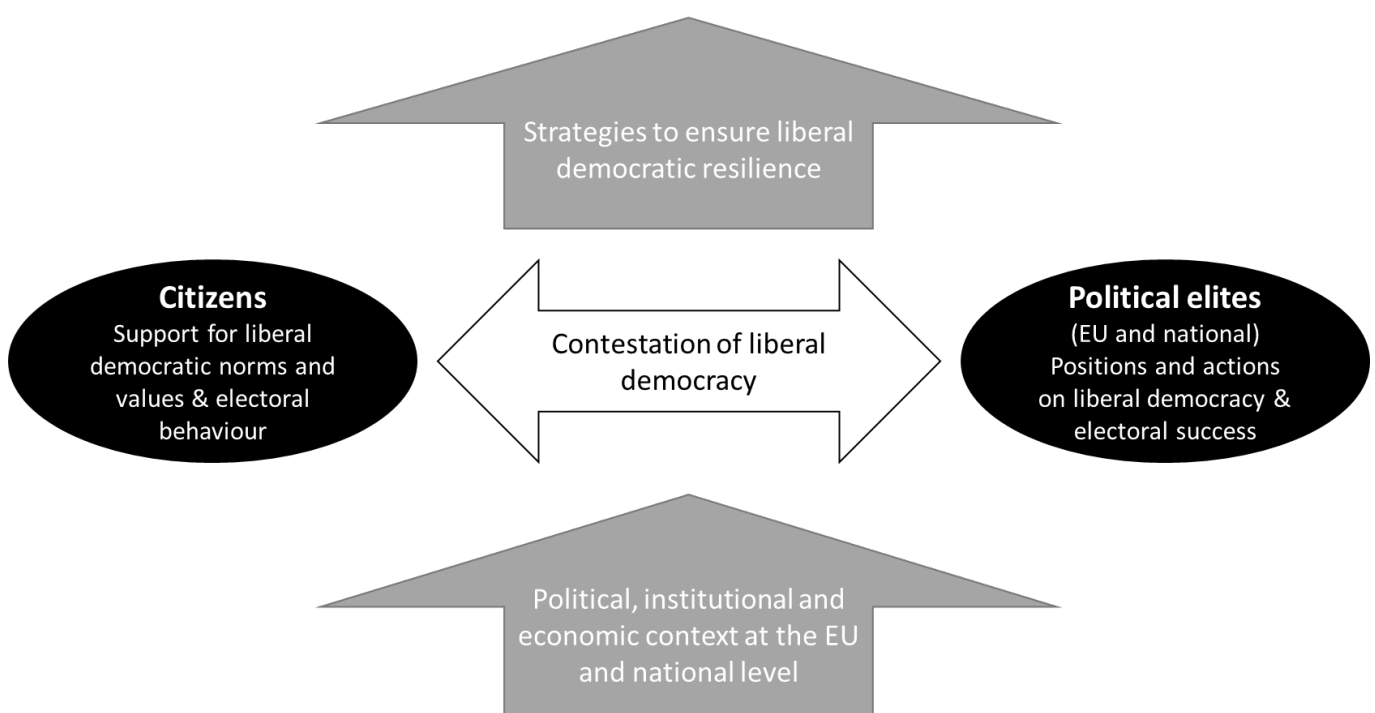
Taken together, DEMCORE is the **first project to provide an integrated account** of long-term trends, current challenges and future implications with respect to liberal democracy in the EU. In doing so, DEMCORE will also deliver on the final expected outcome of *HORIZON-CL2-2021-DEMOCRACY-01-01: The future of liberal democracy in Europe* **in its quest to reinforce the legitimacy and effectiveness of liberal democracies in Europe**. Concretely, it will provide **evidence-based policy recommendations** on a) how to devise new measures to comprehensively capture support for liberal democracy in order to be able to monitor it in the future, b) how to identify and evaluate warning signs in the contestation of liberal democratic ideals between European political elites and citizens, and c) how to address 'illiberal democratic' preferences and counter illiberal appeals. These recommendations are accompanied by **innovative toolkits** for journalists in the form of an educational package and knowledge clips; **pioneering methodologies** in the form of inoculation messages that can be applied by civil society organisations; and **digital narratives** for citizens as end-users in the form of 'heatmaps' which illustrate the level and geographical distribution of current challenges to liberal democracy.

All of DEMCORE's three objectives will be accomplished through the active exchange with stakeholders from politics, media and civil society throughout the project to learn from, test our ideas with and inform these communities. Thereby, DEMCORE will have a **lasting impact on consolidating democratic governance in the EU** – the key ambition of 'Destination 1' in the Work Programme 2021-22 'Culture, creativity & inclusive society'.

1.2 Methodology

DEMCORE's conceptual approach is twofold: it **considers the interaction between political elites and citizens**, which is consequential for shaping and defending civil liberties and liberal democratic institutions, and **unpacks the interplay between the supranational and national level in the EU** in the conflict between democratic erosion and complacency. Figure 1.1a depicts our conceptual model, on which we elaborate in the following pages alongside our use of methodology and data that will enable us to accomplish DEMCORE's objectives.

Figure 1.1a: Conceptualising Liberal Democracy between Complacency and Erosion



1.2.1 Analytical framework: The context of liberal democracy in Europe

Liberal democracy does not evolve in a void. Living conditions in the national context, rules of the game within the liberal democratic context, and the functioning of EU and national institutions influence the interaction between citizens and political elites. This interaction holds the key to the *practice* of liberal democracy, because electoral majorities, as well as political parties that hold governing power, need to respect the authority of the institutions that are designed to constrain the power of the executive. Once governing parties challenge the authority of those institutions and mobilise public support against their legitimacy, the delicate balance between the electoral and constitutional pillar of democracy is jeopardised. To assess the interactions between support for liberal democracy among political elites and citizens, we need to understand the long-term trends in the functioning of liberal democratic institutions in Europe and the contexts in which they operate.

Therefore, **DEMCORE will develop an original analytical framework** of the way historic, political and economic contexts (e.g. the Great Recession, Cold War, dislocation of empires, ‘war on terror’, large inflows of mixed migration, the recent pandemic) may have presented challenges to support for liberal democratic norms, including civil liberties and institutions, and values, such as gender equality, over the past decades across Europe. For example, attitudes towards democracy in general vary across generations and political contexts (e.g. Norris 2017) – also within the EU (e.g. Norris 2011; Zilinsky 2019); and crises, such as the global economic crisis, affect attitudes towards democracy in various ways (e.g. Cordero and Simón 2016; Teixeira et al. 2014). We expect similar dynamics when it comes to long-term trends in public opinion and partisan rhetoric towards liberal democratic norms and values, which also has implications for current challenges and future developments. We therefore go back in time to the beginning of the 1990s. After the fall of communism, the third wave of democratisation got a boost in the 1990s; and patterns of autocratisation or democratic backsliding have begun in the early 2000s. We will collect and combine data that describe the economic and political context citizens experience in their everyday lives on the national level. The relevant **context** variables include:

- National economic performance country-level data across time (e.g. Eurostat, World Bank)
- Demographic data capturing national societal changes in composition, immigration status and education levels
- Work force data to be able to capture changes in the nature of work during the last thirty years
- Government and EU investment data, particularly on infrastructure investment in weaker EU member states
- Data on electoral results and government composition (e.g. *ParlGov*, *whogoverns.eu*)
- Data and measures of party system characteristics in the EU and its member states (e.g. effective number of parties, party system polarisation, electoral volatility, electoral disproportionality)

The framework will also conceive the **relevant trends in the functioning** of civil liberties (e.g. press freedom), civil rights (e.g. gender equality and LGBTIQ rights) and liberal democratic institutions (e.g. independent courts) of European liberal democracies. These include, among others:

- Gender equality indexes and developments in the field of LGBTIQ rights
- Indicators of democracy (e.g. V-Dem, Freedom House)

Last but not least, the framework will also consider how **institutional and political mechanisms at the EU level** have functioned as limits and as a response to illiberal developments by examining how these mechanisms have evolved in recent years. This will be done through a document analysis that starts with the Copenhagen criteria set in 1993 up to current efforts by the EC, the Council and the EP to counter-act democratic backsliding in the member states, including prospective actions to foster liberal democracy following the currently ongoing *Conference on the Future of Europe*.

DEMCORE’s analytical framework will – by combining contextual information with survey data and content analyses of party communication – offer insights for interactions between various contexts at the EU and the national level on the way in which the actions of elites influence public support for liberal democracies and thereby contribute to the project’s **first objective** (see 1.2.1). The contextual indicators will be used for understanding challenges to liberal democracy in the public discourse and in the electoral arena, and thereby help us to accomplish the **second objective** (see 1.2.3). Finally, DEMCORE’s analytical framework will also **guide the case selection that is used to accomplish the third objective**, namely to obtain a better understanding of the conditions that are favourable for sustaining public support for liberal democracy in the EU (see 1.2.4).

1.2.2 Long-term trends of support for liberal democracy

To **accomplish our first objective**, we will unpack it by **studying in parallel** the long-term trends of citizen attitudes towards liberal democracy on the one hand, and conceptions of liberal democracy by political parties on the other:

1) An **in-depth understanding of the long-term trends** of support for liberal democracy among European citizens and political parties and the extent to which these are shaped by contextual factors and institutions.

Citizen attitudes towards liberal democracy

Party positions towards liberal democracy

As discussed above, measuring support for liberal democracy is not straightforward. Defining principles of liberal democracy includes the protection of civil rights of individuals as well as minority groups. Yet, liberal democracy consists of a complex set of institutions that are designed to protect these civil rights, also against governments with democratic electoral mandates. To measure support for liberal democracy we must therefore not only measure 'liberal' attitudes towards underprivileged groups, but also support for the institutions of liberal democracy, as well as for the principle that these institutions should be allowed to overrule electoral majorities, which is safeguarded by civil liberties. We realise that most survey data only contain some items that can be used for our purpose. DEMCORE will make an inventory of the available European data on these relevant attitudes from the 1990s onwards and, in as much as possible, harmonise and pool them into one **original dataset**. Relevant data sources include the European Social Survey (ESS), the European Values Study (EVS), the EES and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES).

Likewise, while we have cross-national longitudinal datasets on the *policy positions* of political parties, such as the Manifesto Project (<https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/>), the Euromanifesto Project that was part of the EES, and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), we lack systematic data that allows us to analyse and compare long-term trends in the party rhetoric towards liberal democracy, its key institutions and liberal democratic values, such as gender equality. Therefore, DEMCORE will collect raw material of national and European parliamentary manifestos and political speeches (from *ParlSpeech* and *EUSpeech* corpora). We will then build an **original dataset**, combining hand-coding and state-of-the-art computational text analysis, with the positions of political parties on core liberal democratic norms and values. The existing literature does not really provide operational definitions for the study of partisan rhetoric towards liberal democracy. However, DEMCORE has the necessary expertise and experience to address this challenge and will develop reliable and valid measures. This will allow us to examine how the rhetoric of different political parties has evolved across time and identify possible convergence across EU countries. We expect political entrepreneurs, i.e. those parties that occupy losing positions on the dominant left-right dimension of political conflict, to be more likely to mobilise on liberal democratic norms values, such as gender equality. Yet, the content of this mobilisation will differ based on their broader ideological profile: we expect green and libertarian parties to advocate for liberal democratic values, while populist radical right parties will more likely challenge these.

Once we have collected (and coded) relevant data that allow us to study the long-term trends in citizen attitudes and partisan rhetoric towards liberal democracy, we will link these two datasets with the contextual data generated by our analytical framework (see 1.2.1). This then allows us analyse the interplay of individual-level support for liberal democracy across generations and changes in party positions towards liberal democracy over time against the backdrop of and political and economic contexts across the EU. These analyses will first of all enable us to **describe how citizen attitudes and partisan rhetoric have evolved over time**. In addition, it will enable us to study the **relationship** between (the development of) support for liberal democracy among voters and among the parties they support. Finally, the link with contextual data will enable us to assess the contexts in which support for liberal democracy is high or low. We expect party identification to play a key role on how citizens react to the rhetoric of political parties, implying that partisans are more receptive of party rhetoric challenging liberal democratic values than non-partisans. Moreover, we expect party rhetoric challenging liberal democratic values to resonate more with citizens when household and national economic conditions are worsening.

1.2.3 Current challenges to liberal democracy in Europe

To **accomplish our second objective**, we will unpack it by **studying in parallel** the contestation over ideals of liberal democracy in public discourse on the one hand, and in the electoral marketplace on the other, which both involve citizens and political parties and politicians:

2) A **comprehensive account of the challenges that liberal democracy in Europe is currently facing** – both in terms of contestation of ideals in the public discourse and in the electoral marketplace – and what role historic, political and economic contexts play for this contestation.

Contestation of ideals in the public discourse

Electoral marketplace for different visions

The **2024 EP election serves as the arena** in which we will study both public discourse and electoral contestation. EP elections are traditionally considered second-order *national* elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980) – a notion that is

still applicable today (e.g. Gattermann et al. 2021; Van der Brug et al. 2016), which means that national instead of European political considerations dominate the election campaigns and guide the voting behaviour of EU citizens. Nonetheless, EP elections have become increasingly politicised over time (Van der Brug et al. 2021c), and challenges to European liberal democracy in the form of democratic backsliding in some EU member states contribute to the contestation over EU integration (Van der Brug et al. 2021a). In other words, questions about national sovereignty vis-à-vis European integration are expected to be highly salient for citizens and political parties, which, as we argued at the outset, impacts the contestation of different ideals of liberal democracy in both the public discourse and in the electoral marketplace. It also allows us to examine whether the EU's efforts to enforce respect for liberal democratic norms and values have any impact on this contestation.

To assess the dynamics of public discourse, we study the **social media discourse between political elites and the public during the 2024 EP election campaigns**. Ease of use, the potential to bypass the mainstream media, and the limit-less opportunities for personalised communication have led politicians to use social media strategically in recent years (Barberá and Zeitzoff 2018; Larsson 2015). Also European citizens use social media as a source of political information (European Commission 2021; Popa et al. 2019) and follow and directly interact with formerly largely inaccessible individuals in the political elite (e.g. Fazekas et al. 2021). DEMCORE will therefore **break new ground** by examining, in the run-up to the 2024 EP election, the extent to which social media spread and shape (il)liberal attitudes in the public discourse. Illiberal attitudes, including the support for authoritarian rule and the challenging of liberal democratic norms and values, were previously considered 'undemocratic', thus unacceptable and marginalised in the mainstream political discourse (Tucker et al. 2017). We expect that the increasing importance of social media in structuring political debate facilitates the diffusion of such values by offering people who hold illiberal attitudes an uncensored platform to challenge the core of liberal democracy. This likely enables them to find like-minded others from larger communities (Tucker et al. 2017). This process is reinforced by the absence of critical journalists acting as gatekeepers and by the insulated character of social media networks (Barberá et al. 2017). Thereby, social media facilitates the surge of political outsiders, who rely on an anti-system discourse that would have previously been suppressed by the traditional institutions structuring political discourse such as parties and legacy media (Jungherr et al. 2019). For example, populist parties owe their success at least in part to their reliance on social media (Ernst et al., 2017; Tucker et al., 2017). Given the established link between illiberal attitudes and support for populism (Van der Brug et al. 2021b), similar assumptions underpin DEMCORE's study regarding the contestation of liberal democratic ideals in the social media discourse.

DEMCORE will identify political actors that challenge or endorse liberal democratic norms and values on social media, analyse patterns of (il)liberal democratic discourse initiated by political elites and the public response, and assess the extent to which their messages appeal to a wide audience. In this respect, we will analyse three aspects of illiberal democratic appeals that could potentially explain their success: 1) the communication style (broadcasting vs. engaging) (Fazekas et al. 2021), 2) the use of emotive rhetoric (Osnabrügge et al. 2021), and 3) their association with other political issues, especially issues related to European integration and functioning of the EU (De Vries and Hobolt 2020). Lastly, DEMCORE will also assess **the extent to which and under what conditions (il)liberal democratic appeals on social media travel across European countries** (or not). This allows us to evaluate if political elites make use of a common 'illiberal playbook', that is "a paradigm of policy change comprising forms of forging, bending, and breaking" (Pirro and Stanley 2021), or if they contextualise these messages according to a given countries' circumstances.

Data will be collected using the *Twitter Streaming API*, which is free for academic research purposes, and *CrowdTangle* for Facebook during the four weeks leading up to the 2024 EP election. Methodologically, we will monitor and measure the spread of (il)liberal democratic discourse and the role that national and EU political elites play in the diffusion of such messages through the use of supervised and unsupervised machine learning methods. Following a similar strategy that was employed by consortium members in previous research (Theocharis et al. 2020; Fazekas et al. 2021), DEMCORE will use human annotation of a random sample of posts along the key dimensions that define illiberal democratic attitudes. We will further employ supervised machine learning to extend the content-coding from that done through human annotation to all the data collected across the EU.

Regarding the electoral marketplace, EP elections provide an appropriate context to examine how **both individual and contextual level factors shape electoral support for 'illiberal democrats'** as they are held at the same point in time across European countries under very similar institutional rules. This allows us to hold constant important institutional and temporal factors. We therefore also design and conduct a **post-election voter survey in the immediate aftermath of the 2024 EP election across all EU member states**. We argued above that there is a possible tension between the two pillars of liberal democracy when civil liberties constrain the executive's ability to enforce 'the will of the people'. Existing survey questions focus more on civil rights and tolerance than on the inherent tension between majoritarian principles and support for the 'constitutional pillar'. To measure voter attitudes

towards liberal democratic norms and values in the electoral marketplace, we will integrate and advance existing work, which consists of three approaches. The first is in line with Schedler and Sarsfield (2007) who define liberal democratic attitudes by the combination of support for democracy and various liberal values, such as tolerance towards homosexuals. There are various cross-national studies which contain these kinds of variables, such as the ESS, the EVS, and the EES. Members of the consortium have played a leading role in the EES in the past few years. The second approach to measuring attitudes towards liberal democratic norms is by means of a battery of survey items included in the 2014 ESS on the “relative importance of various democratic norms”, including independent courts, minority protection and freedom of the press (Ferrin and Kriesi 2016). The third approach is a set of survey questions, which are explicitly designed by members of DEMCORE’s consortium to capture the tension between the electoral and constitutional pillars of democracy (Van der Brug et al. 2021a, 2021b). These questions were previously included by DEMCORE’s consortium members in the EES and one of these items was also included in round 5 of the CSES. We will apply these again in the study of contestation over liberal democracy in the electoral marketplace and **develop additional measures to capture the breadth of the concept of attitudes towards liberal democratic norms and values**. By linking the data on party positions with survey data, we will examine voter support for ‘illiberal’ party platforms, the role their own attitudes towards norms and values of liberal democracy play for voter behaviour and the appeal of those parties that challenge liberal democracy in the EU.

1.2.4 The future of European liberal democracy

In the previous section we described how we will study the ways in which illiberal messages are disseminated via social media and how being exposed to illiberal appeals is related to electoral preferences and support for liberal democracy. However, we also wish to study the **causal mechanisms that underpin preferences** for (il)liberal democratic norms and values. Knowledge of such causal effects are key for developing effective strategies to ensure liberal democratic resilience among European citizens, which is our **third objective**:

3) To develop strategies to counter illiberal democrats and ensure liberal democratic resilience across Europe in the long run.	
Understanding citizen preferences	Inoculation against illiberal appeals

Understanding citizen preferences for (il)liberal democratic norms and values and how these preferences come about is an **important first step towards producing a robust vision for the future of European liberal democracy**. As a set of practices and motivating ideas that contest the hegemony of liberalism while laying claim to democratic legitimacy (Coman and Volintiru 2021), **illiberal democracy needs to be taken seriously**. Even if a majority of voters pay ‘lip service’ to liberal democratic norms and values, the experience of recent years shows many of them to be willing to overlook violations of those norms and to de-prioritise them in favour of other political objectives. However, we still understand little about the **causal links between socio-demographic attributes and political attitudes on the one hand, and preferences for illiberal solutions on the other**. Even in the case of the US, where the majority of existing research into this phenomenon has been conducted, there is little consensus on the consequences of social sorting and polarisation on adherence to democratic norms. While Finkel et al. (2020) argue that ‘political sectarianism’ poses a threat to these norms, Broockman et al. (2020) and Voelkel et al. (2021) find limited evidence to support such claims. Neither is it clear whether, and to what extent, these pro-illiberal behaviours are **persistent over time**. To address these questions, and building on insights into attitudes towards and correlates of liberal democratic norms and values generated through the realisation of DEMCORE’s earlier objectives, we will examine the **causes of illiberal democratic preferences** in a **multi-country panel survey**.

In recent years political science research has sought to move beyond the methodological and inferential limitations of traditional survey questions on democratic values, **using conjoint experiments** to estimate the relative causal impacts of multidimensional respondent attributes and preferences in more realistic and holistic scenarios (Hainmueller et al. 2014). Using the orthodox model of liberal democratic practices and our conceptual model of illiberal democratic practices as sets of preferences, we will embed conjoint experiments in the panel survey with a decision task approach similar to that employed by Singh and Williams (2021), where respondents are presented with choices of political systems they would prefer to live under. These experiments will serve two purposes. First, by varying the characteristics of conceivable democratic systems with respect to liberalism and illiberalism, it will be possible to identify the key socio-demographic and attitudinal causes of support for illiberal democracy. Second, by varying characteristics of those political systems with respect to the policy outputs and institutional arrangements that our conceptual exploration indicates are likely to be responsible for attracting electorates to those offering illiberal solutions, it will be possible to identify political-institutional causes of support for illiberal democracy and the role the EU should play. Additionally, the panel design of this survey allows observing the stability

of preferences for illiberal democracy over time. Both sets of findings will then provide a basis for the **identification of demographics to be targeted in the countering of illiberal democracy** and the political-institutional changes that could potentially **encourage them to turn (back) towards the liberal-democratic model**.

Parallel to this, it is also necessary to confront and refute illiberal messages in order to ensure the **resilience of liberal democratic norms**. A promising approach to doing so comes from **inoculation theory**. The key insight from this theory is that it is possible to ‘inoculate’ people from an anticipated attempt at persuasion. The reference to inoculation is more than a clever analogy; it is core to the theory itself. A vaccine protects people against infection from a virus by introducing a weakened version of the virus into the immune system, creating antibodies that neutralise the virus upon contact. In the same way, an inoculation message “is made with weakened versions of the anticipated persuasive challenges” (Compton et al. 2021: 3). In this project, we conceptualise illiberal messages to be like a virus. If left unchecked, they will spread and infect citizens with a weaker ‘immune system’ by persuading them to support illiberal policies and parties. Inoculation messages can be used both as a prophylactic to make citizens less susceptible to illiberal messages that they may encounter in the future and retroactively to try to dissuade citizens who have adopted illiberal attitudes and beliefs. **Inoculation messages** consist of: a **forewarning** of an attempt to persuade and a **pre-emptive refutation** of these arguments (Ivanov et al. 2020). This two-fold approach creates resistance by letting people know that their attitudes are threatened and providing them with counterarguments to repel persuasive attempts (McGuire 1964). For example, Jolley and Douglas (2017) reduced vaccine hesitancy by warning parents about anti-vaccine conspiracy theories and offering refutations of them. Decades of research show that inoculation messages effectively create resistance to persuasion in many domains (Compton and Ivanov 2013; Ivanov et al. 2020).

The study of inoculation message in politics has focused on candidate preferences and policy attitudes (Compton and Ivanov 2013; Compton et al. 2021; Pfau et al. 2020), leaving open whether such messages can effectively counter illiberal discourse. Moreover, few studies fully investigate the dynamics of partisan politics (e.g. Pfau and Burgoon 1988), even though research on traditional persuasive messages shows that the increasingly **polarised** context causes people to reject any message that comes from opposing parties (Westwood et al. 2018). In polarised contexts, **therapeutic inoculation messages** (Compton et al. 2021) that are designed to change people’s prior beliefs (e.g. convince smokers that smoking is bad) and inoculate them from future persuasive attempts may be less effective. Nonetheless, when people are motivated to second guess themselves — that is, to engage in **reflection** (Stanovich and West 2000) — they become more open to messages that challenge their prior beliefs (Arceneaux and Vander Wielen 2017; Groenendyk and Krupnikov 2021). We expect that **therapeutic inoculation messages** will work in polarised political settings if they also contain a motivation for engaging in reflection.

To study the **effectiveness of inoculation messages**, this part of the research is structured in three phases. In **Phase 1**, we will pilot **test the effectiveness of traditional pre-emptive refutation messages** for strengthening pro-democracy attitudes among those who support liberal democracy and for combating attempts to persuade them to support illiberal policies. We will also **test the effectiveness of therapeutic inoculation messages** for persuading those who support illiberal attitudes and parties to support liberal democracy and then inoculate them from being re-persuaded. We expect that it will be difficult to find effective therapeutic inoculation messages and will therefore also experiment with approaches that have been found to increase people’s willingness to second guess their prior beliefs, such as informing people that support for democracy is widespread (see a similar approach for converting climate change deniers, Maertens et al. 2020) as well as reminding people of the value of being open-minded (Groenendyk and Krupnikov 2021). Once we have identified more effective messages, we will investigate their effective application in **Phase 2**. For this, we propose a **panel study with survey experiments** for three reasons: 1) previous research shows that it is more effective to have a delay of one week between exposure to the inoculation message (i.e. a pro-liberal democracy message that refutes illiberal arguments) and exposure to the persuasion attempt (i.e. an illiberal message); 2) the effectiveness of inoculation messages decays with time and ‘booster messages’ can extend their effectiveness (Ivanov et al. 2020); 3) we can study whether events (e.g. at the EU level) influence the effectiveness of inoculation messages. The **multi-country set-up** allows assessing whether the political context shapes the effectiveness and durability of inoculation messages. In **Phase 3**, we will turn our attention to investigating whether pro-democracy therapeutic messages work in the real-world context of social media, building on the empirical insights that are generated in response to accomplishing DEMCORE’s second objective. **One way to reduce the spread of illiberal messages is to persuade would-be supporters of these messages to not spread them**. Following promising work by Munger (2017, 2021), who has successfully used bots to engage with Twitter users and reduce their use of racist slurs and partisan insults, we will train Twitter bots to respond to illiberal tweets with a therapeutic inoculation message and study whether they reduce the spread of illiberal messages, thereby offering critical **insights into whether and how pro-democracy actors in the EU can effectively counter illiberal discourse on social media platforms and potentially beyond**.

The **country sample** for both the conjoint experiment into preferences and the study of inoculation messages will be **guided by the analytical framework and empirical insights that were generated when addressing DEMCORE's previous objectives**. To understand citizen preferences for 'illiberal democracy', the aim is to include two countries that have experienced sustained democratic backsliding (e.g. Hungary, Poland), two in which liberal democratic norms and values have proven relatively robust to attempted backsliding (e.g. Greece, Slovakia), and two in which there has been little or no pressure brought to bear on liberal democracy (e.g. Finland, Germany). To test the effectiveness of inoculation messages, we require a country sample that exhibits variation in terms of party polarisation and presence/absence of illiberal or anti-democratic movements and propose to consider Denmark, France, Germany, Poland, Italy, and Spain.

1.2.5 The importance of gender

There are two ways in which gender plays an important role in our study. First of all, one of the defining principles of liberal democracy is the protection of civil rights of individuals as well as minority groups. Equality of citizens irrespective of religion, ethnicity, sexual orientations or gender is therefore one of the cornerstones of liberal democracy (Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012). Likewise, gender equality is one of the core values of liberal democracy and a vital element in EU treaties, such as in Articles 3 and 8, TEU. However, a key part of the challenges that liberal democracy in Europe is currently facing is a growing backlash against gender equality, as well as the equality of underprivileged groups, such as people from the LGBTIQ community and ethnic minorities, which is why challenges to gender equality constitute a key research area in DEMCORE's objectives. While the intensity of these challenges is likely to vary across member states, illiberal policies share some aspects that threaten gender equality, such as restricting the space for egalitarian civil society organisations, marginalising gender equality institutions or redefining institutions and policies away from a focus on gender equality and inclusiveness to a focus on the family unit. It is important to carefully examine the extent to which gender equality is under threat by focussing on citizen support for it and party rhetoric about it. **DEMCORE's dedication to exploring these important topics** is reflected in the key objectives and reporting on our analyses in the deliverables across all parts of the project.

Second, **DEMCORE** will also focus on the gender gap in support for liberal democracy. It builds upon important work on gender gaps in politics (Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012, Kittilson 2016), and particularly upon work on the gender gap in support for radical right parties, a topic on which consortium members have worked in the past (e.g. Hartevelde et al. 2015, 2019). DEMCORE will explore gender gaps in support for liberal democratic values and support for 'illiberal' platforms by comparing the survey responses of men and women, and examine heterogeneous treatment effects in our experimental data based on gender. In addition, we will consider intersectional aspects, such as race, ethnicity or socio-economic status. Finally, in the content analyses of party and social media communication we develop a measure of gender critical rhetoric by political parties using both hand coding and supervised machine learning; and account for the gender of the messenger in the social media analysis.

The citizens and party data allows us to develop heatmaps for civil society organisations and journalists focused on gender equality related matters that clearly illustrate the challenge to gender equality across the EU (see 2.2.1.1).

1.2.6 Links to national and international research and innovation activities

In line with DEMCORE's ambitious objectives, DEMCORE will build linkages to the following recent and ongoing national or international research and innovation activities:

Table 1.2a: Research projects whose results will feed into DEMCORE

Project	Objectives	DEMCORE's additional ambition
DANGER (2021-2026, 950359, H2020-EU.1.1.)	DANGER studies elite responses to democratic deconsolidation in interwar and contemporary Europe by investigating which government coalitions help to avoid democratic deconsolidation, and ultimately democratic breakdown.	DEMCORE will build on DANGER by studying challenges to liberal democracy <i>beyond</i> the focus on governments as key actors in the process of preventing democratic backsliding. DEMCORE acknowledges that institutions matter for the contexts in which contestation of liberal democracy take place and thus DANGER's results will feed into our project. Yet, DEMCORE has a particular focus on the <i>interaction</i> between citizens and political elites in the multi-level EU political system.
QUALIDEM (2017-2022, 716208,	QUALIDEM deals with the erosion of democracy. It offers a qualitative (re)appraisal of citizens' (dis-)affection	QUALIDEM offers important qualitative insights into European citizens' disengagement and dis-affection towards politics. It does not deal with poli-

H2020-EU.1.1.)	towards politics by relying on the core argument of the policy feedback literature: attitudes and behaviours are outcomes of past policy. It explains the evolution of democratic linkages as being shaped by public policy, and specifically by the turn to neoliberalism and supra-nationalisation.	tical elites, even though they play a key role as they can both strengthen and uphold, but also seek to undermine, liberal democratic norms and values. Still, DEMCORE will rely on QUALIDEM's infrastructure of qualitative European comparative surveys as these will enrich DEMCORE's <i>quantitative</i> operationalisations of attitudes, preferences and rhetoric. Our combination of large-scale and comparative surveys and experiments is well-suited to study the <i>causal</i> drivers of support for liberal democratic norms and values across Europe.
RECONNECT (2018-2022, 770142, H2020- EU.3.6.1.2.)	RECONNECT evaluates the coherence between democracy and the rule of law, how they are interpreted and applied in the EU, and the extent to which they resonate with EU citizens. Focussing on key policy areas (economic and fiscal governance, counter-terrorism, trade and migration), it tests whether that the attainment of solidarity, entailing a transnational community founded upon mutual trust and justice, leads to a more legitimate EU.	RECONNECT addresses crucial questions concerning the legitimacy of EU governance. DEMCORE will extend its insights regarding challenges to the implementation of the rule of law and goes <i>beyond</i> RECONNECT's policy-making focus in its aim to understanding both the support for liberal democracy and the mechanisms responsible for democratic erosion and develops strategies to counter illiberal democrats and ensure liberal democratic resilience.
SCRIPTS (DFG, EXC 2055)	<i>Contestations of the Liberal Script</i> (SCRIPTS) is a research network between several academic institutions in Berlin, Germany. It addresses the loss of confidence in the ability of core democratic institutions to provide solutions to the most pressing issues of the 21st century, such as rising inequality and the crisis of democracy, across the globe.	SCRIPTS is an influential project and DEMCORE will build on those research insights that are related to liberal values in its ambition to also study attitudes towards liberal democratic institutions and preferences for civil liberties. Plus, DEMCORE has a <i>clear focus</i> on the interplay between EU-level and national-level politics in the EU, which allows it to provide specific recommendations aimed at fostering European liberal democracy in the long run, while SCRIPTS has a less confined global approach to understanding challenges to liberal democracy.
ProConEU (2021-2023, Funder: German BMBF)	Through a systematic analysis of election programmes, social media data and public opinion surveys, ProConEU investigates whether or not current conflicts within and about the EU are based on a transnational cleavage between supporters and opponents of the European project, involving both EU citizens and political elites.	ProConEU is an important project. DEMCORE will particularly build on the project's <i>transnational dimension</i> , yet ProConEU only engages with European integration. While DEMCORE argues that Euroscepticism becomes increasingly aligned with challenges to liberal democracy, DEMCORE's focus lies on the support for liberal democracy expressed by citizens and political elites and how illiberal preferences can be explained and countered. Thus, Euroscepticism plays an important role, but it is not sufficient for understanding current challenges to liberal democracy in Europe.

To accomplish its first objective, DEMCORE will also rely on existing fundamental data and infrastructure:

- Projects that provide **indicators of democracy**, such as the V-Dem Project (v-dem.net/en/), Freedom House, and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA, idea.int/)
- Projects that include **survey data** on attitudes towards democracy, including the ESS, EVS, EES, CSES, the Electoral Integrity Project (electoralintegrityproject.com/), and *eupinions* (eupinions.eu/de/home)
- Projects that provide data on **party positions**, such as the Manifesto Project, the Euromanifesto Project, CHES, *PopuList* (popu-list.org/), as well as *EUspeech* and *Parlspeech* that are available on Harvard Dataverse
- Examples of projects that provide **contextual data** include *ParlGov* (parlgov.org/) and *whogoverns.eu*

Links to existing projects will be established in various ways, including:

- Personal exchanges between consortium members and individual researchers in other projects
- Initiating joint panels with researchers from other projects at international conferences
- Inviting researchers from other projects to DEMCORE's Stakeholder Conference, public debates, and for talks at the consortium's member institutions
- Closely following the research output by other projects; disseminating DEMCORE's research output to them

1.2.7 Interdisciplinarity

The objectives of DEMCORE cannot be addressed by a single discipline. Therefore, we have adopted an **integrated interdisciplinary approach** where world-leading experts from across the social sciences are working closely together in each of DEMCORE's parts to maximise the scientific and societal impact. Notably, DEMCORE brings together perspectives from **political science, psychology, communication science, European studies, methodology and data science** to address the overarching questions of the project: Political science brings expertise in democratic processes, institutions and political actors; psychology provides a deeper understanding of how individual attitudes and norms are formed; communication science focuses on the rhetoric and messages of political parties and their effects on citizens; European studies expertise brings an in-depth understanding of the history and dynamics of European integration; and finally methodologists and data scientists ensure that the project uses state-of-the-art methods in data collection, integration and analysis. Crucially, the governance structure of DEMCORE ensures that these disciplinary perspectives are **closely integrated in each of the Work Packages** (see section 3), rather than operating separately. This interdisciplinary perspective is also reflected in the **wide range of rigorous methods** from time-series econometric analysis, advanced quantitative text analysis, supervised and unsupervised machine learning methods, multi-level survey analysis, and experimental studies. By bringing together expertise across disciplines, DEMCORE is also in a better position to work more closely with policy-makers and stakeholders in addressing the critical questions of challenges to liberal democracy.

1.2.8 Open science approach

DEMCORE's open science strategy is based on two main principles: (1) We aim to achieve high levels of scientific robustness by increasing transparency and reproducibility, that enables other scholars to inspect and verify published results (Klein et al. 2018). (2) We aim to achieve high levels of re-usability of our collected data, through sharing them, so we can improve the efficiency of science by allowing greater re-use and more collaboration (Van Atteveldt et al. 2019).

To achieve high levels of scientific robustness we need to facilitate transparency and reproducibility as well as active replication of our results. To do so our methodology, data collection instruments and data have to be shared in keeping with the criteria of transparent and open science (Miguel et al. 2014; Nosek et al. 2015). For robustness to be fully evaluated and reproducibility to be achieved the data in themselves are not enough. What is needed is a full formal account of data collection and data analysis (American Political Science Association 2012: 10). Additionally, to take a step further towards scientific robustness we need to take seriously the practice of experiment pre-registration. This helps towards elimination of selective reporting, disclosure of p-hacking, and distinction between exploratory and confirmatory research (Wuttke n.d.).

To achieve high levels of reusability of the data collected by DEMCORE we will base our open science activities on the **FAIR principles** requiring that data needs to be *findable, accessible, interoperable, and re-usable* (Wilkinson et al., 2016). For that purpose, we will ensure that the data will be deposited in widely known data sharing facilities that are adapted to the needs of our scientific community and reach the highest data management standards. In our case, CESSDA (Consortium of European Social Science Data Archives) and its service providers is the place where data collections on democratic processes are being curated and managed. The important issue here is that data will be easily found and accessed, and that will remain so well after the end of the project.

Specifically, we will take the following measures to implement our open science strategy. We will provide:

- detailed documentation of all methodological decisions in each stage of data collection
- high quality documentation of our data that will include a methods report
- pre-registration of all experiments conducted by the DEMCORE project
- sharing of all data collected in the project
- sharing of syntax files that produce harmonised datasets, visualisations, and models used in our reports
- sharing of data and syntax will be done through a trusted repository such as a CESSDA Service Provider

1.2.9 Co-creation

To accomplish its objectives and implement the project successfully, DEMCORE has developed an original plan to **facilitate co-creation by involving stakeholders for a two-way knowledge exchange** at critical junctures in the project. Concretely, DEMCORE innovates by **developing an educational package for journalists together with key news journalists and news executives**. It will have the form of an interactive online toolkit, which will present journalists with editorial challenges and choices regarding news topics, different news frames, and different sources that are connected to current challenges of liberal democracy. Once they have made their choices they will receive virtual feedback in the form of short reflexive contributions provided by journalistic stakeholders consulted for the production. The toolkit will be tested and integrate initial user feedback before it will go live ahead of the 2024 EP election (see 2.2.1.1 for further details).

Moreover, DEMCORE plans **three stakeholder workshops in Brussels**, namely (1) prior to the data collection in WP5 and WP6 and ahead of the 2024 EP election to facilitate co-creation in the study of current challenges to liberal democracy, (2) during the planning phase of WP7 to facilitate co-creation in the assessment of causal mechanisms that likely underpin preferences for ‘illiberal’ democracy, and (3) during the planning phase of WP8 to facilitate co-creation in the development of communicative strategies to counter illiberal messages. All of them are designed as researchers-meet-policy-makers workshops that bring consortium members together with Brussels-based policy-makers, NGOs and civil society organisations, and journalists (see 2.2.1 for a detailed list of stakeholders). All workshops will be held prior to the data collection in the respective Work Packages in order to receive input and feedback from stakeholders and practitioners. Additionally, DEMCORE will organise a **two-day stakeholder conference** in Amsterdam one year after the EP election in May 2024 to, among other things, receive input on DEMCORE’s further research plans from national and regional policy-makers, journalists, representatives of civil society organisations and local citizens (see 2.2.1.1 for further details). This input will be particularly relevant for the remainder of the project which – by that time – will be concerned with developing strategies to counter illiberal democrats and ensure liberal democratic resilience across Europe in the long run.

1.2.10 Data and research output management

The project will produce the following data outputs:

1. Database of existing indicators from official statistics and international organisations on contexts and conditions in which democratic institutions operate
2. Database of constructed indicators measuring liberal democracy at the national level
3. Dataset measuring individual-level support for liberal democracy constructed from existing survey data
4. Dataset on party positions towards liberal democracy, in part relying on existing data
5. Three international survey datasets in form of personal data without any direct identifiers
6. Twitter dataset that includes tweets by and those that mention politicians alongside replies to these tweets
7. Twitter dataset that includes user reactions to inoculation messages by Twitter bots

These datasets will not exceed 1 GB, and all of them are in the form of two-dimensional matrixes. They will be provided after the end of the project through the GESIS Data Archives and made available in open access (after registration) after an embargo period of 12 months to all who wish to work with them for academic and non-profit purposes. The exact procedure will be detailed in the data management report (D1.3).

Findability of data/research outputs: All data outputs will be shared to the scientific community through a CESSDA trusted repository, specifically the GESIS Data Archive. They will be given a persistent identifier in the form of a DOI.

Accessibility of data/research outputs: There will be an embargo so that the consortium can ensure the highest data quality. New data generated during the project will be considered the result of joint effort by the partners concerned. Some of the data will be collected from existing data sources, in case of which – if they are not on a licence permitting reproduction and reuse – an agreement will be drafted. This agreement will detail ownership and exploitation and specify any restrictions on processing techniques that may not be used.

Interoperability of data/research outputs: The data will be described using DDI standards for machine readable metadata as applied at the GESIS Data Archive. Data will be provided in form of STATA, SPSS and non-proprietary file formats that allows a wider use on software programmes known in the scientific community.

Reusability of data/research outputs: All of the data will be shared with licences permitting replication and reuse by the wider scientific community for non-commercial purposes.

Curation and storage/preservation costs: In our data management plan, we will detail the curation and manage-

ment of all our data until they will be delivered to the GESIS Data Archive, and also the quality assurance of all documentation supporting the data.

Attention will be paid to data consistency checks. A report about the checking results will be provided to the project group upon completion of the checks on the data. Within-data set metadata (i.e. variable and value labels), and external metadata will be created. A package collating all relevant documents provided by the data collection team and the fieldwork organisation will be prepared for easy dissemination alongside the actual data.

2. IMPACT

2.1 Project's pathways towards impact

DEMCORE will be carried out at a **time when liberal democracy in Europe is under threat**. The EU's core liberal democratic principles and values are challenged by democratic backsliding in some of its member states, most notably Poland and Hungary, and the EU has thus far been unable to effectively counteract those measures introduced by some national governments that are aimed at undermining civil liberties, civil rights, and the rule of law. Initiatives by the EU include infringement procedures by the EC in 2017 and 2019, respectively, to protect the independence of judges in Poland and to prevent the Hungarian government from banning activities by selected civil society organisations. The EP called for sanctions against Hungary for subverting the rule of law in 2018. Moreover, during a European Council meeting in June 2021, sixteen governments publicly condemned Hungary's new anti-LGBT law. In its latest attempt to prevent democratic backsliding the EC, which itself is under pressure to act by the EP, has blocked EU recovery funds from being allocated to Poland and Hungary until they commit to the EU's rule of law. The success of this effort is not yet foreseeable. It is currently being challenged by the respective governments; while the Polish government is also awaiting a decision by the Polish Constitutional Tribunal on the primacy of EU law as result of a previous clash with the European Court of Justice.

This struggle in trying to uphold liberal democratic standards across the EU is exacerbated by supporters of liberal democratic norms and values on the one hand, and those political and societal forces who seek to challenge them. Supporters, steered by prominent voices in the EP, repeatedly call on the EC to sanction member states that actively contribute to democratic erosion. As such, the EC is held accountable for ensuring liberal democracy across the EU. A recent poll by *eupinions* (2021) shows that European citizens are more satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU (60 percent) than in their own country (54 percent); and thus the **EU must not lose the trust of its citizens in this conflict**. However, support for liberal democratic norms and values cannot be taken for granted, as they are contested across Europe (Van der Brug et al. 2021b). Moreover, by interfering in the internal affairs of the member states in question, the EU inadvertently provides a platform of contestation for political agents who claim national sovereignty. Thus, Euroscepticism becomes increasingly aligned with challenges to liberal democracy, particularly in countries where liberal democratic institutions are under siege (Van der Brug et al. 2021a).

Importantly, illiberal tendencies are not only discernible in Poland or Hungary, but also pose a threat to liberal democratic norms and values in other EU member states. *Reporters Without Borders* (2021) are concerned that press freedom in Europe is increasingly at risk of being undermined as some countries, including Germany (rank 13 out of 180), Luxembourg (20) and Slovenia (36) saw their rates dropping during the Covid-19 pandemic, while the current situation in Poland (64), Greece (70), Malta (81), Hungary (92) and Bulgaria (112) is rather dire. Not only are government policies and actions responsible for these trends, but there is also an increase in violent attacks by protestors against journalists alongside online threats. This has led EC President Ursula von der Leyen to call on EU member states to improve journalists' safety in her 2021 State of the Union speech. Likewise, there are concerns over academic freedom, which is increasingly being challenged by mainstream politicians next to members of the radical right in Denmark and France (Meret 2021).

These developments demonstrate that challenges to liberal democracy are not only confined to democratic institutions, but permeate democratic societies across the EU. It is therefore of **utmost importance that we study the interaction between political elites and citizens in the conflict between the EU and the member states**. After all, European citizens' support for liberal democratic norms and values are crucial for ensuring the legitimacy and resilience of liberal democracy across the continent; and political parties and politicians play a key role as they can both strengthen and uphold, but also seek to undermine, those same norms and values. In short, this interaction has consequences for shaping and defending civil liberties and liberal democratic institutions within and across the EU.

2.1.1 Expected outcomes and wider impacts

DEMCORE's timely and unique contribution to the expected outcomes specified in the call *HORIZON-CL2-2021-DEMOCRACY-01-01: The future of liberal democracy in Europe* is threefold. First, applicants are encouraged to **reflect upon and actualise what liberal democracy means in the 21st century in Europe**. DEMCORE does so

by a) providing an in-depth of the long-term trends of support for liberal democracy among European citizens and political parties and b) a comprehensive account of the challenges that liberal democracy in Europe is currently facing – both in terms of contestation of ideals in public discourse and in the electoral marketplace. This will generate a **differentiated image of liberal democracy in contemporary Europe**, including its boundaries with illiberal tendencies, that is conditional upon political agency, generational experiences, and differences in historical, political and economic contexts. To disseminate and allow for the exploitation of these significant insights by the policy-making community, we will translate our results into **policy recommendations**, which are part of the first of a series of three flagship policy reports. In this series, the **first flagship report** will provide recommendations on how to devise new measures to comprehensively capture support for liberal democracy in order to be able to monitor it in the future. The **second flagship report** will advise policy-makers on how to identify and evaluate warning signs in the contestation of liberal democratic ideals between political elites and citizens.

Second, the call stipulates that the project should **contribute to producing theoretically and empirically robust visions for the future of liberal democratic institutions**. Such vision cannot do without extensive insights into the **structure of European citizens' illiberal democratic preferences**, the extent to which these are shaped by citizens' personal experiences and socio-demographic characteristics, and the extent to which they vary across different institutional contexts as well as over time. DEMCORE will provide these critical insights, which will also be used for initiating a new line of research aimed at identifying the mechanisms that could potentially encourage citizens with illiberal preferences to turn (back) towards the liberal-democratic model. In fact, based upon this, DEMCORE will eventually also **design strategies to counter illiberal democrats and ensure liberal democratic resilience across Europe in the long run**. It will do so by **'inoculating the vulnerable' against illiberal appeals and strengthen future support for liberal democracy in the EU** and tests the conditions under which these strategies are successful in the real-world context of social media. Taken together, these results will also be synthesised and translated into **targeted policy recommendations** on how to address 'illiberal democratic' preferences and counter illiberal appeals as part of DEMCORE's **third flagship report**. Its **pioneering methodologies** in the form of inoculation messages will be shared with civil society organisations for further take-up.

Third, the call asks to **develop recommendations, toolkits, narratives and methodologies to reinstate the legitimacy and effectiveness of liberal democracies**. On top of the above-mentioned policy recommendations and methodologies, DEMCORE will also co-create **innovative online toolkits** with and for journalists. These toolkits not only allow these critical actors to increase public awareness of the long-term trends of support for liberal democracy among both European citizens and political parties, but they also equip journalists with greater sensitivity for how different editorial choices in political reporting are connected to current challenges to liberal democracy. DEMCORE will develop **digital narratives** too. They will take the form of 'heatmaps', enabling citizens, and also journalists, representatives of civil society organisations and policy-makers, to gain a deeper understanding on the level and geographical distribution of current challenges to liberal democracy (see 2.2.1.1).

The **scale** of DEMCORE's contribution to the expected outcomes extends to European societies as a whole, including citizens, policy-makers, civil society organisations and the media. In terms of **significance**, DEMCORE's results will have a **lasting impact on consolidating democratic governance in the EU** – the key ambition of 'Destination 1' in the Work Programme 2021-22 'Culture, creativity & inclusive society'. Concretely, at the political level, having a better understanding of citizen attitudes, preferences and behaviour will increase the **input legitimacy** of the EU's effort to enforce liberal democracy across Europe. For European society, awareness of the dynamics that underlie the contestation of liberal democracy in Europe enables media and citizens to hold responsible political actors within and across the EU **accountable**. Likewise, having the tools to counter illiberal appeals will **empower representatives of civil society** to defend liberal democratic norms and values across Europe.

2.1.2 Requirements and potential barriers

For DEMCORE, to contribute to the expected outcomes and have wider impact, the following requirements and potential barriers apply:

- **Policy-makers must be receptive** to our recommendations, even if our results have demanding implications. It is therefore **crucial to build a lobby by actively involving national human rights institutions as well as pan-European NGOs and civil society organisations as key stakeholders** in our dissemination and exploitation strategy (2.2.1.1).
- Reaching **European citizens** is challenging. Since they will tremendously benefit from DEMCORE's results and directly contribute to the future of liberal democracy through expressing their support and preferences, it is imperative that they are aware of the challenges and opportunities associated with liberal democracy and what they can do to contribute to liberal democratic resilience in the long run. Here, **journalists are indispen-**

sable multipliers, which is why, alongside citizens, we do not only target journalists in our communication activities (see 2.2.1.2), but also as part of our dissemination and exploitation strategy.

- Some of the strategies to counter illiberal appeals may be less effective than expected for certain types of individuals or in certain political and institutional contexts. However, that does not mean that the results as such will not be useful. On the contrary, they will be vital for future research, which we will actively encourage through DEMCORE's **continuous exchange with the scientific community** (see 2.2.1.1).
- Likewise, for DEMCORE to have a **lasting impact on politics and society in Europe**, it is imperative that future research exploits our concepts, operationalisations and data, which our open science approach facilitates.

2.2 Measures to maximise impact - Dissemination, exploitation and communication

In order to maximise its impact, the consortium has developed a **rigorous plan** for the involvement of relevant stakeholders alongside the effective dissemination and perpetual communication of DEMCORE's results, and their exploitation, on which we elaborate below. DEMCORE dedicates an entire Work Package (WP9) to dissemination, exploitation and communication. One of the very first tasks of WP9 will be to provide a **detailed Impact Plan** in month 6, on the basis of which the exploitation, dissemination and communication of DEMCORE's results can be implemented successfully. This Impact Plan will be regularly reviewed – and adapted if necessary – throughout the project's lifespan in order to maximise DEMCORE's impact. Importantly, while the Impact Plan's measures are bundled and coordinated in the dedicated WP9, the consortium partners in the substantial WPs all contribute to the exploitation, dissemination, and communication strategy throughout the project's lifetime. Also, DEMCORE's **advisory board is composed of both key policy experts and leading academics** and has the crucial function to advise the consortium on the development and implementation of the Impact Plan alongside the possible identification of new outreach opportunities and possible adjustment of individual measures during the project.

2.2.1 Impact Plan

2.2.1.1 Dissemination and exploitation activities

DEMCORE's consortium will reach out to, among others, the following stakeholders:

Policy-makers at the EU level and in EU member states

DEMCORE's results will have direct implications for democratic governance in the EU. Therefore, we specifically target **key decision-makers in EU politics**, such as *Věra Jourová* (Vice-President of the *European Commission*, Portfolio: Values and Transparency), Members of two *European Parliament* Committees, namely *LIBE* (Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs) and *AFCO* (Constitutional Affairs), and Members of the *CIVEX* Commission (Citizenship, Governance, Institutional & External Affairs) of the *European Committee of the Regions*.

While members of the European Committee of the Regions will be able to disseminate DEMCORE's insights across European regions, we also target **national and regional governments alongside parliamentarians** within EU member states, particularly in those countries in which consortium partners are based.

National human rights institutions

National human rights institutions are crucial for supporting civil liberties and citizen rights. By offering advice to national policy-makers, they strive to promote and protect human rights and raise awareness in case of their violation. These institutions can be either reached locally through direct contacts (e.g. the Polish Ombudsman through SWPS) or via the *European Network of National Human Rights Institutions*.

NGOs and civil society organisations

Input by NGOs and civil societal organisations will be imperative for DEMCORE to accomplish its major objectives. Vice-versa, DEMCORE's results will be of crucial interest for these stakeholders in order to ensure liberal democratic resilience across Europe in the long-run. Therefore, DEMCORE specifically targets **pan-European NGOs and civil society organisations** (CSOs), such as *Civil Society Europe*, which offers European Coordination of Civil Society Organisations, *Amnesty International*, *Transparency International EU*, the *European Centre for Press and Media Freedom*, and the *Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties)*, which currently comprises 20 national civil liberties associations from across the EU, including Poland, Hungary, Ireland, France, the Netherlands, Slovakia and many others.

European journalists and professional journalism associations

Journalists not only present key stakeholders for the dissemination of DEMCORE's results across Europe, but are also crucial for co-creation and exploitation given their watchdog role in liberal democracies. Therefore,

DEMCORE targets **pan-European associations**, namely the *European Federation of Journalists* and the *European Data Journalism Network*, and also relies on individual contacts from the **personal networks** of consortium members, that include journalists at the *Financial Times*, *Pravda* (Slovakia), *Libertatea* (Romania), *Het Financieele Dagblad* (Netherlands) and *Berlingske Tidende* (Denmark), among others. In addition, SDU, who is in charge of exploitation, dissemination and communication (WP9), works in close collaboration with the MFI Centre (Media Research and Innovation Centre) at SDU. The MFI Centre which has extensive experience in producing materials for the **media industry**. Likewise, SDU also has an extensive network of other **journalism schools**, including both universities and vocational training institutions.

Scientific Community

DEMCORE's results not only produce novel insights, but also innovative operationalisations of attitudes, preferences and rhetoric towards liberal democratic norms and values. They will therefore also be highly relevant for the scientific community. We will actively exchange with scholars from a wide range of subdisciplines within **political science** (comparative politics, European studies, political behaviour), **psychology** (political psychology, social psychology), **social science methodology** and **communication science** (political communication, journalism, persuasive communication, political marketing) and more widely with scholars of sociology, history, law, philosophy, and political economy with a regional focus on Europe/the EU.

The purpose of the **dissemination and exploitation activities** is to facilitate dissemination by sharing and discussing DEMCORE's results with stakeholders and allow stakeholders to make use of these. The activities include:

Type of activity: Educational package for journalists. The purpose of this package is to raise awareness among journalists for the current challenges to liberal democracy in Europe. To do so, DEMCORE will develop an interactive online toolkit together with key news journalists and news executives and in consultation with leaders of WPs 3-6. This toolkit will present journalists with editorial challenges and choices regarding news topics, different news frames, and various sources that are connected to current challenges of liberal democracy. Once they have made their choices they will receive virtual feedback in form of short reflexive contributions provided by journalistic stakeholders consulted for the production. The toolkit will be developed and pilot-tested in 2023 and distributed to journalism associations and journalists' contacts before the 2024 EP election for exploitation.

Type of strategy: Dissemination and exploitation (and co-creation, see 1.2.9)

Targeted stakeholders: Journalists and professional journalism associations

Measures to verify impact: Number of users, their (initial) feedback gathered by a user evaluation survey

Type of activity: Two-Day Stakeholder Conference. This conference is to take place in Amsterdam one year after the EP election in May 2024. Its purpose is to invite external academics and interested stakeholders to a) share and discuss key results related to current challenges of liberal democracy (WP5 & WP6), b) receive input on DEMCORE's further research plans, and c) learn more about related research projects. There will also be a public debate organised in the centre of Amsterdam (see 'public debates in EU member states').

Type of strategy: Dissemination, exploitation and communication (and co-creation, see 1.2.9)

Targeted stakeholders: Academics, national and regional policy-makers, journalists, NGO and CSO representatives, local citizens

Measures to verify impact: Number of participants, their feedback and their expressions of interests to learn more about and/or further engage with DEMCORE, social media impact (see 'Twitter account' below)

Type of activity: Public debates in EU member states. DEMCORE's consortium members will organise several public debates between academics and national/regional stakeholders to disseminate and openly discuss DEMCORE's key findings and their implications with citizens and interested stakeholders. Prime locations include Amsterdam, Cologne, Copenhagen, Milan, Paris, and Warsaw.

Type of strategy: Dissemination, exploitation and communication

Targeted stakeholders: National and regional policy-makers, journalists, NGO and CSO representatives, local citizens

Measures to verify impact: Number of participants, their feedback and their expressions of interest to learn more about and/or further engage with DEMCORE; social media impact (see 'Twitter account' below)

Type of activity: Three flagship policy reports. DEMCORE will publish three flagship policy reports that cut across the whole project. Alongside a synthesis of the results from the specific reports in individual Work Packages, each flagship policy report will include specific policy recommendations. The first report will

highlight the long-term trends in public support for liberal democracy and **recommend new measures to capture this support comprehensively to be able to monitor it in the future**. The second report will zoom in on the challenges related to the contestation of liberal democratic ideals in the interplay of political elites and European citizens and **derive recommendations on how to spot and evaluate warning signs** with respect to the diffusion and of illiberal appeals and attractiveness of illiberal platforms. The third report will highlight future implications for democratic governance and provide specific **recommendations on how to address ‘illiberal democratic’ preferences and counter illiberal appeals**. Next to their direct dissemination to relevant stakeholders, all three reports will also be published on the project website and further disseminated via the project’s Twitter account.

Type of strategy: Dissemination, exploitation and communication

Targeted stakeholders: EU-level, national and regional policy-makers, NGO and CSO representatives

Measures to verify impact: Number of stakeholders that receive reports, their feedback and their expressions of interests to learn more about and/or further engage with DEMCORE; website analytics (see ‘Website’ below)

Type of activity: Liberal democracy knowledge clips. DEMCORE will create a series of short knowledge clips about long-term trends of support for liberal democracy among European citizens and political parties in relation to our first objective. The clips will be made together with the MFI Centre at SDU, which has extensive experience in making media industry-oriented materials, is well connected to journalism schools and is well centred for (inter)national networks. Each one version will be made for journalists and journalism schools to be used also beyond the project’s lifespan. They will be disseminated via SDU’s network and periodically followed up.

Type of strategy: Dissemination, exploitation and communication

Targeted stakeholders: Journalism students, journalists and professional journalism associations

Measures to verify impact: Uptake and feedback by journalism schools within SDU’s network

Type of activity: Heatmaps (for sharing). DEMCORE will produce a series of heatmaps to illustrate the level and geographical distribution of current challenges to liberal democracy in a data visualisation that is facilitating for media and policy-makers to engage with. Four heatmaps will be disseminated, for which a targeted communication and exploitation strategy will developed, after the 2024 EP election tapping 1) party positions towards liberal democracy and 2) towards gender equality; and the 3) geographical and 4) gender distribution of voter attitudes towards liberal democratic norms and values.

Type of strategy: Dissemination and exploitation

Targeted stakeholders: Journalists, policy-makers, NGO and CSO representatives (Europe-wide)

Measures to verify impact: Uptake by journalists and other stakeholders in their publications/communication

Continuous exchange with the scientific community

DEMCORE’s consortium members will regularly present their findings and organise panels at **international conferences** (e.g. APSA, EPSA, ECPR, EUSA, ICA) and in **invited public or academic talks** that take place virtually (e.g. academic podcasts) or physically in various locations. Apart from the research exchange at the stakeholder conference mentioned above, another aim is to collect papers at this conference for the publication of a joint **Special Issue** in a major academic journal (e.g. *European Union Politics*; *Journal of European Public Policy*). DEMCORE’s **scientific publications**, including journal articles, special issues and – if possible – books and book chapters, will be made freely accessible online through either **Gold or Green Open Access**. The associated costs have been accounted for in DEMCORE’s budget.

As regards the **public disclosure of research data** the consortium is guided by the principle: as open as possible as restricted as necessary. Anonymised and data protection conform data versions will be easily accessible through a publicly funded data archive (see 1.2.10) within the *Monitoring Electoral Democracy* (MEDem) infrastructure.

2.2.1.2 Communication activities

As DEMCORE’s results will have significant implications for European citizens, it is imperative to reach out to stakeholders beyond the ones identified above. DEMCORE’s **communication activities** are aimed at fostering the project’s visibility and enhancing the public debate on the challenges to European liberal democracy. Here, stakeholders comprise, firstly, **the media** (i.e. journalists in Brussels and across the EU) through which European citizens will be reached indirectly. Secondly, we also target **European citizens** directly at both a local and a transnational level. To accomplish this, DEMCORE has the following direct means of communication:

Type of activity: Website. DEMCORE will build a project website at the beginning of the project and maintain it throughout by adding new information on research outputs, events and other project activities by consortium members. It will be professionally designed, visually appealing and easy to navigate also for a non-specialist audience, with some **interactive elements** (see ‘Heatmaps’) alongside a **Twitter feed** (see ‘Twitter account’) and **blogposts** (see ‘blogposts’) in relation to our public reports delivered to the European Commission. The website and therewith DEMCORE’s results will remain online beyond the project’s lifespan.

Type of strategy: Communication and dissemination

Targeted stakeholders: Specific stakeholders identified above + media + public at large

Measures to verify impact: Website analytics, including page views, clicks on links

Type of activity: Heatmaps (website). The series of heatmaps that DEMCORE will produce for journalists, policy-makers and civil society organisations (see ‘heatmaps (for sharing)’ above) will also be made available as an interactive tool on our website.

Type of strategy: Communication and dissemination

Targeted stakeholders: Specific stakeholders identified above + media + public at large

Measures to verify impact: Website analytics, including page views, clicks on links

Type of activity: Twitter account. DEMCORE will open a Twitter account at the beginning of the project and manage it throughout by regularly tweeting about new information on research outputs, events and other project activities by consortium members and by regularly provide links to the project website. A dedicated social media manager will ensure an active and keen engagement with the public on Twitter.

Type of strategy: Communication and dissemination

Targeted stakeholders: Specific stakeholders identified above + media + public at large

Measures to verify impact: Growth of followers over time; interaction with tweets (likes, retweets, responses)

Type of activity: Blogposts. Upon publication of every public report, DEMCORE will publish a blogpost for a non-specialist audience on its website. Additional blogposts that are connected to the scientific publications of DEMCORE’s members will be published on the websites of renowned Blogs (e.g. LSE EUROPP, Monkey Cage, ECPR’s the Loop) – also beyond the lifespan of the project.

Type of strategy: Communication and dissemination

Targeted stakeholders: Specific stakeholders identified above + media + public at large

Measures to verify impact: Website analytics, including page views, clicks on links

2.2.2 Strategy for the management of intellectual property

The Consortium Agreement will explicate the handling of intellectual property rights (IPR). In all events, three guiding principles will be followed:

- 1) Background (existing knowledge): unless expressly agreed otherwise, each partner grants to all other partners in the consortium access rights to background disclosed for the execution of the project.
- 2) Foreground (generated knowledge): any foreground generated during the project will be considered the result of joint effort by the partners collaborating in the specific Work Package. As such, it shall be jointly owned, entitling all WP partners to exploit it for non-commercial purposes such as academic research, training and teaching activities. Commercial exploitation is only possible when the joint owners give prior consent and agree on fair and reasonable compensation.
- 3) For the use of data owned by external parties, an agreement will be drafted for each secondary dataset processed by the consortium. This agreement will detail how ownership and exploitation will be dealt with and specify any restrictions on processing techniques that may not be used.

2.3 Summary

KEY ELEMENT OF THE IMPACT SECTION

SPECIFIC NEEDS	EXPECTED RESULTS	D & E & C MEASURES
<p><i>What are the specific needs that triggered this project?</i></p> <p>In order to be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reflect upon and actualise what liberal democracy means in the 21st century, produce theoretically and empirically robust future visions, and develop recommendations, tool-kits, narratives and methodologies <p>1) We require an in-depth understanding of the long-term trends of support for liberal democracy among European citizens and political parties and the extent to which these are shaped by contextual factors and institutions.</p> <p>2) We require a comprehensive account of the challenges that liberal democracy in Europe is currently facing – both in terms of contestation of ideals in public discourse and in the electoral marketplace – and what role historic, political and economic contexts play for this contestation.</p> <p>3) We require strategies to counter illiberal democrats and ensure liberal democratic resilience across Europe in the long run.</p>	<p><i>What do you expect to generate by the end of the project?</i></p> <p>Thorough and pioneering knowledge of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the extent to which citizens' attitudes towards liberal democracy have evolved over different generations across Europe, how we can measure support, and those factors (historic, political and economic contexts, external events) and EU and national institutions that explain generational differences. the way political parties have defended liberal democratic norms and values over the past years, how this has changed during recent European crises, whether there are indications of transnational convergence, and the reciprocal relationship between institutional change and partisan rhetoric. the dynamics of public discourse on social media with respect to the contestation of different liberal democratic ideals communicated by political elites, public responses to illiberal appeals and the extent to which and under what conditions (il)liberal democratic appeals travel across the EU. the function of EP elections in offering a marketplace of supply and demand with respect to potentially contrasting visions of liberal democracy in Europe as well as under what conditions, among whom, and where in Europe challengers of liberal democracy are successful or not. the structure of European citizens' illiberal democratic preferences, the extent to which these are shaped by citizens' personal experiences and socio-demographic characteristics and the extent to which they vary across different institutional contexts as well as over time. the strategies to 'inoculate the vulnerable' against illiberal appeals and strengthen support for liberal democracy in the EU in the future and the conditions under which they are successful in the real-world context of social media. 	<p><i>What dissemination, exploitation and communication measures will you apply to the results?</i></p> <p>Exploitation: Educational package for journalists; two-day stakeholder conference; public debates in EU member states; three flagship policy reports; liberal democracy knowledge clips for journalists; 'heatmaps'</p> <p>Dissemination towards the scientific community: conference presentations and dedicated panels; open access scientific publications; invited public or academic talks; a Special Issue in a major academic journal; data for scientific analyses; active Twitter account; project website</p> <p>Communication towards citizens: 'heatmaps' via the media and our own website; blogposts; Twitter account; public debates in EU member states</p>

TARGET GROUPS

Who will use or further up-take the results of the project? Who will benefit from the results of the project?

Policy-makers at EU and national levels: *Věra Jourová* (Vice-President of the *European Commission*, Portfolio: Values and Transparency); members of two *European Parliament* Committees, namely *LIBE* (Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs) and *AFCO* (Constitutional Affairs); members of the *CIVEX* Commission (Citizenship, Governance, Institutional & External Affairs) of the *European Committee of the Regions*; national & regional governments, parliamentarians

National human rights institutions through direct contacts or via the *European Network of National Human Rights Institutions*

Pan-European NGOs and CSOs such as *Civil Society Europe*, which offers European Coordination of Civil Society Organisations, *Amnesty International*, *Transparency International EU*, the *European Centre for Press and Media Freedom*, and the *Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties)*

European journalists (through personal networks) **and journalistic associations**, namely the *European Federation of Journalists* and *European Data Journalism Network*

Scientific community (esp. European politics and communication; and more widely scholars of sociology, history, law, philosophy, and political economy with a regional focus on Europe/the EU)

European citizens (indirectly via the media or locally)

OUTCOMES

What change do you expect to see after successful dissemination and exploitation of project results to the target group(s)?

Specifically policy-makers at EU level:

- *Ability* to devise new measures to comprehensively capture support for liberal democracy in order to be able to monitor it in the future
- *Ability* to identify and evaluate warning signs in the contestation of liberal democratic ideals between European political elites and citizens
- *Ability* to address ‘illiberal democratic’ preferences and counter illiberal appeals

Specifically journalists & journalism associations:

- *Sensitivity* for how different editorial choices in political reporting are connected to current challenges to liberal democracy in Europe

EU and national policy-makers, human rights institutions, NGOs, CSOs, journalists & citizens:

- *Understanding* patterns of citizen attitudes, behaviour and preferences, and party positions towards liberal democracy across Europe
- *Awareness* of conditions and communication styles that foster illiberal tendencies across the EU and of strategies to counter illiberal appeals

Scientific community

- *Recognition* of our arguments and findings
- *Use* of our concepts, operationalisations and scientific data to further investigate the phenomenon in future research

IMPACTS

What are the expected wider scientific, economic and societal effects of the project contributing to the expected impacts outlined in the respective destination in the work programme?

Political:

- Having a better understanding of citizen attitudes, preferences and behaviour, will increase the *input legitimacy* of the EU’s effort to enforce liberal democracy across Europe.

Societal:

- Awareness of the dynamics that underlie the contestation of liberal democracy in Europe enables media and citizens to hold responsible political actors within and across the EU accountable.
- Having the tools to counter illiberal appeals will *empower representatives of civil society* to defend liberal democratic norms and values.

Scientific:

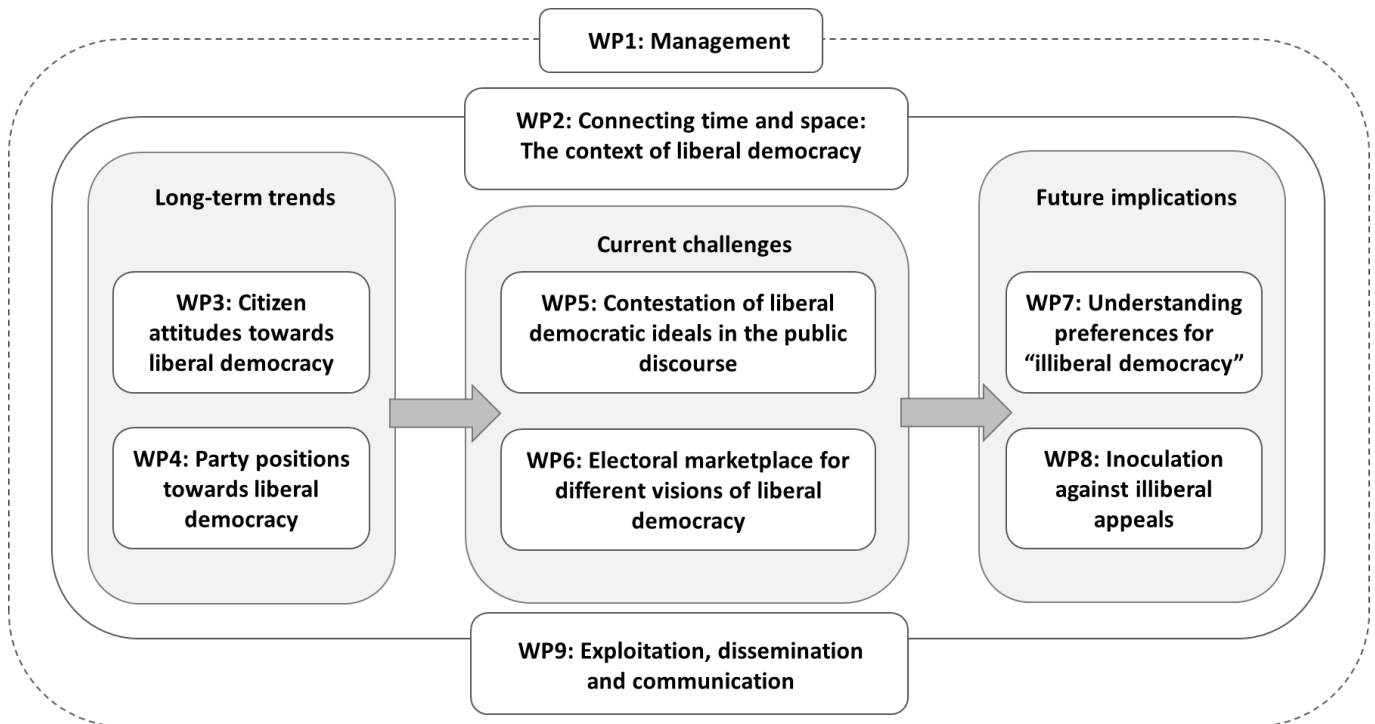
- *A new conceptual framework* that provides an integrated account of long-term trends, current challenges and future implications with respect to liberal democracy in Europe
- *New operationalisations* of elite communication, particularly of illiberal rhetoric, and of citizen attitudes, behaviour and preferences
- *New data* that complement existing data sources and that can henceforth be used in future scientific research and will be kept alive within the MEDem infrastructure

3. QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Work plan and resources

DEMCORE's work package structure is devised in such way that it addresses its three overarching objectives effectively. Figure 3.1a depicts the relationship between the different work packages. The design is structured around the three main objectives that DEMCORE wishes to realise. There are seven substantive Work Packages (2-8). WP2 provides the analytical framework of the relevant historic, political and economic contexts to evaluate liberal democracies and their legitimacy in the past, present and future, which is why it is visually embracing all remaining substantive Work Packages. The latter are **clustered in pairs in their common linkage to the three overarching objectives**.

Figure 3.1a: Relationship between work packages



To study the long-term trends of support for liberal democracy (**Objective 1**), WP3 examines citizen attitudes towards liberal democracy while WP4 is concerned with measuring and analysing party positions and partisan rhetoric towards liberal democracy. To provide a comprehensive account of the challenges that liberal democracy in Europe is currently facing (**Objective 2**), WP5's focus lies on the contestation of liberal democratic ideals in the public discourse that is shared between citizens and political elites. WP6 examines the electoral marketplace for different visions of liberal democracy shared by voters and political parties. To accomplish **Objective 3** and develop strategies to counter illiberal democrats and ensure liberal democratic resilience in the future, WP7 examines the causal mechanisms that underpin citizen preferences for 'illiberal democracy' as offered in different forms by political elites. WP7 then develops effective strategies to 'inoculate the vulnerable' against illiberal appeals.

Finally, **WP1 and WP9 service the substantive Work Packages**: The supportive WP1 (Management) will facilitate the work that is done in the remaining Work Packages, while WP9 is dedicated entirely to the dissemination, exploitation and communication of our results. Both Work Packages span from the very beginning until the final project month and are therefore crucial for the successful implementation of the project and for the effective dissemination and exploitation of DEMCORE's results, respectively.

Figure 3.1b on the next page provides an overview of the **timing** of the different work packages and their components. It shows how the different work packages are **logically following** one another, with overlaps of major tasks allowing for the **smooth implementation** of the project as a whole.

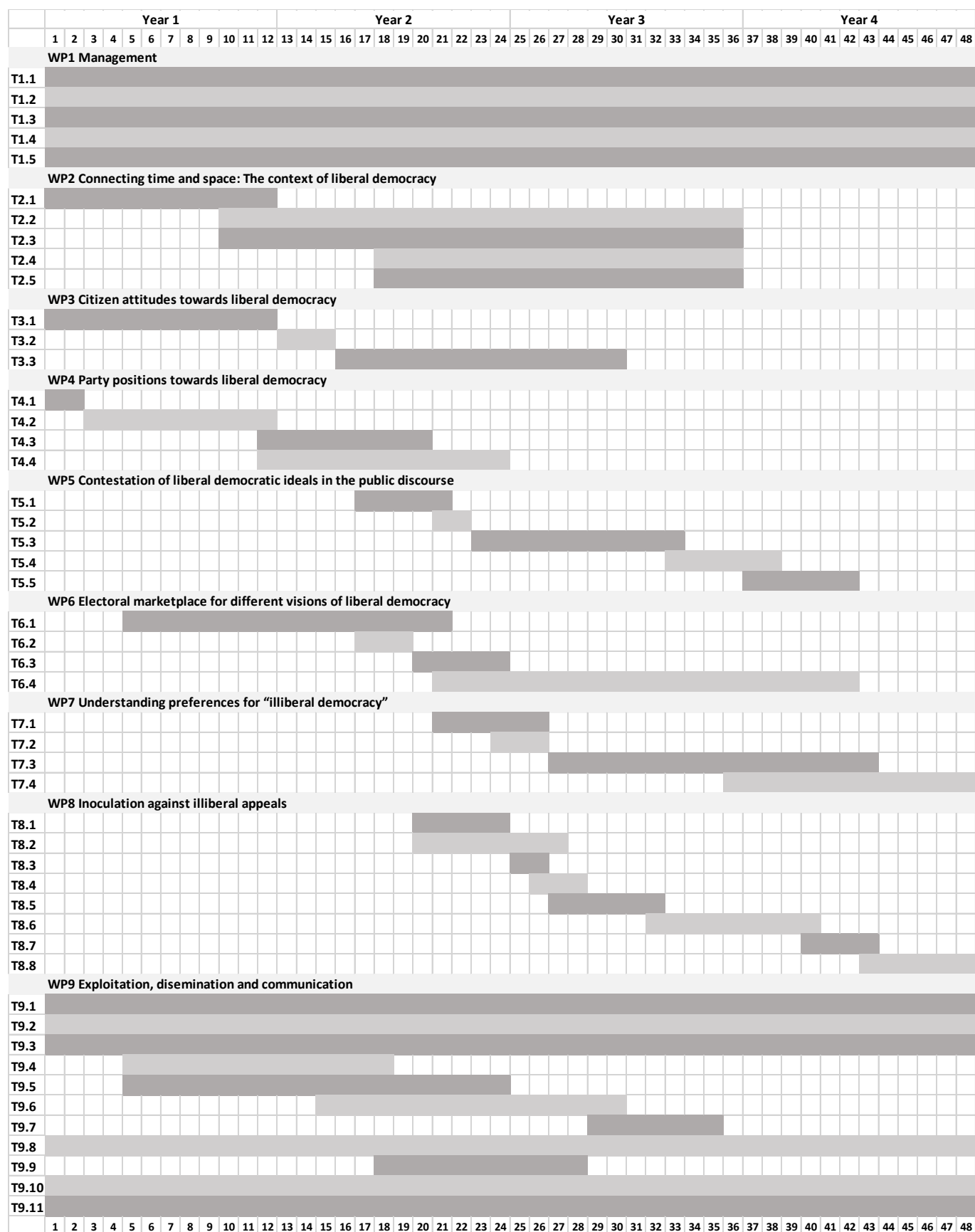
Figure 3.1b: Timing of the different work packages and their components

Table 3.1a: List of work packages

Work Package		Lead Participant				
No	Title	No	Short Name	Person-Months	Start month	End month
1	Management	1	UVA	33.7	1	48
2	Connecting time and space: The context of liberal democracy	5	GESIS	16.5	1	36
3	Citizen attitudes towards liberal democracy	1	UVA	38.1	1	30
4	Party positions towards liberal democracy	6	UCLB	38.5	1	24
5	Contestation of liberal democratic ideals in the public discourse	3	UNCL	35.4	17	42
6	Electoral marketplace for different visions of liberal democracy	4	LSE	53.9	5	42
7	Understanding preferences for ‘illiberal democracy’	2	SWPS	39.0	21	48
8	Inoculation against illiberal appeals	8	FNSP	37.0	20	48
9	Exploitation, dissemination and communication	7	SDU	34.6	1	48
Total person-months				326.7		

Table 3.1b: Work package description

Work package number	1	Lead beneficiary						UVA	
Work package title	Management								
Participant number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Short name of participant	UVA	SWPS	UNCL	LSE	GESIS	UCLB	SDU	FNSP	CEPS
Person months per participant:	19.2	1	1	1	8	1	1	1	0.5
Start month	1	End month						48	

Objectives

WP1 is a non-substantive supportive WP facilitating the work that is done in the WPs 2-9. It does so by ensuring an effective administrative and financial implementation of DEMCORE; monitoring progress; designing and installing procedures to initiate and monitor compliance with high-quality procedures for data management, research ethics and quality assurance; mitigating risks and consulting on IPR and legal issues; and by facilitating optimal liaison both among project partners and with the Research Executive Agency.

Description of work (where appropriate, broken down into tasks), lead partner and role of participants

Task 1.1 Administrative and financial management (lead UVA; partners: none; duration: months 1-48): This task concerns proper (periodic) reporting on the administrative and financial operations of the project, and the timely delivery of deliverables. This will be achieved through detailed planning, frequent communication with all consortium partners, and close liaison with the Research Executive Agency.

Task 1.2 Initiate and monitor quality assurance (lead UVA; partners: none; duration: months 1-48): This task involves the installation of consortium-wide quality assessment procedures in the form of an internal review to ensure that the implementation of the project and its outcomes is of high quality. The respective measures will be subject to continuous assessment and will be modified when necessary.

Task 1.3 Install and monitor ethical standards (lead UVA; partners: GESIS; duration: months 1-48): We will ensure that the project’s research is carried out according to the highest ethical and GDPR standards by devising consortium-wide ethical protocols and working procedures and advising all partners on how to meet these criteria prior to ERB applications at their institutions.

Task 1.4 Data management (lead GESIS; partners: all data collecting partners; duration: months 1-48): This task concerns comprehensive and effective data management procedures as described in section 1.2.10. The task's output includes a data management plan it and fully checked and labelled datasets for data collected in WPs 3-8 as part of DEMCORE's commitment to open science practices (see 1.2.8).

Task 1.5 Project coordination (lead UVA; partners: all; duration: months 1-48): This task involves the monitoring of research tasks and activities in close cooperation with all WP leaders and the provision of prompt and effective assistance to consortium partners in order to ensure that these tasks and activities – and thus the project as a whole – are implemented successfully. It also includes the initiation of the tenders for the research data collection in WPs 6-8, alongside the organisation of consortium meetings in months 1, 9, 18, 26, 34 and 46, which are carefully timed in relation to major milestones, and the meetings with the Advisory Board.

Deliverables (brief description and month of delivery)

D1.1 Quality assurance plan (lead: UVA; month of delivery: 4)

D1.2 Data management plan (lead: GESIS; month of delivery: 4)

D1.3 Report on data management activities (lead: GESIS; month of delivery: 48)

D1.4 Datasets produced by the project (lead: GESIS; month of delivery: 48), with a 12-month embargo.

Work package number	2	Lead beneficiary						GESIS	
Work package title	Connecting time and space: The context of liberal democracy								
Participant number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Short name of participant	UVA	SWPS	UNCL	LSE	GESIS	UCLB	SDU	FNSP	CEPS
Person months per participant:	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	2.5
Start month	1	End month						36	

Objectives

WP2 frames and feeds into the analyses conducted in the substantive WPs 3-8. Its first objective is to develop an analytical framework of the relevant historic, political and economic contexts to evaluate liberal democracies and their legitimacy. It identifies relevant indicators for each of these contexts, and collects and harmonises relevant data across time (from 1990 onwards) and space (from all EU member states). Second, it will also describe the relevant trends in the functioning of liberal democracy in the EU member states. Third, it will describe the relevant political and institutional context at the EU level in order to understand how EU institutions promote liberal democracy and respond to democratic backsliding in EU member states.

Based on these data and developments, WP2 will analyse how institutional and political mechanisms built into liberal democracies at the EU level and cross-nationally have functioned as limits or as responses to democratic backsliding in governance and illiberal developments. WP2 also examines the resistance of liberal democratic institutions to internal challenges within countries, such as demographic shifts and economic and labour changes, and external challenges to liberal democracy, including the Great Recession, the changing geo-political world order, climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Description of work (where appropriate, broken down into tasks), lead partner and role of participants

Task 2.1 Developing analytical framework (lead GESIS; partners: none; duration: months 1-12): We will develop the analytical framework of the way historic, political and economic contexts and institutions may have presented challenges to the evolvement of liberal democracies over the past decades within and across the EU. The goal is to identify indicators for Tasks 2.2 and 2.3. It will also embed WPs 3 & 4 in a larger context, act as the basis for the methodological work in the whole project, and guide the case selection in WPs 7 & 8.

Task 2.2 Building a database of contexts and conditions in which democratic institutions operate (lead GESIS; partners: none; duration: months 10-36): We will collect, structure and harmonise economic and political indicators at the national level to depict context. We will also collect data on the impact of the various crises at the national level, such as the Great recession, migration, the covid-19 pandemic (see 1.2.1). The final database will be structured in such way that it provides linking opportunities to all other project data collected.

Task 2.3 Building a database of liberal democracy indicators (lead: GESIS; partners: none; duration: months 10-36): We will collect, structure and harmonise indicators and instruments that characterise liberal democracy across time and space within Europe, including civil liberties, civil rights and liberal democratic institutions (see 1.2.1 for an overview). The final database will be structured in such way that it provides linking opportunities to all other project data collected

Task 2.4 Improving the understanding of liberal democracy across Europe (lead: GESIS, partners: none; duration: months 18-36): We will analyse the collected data in order to improve the understanding of democratic performance across time and within the economic and political contexts. We will answer major questions about the development of liberal democratic institutions and shed light on their resilience against various historic, political and economic contexts.

Task 2.5 Understanding how EU institutions promote liberal democracy and respond to democratic backsliding in EU member states (lead: CEPS, partners: none; duration: months 18-36): We will describe the relevant political and institutional context at the EU level through document analysis. We will take stock of the way the EC, the EP and the Council have promoted liberal democracy since the Maastricht Treaty and how they have responded to democratic backsliding in its member states. We will analyse the legal foundation for those measures, the measures that have been taken and their effects. We will also assess whether and what kind of actions to foster liberal democracy followed the *Conference on the Future of Europe*.

Deliverables (brief description and month of delivery)

D2.1 Report on the analytical framework for the entire project (lead: GESIS; month of delivery: 12): It forms the basis for the methodological work in the whole project, embed WP3 & WP4 in a larger context, and guides the case selection in WP7 & WP8. It will be released and discussed internally in month 9.

D2.2 Report on the over-time development of liberal democracy across Europe (lead: GESIS; month of delivery: 36): It provides information on the cross-national background for the work in WPs 3-8.

D2.3 Report on the EU's promotion of liberal democracy and its response to democratic backsliding (lead: CEPS; month of delivery: 36): It provides information on the EU institutional background for the work in WPs 3-8.

Work package number	3	Lead beneficiary						UVA	
Work package title	Citizen attitudes towards liberal democracy								
Participant number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Short name of participant	UVA	SWPS	UNCL	LSE	GESIS	UCLB	SDU	FNPS	CEPS
Person months per participant:	30.6	0	0	0	3	3	1.5	0	0
Start month	1	End month						30	

Objectives

WP3 delivers the longitudinal study of citizen attitudes towards liberal democracy. It does so on the basis of European survey data collected in the EU. Although existing research does mostly not focus on these elements of liberal democracy, past surveys do include comprehensive information about highly related attitudes, such as tolerance towards minorities, support for female emancipation, and authoritarianism. In WP3, we therefore make an inventory of the available European data on these relevant attitudes from the 1990s onwards and, in as much as possible, harmonise and pool them. The objectives of WP3 are threefold:

- Identify and combine all available European survey data from data archives that measure support for liberal democracy and highly related attitudes since 1990.
- Analyse and compare – in collaboration with WP2 and WP4 – long-term trends in support for liberal democratic norms and values across institutional, political and economic contexts, and relate these to developments in partisan rhetoric. This is done by focussing on individual-level correlates with a particular focus on generations over time. Particular attention will be paid to gender differences in the support for liberal democracy.

Description of work (where appropriate, broken down into tasks), lead partner and role of participants

Task 3.1 Building a dataset of survey data measuring public support for liberal democracy (lead UVA; partners: none; duration: months 1-12): This task involves a) the identification of relevant data, b) their collection, and c) their integration into one cohesive dataset. The latter requires harmonisation of file formats, variable names and operationalisations.

Task 3.2 Linking individual survey data with contextual data and partisan rhetoric (lead UVA; partners: GESIS, UCLB; duration: months 13-15): This task involves linking the individual survey data from task 3.1 with data from WP2 and WP4. The unit of analysis is the individual citizen.

Task 3.3 Analyse the correlates of support for liberal democracy (lead UVA; partners: UCLB, SDU; duration: months 16-30): We will analyse individual-level support for liberal democracy across generations in the EU, measured against changes in party positions and institutional, political and economic contexts. Particular attention will be paid to gender differences, which is why we collaborate with WPs 4, 5, 6 & 7.

Deliverables (brief description and month of delivery)

D3.1 Report on measuring support for liberal democracy (lead: UVA; month of delivery: 18): It summarises the methodological approach to measuring public support for liberal democracy and will inform the first flagship report on long-term trends in public support for liberal democracy.

D3.2 Report on citizen support for liberal democracy over time (lead: UVA; month of delivery: 30): It summarises the main findings and will also inform the first flagship report.

Work package number	4	Lead beneficiary						UCLB	
Work package title	Party positions towards liberal democracy								
Participant number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Short name of participant	UVA	SWPS	UNCL	LSE	GESIS	UCLB	SDU	FNSP	CEPS
Person months per participant:	0	0	0	0	3	32	2	0	1.5
Start month	1	End month						24	

Objectives

WP4 conducts a thorough and pioneering longitudinal analysis of party positions towards liberal democratic norms and values. Its objectives are twofold:

- Examine how the partisan rhetoric on, and challenges to, liberal democracy in general and gender equality in particular, by European parties has developed over time and across EU member states.
- Through the integration of data collected in WP2 (contexts and institutions) and WP3 (citizen attitudes), we will compare the long-term trends in elite rhetoric and public legitimacy, and explore the impact of major political and economic challenges over the past decades.

To meet these objectives, WP4 builds an original dataset, combining hand-coding and state-of-the-art computational text analysis, with the positions of political parties on core liberal democratic norms and values, using raw national and European parliamentary manifestos and political speeches, including those of pan-EU lead candidates (*Spitzenkandidaten*). This will be integrated with the citizen survey data and economic and political events data to allow for a longitudinal analysis of the long-term trends in the functioning of liberal democratic norms and the state of equality. Finally, a more fine-grained analysis of current party positions, combining text analysis with expert data will allow us to contribute to ‘heatmaps’ of current challenges to liberal democracy and gender equality across the continent (see WP9).

Description of work (where appropriate, broken down into tasks), lead partner and role of participants

Task 4.1 Collecting raw materials for analysing partisan rhetoric (lead: UCLB; partners: none; duration: months 1-2): This task involves collecting the raw material, i.e. party manifestos of national and European parties and political speeches building on *ParlSpeech* and *EUSpeech* corpora. The data will be transformed into computer readable format.

Task 4.2 Development of coding schemes of (il)liberal rhetoric and gender threats (lead: UCLB; partners: SDU; duration: months 3-12): This task concerns the creation of a hand-coding coding scheme and the use of computational analysis to develop a computerised coding scheme.

Task 4.3 Measuring party positions towards liberal democracy and gender equality over time (lead: UCLB; partners: GESIS, SDU; duration: months 12-20): This task involves the coding of party positions towards liberal democracy and gender equality across the EU up to and including the 2024 EP election. This will be done through a mix of hand-coding and automated procedures to ensure validity and reliability of the coded positions. The pre-2024 data will be made available to WP3 in month 15.

Task 4.4 Time-series analysis: the relationship between partisan rhetoric, public legitimacy and institutional change in liberal democracies (lead: UCLB; partners: GESIS, SDU, CEPS; duration: months 12-24): This task concerns linking the dataset on party positions towards liberal democracy and gender equality over time and across countries to public opinion data (WP3) and context data (WP2), followed by a longitudinal analysis of changes in party positions across the EU against changes in public support for liberal democracy and institutional, political and economic contexts. The unit of analysis is the individual party. Additional attention will be paid to the rhetoric of Spitzenkandidaten in 2014, 2019 and 2024.

Deliverables (brief description and month of delivery)

D4.1 Report on Spitzenkandidaten rhetoric towards liberal democracy (lead: CEPS; month of delivery: 22): It sheds light onto the extent to which and how *Spitzenkandidaten* refer to liberal democracy.

D4.2 Report on the longitudinal development of party positions towards liberal democracy (lead: UCLB; month of delivery: 24): It summaries the main findings and their implications for measuring party positions towards liberal democracy, and will inform the first flagship report.

D4.3 Report on the longitudinal development of party positions towards gender equality (lead: UCLB; month of delivery: 24) It summarises the main findings and their implications for measuring party positions towards gender equality, and will inform the first flagship report.

Work package number	5	Lead beneficiary						UNCL	
Work package title	Contestation of liberal democratic ideals in the public discourse								
Participant number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Short name of participant	UVA	SWPS	UNCL	LSE	GESIS	UCLB	SDU	FNSP	CEPS
Person months per participant:	5	0	22.4	0	0	2	6	0	0
Start month	17	End month						42	

Objectives

WP5 studies how illiberal appeals spread across on social media and what reaction they trigger from the public. It examines the dynamic between the supply side (political actors) and the demand side (citizens) when it comes to the proliferation of (il)liberal views in the transnational setting of the EU. In particular, it focuses on how the discourse of political elites shapes and is shaped by citizens' attitudes towards liberal democracy. WP5 has the following objectives:

- Identify the main challengers and the supporters of liberal democratic norms and values, including gender critical rhetoric, and assess the extent to which these actors and their communication strategies are influential on social media.
- Given the potential of social media to provide exposure to counter-attitudinal views (Barberá et al. 2015), examine the tension between these discourses and how this tension shapes attitudes towards liberal democracy among both the public and elites.
- Analyse the diffusion of (il)liberal democratic discourse across time and space and under what conditions this diffusion can be countered.

Description of work (where appropriate, broken down into tasks), lead partner and role of participants

Task 5.1 Development of codebook (lead UNCL; partners: UVA, UCLB, SDU; duration: months 17-21): Based on the analytical framework developed in WP2 and in co-ordination with WP4, we develop a codebook to code (il)liberal discourse on social media. It also includes compiling a list of social media profiles on Facebook and Twitter of relevant politicians (e.g. MPs, EP candidates, national and EU government members) ahead of the 2024 EP election to be used for the data collection alongside meta-information that also includes the gender of the messenger. It will be adjusted to real-world developments on Twitter if necessary.

Task 5.2 Data collection (lead UNCL; partners: none; duration: months 21-22): Based on the list of social media profiles we will collect via the *Twitter Streaming API*: tweets by politicians, replies to these tweets, and all tweets which mention candidates during the election campaigns. Using *CrowdTangle* for Facebook we will also collect: politicians' public posts alongside the number of likes, comments and shares for the same four-week-period before the EP election.

Task 5.3 Social media analysis of the content generated by political actors (lead UNCL; partners: SDU, UVA; duration: months 23-33): This task will analyse patterns of (il)liberal democratic discourse initiated by political elites and the public response. Since similar data were collected at the time of the 2019 EP election by the Work Package leader (Fazekas et al. 2021), we will be able to compare the diachronic evolution of (il)liberal discourse assess the extent to which if illiberal democratic discourse has a growing appeal among elites and the public.

Task 5.4 Identify successful communicational strategies that promote illiberal appeals (lead SDU; partners: UNCL, UVA; duration: months 33-38): This task will analyse how (il)liberal democratic appeals are promoted in terms of communication style, the use of emotive rhetoric and their association with political issues during the 2024 EP election campaigns in order to assess the success of such appeals. Taking advantage of the data availability from 2019, we will also be able to assess the degree to which any changes in illiberal democratic appeals contribute to their popularity.

Task 5.5 The diffusion of illiberal democratic appeal idea across Europe (lead UVA; partners: UNCL, SDU; duration: months 37-42): In this task we will assess the extent to which and under what conditions (il)liberal democratic appeals on social media travel across European countries (or not). This allows us to evaluate if political elites make use of a common playbook or if they contextualise these messages according to a given countries' circumstances.

Deliverables (brief description and month of delivery)

D5.1 Report on the spread of illiberal democratic discourse on social media (lead: UNCL; month of delivery: 33): It also informs the second flagship report on the challenges related to the contestation of liberal democratic ideals.

D5.2 Report on the promotion of illiberal democratic appeals and their effects (lead: SDU; month of delivery: 38): It also informs the second flagship report.

D5.3 Report on the diffusion of illiberal democratic appeals across EU member states (lead: UVA; month of delivery: 42): It also informs the second flagship report.

Work package number	6	Lead beneficiary						LSE	
Work package title	Electoral marketplace for different visions of liberal democracy								
Participant number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Short name of participant	UVA	SWPS	UNCL	LSE	GESIS	UCLB	SDU	FNPS	CEPS
Person months per participant:	6.6	2	1	36.8	3	2	0	1	1.5
Start month	5	End month						42	

Objectives

In order to understand the extent to which liberal democratic norms and values are anchored in people's voting choices, WP6 addresses the following questions: When and why do voters elect parties with 'illiberal' platforms? What role do voters' own attitudes towards the norms and values of liberal democracy play in their voting behaviour? To what extent do the EU's responses to democratic backsliding play a role for voter attitu-

des towards liberal democracy? And, what role do *Spitzenkandidaten* and (if applicable) transnational lists play for party competition and voter behaviour in this respect?

WP6 will design and conduct a post-election voter survey in the immediate aftermath of the 2024 European Parliament election across all EU member states. The design builds on key questions from the long-term trends in attitudes (WP3) to capture the tension between liberal ideals and other salient interests to citizens. We also integrate the coding of party positions in WP4 and the contextual data in WP2 to build a multilevel model of how individual, party- and country-level factors shape the success (or failure) of illiberal democratic parties in the electoral arena. In addition, by collecting new voter data we delve deeper into the political gender gaps that have been shown to characterise support for more illiberal party platforms of radical right political parties.

The 2024 EP election provides a unique arena for co-creation by involving relevant stakeholders in the study design (also in collaboration with WP5). WP6 will also analyse the survey data on public support for liberal democracy to contribute to the ‘heatmap’ of challenges to liberal democracy (see WP9).

Description of work (where appropriate, broken down into tasks), lead partner and role of participants

Task 6.1 Questionnaire development and design (lead LSE; partners: UVA, UNCL, CEPS, GESIS, FNSP; duration: months 5-21): This task concerns the development of the master questionnaire and its translations into all relevant languages. Some of the questions will be based on previous EES voter surveys, particularly from 2019, for which the complementary expertise by UNCL and UVA is imperative. Building on key questions from the long-term trends in attitudes (WP3), an extensive battery of new survey questions will measure the support for liberal democratic norms and values.

Task 6.2 Organise stakeholder workshop in Brussels (lead CEPS; partners: LSE, UNCL; duration: months 17-19): This researchers-meet-policy-makers workshop will be co-organised with WP5 and take place in month 18 ahead of the data collection. The task involves the preparation, execution and reporting to project partners.

Task 6.3 Conduct voter survey (lead GESIS; partners: LSE; duration: months 20-24): This task involves the implementation of the 2024 EP post-election study in 27 EU member states. It requires careful organisation, potential pre-tests, data collection, data checks and harmonisation of all 27 country samples into one single and cohesive dataset.

Task 6.4 Integrate voter, party and contextual data and analyse party choice (lead LSE; partners: UNCL, UCLB, GESIS, UVA, SWPS; duration: months 21-42) : In order to integrate data within the project and understand long-term trends, this task involves linking the individual survey data from task 6.2 with contextual and institutional data (WP2) and party positions towards that were held at the time of the 2024 EP election (WP4). UVA’s, SWPS’s and UNCL’s methodological expertise will be required to complete this task.

Deliverables (brief description and month of delivery)

D6.1 Report on voter attitudes towards liberal democracy (lead: LSE; month of delivery: 38): It summarises the novel measures and findings related to voter attitudes towards liberal democracy and informs the second flagship report.

D6.2 Report on the electoral market place for different visions of liberal democracy (lead: LSE; month of delivery: 42): This report summarises the main findings regarding the current challenges to liberal democracy in the European electoral market place; their implications inform the second flagship report.

Work package number	7	Lead beneficiary						SWPS	
Work package title	Understanding preferences for ‘illiberal democracy’								
Participant number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Short name of participant	UVA	SWPS	UNCL	LSE	GESIS	UCLB	SDU	FNSP	CEPS
Person months per participant:	6	30	0	0	0	2	0	0	1
Start month	21	End month						48	

Objectives

The objectives of WP7 are twofold:

- Examine the causal links between socio-demographic attributes, including gender, and political attitudes on the one hand, and preferences for illiberal solutions, including for the EU, on the other.
- Analyse the extent to which extent, ‘pro-illiberal’ behaviours are persistent over time.

To meet these objective, WP7 will carry out a multi-country panel survey. The case selection will be guided by findings of WPs 2-6 alongside current developments at the time of investigation. Building on insights into attitudes towards and correlates of liberal democratic norms and values generated by WPs 3, 5 & 6, WP7 will focus on the causes of illiberal democratic preferences, using conjoint experiments with decision tasks concerning preferences for political regimes and outcomes. This approach will make it possible to estimate the relative causal impacts of multi-dimensional respondent attributes and policy preferences on preferences for illiberalism in more realistic and holistic scenarios. Additionally, the panel design of this survey allows observing the stability of preferences for illiberal democracy over time.

Description of work (where appropriate, broken down into tasks), lead partner and role of participants

Task 7.1 Questionnaire development and design (lead SWPS; partners: UCLB, UVA; duration: months 21-26): This task concerns the development of the master questionnaire and its translations into all relevant languages. While building on the operationalisations identified (WP3) or used (WP6) in earlier WPs, a comprehensive battery of survey questions will be developed that tap citizen preferences (as opposed to attitudes) for liberal democratic norms and values to study causal mechanisms underpinning these preferences.

Task 7.2 Organise stakeholder workshop in Brussels (lead CEPS; partners: SWPS; duration: months 24-26): This researchers-meet-policy-makers workshop will take place in month 25 ahead of the data collection. The task involves the preparation, execution and reporting to project partners.

Task 7.3 Conduct panel survey with embedded conjoint experiments (lead SWPS; partners: none; duration: months 27-43): This task involves the implementation of the multi-country panel survey with embedded conjoint experiments. It requires careful organisation, potential pre-tests, data collection, data checks and harmonisation of all country samples into one single and cohesive dataset.

Task 7.4 Analyse the causes of illiberal democratic preferences (lead SWPS; partners: UVA; duration: months 36-48): This task involves the analysis of the causes for varying preferences for liberal democratic norms and values. Thereby, it analyses the results from the conjoint experiments and assess the extent to which preferences for illiberal democracy change over time.

Deliverables (brief description and month of delivery)

D7.1 Report on the individual causes of illiberal democratic preferences (lead: SWPS; month of delivery: 47): The report will summarise the main findings regarding individual preferences for ‘illiberal democracy’. Their implications inform the third flagship report on future implications for democratic governance.

D7.2 Report on the cross-national patterns of illiberal democratic preferences (lead: SWPS; month of delivery: 47): The report will summarise the comparative findings regarding preferences for ‘illiberal democracy’ in different political and institutional contexts. It also informs the third flagship report.

Work package number	8	Lead beneficiary						FNSP	
Work package title	Inoculation against illiberal appeals								
Participant number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Short name of participant	UVA	SWPS	UNCL	LSE	GESIS	UCLB	SDU	FNSP	CEPS
Person months per participant:	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	33	1
Start month	20	End month						48	

Objectives

The objectives of this Work Package are twofold, namely to:

- Develop and test the effectiveness of ‘inoculation’ messages that are designed to strengthen support for liberal democracy in the face of illiberal appeals.

- Investigate whether these inoculation messages are effective in real-world settings on social media.

We envision three phases of empirical research. In Phase 1, the WP leader will pilot test the effectiveness of traditional pre-emptive refutation messages that are designed to strengthen and reinforce pro-democracy attitudes and beliefs among those who are already supportive of liberal democracy. In Phase 2, we will investigate their effectiveness using a multi-country panel study with survey experiments, and whether this effectiveness differs for men and women. In Phase 3, we will turn our attention to investigating whether pro-democracy therapeutic messages can work in a real-world context of social media in collaboration with WP5. One way to reduce the spread of illiberal messages is to persuade would-be supporters of these messages to *not* spread them. For this, we will train Twitter bots to respond to illiberal tweets with a therapeutic inoculation message and then study the downstream effects of these messages.

Description of work (where appropriate, broken down into tasks), lead partner and role of participants

Task 8.1 Develop inoculation messages (lead FNSP; partners: SWPS, UNCL; duration: months 20-24): This task serves to develop pre-emptive refutation messages that are designed to confront illiberal messages.

Task 8.2 Questionnaire development and design (lead FNSP; partners: SWPS; duration: months 20-27): This task involves the design of survey questionnaire and of the experiments using the inoculation messages selected through the pilot study.

Task 8.3 Pilot effectiveness of inoculation messages (lead FNSP; partners: none; duration: months 25-26): This task serves to pilot test the effectiveness of inoculation messages in a small sample.

Task 8.4 Organise stakeholder workshop in Brussels (lead CEPS; partners: FNSP; duration: months 26-28): This researchers-meet-policy-makers workshop will take place in month 27 ahead of the main data collection. The task involves the preparation, execution and reporting to project partners.

Task 8.5 Administer multi-country survey experiment (lead FNSP; partners: none; duration: months 27-32): This task involves the implementation of the multi-country panel study with survey experiments.

Task 8.6 Analyse experimental data collected from the multi-country survey experiment (lead: FNSP; partners: SWPS; duration: months 32-40): we examine the effectiveness of ‘inoculation’ messages that are designed to strengthen support for liberal democracy in the face of illiberal appeals.

Task 8.7 Administer Twitter intervention (lead FNSP; partners: none; duration: months 40-43): This task involves training Twitter bots to respond to illiberal tweets with a therapeutic inoculation message.

Task 8.8 Analyse the effectiveness of inoculation messages on Twitter (lead FNSP; partners: SWPS, UNCL; duration: months 43-48): This task serves to investigate whether pro-democracy therapeutic messages can work in a real-world context on Twitter following the training of Twitter bots.

Deliverables (brief description and month of delivery)

D8.2 Report on the inoculation experiments (lead: FNSP; month of delivery: 40): This report also provides recommendations for the Twitter intervention; and it informs third flagship report.

D8.3 Report on the Twitter intervention (lead: FNSP; month of delivery: 47): It informs the flagship report.

Work package number	9	Lead beneficiary						SDU	
Work package title	Exploitation, Dissemination and Communication								
Participant number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Short name of participant	UVA	SWPS	UNCL	LSE	GESIS	UCLB	SDU	FNSP	CEPS
Person months per participant:	4.6	1	1	1	1	4	15	1	6
Start month	1	End month						48	

Objectives

WP9 is responsible for facilitating both co-creation and dissemination and for the effective communication and exploitation of DEMCORE’s results in order to maximise outreach and impact. Its specific objectives are to:

- Develop 1) a comprehensive overview of relevant stakeholders at the EU, national and regional level and 2) a rigorous Impact Plan for the dissemination, communication and exploitation of results.
- Raise awareness and generate informed discussion on liberal democracy in Europe among its stakeholders, the media and European citizens by initiating and coordinating a series of targeted outreach events and exploitation of its analyses (see 2.2.1 and to be further detailed in our abovementioned Impact Plan).
- Effectively monitor and consult the Advisory Board on the implementation of DEMCORE's Impact Plan and adapt the Impact Plan should the need arise.

Description of work (where appropriate, broken down into tasks), lead partner and role of participants

Task 9.1 Developing and regularly updating detailed Impact Plan (lead UVA; partners: SDU, CEPS; duration: months 1-48): This task involves the development of a detailed plan for dissemination and exploitation, including communication activities and a stakeholder overview based on our current plan (see 2.2.1). It will be periodically updated following the project's progress and upon consultation with the Advisory Board.

Task 9.2 Building and maintaining a project website (lead UVA; partners: none; duration: months 1-48): This task involves building and maintaining a project website (see 2.2.1.2).

Task 9.3 Creating and managing a Twitter account (lead UVA; partners: none; duration: months 1-48): This task involves creating and managing a Twitter account (see 2.2.1.2).

Task 9.4 Developing educational package for journalists (lead SDU; partners: UVA, UNCL, LSE, UCLB; duration: months 5-18): We will develop an interactive online toolkit together with key news journalists and news executives and in consultation with leaders of WPs 3-6 (see 2.2.1.1). The task involves making an inventory report of existing educational packages, planning and creating an initial version of the toolkit, pilot-test it, and receive initial user feedback before its online rollout ahead of the 2024 EP election.

Task 9.5 Developing series of liberal democracy knowledge clips (lead SDU; partners: UVA, UCLB; duration: months 5-24): This task involves the making of short knowledge clips about long-term developments in liberal democracy in consultation with WPs 3 and 4 (see 2.2.1.1). The production includes story development, gathering feedback from consortium members and SDU journalism students and finalisation.

Task 9.6 Coordinating three stakeholder events in Brussels (lead CEPS; partners: SWPS, UNCL, LSE, FNPS; duration: months 15-30): Together with leaders of WPs 5 & 6, WP7 and WP8, DEMCORE plans each one stakeholder workshop to facilitate co-creation at critical junctures of the project (see 1.2.9).

Task 9.7 Organising two-day stakeholder conference in Amsterdam (lead UVA; partners: all; duration: months 29-35): This task also includes the post-event evaluation of the conference (see 2.2.1.1).

Task 9.8 Coordinating public debates series in EU member states (lead UVA; partners: SWPS, GESIS, UCLB, SDU, FNPS; duration: months 1-48): This task involves the coordination of public debates, which are organised by consortium members on location throughout the project.

Task 9.9 Developing 'heatmap' series (lead UCLB; partners: GESIS, LSE, CEPS; duration: months 18-28): This task involves the creation and coordination of the publication of four heatmaps, for which data are provided by WPs 4, 5 and 6 in relation to the 2024 EP election campaigns. They include 1) party positions towards liberal democracy and 2) towards gender equality; and the 3) geographical and 4) gender distribution of voter attitudes towards liberal democracy.

Task 9.10 Writing and distributing three flagship policy reports (lead CEPS; partners: all; duration: months 1-48): Together with all contributors to WPs 2-8, DEMCORE will produce three flagship reports that cut across the whole project and that include policy recommendations (see 2.2.1.1).

Task 9.11 Coordinating public report series (lead CEPS; partners: all; duration: months 1-48): This task involves the coordination of public reports, which are provided by lead partners in WPs 2-8.

Deliverables (brief description and month of delivery)

D9.1 Detailed Impact Plan (lead: UVA; month of delivery: 6)

D9.2 Educational package for journalists (lead: SDU; month of delivery: 18) ready for online rollout.

D9.3 Liberal democracy knowledge clips (lead: SDU; month of delivery: 24) to be shared with journalists and journalism schools.

D9.4 Four 'Heatmaps' on the health of European liberal democracy (lead: UCLB; months of delivery: 24, 27), published in pairs

D9.5 First flagship policy report on the long-term trends in the support for liberal democracy (lead: CEPS; months of delivery: 30)

D9.5 Second flagship policy report on the contestation of liberal democratic ideals (lead: CEPS; months of delivery: 42)

D9.5 Third flagship policy report on the future implications for democratic governance (lead: CEPS; months of delivery: 48)

Table 3.1c: List of deliverables

#	Name	WP	Lead	Type	Diss. level	Date (months)
D1.1	Quality assurance plan	1	UVA	R	SEN	4
D1.2	Data management plan	1	GESIS	DMP	SEN	4
D1.3	Report on data management activities	1	GESIS	R	PU	48
D1.4	Datasets produced by the project (+ 12-month embargo)	1	GESIS	DATA	PU	48
D2.1	Report on the analytical framework for the entire project	2	GESIS	R	PU	12
D2.2	Report on the over-time development of liberal democracy across Europe	2	GESIS	R	PU	36
D2.3	Report on the EU's promotion of liberal democracy and its response to democratic backsliding	2	CEPS	R	PU	36
D3.1	Report on measuring support for liberal democracy	3	UVA	R	PU	18
D3.2	Report on citizen support for liberal democracy over time	3	UVA	R	PU	30
D4.1	Report on Spitzenkandidaten rhetoric towards liberal democracy	4	CEPS	R	PU	22
D4.2	Report on the longitudinal development of party positions towards liberal democracy	4	UCLB	R	PU	24
D4.3	Report on the longitudinal development of party positions towards gender equality	4	UCLB	R	PU	24
D5.1	Report on the spread of illiberal democratic discourse on social media	5	UNCL	R	PU	33
D5.2	Report on the promotion of illiberal democratic appeals and their effects	5	SDU	R	PU	38
D5.3	Report on the diffusion of illiberal democratic appeals across EU member states	5	UVA	R	PU	42
D6.1	Report on voter attitudes towards liberal democracy	6	LSE	R	PU	38
D6.2	Report on the electoral market place for different visions of liberal democracy	6	LSE	R	PU	42
D7.1	Report on the individual causes of illiberal democratic preferences	7	SWPS	R	PU	47
D7.2	Report on the cross-national patterns of illiberal democratic preferences	7	SWPS	R	PU	47
D8.2	Report on the inoculation experiments	8	FNSP	R	PU	40
D8.3	Report on the Twitter intervention	8	FNSP	R	PU	47
D9.1	Detailed impact plan	9	UVA	R	SEN	6
D9.2	Educational package for journalists	9	SDU	DEC	PU	18
D9.3	Liberal democracy knowledge clips	9	SDU	DEC	PU	24
D9.4	'Heatmaps' on health of liberal democracy	9	UCLB	DEC	PU	24,27
D9.5	First flagship policy report on the long-term trends in the support for liberal democracy	9	CEPS	R	PU	30
D9.6	Second flagship policy report on the contestation of liberal democratic ideals	9	CEPS	R	PU	42
D9.7	Third flagship policy report on the future implications for democratic governance	9	CEPS	R	PU	48

Table 3.1d: List of milestones

#	Name	WP	Due date (month)	Means of verification
M1	Analytical framework for the entire project	2	9	Discussion with all project partners. Report (D2.1) on the analytical framework (month 12).
M2	Database on contexts in which institutions operate	2	15	Complete dataset for starting curation process. GESIS releases the internal data version to all partners.
M3	Database of liberal democracy indicators	2	15	Complete dataset for starting curation process. GESIS releases the internal data version to all partners.
M4	Dataset of citizen support for liberal democracy	3	16	Complete dataset for starting curation process. GESIS releases the internal data version to all partners.
M5	Coding scheme of party positions	4	12	GESIS verifies the quality of the coding scheme and provides approval for starting the field stage.
M6	Dataset on party positions towards liberal democracy	4	15	Complete dataset for starting curation process. GESIS releases the internal data version to all partners.
M7	Ethical approval for new data collection on parties in the 2024 EP election	4	17	Ethical approval received from UCLB's ERB.
M8	Updated dataset with party positions from the 2024 EP election	4	22	Complete dataset for starting curation process. GESIS releases the internal data version to all partners.
M9	Codebook for the coding of social media content	5	19	GESIS verifies the quality of the codebook and provides approval for starting the field stage. Potential adjustments as a result of real-world changes will be implemented promptly during the data collection.
M10	Ethical approval for the social media analysis	5	19	Ethical approval received from UNCL's ERB.
M11	Dataset of (il)liberal social media discourse	5	29	Complete dataset for starting curation process. GESIS releases the internal data version to all partners.
M12	Stakeholder workshop ahead of the 2024 EP election	6	18	Stakeholder workshops takes place in Brussels. Their input will be gathered and reported internally by CEPS to consortium partners.
M13	Survey questionnaire for 2024 EP election study	6	19	The survey questionnaire, in all relevant languages, will be used in the 2024 EP post-election study.
M14	Ethical approval of the 2024 EP election study	6	20	Ethical approval received from GESIS' ERB.
M15	Dataset of the 2024 EP election study	6	29	Complete dataset for starting curation process. GESIS releases the internal data version to all partners.
M16	Stakeholder workshop ahead of the study of preferences	7	25	Stakeholder workshops takes place in Brussels. Their input will be gathered and reported internally by CEPS to consortium partners.
M17	Survey questionnaire for the study of preferences	7	26	The survey questionnaire, in all relevant languages, will be used in the multi-country panel survey.
M18	Ethical approval of the study of preferences	7	26	Ethical approval received from SWPS' ERB.
M19	Preregistration for the study of preferences	7	26	The hypotheses for the analyses will be pre-registered prior to data collection.
M20	Dataset of illiberal preferences	7	36	Complete dataset for starting curation process. GESIS releases the internal data version to all partners.
M21	Survey questionnaire for inoculation experiments	8	24	The survey questionnaire, in all relevant languages, will be used in the pilot and adapted if necessary for the multi-country panel survey.
M22	Ethical approval for inoculation experiments	8	24	Ethical approval received FNSP's ERB for the pilot. If necessary renewed approval will be sought for the multi-country panel survey.

M23	Pilot study	8	27	Complete dataset for starting curation process. GESIS releases the internal data version to all partners.
M24	Stakeholder workshop before inoculation experiments	8	27	Stakeholder workshops takes place in Brussels. Their input will be gathered and reported internally by CEPS to consortium partners.
M25	Preregistration of inoculation experiments	8	31	The hypotheses for the analyses will be pre-registered prior to data collection.
M26	Data of the inoculation experiment	8	32	Complete dataset for starting curation process. GESIS releases the internal data version to all partners.
M27	Ethical approval for Twitter intervention	8	42	Ethical approval received FNSP's ERB.
M28	Preregistration of Twitter intervention	8	42	The hypotheses for the analyses will be pre-registered prior to data collection.
M29	Data of the Twitter intervention	8	43	Complete dataset for starting curation process. GESIS releases the internal data version to all partners.
M30	Inventory report of existing education packages	9	5	Report ready. Discussed with MFI Centre at SDU
M31	Toolkit outline	9	12	Receive initial user group feedback on the outline.
M32	Story development of knowledge clips	9	15	Receive initial feedback from consortium members and SDU journalism students.
M33	Stakeholder Conference	9	33	Stakeholder conference takes place in Amsterdam. Their feedback will be gathered and reported internally by UVA to consortium partners.

Table 3.1e: Critical risks for implementation

Risk description & level of likelihood	WP(s) involved	Proposed risk-mitigation measures
Conflicts among partners arise (low)	1	The researchers involved have a track-record of working effectively together in other collaborative projects and infrastructures. Yet, in case of conflict, the coordinator will mediate to find a consensual solution and, in case of no solution, take a binding decision.
Legal issues arise (low)	1	The coordinator will contact the legal experts of the EC and/or the Data Protection Officer in order to resolve the issue.
Personnel changes occur at participating institutions (low)	1	Participating researchers are embedded in teams at their institutions, particularly the coordinator. So, another team member would step in, which the coordinator will discuss with the respective partner. We would hire replacements for early career researchers.
Necessary existing data sources may not have a licence permitting reproduction and reuse (low)	2,3,4	In this case an agreement will be drafted (see 1.2.10). If it cannot be reached, the project's objectives will not be harmed as we will rely on various existing data sources to implement the respective WPs (see 1.2.1 and 1.2.2).
The validity and reliability of machine learning techniques for text analysis may be lower than anticipated (moderate)	4,5	WP4 will additionally use human coders to address these issues. Alongside using new approaches (e.g. word embeddings) that offer very good results, WP5 will also collect a large random sample of social media content that will be annotated by trained humans. Thus, the results of this exercise can be considered representative of the social media discourse.
Low response rates due to survey fatigue could reduce the quality of our data (low)	6,7,8	We will work with an excellent pollster, such as Gallup, with whom some DEMCORE members collaborated before. They will have ample experience, high quality panels and will advise us on the length of the surveys. We will adapt them if necessary.
Panel survey outcomes may be affected by attrition (low)	7,8	We will rely on the pollster's advice on how to keep panel attrition low and can be flexible in the panel design (e.g. through reducing the time between waves).
Twitter and/or Facebook API may become unavailable (low)	5,8	In this case, we would seek to acquire the social media content directly from the platforms. Based on past experience this costs

		around EUR 15,000, which is accounted for in the budget.
Participants in the inoculation experiments do not pay enough attention to the messages (low)	8	The WP leader has ample experience with survey experiments and will also conduct a pilot test. Standard measures, including attention checks and timers, will be applied.
Twitter bot training may be challenging (low)	8	The WP leader is well-connected and able to rely on further advice from external colleagues. The wider team at UVA also has AI knowledge that can be consulted.
It may be difficult to involve stakeholders in co-creation (low)	5,6,7,8,9	Co-creation activities will be carried out by partners who are excellently placed to engage with stakeholders. SDU collaborates the MFI Centre which has long-standing links to the media industry and journalism schools. CEPS has access to a wide range of networks and institutional settings, comprising research institutes and non-for profit organisations from all over Europe and is renowned for its Annual Ideas Lab. UVA benefits from the Amsterdam Centre for European Studies (see 3.2.3).
Data handling may expose privacy violations (low)	All	DEMCORE will follow very strict protocols that comply with European GDPR regulation. With GESIS as core partner in charge of data management we have excellent expertise for ethically compliant data handling.

Table 3.1f: Summary of staff effort per work package and participant in person months (PMs)

#	Participant	WP1	WP2	WP3	WP4	WP5	WP6	WP7	WP8	WP9	Total PMs per Participant
1	UVA	19.2	0.0	30.6	0.0	5.0	6.6	6.0	0.0	4.6	72.0
2	SWPS	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	30.0	2.0	1.0	36.0
3	UNCL	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.4	1.0	0.0	1.0	1.0	26.4
4	LSE	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	36.8	0.0	0.0	1.0	38.8
5	GESIS	8.0	14.0	3.0	3.0	0.0	3.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	32.0
6	UCLB	1.0	0.0	3.0	32.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	0.0	4.0	46.0
7	SDU	1.0	0.0	1.5	2.0	6.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.0	25.5
8	FNSP	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	33.0	1.0	36.0
9	CEPS	0.5	2.5	0.0	1.5	0.0	1.5	1.0	1.0	6.0	14.0
Total PMs per WP		33.7	16.5	38.1	38.5	35.4	53.9	39.0	37.0	34.6	326.7

Table 3.1g: ‘Subcontracting costs’ items

2/SWPS		
	Cost (€)	Description of tasks and justification
Subcontracting	€100,000	WP7-related multi-country panel survey with embedded conjoint experiments. The cost estimate based on offer from a polling firm
3/UNCL		
	Cost (€)	Description of tasks and justification
Subcontracting	€6,625	Cloud computing services (Amazon Cloud)
5/GESIS		
	Cost (€)	Description of tasks and justification
Subcontracting	€200,000	Post 2024 EP election voter survey in all EU member states. Cost estimate based on offer from polling firm
6/UCLB		
	Cost (€)	Description of tasks and justification
Subcontracting	€10,000	Data visualisation for heatmaps
7/SDU		
	Cost (€)	Description of tasks and justification
Subcontracting	€20,000	WP9-related educational package and Liberal democracy knowledge clips

8/FNSP		
	Cost (€)	Description of tasks and justification
Subcontracting	€65,000	WP8-related multi-country panel study with survey experiments. Cost estimate based on offer from a polling firm

Table 3.1h: ‘Purchase costs’ items (travel and subsistence, equipment and other goods, works and services)

1/UvA		
	Cost (€)	Justification
Travel and subsistence	€36,250	Hosting 6 consortium meetings, 2 conference participations
Other goods, works & services	€39,000	Website, stakeholder conference, audit, open access fees, national outreach event
Total	€75,250	
2/SWPS		
	Cost (€)	Justification
Travel and subsistence	€11,950	Joining consortium meeting, 2 conference participations
Other goods, works & services	€8,000	Open access fees, conference fees, national outreach event
Total	€19,950	
3/UNCL		
	Cost (€)	Justification
Travel and subsistence	€11,950	Joining 6 consortium meeting, 2 conference participations
Other goods, works & services	€49,185	Open access fees, conference fees, student research support, social media data acquisition
Total	€61,135	
9/CEPS		
	Cost (€)	Justification
Travel and subsistence	€9,300	Joining 6 consortium meeting
Other goods, works & services	€16,000	Organising and hosting stakeholder outreach events
Total	€25,300	

3.2 Capacity of participants and consortium as a whole

The DEMCORE consortium has been formed to ensure that (a) that the membership brings together a critical mass of top class academic institutions involving the core disciplines of political science, political psychology, communication and data sciences; (b) that the participating scholars are leaders in their fields and could contribute the complementary knowledge and skills necessary to produce a comprehensive knowledge base and have a proven track-record of collaboration; (c) that the consortium expresses our commitment to gender representation and geographical diversity across Europe; and (d) that the consortium – including CEPS as a core partner– reflects the commitment to undertake policy relevant research and engage with relevant stakeholders.

In essence, the DEMCORE consortium brings together world-leading scholars across the social sciences with complementary of expertise in the areas of democracy, public opinion, political parties, institutions and media, a geographical spread across Northern, Southern and Central and Eastern Europe, strong female leadership and a track-record of engaging with policy-makers and practitioners.

3.2.1 Academic Excellence, Disciplinary Range and Methodological Range and Gender

DEMCORE brings together top scholars in the **disciplines of political science, communication science, political psychology, European studies and data science**, based at some of the very best research universities in Europe and partnering with one of the leading think tanks in European Affairs – CEPS – as well as one of the largest European data infrastructure institutes for the social sciences, GESIS, that hosts comparative surveys. The consortium consists of senior and junior researchers and will provide unique career development opportunities for a pool of post-doctoral and doctoral researchers who will benefit from DEMCORE and the mentoring experience of the senior scholars involved. The participating scholars are leaders in their fields who have published in top journals and quality presses and who regularly present papers at major international and national conferences. Importantly, the consortium spans both the **academic and policy relevant knowledge** necessary for the research outlined in this proposal and has the theoretical, analytical and methodological capacity needed to deliver high quality, policy relevant research output. One of the partners, CEPS, is among the top think tanks in Europe, offering an extensive network of partner institutes throughout the world and the ability to analyse policy-relevant questions and

disseminate research findings with relevance to European affairs. In addition, the consortium members have extensive networks and established relationships with many of the actors who are directly concerned with the subject matter of this proposal: EU and national-level policy-makers, NGOs and civil society organisations, and journalists. The **advisory board** also combines academic expertise and linkages with the policy world and will strengthen the consortium's capacity to link innovative research with policy-relevant engagement with key actors.

The consortium brings together experts in political science, communication science, political psychology and data science with particular expertise in challenges to liberal democracy. From the perspective of **political science**, Wouter Van der Brug (UVA) is a world-leading scholar of the radical right parties, voting behaviour and challenges to liberal democracy. Catherine De Vries (UCLB) is an internationally renowned expert of public opinion and parties, and has recently written an award-winning book on Euroscepticism. Another acclaimed scholar is Sara Hobolt (LSE), who has also published high impact research on voters and parties, as well as on Brexit and referendums more generally. Based at SWPS in Poland, Ben Stanley provides essential scholarship on democratic backsliding and populism in Central and Eastern Europe. From the communication perspective, Katjana Gattermann (UVA) is a rising star in the field of **political communication** and journalism, political behaviour and public opinion within the EU. Claes De Vreese (SDU) is a world-leading scholar of political communication, focusing on AI, media and democracy. He is the scientific director of the Digital Democracy Centre and recently served as President of the International Communication Association. Further expertise in the area of social media is brought to the project by Sebastian Popa (UNCL) who specializes in using state-of-the-art methods to analyse the use of social media in electoral campaigns. From the perspective of **political psychology**, Kevin Arceneaux (FNSP) provides world-leading expertise in the study of attitude formation, the role of human biology, and experimental methodology. **European studies** is represented by Sophia Russack (CEPS), whose expertise lies on the EU institutional architecture, decision-making processes and institutional reform, and Steven Blockmans, who is Director of Research at CEPS and author of several books, including books on democracy in the EU and the EU's role in global governance. Finally, the consortium has excellent expertise and infrastructure in survey methodology, **data management** and **data sciences** with Alexia Katsanidou, who is the scientific director of the GESIS Department Survey Data Curation and a leading expert in social science data infrastructures, management and methods. **Methodologically**, the team brings together expertise in survey methods and questionnaire design (Van der Brug, Hobolt, De Vries, Katsanidou), quantitative analysis of texts and (social) media (Popa, Gattermann, De Vries, Hobolt, De Vreese), experimental methods (Arceneaux, Stanley, Hobolt, Gattermann), focus groups (De Vries) and data science and data infrastructures (De Vreese, Katsanidou). All consortium partners are **committed to open science**, with GESIS providing the data infrastructure and individual members as influential promoters of open science practices in their fields, including Arceneaux as Editor of the Journal of Experimental Political Science and De Vreese as former President of the International Communication Association.

The consortium is coordinated by Katjana Gattermann (UVA), who has considerable research management experience as Director of the Erasmus Academic Network on Parliamentary Democracy in Europe (PADEMIA), which was funded by EU Lifelong Learning Programme and the EACEA and brought together 56 academic institutions from 31 European countries between 2013 and 2016. She was Principal Investigator of a recently concluded NWO-funded project, is Co-Founder of the ECPR Standing Group 'Political Communication' and has served as its first Convenor. She is supported by a strong team of scholars and senior advisors at the Project Office of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences at UVA. This consortium thus puts emphasis on **strong female leadership and gender representation**, with four out of seven substantive Work Packages led by women (Gattermann, De Vries, Hobolt and Katsanidou). In the recruitment of researchers for DEMCORE, we will ensure that the calls for posts are designed to attract female candidates, that interview boards are balanced and that there is mentoring of early career scholars, both female and male, in the consortium. All activities of the consortium, including conferences, public debates and stakeholder workshops will be designed to guarantee balanced gender representation.

Our **Advisory Board** also has outstanding female members, who play a leading role in the policy debate on liberal democracy in Europe. It includes **Heather Grabbe**, director of the Open Society European Policy Institute, who works to ensure that open society values are at the heart of EU policies and actions, both inside and outside its borders, and will provide invaluable advice to DEMCORE on how the findings on liberal democracy can inform EU policies and action. Another member of the Board is **Isabell Hoffmann** of the Bertelsmann Foundation, who is founder of *eupinions*, an independent platform for European public opinion. Hoffmann also brings expertise from the media as a former political editor at the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*. A third member of the Board is **R. Daniel Kelemen**, professor and Jean Monnet Chair at Rutgers University, US, and one of the leading scholars of democratic backsliding within the EU. **Erik Jones**, Director of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute, is another distinguished member of the advisory board who brings unparalleled expertise on EU affairs and engagements with EU institutions. **Michiel van Hulten** is Director of Transparency

International EU. He was also a Member of the European Parliament and managing director of *VoteWatch Europe*, the organisation that monitors the decision-making processes of the EU institutions. His expertise in issues around democracy, transparency, accountability and citizenship will be invaluable to DEMCORE. The Advisory Board was thus chosen to bring both academic expertise as well as policy engagement to the project, and members will be invited to contribute to the project with advice at insights from the very inception.

3.2.2 Complementarity, Cross-Institutional Collaboration

The consortium is well-placed to deliver its ambitious objectives, not only due to the complementarity and expertise of the network, but also because the researchers involved have a track-record of working effectively together in other **collaborative projects and infrastructures**. The researchers in this project have worked together on ambitious collaborative infrastructure and research projects, such as the European Elections Study (Van der Brug, Gattermann, Hobolt, Popa, De Vreese), the European Voter (Katsanidou, Van der Brug), *eupinions* (De Vries, Hoffmann, Hobolt), MEDem (Katsanidou, Van der Brug, Hobolt, Popa, De Vreese) and the CSES (Van der Brug, De Vries, Hobolt). These successful collaborative efforts have shown that the researchers involved in the consortium complement each other and can work effectively together within and across the Work Packages. Every node of the consortium has at least one person who has worked intensively with a colleague in another institution. This greatly reduces the transaction costs, facilitates working together to deliver the project as conceived and will make mutual support across the consortium easier to achieve. It also illustrates the wealth of experience in the consortium in terms of data collection, questionnaire design and data analysis in a cross-national setting. The scholars working on deepening and expanding data sets on Work Packages 3 and 4 are building on already existing high quality data sets, thus maximising the potential for DEMCORE to produce a unique resource on liberal democracy of substantial added value. In addition, the consortium will jointly collect original data, both cross-national survey data (WP6) and micro-level experimental data (WP7 & WP8) alongside social media data (WP5). Given the experience of the researchers involved, and the outstanding expertise of GESIS on data infrastructures, the consortium is very well placed to undertake and deliver on data integration, development and analysis.

3.2.3 Engagement and Impact

The DEMCORE consortium is well-placed to deliver the evidence-based policy recommendation and wider **engagement** that that is a core part of its objectives. All of the researchers involved in the project have considerable experience in engagement with relevant stakeholders, including national and EU-level policy-makers and journalists. They also have access to important networks that allow them to engage with policy-makers and the wider public. For example, De Vries frequently provides commentary in newspaper outlets, including as columnist for the Dutch *Het Financieele Dagblad*, and she serves as the scientific advisor for *eupinions* funded by the Bertelsmann Foundation and a member of European Integration Committee of the Dutch Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs. Another example is De Vreese who is director the Digital Democracy Centre at SDU, and who will work closely on impact in collaboration with the Media Research and Innovation Centre (MFI Centre) at SDU, which has extensive experience in making industry oriented materials. Likewise, the Amsterdam Centre for European Studies (ACES) at UVA is an interdisciplinary centre of excellence on contemporary Europe and the EU. Its objectives include increasing the wider visibility and policy impact of European research while enhancing the quality of the public debate on contemporary Europe, by engaging a variety of audiences within and beyond the Netherlands. Moreover, CEPS has access to a wide range of networks and institutional settings, comprising research institutes and non-for profit organisations from all over Europe and beyond, that will enable DEMCORE to extend its outreach. The consortium's **strong networks** in Brussels as well as in European capitals are an asset and will assure that the research findings and recommendations are disseminated effectively. The consortium will also lead to the establishment of new networks by integrating early career scholars and researchers into a European-wide community of scholars working on aspects of liberal democracy, populism, public opinion and party competition.

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