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FINLAND'S DEMOCRACY SUPPORT
Concept, motivation, and challenges

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ABSTRACT

Anna Antila: Finland's Democracy Support. Concept, motivation, and challenges.

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This Master's Thesis explores Finland's democracy support from the perspective of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. Democracy support means the policies and actions which seek to influence other states towards democracy, strengthen their democracy or consolidate their emerging democracy. It can be put into practice by, for example, political dialogue, foreign aid, and election observation. Supporting democracy can be seen as a resilient part of Western democracies' foreign policy. Democracy support has been a part of Finland's foreign and development policy since the 1990s. Currently, promoting democracy is acknowledged as an important part of foreign policy, and democracy is included as one of the main priority areas of Finnish development cooperation.

The study is based on a qualitative content analysis, firstly, of 18 documents on foreign policy, development cooperation and democracy support produced by the Foreign Ministry, and secondly, on six interviews of senior-level civil servants working with development cooperation and democracy support within the Ministry. The analysis uses an analytical framework of four themes: 1) the concept of democracy, 2) good governance and its relationship to democracy, 3) motivation for democracy support, and 4) challenges in democracy support. Through the qualitative content analysis of these two types of data, three to eight subthemes were constructed under each of the main analytical themes of the framework.

The study found that Finland has a broad understanding of democracy, which links together democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance. Good governance is an inherent part of Finland's democracy support, but its relationship as a concept to democracy is vague. Analysis indicates that potential motivating factors for democracy support are the value of democracy as well as how democracy is seen to reinforce other goals in Finnish foreign policy and development cooperation. The challenges in democracy support were mostly linked to how democratic developments are volatile and possibly slow, and the interviewees saw a discrepancy between the value of democracy in Finland's rhetoric and the scope of democracy support in practice.

Keywords: Democracy support, Finland, foreign policy, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. DEMOCRACY SUPPORT	5
2.1 What is Democracy Support?	5
2.2 Democracy as an International Norm	8
2.3 Finland's Democracy Support in Focus	10
3. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: FOUR THEMES	14
3.1 Concept of Democracy in Democracy Support	15
3.2 Good Governance and its Relationship to Democracy	18
3.3 Motivation for Democracy Support	19
3.4 Challenges in Democracy Support	20
4. METHODS AND RESEARCH MATERIAL	24
4.1 Documents	25
4.2 Expert Interviews	27
4.3 Qualitative Content Analysis	30
5. FINDINGS FROM THE DOCUMENTS	32
5.1 Broad Understanding of Democracy	32
5.2 Good Governance in Relation to Democracy Support	37
5.3 Democracy is Both a Goal and a Reinforcing Factor	40
5.4 Challenges Identified in the Documents	44
6. FINDINGS FROM THE EXPERT INTERVIEWS	47
6.1 Essential Qualities of Democracy	47
6.2 Good Governance is Not a Synonym for Democracy	51
6.3 Democracy as a Value and Reinforcing Factor	54
6.4 Challenges of Ambiguity and Discrepancy	58
7. DISCUSSION	64
7.1 Discussion on the Findings	65
7.1.1 <i>Concept of Democracy: Broad Understanding</i>	65
7.1.2 <i>Good Governance and Democracy: Multifaceted Relationship</i>	66
7.1.3 <i>Strong Motivation for Democracy Support</i>	67
7.1.4 <i>Challenges for Democracy Support</i>	69
7.2 Limitations and Weaknesses of the Study	70
7.3 Possibilities for Future Research	72
7.3.1 <i>Implications for Practice</i>	73
8. CONCLUSION	75
REFERENCES	78
APPENDICES	84
Appendix 1: Interview Questions	84
Appendix 2: Interviewees	85
Appendix 3: The Original Finnish Phrases on Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8	86
Appendix 4: Finland's ODA funding to democracy support sectors in 2018	90

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. The concept of democracy: subthemes in the documents	32
TABLE 2. Good governance and its relationship to democracy: subthemes in the documents	37
TABLE 3. Motivation for democracy support: subthemes in the documents.....	40
TABLE 4. Challenges in democracy support: subthemes in the documents	44
TABLE 5. Concept of democracy: subthemes in the interviews	47
TABLE 6. Good governance and the relationship to democracy: subthemes in the interviews	51
TABLE 7. Motivation for democracy support: subthemes in the interviews	54
TABLE 8. Challenges in democracy support: subthemes in the interviews.....	58
TABLE 5a: Concept of democracy: subthemes in interviews, original Finnish phrases	86
TABLE 6a: Good governance and the relationship to democracy: subthemes in the interviews, original Finnish phrases	87
TABLE 7a: Motivation for democracy support: subthemes in the interviews, original Finnish phrases	88
TABLE 8a: Challenges in democracy support: subthemes in the interviews, original Finnish phrases	89

1. INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on how the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) understands democracy support¹. External democracy support² means the policies and actions which seek to influence other states towards democracy, strengthen their democracy or consolidate their emerging democracy. This means that democracy support is defined by its goal of democracy. In practice, it can be done by, for example, political dialogue, foreign aid, and election observation. (Azpuru et al, 2008, p. 151; Wolff & Spranger, 2011, pp. 3–4.) Democracy support is seen as one of the major goals guiding Western democracies' foreign and development policies (Wolff & Spanger, 2017, p. 33).

In this thesis, Finland's democracy support is explored through the understanding that MFA has. The research material consists of 18 documents produced by MFA and six interviews of senior-level officials, and both types of the research material are analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This study builds on earlier research and creates a new analytical framework. The analytical framework of this study focuses on four themes of Finland's democracy support. These themes are: 1) the concept of democracy, 2) good governance in relation to democracy in democracy support, 3) the motivation for democracy support, and 4) challenges identified in democracy support.

Firstly, the concept of democracy in Finland's democracy support is analyzed. Democracy is a rather complex system, including an array of rights and freedoms as well as political, economic, and cultural matters (Ylimaz, 2019, p.115). The concept of democracy matters because the understanding and employment of democracy affects the implementation of Finland's democracy support, and its desired outcomes and how the results are measured. Secondly, the relationship between two central concepts in democracy support, good governance and democracy, is explored. Donors often see these two concepts as interlinked, and in this study, their overlapping elements, differences, and meaning to democracy support are researched. Thirdly, the theme of the motivation

¹ In addition to the term *democracy support*, the term of *democracy promotion* is also used. I see these terms as synonyms and have chosen to use the term democracy support because it is the term MFA uses most prominently in its own communication.

² This study focuses on external democracy support. This means that internal democracy support, meaning democracy policies and actions Finland has to enhance its own democratic governance are not included in the analysis.

for democracy support, is for its part interested in the reasons for democracy support's existence, and whether the motivation for democracy is intrinsic, tied to the very value of democracy itself; or instrumental, where democracy is seen to reinforce other goals in Finland's development and foreign policy. Fourthly, the challenges in democracy support are explored. Democracy support and development aid communities have had debates³, and political aid may still be a difficult subject in multilateral areas.

The great variety in which democracy support can be 'done' makes it a complex phenomenon. Within one country, there can be many organizations involved in democracy support implementation. Different democracy support actors choose certain parts of democratic societies they focus their aid on, and democracy support can be seen as "inherently pluralistic" (Carothers, 2009, p. 13). The complexity, the way democracy can be seen as "a universal value" and "an essentially contested concept" at the same time, and the way how Western states are strong in their rhetoric for democracy, but then the funding for democracy aid projects does not correspond, are all examples of the ambiguities within democracy support. This shows the need for additional research to understand the international phenomenon of democracy support. My study does this by focusing on one actor, Finland, as it analyzes its democracy support through the understanding of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.

Democracy support has been a part of Finland's foreign and development policy since the 1990s (Hosseini et al. 2003, p. 29). Currently, promoting democracy is acknowledged as an important part of foreign policy and democracy is included as one of the main priority areas of Finnish development cooperation (MFA 2021a). In 2018, Finland's ODA funding to Government and Civil society sector was around 78 million USD, which amounts to 16% of the total bilateral ODA of Finland. Of this total, the support for democracy support sectors⁴ was around 16 million USD, 3,2% of the total bilateral ODA. Finland had a total of 247 projects regarding democracy support sectors in 2018. Looking

³ These debates are discussed more in detail in the chapter 3.4.

⁴ The five democracy support sectors are: 15130 Legal and judicial development, 15150 Democratic participation and society, 15151 Elections, 15152 Legislatures and political parties and 15153 Media and free flow of information. Similar way of counting democracy support funding has been used in European Partnership for Democracy (2019) and Niño-Zarazúa et al., (2020). The data provided by OECD does not have a specific DAC code for democracy support and the sector of Government and Civil Society (DAC code 5, 150) includes a wide variety of sectors, from which these five are identified as 'democracy support'. Please see Appendix 4 for details.

at the development cooperation projects, Finland funded 28 projects in the category of legal and judicial development, 190 projects in democratic participation and civil society, 2 projects in elections, 9 projects in legislatures and political parties and 18 projects in media and free flow of information. (OECD 2021b.) These projects are implemented by the MFA or different civil society organizations which receive funding from the MFA. To conclude, in the rhetoric of Finland, democracy support is an integral part of development assistance and foreign policy, but the funding towards these democracy goals is modest.

Democracy support as a research theme is now more topical than ever. Varieties of Democracy research report identifies the growing trend of autocratization worldwide (Alizada et al. 2021). The commitment to supporting democracy has diminished internationally. The consolidation of emerging democracies has proven to be difficult, and even robust democracies now have problems related to polarization, the rise of populism, and state of emergency provision related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Finland's funding towards democracy support is modest, but it has clearly and strongly stated the importance of democracy in its foreign policy. Democracy support is a unique way of combatting the growing trend of authorization and democratic backsliding, and an integral part of Western states' foreign policy. Democracy support has been mainly studied in comparative politics and development research. There are no recent studies on democracy support of Finland from the international relations' perspective. The analytical framework used in this study explores Finland's democracy support from the perspective of MFA providing new insights.

The research question is: *How does the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland understand democracy support?* The research material consists of 18 documents produced by MFA and six interviews of senior-level officials working in the MFA. The 18 documents consist of documents on foreign policy, development cooperation and democracy support as well as the country strategies of Finland's main bilateral partners. This data is analyzed with qualitative content analysis. The analysis is guided by the analytical framework of four themes.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. After the introduction, the chapter 2 gives a review of earlier literature on democracy support and the chapter 3 presents the analytical

framework of four themes. The chapter 4 presents the methods used in data gathering and analysis. It also presents the research material: documents produced by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and six expert interviews. The chapters 5 and 6 include the findings of this study. Firstly, findings from the documents are presented in each of the analytical themes, and secondly, the findings from the expert interviews under these themes. Finally, the chapter 7 is the discussion where these findings are considered in more detail, and the limitations and weaknesses of the study as well as possibilities for future research are presented. This is followed by the chapter 8, the conclusion chapter of the study.

2. DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

This chapter presents the earlier research literature relevant to this study. The chapter is divided into three parts: the first discusses democracy support as a phenomenon in international relations, the second one presents democracy support as an international norm, the third part presents the focus of this study, Finland's democracy support.

2.1 What is Democracy Support?

Democracy support means all foreign policy actions which have the goal to promote democracy.⁵ These actions may aim to foster democratic transitions, help consolidate new democracies, or improve democracy in other states. The promotion of democracy is a part of Western states' foreign policy (Huber, 2015, p. 23). Despite the challenging international environment for democracy, democracy support is a resilient part of Western donors' agenda. It is perceived as a "normative good worth pursuing" and a core issue for the foreign policy of liberal states (Jahn, 2012, p. 685; Schraeder, 2003, p. 23).

Democracy support is a complex phenomenon. Even within the scope of one donor, it encompasses various policy areas and a spectrum of actors who may use different strategies, actions and tools (Wolff, 2014, p. 256). Studies on democracy support donors have found significant differences in the way donors understand and put democracy support into action. Researchers have created different categories or ideal types, which explain the motivation and choices regarding democracy support in foreign policy, such as the three generations of democracy support promoters (Huber 2015, p. 18), and the United States as a "freedom fighter" and Germany as a "civilian power" (Poppe et al., 2019, p. 776). However, these categories are often not applicable to other donors, and might remain as characterizations of only one donor. This highlights how generalizations are difficult to make and research often focuses on specific donors.

In practice, democracy support donors can incorporate various strategies and actions (Kurki & Hobson, 2011, p. 3). These include diplomatic dialogues, democracy

⁵ This goal-oriented definition of democracy is subjective in the way it means that democracy is what the democracy promoter believes it to be (Huber 2015, p. 23). Thus, the effectiveness of this policy is beyond the scope of this study.

assistance⁶, political conditionality, work in multilateral forums, international observation (e.g. election monitoring), military interventions, and support for opposition movements (Agné, 2012, p. 49; Schraeder, 2003, p. 26; Wolff & Spanger, 2017, p. 4). Coercive actions, such as military interventions in the name of democracy promotion, are very controversial and regarded with high suspicion. Several scholars suggest that democracy promotion with force is impossible (Beetham, 2009, p. 443).

Today's main democracy support actions of Western donors are dialogue, both bilaterally and in multilateral forums, political conditionality, and foreign aid. Dialogue is a form of classic diplomacy between states, but in the case of democracy support, it may happen also between a donor and civil society. The dialogue can promote democratic values and raise difficult questions, such as civil and political rights, on the agenda. Political conditionality means the adaption of economic sanctions as punishments for undemocratic acts (Schraeder, 2003, p. 26).

Democracy aid is the most common and significant tool for democracy support (Carothers, 1999, p. 6). Democracy assistance projects are typically directed towards human rights promotion, good governance, political liberalism, freedom of speech, the rule of law, promotion of decentralization, and various other fundamental characteristics of a democratic society (Hossain et al., 2003, p. 111). Projects can be focused on elections, political parties, constitutions, local government, media, and civil society. These can be implemented by bilateral programs and projects, or through multilateral actors.

Democracy support became a part of Western donors' agenda in the 1990s. Before this, democracy promotion was present in declatory statements, and this effort doubled after the developments in the 1990s (Whitehead, 1996, p. 247). Changes in the political landscape in the late 1980s, such as the fall of the Berlin wall and the Cold War ending, gave space for a new and bolder approach to democracy promotion. The "third wave of democratization", a term introduced by Samuel P. Huntington, described the vast number of countries moving towards democracy in the late 1980s and 1990s (Huntington, 1991,

⁶ Democracy assistance or democracy aid mean development aid with the specific goal to promote democracy (Carothers, 1999, p. 6).

p. 3). This positive move towards greater democratization was seen as an opening for new opportunities for donors to engage in democracy support worldwide.

In the 1990s, the mainstream aid organizations began to emphasize the connection between politics and economic development. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) brought forward a new agenda, stating the importance of participatory development and good governance, which in its viewpoint, should be taken into account in the allocation of development assistance. There were also public commitments to achieving political goals in developing countries. All these developments grew the profile of democracy support. (Carothers & De Gramont, 2013, p. 56.)

From the perspective of development aid, there were both new democracy support programs and will to mainstream democracy and human rights work in all development aid in the 1990s. This development highlights how the idea of "political good things" building on the modernization theory's idea of "all good things", begins to grow.⁷ In this time period, donors and aid organizations began to incorporate democracy, good governance, state reforms, institution building, accountability, the rule of law, anti-corruption, transparency, participation, and human rights, each in their own way in their development and foreign policies. (Carothers & De Gramont, 2013, p. 67.)

In the 2000s and 2010s, scholars pointed out the rise of democratic challenges, such as transitional states getting stuck in the electoral democracy realm (Silander, 2017, p. 5). The new democracies were struggling to deliver for their citizens, and autocracies grew stronger. The way the United States combined democracy promotion goals to their geopolitical agenda and war on terrorism in the 2000s, especially in Iraq, has had a significant and long-lasting impact on the negative association of democracy promotion (Carothers, 2008, pp. 130–132).

In the 2020s, the research on democracy support has turned inwards, echoing the challenging international environment for democracy and the less enthusiastic commitment of donors to democracy promotion, especially by the earlier leader in

⁷ This means how according to the modernization theory, once certain level of economic, bureaucratic and educational capacity are sufficient, citizens will demand democratization.

democracy issues, the United States. The studies discuss how democracy support fits into this new, turbulent political landscape. The recent articles reflect on these developments and how donors could evolve and adapt. There is a need to focus on the relationship between state capacity and democracy as well as counter the authoritarian influences of China and Russia, and also strengthen Western democracies. (Carothers, 2020, p. 132; Diamond, 2020, pp. 48–49; Fukuyama, 2020, p. 18.)

Despite the challenges and negative associations, democracy support is a resilient part of Western states' foreign policy. The empty space left by the United States calls for other democratic countries to act for democracy in this challenging environment. The role of middle-power democracies is seen as critical. Middle-power democracies mean democracies which have democracy support as a part of their foreign policy, are committed to it and have some experience with supporting democracy. These middle-power democracies might bring in the energy, ideas and leadership that the international community needs to protect democracy going forward. (Kleinfeld et al., 2021, pp. 8, 13, 26.)

2.2 Democracy as an International Norm

One of the controversies in international democracy support is that external democracy support aims to influence another state's governance system, which is seen as an internal political affair. This might make donors hesitant to participate in democracy support. The partner governments might voice their discontent in the way that international actors seem, in their mind, to meddle in their domestic affairs, and might call for the sovereignty of the state to be respected. Donors may be uncomfortable with addressing the political factors when diplomacy and development aid aim to sustain good relations. (Lekvall, 2013, p. 84.)

Despite the hesitations, Western democracies are involved in democracy support. This has been explained by how democracy has become an international norm, and democracy support a norm of practice (Gershman & Allen, 2006, p. 49). Democracy support and promotion have global legitimacy. International organizations, regional and global, such as the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN), acknowledge the importance

of democratic governance and have their policies and programs to support democracy (Diamond & Plattner, 2009 p. xii).

Today, there are international commitments to support democracy. The UN acknowledges democracy as a universal value and the preferred form of governance in its Charter, and The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights presents democratic freedoms of an individual, and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action calls for the international community to support and promote democracy (Lekvall 2013, p. 26). Countries in the European Union are committed to the promotion of democracy because the Treaty on European Union includes an obligation to promote democracy. These policies are operationalized in the Council Conclusions on Democracy and the corresponding Action Plan.

Cristopher Hobson and Milja Kurki (2011) explain that the history of democracy promotion shows us how it was embedded in international politics "at a unique historical moment, a time in which there was unusually little discussion over alternate forms of rule" (Kurki & Hobson, 2011, p. 1). The changes in donor mindsets in the 1990s represent a change from the earlier practices when realpolitik was the only justification for aid, and governance models were not considered (Crawford, 2000, p. 2).

The first one of the changed conditions was the rediscovery of the state and the change of the international political atmosphere. Firstly, state was seen as an essential vessel for carrying out the necessary adjustments related to a market economy; and the state was seen as a referee keeping up the so-called "rules of the game" for a prosperous market economy. There has been a strong pairing of economic and political development, especially the connection of democracy to the market economy. (Carothers & De Gramont, 2013, pp. 57–59.)

Secondly, the change in political atmosphere gave more room to address issues related to democracy and human rights. The "third wave of democratization" solidified the discourse of democracy as a universal value. This means democracy is a strong international norm that other state actors promote on behalf of the international community, and democracy is seen by policymakers as a "normative good worth pursuing". (Schraeder, 2003, pp. 25, 30.)

2.3 Finland's Democracy Support in Focus

This chapter introduces the focal point of this thesis: Finland as a democracy support actor. Finland strongly states democracy to be a value in its foreign and development policy, together with the rule of law, human rights, and good governance. The main goal of Finnish democracy support is to support the locally driven democracy processes with "an appropriate mix of financial and political instruments tailored to the specific situation of the country" (MFA, 2011, p. 1).

Finland has a human rights and value-based foreign policy. Democracy is one of the four priorities of Finland's development policy, and it is included in the development policy priority area three: "Education, well-functioning societies and democracy", with an emphasis on high-quality education, improved tax systems, support for democracy, and the rule of law. In the key priorities of development policy, the possibility to exert influence is seen as part of human rights (MFA, 2021a).

From the very beginning, Nordic donors⁸ have linked their foreign aid to the promotion of human rights, democracy, and good governance. Nordic donors noted the importance of these values in their rhetoric, and their new stated policy aims included promotion of civil and political rights, democratic governance, and efficient public management. They are seen as the pioneers of this development, which then gained succession among the development programs other Western bilateral donors. (Crawford, 2000, p. 1.)

Democracy support became a part of Finland's development cooperation policy in the early 1990s. This was a part of the larger movement in the 1990s in the international development community and the changes in the political environment marked a shift in the strategy of Finland's development aid. The earlier focus on infrastructure building has now moved on to emphasizing socio-economic and political values. Democracy was highlighted as one of the goals to promote, and it was considered relevant in addressing global problems strengthening Finland's own economic and political security. (Hossain et al. 2003, p. 28.)

⁸ Nordic donors include Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland.

The shift to focus more on the socio-economic and political system of the recipient country was seen as an answer to the frustration with development assistance's failure to achieve its goals (Hossain et al., 2003, pp. 27-28). There was a need to create results with moderate resources. The first bilateral democracy support program of Finland consisted of technical aid as a part of the common Nordic initiative. According to Liisa Laakso (2002), Finland did not first start with its own programs, because Nordic cooperation was thought to be a better choice. This was explained by the recognition of the limited resources in Finnish development cooperation (Laakso 2002, p. 56).

In the beginning of the 2000s, Finland continued to promote democracy in its policy towards developing countries. Promoting democracy was one of the goals together with the reduction of poverty, promotion of human rights and equality. The promotion of these values was thought to increase global security, including human and ecological security, and increase economic interaction. In the 2000s, bilateral programs focusing on democracy and human rights were rare, but bilateral programs that focused rather on good governance were more common. (Siitonen & Koponen, 2005, p. 217.)

At this time, political factors became one of the core policy considerations of Finnish foreign aid. MFA started allocating its funds for development aid to be used in interventions and projects which had democratic governance as a goal (MFA, 2001, p. 10). Hossain et al. (2003) discuss four factors that justify the importance of democracy, human rights, and good governance. These are: 1) the relevance of democracy for development in general, 2) democracy as a basic socio-economic value of Finnish society, 3) the positive effect of democracy for international security, 4) the role of Finland as a member of the international community, and 5) strengthening the internationally agreed and recognized norms and values (Hossain et al., 2003, p. 28). Finland wanted also to be recognized as a part of the international donor community (Koponen et al., 2016, p. 215).

The only policy paper on democracy support, published by MFA in 2014, presents Finland's democracy support actions: Dialogue, in international areas and bilaterally, multilateral cooperation, as a part of EU and other multilateral donor organizations, and aid giving to different democracy support interventions and projects multilaterally and bilaterally (MFA, 2014).

In the 2010s, there were several smaller democracy support activities and over 200 projects making up 40 million euros. At that time, the aim was to increase democracy support funding, but the concern was the possible fragmentation of aid. The number of projects was to be limited, and the aid channeled through the CSOs would be focused on the priority themes to decrease aid fragmentation (MFA, 2014). MFA outlines its goals for democracy support policy for the future: 1) more results by lessening fragmentation, 2) supporting the broad view of democracy in Finland's foreign policy, and 3) coherent and result providing democracy support policy. Democracy support policy should also be in line with the human rights policy and development policy priorities (MFA, 2014, p. 4). Even though the documents such as the policy paper outline the main goals, the more specific objectives regarding the dialogue and financing of democracy support are written in the country and organization strategies (MFA, 2014, p. 5).

The main instruments for Finnish democracy support are political dialogue and development aid. Finland's development aid has a human rights-based approach, which includes civil and political rights (OECD & World Bank, 2013, p. 27). Democracy aid includes a variety of different interventions aiming at enhancing women's rights, minority rights, good governance, and the rule of law. Finland has linked democratic rights and socio-economic development in its democracy support policy since the early stages.

Finland's current Government program communicates its strong commitment to promoting democracy and acknowledges the difficult international environment for democracy (Government program, 2019, p. 60). Finland has recently made democracy support funding more institutionalized, when in 2020 Political Parties for Democracy – Demo Finland and a new actor focused on the Rule of Law⁹ got their own budget line¹⁰ within Finland's budget. The budget line was proposed to be 3 million euros. Earlier, all democracy assistance was funneled through MFA's few bilateral projects, funding for multilateral organizations and NGOs. The new budget line was aimed to strengthen the strategical priority of the development policy priority area three¹¹. This budget line was seen as important because it strengthens Finnish democracy support done by ODA

⁹ As of March 2021, the Rule of Law actor has been launched in cooperation with University of Helsinki. The details on this actor and the projects are under preparation and not yet public.

¹⁰ Moment 24.30.67, Democracy and Rule of Law support

¹¹ Development cooperation priority area three is "Education, well-functioning societies, and democracy".

funding. This was seen as important by the Parliament in the ever more challenging international environment regarding democracy, and to strengthen the achievement of 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Eduskunta 2019).

3. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: FOUR THEMES

This chapter presents the analytical framework for this thesis. The analytical framework consists of four themes, through which democracy support of Finland is analyzed. These themes are built based on a literature review, and they have defined the particular aspects of Finland's democracy support on which this study focuses. These themes help us to understand the donor perspective on democracy support, but of course they are not all-encompassing, but rather highlight the parts of these phenomena I have identified as the most crucial. The focus was specifically to fill the gaps in our knowledge about Finnish democracy support, such as what is the motivation behind Finland's democracy support and what kind of challenges are identified in the MFA in relation to supporting democracy.

The analytical framework consists of four themes:

1. The concept of democracy in democracy support
2. Good governance and its relationship to democracy
3. Motivation for democracy support
4. Challenges to democracy support

Democracy support is defined by its goal, which in the case of Finland, is consolidated, well-functioning democratic governance. Democracy support can include a variety of policy areas and a broad spectrum of actors inside one country, and it can work through different instruments (Wolff et al., 2013, p. 253). In this thesis, the analysis includes as democracy support the statements and actions that have a goal to have an explicitly positive impact on democracy, outside Finland.

Democracy support means the policies and actions, through which democracy is promoted and supported in other countries. The actions to strengthen democracy within Finland are not taken into account, even though in the 2014 policy paper on democracy support one of the goals was also to increase the coherence between national and international democracy support. I also acknowledge the wide debate on whether these activities in fact cause democracy in the target country, and the debated relationship

between democracy and development. This is beyond the scope of this study, as this study focuses on the understanding that one donor, Finland, has on democracy support. This study does not either make comparative reflections between other donors and Finland.

My analysis focuses on Finland as a democracy support actor. There are many organizations involved in the implementation of democracy support. This study focuses on the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA). MFA provides funding for the CSOs that implement democracy support, and also has its own bilateral programs. I see MFA as the main actor which shapes Finland's democracy support.¹² Therefore, its understanding on democracy support matters, as it may shape the sector of democracy support of Finland. The research question is answered with qualitative content analysis, based on the analytical framework of four themes. Below I present these four themes of my analytical framework in detail.

3.1 Concept of Democracy in Democracy Support

We cannot look at democracy promotion without looking at the very concept of democracy. Democracy is seen as an essentially contested concept (Kurki, 2010, p. 362). Democracy, development, democratization, and democracy support all mean different things to different people. Hobson & Kurki (2011) have studied the different notions of democracy that democracy support actors use; questions on whether the understanding is clear or vague, and whether there are contestations and shifts in their understanding of democracy. The contestation over the concept of democracy exists between different donors and within the organizations of donors involved in democracy support. (Kurki & Hobson, 2011, pp. 1–3.)

There is a wide array of theoretical literature defining democracy. The term democracy originates from ancient Greek, being a combination of words *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule). At its core, democracy is a system of governance where the key is the will of people

¹² MFA is subject to the political guidance of the Government and Ministers, and this political part also has a big role on democracy support through, for example, Government Program and state budget. These political factors are noted as the background context on Finnish democracy support, presented in Chapter 2.3. Nevertheless, these political factors are out of the scope of this study, and the focus here is on the Foreign Ministry.

as the method of rule. (Hossain et al. 2003, pp. 8-9). Larry Diamond (2016) has presented the minimum requirements of democracy to be following:

1. universal, adult suffrage;
2. recurring, free, competitive, and fair elections;
3. more than one serious political party; and
4. alternative sources of information. (Diamond, 2016, p. 34)

The current usage of the term can be divided into two definitions: broad and narrow. The broad understanding of democracy can include economic, social democracy, civil and political liberties. The narrow definition only refers to the system of government, and the most important procedures, such as elections. (Hossain et al. 2003, pp. 8-9). These are presented more in detail below.

The so-called narrow understanding¹³ of democracy highlights the procedures of democracy, such as elections. This is linked to Peter Schumpeter's definition of democracy, which sees democracy as a method for people to elect representatives and highlights the way in which individuals acquire power through political competition within the system of democratic governance. This definition has been used widely in political science, as it is useful and helps to differentiate democracies from non-democracies via institutions. Hossain et al. (2003) argue that this concept has been the most prominent in democracy support in theory and practice. The narrow conceptualization of democracy can be considered to support political stability and elections. (Hossain et al., 2003, p. 9; Setälä, 2003, pp. 61–64.)

Polyarchy, a term created by Robert A. Dahl, builds on the narrow understanding of democracy. In polyarchy, there are competitive elections, meaning public contestation, and inclusiveness in who is allowed to vote. Thus, in addition to the procedures such as elections, democracy also requires freedoms, such as the freedom of expression, freedom to join and form associations guaranteed by institutions, and that citizens have the right to formulate their preferences and those are weighed by the government. To conclude, polyarchy includes the relevant procedures of a democratic regime and adds on civil and political rights. (Niño-Zarazúa et al., 2020, pp. 48–49; Setälä, 2003, pp. 85–86.)

¹³ Also called minimal or procedural definition of democracy.

The broad definition builds on these narrow understandings of democracy. The narrow definition that only focuses on elections, has too narrow an approach. In the broad definition, important are also the political rights and civil freedoms in democracy, and additionally a variety of other factors, such as rights of minorities, equality, fundamental freedoms, rule of law and human rights. (Silander 2017, p. 179.)

Research has found that Western states operate mostly with the goal of liberal democracy. Liberal democracy promoters tend to group together the concepts of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Elements such as free and fair elections, political parties, CSOs, the media, educate citizenry and guarantee of minority rights are essential to liberal democracy (Huber 2015, pp. 23-24.)

The concept of democracy is seen to influence the democracy support, and in addition to being a question of academic interest, this may have important consequences on the practice of democracy support. The way donors define and employ the understanding of democracy may also explain the dynamics and effects of democracy support practice and dialogue (Hobson & Kurki 2011, p. 5). Anna Brodin (2000) concludes: "Democracy as a value carries immense goodwill, but the range of interpretations and prioritizations associated with the concept of democracy affect outcomes and recipients" (Brodin, 2000, p. 250). This is why it is essential to research the concept of democracy to understand democracy support.

One possible way how the concept of democracy affects the approach to democracy support is presented by Thomas Carothers (2009). He sees that the narrow concept of democracy leads to a political approach to democracy support, which is focused on elections and political liberties. Aid is then directed especially towards elections, political parties and politically oriented civil society groups. The broad concept of democracy leads to a developmental approach to democracy support, which sees that democracy produces substantive outcomes such as equality, welfare and justice. The developmental approach favors democracy assistance that pursues long-term changes in a wide range of political and socio-economic sectors, emphasizing governance and well-functioning state. These approaches are not clear cut, but can be overlapping within one donor. (Carothers, 2009, pp. 5, 7–8, 13.)

3.2 Good Governance and its Relationship to Democracy

Good governance is as broad a concept and as difficult to define as democracy. There is some overlap on these two concepts and donors see them as interlinked. Rachel Gisselquist (2012) argues, that donors do not differentiate enough good governance as a concept from liberal democracy (Gisselquist, 2012, p. 16). Good governance and democracy both include accountability, transparency, and participation. Some donors see supporting governance as the same thing as supporting democracy, and they put goals such as decentralization and public administration into both of the categories of democracy and good governance. The main difference between these two concepts is that governance means encouraging efficiency of public administration, states' ability to deliver for its citizens, with little focus on participation (Lekvall, 2013, p. 89; Plattner, 2013, p. 23).

Good governance has received substantial attention from donor and development actors in the past decade. Governance issues are seen as crucial for the economic development because governance creates a stable environment for investors and trade as it ensures the functionality of the state and its capacity. In addition to this, a well-functioning state was seen to provide for its citizens (Lekvall, 2013, p. 89). Now, good governance has become a "buzzword" for donors, and it functions as an umbrella term for discussions on political and administrative issues and processes (Van Arkadie, 2012, pp. 53–54).

Good governance and democracy share qualities, and most democracies also have good governance. However, there are exceptions, and even authoritarian regimes can have what is seen as "good governance". Singapore is a good example of this. It is a wealthy country which scores highly on many measures of good governance, even if it is ruled autocratically (Plattner 2013, pp. 15-16). This is one concrete example of the difference between these two concepts, even though interlinked.

The reason why good governance is taken into specific scrutiny is the relationship it has with democracy – it is seen as both a precondition and a result of democracy. Finland, as a democracy support actor, links closely the concept of democracy to three additional concepts: human rights, the rule of law and good governance. The focus of this thesis is specifically on good governance, because of the way it has almost become a synonym for

democracy in Finnish development aid and rhetoric, and more widely in the donor community.

Even though these two concepts are used almost as synonyms, democracy and good governance are not the same thing. Most notably, because good governance focuses on the efficiency of public administration, there is little support for participation. Focusing only on strengthening delivery, and efficiency of governance the aid might work against democracy if these bureaucracies, which create the effective government, also resist political change of democratic processes. (Lekvall 2013, p. 89.)

3.3 Motivation for Democracy Support

Motivation for democracy support means the incentives and driving factors for the democracy support actor. The motivation for democracy support can also guide the democracy support actor to focus on specific areas of democracy it sees the most vital. The theory on motivation can be divided into two categories: firstly, intrinsic motivation, meaning the value of democracy itself, or secondly, instrumental motivation, meaning how the promotion of democracy can help other goals. These goals can be, for example, economic development, peace or other interests of the donor country. (Wolff & Spanger, 2017, p. 4.)

Jonas Wolff and Iris Wurm (2011) have presented different motives for democracy support derived from different IR theories. All these approaches rely on the theory of democratic peace, in which the main idea is that democratic states do not go to war against each other. Because democratic regimes are thus seen as inherently peaceful, the cooperation to achieve more democratic countries has its benefits for the donor. Through this lens, they developed four approaches: materialist theory, normative theory, cultural theory, and critical theory, which all explain why countries are involved in democracy support. (Wolff & Wurm, 2011.)

Materialist theory, which draws from rationalist approaches, sees that promoting democracy is one foreign policy instrument, among others. A normative theory rests on the normative explanations and explains how democratic countries are responding to a norm when they promote democracy. Cultural theory draws from action-centered constructivism, seeing the promotion of democracy as a constitutive norm and a part of

the identity of a country. Finally, the critical theory sees democracy promotion as an important instrument which requires normative significance to be effective. (Wolff & Wurm, 2011, p. 89.)

From these approaches, Jonas Wolff and Hans-Joachim Spanger then identify two interest-based factors: security interests of the donor in the recipient country and its economic interests. In addition, two norm-based factors identified were the donor's conception of democracy promotion and international norms. They see that these different factors can co-exist, as democracy support policies are result of interaction between interests and norms. (Wolff & Spranger 2017, pp.12, 26.)

As mentioned before, democracy support is defined by the goal to support democracy. Thus, intent for democracy is always the primary objective (Burnell, 2000, p. 5). Wolff and Spanger (2017) see democracy promotion as an object and instrument which can be seen to correspond to both the foreign policy interests and identity of democratic states. This allows states to pursue their interests and norms through this foreign policy simultaneously. (Wolff & Spanger, 2017 pp. 2, 279.)

Studies on Nordic countries' democracy support find that these countries are motivated by the humanitarian interest in their foreign policy, which means that they see that democratic regimes achieve social development and protection of human rights. Nordic countries also traditionally highlight the reduction of social inequalities and the promotion of gender issues in their support (Schraeder, 2002, p. 229). Liisa Laakso (2002) in her study, which included Finland, found that Nordic countries regard democracy worth pursuing as it is intrinsically valuable. She argues this is tied closely to the very identity of Nordic countries as democracies and this identity is reflected in their foreign policy. (Laakso, 2002, p. 55).

3.4 Challenges in Democracy Support

Today, development aid is the main way for Western states to implement their democracy support. However, the relationship between development aid and democracy aid has tensions. There have been debates if democracy should be promoted at all in development cooperation, or if politics should be kept separate from development aid. There are also different viewpoints on the relationship between democracy and development, and which one of them should the donors prioritize.

Carothers and De Gramont (2013) have identified the debate between "traditional and political aid", which has been prominent in aid practitioners' and scholars' discussions. A glance into this debate explains the hesitations on democracy support, and how democracy support actors are still often separate from other development aid actors in the way donors organize their aid. The debate began in the 1960s, when development aid was mainly approached from the "technical approach", which meant the exclusion politics from aid. The donor community even thought that autocratic countries could prove to be better partners than the "shaky" democratic ones (Carothers & De Gramont 2013, pp 30-31). At this time, the thought process of donors behind aid was that modernization would enforce all good things, meaning political, economic, and social development. This meant, that if merely development was aided, democracy would follow (Carothers, 2012, p. 389).

The idea of development becoming before democracy has been prominent in the donor and development community and these historical divisions between socio-economic foreign aid and aid with political goals can still be seen today. There has been a suspicion towards 'political aid', meaning the suspicion in the donor community on whether aid is becoming too political or the doubts on what political aid can offer. There has been a persistent fear that political aid means donors use it to meddle with an aid-receiving country's domestic affairs for their own interests. The consequences of this divide or suspicion can be seen in few areas. Regarding funding, openly political aid has usually received lower funding than sectors concentrated in more traditional areas, such as economic growth or health. Democracy support and human rights often still get their own sector programs that are separate and disconnected from rest of the country's development aid. (Carothers & De Gramont, 2013, pp. 6–7; Dodsworth & Cheeseman, 2018, p. 303.)

Political institutions and processes have proven to be a difficult topic for the development community. Political institutions' role as a key for development has not been recognized, and efforts to strengthen governance or "take politics into account" might have been rather only rhetorical remarks. Anna Lekvall (2013) notes that political systems are a sensitive matter in the relations between states and even awkward for donors to engage in. Political

institutions and political parties might also present weak or unpredictable characteristics, which hinders the enthusiasm of donors to engage with them (Lekvall, 2013, p. 87).

A recent article by Susan Dodsworth and Graeme Ramshaw (2021) argues, however, that the perceived tradeoff between democracy and development is persistent in the development discourse, but there are possibilities to create synergy between democracy building and development. What is missing from this debate is the point of view of the political actors – such as parliaments and politicians – as development actors. They conclude that it is also possible to help development democratically. They argue that democracy and political actors should be taken into account when striving for sustainable development. (Dodsworth & Ramshaw, 2021, pp. 126–127.)

States have many objectives for their foreign policy, and often these priorities or objectives have an unstated hierarchy. Democracy is often trumped by political stability, security, and trade (Lekvall 2013, p. 89). This indicates that democracy support needs to compete with the other objectives on Western governments' agendas (Whitehead 1996, p. 269). Thomas Carothers (1999) has argued that democracy promotion, from what he calls a “semi-realist approach”, is a relevant but a secondary aim in foreign policy (Carothers 1999, p. 16). Similarly, Peter Schraeder (2003) has concluded that democracy support is overridden when other interests clash with this normative goal (Schraeder 2003, p. 41). The normative goal of promoting democracy is ignored once it collides with either security or economic interests, which are then given priority in foreign policy (Wolff & Spanger, 2017, p. 1).

This challenge of conflicting foreign policy objectives was also brought up in Laakso's study on Nordic countries, which included Finland. She found that economic, ideological and security interest counter or even override democracy promotion, even though Nordic countries have a long history of stating their interest in democracy promotion. Laakso concludes: “Although the Nordics recognized, at least implicitly, the importance of civil and political rights in the development process, their development projects typically concentrated on the practical socioeconomic concerns of economic growth, production, infrastructure, health care, and education”. (Laakso, 2002, p. 57.)

There can also be conflicting objects within democracy support. Sonya Grimm and Julia Leininger (2012) note that integrating too many objectives into democracy support programs can hinder the effectiveness and results of these programs. Often, donors include “all the good things”, including support for democracy, the rule of law, stability and peace in their strategies at the beginning, which may later create problems in the implementation of development cooperation. The research found that due to the limited resources in development cooperation, policy choices are often made at the expense of democracy support. (Grimm & Leininger 2012, pp. 394, 408.)

This nature as a “secondary foreign policy aim” might also be reflected in how research has called for democracy support action, not only rhetoric.¹⁴ Some scholars have even challenged if the donors in fact have as much interest in democracy promotion as they state in their rhetoric, due to the low level of funding (Bann Seng Tan, 2020, p. 150). Researchers have identified this "gap between theory and practice" on how democracy support actors recognize the importance of their policies' political dimensions but may fail to put this into practice (Crawford, 2000, p. 2; Lekvall 2013, p. 89).

In a recent article, Susan Dodsworth and Nic Cheeseman, drawing from democracy support literature, identify ten challenges to democracy support: “difficult cases, authoritarian backlash, adapting to context, confronting politics, managing uncertainty, unintended side effects, a tight funding environment, defining and demonstrating success, competing priorities and a limited evidence base”. (Dodsworth & Cheeseman, 2018.)

Democracy support is aiming to affect very complex processes and bring controlled change in political system (Burnell, 2000, p. 349). This is now further challenged by the lack of favorable international environment for democracy. The international commitment to support democracies is wavering, many scholars observe more democratic backsliding occurring, and a trend of autocratization is observed (Diamond, 2020, p. 36; Alizada et al. 2021). These changes in international environment bring even greater challenges to democracy support in the 2020s.

¹⁴ See for example Jahn, 2012.

4. METHODS AND RESEARCH MATERIAL

This chapter presents the methods and research material of the thesis. The research focuses on understanding of Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland on Finnish democracy support from four thematic perspectives, created on the basis of earlier literature and presented in the chapter 3. These themes are: 1) the concept of democracy, 2) good governance in relation to democracy, 3) motivation for democracy support, and 4) challenges in democracy support. The research question, ‘how does MFA understand democracy support?’, is answered with qualitative content analysis on the documents produced by MFA and on the expert interviews. This chapter presents the methods of data gathering and analysis as well as the research material more in detail.

Qualitative research was chosen as a research approach because there is not a lot of earlier research specifically on the democracy support of Finland. The research focused on other countries and the created ideal types of democracy support actors are not applicable as such to the context of Finland. The aim of the study is to describe democracy support of Finland by exploring the concept of democracy used in its democracy support, the relationship between good governance and democracy in its democracy support, the motivating factors for democracy support along with the challenges that arise.

The research materials consist of 18 documents produced by the MFA and six expert interviews. The documents regard foreign policy, development aid and democracy support itself. These are presented more in detail later in this chapter. A challenge for this research was that there are not many documents specifically on democracy support, and the few there are, date from the early 2000s to 2010, and there are no recent policies on democracy support. Therefore, more recent documents on foreign policy and development policy, in addition to documents specifically on the topic of democracy support, were analyzed to create a current picture on democracy support of Finland.

In addition to the documents, there were six semi-structured interviews conducted in December 2020 and January 2021. The interviewees are senior-level officials with

expertise in democracy support and development cooperation. Each interview lasted approximately an hour, and in total there were six hours of interview data. The interviewees and interview questions can be found in the appendices 1 and 2.

The interview data provided invaluable additional information on democracy support of Finland, that is not available otherwise, especially on the relationship between good governance and democracy as well as the challenges democracy support actors face. The sample of the interviewees is small, and thus it is not possible to generalize the findings. The sample is, however, relevant specifically to knowledge of democracy support, as all six of the interviewees have worked or currently work in the MFA on democracy support, good governance, and development cooperation. The research material and qualitative content analysis are presented more in detail below.

4.1 Documents

The key documents for analyzing the democracy support of Finland are the documents on democracy support, documents on foreign policy priorities, and documents on development cooperation. The documents were selected to give an overview of Finland's democracy support.

From the key documents on foreign policy; three were analyzed in detail. *The Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy*, published in 2020, defines the goals and priorities of Finnish foreign policy. *The Strategic Priority Areas in the Foreign Service*, published in 2018, defines the strategic areas more in detail. *Finland Acts in a Changing World – Futures Review of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs* examines the changes in international relations and what kind of possibilities and challenges they pose to Finnish foreign policy.

Four documents on democracy support were included in the research material. The most important of these is the *Democracy Support Policy*, published in 2014. This document outlines the goals and implementation of Finnish democracy support. There are also two shorter documents: *Democracy and Human rights – A Pathway to Peace and Development* (2000) and *Supporting Democracy – The Finnish Experience* (2011). These brochures present the democracy work Finland does. In addition to these, a book

published in 2001, *Thinking Strategically about Democracy Assistance*, contains the procedural guidelines for Finland's democracy support (MFA, 2014). This handbook presents the Finnish policies on supporting democracy, and what (the then new) sector of democracy assistance entails (MFA, 2001, p. 11).

It is worth noting, that the earliest documents included in the analysis are from 2000s. The reason why these are also included, is that there are not that many documents specifically on democracy support. As these documents were made 20 years ago, the context in which these are written was different. During the analysis, it was found that the view on democracy support found in these earlier documents are still valid and coherent compared to the more recent documents. This demonstrates the coherence of Finnish democracy support policy.

The documents on development policy that were analyzed were *the Development Policy 2016*, the report on it from 2018, and *Theories of Change and Aggregate indicators of Finland's development policy 2020*. The document *Theories of Change and Aggregate Indicators for Finland's Development policy (2020)* concretizes how Finland conceptualizes the change it wants its development policy to achieve, and what the indicators by which the impact and outcomes are measured are. It includes the aims and indicators for democracy support under the third priority area "Education and peaceful democratic societies". Overall, Finland's development policy has four priority areas:

1. Strengthening the status and rights of women and girls, with an emphasis on sexual and reproductive health and rights.
2. Strengthening the economic base of developing countries and creating jobs, with an emphasis on innovations and the role of women in the economy and female entrepreneurship.
3. Education, well-functioning societies and democracy, with an emphasis on high-quality education, improved tax systems and support for democracy and the rule of law.
4. Climate change and natural resources, with an emphasis on strengthening adaptation alongside mitigation of climate change, food security and water, meteorology and disaster risk prevention, forests and safeguarding biodiversity. (MFA 2020e.)

In addition, also the development cooperation country strategies of Finland's main bilateral partners were included in the research material. The main bilateral partners are: Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Somalia, Tanzania, Zambia, Myanmar, and Nepal. The objectives of Finland's democracy support are specified in the country strategies. The country strategies identify the cooperation goals, the different sectors for cooperation,

how the aid is implemented and measured. The country strategies are prepared in cooperation with the partner country whose development goals are also taken into account in the preparation.

4.2 *Expert Interviews*

The interviewees were six senior-level civil servants from the Finnish MFA. Because of the position of my interviewees, the interviewing method relied heavily on the methodology of elite and expert interviews. There is overlap with the methods of elite interviews and expert interviews in literature, and therefore those are discussed together. The differences between these two methods are small; anglophone research world uses the term "elite interview", while German-langue tradition refers to "expert interview". The research design draws from both the anglophone tradition of elite interviews and the newer tradition of expert interviews. (Littig, 2009, pp. 98–99.)

The tradition of elite interviews highlights the power that elites have, seeing a small minority holding the most power. In the case of my interviewees, the senior-level officials do have bureaucratic power and hold senior positions in the ministry, but at the same time they are experts on democracy, democracy support and development policy, highly skilled, experienced, and educated. For this study, the interviewees' intersection of their position as elite and experts is very important, due to their knowledge on Finnish democracy support, development cooperation and foreign policy.

Experts can be defined as: "people who possess specific knowledge that relates to a clearly demarcated range of problems and plays an authoritative role in decision-making of different kinds" (Bogner et al., 2009, p. 667). Even though the elite interview methodology has influenced the research design of this study, the interviewees can also be defined as experts because of the significance of special knowledge they hold. Elites are usually defined by their status, which can be acquired in addition to knowledge by personal relations, poise, and habitus. Experts, as well as elites, also hold power; but as a distinction of elites, their power may not manifest in political influence or monetary wealth but in the way people understand and interpret the world or particular issues. (Borgner et al. 2018, pp. 667-668.)

The selection of interviewees could be described as "purposive selective sample", which is guided by the question: "who has the information the researcher wants?" (Beamer 2002, p. 87). MFA was identified as the key organization of Finnish foreign and development policy. The interviewees were selected for their expertise in democracy support, foreign affairs, and development cooperation.

Elite and expert interviews are categorized by the perceived asymmetric power relations between the interviewee and interviewer. This posed challenges also to this study. The first one is access. Access to the interviewees and interviewees statements can be influenced by many different factors (Bogner et al. 2018, p. 653). As this thesis was an assignment for Political Parties of Finland for Democracy – Demo Finland, an organization which works closely with MFA, there was help from this organization to identify and to gain initial contact with the key experts. Organizing the interviews took perseverance. Most often, the most successful way to gain access to the interviewees was a recommendation of an earlier interviewee. In total, thirteen people were approached to participate in the study. Out of these thirteen people, two declined, five did not answer and six were interviewed.

Another challenge presented in the method literature is the flexibility needed in elite/expert interviews and the importance of adapting to every scenario and personality at hand (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 15). Scheduling and other practical problems and the elites themselves can create difficult situations, which call for flexibility from the researcher. Flexibility in my case can be seen in how the interviewees were able to decide on the date and time of the interview, and I was prepared for any last-minute changes. The questions I asked in each interview were the same, but the interviewees' answers made every interview different, as I asked additional questions on the points they discussed, and this means the interviews were semi-structured.

The interview questions were constructed based on the idea of the analytical framework, through operationalization of the constructs of interests, which were: the concept of democracy, the democracy support policy of Finland and the motivation for democracy support. These constructs of interest were then later developed into the final analytical framework. This follows the model of Glenn Beamer (2002), in which the questions are formulated based on the constructs in which the researcher is interested (Beamer, 2002,

p. 86). Using the analytical framework as a basis for the questions ensured that the interviewees focused on these predetermined topics. Therefore, I was able to gain data on the specific themes I was interested in, but this in turn restricted the freedom of answers. The questions were open-ended, which allowed the interviewees to organize their answers within their own framework, giving them the flexibility to structure their answers. This is well-suited for explanatory work and working with elites/experts (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002, pp. 673, 675).

Informed consent of all the interviewees was attained before the interviews. When approached by email, the interviewees were given a document outlining the purpose of the research and its goals, with the plan of data retention and an assurance to delete all material after the research. Recording was discussed in advance, and all the material was kept safely and confidentially. The interviews were recorded due to its many benefits instead of merely relying on taking notes, as recording provides an opportunity for the researcher to focus on the interview, participate in discussion and ask additional questions, instead of having to transcribe simultaneously (Beckmann & Hall 2013, p. 203). The interviewees could refrain from the research at any moment, and they had a possibility to check their quotations before this study was published.

The interview material, as it is presented in this study, is in no way connected to one individual. The interviewees names and positions are included as a list in the appendix. The codes used in the chapter 6 (i1, i2, i3, i4, i5 and i6) are not given in the same order as the names in the appendix. I decided to include the names of the interviewees, because full anonymity would have been difficult, if not impossible, to keep. The pool of experts at this field is very limited, and it would have been easy for the reader to try and guess who I have interviewed. Thus, breaking anonymity was discussed with the interviewees and I obtained their consent in writing that I would be allowed to publish their names in the appendix. As Jari Eskola and Juha Suoranta (1998) note, the researcher should never promise more than they are in fact capable of providing regarding anonymity and confidentiality (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, Chapter 2). After a careful and thoughtful consideration process and discussions with the interviewees before the interviews, I decided to include the names and positions.

The thesis data collection was conducted in December 2020 and January 2021, when the COVID-19 pandemic brought forth restrictions in Finland. This affected my initial plans to have the interviews in person, thus they were done through Microsoft Teams. Doing the interviews remotely might have affected the data and interaction. Nevertheless, the interviewees were familiar with Microsoft Teams because of their daily work, and there were no technical big technical issues.

4.3 *Qualitative Content Analysis*

The analysis method for both the documents and the interview data was qualitative content analysis (QCA). The analysis aimed at finding relevant points from the data under each of the analytical framework's main themes. This was done by coding all relevant information from the data, and by then creating subthemes combining the codes which have the same meanings or same topics (Schreier, 2012, p. 4). The coding was done on the level of phrases. The only parts that discussed external democracy support were included. Thus, for example, the democracy work Finland does to strengthen its own democracy is not included in the analysis.

Themes in this study mean the overlapping categories that help to find the answer to the research question. The reason why the term of themes is used instead of categories, is to highlight the fact that themes require a higher level of interpretation from the researcher (Vaismoradi et al., 2016, p. 102). In other words, I have interpreted the data to achieve these main themes and subthemes. This has happened in the process of coding, abstracting and combining the codes into these subthemes and linking them to the main themes. The coding needs to be carefully evaluated. In this study, the evaluation included the execution of the coding process several times and a critical evaluation of the choices I had made.

QCA was chosen because through this method, it is possible to understand, describe and interpret complex phenomena from different perspectives. QCA presents the most important findings in a coherent matter and it works well with these two different data. QCA is an interpretative, flexible, and systematic descriptive analysis of the data, through which the relevant data was divided into subthemes under the main themes of the analytical framework. The analysis was guided by the analytical framework. (Schreier, 2012, pp. 1–4; Vaismoradi et al., 2016, p. 100.)

The aim of qualitative content analysis is to present a more coherent picture of the phenomena from the data gathered. This is done by organizing the data in a consistent and clear way, without losing the information in it. This provides researchers a new understanding and more information on the phenomena which is being researched. (Tuomi ja Sarajärvi 2018, chapters 4,1, 4.4.3)

One big part of interpretative qualitative analysis is the possibility to find different meanings from the same data. This means, that in the analysis the meanings are *given*, not purely *existing*. Meanings are created in relation to each other, so the scope of the study, assumptions and interests affect the way researcher assign meanings (Moilanen & Rähkä, 2018). The QCA has in this case been guided by the earlier research, and the analytical framework has limited the scope of this study to the four main themes I have identified as most important. This research does not, however, test any theory, because the analytical framework is a combination of different approaches. In addition, the main themes were formulated from earlier research, but the sub-themes were found from the data through the coding process.

The advantage of QCA is flexibility. It fits well with both data used in this research. Documents are very traditional data for QCA, and it has also been widely used on interview data, in which QCA is oftentimes used for the analysis to reduce the vast matter of transcribed pages into the summarized expressions on the subjects of interest that are relevant to the study (Schreier, 2012, pp. 1–4). Thus, QCA works well with data of this size, in which only the relevant parts are presented as findings. There was also the aim to understand the phenomena in a broad way, even though the amount data was not large. QCA made it possible to present all the voices that rose from the data, even if they were contradicting. Thus, QCA works well with less studied phenomena, two different types of data, the analytical framework of themes and aims to produce understanding on Finland's democracy support.

5.FINDINGS FROM THE DOCUMENTS

In this chapter, the main findings of the qualitative content analysis on the documents produced by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland are presented. As mentioned before, the Prime Minister Sanna Marin’s Government program states how the promotion of Finland’s values, one being democracy, is important in foreign policy (Government programme 2019, p. 60). In the priority areas of Finland’s development policy, democracy is included in the priority area three: “Education, well-functioning societies, and democracy”. The high-quality education, improved tax systems, support for democracy and the rule of law are emphasized within this priority area (MFA, 2021). The goal in this priority area in relation to democratic governance is that ”societies have become more democratic and better-functioning” (MFA, 2016, p. 15). The document on the development cooperation results from 2018 highlights three ways in which Finland has supported democracy:

Finland has supported the democratization of parliaments, political parties and local decision-making bodies in 19 countries through bilateral cooperation and cooperation with civil society organizations (MFA 2018c, p. 47).

In the following sections the findings from the documents under each theme of the analytical framework are presented.

5.1 *Broad Understanding of Democracy*

TABLE 1. The concept of democracy: subthemes in the documents

Subtheme	Example phrase
Broad understanding of democracy	Finland’s contribution to the building of well-functioning societies is based on a broad concept of democracy (MFA 2018 a, p. 46).
Broad understanding of human rights	Democracy is more than civil and political rights, it is also about economic, social and cultural rights (MFA, 2011, p. 2).
Inclusive participation	Due to discrimination, attitudes or lack of knowledge, especially women, children, young people and vulnerable people may have limited

	opportunities to influence their own lives (MFA, 2016, p. 5).
Equality and role of women	The ability of men and women to participate on equal terms in political life and in decision-making is a prerequisite of genuine democracy (MFA, 2011, p.2).
Diverse forms of democracy	Due to historical circumstances, differences in cultures, and stage of development, democracy is practiced in diverse forms around the world (MFA, 2011, p.11).

The main finding is that the concept of democracy in democracy support is broad or holistic. The democracy support policy paper explains that the broad understanding of democracy means democracy is seen as interlinked with human rights, good governance, and the rule of law (MFA, 2014, p. 2). A similar broad understanding was presented in the 2018 MFA policy paper:

Finland’s contribution to the building of well-functioning societies is based on a broad concept of democracy, which views the promotion of human rights, democracy, rule of law and good governance, as well as the eradication of corruption as equally important aspects in strengthening democracy (MFA 2018 a, p. 46).

The broad understanding of democracy also means that these different aspects linked to democracy – human rights, rule of law, good governance and anti-corruption – are all seen as equally important in building democracy.

Already in the 2000s, in the book published by the MFA, *Thinking strategically about democracy assistance* (2001), it is acknowledged that these themes are not clearly defined in relation to development cooperation.

Democracy, human rights and good governance are themes which are often invoked in discussions about what development entails. It is, however, not always clear what is meant by democracy, human rights and good governance, or what implications they have with regard to development co-operation. (MFA, 2001, p. 9)

The book, which aims to create a more comprehensive approach to the then new sector of democracy assistance, notes the ambiguities of these concepts. The concepts are used in development cooperation without specifically defining them. The book also presents three essential conditions for democratic governance:

For a system of government to be considered democratic, it must combine three essential conditions: meaningful competition for political power amongst individuals and organised groups; inclusive participation through free and fair elections; and a supportive level of civil and political liberties. [...] In addition, a functioning democracy permits adaptation, dissent, accountability and change through various mechanisms including political debate, legislation and elections. (MFA, 2001, p. 9).

This showcases the three essential elements which define democracy. Democracies can vary in their form, but these essential qualities guarantee the participation of people and the possibilities for actual changes. There needs to be actual mechanisms and procedures in place that make the functioning of democracy possible. This finding points out that democracy has to be effective and offer possibilities to influence the actual decision-making processes to be considered functional.

Human rights are an integral part of democracy for Finland, and the holistic understanding underscores how human rights are also understood in a very broad manner. In addition to civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights are also included. The holistic understanding of democracy is presented as follows:

Finland applies a holistic approach to democracy. Democracy is inextricably associated to human rights, rule of law, good governance and to anti-corruption. Democracy is more than civil and political rights, it is also about economic, social and cultural rights. (MFA, 2011, p. 2).

Protection of human rights is an essential part of democracy, and the different human rights need to be taken into account in the implementation of development cooperation. Inclusivity and human rights are also tied together.

Special attention is paid to the respect for the human rights of persons and groups in vulnerable situations and exposed to discrimination. In dialogue with various stakeholders, Finland highlights the pivotal role of the enforcement of human rights obligations and the freedom of speech, freedom of opinion and freedom of assembly for stable and successful societies (MFA, 2020b, p. 41).

Finland seeks to promote especially the civil and political rights of women and vulnerable or marginalized groups in its development cooperation and also in democracy promotion. (MFA, 2014, p. 4) This means that the concept of democracy also encompasses inclusivity and equality. The role of women and the equality between different genders is highlighted:

Finland promotes the right of women and girls to participate in decision-making and become economically empowered. This covers political decision-making, conflict resolution, work and social protection, as well as land ownership and inheritance law. Gender equality is key to progress in many areas. (MFA, 2018c, p. 28)

Equality and inclusivity are essential to the very concept of democracy from Finland's perspective, and inequality is an infringement of universal human rights. Democracy provides everybody equal opportunities to influence each person's own and common welfare. The MFA notes that there are specific groups that may be in risk of having limits and barrier to equal participation.

Due to discrimination, attitudes or lack of knowledge, especially women, children, young people and vulnerable people may have limited opportunities to influence their own lives (MFA, 2016, p. 5).

Finland highlights the issues of gender equality, possibilities of influence for the youth and vulnerable people. The term "vulnerable people" is not defined, but this may be because it is always dependent on the context. This may mean certain ethnic groups, language minorities, or people from specific geographical areas.

Finland's broad understanding of democracy acknowledges that there is not only one form of democracy, but democratic governance can be organized in diverse forms.

Due to historical circumstances, differences in cultures, and stage of development, democracy is practiced in diverse forms around the world. (MFA, 2011, p.11)

No two democratic systems are identical, but it can be said that a functioning democracy maintains inclusive political and social channels for the peaceful discussion of difference and provides, particularly in the rule of law, a system of universally-applicable rules to govern such discourse. (MFA, 2001, p. 9).

These citations show how the different historical, cultural, and developmental characteristics of states are acknowledged. Democracy includes the essential qualities of participation, rule of law and governance, but there can be differences in how these are organized. In democracy support and development cooperation in a broader sense, the question of ownership is essential for sustainable development and making lasting impact. This means that Finland does not see that it can "export" the Finnish political system as such, but the creation and consolidation of diverse forms of democracy are supported.

The documents present three main categories through which democracy support is done: support of multiparty systems, work of parliaments and election monitoring.

Finland also supports the development of multiparty systems and the work of parliaments. [...] Election monitoring, carried out to support the development of democracy and to strengthen citizens' trust in the election arrangements, is part of the system of representative democracy (MFA, 2018c, p. 46).

This shows what democracy support actions Finland has focused on. Parliaments, multiparty systems, and elections can all be seen as essential ways to institutionalize decision-making processes and increase accountability in the society.

When discussing the concept of democracy in Finnish democracy support, it is also important to look at how the results are measured: what are the goals and the indicators for the results. In the document *Theories of Change and Aggregate Indicators for Finland's development policy*, the priority area number three is named: "Education and peaceful democratic societies", and it includes two outcomes that are relevant to democracy support:

OUTCOME 3 More peaceful, stable and just societies with strengthened political and judicial institutions and inclusive state-building processes (SDG 16) and OUTCOME 4 The enabling environment for and capacity of the civil society and persons in vulnerable positions to influence and participate in decision-making has improved (SDG5, T5; SDG16, T7). (MFA, 2020a, p. 10)

In more detail, the outcome three includes indicators regarding peace, security, participation, judicial institutions as well as political decision-makers (MFA 2020a, pp. 10–11).

In the outcome 4, all four indicators are relevant to democracy support:

1. Strengthened public and political participation and decision-making power of women and those in vulnerable positions
2. Increased capacity of an independent, vibrant and pluralistic civil society to organize, advocate and participate in political decision-making
3. Improved legislation and enforcement of freedom of speech, assembly and association (SDG 16, T10)
4. Enhanced protection of independent media, whistle blowers and human rights defenders (SDG 16, T10) (MFA 2020a, pp. 10-11)

The theory of change and the indicators operationalize the concept of democracy that Finland has by concretizing what indicators are measured, and what is thus seen as a result in Finnish development cooperation concerning democracy.

To conclude, Finland has a broad or holistic understanding of democracy, which includes human rights (civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights), the rule of law, and a special focus on underrepresented groups. Well-functioning democratic governance also includes good governance and strong institutions.

5.2 *Good Governance in Relation to Democracy Support*

TABLE 2. Good governance and its relationship to democracy: subthemes in the documents

Subtheme	Example phrase
Good governance as a main theme in democracy support policy	Finland will support the promotion of human rights, democracy, the rule of law, good governance and the eradication of corruption (MFA, 2014, p. 2)
The principles of good governance are principles of democratic governance	There are three guiding principles that define good governance: transparency, accountability and participation. These three principles are inherent parts of a democratic society (MFA, 2001, p. 50).
Good governance as a prerequisite for democracy	In the most fragile countries, there is a need for stronger development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Finland’s activities are particularly geared towards strengthening the [...] and good governance (MFA, 2018, p. 16).

As presented in the previous chapter, good governance is an integral part of the very concept of democracy of Finland. Good governance is listed as one of the “main themes” of democracy support policy of Finland (MFA, 2014, p. 4).

To clarify, in Finnish democracy support good governance has been defined by the following attributes: “Good governance follows the principles of the rule of law and democracy; is open and public; is not based on corruption; and offers equal chances of participation to all citizens” (MFA, 2000, p. 10).

The relationship between democracy and good governance is not stated explicitly in the documents. Sometimes the two concepts are used interchangeably, sometimes good governance is seen as a part of democracy and sometimes as a prerequisite of democracy. In the country strategies, good governance is a goal in itself. Anti-corruption and taxation, which are highlighted in the development cooperation priority area three, are rather elements of good governance than democracy. However, these elements are important for well-functioning democracies to ensure that these democracies can deliver for their citizens.

Good governance is seen to be included in the “well-functioning societies” of the development cooperation priority area three: “Education, democracy and well-functioning societies”. A well-functioning society is seen to include peace, democracy, taxation and civil society (MFA, 2018a, p. 46). The essential qualities of good governance are as follows:

There are three guiding principles that define good governance: transparency, accountability and participation. These three principles are inherent parts of a democratic society (MFA, 2001, p. 50).

Accountability, transparency and participation are also parts of the very concept of democracy. This further illustrates how good governance is its own concept but has overlapping meanings with democracy.

What is interesting to note is how in relation to the most fragile states good governance is highlighted, but democracy is not mentioned as such.

In the most fragile countries, there is a need for stronger development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Finland’s activities are particularly geared towards strengthening the position of women and girls, sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as education, employment and good governance. (MFA, 2018, p. 16).

This may be interpreted to mean that good governance creates the minimum requirements a state must have in order to democratize and consolidate its democratic governance.

The following quote from the democracy support policy paper once again demonstrates how good governance, democracy, human rights and the rule of law are interlinked, and how democratic social institutions create good governance in societies.

Finland promotes human rights, democracy and an accountable society by, among other things, supporting human rights actors, good governance and the rule of law, and by strengthening the democratic social institutions that serve citizens and produce security in partner countries. (MFA, 2014, p. 2).

The analysis of Finland's country strategies¹⁵ shows that good governance is represented much more clearly as a goal than democracy. The move towards democratization is often mentioned in the country context, but when we look at the goals, impact and funding, democracy is often not mentioned. Democracy as a goal and impact, linked to sustainable governance, is only mentioned in the country strategy of Myanmar. In others, interlinked concepts such as good governance, human rights or women's rights are mentioned.

To conclude, the documents specify good governance as an important part of Finnish democracy support, as it is seen as both a prerequisite and a consequence of democracy. Good governance is a broad concept which is not clearly defined, and it seems to share many of the qualities of the concept of democracy. Good governance is prominent especially in the country strategies of Finland's main bilateral partners, in which democracy is hardly mentioned.

¹⁵ The following documents were included in the analysis: Country Strategy for Development Cooperation with Ethiopia 2016–2019, Country Strategy for Development Cooperation with Kenya 2016–2019, Country Strategy for Development Cooperation with Mozambique 2016–2019, Country Strategy for Development Cooperation with Myanmar 2016–2019, Country Strategy for Development Cooperation with Somalia 2017–2020, Country Strategy for Development Cooperation with Tanzania 2016–2019, and Country Strategy for Development Cooperation with Zambia 2016–2019.

5.3 Democracy is Both a Goal and a Reinforcing Factor

TABLE 3. Motivation for democracy support: subthemes in the documents

Subtheme	Example phrase
Democracy as a value	In the rapidly changing world, the promotion of our values – human rights, democracy, rule of law – is increasingly important (MFA, 2018, p.1)
Peace and conflict prevention	Democratic countries that respect human rights are the most stable and are less prone to conflicts. (MFA, 2014, p. 2)
Development	Democracy, which is closely linked with human rights and a dynamic civil society, is seen to be the way to create the preconditions for sustainable development, poverty reduction and the wellbeing of people (MFA, 2014, p. 2)
Stability	Democracy lays a foundation for social stability and equilibrium (MFA, 2000, p. 6)
Global responsibility and international commitments	The countries of the West have rather unanimously committed themselves to supporting the democratisation processes in the developing world and respect for human rights in these countries (MFA, 2000, p. 3)

For Finland, the promotion of its values in foreign policy is important. Democracy is clearly and strongly stated as a value within the foreign policy.

The key elements of the set of values Finland applies in its foreign and security policy include the promotion of human rights, the rule of law, democracy, peace, freedom, equitable treatment and equality in all its international activities. (MFA, 2020b, p. 10).

In the rapidly changing world, the promotion of our values – human rights, democracy, rule of law – is increasingly important. (MFA 2018a, p. 10)

Democracy is not the only value in Finland’s foreign and security policy. Others, such as peace and human rights, are also presented and all of these are linked to one another and mutually reinforcing. The documents acknowledge both the inherent and the instrumental value of democracy.

Safe living conditions, human rights, people’s ability to influence issues which affect them, an adequate income, and a good living environment in the developing countries are

important goals in their own right. In achieving these goals, they also strengthen international security, the economy and the environment. (MFA, 2016, p. 3.)

In the quote above, the phrase “people’s ability to influence issues which affect them”, seems to refer to democracy. Supporting democracy is a goal in its own right, but it is also seen to have a positive effect on other sectors. Democracy is linked with positive effects on development, economic development, peace and equality (MFA, 2014, p. 4). Democracy and the democratic institutions create the preconditions for economic development and equal social policies:

Through support for democracy, Finland seeks to strengthen democratic social institutions that ensure equal treatment of citizens and create the basis for economic and business development as well as for a just social policy. (MFA 2014, p. 4).

In development policy, Finland sees a strong link between democracy and the development of market-economy, which is seen as a precondition for a country’s economic well-being, because market-oriented economy is seen as a way for individuals to pursue economic wellbeing (MFA, 2001, p. 10).

The instrumental value of democracy is also linked to stability, security, peace, conflict prevention and reconstruction after conflict. Democratic governments are seen as more stable and less prone to conflicts (MFA, 2014, pp. 2, 4). Supporting democracy is seen as an important factor in the conflict management work of Finland.

Building of democracy, good governance and crisis resilience in fragile states, especially in the zone extending from Afghanistan to the Sahel, will be an important part of this work. By supporting democratic and sustainable development and assisting developing economies in climate change mitigation and adaptation, we can help to prevent crises and forced migration (MFA 2018a, p. 3).

Democracy is seen to provide international stability, because democracies are less prone to conflicts. Therefore, democracy support is also seen as conflict prevention.

Democracy work should therefore be based on the international promotion of human rights and the rule of law. It is part of support for social development, conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction work. (MFA, 2014, p. 2)

Democracy is seen to create conditions in which human rights are protected and there are ways to peacefully resolve arising conflicts. This means that internal conflicts are resolved without expand into international conflicts.

It would be cheaper to help the developing countries establish such democratic and comprehensive human-rights practices which prevent social tensions mounting into outbreaks of violence. This would not only be more economical but also help eliminate a vast amount of human suffering. (MFA, 2000, p. 6.)

The way democracy is linked to peace seems to be an important motivating factor for Finland, as it can be found in many different documents. Democracy support is seen as an economical way to prevent conflicts and grave human suffering.

One motivating factor for democracy support is also the connection it has to sustainable development.

Democracy, which is closely linked with human rights and a dynamic civil society, is seen to be the way to create the preconditions for sustainable development, poverty reduction and the wellbeing of people. (MFA, 2014, p. 2).

Democratic governance is seen to improve the economic situation and welfare of people in the long run.

The main objectives of Finland's development cooperation include the promotion of human rights, social equality, democracy and good governance. This is expected to gradually influence the developing countries' economic and social welfare. (MFA, 2000, p. 12)

Democracy creates the foundations for a positive development. Nevertheless, it is also noted that development is not straightforward.

Democracy lays a foundation for social stability and equilibrium. Stable and peaceful conditions, for their part, constitute a prerequisite for economic growth and development. Free elections and other democratic ways of action do not, however, as such, guarantee an improving economy. For the developing countries to manage to break out of the poverty trap, more equitable world trade and support from the rich nations of the world are required to improve the structures of their business and economy. (MFA, 2000, p. 6.)

One of the motivations for supporting democracy that can be found in the document is the global responsibility of Finland (MFA 2018, 5). Finland also has international commitments to support democracy, and these international commitments shape the development policy of Finland.

Finland's values and principles and its international commitments will be taken account of in the planning and implementation of all action, irrespective of what field, where and by whom development policy and development cooperation are being implemented. They provide long-term guidelines for action, which remain valid from one government term to the next. These values and principles include democracy and the rule of law; gender equality and human rights; freedom of speech; a sustainable market economy and sustainable use of natural resources; and the Nordic welfare state, including a high level of education. The Nordic social model enjoys a good reputation in many developing countries, and there is a demand for related know-how. (MFA, 2016, p. 12).

International commitments for democracy support, especially from the UN and the EU, push Finland to support democracy.

The countries of the West have rather unanimously committed themselves to supporting the democratisation processes in the developing world and respect for human rights in these countries. The promotion of human rights, social equality, democratic government and good governance are among the priorities of Finnish development cooperation, and it is a significant objective also in the EU's relations with the developing countries. (MFA, 2000, p. 3)

Especially important in relation to development cooperation is the commitment to the UN 2030 Agenda.

Sustainable development goals are implemented in the development policy in the areas of priority based on Finland's values and strengths. Finland promotes the rights and status of women and girls, strengthens the well-being in the developing countries – jobs, education and democracy included – and enhances climate resilience in developing countries. The overarching goals to be observed in all activities include gender equality, equitable treatment, climate resilience and low-carbon development. The implementation and effectiveness of the development policy is enhanced through multilateral cooperation. In development policy, the geographical focus is on Africa. (MFA, 2020a, p. 45)

Democracy guarantees human rights for all, including marginalized and vulnerable groups. As equality is inherent in the very concept of democracy Finland employs, a well-functioning democratic society also creates equality.

Democracy ensures that rulers can be held accountable for their actions and democracy also ensures the rights of all, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, of indigenous peoples and vulnerable groups. (MFA, 2011, p. 2).

Finland is also motivated to work on the sectors of human rights, good governance and rule of law because it sees Finland has a lot to give on these sectors:

Why is it important? Democracy and respect for human rights, a transparent and well-functioning public administration, taxation capacity and public services, a good justice system, an independent media and a free civil society are indispensable for the achievement of development and peace. Finland has a lot to offer in all these sectors, and also in the field of education, which is a cornerstone for development. From a welfare perspective, economic growth alone does not suffice if the developing country’s entire society does not benefit from the positive development. Here, too, the well-functioning Nordic model serves as a good example. (MFA, 2016, p. 19).

To conclude, the motivation for democracy support are both democracy as a goal in itself and the way how democracy is seen to advance development, stability, peace, and equality. The motivating factors for democracy support are the international commitments and how democracy is seen as a part of the value base on which foreign policy is built on.

5.4 Challenges Identified in the Documents

TABLE 4. Challenges in democracy support: subthemes in the documents

Subtheme	Example phrase
Non-linear democracy developments and long timelines	The path to democracy, better governance and respect for human rights is not likely to be a straight one. ‘Non-linear’ is the way many authors have come to characterize the democratisation process (MFA, 2001, p. 11)
Changes in the global commitment to democracy	The commitment to universal human rights, democracy and the rule of law has diminished (MFA, 2018, p. 10)
Conflicts and volatile environments in partner countries	Conflicts hinder the implementation of development cooperation in many partner countries (MFA, 2018a, p. 68)
Ensuring coherence and continuity, without fragmentation	The more consistent democracy support policy of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs requires a more consultative approach, more systematic contacts and exchange of information within the Foreign Service (MFA, 2014, p. 5)

The Foreign Ministry notes that the global community’s commitment to democracy is weakening: “The commitment to universal human rights, democracy and the rule of law has diminished” (MFA 2018, p. 10). It is also stated that in this more difficult and rapidly changing environment the promotion of Finland’s values – human rights, democracy, and the rule of law – is seen as increasingly important. Finland’s very own future is also seen to be defined by the current challenges democracy faces. (MFA, 2018, p. 3).

In the democracy support policy (2014), a more coherent and consistent approach is called for.

The more consistent democracy support policy of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs requires a more consultative approach, more systematic contacts and exchange of information within the Foreign Service. (MFA, 2014, p. 5)

In the same policy paper on democracy support, the goal is to create a coherent and more effective democracy support policy without fragmentation. Aid fragmentation means that there are many different actors implementing many different democracy support activities.

One of the challenges is the timeframes for democratic developments being long.

However, progress is slow on the rocky path. Democracy shows in increasing welfare only after a long time has passed (MFA, 2000, p.3).

Democratization in itself may be a volatile process, and there might be backsliding despite supporting democracies. The benefits of the democratic system in economy or welfare can take a long time to be realized.

Conflicts and changing societal factors in the partner countries are a challenge for all development cooperation.

Conflicts hinder the implementation of development cooperation in many partner countries (MFA, 2018a, p. 68)

Societal impacts are the sum of many factors and most of them are beyond Finland's control. Desired changes can often only be achieved with enough time and favourable conditions. (MFA, 2018a, p. 68)

There might be unpredictable developments in the partner countries, which affect the democracy support of Finland. These can be internal conflicts and unrest, rise of authoritarian leaders or international conflicts. Democratic developments may be non-linear. Thus, flexibility is needed in democracy support policy and implementation.

The path to democracy, better governance and respect for human rights is not likely to be a straight one. 'Non-linear' is the way many authors have come to characterize the democratisation process. Thus the OECD/DAC recommends a flexible approach that allows for frequent information feedback, learning and adjustment. This points to what 'thinking strategically' entails. It implies an approach to aid administration that lies

somewhere between the rigid framework of a formal strategy, or blueprint (which is unattainable and thus doomed to unravel), and an ad hoc management style which takes 'flexibility' to the extreme. (MFA, 2001, p. 11).

To conclude, the challenges of Finland's democracy support presented in the documents are the weakening of international commitment to democracy, the need for internal coherence, and the fact that democratization processes and the consolidation of democracy are long processes, which are also affected by the volatile conditions in the partner country.

6.FINDINGS FROM THE EXPERT INTERVIEWS

This chapter presents the main findings in the interview data. In the following sectors, these findings are presented under the four themes of the analytical framework to create an understanding of the view the MFA has on Finnish democracy support.

6.1 *Essential Qualities of Democracy*

TABLE 5. Concept of democracy: subthemes in the interviews

Subtheme	Example phrase ¹⁶
The possibility to exert influence	The most essential part is the free individual, who is able to exert influence on the decisions related to his/her life (i3)
Human rights and fundamental freedoms	Freedom of speech and freedom of thought are the basis [of democracy] (i5)
Inclusive participation	Participation and inclusivity are one of the pillars of democracy (i5)
Rule of law	Rule of law and the respect for rule of law is an integral part of democracy (i1)
Elections as the most important democratic procedure	The elections and also elections that are free and fair, the whole base for the western democracy (i4)
Dependency on the local context	When we aim to support democracy, it is work which is context dependent (i1)
Continuous participatory processes	The [participation] crystallizes in elections, which are the base for democracy, but often it is understood as too limited, there should be more continuous participation (i6)
Accountability and trust	Democratic government needs to be accountable [...] it creates trust in the whole system (i2)

The concept of democracy that was found in the expert interviews was similar to the broad, holistic understanding of democracy that was also found in the documents. The experts highlighted similar elements of democracy, such as the freedoms of an individual,

¹⁶ The original Finnish example phrases for tables 5, 6, 7 and 8 can be found in Appendix 3. All the translations of the quotes have been made by me.

the rule of law, inclusivity, the possibilities to take part in decision-making through elections, and also other ways of influencing decision-making in addition to elections.

There is not an internationally accepted definition for democracy. It is in itself an evolving concept. [...] but if I try to define its most essential qualities, I think those are equal political rights, free and fair elections, the accountability of government and decision-makers in relation to the citizens, independent judicial bodies, inclusivity and free flow of information are the kinds of concepts, which define democracy.¹⁷ (i1)

The concept of democracy was acknowledged in the answers as a contested and evolving concept with no clear and concise definition for it. The interviewees brought up many different factors with a wide variety of views on the most essential elements of democracy. The concept of democracy was not limited in the interview question, and often the interviewees made distinctions between different understandings of democracy, such as: weak/strong democracies, narrow/broad understanding, and acknowledged that there is no one model for democracy, but rather of a set of principles which are the common denominators for a well-functioning democracy.

The essential elements of democracy presented were: 1) participation and inclusivity, 2) accountability of the government, 3) transparency of the government, 4) trust, 5) the rule of law, 6) free individuals who are able to influence the decisions that have an effect on their life, 7) human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of thought and freedom of media, civil and political rights, 8) well-functioning institutions and 9) elections. All these fit in the broad understanding of democracy.

For some of the interviewees, democracy was linked with the concept of 'educated citizenry'. Education and critical thinking, in addition to the free flow of information, make it possible for people to challenge the political leaders, and develop and consolidate the democracy further. In this regard, the role of civil society is also critical for democracy.

The most essential is a free individual, who can influence the decisions on their life. So I am starting from a individualistic point of view. That is one, and then very quickly we

¹⁷ Kansainvälisesti hyväksyttyä määritelmää demokratialle ei ole olemassa. Demokratia on itsessään kehittyvä käsite [...] mutta jos pyrkii määrittelemään demokratian olennaisimmat osat niin ne ovat minusta poliittiset oikeudet, vapaat ja rehelliset vaalit, hallituksen ja päätöksentekijöiden tilivelvollisuus suhteessa kansalaisiin, riippumaton oikeuslaitos, syrjimättömyys ja vapaa tiedonkulku on sellaisia käsitteitä, jotka määrittää demokratian sisältöä.

come to civil society, these active, educated individuals and the communities which are built from this.¹⁸ (i3)

Elections were seen as an essential element, highlighted by many interviewees. Free and fair elections were seen as the way people can keep their decision-makers accountable. Inclusivity in elections was also mentioned, meaning that anyone can run as a candidate, regardless of their gender or financial situation.

One of the most essential is participation or making sure that everyone can participate and express their opinions. Often when we speak about democracy, we only speak about elections, but that is not enough. What happens in the time periods between elections is also interesting and important [...] elections are so rarely, and those can be distant for people, and there are also be other forms of influence, so that people feel that they are heard.¹⁹ (i2)

Some interviewees brought up that focusing too narrowly on elections might be too technical or limited. The time between elections as well as other ways to influence decision-making need to be taken into account, and elections as an element of democracy cannot be extracted from the larger context of the democratic society. If the trust in elections is questioned, the trust in democracy might also diminish. Elections and other forms of influencing must also make citizens trust in their government and create a feeling that they can in fact influence decision making.

People have a feeling, that the power belongs to the citizens. So that this happens in practice, and I have an opportunity to influence, if there are changes in power when I vote. The worst thing possible would be if you vote, and nothing happens, then it creates frustration.²⁰ (i2)

The interviewees also highlighted how democracy needs to be inclusive, meaning that no group of people is left outside the possible ways to influence decision making.

¹⁸ Mä lähden siitä, että olennaisin osa on vapaa yksilö, joka pystyy vaikuttamaan omaan elämäänsä vaikuttaviin päätöksiin. Et mä lähden hyvin yksilökeskeisestä näkökulmasta. Sit tullaan hyvin nopeesti siihen kansalaisyhteiskunnan puolelle, eli tämmöinen aktiivinen tiedostava yksilö ja sitä kautta syntyvät yhteisöt.

¹⁹ Varmaan yksi olennaisimpia on osallistuminen ja sen varmistaminen, et kaikilla on mahdollisuus osallistua ja ilmaista oma mielipide. Usein jotenkin demokratiasta kun puhutaan puhutaan vaaleista, se on olennainen, mut ei riittävä. Se mitä tapahtuu vaalien välillä on myös mielenkiintoista ja tärkeää. [...] Vaalit on niin harvoin ja ne voi jäädä ihmisille etäisiksi, ja on myös muita osallistumiskeinoja, ja ihmiset kokevat että he tulevat kuulluiksi.

²⁰ Ihmisillä on tunne siitä, että valta kuulu kansalle. Ja tää niinku käytännössäkin tapahtuu, ja myös mulla on mahdollisuus vaikuttaa, ja et näkee että se valta vaihtuu kun äänestää. Kaikista pahin on varmasti, jos äänestää ja mitään ei tapahdukaan, niin tulee turhautuminen.

The concept of democracy in democracy support was seen as dependent on the context. Many of the interviewees underscored the need for understanding society and the power structures of the partner country. The question of ownership, which has become more prominent especially in development studies, is interesting in relation to democracy support. Ownership in these cases is seen to belong to the wider society, and the request for aid does not need to come from the country's official government, but it can come also from other sections of the society, such as CSOs. This ownership and the projects and programs of democracy support Finland has implemented are seen to have a positive impact on the relationship between Finland and the partner country's civil society. There is not a "one size fits all" solution of democracy that Finland would "export".

Rule of law was seen as an essential part of well-functioning democracy, and laws also protect the democratic governance system.

Rule of law, separation of powers, which rarely happen in developing countries, are democracy's essential elements.²¹ (i6)

Trust as a rather abstract building block of democracy was seen as important. Many of the rule of law and good governance related projects are also seen to build trust, which is essential for the society's development, especially in fragile states. The trust was seen to be built on how government delivers for its people, providing services and security.

To conclude, the essential elements of the concept of democracy found in the expert interviews were the possibility to exert influence, human rights and fundamental freedoms, inclusive participation, the rule of law, elections, continuous participatory processes and accountability as well as trust.

²¹ Oikeusvaltioasiat, totta kai vallan kolmijako, yleensä kun on näiden kehitysmaiden kanssa tekemisissä se harvoin toteutuu.

6.2 Good Governance is Not a Synonym for Democracy

TABLE 6. Good governance and the relationship to democracy: subthemes in the interviews

Subtheme	Example phrase
Good governance can be undemocratic	Good governance can sometimes be pretty undemocratic (i3)
Good governance is more technical	Good governance can be seen as more technical (i6)
Good governance is a precondition democracy	Good governance could be seen a precondition for democracy (i2)
Democracy advances good governance	Democratic institutions, democratic governance advances good governance, because through democratic institutions it is possible to build well-being for citizens, create equality, which is seen as the meter for good governance (i1)
Good governance as a vague concept	Everyone seemed to have a different idea of what good governance means (i6)

Many of the interviewees underscored, that good governance can be understood in many ways. As one of the interviewees said: “Everyone seemed to have a different idea of what good governance means.”²² (i6) The definition of good governance is seen as broad and vague by many of the interviewees.

Good governance is a broad concept. It includes everything that advances the fulfillment of the rights of the citizen, done according to laws and procedures.²³ (i2)

Good governance and democracy were seen as interlinked: good governance makes democracy possible, and democracy makes good governance possible. It means that both are needed in a well-functioning society.

Even the technical democracy, which focuses on election system and process, cannot work without good governance.²⁴ (i4)

²² Kaikilla vaikuttaa olevan eri käsitys siitä, mitä se hyvä hallinto tarkoittaa.

²³ Hyvä hallinto on laaja käsite. Et oikeastaan kaikki mikä edistää kansalaisten oikeuksien toteutumista, jos se tehdään niinku lakien ja menettelyjen mukaan.

²⁴ Edes tekninen demokratia eli vaalijärjestelmään ja prosessiin keskittyä demokratia ei voi toimia ilman hyvää hallintoa.

Good governance can be seen to create the environment in which the democratic processes function. As one of the interviewees describes: “Good governance is the environment, in which the use of power materializes, and the democratic process is either fostered or damaged”.²⁵ (i4).

Some participants also found differences between the concepts of good governance and democracy: good governance as a concept was seen as more ‘technical’, focusing on the effectiveness of public administration and transparency of the government. The interviewees noted that there can be good governance without democracy.

Good governance and democracy are both elements of functioning society, but the difference is that good governance is effective governance, which produces services for citizens. This can also be found in societies, which do not fulfill the principles of open democracy (...) State effectiveness and fully fledged inclusive democracy often go hand in hand, but they are not synonyms.²⁶ (i5)

Some of the interviewees had noticed an increase in the use of the concept of good governance. Often, using the concept of good governance was seen to be a way for political leaders to use more apolitical language, which might be easier in international areas.

I think good governance has been made as a compromise at the time. It is created to satisfy the multilateral world, because speaking of democracy in the UN is very difficult, good governance was created as an attractive word. [...] I can think that good governance is a part of democracy, but it refers more to the strength of the institutions. [...] But I see this relationship as dangerous, and it has taken space from democracy.²⁷ (i3)

One of the interviewees pointed out the bad reputation democracy support got from the USA’s so-called democracy promotion intervention in Iraq. They speculated that this bad reputation from the early 2000s might still affect the reputation of democracy support. Many developing countries also prefer to talk about governance rather than democracy.

²⁵ Hyvä hallinto on se ympäristö, jossa vallankäyttö toteutuu ja jonka kautta voidaan tätä demokraattista prosessia joko vahvistaa tai haavoittaa.

²⁶ Hyvä hallinto ja demokratia ovat toimivien yhteiskuntien perustaa, mutta siinä on erona että hyvä hallinto, joka on tehokasta hallintoa, joka tuottaa palveluita kansalle, niin sitä näkyy myös sellaisissa yhteiskunnissa, jos ei ehkä kaikilta osin täytä avoimen demokratian pelisääntöjä [...] että tällainen state effectiveness ja fully fledged inclusive democracy useen kulkee käsi kädessä, mutta ne ei ole synonyymejä.

²⁷ Hyvä hallinto on ollut kompromissi aikanaan, se on luotu tyydyttämään monenkeskeistä järjestelmää, koska demokratiasta puhuminen on YK:ssa vaikeeta, hyvä hallinto luotiin viehättäväksi sanaksi. [...]mä ajattelen et hyvä hallinto on yks demokratian osa, mut viittaa enemmän insituutioiden vahvuuteen. [...] mut tää on vaarallinen suhde ja sellainen suhde, joka on vienyt demokratialta jalansijaa.

Many of my interviewees pondered on the relationship between democracy and good governance. Do democracies create good governance or does good governance create democracy? Many concluded that both are needed in a well-functioning democratic society.

Democratic institutions, democratic governance advance good governance, because through democratic institutions it is possible to build well-being for citizens, create equal opportunities, which are usually seen as the meter for good governance.²⁸ (i1)

The elements of good governance, such as taxation and the use of public funds, were also seen to be integral for the working of democracy, because they build trust in the society, which is essential for the well-being of democracy. It was seen as important that a well-functioning democratic government delivers for its citizens.

If government is not able to govern the fiscal resources well, it cannot produce the conditions in which people can participate. It could be a prerequisite for democracy [...] and then this trust, through the principles of good governance the trust is created in transparent manner, and through that there is want and capabilities to participate in democratic manner.²⁹ (i2)

This shows how these different sectors of development cooperation are needed and interlinked. Some interviewees saw that projects that have a focus on good governance or human rights, and not explicitly on democracy, might prove to be useful and beneficial for democracy in the long run. They are seen to have a similar goal to have a more just and equitable society for citizens.

The support for democracy and the support for good governance are seen to be different things in rhetoric and action despite being interlinked. What is important to note is that a country can do well on good governance, but it may still have problems with democracy. As one of the interviewees puts it:

²⁸ Demokraattiset instituutiot, demokraattinen hallintomalli, se edistää hyvää hallintoa, koska demokraattisten instituutioiden avulla me voidaan rakentaa kansalaisten hyvinvointia, tasa-arvoa, mitä yleensä pidetään hyvän hallinnon mittarina.

²⁹ Et jos hallinto ei pysty hallinnoimaan taloudellisia resursseja hyvin, se ei pysty tuottamaan niitä puitteita joissa ihmisillä olisi mahdollisuus osallistua. Et se voisi olla tällainen edellytys sille demokratialle. [...] ja sitten tää luottamus et hyvän hallinnon periaatteiden mukaisesti läpinäkyvästi luodaan sitä luottamusta kansalaisille [...] ja sitä kautta myös on sitten halua ja kysyä vaikuttaa asioihin, kuten demokratiassa kuuluukin.

If there is no political participation, if there is not accountability, no free flow of information, then the base for democracy is removed, even though on the indicators of good governance, such as financial administration, the country can do well.³⁰ (i1)

To conclude, the interviewees see that there are close interlinkages between democracy and good governance, and good governance is needed in a well-functioning democratic society. Democracy and good governance are not however synonyms, because a country can have good governance without democracy.

6.3 Democracy as a Value and Reinforcing Factor

TABLE 7. Motivation for democracy support: subthemes in the interviews

Subtheme	Example phrase
Finland's own development	Our own story, how Finland has been built on the democratic rule of law model (i2)
Democracy support's influence on international relationship	I see that it creates more respect and trust towards Finland, and respect towards Finland's actions, when we support democracy in different parts of the world (i1)
Value base	It [democracy] is a strong value base, which we want to promote (i2)
Finland's interests as a small country	It is in the interests of Finland as a small country to support this (i6)
Peace and conflict prevention	If there is not a way to resolve disagreements, there is [...] a pretty short way to violence (i5)
Development	Democracy is one of the pillars of inclusive development (i1)
Stability and economic interests	If you want to take investment and companies to these markets, the operational environment needs to be predictable (i5)
International commitments	We have very strong international norms and commitments by which we are in the democracy support work (i1)

The interviewees noted that democracy is communicated as a clear commitment of Finland on a high-level. The political decisions affect the Ministry's democracy support

³⁰ Et jos ei ole poliittista osallistumista, jos ei ole tilivelvollisuutta, jos ei ole vapaata tiedonkulkua, niin silloin se pohja siltä demokratialta menee pois, vaikka tietyillä hyvän hallinnon mittareilla, esimerkiksi taloushallinnossa, maa voi pärjätä hyvin.

greatly, thus the commitment of politicians and commitments within the Government program matter.

We have at the very high-level, on the government level, ministry level, in our foreign ministry and public administration strongly committed to supporting democracy.³¹ (i1)

Democracy is also seen as a clear part of the value base of Finland's foreign policy, and almost all of the interviewees mentioned this. One of the interviewees concludes that democracy is seen as a goal itself, and also as a factor which creates development in other sectors:

We see democracy as one of the development goals, in the same way as economic and social development. But we also see it as a factor which creates conditions for other development. It includes these both; a value and goal in itself, and this instrumental view.³² (i6)

The very development of Finland (or the story of the development of Finland) is seen as a motivating factor for democracy support because Finland's own development rests on democratic principles.

It stems from our own value-base, a welfare state, a state which tries to guarantee the possibilities of political participation, security, it has been important in our own development history after the wars.³³ (i5)

Democracy was seen as the best model of governance for the protection of human rights. As stated earlier, the guaranteeing of human rights of everybody is an essential element of democracy and one of the key motivations for democracy support.

It was noted in many of the interviews that Finland is a small country which needs to base its foreign policy on its values. As a small country, it is also important to analyze what other countries are doing and find what is the added value Finland can bring. It is also in

³¹ Me ollaan korkealla tasolla, hallitustasolla, ministeriötasolla, ulkoministeriö ja valtionhallinnon tasolla vahvasti sitouduttu demokratiakehityksen tukemiseen.

³² Me nähdään yhtälailla demokratia yhtensä kehitystavoitteena kuin taloudellinen ja sosiaalinen kehityskin. Mut kyllä me nähdään se myös sellaisena tekijänä, joka luo edellytyksiä myös muulle kehitykselle. Et siinä on tavallaan molemmat.

³³ Se palaa meidän omaan arvopohjaan, hyvinvointivaltio, valtio joka pyrkii takaamaan kansalaisille poliittisen osallistumisen mahdollisuudet, turvallisuutta, se on ollut tärkeä meidän omassa kehityshistoriassa sotien jälkeen.

the interests of Finland to support democracies to achieve a more peaceful world and increase the support for the multilateral rule-based order.

Finland is a small country, and it is useful to us, that international law, principles of rule of law, these are respected. These are good for a small country, and create security and predictability, to how world develops and allow a small country to have its say in common agenda.³⁴ (i2)

Democracies are seen as more predictable, and there is an assumption that democracies respect international commitments and laws, which creates a more stable and predictable environment for Finland too.

The interviewees did not find any negative effects in democracy support or the relations of Finland with other countries. There were positive effects such as increased credibility of Finland, good relations to civil society and an improved national brand.

We want to profile ourselves strongly in peace, human rights, and democracy also belongs here, in this Finnish, Nordic... we are expected to do this, like who is surprised if Finland speaks of democracy.³⁵ (i4)

Finland has international commitments to support democracy, especially within the UN and the EU frameworks. Two frameworks were mentioned specifically: the new EU Democracy Action Plan and the 2030 Agenda. Democracy is also recognized as an international norm.

We have very strong national and international norms and commitments, by which we are involved in democracy support work.³⁶ (i1)

Two positive effects linked to democracy were highlighted in particular: peace and a stable environment for economy and investments. Peace and prevention of conflicts were mentioned as a motivation for democracy support. Democracy creates institutionalized

³⁴ Me ollaan pieni maa, siitä on meille hyötyä, et on vaikka kv-oikeuden säännöt, oikeusvaltioperiaatteet, tällaisia noudatetaan. Ne on pienen valtion kannalta hyväks, et ne tuo turvaa ja ennalta-arvattavuutta miten tilanne kehittyy ja toisaalta mahdollistaa, että pienellä maalla on sanottavansa yhteisen agenda asettamisessa.

³⁵ Me halutaan profiloitua vahvasti rauha, ihmisoikeudet niin kyllä tähän kuuluu demokratia ilman muuta, tää kuuluu tähän suomalaiseen, pohjoismaalaisen... meiltä ikään kuin odotetaankin sitä, niinku kuka yllätty jos Suomi puhuu demokratiasta.

³⁶ Meillä on vahvat kansalliset ja kansainväliset normit ja sitoumukset, joiden kautta ollaan mukana tässä demokratiatyössä.

ways to settle disputes, and countries without democracy were seen as more prone to conflicts. As one of the interviewees put it, if Finland increases its profile as a peace and human rights actor, it also needs to take into account democracy and the rule of law.

In relation to the instrumental value of democracy in trade and stability, one of the interviewees said:

I see that democracy, the rule of law and human rights are the basis to advancing development on other sectors. Take for example trade, trade cannot be advanced in a society which has unpredictable rules.³⁷ (i2)

Democratic governance was seen as an answer to creating more stable societies, in which also Finnish companies would be interested to invest, and thus, more trade opportunities for Finland would be created.

To be a credible international actor, Finland must advance the values on which it has know-how. As one of the interviewees says: “To give something, you have to know about it yourself first. Otherwise, it is not credible.”³⁸ (i5). This demonstrates how Finland’s motivation is also built on the thought that Finland has related know-how on democratic governance, and the way it has organized its society is a good model to draw from.

To conclude, democracy is seen as both a value to promote in foreign policy, and reinforcing development, stability, peace and protection of human rights. Democracy is seen to protect the individual, community, society, and have positive effects on economy and sustainable development. In addition to these, Finland’s own story and identity give further motivation for external democracy support. It is also important for Finland to fulfill its international commitments and to be a credible actor in international relations.

³⁷ Mä nään että demokratia, oikeusvaltio ja ihmisoikeudet on se mikä luo edellytyksen myös edistää muita sektoreita. Vaikka niinku kauppaa, et ei niinku kauppaa voi edistää yhteiskunnassa jossa on arvaamattomat säännöt.

³⁸ Onhan se niin että jotta voi olla jotain annettavaa, niin täytyyhän se ensin osata itse. Muutenhan se ei ole uskottavaa.

6.4 Challenges of Ambiguity and Discrepancy

TABLE 8. Challenges in democracy support: subthemes in the interviews

Subtheme	Example phrase
Democracy comes after development	We see democracy is a side-product of development (i3)
There is less democracy support and less funding	I see that democracy support has diminished (i1)
The discrepancy between the value of democracy and democracy support policy/implementation	In rhetoric, Finland want this on the sectors of democracy, human rights and good governance, but the actions do not match at all (i5)
Lack of clear democracy support policy	Democracy is a value [...] but do we have a democracy support policy? (i4)
Long timeframe to see results	We have a result-based approach and people want to see results faster than 30 years from now (i6)

One of the identified challenges in relation to democracy support was the vagueness of the concepts, the need for clearer definitions, and the concretization of what these concepts mean in practice.

When we speak about democracy, we often also speak side by side about human rights, rule of law, good governance and corruption and so on... without actually specifying or concretizing what we are going to do. And even though these concepts are interdependent, influencing them, are we influencing democracy, or influencing corruption, it needs to be specified so we know what is the problem and what are we going to do.³⁹ (i1)

One of the challenges is the perceived lack of a clear, current democracy support policy. As stated before, the promotion of democracy is included in the section of development policy priorities, foreign and security policies of the government program, but there remains vagueness in the use of these concepts and how the promotion of these values is done in practice. There is also a new emphasis on good governance.

Democracy support done with development aid as a part of our country programs has

³⁹ Demokratiasta puhuttaessa puhutaan rinnakkain ihmisoikeuksista, demokratiasta, oikeusvaltioperiaatteen kunnioittamisesta, hyvästä hallinnosta, korruptiosta ja niin edelleen, ilman että me täsmennetään tai konkretisoidaan mitä me aiotaan tehdä. Vaikka nää käsitteet on keskinäisriippuvaisia, niihin vaikuttaminen, vaikutetaanko me demokratiaan, vaikutetaanko me korruptioon, niin sehän täytyy täsmentää, jotta me tiedetään mikä ongelma on ja mitä me aiotaan tehdä.

diminished in the recent decades. At the same time, the thematic of good governance has been emphasized [...] but democracy has fallen behind.⁴⁰ (i1)

This also signifies that the relationship of good governance and democracy, despite seen as mutually reinforcing, can pose problems in practice and implementation, especially when the concepts are vague and used interchangeably.

The interviewees also note the broadness of the development cooperation priority area three. The broadness of this priority area was seen as a problem because of the limited resources, meaning the funds available for democracy support work. If there are too many goals with too few resources, it is not possible to advance all these goals.

Priority area three is very broad, as we have taxation issues and public administration, to which these small resources are directed to in attention to issues on democracy or the “pure” democracy support, and there are opinions that there is less this kind of democracy support than before.⁴¹ (i2)

In addition to the broadness of the priority area three, also the inclusion of education within this priority area was seen as superimposed by some of the interviewees: education as a development sector has also been very important to Finland and linking it together with democracy and well-functioning societies was not seen as the best solution. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the aid to education is not regarded as democracy support.

What is interesting to note is how some interviewees tried to define ‘pure democracy support’, and how small this sector is within Finland’s development aid.

Do we support democracy? Or do we support human rights? These two are not contradictions, but it is not democracy. It starts from how these are defined, does Finland do traditional pure democracy work, in which the aim is to influence the possibility to exert influence on decisions.⁴² (i3)

⁴⁰ Kehitysyhteistyövaroista tuettava demokratiatyö osana meidän maaohjelmia on viime vuosikymmenten aikana vähentynyt. Samaan aikaan on korostunut tämä hyvän hallinnon tematiikka [...] mutta se demokratia on tavallaan jäänyt vähemmälle.

⁴¹ Painopiste kolmekin on aika laaja, et meillä on verotuskysymyksiä ja julkisen taloushallinnon vahvistamista (...) joihin näitä vähäisiä resursseja on ohjattu demokratiakysymysten tai puhtaan demokratiatuen ohella, niin on näkemyksiä että demokratiatukea on vähemmän kuin aikaisemmin.

⁴² Tuetaanko me demokratiaa? Vai tuetaanko me ihmisoikeuksia? Sehän ei oo mikään vastakkaistermi demokratialle, mut se ei oo demokratiaa. Eli se lähtee siitä miten sä määrittelet, et tekeekö Suomi perinteistä puhdasta demokratiatyötä jossa vaikutetaan ihmisten mahdollisuuteen vaikuttaa heitä koskeviin päätöksiin.

This can be seen as a way to differentiate the aid to political actors and instruments from the larger framework of Finland's human rights-based approach to development aid, and it shows how the very broad concept of democracy has an effect also to what is seen as democracy support. Thus, programs which aim to improve, for example, human rights can also be seen as instrumentally strengthening the conditions for democracy, but this does not fit under the rubric of "pure democracy support" presented by the interviewee here.

Many of the interviewees acknowledged the worsening international commitment to democracy and saw how the environment has become more challenging. They saw that Finland would have opportunities to do more in the democracy support sector to combat the challenging developments.

Many interviewees saw that the overall attitude towards democratization has become more negative compared to the heydays of democracy support in the 1990s, and the resources directed to democracy support have diminished. The interviewees saw that there was continuity and coherence in Finland's democracy support in the rhetoric, as democracy has long stayed as one of the priorities. However, there was concern for if democracy support in practice matches the level of rhetoric. In the practical political world, the priorities of foreign policy and development policy can change. One of the interviewees reflected on these changes as follows:

I don't know if there is a new democracy support policy being prepared, the old one is from around 2014. It guides very little, there is this broad understanding of democracy. But then on the other hand our aid is very small, and then we have this very broad understanding of democracy, so it does not really say what should be done. It is always context dependent, what is seen as important. The priorities of course also change, and you can see when there is a new minister, that ministers have different priorities.⁴³ (i6)

The following quote presents also how the political context and the ministers with

⁴³ Mä en tiedä onko valmisteilla uutta linjausta, vanha on jostain vuodelta 2014. Se linjaa hyvin vähän, sillä siinä on just tällainen laaja demokratiakäsitys. Mut sit taas meidän tuki on hyvin pientä, ja meillä on tällainen laaja demokratiakäsitys, niin ei se sitä hirveesti linjaa. Se aina vaihtelee kontekstista, mikä nähdään missäkin tarpeelliseksi. Tietenkin painotukset on vaihdellu ja sen huomaa ministerien vaihtuessa, et ministereillä on toisenlaisia painotuksia.

different priorities in foreign policy and development cooperation affects (tai may affect) democracy support.

Many of the interviewees brought up the fact that the aid allocations to democracy support are small. Some said that it is understandable that the sums are small compared to other development projects like building infrastructure, because the projects of democracy support are rather in-person trainings. Others saw these small allocations as a problem, because there would be opportunities for Finland to do more and match its rhetoric with the importance of democracy also in practice.

One interviewee said that small allocations and discontinuity, for example cuts in aid, have affected the credibility of Finland in the eyes of the partner countries. If Finland is not willing to give proper aid, it is not seen as a worthy partner in dialogue, especially regarding difficult questions, such as democracy. Another interviewee sees that Finland being systematic and consistent in democracy support creates more trust towards it.

Many of the interviewees mentioned the small resources for democracy support, in contrast to the strong rhetorical commitments. One example of this was how the funding to the organization International IDEA had been cut, and how the wide development cooperation cuts in 2016 affected democracy support programs too. The discrepancy between the rhetoric and actions was brought up:

Put your money where your mouth is. It is not realized. On the level of discourse, yes, Finland wants this on sectors of democracy, human rights and good governance and it does not match with the actions at all.⁴⁴ (i5)

Many of the interviewees brought out that democracy has been clearly and consistently communicated as a priority of Finland throughout the years. It has a very strong status, and the new budget line for the funding of Political Parties of Finland for Democracy - Demo Finland and the Rule of Law actor was mentioned as a way to solidify and promote also democracy support⁴⁵. One interviewee pointed out that even though the monetary sums are not the biggest, there is a great symbolical value at the separate budget line for

⁴⁴ Put your money where your mouth is. Se ei toteudu tässä. Keskustelun tasolla kyllä, Suomi haluaa tätä demokratian, ihmisoikeuksien ja hyvän hallinnon saralla ja se ei mätsää niihin toimenpiteisiin ollenkaan.

⁴⁵ The budget line is presented more in detail in Chapter 2.3.

the two democracy support actors, which might signify how there is a political will to invest more in democracy support.

Despite these new budget lines, one interviewee saw that there was lack of political support for making democracy more of a priority for Finland:

Of course, public servants have a lot of power in these types of questions, but if there are no defenders on the political level, there will not be any changes.⁴⁶ (i3)

This also highlights how the political context of Finland affects its democracy support and everything the MFA does.

There are also challenges that come with the long-term timelines of these types of projects, as the focus of development cooperation has been increasingly in showing results.

What is perceived as a challenge is, as we have this result-based approach and the results want to be seen faster than in 30 years' time, that our cycles are 4 to 5 years, in that time there needs to be some significant results to be seen.⁴⁷ (i6)

Democratization and consolidation of new democracies might take a long time. Also, when positive results are seen within a partner country, it might be difficult to attribute these results to Finnish democracy support.

One of the problems that democracy support faces in addition to the long-term timelines is the perceived ambiguity of what democracy support is. Speaking of the priority area three of the Finnish development policy, one of the interviewees said:

Education is easy, it is more concrete, kids in a class being taught... it is maybe easier also for the politicians to understand, than democracy, human rights, freedom of expression, the state of civil society, it is more difficult to make concrete – more difficult to put your finger on it.⁴⁸ (i5)

⁴⁶ Kyllähän virkamiesvalta on tän tyypisissä kysymyksissä suuri, mut jos meidän puolustajat ei löydy poliittisesta kentästä niin ei täs mitään muutosta tuu tapahtumaan.

⁴⁷ Mikä koetaan haasteeksi niin meillä on tää tulosperustaisuus ja tuloksia kuitenkin halutaan nähdä myös nopeammin kuin 30 vuoden päästä, et nää meidän syklit on 4-5 vuotisia, et sinä aikana olis jotain merkittäviä tuloksia nähtävissä.

⁴⁸ Opetus on helppo, konkreettisempi, lapsia luokassa ja niitä koulutetaan... Niin se on ehkä helpompi myös poliitikkojenkin ymmärtää, kun taas demokratia, ihmisoikeudet, sanavapaus, kansalaisyhteiskunnan tila, niin se on ehkä sellasta vaikeempi konkretisoida – more difficult to put your finger on it.

Regarding democracy support, there are contradictions with the need for more focused aid, more concrete policies, and the need for flexibility. Many of the interviewees mentioned the need for more focused aid, but there is also a need for policy that is flexible and can be applied to different contexts.

Democracy might be a more difficult subject for partner countries than, for example, economy, investments and so on. As one of the interviewees says: “These are the difficult topics for the partner – human rights and democracy are not the most popular topics.”⁴⁹

(i4)

To conclude, many challenges in democracy support were found in the interview data. The most prominent findings were: the discrepancy between the action and the rhetoric, the need for more concretization in a flexible manner, long-term timelines, the need to provide results, and the perceived vagueness of democracy support.

⁴⁹ Näitä hankalia aiheita kumppanille – et ei välttämättä mieluisimpia demokratia ja ihmisoikeudet.

7.DISCUSSION

This study aimed to answer the research question: *How does the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland understand democracy support?* Eleven documents, seven country strategies and six expert interviews were analyzed through qualitative content analysis using the analytical framework. The analytical framework consists of four important themes which help us understand Finland's democracy support from the MFA's perspective. The themes are 1) the concept of democracy, 2) the relationship between good governance and democracy, 3) the motivation for democracy and 4) challenges in democracy support.

The findings indicate that Finland has a broad understanding of democracy in its democracy support. For the MFA, democracy thus includes the protection of human rights, the rule law, inclusive participation, and good governance. Good governance is seen as part of a democratic society, and as concepts, good governance and democracy share characteristics such as accountability and transparency. Good governance and democracy have a two-way relationship: good governance is seen as a prerequisite for democracy, especially in fragile countries; in addition, good governance is seen as an reinforcing factor for democracy, especially by the way good, well-functioning governance can build trust within the society. Good governance is a vague concept, and sometimes used almost as a synonym for democracy. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these two concepts have their differences: good governance highlights efficiency, and democracy highlights participation.

The motivation for democracy support is both intrinsic and instrumental. Democracy is seen as an important value for Finland. This may be because of Finland's perceived identity as a democratic state, its own development story, and the status of democracy as a universal value, enshrined in international commitments. Democracy is also considered to help achieve other goals, such as development, peace, and stability. The main challenges for democracy support are the long timelines in these developments, the weakening international commitment to democracy and the discrepancy, and the ambiguities within Finland's democracy support. All these findings are discussed more in detail in this chapter.

7.1 Discussion on the Findings

7.1.1 Concept of Democracy: Broad Understanding

The documents and interviews both indicate that the MFA has a broad understanding of democracy in regard to democracy support. Democracy is seen to include human rights, individual freedoms, inclusive participation, the rule of law, elections, accountability, trust, good governance, anti-corruption, and well-functioning institutions.

Finland's broad understanding of democracy is also very close to the concept of liberal democracy, even though it was not mentioned as such in the documents or interviews. Finland groups democracy together with the rule of law and human rights; especially the way the rights of vulnerable groups are highlighted, and educated citizenry are seen as a prerequisite fit within the understanding of liberal democracy (Huber 2015, pp. 23–24).

The findings of Finland's broad understanding of democracy were not surprising. Finland has been consistent with the way in which it sees democracy to be linked to a wider framework of human rights and well-functioning state. This broad understanding is also seen in the way that democracy needs to deliver for citizens. The broad understanding of democracy in Finland's democracy support has been presented also in earlier research, which highlights how democracy is linked with human rights and good governance in Finnish democracy support (Hossain et al., 2003, p. 29).

In order to reflect the way how the concept of democracy affects democracy support, I will discuss the way broad understanding of democracy is seen to lead to developmental and narrow understanding of political approach (Carothers, 2009). I see that the approach to democracy support is not quite straight-forward in the case of Finland. Even though the broad understanding of the concept of democracy is clear, the approach to democracy assistance combines elements of the developmental approach and the political approach. Finland's democracy support actions focus on the participation and leadership of women, vulnerable groups, multiparty support, parliaments, and election observation. The focus on multiparty support, parliaments and elections can be categorized as elements of the

political approach. Nevertheless, the way these beforementioned institutions guarantee participation, accountability, and protection of human rights, to a well-functioning democracy which delivers to its citizens could be categorized as the developmental approach, linked to the broad understanding of democracy Finland has.

The very broad understanding of democracy may also create challenges. Finland has limited resources for democracy assistance and having this many elements in its concept of democracy means it needs to prioritize these goals in interventions. Many of these goals can be seen as mutually reinforcing, for example, how the respect for the rule of law can create trust, but having too many objectives risks these objectives conflicting in project implementation (Grimm & Leininger, 2012, p. 392). The relationship and prioritization of these goals should be addressed as it affects Finland's democracy support. Conceptual ambiguities can cause difficulties in the evaluation of how to make interventions and what the impact has been (Gisselquist, 2012).

The broad understanding is beneficial in the way it sees different factors of societal change as interlinked. Democracy is not seen as something separate from all these other factors which create sustainable development and better lives for people. The broad concept offers Finland possibilities to keep its democracy support flexible and to find different ways to support democracy in varying contexts.

7.1.2 Good Governance and Democracy: Multifaceted Relationship

Good governance is one of the main themes in Finland's democracy support, and it is one of the essential qualities of democracy. Nevertheless, the concept of good governance in general is vague and not clearly defined. Good governance is defined by three principles: transparency, accountability, and participation. These overlap with the broad understanding of democracy. Good governance and democracy are not synonyms, and the biggest difference is that good governance is more technical and rather focuses on efficiency than participation.

Good governance has a two-way relationship to democracy; it is seen as both a prerequisite for democratic governance and a reinforcing factor for democratization. The interviewees specifically noted the way good governance is seen as an 'easier', perhaps a

more approachable term than democracy in multilateral areas and in dialogue with partner countries.

What was surprising in the findings was the way good governance was used as a synonym for democracy. This was especially prominent in the country strategies, in which democracy was hardly mentioned. Only the country strategy of Myanmar contains democracy as a goal, while the rest only mention good governance. This raises a question whether it is easier for Finland to implement its democracy support in the less political and technical approach of good governance. A big factor here could be also the rise of the use of the term good governance by the partner countries. The country strategies are prepared in cooperation with the receiving countries, which can be apprehensive towards the word democracy, which may have affected why democracy as such is not mentioned.

An interesting finding is how the interviewees brought up how the use of the term good governance might take up space from supporting democracy in development cooperation, as the donor focuses more on supporting good governance. This might be especially worrying if the relationship between these two concepts and the inherent differences in them are not recognized. As good governance and democracy are both vague concepts, there is a need to focus on the goals, also called ‘the aims of political life’⁵⁰, when Finland formulates its democracy support strategies.

7.1.3 Strong Motivation for Democracy Support

The findings in both the documents and the interviews highlighted the intrinsic value of democracy and the instrumental value it has regarding peace and conflict prevention, development, and stability. In addition to this, the promotion of democracy was seen as a global responsibility for Finland and explained by the interviewees to be a result of Finland’s own development and identity as a small country.

Democracy as a value was linked to other values, such as promotion of human rights and equality. Democracy has achieved the status of an international norm and universal value, especially for Western states, hence this was not surprising.

⁵⁰ This term: ”aims of political life”, is from Plattner 2013, p. 27.

Democracy was also seen as a pragmatic interest in the way it reinforces other goals. Democracy was linked to peace and conflict prevention. This is not only linked to the theory on democratic peace, in which democracies do not go to war against each other, but also to the fact that democracy prevents internal conflicts, which could then spread outside a country's borders. Democracy was seen as the base for sustainable development. Sustainable development and conflict prevention both need ways to distribute the wealth of the state, provide for the citizens and protect their human rights, and democracy was seen to be an answer to all this.

Democracy has been closely linked to stability and trade (Carothers 1999, p. 60). This is because democracy is seen to provide a stable and predictable environment which would be beneficial and inviting for Finnish companies and investors. The link between democracy and market economy is considered strong and taken as self-evident.

If democracy support is only motivated by the instrumental factors, it may be a problem if a democracy does not deliver these things which it is presumed to; the elected officials might want to have policies which are not favorable to Western donors. There is also the possibility of democratic backsliding and military coups. The consolidation of democracy is a long process, and democratization in itself is a volatile process. Therefore, these challenges may affect the instrumental motivation of democracy support.

What was surprising in the findings was the way that Finland's own development story, its identity as a small country and its interests were motivating factors. The democratic role identity has been identified as a pushing factor for democracy support (Huber 2015, p. 3). What is interesting though is the way that the story of Finland's development was seen to give Finland knowledge and know-how in its external democracy support.

Another surprising factor was the way Finland's interests as a small country were brought up. This means specifically the interests in upholding a rule-based international order in which also the small countries have a say. This may be rooted in the belief that democratic countries are more peaceful and open for dialogue also in multilateral areas compared to authoritarian ones.

This study shows how the motivation for democracy support is very strong. Finland sees democracy as a value and that it reinforces other goals, which are important in foreign policy and development cooperation. In addition to this, it is also motivated by the very ‘core’ of Finland, its identity and story as a country. Despite this strong motivation, the funding for democracy support is still rather modest compared to Finland’s development cooperation, and democracy is only one of the many goals in Finland’s development cooperation.

7.1.4 Challenges for Democracy Support

In this theme the findings of the documents and the interviews vary slightly, probably because of the very different natures of these two types of data. The documents identified the challenges in democracy support to be long timelines, changes in the global commitments to democracy, and volatile environments which affect the implementation of democracy support projects and ensuring coherence and continuity in democracy support work.

The interviews highlighted also the long timeframe of democratic developments, which can be a challenge because of the result-based approach of development that Finland has. Democratization may be a long and volatile process, and democracy development does not happen in a straightforward fashion. Therefore, short interventions and the pressure to showcase results can pose a challenge. There is a need for understanding the timelines for these processes, and for the adaptation of the democracy support interventions and programs accordingly.

The interviewees also acknowledged discrepancy in the rhetoric and action as well as ambiguities with what is regarded as democracy support and what is not. A surprising finding was the discrepancy between the strong rhetorical commitment to supporting democracy and the reality with modest funding and a small number of democracy support projects. This was explained according to one interviewee by the way that most democracy support interventions are cheaper to execute compared to, for example, infrastructure projects. Nevertheless, the need for functioning democratic state, which can upkeep these infrastructural investments and uphold sustainable development, should not be overlooked.

Another surprising challenge was the lack of political support for democracy support. Despite of being included in the Government program, the commitments to democracy are often vague, only referring to it as a value or as a part of the phrase “human-rights-rule-of-law-democracy”, without ever elaborating what is, in reality, done and why. Thomas Carothers (2015) has also noted the diminishing interest of politicians to associate themselves with democracy support. He explains this by telling how supporting democratization processes seems volatile and risky. He has found that this means that the “low-policy” on democracy support remains, meaning it is still included and the funding stays the same, but it is not elevated to “high-policy”, in which democracy would be included in a cross-cutting manner in policy frameworks. (Carothers, 2015, pp. 70–71.)

There needs to be further research on the political support of democracy support and on the possibility that democracy support is a “low-policy” in Finland. However, the recent creation of new budget line in the state budget for two democracy support actors⁵¹, and the inclusion of democracy support in the government program signal commitment to democracy support. There are avenues to do more on this sector for Finland, especially given the difficult circumstances for democracy around the world and the waning international commitment to democracy support. The broad understanding of democracy, which includes inclusivity, human rights and the rule of law, could be rather brought the forefront of Finnish foreign policy, as promoting its values is seen to make it a more credible actor in international relations.

7.2 Limitations and Weaknesses of the Study

This chapter presents the limitations and weaknesses of this research, which had an impact on the interpretation of the results. The analytical framework of four themes has guided this study strongly. The focus was on these four specific issues, which has limited the scope of this study. Furthermore, this has limited the interviews as the interview questions were derived from this framework. However, these four themes are very

⁵¹ These two actors are Political Parties of Democracy for Finland – Demo Finland and a new the Rule of Law actor.

different from each other, and this study works as an exploratory study providing openings for further research.

Regarding the interview data, the sample size of the interviewees is small, consisting only of six persons. This is mostly due to the difficulty of gaining access to these experts, which was mentioned in Chapter 3. This means that the findings of this study are not generalizable. However, this unique data gained from experts adds to the understanding of democracy support and the interviewees were selected carefully, which meant that all of the interviewees had relevant information and opinions concerning Finland's democracy support.

The interviews were conducted in Finnish, and the final report of this study is in English, which means that the translations I have made might have changed the meaning of what the interviewee said. Therefore, the original Finnish citations are included in the findings chapter. The citations are marked with interviewee numbers which do not correlate with the list of interviewees in the appendix 2 to ensure that the quotations cannot be connected to any individual.

The data from the six semi-structured interviews is self-reported. This means that the interviewees speak from their own understanding and there might be things they are not willing to discuss or do not know. Therefore, the documents were also analyzed to gain a broader picture of this issue. This unique interview data truly adds to the analysis of documents, and even this small sample produced new findings on Finland's democracy support especially from the viewpoint of the MFA.

Finland's development cooperation and especially democracy support is not often seen as significant enough to warrant research. This means that there is not a lot of research that focuses specifically on Finland's democracy support. The few studies⁵² there are, date from the early 2000s and there is a lack of recent research. This motivated this study.

I currently work in democracy support field and this study was commissioned by the organization Political Parties of Finland for Democracy – Demo Finland. The study was

⁵² See for example Hossain et al. (2003) and Laakso (2002).

conducted independently. Working in the field made me interested in researching democracy support and I recognize its importance. It is commonplace in democracy support research that the practitioners are also involved in research, and I think this creates new avenues for studies as questions and approaches also come from the field. These are present in this study especially in the relationship between democracy and good governance, and the challenges arising from this relationship, which also have consequences in practice.

7.3 Possibilities for Future Research

My study is an exploratory research which provides many openings to new studies. This study has focused on creating a current picture of the MFA's understanding on democracy support. In my research, the interviewees mentioned some events that have affected democracy support, such as the foreign aid budget cuts in 2016 and the weakening of overall commitment to democracy. For future research, a fruitful approach could be, for instance, an analysis of a longer timeframe to examine the changes in democracy support, even from the beginning of democracy support programs in the 1990s to the present day, and how these beforementioned and other events may have affected Finland's democracy support.

This study does not compare Finland to other countries, but the analytical framework presented here could also be used in comparative research. Comparative research could point out the similarities and differences of Finland with other states that do democracy support. More comparative research within the EU countries and the Nordic+ group should be done, as these were identified as the strongest international frameworks for Finland.

There could also be more research on the concept of democratization that democracy support donors have. In this study, I have only focused on the concepts of democracy and good governance, but research on the concept of democratization might open new avenues to gain a better understanding on why donors do the democracy support they do, and how they see the causal factors in these processes, which may have very concrete implications for the interventions and programs.

Democracy support can be seen as a secondary foreign policy aim even though the motivation for democracy support is strong, as in the case of Finland, and this calls for further research to explain this. There needs to be more studies that explore the prioritization of foreign policy goals and trade-offs, and the competition of these within the ministries. The role of individual ministers, and the changes of, for example, foreign ministers and the effect on different prioritizations could provide interesting research topics.

7.3.1 Implications for Practice

The interviewees often said that the interview and the questions on democracy support made them ponder these questions more in detail, and they often ended the interview saying that “we should discuss this more within the MFA”. Democracy support is a small sector dealing with big, structural problems, which have real consequences on the lives of people. The way my study has challenged the concepts within the democracy support of Finland that have not been explored before also provides new knowledge for the democracy support practitioners.

An important finding in the interviews was the discrepancy of rhetoric and actions. What this means is that democracy is communicated as a strong value of Finland, but it is not prioritized in development cooperation and the funding is modest. In rhetoric, it is often a part of the phrase “human rights, democracy and the rule of law”, but these are not defined, even though they are communicated as important to Finland. The approach suggesting that democracy simply ‘happens’ after development has its risks. Democracy needs specific ways of support which create proper inclusive ways of participation.

This discrepancy between the rhetoric and actions can make Finland a less credible partner to developing countries and in international arenas. Advocating for its values makes Finland a more credible international actor. There are also difficulties, such as partner governments’ apprehensive approach to democracy and the resources available for development cooperation. However, there are also many motivating factors for Finnish democracy support, as found in this study, such as Finland’s very identity as a democratic country and its international commitments.

The findings also show how democracy is linked to peace and especially conflict prevention. This is a great avenue for Finland to focus on, as it has recently established a new Center for Peace Mediation within the Foreign Ministry (MFA 2021b). Democracy support is conflict prevention in the way it creates avenues for dialogue and possibilities for peaceful societies. There is a possibility to include democracy support more strongly in conflict prevention and find the synergies between these two sectors.

8.CONCLUSION

This study aimed to answer the research question: *How does the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland understand democracy support?* The research material consisted of the Foreign Ministry's documents on foreign policy, development cooperation and democracy support, as well as six interviews of senior-level civil servants. The analysis used the analytical framework of four themes: 1) the concept of democracy, 2) good governance and its relationship to democracy, 3) motivation for democracy support, and 4) challenges in democracy support, and the analysis method was qualitative content analysis.

To conclude, the study found that Finland has a broad understanding of democracy, which links together democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance. Good governance is an inherent part of Finland's democracy support, but its relationship as a concept to democracy is vague. The analysis indicates that the potential motivations for Finnish democracy support are both the value of democracy and how democracy is seen to reinforce other goals in Finnish foreign policy and development cooperation. The challenges in democracy support were mostly linked to democratic developments' volatility and slowness, and the interviewees saw a discrepancy between the value of democracy in Finland's rhetoric and the scope of democracy support in practice.

It can be concluded that the MFA's understanding of Finland's democracy support is based on a broad understanding of democracy. The subthemes found in the documents show that the broad understanding of democracy includes a broad understanding of human rights and inclusive participation highlighting the equality of women and vulnerable groups in political decision-making. The interviews also emphasize these facts, and add on the rule of law, elections as an important democratic procedure, continuous participatory processes, accountability, and trust. These subthemes under the main theme of the analytical framework, the concept of democracy, demonstrate a broad understanding of democracy in democracy support.

In the second analytical theme, good governance and its relationship to democracy, the findings indicate that good governance is an essential element of democracy.

Nevertheless, its relationship to democracy in democracy support is not clear. In the documents, the findings show that good governance shares the same principles with democracy, mainly accountability and transparency, and that good governance can be seen as a prerequisite for the functioning of a democratic government. However, the interview data indicates that there are also tensions within this relationship in regard to Finland's democracy support: good governance can also be undemocratic, and it is seen as rather technical. The very concept of good governance is vague, and there are many understandings of its meaning. The interviewees also note that good governance is an inherent part of a democratic society. They saw that that democracy advances good governance within a country, but also the increased trust in the society because of good governance can enhance democracy. This conceptual vagueness and the manifold relationship warrant for further research.

The study found that there are strong pushing factors which compose the motivation for democracy support. Both the documents and the interview data identify democracy as an important value for Finland, and it has a value-based foreign and development policy. Supporting democracy is connected in both data to positive effect on development, peace and conflict prevention, international stability, and Finland's own economic interests. Both types of data also acknowledge the international commitments and the global responsibility according to which Finland has to support democracy, especially because of the EU and UN frameworks. In addition to these factors, the interviewees also mention democracy's role in Finland's own development and its interests as a small country, due to which the respect for rule-based international order is important.

Regarding the challenges in democracy support, one of the findings in the analysis of the documents was that lately the global commitment to democracy has weakened, affecting the global environment of democracy support. In relation to Finnish democracy support from the development cooperation perspective, the non-linear democracy developments, which may take even decades, were seen as a challenge. In addition, democratization processes may be volatile, and the possible conflicts and unstable environments in the partner country hinder the implementation of democracy support projects. The interviewees also acknowledge the long timelines, and how democratic developments may be difficult to attribute to the Finnish support. They also found challenging the idea of "democracy comes after development", meaning prioritizing other development aid

instead of democracy support in the hope that democracy ‘emerges naturally’ after a country has developed. In the analysis, the discrepancy between the value of democracy in Finland’s rhetoric and the scope of democracy support in practice, mainly meaning the modest funding, was noted by many of the interviewees.

These results indicate that democracy is an important value in Finland’s foreign policy, but there would be further possibilities for Finland to do more in the democracy support sector. This exploratory study has found different aspects in: the concept of democracy, the relationship between good governance and democracy, the motivation for democracy, and the challenges in democracy support from the perspective of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Theme 1: Democracy

- What do you see as essential elements of a well-functioning democracy?
- What is the relationship between good governance and democracy?
- What do you see as the most successful way to support democracy?

Theme 2: Democracy support policy

- What do you see as the most significant changes in the Finnish democracy support policy?
- How do you see the coherence and continuity in the Finnish policy?
- What do you see as the biggest challenge in Finnish democracy support?
- What are the essential international frameworks for Finnish democracy support?

Theme 3: The motivation for democracy support and democracy support as a part of foreign policy and development policy

- Why does Finland support democracy?
- How does Finland's democracy support affect international relations with other states?
- What would you like to see change in the Finnish democracy support policy?
- What should Finland's democracy support look like in the future?

Appendix 2: Interviewees

Name	Position
Jaakko Jakkila	Senior Adviser, Development Policy
Johanna Jokinen-Gavidia	Senior Adviser, Development Policy Democracy
Laura Torvinen	Senior Adviser Democracy, Rule of Law and Good Governance
Marikki Stocchetti	Secretary General, Finnish Development Policy Committee
Olli Ruohomäki	Senior Adviser, Development Policy Conflicts and Social development
Tiina Markkinen	Senior Adviser, Development Policy Rule of Law and Human Rights

Appendix 3: The Original Finnish Phrases on Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8

TABLE 5a: Concept of democracy: subthemes in interviews, original Finnish phrases

Subtheme	Example phrase	Original phrase in Finnish
The possibility to exert influence	The most essential part is the free individual, who is able to exert influence on the decisions related to his/her life (i3)	Olellainen osa on vapaa yksilö, joka pystyy vaikuttamaan omaan elämäänsä vaikuttaviin päätöksiin
Human rights and fundamental freedoms	Freedom of speech and freedom of thought are the basis [of democracy] (i5)	Sanavapaus ja ajatteluvapaus on kyllä [demokratian] lähtökohta
Inclusive participation	Participation and inclusivity are one of the pillars of democracy (i5)	Osallistuminen, inklusiivisuus, on yksi peruspilari
Rule of law	Rule of law and the respect for rule of law is an integral part of democracy (i1)	Oikeusvaltio ja oikeusvaltioperiaatteen kunnioittaminen on keskeinen osa demokratiaa
Elections as the most important democratic procedure	The elections and also elections that are free and fair, the whole base for the western democracy (i4)	Vaalijärjestelmä ja se, että vaalit voidaan toteuttaa vilpittömästi, koko tää länsimaisen demokratian ydin
Dependency on the local context	When we aim to support democracy, it is work which is context dependent (i1)	Kun pyritään tukemaan demokratiaa, se on kontekstiriippuvaista työtä
Continuous participatory processes	The [participation] crystallizes in elections, which are the base for democracy, but often it is understood as too limited, there should be more continuous participation (i6)	Se [osallistuminen] kitetty vaaleihin, ja sehän on demokratian perusta, mutta monesti se ymmärretään liian rajallisesti, että pitäis olla enemmän jatkuvaa osallistumista
Accountability and trust	Democratic government needs to be accountable [...] it creates trust in the whole system (i2)	Demokraattisen hallinnon pitää olla tilivelvollista [...] se luo luottamusta koko systeemiin

TABLE 6a: Good governance and the relationship to democracy: subthemes in the interviews, original Finnish phrases

Subtheme	Example phrase	Original phrase in Finnish
Good governance can be undemocratic	Good governance can sometimes be pretty undemocratic (i3)	Hyvä hallinto voi joskus olla aika epädemokraattista
Good governance is more technical	Good governance can be seen as more technical (i6)	Hyvä hallinto voidaan nähdä teknisempänä
Good governance is a precondition democracy	Good governance could be seen a precondition for democracy (i2)	Hyvä hallinto voisi olla edellytys sille demokratialle
Democracy advances good governance	Democratic institutions, democratic governance advances good governance, because through democratic institutions it is possible to build well-being for citizens, create equality, which is seen as the meter for good governance (i1)	Demokraattiset instituutiot, demokraattinen hallintomalli, edistää hyvää hallintoa, koska demokraattisten instituutioiden avulla me voidaan rakentaa kansalaisten hyvinvointia, luoda sitä mahdollisuuksien tasa-arvoa, mitä yleensä pidetään hyvän hallinnon mittarina
Good governance as a vague concept	Everyone seemed to have a different idea of what good governance means (i6)	Kaikilla vaikutti olevan eri käsitys, mitä se hyvä hallinto tarkoittaa

TABLE 7a: Motivation for democracy support: subthemes in the interviews, original Finnish phrases

Subtheme	Example phrase	Original phrase in Finnish
Finland's own development	Our own story, how Finland has been built on the democratic rule of law model (i2)	Meidän oma tarina, miten Suomi on rakentunut demokraattisen oikeusvaltiomallin pohjalta
Democracy support's influence on international relationship	I see that it creates more respect and trust towards Finland, and respect towards Finland's actions, when we support democracy in different parts of the world (i1)	Mä näkisin että se lisää arvostusta ja luottamusta Suomea kohtaan, ja arvostusta Suomen toimintaa kohtaan, kun me johdonmukaisesti edistetään demokratian kehitystä eripuolilla maailmaa
Value base	It [democracy] is a strong value base, which we want to promote (i2)	Se [demokratia] on vahva arvopohja, jota halutaan edistää
Finland's interests as a small country	It is in the interests of Finland as a small country to support this (i6)	Se on Suomen intresseissä pienenä maana tukea tätä
Peace and conflict prevention	If there is not a way to resolve disagreements, there is [...] a pretty short way to violence (i5)	Et jos ei keskinäisiä erimielisyyksiä voida ratkoa [...] sitten on aika lyhyt matka väkivaltaan
Development	Democracy is one of the pillars of inclusive development (i1)	Demokratia on myös inklusiivisen kehityksen peruspilareita
Stability and economic interests	If you want to take investment and companies to these markets, the operational environment needs to be predictable (i5)	Jos sä haluat viedä investointeja ja yrityksiä markkinoille, niin toimintaympäristöltä vaaditaan ennalta-arvaavuutta
International commitments	We have very strong international norms and commitments by which we are in the democracy support work (i1)	Meillä on hyvin vahvat kansainväliset normit ja sitoumukset, joiden kautta ollaan mukana tässä demokratiatyössä

TABLE 8a: Challenges in democracy support: subthemes in the interviews, original Finnish phrases

Subtheme	Example phrase	Original phrase in Finnish
Democracy comes after development	We see democracy is a side-product of development (i3)	Nyt nähdään, että kehitetään ja demokratia tulee sivutuotteena
There is less democracy support and less funding	I see that democracy support has diminished (i1)	Minusta se demokratiatuki on vähentynyt
The discrepancy between the value of democracy and democracy support policy/implementation	In rhetoric, Finland want this on the sectors of democracy, human rights and good governance, but the actions do not match at all (i5)	Keskustelun tasolla kyllä, Suomi haluaa tätä demokratian, ihmisoikeuksien ja hyvän hallinnon saralla ja sit se ei mätsää niihin toimenpiteisiin ollenkaan
Lack of clear democracy support policy	Democracy is a value [...] but do we have a democracy support policy? (i4)	Demokratia on perusarvo [...] mut onko meillä tällaista demokratiatukipolitiikkaa?
Long timeframe to see results	We have a result-based approach and people want to see results faster than 30 years from now (i6)	Meillä on tää tulosperustaisuus ja tuloksia halutaan nähdä myös nopeemmin kuin 30 vuoden päästä

Appendix 4: Finland's ODA funding to democracy support sectors in 2018

CRS code	Explanation	Number of projects	USD millions	Clarifications
15130	Legal and judicial development	28	3.44823	Support to institutions, systems and procedures of the justice sector, both formal and informal; support to ministries of justice, the interior and home affairs; judges and courts; legal drafting services; bar and lawyers associations; professional legal education; maintenance of law and order and public safety; border management; law enforcement agencies, police, prisons and their supervision; ombudsmen; alternative dispute resolution, arbitration and mediation; legal aid and counsel; traditional, indigenous and paralegal practices that fall outside the formal legal system. Measures that support the improvement of legal frameworks, constitutions, laws and regulations; legislative and constitutional drafting and review; legal reform; integration of formal and informal systems of law. Public legal education; dissemination of information on entitlements and remedies for injustice; awareness campaigns.
15150	Democratic participation and civil society	190	9.142602	Support to the exercise of democracy and diverse forms of participation of citizens beyond elections (15151); direct democracy instruments such as referenda and citizens' initiatives; support to organisations to represent and advocate for their members, to monitor, engage and hold governments to account, and to help citizens learn to act in the public sphere; curricula and teaching for civic education at various levels.
15151	Elections	2	0.207293	Electoral management bodies and processes, election observation, voters' education.
15152	Legislatures and political parties	9	1.082602	Assistance to strengthen key functions of legislatures/ parliaments including subnational assemblies and councils (representation; oversight; legislation), such as improving the capacity of legislative bodies, improving legislatures' committees and administrative procedures; research and information management systems; providing training programmes for legislators and support

				personnel. Assistance to political parties and strengthening of party systems.
15153	Media and free flow of information	18	1.693715	Activities that support free and uncensored flow of information on public issues; activities that increase the editorial and technical skills and the integrity of the print and broadcast media, e.g. training of journalists.

All this data is available at OECD (2021b). *QWIDS, Query Wizard for International Development Statistics*. Available <https://stats.oecd.org/qwids/>.