



Article

Enough Crises to Choose from: The Perceived Sense of Crisis in Panama

Gabisel Barsallo ^{1,*} and Elisa Mendoza ²

¹ Research Center of the Faculty of Humanities (CIFHU), Universidad de Panama, XFM8+CG, Panama City 0819, Panama

² Department of Statistics, Universidad de Panama, XFM8+CG, Panama City 0819, Panama; elisa.mendoza@up.ac.pa

* Correspondence: gabisel.barsallo-a@up.ac.pa

Abstract: The COVID-19 health crisis and its consequences have exacerbated existing issues in the political, economic, and cultural spheres of societies. An exploratory, descriptive, mixed-method study using a phenomenological interpretative approach was conducted to identify the perceptions of Panamanian residents on what type of crisis the country is facing, who is responsible, and how should it be dealt with? This study relies on one online survey distributed across social media platforms over a 5-month period in 2020, generating a non-probabilistic convenience sample of 561 persons. Demographic variables and open-ended questions were included in the survey. We conclude that education, health, and labor were the most commonly identified crises. Training, civic engagement, and solidarity were acknowledged as critical in overcoming the crisis. There is a strong tendency to delegate these overcoming responsibilities exclusively to government authorities. The perception of the crisis varies depending on the respondent's educational level. Higher educational levels encourage a more active and self-reflective response to the circumstances, and the desire to seek social support through community networks corresponds to this perception. This encompasses positive aspects such as the opportunity for a change and improving one's quality of life, and negative aspects such as increased distrust of government institutions and ruling politicians.



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1. Introduction

COVID-19, which brought the recent pandemic that emerged at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, has become more than a crisis with a global impact. It has become an experience of a transcendent nature. The consequences have been experienced in a similar way in many countries, although at different levels and contexts. These differences have had an impact, deepening already known inequalities (OECD 2020; NU CEPAL 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down the global economy due to the consequences of quarantine and other outcomes stemming from the aforementioned virus. However, global economies such as China and the United States have not ceased in their commercial, financial and productive industries. Beyond a health crisis or syndemic (Escudero-Nuñez 2021), a series of events have been triggered. As a consequence of this health crisis, these events have undermined the political, economic, and cultural spheres in various societies. The World Trade Organization (2020) declared a drop in global trade of 13% to 32%, led by the service sector, due to the workforce reduction because of quarantines and deaths from the disease, as well as the number of massive layoffs, which have triggered a sharpening at the thresholds of poverty and extreme poverty. Panama did not escape this reality.

Panama is located in the narrowest part of the American continent, connecting Central America (Costa Rica) and South America (Colombia). As of 2020, the population of Panama is estimated to be 4,315,000 inhabitants. The male population is slightly higher than the female population at 50.06 percent, and 64.9 percent of the population is of

productive age (15–64 years). In a total area of 75,320 km², it has a population density of 57 inhabitants per km². Panama has a democratically elected government that includes executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

From 2005 to 2019, Panama experienced economic growth and maintained an annual average per capita income growth of 6.8 percent, making it the Latin American country with the highest purchasing power parity per capita income. This allowed the advancement of growth and the implementation of social policies aimed at reducing poverty and inequality, even when these were high in relation to per capita income (Garcimartín et al. 2021). Regarding poverty, despite the prevalence of rural poverty over the urban poor, the middle class increased from 50.8% to 56.9% of the population from 2015 to 2019 (Banco Mundial 2022). The Republic of Panama has maintained high growth rates through the years, supported by public investment and the construction sector, according to the World Bank. However, these rates have been declining over time, resulting in significant regional disparities, such as low social investment compared to countries with similar economies, and deficiencies in the quality of the education system (Garcimartín et al. 2021).

As a result of the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, poverty increased by nearly three percentage points and the growth in GDP fell below double digits in 2020, starting to recover at the end of the year but still reflecting the setback caused by the pandemic, when unemployment jumped from 7.1 percent to 18.5 percent (INEC 2020) due to mobility restrictions imposed by the authorities (Banco Mundial 2022). Consequently, the existing fiscal deficit of 2.9 percent in 2019 increased to 5.5 percent in 2021, and debt levels increased by 17.4 percent. It was clear that, as in all countries around the world, the pandemic caused an economic slowdown, and increased and exacerbated each country's existing challenges, resulting in a generalized crisis (Banco Mundial 2022).

Nevertheless, COVID-19 in the Panamanian scenario not only had effects on the local and international economy. It had effects especially in the political and institutional sectors and in the sociocultural sphere (Gandasegui 2010). This was evidenced by drastic changes in the resident's quality of life¹ (QoL), where evaluations of the experiences and capacities of residents, together with their behaviors and reactions to the present circumstances, suggest a general disaffection (Skevington and Böhnke 2018). Therefore, the objective of this study is to reflect on Panamanian residents' perceptions of being affected by the crisis, whatever that may mean, and their vision of any possible solution.

1.1. What Is Crisis and How Do We Perceive It?

The perception of a person regarding a phenomenon depends on the recognition of human emotions and reactions. Impressions are formed from the combination of different pieces of information gathered in the first moments of interaction. One of the most relevant meanings of the concept of perception refers to the evaluation that a person makes in relation to a certain social situation and his/her role or opportunity within it (Moya 1999). Social psychology emphasizes the evaluation that each individual makes in the context of social interaction in a given situation. As a result, when we talk about perception, we are referring to something related to each individual's learning or experience (Balasch 1991). Each individual's assessment of a situation is based on the information received and its interpretation in the context in which it is developed. Each individual's perception is shaped by his experiences and the society to which he belongs (Rosado Millán et al. 2008). Therefore, even when perception is personal, it is always influenced by collective subjectivity. Social perception enables us to understand and interpret social phenomena that influence those who are members of a society, or the relationship between themselves and society.

Starting from the assumption that we are in a crisis, we must try to approach the crisis and its different associations according to the classic understanding, as expressed by both conservative and contemporary expressions, taking into account that the word "crisis" itself denotes a negative evaluative degree (Penrose 2020). However, for many theorists of

behavioral theory, the concept of crisis can also represent an opportunity. Our individual perception can help to interpret the crisis in a more favorable way.

The concept and meaning of the word “crisis” is affected by changes in context. This expression is not evident in medieval European texts, yet it emerges during the European Renaissance, specifically when classical Greek medicine resurfaces ([Starn 1971](#)). The term “crisis” was relatively absent from medieval European texts and entered the modern vernacular language during the revival of classical Greek medicine at the time of the European Renaissance. The context of the term “crisis” has also changed, as it initially had a technical medical meaning used as a determinant of a “judicial verdict” during the 17th and 18th centuries ([Hippocrates 1868](#)). This technical concept of crisis was used in a more versatile manner when applied figuratively while describing social and political institutions. A medicalized vocabulary also allowed contemporaries to use the word to provide a scientific reason for previously adulterated social and political realities, and thus we observe the evolution of the applied concept.

The concept of crisis is expressed by nouns such as disturbance, dysfunctionality, and disorder ([Seidmann et al. 2007](#)), since it denotes a state of uncertainty and bewilderment about the environment that surrounds us. It is found in the Latin language as *crisis*, and in Greek as *krisis*. Etymologically, crisis is the verdict that we issue based on the analysis to which we submit each situation. “A crisis occurs in a framework of instability, which can have multiple triggering factors, removing a need to heal the manifested damage” ([Veschi 2020](#)). As an example, it can be said that crisis is seen in the development and duration of a disease, in the process of an event, in situations of important and unexpected consequences, or in difficult situations that need a solution.

The definition of the word crisis is broad and can be adapted to various circumstances; therefore, being a social phenomenon, it is attributed as having characteristics such as poorly structured situations, containing threats to a system (political, social, cultural, and economic), influenced by the time factor and human relations, and lacking sufficient resources to respond to them ([Sutherland 2017](#)). That is, crisis is a medical term in its origin which is figuratively applied to descriptions adopted by political and social institutions.

The concept of crisis is as “a complex reality, which currently escapes the momentary character that its traditional definition proposes” ([Bustos 2005](#)). This concept is frequently repeated when analyzing the realities of our contemporary world and associates the word with the self-perception that people have in search of solutions to their social and political situations. Crisis is just a label that affirms the urgency attributed to determining a set of contingencies necessary to face an immediate and serious threat ([Spector 2020](#)). It is not a material object that can be manipulated, examined, or subjected to an experiment. However, each crisis brings us to a crossroads that forces us to make complicated and transcendental decisions to find a way out of it ([Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020](#)).

In his memorable speech, John F. Kennedy, President of the United States of America, made reference to the word crisis in Chinese, asserting that it is written in two characters that in turn mean danger and opportunity. Years later, this incorrect statement was corrected by a Chinese linguist who explained that, although the word *Weiji* in Chinese means crisis and its first component means danger, the second component rather indicates an incipient moment or turning point, as when something begins or changes ([Mair 2009](#)). Nonetheless, what Kennedy really meant was that a crisis can become a critical moment in which to create and take opportunities. With this explanation, we intend to clarify how a crisis is seen both according to what it really is and according to the perception that the individual may have of it.

Crises develop often from financial disasters, which lead to political instability, but it also depend on the context in which the term is used ([Popa 2015](#)). In turn, financial crisis can be considered as the result of a general crisis, the two being mutually linked. However, there are crises that are caused by natural disasters such as earthquakes or the effects of global warming. From the health point of view, a crisis is defined as a temporary state of disorder and disorganization, determined by the lack of personal ability to face a situation

using traditional mechanisms in order to solve problems, and by the ability to achieve extremely positive or negative results (Slaikeu 1990).

Regarding the economy, crises are characterized by the models and technologies that underpin markets, are shaped by the culture of commerce to which they belong, and have a historical moment. Nevertheless, crises can also be perceived as trends depending on the lens of the person who perceives the situation, based on their own values, positions, and responsibilities (Zoeller and Bandelj 2019). It can also be described as an event capable of causing a change of great magnitude that can be detrimental to the social system, in which the lack of proportionality between cause and consequence prevails (Walby 2015).

Having defined the different understandings of the concept of crisis, we can identify a society that believes in a crisis without understanding its meaning and that, in turn, affirms its existence without being able to identify which crisis it actually is, or what is its cause. All of this is perceived in the form of objects or states identified through observation of the world around us and whatever requires our solution (Gilbert 2019). Thus, in this study, we will use the word crisis, which commonly appears in health terminology to indicate a condition, applying it in the sense of determining a problematic situation. Situations such as social injustice, poor financial management on the part of the government and private financial institutions, false morality and opportunism, the social imbalance produced by consumerism, and the inappropriate levels of public spending and social investment on the part of the government are commonly understood aspects of a crisis situation.

1.2. Are We Really in Crisis?

In general, the crisis, as such, is presented as a moment of transition or transformation of normality and established ways of acting and thinking. Established forms, though not necessarily correct or adequate forms, come to be disruptive elements of the normativity established by the collective conscience, as that amalgam of beliefs and corresponding feelings within society that is made of moral, normative, and social influences which manipulate the participation of the actors. In turn, a crisis can be perceived as an opportunity to modify the behavior to which the majority conforms and thus develop their innovation capacity and strategies that contribute to the potential for action in critical personal and structural situations (Lintner 2018).

However, the concept of crisis contains in itself a negative meaning that, although generic, is intrinsic in its use, as it is related to events with a great psychological or sociological impact, an impact that frequently affects economic, health, political, and educational situations, etc. (Minati 2018; Karabag 2020). The word crisis has become routine, a concept used indiscriminately to describe almost any problem or changing process that can negatively affect our status quo. Consequently, we conform to situations labeled as crises, making our own analysis of how this might harm us. Nevertheless, is there much or is there only little we can do about it?

The understanding of crises is important, but that understanding must be converted into decisions and actions to change reality (Petrella and Tessore 2021). The crisis phenomenon plays a fundamental role in the diagnosis of the systemic problems produced by capitalist society and its tendency to reproduce itself through recurrent crises (Cordero 2016). For example, a large number of crises that have occurred in past decades around the world (e.g., the collapse of the US housing market in 2009, restrictive monetary policy and inflation in 1991, the US and Japanese economic recession in 1982, the Latin American debt crisis in 1980, the oil/energy crisis in Arab countries in 1973–1979, the post-war recession in 1945, the great depression in 1938, and so on) have demonstrated that capital and trust are linked by a thin and common string. This would seem to suggest that crises have become part of a systemic mode of reproduction of symbolic and cultural capital, exacerbated by the present health crisis. In this way, crises lead us to ask ourselves questions about causes, control capacity and future prevention methods, which are repeatedly transformed into everyday discourse and politics. Consequently, this discourse determines our subjective perception and interpretation of the crisis (Von Scheve et al. 2016).

Once again, today's political thinkers are paying attention to the importance of reflecting on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of people in order to have greater knowledge about the realities of common social life in accordance with those ideas, sensitivities or situations important to the people concerned (Jodelet 2018). The analysis of how these people accept that they are experiencing a crisis allows us to focus on certain collective thoughts about the situation and visualize the new inequalities (i.e., distancing, exclusion) and those maintained during the crisis and, perhaps, after it, beyond those tabulated and aligned data provided by government bodies. Thus, even when state responses are produced, people become aware and reorganize their lives in different ways, recognizing the realities implicit in the practices acquired during the crisis (Bhan et al. 2017).

We must take into account that the term crisis, seen in a more generic way, can also lead us to think of an existential crisis. However, seen on an expanded and much more general plane, we can think also of a crisis of confidence and a crisis of political legitimacy. Even during this period called the pandemic, some Panamanians not only see a health crisis (SENACYT 2017), but also perceive other types of crises of much greater importance to them, a reality that lends itself to a better analysis of the current situation. Therefore, yes, we are indeed in crisis.

2. Materials and Methods

The collected data for this article belongs to that from a larger study in the project *Perception of Panamanian Citizens on the incidence of values during the crisis. (Percepción de los Ciudadanos Panameños sobre la incidencia de valores ante la situación de crisis.)*. This is the first article for this project.

This study uses a mixed method approach with an exploratory and descriptive cross-sectional design, chosen as the most appropriate since it allows us to analyze and distinguish perceptions and reactions concerning how respondents made sense of their experiences during the crisis. It emphasizes how respondents give meaning to realities, frustrations and feelings, as well as how they make sense of the phenomenon that has affected them. Given that the country and the entire world were declared to be in crisis by 2020, this study finds its motivation in the respondents' perceptions related to the question and is motivated by perceptions related to the following questions: What kind of crisis do you think the country is facing? As a secondary question, who is responsible and how should it be dealt with?

Collected data from a sample of 561 adult residents in Panama was gathered using structured questionnaires in online surveys created through the Google Forms platform in order to facilitate access over the internet. This instrument's reliability was validated by expert judges and it was concluded that the questionnaire had a reliability of $\alpha = 0.846$ indicating good internal consistency among the instrument's components (Quero Virla 2010; Corral 2009). The questionnaire was circulated on several social networks (i.e., WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram) from June to October 2020, resulting in a non-probabilistic sample for convenience, which eased respondents' access to this study (Otzen and Manterola 2017).

Quantifiable descriptions of the responses obtained and the demographic data of the respondents, along with other factors related to the topic, are identified in a linear representation of the results taking into account the adult population (18 years and over) resident in the country during 2020 (See Table 1). The study variables include fundamental demographics such as gender, age, work status, educational background, and nationality, as well as six other questions. Of these, three were open-ended questions related to the perception of crisis, broken down in terms of identifying the type of crisis, feelings and beliefs, and actions; three were close-ended questions related to the type of crisis, who is responsible for the crisis and solutions to the crisis. In the study, the variables were measured categorically so that the most appropriate statistical analysis to observe association between variables corresponded to the Chi square statistic.

Table 1. Sample overview.

Demographic Characteristics		No.	Percent	Male	Female	National	Foreigner
Sex	Male	184	32.8	-	-	29.4	3.4
	Female	377	67.2	-	-	60.1	7.1
Age	18–30	298	53.1	18.0	35.1	48.5	4.5
	31–40	107	19.1	6.1	13.0	16.8	2.3
	41–50	103	18.4	5.5	12.8	16.4	2
	51–60	41	7.3	2.9	4.5	6.1	1.2
	61–70	9	1.6	0.2	1.4	1.4	0.2
	71+	3	0.5	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.2
Nationality	Panamanian	502	89.5	29.4	60.1	-	-
	Foreigner	59	10.5	3.4	7.1	-	-
Work status	Unemployed	207	36.9	40.2	34.5	37.5	27.1
	Formal worker	245	43.7	39.1	45.9	43.8	42.4
	Entrepreneur	116	20.7	17.4	16.7	15.5	28.8
	Informal worker	18	3.2	3.3	2.9	3.2	1.7
Education level	Post-graduate	137	24.4	21.7	25.7	23.3	33.9
	University	319	56.9	59.8	55.4	57.0	55.9
	High school	105	18.7	18.5	18.8	19.7	19.7

The fundamental purpose of this empirical study is to describe, qualitatively and quantitatively, the different perceptions that society has regarding the term crisis, motivated by the pandemic of the year 2020. In order to obtain the necessary evidence about the crisis from the perspective of Panamanian residents, an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach (Smith 1996) is used.

The qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti was used to help us code the respondents' answers and provide a systematic categorization of data and descriptive comments assigned to codes in the analysis of the answers and classification of the open questions. In addition, for the descriptive and quantitative analysis of the demographic variables, we used Microsoft Excel 2016 and SPSS v.25.

Phenomenology assumes that knowledge is informed by human lived experience from an epistemological standpoint. The psychological, philosophical, and sociological underpinnings of this study are consistent with the research design because truth is viewed as a subjective expression of reality as perceived by the participant, shared with the researcher, and later interpreted by the researcher. IPA relies on the process of people making sense of the world and their experiences, adding a double hermeneutic to it when these perceived sense experiences are first interpreted by the participant, and then by the analyst. It emerged in the field of health psychology, but it has been very useful in human, health, and social sciences research. However, the intention is to examine the process of construction of meaning in relation to a phenomenon under study: what was the experience like for the participants, how they engaged with it and what they felt (Brocki and Wearden 2006).

For this study, all respondents were presented with a declaration of informed consent, which was included at the beginning of the survey, in order to guarantee confidential use of the provided data.

3. Results and Discussion

There are events that, by their nature, are crises (Spector 2020). This statement is based on the scope of the event and the debate about and/or consensus on the meaning of the event, while considering that the statements made by this study are the result of individual human statements. The author argues that we all classify phenomena in some way, and this classification has an impact on our behavior, especially in our decisions. Calling phenomenon a crisis is simply a label used by leaders to denote an immediate threat. A crisis is real in the sense that it represents real changes in social processes, but its

effects on society depend on how it is interpreted (Bernburg 2016; Walby 2015). The shared meanings associated with crises are malleable and controversial. Movements of power and contestation determine the identification of cause and blame.

In fact, the way we make sense of or classify phenomena has a real impact on how we behave. Making sense is an ongoing process that thrives in times of uncertainty and ambiguity (Longmuir 2021). It is then that we can say that the recent pandemic, with the aim of making sense of its implications and consequences, has been configured as the main event that has led to the development, increase, and/or intensification of the phenomena that we have identified as crises. Thus, crises remain a distinctive structural feature of modern societies, as much as a rich source of knowledge of the dynamics of social life (Cordero et al. 2016).

The following open-ended questions were provided in the survey, specifying that we were not necessarily referring to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Answers to these questions will help us broaden our understanding of the perceptions of Panamanians regarding the crisis.

3.1. Question No. 1. What Kind of Crisis Do You Think Is Being Experienced in Panama?

Crisis is a polysemic word and, in turn, a multifaceted and ambiguous concept that allows it to be approached from different points of view (Jessop 2015). Its scope depends on its connection with other concepts within the same idea and the theoretical framework or context in which it is used. In other words, each person assumes that his reality corresponds to the knowledge he has of it. The analysis of a crisis situation may have been carried out without a true understanding of the concept of crisis. Therefore, defining a situation as a crisis implies perceiving an event in the environment in which it unfolds (Rosado Millán et al. 2008). This triggering event or events will be perceived, attended to, and evaluated according to the evaluator's standard, which dictates how things should or should not be, so that a problem is detected. Thus, a problem is perceived when a discrepancy is found between the existing state and the desired state (Billings et al. 1980). Therefore, the type of crisis observed by the respondents at the time of the survey will be in accordance with the reality known at the same time.

There are several types of crises (e.g., financial, economic, social, environmental, personal, community, international, etc.). The list is extensive, and each has a broader scope. We chose seven of these as the most frequently mentioned by Panamanian authors as latent in the country prior to the pandemic, as follows: Labor crisis (as mentioned by Castillo (2001); Solera et al. (2016)), Economic crisis (as mentioned by Castillo (2001); Gandasegui (2010); Solera et al. (2016)), Political crisis (as mentioned by Chaves Garcia (2021); Rodriguez Reyes (2016); Beluche (2001)), Education crisis (as mentioned by De León (2017); De Gracia (2016)), Cultural crisis (as mentioned by Ramos (2018)), Social crisis (as mentioned by Beluche (2001)), and Health crisis (as mentioned by Alabarca (2015)).

For this question, we provided the chosen list from which the respondents would choose different types of crisis they have perceived (multiple selection). Of these, the categories of education (78.4%), health or healthcare (76.8%), and labor (68.8%) were the most commonly selected by the respondents. However, it is noteworthy that in both groups of men and women, the education and health crises prevailed as the most voted for (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of the sample by sex and education level, according to type of crisis identified ¹.

Kind of Crisis	Male (n = 184)	Male %	Female (n = 377)	Female %	Total (n = 561)	Total Percent	p Value
Labor	120	65.2	266	70.6	386	68.8	0.2
Economic	108	58.7	76	20.2	184	32.8	0.131
Politics	115	62.5	237	62.9	352	62.7	0.933
Education	141	76.6	299	79.3	440	78.4	0.469
Culture and Values	118	64.1	244	64.7	362	64.5	0.891
Social	105	57.1	196	52	301	53.7	0.258
Health	130	70.7	301	79.8	431	76.8	0.015

Kind of Crisis	Post-Graduate (n = 137)	Post-Graduate %	University (n = 319)	University %	High School (n = 105)	High School %	p Value
Labor	96	70.1	213	66.8	77	73.3	0.423
Economic	89	65	197	61.8	68	64.8	0.75
Politics	95	69.3	193	60.5	64	61	0.184
Education	106	77.4	255	79.9	79	75.2	0.562
Culture and Values	97	70.8	205	64.3	60	57.1	0.088
Social	91	66.4	163	51.1	47	44.8	0.001
Health	108	78.8	248	77.7	75	71.4	0.336

¹ Respondents could opt for multiple answers.

A chi-square analysis was performed to verify the statistical independence between each of the identified types of crises and each of the demographic variables. There were no statistically significant differences between the gender variable and the types of crises, except for Health ($p = 0.015$), indicating that there is an association between the gender variable and the health crisis.

Regarding academic training, a statistically significant association was found with the identification of the type of Social crisis ($p = 0.001$), whose proportional values in each group were 66.4% for respondents with postgraduate studies, 51.1% form respondents with university studies and 44.8% for respondents with only high school studies. No respondent reported to have only completed elementary school. It should be noted that, in the Post-graduate group of respondents, the more frequently selected types of crisis were health (78.8%), education (77.4%), and culture and values (70.8%). In the University group of respondents, the more frequently selected types of crisis were education (79.9%), health (77.7%), and labor (66.8%) and in the High school group of respondents, education (75.2%), labor (73.3%), and health (71.4%) were the most frequently selected types of crises.

The types of crisis identified in relation to age did not show any statistically significant association, implying that each type of crisis identified is age independent. In the group of 18 to 30 years old, the education crisis stood out (81.2%). In the group of 31 to 40 years old, the health crisis was prominent (81.3%). In the group of 41 to 50 years old, there was a tie between the education crisis and health crisis, both with 70.9%. And in the group of 51 and older, the education crisis prevailed (75.5%) (Table 3).

According to the work status of the study respondents, there is a statistically significant association between two types of crises identified: culture and values crisis ($p = 0.005$) and social crisis ($p = 0.022$). An important absolute difference between the different categories of work status was observed with respect to the unemployment group of respondents and the culture and values crisis, as well as the social crisis. The respondents with formal employment most frequently identified the health and education crisis (76.3% each), followed by the labor crisis. In the informal worker group, due to the fact that the number of participants in this category is small, ties were determined between the two types of crisis health and labor (72.2% each), and between education and culture and values (66.7% each) and economic and social (55.6% each). In the entrepreneur group of respondents, education crisis (66.4%) had the highest weight, followed by health crisis (64.7%) and culture and values crisis (62.9%). Lastly, the unemployed group of respondents most frequently identified education crisis (79.2%), health crisis (75.4%), and labor crisis (69.1%) as the predominant types of crises in the country.

Table 3. Distribution of the sample by age group and work status according to type of crisis.

Kind of Crisis	18–30 (n = 298)	18–30 (%)	31–40 (n = 107)	31–40 (%)	41–50 (n = 103)	41–50 (%)	51+ (n = 53) ¹	51+ (%)	p Value
Labor	215	72.1	75	70.1	64	62.1	32	60.4	0.137
Economic	196	65.8	68	63.6	62	60.2	28	52.8	0.296
Politics	191	64.1	70	65.4	61	59.2	30	56.6	0.58
Education	242	81.2	85	79.4	73	70.9	40	75.5	0.159
Culture and Values	188	63.1	72	67.3	66	64.1	36	67.9	0.825
Social	148	49.7	63	58.9	57	55.3	33	62.3	0.189
Health	232	77.9	87	81.3	73	70.9	39	73.6	0.29

Kind of Crisis	Formal Worker (n = 245)	Formal Worker %	Informal Worker (n = 18)	Informal Worker %	Entrepreneur (n = 116)	Entrepreneur %	Unemployed (n = 207)	Unemployed %	p Value
Labor	164	66.9	13	72.2	66	56.9	143	69.1	0.791
Economic	151	61.6	10	55.6	65	56	128	61.8	0.676
Politics	156	63.7	9	50	65	56	122	58.9	0.415
Education	187	76.3	12	66.7	77	66.4	164	79.2	0.55
Culture and Values	162	66.1	12	66.7	73	62.9	115	55.6	0.005
Social	138	56.3	10	55.6	60	51.7	93	44.9	0.022
Health	187	76.3	13	72.2	75	64.7	156	75.4	0.962

¹ Ages were regrouped at 51 years old.

Undoubtedly, with the recent declaration of the worldwide state of a pandemic, latent shortcomings in local and global health systems were revealed. Education suffered devastating impacts not only at K-12 levels, where most classrooms remained closed, deepening families' socioeconomic inequalities and students' vulnerability gaps (UNICEF LACRO 2020) at schools, but also at the academic (university) level.

Regarding the labor crisis, the impact that the current health crisis has had on the labor area can be seen by an increase in the national unemployment rate by 25% (Rodríguez et al. 2019). This percentage includes wage earners, suspension of contracts and work stoppages, seeking to promote the continuity of the employment relationship with the implementation of reduced working hours and the temporary suspension of contracts (NU CEPAL 2020), or cessation of operations of private companies. These measurements directly impacted the population, considering that more than 50% of the respondents were young people at their productive age with specific bio-psychosocial needs for healthcare, education, housing, and employment (Mendoza et al. 2017).

The education and health crises were related to the type of resident ($p = 0.015$ and $p = 0.002$, respectively). The education crisis (79.9%) and the health crisis (78.7%) were the most common concerns among the nationals group. Politics and culture and values crises both had the same percentage in the foreigners group (64.4%) (Table 4).

Table 4. Distribution of the sample by type of resident according to type of crisis.

Kind of Crisis	National (n = 502)	National	Foreigner (n = 59)	Foreigner	p Value
Labor	349	69.5	37	62.7	0.285
Economic	321	63.9	33	55.9	0.228
Politics	314	62.5	38	64.4	0.780
Education	401	79.9	39	66.1	0.015
Culture and Values	324	64.5	38	64.4	0.984
Social	270	53.8	31	52.5	0.856
Health	395	78.7	36	61.0	0.002

3.2. Question No. 2. How Do You Feel about the Identified Crisis(es)?

Feelings play an important role in the development of stories about socially relevant issues (Ortega-Sánchez and Pagès 2021). A feeling is an affective state caused by an emotion. This is produced more consciously and is sustained by a long-lasting state of mind or mood. This means that in order for a feeling to be generated, there must be reasoning caused by a thought that causes the person to feed it and make it something lasting. Feelings pass through a mental filter that allows us to think more rationally, allowing us to value and evaluate the lived experience (Bisquerra Alzina 2000). In this way, feelings manifest a

person's inclinations to perceive the world from a specific affective background, form ideas appropriate to the perception, and generate action guidelines (Rosas 2011). In this sense, this question was formulated to explore the feelings produced by the crisis situation that respondents perceived. However, respondents not only expressed their feelings about the situation but also provided opinions and related thoughts.

Answers to this question were classified into three categories: feelings, opinions, and thoughts, coded according to what was expressed by the respondents and in order to identify how involved or affected people felt about it (Table 5).

Table 5. Answers regarding the effect that the crisis has had on respondents.

Type of Answers	Number	Percent
Total	561	100.0
Feelings	292	52.0
Opinions	185	33.0
Thoughts	73	13.0
No answer	11	2.0

Most of the respondents (52%) took the opportunity to express their feelings using a single word. Among the most commonly used words, valued by hit count were: disappointed (32), frustrated (25), helpless (55), bad (38), worried (89) and sad (19). Of the respondents, 2% did not answer this question.

Among their opinions, topics such as the current and future economy, justice, education and its consequences, and the governmental sphere stood out. On education and its consequences, one male formal worker between the ages of 18 and 30 with high school education gave his opinion on the elected government authorities:

The country has been falling into these types of crises because our current rulers, together with their circles, put their personal and economic interests before those of the people who elected them.

Another respondent stated his opinion on how education has changed through the years:

Everything is the product of a bad education plan that has been going on for decades. We are living in a country that our grandparents built and we are the product of that teaching that today's adults must now change in our children, so that the youth of tomorrow can change the course of the country through values and ethics. (Unemployed male between 18 and 30 years old with secondary education)

Other respondents focused on giving their opinion about changes in social behavior (33%). One unemployed male between 18 and 30 years old with a university education said:

At first, I was bad and indignant; then, like everyone else, I fell into national conformism.

On another point, an unemployed female between the ages of 18 and 30 with high school education expressed her thoughts as follows:

We have lost a lot of the essence and the culture of wanting to do things just as they are. We want to do things only if they appear in our favor, without caring about the damage they cause to others. We have lost our values and we have also grown bad thoughts about our convenience and nothing more.

Opinions and thoughts may be seen as synonyms, but they are not. An opinion is a perspective that a person has formed about a topic from a judgment, taste or subjective belief. It is the act of giving expression or voice to your emotions using words (Gough 2001). On the other hand, thoughts come from an individual's ability to think with their own deep and objective powers of reason. We could say that thoughts are mental processes and representations used prior not only to solving problems and making decisions in matters of our own experience (Fisher 2001), but also before acquiring new knowledge (Sternberg 1986).

Some respondents also expressed positive thoughts (13%) derived from the situation in which their status changed. One male formal worker between 51 and 60 years old with a university education said:

At first, I felt powerless because my freedom of movement, both economic and social, had been restricted. Now I feel a little more relaxed because I looked for other job alternatives that allow me to be with my family and friends and to reactivate my economy.

Another respondent stated:

I am blessed that I have a job, but I know that if I didn't, this would be an opportunity to get out of my comfort zone and start a business based on an existing need. (Female formal worker between 41 and 50 years old with university studies)

Although these two respondents mentioned feelings such as being powerless and blessed, their explanation extended to more complex thoughts in which they compared their current situation to the one before.

We rarely consider the emotional costs of economic and political crises, despite the fact that almost all of us have experienced distrust and fear of the future in the midst of an unstable situation (Bude 2017), concern about the high cost of living, and have been forced to make decisions due to unmet needs. It is frequently forgotten that humans are not only concerned about succeeding or failing, but also about thinking, feeling, and constantly striving for those fundamental elements needed to make decisions in the face of reality. Trying to understand the depth of this type of response demonstrates how challenging it is to assess and contrast people's feelings, moods, hopes, uncertainties, and sensations regarding problems in their social environment. Social sciences typically focus on what social subjects do rather than what they perceive and feel, overlooking the fact that these subjective values serve as an incentive for the coordination of wills in civil society, while they also can trigger protests, outbursts, and revolutions.

3.3. Question No. 3. As a Panamanian Resident, What Do You Think You Can Do to Fight against the Identified Crisis?

When facing a crisis, phrases like “executing an action plan” or “plan B” are very common, but what happens when the crisis has many facets that involve different items, transcendence in time, and acceptance of a new reality? We can find authors who see the crisis as a temporary state of disorder and disorganization (Spector 2020) and others who affirm that this is determined by the urgency attributed to the need for a contingency plan in the face of the situation (Slaikeu 1990). However, respondents had their own ways of addressing the issue.

Answers to this question were classified into 10 categories according to what was expressed by the respondents to the survey as civicism, choosing rulers, education/training, information/motivation, protest, religion/spirituality, health, solidarity, work, others, and no answer (Table 6).

Table 6. Means to face the crisis according to Panamanian residents ¹.

Means to Face the Crisis	Number	Percent
Education/Training	129	23
Civicism	112	20
Solidarity	75	13.4
Information/motivation	46	8.2
Protest	42	7.5
Health	29	5.2
Work	25	4.5
Elections	21	3.7
Religion/spirituality	9	1.6
Other	86	15.3
No answer	47	8.4

¹ Respondents could opt for multiple answers.

Of these categories, three stood out: education/training (23.0%), civicism (20.0%) and solidarity (13.4%) as means to be able to face the crisis as explained by the respondents. In relation to civicism, the respondents see themselves as part of society, and therefore with an obligation to work in favor of it by recognizing the importance of their participation in fulfilling their work and economic commitments and abiding by the laws and instructions of the authorities. Respondents repeatedly emphasized trying to be correct citizens, practicing values, and leading by example as elements of great importance in facing the crisis. On this matter, one respondent commented: Keep going, help those you can, give 100% in everything, always be honest and positive (Female formal worker between 18 and 30 years old with secondary education).

Another respondent said:

I must continue to do my professional work well, be a good citizen and share the knowledge I have acquired with those around me, set an example and create civic, environmental, and moral value awareness. (Entrepreneur between 41 and 50 years old with university studies)

Respondents also stressed the importance of choosing the right rulers at election time, taking into account the sensitivity of those who wish to be elected to seek good for all and that, as leaders, they confront partisan politics that is detrimental to the governmental system. After one dictator² and several failed presidential terms, the country's political crisis has taken a turn and manifested itself in a precarious political participation in recent years, as citizens no longer believe in the party system, and the lack of political tolerance for the political system has increased due to governments that do not respond to the needs of the majority, but to their own interests. One female entrepreneur between 18 and 30 years old with postgraduate studies expressed this thought:

This is a vicious circle that I don't know where it would break ... electing a government that truly thinks about the common good implies a country educated with values, and a good, fair, and equitable educational system depends on authorities elected by a country that is not very well mannered.

This woman not only tells us about the importance of making a good choice for our leaders, but also relates this to the current level of education in the country. On this issue, [Rodriguez Reyes \(2016\)](#) agrees and states that it is possible that in the desire to depoliticize education, people were deprived of the teaching of defendable democratic values, resulting in a general disempowerment of citizens and a social conformism that is detrimental to education. Young people are easily manipulated because they lack civic participation.

On education matters, the vast majority of the respondents affirmed the lack of promotion of education as a tool for change, the need for civic education training, rigorous enough to allow social maturity³ in the future, and the need for training in values, social management and financial and health guidance. One female entrepreneur between 18 and 30 years old with university studies commented:

Invest in education, allow foreign professionals to be part of the academy and train the next generations of professionals. By doing this, cultural and knowledge encounters will be much more efficient. At the same time, there must be a restructuring of the K-12 education system, especially in the public sphere. By having a well-educated population, the reproduction of inequality, corruption, and the famous *juega vivo* will be avoided.

On the same matter, other respondent said:

Educating myself is the only thing left. I have no money, no contacts, but if I educate myself, I can support my ideas of growth and share them with others. It would be good to make a chain of conscience and not depend on the government but on us. (Male formal worker between 41 and 50 years old with postgraduate studies)

It is important to point out that *juega vivo*, as an opportunistic behavior commonly related to corruption, was mentioned multiple times by the respondents, not only when referring to the government, but to the population in general, as a practice that, despite being highly criticized, is approved of by many (Barsallo Alvarado 2021). Regarding information and motivation, the respondent reiterated the extensive effect that dialogue between informed people can have, and the motivation generated by union with the aim of supporting and being consulted about the same goal that converges in the common benefit. One respondent commented:

It is a bit difficult, because for carrying out movements of this type you need people who want a change, have a goal and mind set on the objective and do not let themselves be defeated. The Panamanian himself is well off and expects someone else to fight his battles. But what I would do is meet with people determined to fight for their rights, undertake activities and information campaigns; so that Panamanians know more about everything that happens and make them understand that the fight belongs to everyone and for everyone, with the well-being of the people as its objective. (Unemployed male between 41 and 50 years old with university studies)

It is then that we relate information and motivation to training (education), seen as leadership practices acquired by people and seen as an opportunity to contribute to or respond to the crisis (Thornton 2021). Within these practices, we can mention the improvement in communication and empathy between people, the understanding of the importance of favoring the common good, the effectiveness of leading by example, and the opportunity to develop new attitudes and thus lead in the face of a situation while trying to prevent it from happening again (Fisher et al. 2020; Seidmann et al. 2005).

Some respondents confirmed that, for them, protest is a way to make change, asserting their rights and communicating about that with which they do not agree. On the other hand, 1.6% of the respondents take refuge in spirituality and argue that there is a need to approach God in order to get out of the crisis situation.

The survey indicated that, when asking about crisis, it was not necessarily referring to the COVID-19 crisis. However, 5.2% of the respondents referred to the health crisis, clarifying that it is important to be disciplined when following sanitary measures and restrictions indicated by the authorities. They also emphasized solidarity as a primary value that everyone must have as this period of economic uncertainty unfolds. Respondents also commented on their work as contributor to a better economic status in the country. One female formal worker between 18 and 30 years old with university studies expressed her thoughts on this: All of us nationals supporting micro entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs so that they flow among all. Another respondent, an unemployed male between 18 and 30 years old with secondary education recommended: Undertaking to generate your own income and sources of employment and income for others.

15.3% of the answers to this question were classified as “others” because they were either incomplete sentences or not direct answers to the question. However, respondents repeatedly referred to what is positive or negative that can be achieved from the crisis, from corruption, and from the state of the economy.

3.4. Question No. 4. What National Figure(s) Should Do Something about It?

Since a crisis can be perceived and valued differently by different people, we could say that crises are constantly subjected to interpretation and politicization (Edelman 1977). People live in their own communities and contexts with their own values and beliefs about responsibility toward others and who is responsible. In community contexts where various aspects of a crisis influence community responsibility, a sense of community responsibility emerges, and public administration frequently plays a critical role in facilitating crisis mitigation and response (Boyd and Martin 2020). However, it is not always the public administration that is to blame.

The respondents were provided with nine national figures in order to select the one they considered was responsible for providing a solution to the crisis. The provided figures were: teachers, government, church, media, society, everyone, me, others, and none. Of these, Government (62.6%) stood out as the most commonly selected, followed by All (18.7%) and Society (10.3%) (Table 7).

Table 7. National figures with responsibility to provide solutions to the crisis.

Responsible Figures	Number	Percent
Government	351	62.6
Everyone else	105	18.7
Society	58	10.3
Other	23	4.1
Teachers	20	3.6
Media	15	2.7
Me	13	2.3
Church	12	2.1
None	13	2.3
No answer	12	2.1

The vast majority of the respondents attribute the responsibility for improving national events to government figures (i.e., authorities, the President, ministers, and deputies) and to everyone else (i.e., government, private enterprise, and civil society). Very few respondents mentioned those related to education (teachers, 3.6%), church (2.1%), the media (2.7%) or themselves (me, 2.3%). Some respondents assert that no figure is competent (2.3%) and 2.1% did not answer.

Greater responsibility was attributed to the efforts that the elected government authorities made towards solutions. Those respondents who mentioned the government referred to the actions of the President and the authorities regarding the existence of corruption and a lack of transparency. One female formal worker between 18 and 30 years old with university studies stated:

I think that the laws and the defense of human rights should be more equitable. Many times, when speaking of politics, they commit acts of corruption that are hidden for the good of a few. This has had a harmful impact on the good that has been done for people and the nation itself. I think that this has been one of the most notorious crises in the world. The clash between those who have greater power and the victims of those decisions. The victims could be considered unemployed people with poor public services, including education.

Another respondent explained the authorities' responsibilities:

Last time I heard on the news, the director of IDAAN (Water Ministry) was asked to put his hand on his heart. And, I thought, he should put his hand on his salary since it is his job and that is why he is in the position. (Unemployed male between 18 and 30 years old with high school education)

Regarding the ALL category, the respondents not only supported the need for a better performance by the authorities, but also contemplated the importance of everyone being involved. On the present health crisis, one unemployed male between 18 and 30 years old with university studies said:

Not necessarily the well-known figures. We are all responsible for setting an example. We should not expect others to do it for us. If we all take care of ourselves and we are all as supportive as we can, it is not necessary for those most economically affected to take the streets and expose themselves.

Other respondent posed several ideas:

We citizens must empower ourselves more in the spaces of creation for the economy and education. Also, get more involved in the development of culture

and values in society. Due to the above, it seems to me that community work is fundamental in order to face these crises. Regarding the health issue, we need strong and constant government policies to provide quality service to the entire population. (Female formal worker between 51 and 60 years old with university studies)

Another respondent offered comment on who is to do the job:

I do not believe that only one figure can do this job, but also each individual who has the opportunity to do positive things for his community or his friends achieves a grain in the great mountain. (Unemployed female between 18 and 30 years old with university studies)

In a crisis there is always a person or entity considered responsible for it, and this influences the decisions of those who feel affected. The attribution of responsibility for the situation is ruled by discourse about the information received (i.e., the media). As a result, the perceptions and thinking of those affected are modified regardless of the objective truth and the subsequent public discourse will propose actions to overcome, avoid, and respond to future crises. However, this same discourse inspires different interpretations of the situation and has effects on the perception not only of the people affected but also at the institutional level (Von Scheve et al. 2016).

3.5. Question No. 5. What Should This Figure(s) Do?

Faced with the threat of a crisis, each person determines to whom he assigns responsibility for the execution of a solution and what type of solution should be executed. As we have been able to show, for the respondents of this study there is a high appreciation of the role of government authorities and the contributions that they make or can make are very important for the resolution of their needs.

Common developments in overcoming the crisis have brought deprivation to many, especially those who are politically and economically weak, and have often brought benefits to some who have the resources to deal with the new situation (Edelman 1977). In this sense, some respondents agreed that concepts such as unity and common sacrifice appear to be reasonable enough while being in the midst of any of the mentioned crises, as leaders tend to justify their actions and the sacrifices they demand from others. However, for those who actively question common assumptions about crises and investigate their causes and consequences, a different picture can emerge.

Respondents to this question provided opinions and ideas about how to solve the crisis. From their answers, we synthesized 13 concepts as ways to solve the crisis: the common good, seek/follow God, change/change, dialogue, new laws, education, justice, planning, setting an example, protest, work, transparency and others (Table 8).

Table 8. Solutions to the crisis.

Solutions to the Crisis	Number	Percent
Planning	107	19.1
Greater good	89	15.9
Justice	71	12.7
Transparency	66	11.8
Education	64	11.4
Set example	37	6.6
Work	12	2.1
Dialogue	10	1.8
Law enforcement	9	1.6
Change attitude	9	1.6
Protest	8	1.4
Spirituality	6	1.1
Other	95	16.9
No answer	21	3.7

Of the proposed solutions, planning (19.1%), the common good (15.9%), justice (12.7%), transparency (11.8%) and education (11.4%) stood out as highly accepted. The category Other had a high percentage (16.9%) due to the ambiguity of some answers, most of which did not reach any specific conclusion.

We made a count of the most commonly mentioned words (Table 9) within the answers to this question, in which the topic of Education was the most referred to in relation to what needs to be done, denoting discontent and recognition of the need to optimize this aspect. In the same way, work, or lack of work, causing the detriment of people's purchasing power, has affected the economy of households, triggering an imbalance. Corruption, as a practice that has managed to become the norm (Barsallo Alvarado 2021), was also identified and related to the causes of the lag in actions that might promote the development of the country (Mendoza and Cosme 2017).

Table 9. Words associated with solution to the crisis.

Mention	Male %	Female %	Total %
Education/educate	8.2	10.3	9.6
Work/job	10.9	6.9	8.2
Corruption/corrupted	8.2	6.9	7.3
Lay	7.1	5.3	5.9
Make better/improve	4.3	4.5	4.5
Transparency	2.7	2.4	2.5
Honest	2.7	2.1	2.3
Order	3.3	1.6	2.1

There is a difference (age \times mention) regarding the perception that respondents have regarding the duties or observances that people should address to improve the crisis. This may be due to the influence of the experiences that each has obtained throughout their lives, coupled with the way in which these experiences have been managed (Table 10).

Table 10. Perception of people's duties regarding crisis solution.

Mention	18–30	31–40	41–50	51–60	61–70	71+	Total
Education/educate	8.4	7.5	14.6	9.8	22.2	0.0	9.6
Work/job	7.4	5.6	11.7	7.3	33.3	0.0	8.2
Corruption/corrupted	6.7	8.4	10.7	2.4	0.0	0.0	7.3
Law	6.7	7.5	2.9	4.9	0.0	0.0	5.9
Make better/improve	6.7	1.9	1.9	2.4	0.0	0.0	4.5
Transparency	2.7	1.9	2.9	2.4	0.0	33.3	2.5
Honesty	0.7	6.5	1.9	4.9	0.0	33.3	2.3
Order	3.4	0.9	0.0	2.4	0.0	0.0	2.1

It is interesting that there are differences in age range related concerns. The majority of respondents referred to education as a means of reducing the crisis, while those ranging from 31–40 years old visualized that confronting corruption is more important. Older respondents referred to work or working hard, honesty and transparency as key concepts for combatting the growing crisis.

We can assert that both Panama and Latin America have had to face this great health crisis in addition to other crises. This has been done without a defined institutional architecture and has relied on resources such as information exchange and debt to multilateral financing funds (Sierra 2020) to try to mitigate its effects not only on the economy, but also on the general population. However, these effects have made it possible for people to perform a better self-analysis with respect to what they can contribute to improving the situation.

3.6. Question No. 6. What Aspect(s) Have Made the Crisis That You Have Previously Identified Deteriorate?

The COVID-19 pandemic debate has improved our understanding of the scope and forms of the global crisis's impact on our country and, more importantly, on ourselves. We find ourselves in the midst of a crisis scenario that is uncertain, complex, and multidimensional, and full of challenges that constantly disrupt the order of our lives and expose us to difficult decisions and changes.

Having already identified the crisis or crises affecting the country, the respondents proceeded to refer to different aspects that in some way have interfered in the aforementioned crises, intensifying them. We synthesized 13 aspects that can negatively intervene in a crisis situation. These aspects are: democracy, discrimination and inequalities, economy, education and training, isolation, *juega vivo*, labor market, lack of values, media, political situation, religious beliefs, social class, and technological development (Table 11).

Table 11. Aspects that cause the crisis to deteriorate.

Aspects	Extremely Likely	Likely	Extremely Unlikely	Neutral	No Answer
Education and training	87.7	9.1	1.1	0.7	1.4
Juega vivo	87.5	6.4	2.9	0.0	3.2
Economy	86.6	8.7	1.6	1.1	2.0
Lack of values	83.8	10.9	3.6	0.0	1.8
Political situation	82.9	9.4	2.9	0.5	4.3
Discrimination and inequalities	71.5	17.3	6.8	1.2	3.2
Labor market	67.9	23.4	5.7	0.5	2.5
Democracy	56.9	24.2	11.6	1.2	6.1
Social class	51.7	31.7	11.6	0.7	4.3
Media	49.7	32.4	10.7	1.4	5.7
Isolation	43.9	36.7	12.3	0.5	6.6
Technological development	39.4	37.4	19.3	0.7	3.2
Religious beliefs	25.8	36.4	28.9	0.2	8.7

Respondents affirm that education and training, *juega vivo*, economy, lack of values and the political situation play a more important role in the development or reversal of the crisis. Once again, we observe that education and training, its status and importance are latent in the minds of Panamanian residents. However, this not only includes education in the form of schooling, but the importance of training in order to enhance the independence of each individual. Training is not achieved by itself; an institutional and vocational effort is required, with long-term aspirations, which must promote welfare policies that contribute to the development of better citizens (Rodríguez Reyes 2016).

In the same way, *juega vivo* coupled with lack of values also contribute to the deterioration of the situation, as negative aspects added to it. Respondents also evaluated cultural practices such as *juaga vivo* and lack of values as aspects of negative influence that, beyond the crisis situation, lead to a setback in individual progress and that of the country.

Respondents drew our attention by mentioning discrimination and inequalities separately from politics, even when these could be closely related to the political or economic situation. According to Garcimartín et al. (2021), having high purchasing power helps the country focus on reducing poverty and inequalities, but in this case, respondents associated it with discrimination. The same was observed with democracy. As each crisis situation becomes an opportunity for analysis, allowing new effects to be visualized, inequalities become more preponderant when they are not only detected but accentuated by their association with the negative connotation of discrimination.

Respondents (67.9%) believe that the labor market scenario is not helping to alleviate the problem. It should be mentioned that when unemployment is high, people's quality of life suffers to the point where recuperation becomes almost impossible. Furthermore, the current interrelationship between the management of the economic crisis and persistently

high unemployment has a severe influence not just on physical health but on people's mental health (Espino Granado 2014). For example, the deficit of available employment has increased in the broad labor market due to the current economic crisis and the ineffectiveness of the palliatives taken by the government. The current situation is characterized by a high level of formal unemployment and a growing movement towards precarious employment, which facilitates the appearance of job stress, insecurity about the present, and fear of the future. The recession in the labor market associated with the economic crisis and the great income gap existing due to the inequalities between social classes, together with exclusive behavior and discrimination in general, are nothing more than links in the endless cycle of the general crisis that we all suffer. In addition to this, the preponderance of the current situation caused by the health crisis accentuates the negative impact that the economic crisis has on the general health and even the mental health of individuals.

The media is regarded as a powerful tool for imitative learning and ideology modeling (Barsallo Alvarado 2019). It can undoubtedly be used to advance progress, but respondents did not see it that way. Apart from having a powerful influence on how people act and interact in society, the media can also be used to divert attention away from what is at stake. In this sense, the media can also be detrimental to the country's efforts to combat the crisis.

Answers to this question show us that respondents are not referring only to the crisis that was once considered solely in terms of health, but rather to a permanent crisis that has become a component of the country's development. Certainly, some will argue that the current crisis is more than just financial or economic; it is also social, cultural, and human. In fact, the crisis has been an opportunity or, better said, a test of strength for countries in the way that activities of regional political and economic integration have been developed, and for their residents when they have been forced to put into practice different ways of survival.

4. Conclusions

Crises are sometimes closely linked to one another, even though each crisis is experienced as unique as it comes upon us. In this article, we have not tried to explore all the aspects related to crisis. Nevertheless, it is a fact that the recent pandemic has allowed us to observe how the extraordinary lockdowns and closures around the world have produced changes at all levels, in addition to experiencing a greater sense of crisis than that which already existed (Olick and Teichler 2021).

Panamanians are known to be critical of their society. The vast majority of people are somehow dissatisfied with the overall situation, and this critical viewpoint is shared with regard to the economic reality, social situation, environmental issues and culture. In the context of the crisis and under the effects of the pandemic, we have examined the current reality of some Panamanian residents, their vision of society and the country in which they live. Given that the aforementioned pandemic has damaged the normal standards of quality of life, solidarity, responsibility, and justice, residents' new thinking is evident because they have been impacted by the crisis, although we do not cease to consider the crisis as a situation that produces expectations towards obtaining new outcomes that may produce change and, thus, improve the quality of life (Rodríguez Zambrano and Castillo 2020).

Education, health, and labor crises were the types of crises most recognized by these Panamanian residents. However, women and men differ in their perception of which crisis is affecting Panamanians most. We were able to observe differences in the perception of the same issue with respect to the educational level of the respondent, showing that, the higher the education the respondent had, the more active was the coping and reflective self in the face of the crisis. Of the most recognized types of crises, we relate the education crisis and the labor crisis as elements of the same cycle, experiencing a direct effect of the current pandemic. However, the issue of education and its known shortcomings was not addressed directly by the respondents, unlike the labor issue. However, the educational crisis in Panama has promoted social deterioration in general. In this way, it is essential

to prioritize the educational issue as the integral axis of a dynamic aimed at raising the indicators of human development in the country.

Respondents emphasized the importance of planning future actions for the common good and not just for the benefit of a few. Contrastingly, the planning of these actions correspond to the authorities and, although respondents manifested the need to incorporate citizen participation in this planning, their responses showed a marked propensity to leave these tasks solely and exclusively to the government authorities. Respondents identified positive aspects of the crisis, such as the opportunity for change and improvement in quality of life, and negative aspects, such as greater mistrust in government institutions and ruling politicians.

Fear and ignorance must have serious consequences in societies paralyzed by slow-downs and confinement, also implying long-standing educational deficiencies and greater mistrust in the leadership of government institutions and politics itself, which have been rooted in the current pandemic and corruption, as perceived by the respondents in this study. Due to the changes driven by the current pandemic, the volatilization of fear or the existing uncertainty about the elected or future authorities, and the lack of leadership and transparency in the planning of projects that involve the common good, perhaps the overall situation does not allow us to resolve the different crises.

Beyond the various types of crises, respondents gave us a view of the country's situation, in which crisis has become a component that promises development opportunities, although these are not commonly shared. To say that we have figured out all aspects related to the perception that Panamanian residents could have about any crisis would be a lie, as there is no single defining aspect. The world constantly changes, and indeed it changes because crises. Nonetheless, the evidence is clear: people do not always identify the crisis as a general issue, but as a series of independent situations. Policymakers and civil society must focus on the future together, and not just on their own short-term interests, and work to educate and train society for future challenges implicit in all crisis situations. Therefore, we are proposing a new understanding of the topic, laying the groundwork for future research.

Future research into how Panamanians visualize and understand local and global issues is recommended. However, it should not only focus on numbers but on establishing a clearer voice of the people, as their perceptions of crises can have a significant impact on crisis management. More qualitative studies are required to gain more insight into social behavior or thinking patterns regarding these issues, perhaps thus avoiding that, in addressing the crisis, the country's progress will be limited by ignoring the experiences and perceptions of its people.

5. Limitations of the Study

This study contributes to a better understanding of Panamanian residents regarding the crisis, its implications and possible ways to ease the situation. However, there are still limitations that must be considered.

The sample in this study is gender-imbalanced, being mostly female, which interferes with the generalizability of the results. Although the sample was of a large size, which covered a broad span of ages, education level and work status, future research should consider the contribution of other variables.

The survey used for this study was distributed online in a period of the year 2020 in which the Panamanian population was on lockdown by instructions from the central government. It is possible that, in other instances, the level of participation in it would have been higher.

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Notes

- ¹ Quality of life (QoL) refers to an individual's perception of their position in life, in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live, and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns. It is a subjective but broad concept, which incorporates in a complex way the physical health of the person, the psychological state, the level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs, and the relationship with the characteristics of the environment (WHOQOL Group 1994). It is a concept of multidisciplinary use that denotes the well-being observed after the evaluation that the person makes of those in various areas of their life (Urzúa and Caqueo-Urizar 2012). It was first assessed through the per capita income (GDP) but now we refer to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as new ways of measuring well-being and sustainability, material and emotional, without leaving out aspects such as inequality, employment, energy, water, education, food, family, poverty, biodiversity, and transparency in institutions, among other aspects.
- ² Manuel Antonio Noriega was a Panamanian member of the armed forces and politician who served as military dictator and de facto leader of the Republic of Panama from 1983 to 1989 before being deposed by the United States during the invasion of Panama in 1989.
- ³ Social maturity is described as the way of behaving in situations that must be faced, individually, away from the family, in relation to the group, in relation to problem solving, and in relation to reality testing. It is how the individual in his walk acquires awareness of himself and others while understanding society and developing skills for his interaction in it (Comellas 2000).

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