# The Future is Now.

# The German Political Discourse on Intergenerational Responsibility and Justice in the Face of Climate Change

## A Critical Discourse Analysis

Master's thesis in Politics and Society

by

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## Abstract

*Key words:* climate justice, critical discourse studies, election manifestos, intergenerational responsibility, liberal exceptionalism

The broad geographical scope of anthropogenic climate change is largely undisputed; its temporal dimension, however, plays a far less prominent role in political discourses and scientific research. In order to contribute to awareness raising and knowledge production, this thesis explores the German political discourse on intergenerational climate justice over the past three decades. From a critical discourse studies perspective and based on an innovative theoretical approach merging the established politicisation and securitisation frameworks, the key findings can be structured around four overlapping phases: extrinsic polarisation (1990-1998), lethargic leadership (1998-2005), competing crises (2005-2013) and forced clarity (2013-2021). The analysis of qualitative election manifesto data revealed the important role of issue ownership parties, most notably the Greens, as both driving and, to a lesser extent, impeding forces. Over time, their successful politicisation and securitisation moves led to a de-ideologisation regarding the diagnosis, hence to the general recognition of climate change as an urgent, existential question. Political responses, however, continued to follow historical lines of conflict dividing ideological camps. Whereas intergenerational responsibility and justice have reached largely independent status for parties on the left side of the political spectrum, the issue remained subordinated to economical, social and religious considerations for centre-right parties. This is particularly true for the liberal FDP as it faces a special dilemma referred to as liberal exceptionalism: to reconcile a fundamental, liberty-driven concern for the rights and prosperity of future generations with the long-standing co-responsibility of neo-liberal economics for environmental degradation. The findings of this thesis may benefit researchers and policy-makers alike in their efforts to analyse, understand and shape long-needed, radically future-oriented political discourses.

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# Abbreviations

AfD ............................................................................... Alternative für Deutschland

BMU ................................................................................Bundesumweltministerium

BNatSchG ........................................................................Bundesnaturschutzgesetz

BVerfG ............................................................................. Bundesverfassungsgericht

CDA ................................................................................ Critical Discourse Analysis

CDS ................................................................................. Critical Discourse Studies

CDU .................................................... Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands

CSU .......................................................................................... Christlich-Soziale Union

EEG ............................................................................. Erneuerbare-Energien-Gesetz

FDP.................................................................................... Freie Demokratische Partei

GDR ............................................................................. German Democratic Republic

IPCC .......................................................Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

MDGs ........................................................................ Millennium Development Goals

PDS.............................................................Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus

SDGs ........................................................................Sustainable Development Goals

SED .......................................................... Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands

SPD.............................................................Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands

## Introduction

Global climate change is not only caused but must also be tackled by humankind (Myers et al., 2021; NASA, 2022). It blurs spatial and temporal boundaries in an unprecedented manner. Accordingly, power and responsibility to master the challenge are shared on many levels between various stakeholders. Whether or not mitigation and adaption efforts succeed depends, inter alia, on intergovernmental cooperation and joint commitments.

International agreements, however, are of a non-binding nature, and regulatory bodies lack independence from national-level interference. Therefore, despite the undeniably global dimension of climate change, domestic discourses and decisions matter to addressing this collective-action problem (Follesdal & Hix, 2006; Ostrom, 2010). Two observations make Germany a highly relevant case in this context: First, the country's significantly higher than average and above-budget greenhouse gas emissions (Ritchie & Roser, 2020). Second, its economic and diplomatic (soft) power, especially in the field of climate foreign policy (Li, 2016; Lowy Institute, 2019; Quitzow & Thielges, 2020). Taken together, the country not only has major responsibility but also the necessary means to act. Hence, Germany's response to climate change matters. This relevance becomes even more evident when viewed from an intergenerational climate justice perspective. In view of a creeping "catastrophe without event" (Horn, 2018, p. 55), today's (in)action strongly affects the lives and liberties of future generations. Politicians and parties, however, are mandated and elected by present-day voters. Consequently, they are faced with conflicts of interest, trade-offs and dilemmas, for instance, between weighing short-term advantages against long-term benefits and responsibilities.

So far, studies dealing with climate justice in the German context have shared a narrow perspective and focused on specific groups such as the Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion movements (Buzogány & Scherhaufer, 2022; von Zabern & Tulloch, 2021), on sectoral dynamics (Fleischer & Hustedt, 2012; Schmidt et al., 2019) and on very limited or

undefined time spans (Schneider & Ollmann, 2013). Contributions that have looked more deeply into the politicisation and securitisation of climate change over time, lack a clear future-oriented perspective (von Lucke, 2020; Watanabe & Mez, 2004). This major research gap is unsatisfactory not only from an academic but also from a societal perspective: Anthropogenic climate change and environmental degradation will affect and burden younger and future generations most severely (Bednar et al., 2021; Watts et al., 2019). At the same time, these groups have limited (access to) social and political power – due to being denied suffrage, unable to hold change-making positions, or simply not even born yet (Routley et al., 2021). Therefore, insights into the long-term interplay between political actors and the conditions of future-oriented policy-making are urgently needed. This knowledge is a key prerequisite for meaningful change and tackling humankind's greatest challenges. Creating it requires a paradigm change, moving from an 'ex post' to an 'ex ante' approach in practicing science, hence to a perspective "that learns from the past about the present for the future" (Bai et al., 2016, p. 353).

In order to live up to this ideal and to explore the 'German way' of dealing with intertemporal challenges linked to climate change, a political discourse analysis was conducted. This critical and comprehensive qualitative review of key publications – political parties' election manifestos contrasted with governments' environmental reports – provided valuable insights into partisan similarities and differences regarding intergenerational climate justice. More precisely, this research project aims to find out if and how the topic was politicised over the past decades. In order to develop a suitable analytical approach that enables to identify critical discourse moments, a conflict-oriented understanding of politicisation was extended with the neighbouring and conceptually linked concept of securitisation. Accordingly, this research not only explored whether intergenerational climate justice was identified as an object of political action by governments and parties, it also examined whether the issue was framed as an existential menace that requires emergency responses – and if so, by whom, in what way

and to what extent (Buzan et al., 1998; Wiesner, 2021a). The theory-guided analytical approach provided an innovative tool to foster a nuanced understanding of the German political discourse and to answer the following research questions:

How has the discourse on intergenerational responsibility and justice arising from climate change been politicised and securitised in German parties' election manifestos over the past three decades? And how can these discursive dynamics be understood?

# I.     Theoretical Framework

Before turning to the critical analysis of the German political discourse on intergenerational climate justice, first, it is important to lay some theoretical bases. Therefore, from fundamental moral considerations a line will be drawn to the research problem at hand. A revised framework blending politicisation with securitisation will play a central role in this endeavour. The innovative theoretical perspective, it will be argued, not only allows to bridge the philosophical and the political domain, but also to strengthen the analytical approach to understanding the discursive practices involved.

## Intergenerational responsibility and justice

Demands for responsibility and justice in the face of the intertemporal implications of climate change are inherently moral in nature. However, especially on a governmental level, they are neither undisputed nor are they realised today or any time soon (Vrousalis, 2016). For the sake of clarity, this paper adopts a broad definition of future generations. It covers both those who are not yet born and those who are not yet citizens, thus, includes children and adolescents (Caney, 2018). Future generations, in this sense, are non-voice parties in today's democratic processes (Köhler, 2017). They share a high degree of affectedness without having opportunities to meaningfully participate or achieve descriptive representation in political decision-making processes.

Intergenerational questions remain unresolved problems and challenges to moral theory, however, this may not suffice to justify political short-termism (Parfit, 1984; Weston, 2012). Also known as the presentist bias, this notion describes the structural tendency of democratic processes to incentivise pursuing short-term benefits at the expense of long-term interests for epistemic, motivational and institutional reasons (Ederer et al., 2006; González-Ricoy & Gosseries, 2016). It leads, inter alia, to environmental degradation being more lucrative than the sustainable use of natural resources (Boyce, 1994). The short-sightedness of politics and its

apparent inability to fully include future interests into decision-making processes become increasingly challenged by the propensity of outcomes to transcend the spatial and temporal boundaries of the procedures they were produced by (Brown Weiss, 1992). Based on this observation, Hans Jonas (1984) called for a new ethics that takes into account the far-reaching implications of human action in modern times. His diagnosis: "The nonexistent has no lobby, and the unborn are powerless" (Jonas, 1984, p. 22). It can be argued that future generations' vulnerability to detrimental consequences of previous actions or omissions, including anthropogenic ecocide and climate change, and the concomitant power, impose strong responsibilities and moral obligations on current generations (Goodin, 1985; Jonas, 1984).

Given that governing pro tempore guarantees responsiveness and accountability towards current citizens, democracy should not be roundly condemned for its presentism (Thompson, 2010). Nevertheless, short-termism and moral uncertainty justify a precautionary principle with regard to posterity (Birnbacher, 2012; Davidson, 2008). According to this approach, climate-destructive actions are to be treated as wrongful harms. Consequently, intergenerational justice should be included in policy- and decision-making processes at all levels (Davidson, 2008; Rose & Hoffmann, 2020). This morally and politically derived conclusion found its way into a landmark decision by the Federal Constitutional Court in 2021, according to which the government's Federal Climate Change Act, the core of German climate policy, was incompatible with Basic Law. The court ruled that fundamental rights imply an intertemporal guarantee of freedom that requires to protect future generations against greenhouse gas reduction burdens being unilaterally and disproportionally offloaded onto them. Therefore, "the legislator should have taken precautionary steps" (BVerfG, 2021).

Disagreement and conflict constitute key prerequisites of an open discourse (Habermas, 2019; Vrousalis, 2016). But have these debates also entered the party-political realm in the past decades?

**Politicisation**

The process of issues finding or making their way into politics is referred to as politicisation. In contrast to viewing politics as a rigid system, an action-based understanding conceives politicisation as an act of marking a phenomenon as political (Palonen, 2003). According to this broad, macro-level definition, politicisation has no boundaries and is not restricted to any single sphere. This understanding might be fruitful in some contexts, for the research at hand, however, an appropriately narrow definition is needed to analyse the written records of political actors (Wiesner, 2021a). This can be found in conflict-oriented approaches. Here, too, contingency and controversy are central, but the role of the public is different. Issues might, as action-based approaches suggest, follow a bottom-up model and be brought to the political agenda by the public. Politicisation, however, is only related to relevant conflicts, namely those, which visibly take place and effect in the political system (Schattschneider, 1957). Again, this theorising does not preclude the possibility that politicisation happens outside institutionalised politics. The conflict-oriented understanding, however, helps to develop a suitable analytical lens capable of detecting the manifestations of (strategic) positioning in the German political discourse. In the course of this, it seems reasonable to watch out for even "relatively slight changes in the intensity, visibility, direction, and scope of conflict" as they are "likely to produce great consequences" (Schattschneider, 1957, p. 937). Based on this notion of politics, Grande and Hutter (2016) developed three dimensions of politicisation – issue salience, actor expansion and actor polarisation – which will be used as sensitising concepts for the discourse analysis. The conflict-oriented understanding provides a solid basis to explore the political discourse including partisan conflicts and agenda-setting as marked by moves and waves of politicisation (Palonen, 2021). It also allows to track both the supply and, although to a lesser extent, the demand side of politics. In order to fully capture the multifaceted nature of intergenerational justice, however, an extended framework is needed.

**Securitisation**

Whereas most studies chose to quantify data, there are other ways to learn about the degree of politicisation – the intensity, visibility, direction and scope of an issue brought to the institutionalised arenas of political action (Dolezal et al., 2016). This thesis makes use of an innovative theoretical and analytical approach: a revised politicisation framework extended with the notion of securitisation.

The concept of securitisation, developed by members of the Copenhagen School, builds upon a broad definition of security that reaches far beyond traditional military-political understandings. Thus, it also encompasses the notion of human security and issues such as food, health and the environment (Brzoska, 2009). Following this understanding, security is about survival, about existential threats justifying emergency measures. Importantly, securitisation does not require objective real-world indicators. Instead, security can be thought of as what in language theory is called a "speech act" (Buzan et al., 1998). According to Wæver (1989), "it is the utterance in itself that is the act: by saying it, something is done" (p. 5). This implies that if a securitising actor such as a political party or politician, frames a referent object (e.g., the long-term conservation of the ecosystem or biodiversity) as urgent, harmful and requiring a break free of established rules, one might witness securitisation. It is important, however, to distinguish between securitising moves and successful securitisation. The latter can only be achieved, if the securitising actor finds substantial political resonance and acceptance among the public (Buzan et al., 1998).

Two main considerations substantiate the decision to draw on this particular concept: First, the framework allows to locate any public issue on a continuum ranging from non-politicised through politicised to securitised. Consequently, securitisation serves as an upper-bound indicator that signals the intensification of politicisation (Buzan et al., 1998). If a securitising move was successful, the issue at stake is no longer a matter of choice or up for

discussion. Instead, it is framed as 'without alternative'. In this sense, securitisation paradoxically leads to both politicisation and, to a certain extent, de-politicisation (Wiesner, 2021b). This is why the securitisation framework, if carefully applied, can expand and strengthen the analytical value of the politicisation framework: Omission of intergenerational climate justice equals non-politicisation; securitisation, in turn, indicates a high degree of politicisation in the German political discourse. The extended conceptualisation provides a frame of reference and, thus, a key prerequisite to compare trends over time and between actors.

Second, the framework already introduces environmental issues such as the survival of species or climate mitigation as possible reference objects (Buzan et al., 1998; von Lucke, 2020). Especially in the case of intergenerational climate justice, adopting a broad, nonessentialist understanding allows to understand securitisation as "a reflexive and contextualized process that generates meanings and practices" (Trombetta, 2008, p. 600). Indeed, politicisation and the conceptually linked process of securitisation may happen in fora other than the political and by entities other than parties and governments. Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged that securitisation can best be studied by scrutinising political discourses and configurations (Buzan et al., 1998). Attention should thus be devoted to institutional, procedural and structural mechanisms as manifested, contested and re-established in linguistic, rhetorical and semiotic structures (Buzan et al., 1998; Trombetta, 2008; Urquijo et al., 2015).

## II.      Methodology

Based on these theoretical considerations, this research aims to explore the political discourse on intergenerational climate justice in Germany. In order to not only describe but also understand the dynamics over time, the written records of political parties are analysed in retrospect as well as in relation to governmental reports and contextual factors. Accordingly, in line with a critical discourse studies (CDS) perspective, this research is particularly interested in the link between power relations and social problems, between structures and practices (Fairclough, 2001; van Dijk, 2015). Therefore, a qualitative and predominantly inductivist design was deemed appropriate for this thesis.

**Data**

Given the complex, long-term nature of intergenerational justice in view of human-caused climate change, this research benefits from combining and comparing longitudinal data sets. Therefore, a qualitative content analysis was performed on two types of documents: election manifestos and environmental reports.

*Background*

Election manifestos are the result of intra-party and societal debates. Drawing on spatial theories and the median voter theorem, in multiparty systems parties' positions can, to a certain extent, be considered to reflect the general public opinion as well as the varying interests of specific societal segments and interest groups (Black, 1948; Downs, 1957). Although electoral programmes provide insight into the polarisation of conflict among actors and the salience of certain issues, they nevertheless have limited informative value when it comes to actual policy-making and institutional or procedural responses to challenges (Laver & Garry, 2000). Considering the varying strategic incentives, internal and external constraints as well as the growing importance of agenda-setting and issue-ownership in partisan competition, political

parties' programmes serve different functions: On the one hand, they communicate policy positions, on the other hand, they include strategic, rhetorical statements to shape public opinion and mobilise voters through priming, framing and cueing (Adams et al., 2009; Eder et al., 2017; Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Klingemann et al., 1994; van der Brug, 2004). It is thus important to be vigilant, inter alia, about parties deciding to obscure and clarify programmatic supply or to adopt accommodative, adversarial or dismissive strategies when facing competitors (Lacewell, 2017; Meguid, 2005).

Political parties play an important role as intermediaries in gatekeeping positions linking the demand and the supply side of politics. Due to their constraining impact on incumbent government activities, possible coalition building efforts and the policies parties themselves pursue once in office, election manifestos matter (Hofferbert & Budge, 1992; Knill et al., 2010; McDonald & Budge, 2008). By implication, it is all the more important to study if and how partisan outputs translate into government policy-making and, subsequently, into real-world outcomes. The last step goes beyond the scope of this research. The latter link, however, is incorporated through the (quadrennial) environmental reports. In line with statutory requirements, these publications inform about the state of the environment and the most important environmental policies, problems and challenges from a German government perspective (BMU, 2019). The environmental reports, thus, serve as a valuable supplement aiding the interpretation of party-political developments. In conjunction with the party manifestos and contextual factors, the resulting systematic and longitudinal analysis promises insights into parties' (strategic) position-taking and how socio-political tensions may lead to lasting political change. Moreover, it may uncover conditions for evidence-based policy-making and the possible existence of a knowledge-action gap in politics, especially when it comes to climate action (Knutti, 2019). The research design of this thesis, it is argued, provides the necessary tools and depth needed to explore how narratives and meanings are constructed as part of a discourse among interdependent actors (Zúñiga, 2018).

*Case selection*

Although scientific debates reach back as far as the 1970s or even earlier, the issue of climate change only gained momentum and entered both mainstream societal and political discourses in the 1990s (Schmidt et al., 2019; von Lucke, 2020; Wellmann, 2016). At that time, not only sectoral trends but also broader geo-political and domestic transformations marked a historical paradigm shift: The Berlin Wall fell, so did the Iron Curtain. German reunification has had a tremendous impact on domestic politics and society since then. Therefore, tracking and analysing the discourse about an emerging global challenge almost from the very beginning it received mainstream attention and was put on both the national and global agenda, constitutes a unique research opportunity.

The German political landscape is characterised by a pluralist multi-party system, considerable decentralisation and a culture of consensus leading to a high level of political stability (Lijphart, 1984, 1994). Accordingly, power and responsibility are shared across different levels and among various stakeholders. Although parties play a major role in shaping German politics, they are nonetheless constrained by veto points and players. The 2021 Federal Constitutional Court decision, which has already been mentioned, serves as a good example (BVerfG, 2021). For the purpose of this study, it was decided to include the manifestos of all parties voted into the German parliament (Bundestag). In order to ensure a continuous record of the partisan politics, the author chose to also analyse manifestos of parties that were temporarily not[1] or not yet[2] represented in Bundestag. The programmatic supply of the following political parties was explored: the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands, CDU), the Christian Social Union in Bavaria[3]

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[1] FDP failed to meet the 5% electoral threshold and was not represented in Bundestag from 2013 until 2017
[2] AfD, founded in February 2013, failed to meet the 5% electoral threshold and was not represented in Bundestag from 2013 until 2017
[3] CDU and CSU are independent parties, however, they form an alliance and a parliamentary group. CSU has members and local affiliations only in Bavaria, whereas CDU stands for election in the remaining 15 federal states. In 1990, CDU and CSU presented separate manifestos, but joint programmes ever since then.

(Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern, CSU), the Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, SPD), Alliance 90/The Greens[4] (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), the Free Democratic Party (Freie Demokratische Partei, FDP), the Left[5] (Die Linke) and the Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD). All textual data – 49 election manifestos and eight environmental reports – were collected from publicly available sources such as government or political party (foundation) websites. In total, 57 documents were analysed. The German domestic discourse on intergenerational climate justice cannot be understood without taking into account important contextual factors. Therefore, Figure 1 gives an overview of the publications analysed as well as the governing coalitions and pivotal events on a national and international level.

*Ethics and privacy statement*

The research does not involve human participants or sensitive personal data requiring consent. Therefore, the proposed thesis is considered to be in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam.
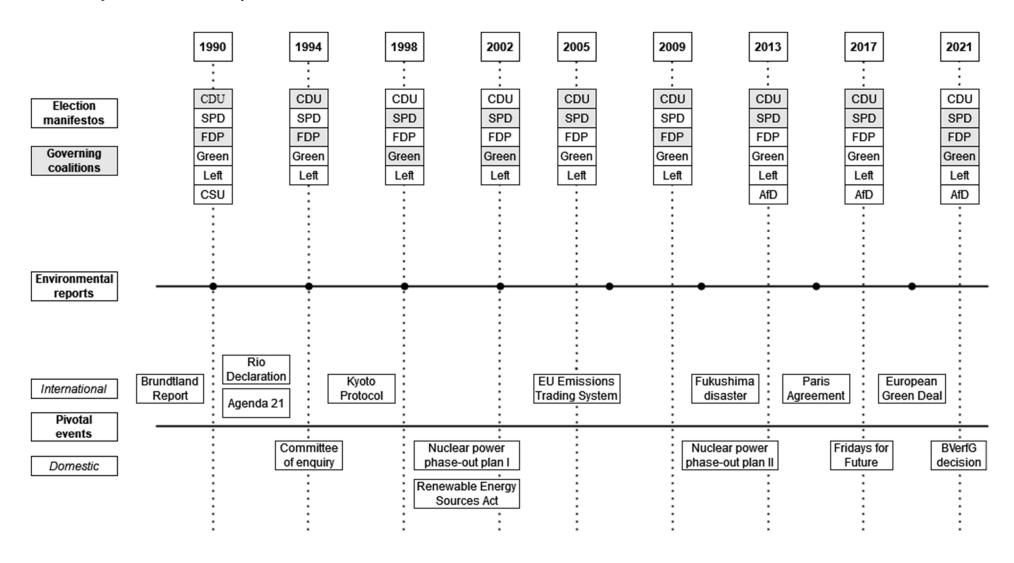
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[4] The party competed as "The Greens" in the Western part of the country and as "Alliance 90/Greens – Citizens' Movement" in the territory of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1990. The 5% threshold was applied separately, only the Eastern Greens gained representation. Both parties merged in 1993 and formed "Alliance 90/The Greens"

[5] The party competed under different names: "Linke Liste/PDS" (1990), "PDS" (1994-2002), "Linkspartei.PDS" (2005) and "Die Linke" (since 2009). It failed to reach the 5% threshold in 2002, however, was represented with two members in Bundestag due to winning two direct constituencies: The Left also failed to reach the 5% threshold in 2021. The party was nonetheless entitled to full proportional representation as it won three direct constituencies.

**Figure 1**

*Overview of the Documents Analysed as Embedded in the Historical Context*

## Critical Discourse Studies

A constructivist perspective, as taken by this research, seems especially fruitful for issues characterised by long time frames, large uncertainty and high ambiguity. All these attributes are basic ingredients of any discourse linked to climate change, particularly those related to intertemporal questions (Schneider & Ollmann, 2013). The longitudinal data analysed as part of this study cannot be understood without taking into account the historical context at the respective points in time. Moreover, the stakeholders and their positions are strongly intertwined: Political parties, for instance, can form governing coalitions and, thus, contribute to both opinion-forming and policy-making. In order to capture the latent structures of meaning as embedded in "cognitive, social, historic, and cultural contexts" (Urquijo et al., 2015, p. 279) and consistent with the aim of this thesis to understand rather than to quantify trends and relations, a critical discourse studies perspective constitutes a promising theoretical and methodological approach. It provides an adequate scientific angle to critically interpret the political discourse and normatively reflect upon the findings in a subsequent step.

CDS, however, is not a standardised, ready-to-use instrument; it needs to be constructed and adapted to the research topic. In line with the theoretical framework, the resulting approach was designed to not only capture contributions to the discourse, but to also qualitatively assess (ranging from non-politicised through politicised to securitised) the dynamics. The chosen methodology provided the researcher with a tool to discover different story lines and to grasp the flow of the discourse as embedded in historical context and marked by turning points, institutionalised patterns and interaction (Metag, 2016).

Both the approach to the data as well as a set of open-ended content-analytical units and sensitising concepts were defined in advance to ensure a systematic, theory-guided procedure. The resulting broad coding guidelines comprised important concepts and keywords derived from the theoretical framework and built upon previous research efforts (Boston, 2017; von

Lucke et al., 2014). In line with scientific standards, an initial perusal of approximately 50 percent of texts revealed important patterns, which allowed to revise and further develop the coding scheme out of the data (Mayring, 2014). Hence, the creation of the codebook was both deductive and inductive, theory- and data-driven. The pilot tested and revised category system lead to a clear and adequately abstract analytical frame.

Born of the conviction that the political discourse of intergenerational climate justice can only be understood as interwoven with other partisan positions, debates and conflicts, all documents were manually reviewed on a line-by-line basis and fully coded. This time-consuming in-depth procedure proved to be extremely valuable in producing a close-knit network of knowledge along longitudinal and partisan lines. Although distinctly different from manifestos in form, function and content, and therefore particularly challenging, the analysis of environmental reports turned out to enrich this research significantly. The results of the CDS-guided qualitative content analysis will be presented in the following section.

<center>**III.     Results and Discussion**</center>

The qualitative analysis of the data revealed four major phases of the German political discourse on intergenerational climate justice: The phase of extrinsic polarisation (1990-1998), of lethargic leadership (1998-2005), of competing crises (2005-2013) and of forced clarity (2013-2021). These periods are based on macro developments derived from election manifestos and supplemented by insights from environmental reports. They are to be understood as overlapping and simplified descriptions of a complex, multilateral discourse on intergenerational climate justice involving multiple stakeholders and influencing factors.

**Phase of extrinsic politicisation (1990-1998)**

Attention is a scarce resource (Crawford, 2015). From this perspective, issue salience can be regarded as a zero-sum game (Lahav, 2004). Amidst the historical transformations and uncertainties related to German reunification in 1990, many political matters were downgraded to second-order issues. Developing Germany's East, the so-called "Aufbau Ost" of former GDR territory, and the geo-political creation of a global peace order after the dissolution of the Soviet Union were prioritised, while side-lining other challenges, including climate change. Taking into account these particular framework conditions, the party-political dynamics during this phase can be understood along three story lines: bloc mentality, liberal exceptionalism and sole issue ownership.

In an effort to remove the "legacy of socialism" (CDU, 1990, p. 3) epitomised by the Left, parties of the right spectrum and, to a lesser extent, Social Democrats, aimed to address environmental issues en passant while focusing on social and economic challenges through means of the Soziale Marktwirtschaft (social market economy) model. New macro-political conditions in a post-Soviet world and the experience of international ecological interdependencies following the Chernobyl nuclear disaster "triggered fears and posed questions" (BMU, 1990, p. 15), and ultimately altered the common understanding of security.

As a result, environmental degradation was not securitised due to its detrimental consequences for current and future generations but merely to distinguish a Christian conservative, neo-liberal establishment from a reactionary, socialist antagonist that threatened to destroy God's creation by "recklessly poisoning soil, water and air" (CSU, 1990, p. 6). The underlying ideologisation of ecological issues called for strict actor polarisation and led to an ambiguous attitude towards securitising moves that manifested in promising a good and secure future while strongly rejecting "fear for the future, screaming for disasters, and doom and gloom" (CSU, 1990, p. 4).

The environmental reports published by the liberal-conservative coalition reveal that actor polarisation was strategically used, whereas religious and ethical concerns constituted permanent policy positions: "Preserving the integrity of creation also means: to protect the environment and protecting it for our children and grandchildren" (BMU, 1990, p. 25). In order to meet the challenges of modern civilisation in the technological age along with the uncertainty of future developments, according to the government, ethically responsible decision-making must factor in a "security margin" (BMU, 1990, p. 25) . The environmental reports at that time, much more explicitly than the manifestos, named the intertemporal risks and dangers related to climate change due to the long time lag between causing and implications: "Even if not all the complex scientific interrelations of this looming global environmental threat have been clarified yet, the precautionary principle urges us to act immediately in our own interest and in the interest of future generations" (BMU, 1994, p. 206). Thus, it can be argued that new risks arising from an emerging climate crisis became evident to all parties, but were often covered under the garment of religiously or ideologically justified concerns for future generations. The apparent knowledge-action gap was reflected in rather unambitious policy-making by the conservative-led governing coalition: Instead of granting environmental protection as a fundamental and enforceable right, CDU, CSU and FDP opted for a more moderate response and introduced a new national objective in 1993 (BMU, 1994). This constitutional provision, for the first time, established safeguarding natural resources as a state responsibility towards

future generations (Schmid, 2013). Other than that, the governing parties almost exclusively proposed using pre-existing economic tools such as "the powers and steering mechanisms of the market" (CDU & CSU, 1994, p. 26), and narrow sectoral responses to environmental degradation.

Bloc thinking, however, could be found on both ends of the party-political spectrum. The Left, a party following an economically socialist agenda, drew on actor polarisation to pinpoint political responsibility: "The capitalist market economy stands for unbridled economic growth leading to further ecological destruction" (Linke Liste/PDS, 1990, p. 19). Similar to the conservative parties, although in the exact opposite direction, the Left securitised the antagonism between democratic socialism and capitalist societies in the Western hemisphere. Human survival, they claim, required turning away from "capitalist exploitation and profit-orientation" as pursued by "the German government and other global powers" (PDS, 1994, pp. 4–5). A climate-related concern for future generations, again, was not driven eo ipso, but was part of an ideologically charged debate.

The economically liberal FDP faced a particular challenge in the early 1990s and, as will be shown, up until the present day. This specificity will be referred to as *liberal exceptionalism*: On the one hand, the party belonged to all governing coalitions since 1969, hence, was co-responsible for the ecological repercussions of federal policies following an economically neoliberal model. This complicity provided strong incentives to obscure the programmatic supply and to de-emphasise the issue in the political discourse. On the other hand, issue ownership over preserving and expanding civil and economic liberties required proactive policies: "Liberal politics is a constant struggle against short-sightedness" (FDP, 1990, p. 13). In line with this observation, the party recognised the insidious threat of environmental degradation, while stressing the benefits of less state interference (FDP, 1990). This apparent contradiction was resolved by actor expansion. Intergenerational responsibility

was shifted to other actors, inter alia, via privatisation and the introduction of the polluter-pays principle as well as the right of associations to initiate proceedings (FDP, 1990). Moreover, it was taken to the European level by demanding "to enshrine the guiding principle of an ecological future for subsequent generations in a prospective European constitution" (FDP, 1994, p. 128).

The Greens, in contrast to their competitors, were neither constrained by previous decisions as a ruling party nor by strong social or economic demands of their voter base. Emerging from anti-war and anti-nuclear energy movements, the party could claim issue ownership over an environmentalist agenda from the very beginning. The strong, undisputed issue ownership allowed and incentivised them to clarify their programmatic supply without having to consider strong ideological or network obligations. For this reason, they took a clear position and called for the "primacy of ecology over […] economic interests" (DIE GRÜNEN, 1990, p. 8). More than any other party, they went beyond environmental degradation and also securitised climate change by calling it a worldwide catastrophe transgressing planetary boundaries, the threat of which could only be compared to a "nuclear bloody war of extermination" (DIE GRÜNEN, 1990, p. 8). Based on this devastating diagnosis, they presented themselves as the only viable alternative to the incumbent government and demanded a "solidarity-based, ecological transformation of the global economy" (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, 1994, p. 3). The holistic, cross-sectional view was based on the party's core intergenerational self-understanding and since then often-repeated narrative: "We have only borrowed the world from our children" (DIE GRÜNEN, 1990, p. 17).

Intergenerational climate justice, albeit to a limited extent, became passively politicised through ideologically motivated actor polarisation and securitisation. The Greens exceptional intrinsic concern for resolving environmental problems and their divergent positions, however, obtained limited influence due to the dominating salience of geo-political transformations.

**Phase of lethargic leadership (1998-2005)**

Landmark agreements on climate change such as the Rio Declaration (1992) or the Kyoto Protocol (1997), underscore the growing attention given to the issue on a global level. These intergovernmental efforts, however, could not be translated into consistent policy-making in Germany due to constraints and restrictions of the incumbent government and a lack of incentives for opposition parties.

At first, the international paradigm change and their long-standing commitment to ecological sustainability gave the Greens the opportunity to harness their potential and to call for a change of government: "The challenges of a new century cannot be mastered using the concepts of yesterday" (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, 1998, p. 5). In order to distance themselves from the incumbent government and its unsatisfactory political record, they heavily politicised future challenges through actor polarisation and securitisation: The conservative political model would not only lead to irresponsibility and failure regarding future-oriented policy-making, it would also throw the country into an "economic, ecological and social crisis" (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, 1998, p. 14). Consequently, the 1998 federal elections were framed as a choice "between preserving our natural livelihoods and growing climate catastrophe" (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, 1998, p. 5). Averting this danger, according to the Greens, required a joint majority with SPD in the German parliament (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, 1998).

The subsequent coalition agreement between SPD and the Greens can be regarded as a major step towards politicisation of intergenerational climate justice as it reached a new political arena, thus, an expansion of actors and a higher level of salience in the governmental agenda. At the same time, after years of successful securitising moves by the Greens and its civil-society allies leading to contagious effects on other parties' strategic positioning, the environmentalists now presented themselves in a tamed manner (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN,

1998, 2002). Research has shown that governing parties avoid putting issues on the agenda, if they expect widespread disagreement leading to an inability to craft compromise (van der Brug & van Spanje, 2009). Conflicting interests between the Social Democrats and the Greens might have lowered their ambitions to a point that allowed them to form a governing coalition in the first place and to agree to a second term in office in 2002.

The SPD had particularly strong incentives to strategically de-emphasise the urgency and intergenerational nature of climate change, for instance, due to strong office-seeking incentives to not undermine the Greens' issue ownership; an effort with little prospect of success anyway (Budge & Laver, 1986; van der Brug & van Spanje, 2009). Moreover, in line with leftist exceptionalism, close ties to trade unions, many of which not yet ready to risk large-scale social and economic transformations impacting their member base, restricted the Social Democrat's ideological and strategic flexibility (Adams et al., 2009). Unsurprisingly, the Social Democratic Party, similar to the conservative Christian Democrats, therefore focused on the idea of a "Generationenvertrag" (SPD, 1998, p. 39). This quasi contractual understanding of solidarity and social justice between living generations was linked to traditional policy areas important to their voters including social security benefits, youth unemployment or national debt (CDU & CSU, 1998; SPD, 1998).

Constrained by the coalition partner, interest groups and (macro-) political framework conditions and events, framing climate change as urgent and harmful came with risks at the turn of the century. As a consequence, the government failed to put their firm belief that "the challenges of today cannot be solved using recipes from yesterday" (SPD, 2002, p. 7) into practice. Developing a national sustainability strategy with intergenerational justice as one of four focal areas, adding a forward-thinking perspective to the Federal Nature Conservation Act (Bundesnaturschutzgesetz, BNatSchG), passing the Renewable Energy Sources Act (Erneuerbare-Energien-Gesetz, EEG) and initiating the so-called Energiewende (energy

transition), a gradual nuclear power phase-out plan, were far from enough to mitigate climate change (BMU, 2002).

The remaining parties, for different reasons, had little incentive to push the incumbent government to take more intergenerational climate responsibility. Following issue ownership theorising, they shared strong incentives to obscure their programmatic supply as they collectively faced a competitor with long-standing commitment and expertise in environmental questions (Lacewell, 2017). Moreover, the (intentional) omission of intergenerational climate justice in their manifestos might indicate a dismissive strategy, which historically proved to be most successful if the issue is of minor relevance to the voter base (Meguid, 2005).

In contrast to the union of CDU/CSU, the FDP expressed deep concerns over future generations "access to liberties and […] economic development" (FDP, 2002, p. 25). Nevertheless, it was ideologically bound to not securitise intergenerational climate justice. For this reason, the Liberals were trapped struggling for a reasonable balance between liberty and security, between the Kantian leitmotif of individual political maturity and geo-political security challenges especially in an increasingly interdependent post-Chernobyl, post-9/11 world (Andexinger, 2014). The attempt to find a compromise led to the paradoxical understanding of a "freedom to take responsibility" (FDP, 2002, p. 2). Based on the imperative of responsibility, the FDP rejected "ideologically motivated environmental hysteria" (FDP, 1998, p. 77) and promoted an optimistic, market-oriented perspective instead. The proposed introduction of an official "generational balance sheet" (FDP, 1998, p. 39) juxtaposing debit and credit in order to raise awareness for intergenerational responsibility, appears progressive at first glance, but reactionary at second: An economically-inspired balance listing to offset burdens (e.g., national debt) with benefits (e.g., education) ignores the all-encompassing and urgent nature of climate change (FDP, 1998, 2002).

A more radical approach to societal transformation can be found on the very left side of the party-political spectrum. From a strong anti-establishment position, the Left party countered neo-liberal arguments and short-sightedness of an economic and political elite with a solidary and environment-friendly vision of living together (PDS, 1998). However, even the opposition party without feasible coalition-building options was not free of constraints: On the one hand, the Left had to respond to the everyday needs of a comparably less educated, low-income voter base demanding social justice; on the other hand, the party, just as the SPD, faced network and organisational constraints (Adams et al., 2009). This might explain a certain degree of restraint in politicising and securitising the long-term consequences of climate change per se without it being linked to ideological struggles against "the pact of the economically powerful" (PDS, 2002, p. 26).

After decades of social activism, scientific research and institutional opposition on all levels, global climate change entered the realm of politics. The preservation of the natural bases of life across borders, although to a varying extent and in different shapes, became broad consensus among German parties. This convergence on a positional level, however, did not lead to determined action. Instead, intergenerational responsibility and justice remained vague ideas in a political discourse marked by strategic and ideological reluctance.

**Phase of competing crises (2005-2013)**

Climate change became a relevant and visible conflict in German politics, a key prerequisite for meaningful politicisation following Schattschneider (1957). The gradual but significant shift in discourse was interrupted by elections bringing a grand coalition and later a conservative-liberal coalition with a stronger neoliberal economic agenda to power. Concurrent global financial and economic crises turned out to become critical discourse moments.

Pushed by the national and international changes in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Christian Democrats, more clearly than ever before, recognised the alarming degree of climate

change and its intergenerational implications: "Global climate change is already reality today. It is accelerating and becoming a threat to God's creation and the livelihood opportunities of future generations" (CDU & CSU, 2009, p. 70). Nevertheless, the newly formed coalition of CDU/CSU and FDP, chose not to strongly securitise the issues and continued to advocate for economically-inspired, market-based solutions. This allowed the governing parties, despite promoting "transgenerational climate protection" (CDU & CSU, 2005, p. 31), to de-politicise the topic in a number of ways, inter alia, through downplaying the salience of climate change or through expanding the range of actors and transferring responsibility out of the sphere of institutionalised politics to the economy and citizens (CDU & CSU, 2005). According to the Christian Democrats and Liberals, a "perspective of decades not of legislative periods " (CDU & CSU, 2005, p. 52) was needed, because "ecology is economy in the long run" (FDP, 2005, p. 27). Liberal exceptionalism and new crises undermining public trust in economy, however, incentived the FDP to become the driving force in the coalition and to demand more than reforming the social market economy model. Therefore, the government implemented new procedural and institutional response, inter alia, a sustainability assessment as part of the legislative impact analysis (BMU, 2010; FDP, 2009). As the self-proclaimed party of courage to embrace change, later framed as „German Mut" (FDP, 2017, p. 16), the Liberals' intergenerational perspective cannot possibly be driven by securitisation. Instead, the FDP meets future challenges with an optimistic approach: "The greater risk today is not to change the status quo, but not to do so" (FDP, 2005, p. 3).

In the 1987 landmark report of the Brundtland Commission, sustainable development was defined as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 1987, p. 16). However, it took years until the term sustainability played a more prominent role in the political discourse. From the early 2000s onwards and certainly reinforced by the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the succeeding Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),

sustainable development became a key goal. A possible explanation for the concept's renaissance in the political discourse may be found in its ability to reconcile social, economic and ecological objectives as aspired by all parties, albeit with very different emphases.

De-sectorisation and the establishment of climate policy as a cross-cutting task, was at first only demanded by the Greens and the SPD (DIE GRÜNEN, 1990; SPD, 1994). Especially during the financial crisis of 2008 and the European debt crisis since 2010, an economisation of the political debate – content-related and rhetorically (e.g., "natural capital"; SPD, 2009, p. 75) – could be observed. This development was accompanied by further ideologisation on the supply side of politics and impacted the salience of intergenerational climate justice. For parties of the economically right spectrum, intergenerational responsibility was predominantly a matter of financial sustainability including topics such as national debt or health care spending (CDU & CSU, 2009; FDP, 2009). The Social Democrats, in contrast, had to perform a political balancing act and respond to a "double structural challenge", an ecological and an economic crisis (SPD, 2009, p. 24). Instead of playing them off against, the party believed in cross-fertilisation effects: "Today, environmental policy is no longer pursued purely from a protection perspective. It is also a driver for innovation and economic success" (SPD, 2009, p. 25). Reconciling social, economic and ecological challenges, thus, expanding the number of actors, allowed the Social Democrats to frame themselves as only "co-responsible for future generations" (SPD, 2009, p. 12). In doing so, the party converged to the position of the incumbent coalition.

For the Greens and, to a greater extent, the Left, economic recession and climate change represented interlocking crises that share the same roots: "Capitalism is not only socially unjust and a driver of climate catastrophe. Today, it is also harmful to the economy" (DIE LINKE, 2009, p. 2). Whether the Greens with securitisation or the Left additionally with actor polarisation, both parties tried to seize the opportunity to politicise climate change. They framed

climate change as a crisis, a catastrophe posing a global threat and requiring immediate, determined efforts (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, 2009, 2013; DIE LINKE, 2009, 2013). For reasons already mentioned above, the green issue ownership party had advantages compared to its competitors and, therefore, strong incentives to clarify its programmatic supply. Therefore, the Greens benefitted from emphasising both the temporal and spatial ramifications of climate change as a distinguishing feature in the party-political competition (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, 2009, 2013).

Whereas the strong ideologisation of climate change related risks could no longer be upheld once the issue reached greater political and societal salience and a more independent status, major dissents persisted with regard to the root, the security implications and the problem-solving approaches to be sought. Translating the basic recognition of intergenerational responsibility to mitigate climate change into action, thus, failed due to diverging ideologies, interests and crises-related prioritisations.

**Phase of forced clarity (2013-2021)**

A new far-right competitor pursuing novel approaches and objectives brought about lasting change in German political discourses including the ones related to intergenerational climate justice. Together with geo-political challenges and inner-societal conflicts, these new developments not only posed serious threats to the unrestricted flow of the discourse, but also represented unhoped-for-opportunities.

The emergence of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), initially formed as a single-issue party with a Eurosceptic, right-liberal agenda, jolted the party-political landscape. Ignored in their first election manifesto in 2013, climate change and its detrimental consequences were systematically de-securitised and de-politicised thereafter. The party, for example, called for the withdrawal from the Paris agreement, the immediate stop of decarbonisation efforts and the cutting of public funding for all climate protection organisations (AfD, 2017). Following issue-

ownership theory and agenda-setting theory, the radical right populists had strong incentives to reduce the dimensions of political competition, thus, to de-emphasise the salience and severity of climate change and to render itself credible and reliable concerning its core issues, namely Euroscepticism, anti-establishmentarianism and, later, ethnic nationalism and the restoration of law and order (Walgrave & Swert, 2004). This strategic positioning was coupled with another two distinguishing features: First, counter-scientific reasoning claiming that IPCC statements about anthropogenic climate change were "not scientifically sound" (AfD, 2017, p. 65). Quite the contrary, according to radical right party, the recent global warming was part of natural climate fluctuations that historically lead to a "blossoming of life and cultures" (AfD, 2021, pp. 174–175) and should thus be welcomed. Second, polarisation of the party-political system accompanied by securitisation moves framing incumbent parties as illegitimate, incapable of managing crises and threatening civil liberties (AfD, 2021). Similar to the ideological bloc mentality in the 1990s, the AfD (2021) rejected "left-green world rescue projects" (p. 126) and radical societal transformations such as "The Great Reset" (p. 174). Using common wording among conspiracy ideologues and appealing to these groups can be considered to be part of a deliberately chosen adversarial, anti-establishment strategy (AfD, 2021; Robinson et al., 2021).

AfD's rapid radicalisation forced the other democratic parties to not only form a cordon sanitaire, but to also clarify their positions in order to not risk being associated with the far right. In the field of intergenerational climate justice, this led to both a further de-ideologisation with regard to diagnosis and a further ideologisation of proposed policy measures. The dramatic consequences and irreversible damages for future generations caused by human-made climate change became solidified as broad consensus, now even acknowledged by the most conservative parties according to which achieving climate targets was a "matter of survival for humanity" (CDU & CSU, 2021, p. 15). This insight, however, did not necessarily lead to securitisation or, subsequently, firm action.

Parties of the left spectrum continued to consider climate change to not only be an existential threat but also a challenge that requires urgent responses (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, 2017; DIE LINKE, 2017). The current generation – "the first to feel the effects of climate change, the last to tackle it" (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, 2017, p. 9) – had "to decide what to rescue: capitalism or climate" (DIE LINKE, 2017, p. 9). Hence, the unequivocal and continuous securitisation of climate change and its geo- and chrono-political implications, linked to a broad definition of human security, distinguished left parties from their competitors and from previous (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, 2017, 2021; DIE LINKE, 2017, 2021). Despite the ongoing actor polarisation targeted at the incumbent government and global capitalism, the Left emphasised the need to close ranks with civil society and across party lines. After decades in both forced and chosen opposition, policy-seeking and office-seeking incentives now needed to be reconciled: "We seek to govern in order to change!" (DIE LINKE, 2021, p. 154). The Left party's strong emphasis on intergenerational climate justice, inter alia manifested in demands such as the compliance with the BVerfG decision, the introduction of ecocide as a criminal offence or granting suffrage to everyone aged 14 years or older, can be viewed as an attack on the Greens' issue ownership (DIE LINKE, 2021). Given the Green parties' long-standing expertise in the public perception, the ambitious approach could not (yet) be translated into electoral success (The Federal Returning Officer, 2022).

Despite ground-breaking developments in the political and activist sphere as well as the high salience of climate change, the other parties systematised their responsiveness efforts considerably slower, if at all. Instead, they continued to act in a sporadic manner (Wratil, 2018). In the case of the Social Democrats, this may be explained by their ideological immobility due to network and organisational ties, the difficult legacy of past decisions or the challenge of dealing with cross-cutting issues. No matter what political course they take, parts of their in heterogeneous electorate will inevitably be left disappointed (Adams et al., 2009). However, the Social Democrats' reserved position vis-à-vis global warming, may also be based on the

assumption of continued fluctuations and variability in salience as if public attention was still solely triggered by single events as it was in the past. In line with this explanatory approach, sustaining prosperity through fighting climate change was framed as a "mission for the future" (SPD, 2021, p. 8) rather than a current crises, immediate task or negligent omission of past governments. Instead, despite the stated political objective of "environmental justice" (SPD, 2017, p. 61), the party adhered to a narrow definition of intergenerational responsibility and, inter alia, demanded introducing a legislative impact assessment, the so-called "youth-check" (SPD, 2017, p. 40); a proposal similar to the Liberals' previous, sustainability-based idea or the Christian Democrats' "demography-check" (CDU & CSU, 2013; FDP, 2009).

After decades of climate change shaping the German political discourse, its salience and interdisciplinary nature could no longer be ignored: "Environmental policy is no longer a niche topic, but is of paramount importance for all societal and political sectors" (BMU, 2015, p. 4). "Climate change is not just a matter of the distant future", the authors of the federal environmental report stress, "global warming has been going on for a long time" (BMU, 2019, p. 57). Although the intergenerational responsibility arising thereof had already been acknowledged before (BMU, 2010), its profound repercussions and political topicality were further underlined by being mentioned the inherently intertemporal scope in both the very first and the very last sentences of the latest report (BMU, 2019).

In recent CDU/CSU and FDP manifestos, however, a striking gap between insight and proposed action could be witnessed. On the one hand, the issue was acknowledged as a "matter of survival of humankind" (CDU & CSU, 2021, p. 15) based on the realisation that "even in our middle latitudes, continuing climate change would lead to irreversible damages, which would primarily affect our children and grandchildren" (CDU & CSU, 2017, p. 68). On the other hand, instead of emergency responses, economic solutions reaping "an intact environment, growth and prosperity" (CDU & CSU, 2017, p. 67) at once were presented. The
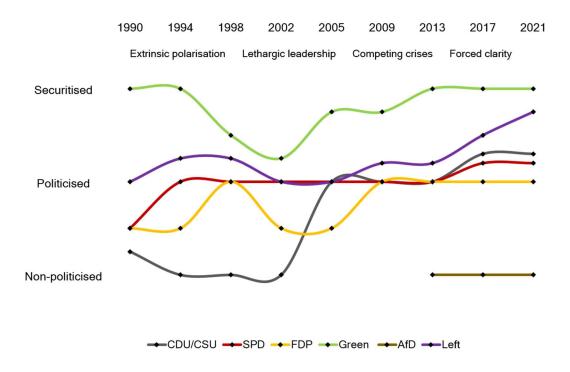
ideologisation of combating climate change and realising intergenerational justice was even more evident among the Liberals. Despite repeatedly stressing the need for political long-termism, they refused to respond to securitisation moves from the left. Instead, the party advocated for a positive approach: "Climate change, too, will be tackled with German Mut, not with German Angst" (FDP, 2021, p. 45). In its extreme form, this strategic optimism may even lead to a de-prioritisation, especially if intergenerational responsibility requires making concessions today: "For liberals, sustainability has nothing to do with asceticism. Today's people also have a right to a good life" (FDP, 2013, p. 76).

<div align="center">

**IV.    Conclusion**

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As sea levels rise, scientists warn and social movements emerge, climate change became increasingly salient over the last three decades – not only in scientific and societal but also in political discourses. In contrast to other challenges, climate change and its harmful consequences extend both spatial and temporal boundaries. In order to shed light on this often neglected, though crucial entanglement with major political and ethical implications, this thesis explored how the discourse on intergenerational responsibility and justice arising from climate change has been politicised and securitised in German parties' election manifestos over the past three decades. Federal environmental reports served as a valuable corrective in this analysis helping to distinguish temporary strategies from genuine positionings.

**Figure 2**

*The German Political Discourse on Intergenerational Climate Justice Over Time*



From a critical discourse studies perspective and building upon an extended politicisation framework, this thesis revealed four major overlapping phases as depicted in Figure 2: Extrinsic polarisation (1990-1998), lethargic leadership (1998-2005), competing crises (2005-2013) and forced clarity (2013-2021).

From the very beginning, the Greens played a special role in the domestic political discourse. Thanks to undisputed issue ownership in the field of environmental policies, the party could, compared to their competitors, act far less constrained by structural or historical ties or challenges linked to German reunification and persistent conflicts in the Post-Cold War era. It was the driving force of politicisation in the early 1990s – and remains so to this day. The analysis, however, brought critical discourse moments and a more nuanced picture to light. After successful securitising moves in the first decade of the investigation period, the parties converged as climate change became an established and contested political issue. In the course of this, the Greens, however, became part of a governing coalition. A first wave of politicisation came to an end when the party sought pragmatic solutions to the new trade-off between policy- and office-seeking incentives. After the change in government in 2005 and facilitated through a shift in public sentiment during the sixteen-year-long Merkel era, the Greens reclaimed their pioneer role later.

Contrary to scientific consensus, climate change and particularly its intertemporal dimensions remained an ideologically charged issue leading to polarisation and partisan conflicts. In the early years, this was still strongly related to the diagnosis, later primarily to its implications and the conclusions to be drawn from it. The SPD and the Left – albeit in a different, later divergent manner – showed a discursive hesitancy that strongly support leftist exceptionalism. Although intergenerational climate justice represented a feasible objective in line with the political agenda, it could not be fully embraced and had to be strategically de-emphasised due to a number of ideological and organisational constraints. The conservative Christian Democrats, in contrast, responded to growing salience and, later, to the emergence of the far-right, climate-change denying AfD with partial recognition of the challenge (see Fig. 2), though an overall dismissive strategy when it comes to policy proposals. For them, the rights of future generations remained religiously motivated considerations that mainly concern single policy areas and the relation between living generations. Moreover, much like the Liberals,

proposed policy responses were characterised by economic rationale. The FDP, however, was faced a unique dichotomy between the long-term preservation of both civil liberties and an economically neo-liberal system. Given the strong entanglements between the downsides of capitalism and the drivers of environmental degradation, the Liberals could not avoid a conflict of interests. Resolving this with market-based instruments, promises of prosperity and mantra-like calls to optimism was and is doomed to failure in the face of the contemporary and future realities of accelerating climate change.

The retrospective analysis of intergenerational climate justice since its entering in the mainstream party-political discourse yields highly relevant findings far beyond the German context. First, it suggests a more nuanced understanding of the sometimes paradoxical role and influence of issue ownership parties. They indeed function as driving forces through agenda-setting, politicising and securitising moves as well as contagious effects, at the same time, one should not ignore unintended restraining factors that may prove detrimental to the cause. Moral and epistemological superiority could discourage other parties from taking up an issue and contributing to its salience. Issue-denial parties, in turn, can exert an accelerating and converging force on their competitors, if there are strong incentives not to be associated with the party and its political objectives. Second, knowledge about the evolvement of first-order issues could be transferred to and applied in other contexts. This seems particularly fruitful with regard to challenges sharing an equally broad geographical and temporal as well as political, societal and scientific scope, for instance, genetic engineering or artificial intelligence. Third, the role of strategic positioning as a response to party-political dynamics and external factors. Especially in cases involving strong scientific consensus and wide access to knowledge, the sometimes counterfactual and contra-rotating role of (re- and de-) ideologisation is crucial to understanding political discourses. Forth, the politicisation framework extended with the notion of securitisation provides a valuable tool to capture discursive dynamics and strategic decisions by the actors involved in political discourses. Particularly in view of the unprecedented

coincidence of ever broader understandings of security, including climate change and its (future) implications, and the resurgence of traditional military considerations following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, future political discourses will be increasingly characterised by far-reaching (de-)securitisation (moves). Understanding the analytical and strategic implications for political discourses on national and international levels will be essential for researchers and policymakers likewise.

This research allowed valuable and deep insights into the party-political discourse around intergenerational climate justice in Germany. The findings, however, should be interpreted with caution as both the research set-up and the selection of the substantive focus are subject to limitations: First, the nature of the documents analysed. Party and government publications reflect ex-ante strategic positioning rather than actual outcomes. Moreover, they may not display the full range of diverging interests and party-political confrontation (Budge & Farlie, 1983). Election manifestos and environmental reports may reveal important dynamics, however, they neither allow for broad generalisations nor to establish causality. Second, linked to the aforementioned, the existence of additional influencing factors. Political discourses do not exist in a vacuum, they are influenced by multilateral processes and external event. Third, the bigger picture. Intergenerational climate justice can be understood as embedded in a mutually interdependent system of political, scientific and societal discourses. Change-making, stagnation and setbacks can only be fully explored and understood from a holistic perspective that goes beyond the realm of formal political processes and, thus, the extended politicisation framework as presented in this research.

Based on these limitations and the findings of this study, future research may shed light on scientific and societal discourses and their manifold interactions with political entities. More specifically, exploring the role of scientific consensus on climate change as presented in the IPCC assessment reports in conjunction with the Two Communities Theory seems fruitful

(Caplan, 1979). In addition to that, research on intergenerational climate justice would certainly benefit from including a wider range of data, actors and methodological approaches. This might, for instance, involve blending partisan pre-election intentions and views with data on actual implementations. Building upon the findings of this research, which are restricted to the German context, the flow of the discourse may be compared across countries, especially between multi-and bipartisan systems as well as between more and less centralised states. Aware of the fact that the role of civil society could not be examined in-depth in this thesis, future research should devote specific attention to the direct or indirect influence of climate justice organisations and movements on political discourses.

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    political-party-programmes

**CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH**

**INSTRUCTION**

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Jennifer A. Holland, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

**PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION**

Project title: The Future is Now. The German Political Discourse on Intergenerational Responsibility and Justice in the Face of Climate Change. A Critical Discourse Analysis.

Name, email of student: Stefan Morlock, 613458sm@student.eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Jeroen van der Waal, 38199jvw@eur.nl

Start date and duration: February 7, 2022 – five months

Is the research study conducted within DPAS                                                    YES

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

**PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS**

1.      Does your research involve human participants.                    NO

        *If 'NO': skip to part V.*

        If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research?      YES - NO
        *Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act (WMO) must first be submitted to an accredited medical research ethics committee or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (CCMO).*

2.      Does your research involve field observations without manipulations
        that will not involve identification of participants.              YES - NO

        *If 'YES': skip to part IV.*

3.      Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary
        data that has been anonymized by someone else).                    YES - NO

        *If 'YES': skip to part IV.*

**PART III: PARTICIPANTS**

1.  Will information about the nature of the study and about what
    participants can expect during the study be withheld from them?       YES - NO

2.  Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written
    'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study?    YES - NO

3.  Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation
    at any time be withheld from participants?                             YES - NO

4.  Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants?            YES - NO
    *Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to*
    *think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study*
    *is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they*
    *harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).*

5.  Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or
    negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by
    participants?                                          `               YES - NO

6.  Will information be collected about special categories of data, as
    defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions,
    religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic
    data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person,
    data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's
    sex life or sexual orientation)?                                       YES - NO

7.  Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or
    other groups that cannot give consent?                                 YES - NO

8.  Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study?  YES - NO

9.  Can participants be identified by the study results or can the
    confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured?          YES - NO

10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? YES - NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

_____
_____
_____
_____

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

_____
_____
_____
_____

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

_____
_____
_____
_____

*Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.*

*Continue to part IV.*

**PART IV: SAMPLE**

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

_____

_____

*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

_____

_____

*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

_____

_____

*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

*Continue to part V.*

**Part V: Data storage and backup**

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

- The data is stored on hard drives as well as in a cloud. Most documents were already downloaded on February 15, 2022.

*Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.*

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

- The person responsible for the management, storage and backup of the data is the student himself.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

- Full back-ups will be done on a weekly basis, partial back-ups of the crucial documents will be done daily.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

- No personal data will be collected.

*Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.*

**PART VI: SIGNATURE**

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student:                                          Name (EUR) supervisor:
Stefan Morlock                                        Jeroen van der Waal

Date: 20.03.2022                                      Date: 20.03.2022