

Climate crisis as the culmination of technocratic crisis policy: further erosion or the end of democracy?

By Günter Roth, Munich, February 10, 2024

1 Introduction

With the scenario of an ultimate 'climate crisis', political demands to restrict freedom and democracy in the interest of 'securing the future' are increasing. This follows on from developments during the coronavirus pandemic (2020 to 2022), when, under the battle cries of

"Follow the science" and "We stick together" rallied the majority of the people behind the government (with its selected experts). In the political state of emergency of a crisis-induced concentration of power in the government, fundamental restrictions on democracy (freedom, co-determination and control) followed. This was accompanied by authoritarian aggression against dissenting, protesting or non-vaccinating people, who were discriminated against and excluded as "covidioties" or "social pests". However, the growing authoritarianism (submission, conformity and aggression against dissenters) is not only a consequence of fear and perceptions of crisis, but rather an expression of a new type of 'technocratic authoritarianism' under the banner of the supposedly only 'true or good', which is particularly widespread among the political left and academically educated, younger people. The article begins by looking at the background to growing constructions of crisis, with a critical look at the constructions of the 'climate crisis'. This is followed by an analysis of the development and background of technocratic-authoritarian 'no-alternative' crisis policies. This reveals a growing blatant inequality and polarization of society, with a hegemonic academic 'bloc bourgeois' in power, which has long ruled against the will of the politically and publicly largely marginalized 'ordinary' working people. The 'climate crisis' threatens to further exacerbate this threatening division and the erosion of democracy.

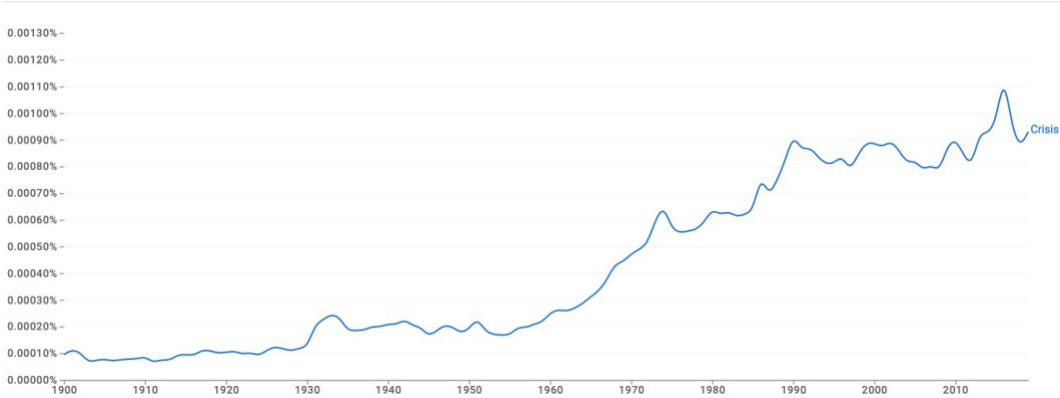
2 Background of growing crisis perceptions

2.1 What is a 'crisis' and how have perceptions of crisis developed?

Looking back historically, it is reported that medicine first used the Greek term "*Krisis*" (for distinction, opinion, judgment or decision) from the 14th century onwards.

This had come to a head in the 19th century in military terminology and state theories (cf. Graf 2020), especially as the state was thought of in analogy to the human body at the time and concerns about a 'sick national body' were widespread. ¹ One of the most powerful 'crisis theorists' was Karl Marx, with his theories of an *inevitable* conflict and crisis-ridden development of capitalist society. Although his predictions were only partially accurate, in the face of revolutions, world wars and global economic crises, the 'crises' such as 1929 or 2017/18, his 'crisis theory' remains powerful to this day. A look at the frequency of occurrence of the term 'crisis' for the period from 1800-2019 shows that it increased sharply from around 1930, only to stagnate until the mid-1950s and then rise rapidly since then (with peaks around 1973, 1989 and 2015) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Frequency of the term "crisis" in Google Books (1900-2019)



Source: Search for "Crisis" at: <https://books.google.com/ngrams/>

2.2 'Culture of fear' in the 'risk society'

In view of the observation that all areas of society (from A for work to Z for cohesion, via education, democracy, finance, state or economy) are increasingly associated with 'crisis', Frank Furedi stated a 'culture' or a 'century of fear' (cf. Furedi 1997; cf. Graf 2020). Ulrich Beck chose the term 'Risk society' (Beck 1993), on the one hand due to growing risks from technologies such as nuclear energy, chemistry, etc., which transcend all boundaries and ideas, and on the other hand due to constant dynamic social changes and the resulting uncertainty, as 'modernization', 'individualization', loss of traditions,

¹ See, for example, the rhetoric among social welfare experts in the 1920s, in which so-called 'asocials' were identified as a danger to the 'healthy national body' (cf. Roth 1999, 74).

Cohesion, predictability, etc. However this development is conceptualized or interpreted, it is clear that fears and perceptions of risk are omnipresent:

"Fear is not simply associated with high-profile catastrophic threats such as terrorist attacks, global warming, AIDS or a potential flu pandemic; rather, as many academics have pointed out, there are also the 'quiet fears' of everyday life. ... Today's free-floating fear is sustained by a culture that is anxious about change and uncertainty, and which continually anticipates the worst possible outcome. This 'culture of fear', as I and others have called it, tends to see human experience and endeavor as a potential risk to our safety. Consequently, every conceivable experience has been transformed into a risk to be managed." (Furedi 2007)

However, as the risks grow, so do the technical, economic and political possibilities of 'risk management', at the center of which is the 'social or welfare state as an omnipresent 'crisis manager' and guarantor of welfare, although at the same time it itself constantly creates, defines and promotes risks.

2.3 *The social and welfare state as 'crisis manager'*

Over the course of the 20th century, the 'social or welfare state' developed increasing risk management capabilities, with more and more personnel, expenditure and facilities for the provision of services of general interest, health, social security, education, 'inclusion', etc. (cf. Ewald 1993; Kaufmann 2003; Ritter 2012). (cf. Ewald 1993; Kaufmann 2003; Ritter 2012). An increasingly pervasive (capitalist) 'welfare state' has emerged as a guarantor of security and welfare, from the cradle to the grave. On the one hand, its enormously powerful 'hard right hand', with huge security apparatuses (military, police, etc.), with which it can monitor, control, discipline, punish and, not least, kill.² No less powerful, and perhaps even more powerful, is its 'soft left hand', with which the 'public order' and 'well-being' promoting, helping, caring, educating and training education and training systems, social and health services, etc.³ The welfare state's 'risk management' thus enables the astonishing 'resilience' of capitalism, which seems to emerge stronger from every 'crisis' (cf. Boltanski and Chiapello 2001).

2.4 *Social sciences as crisis sciences*

Among the ever more numerous servants of the (capitalist) state, the social sciences in particular are observing and discovering themselves as 'crisis sciences' (Sewing 1983)

² In terms of arsenals of violence, the USA should be mentioned first and foremost, with almost 900 billion \$ (2022) alone will account for 39% of the world's total military expenditure (see <https://www.sipri.org>).

³ The image of the 'right and left hand of the state' is borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu (cf. 1998, 93 ff.).

constantly '*social problems*' (as problems of public order and governance and whereby the social sciences often only address problems raised by state administrations).

"ratify") (Bourdieu 1998, 96). A problem can be defined as the difference between an 'ought' and

'actual state', i.e. social sciences observe, monitor and construct *norms*. As a co-founder of sociology, Émile Durkheim was one of the first to analyze the problem of the 'anomie' of market-driven (capitalist) societies based on the division of labor and the resulting functional transition from 'mechanical' to 'social' society.

'organic' solidarity, which does not weaken cohesion in modern society based on the division of labor, on the contrary, because the *state*, "on which we are increasingly dependent", "has the task of reminding us of the feeling of common solidarity" (Durkheim 1893, 258). However, the legions of private non-profit, state-sponsored organizations such as the Red Cross, Greenpeace, Oxfam, including the foundations of the super-rich such as Gates, Omidyar or Zuckerberg, which in turn, together with international, state-affiliated organizations such as the World Bank, WHO or the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), are contributing to the rationalization, standardization and institutionalization of a global society or 'global governance' (cf. Meyer et al. 1997).

2.5 *Media and 'crisis perceptions'*

In addition, there are media or communication companies that contribute to the perception and contribute to the 'construction' of social problems and crises.⁴ This takes place in a competitive economy, with the primary competition being for attention, which is higher the more unusual and problematic events are perceived and the more people are affected (cf. Lengauer, Esser, and Berganza 2012; cf. Meyen 2015, cf. 2018; cf. Soroka and McAdams 2015). The constant hunt for 'sensations' can thus artificially inflate or create perceptions of crises: for example, storms that were hardly worth mentioning in the past are now reported on intensively, with 'breaking news', 'live reports' 'on location', etc., which the media have to do simply because the competition does it (cf. Meyen 2009, 2015, 2018). Media professionals can hardly escape such pressures, so that in the case of terrorist attacks such as '9-11', wars or Covid-19, the same horror news and images are always running on all channels in a kind of continuous loop, even if no new information is available or awareness is clouded by the effect of images (see the misleadingly interpreted images with transports of coffins from Bergamo). A society kept in such a state of suspense and fear by the media also tends to

⁴ These organizations, individuals or 'networks' provide information and exchange opinions, whereby they also serve as a 'fourth estate' for political control (cf. Grotz 2021, 211 ff.).

tend to systematically overestimate the risks and dangers of terrorist attacks, Covid-19, etc. and the frequency of media consumption, especially moving images, correlates significantly positively with (exaggerated) fears, e.g. of terrorism or Covid-19 (Nellis and Savage 2012; Sasaki et al. 2020).⁵

3 Crisis scenarios and the construction of the 'climate crisis'

3.1 Crisis scenarios between interests and scientific hubris

Scientific crisis scenarios are increasingly determining political decisions, as was recently the case with the coronavirus pandemic. The fact that economic and political interests have an influence is usually ignored, as is the fact that scientific experts strive for recognition, power and money and are not politically objective or fallible. The crisis scenarios of 'demographic change' are a textbook example, whereby the 'experts' have long predicted a shrinking population in Germany, which has been thwarted by underestimated immigration, without the 'forecasting business' as such (Roth 2012). A thought experiment illustrates the hubris inherent in scientific scenarios that point far into the future and relate to dynamic social events,

If 'forecasts' of population development had been made a good hundred years ago, e.g. 1910 to 1950/60, they would have been invalidated by the First World War. An analysis of the political background to demographic crisis forecasts (including the thesis of the crisis and need for reform of old-age provision) also shows that economic lobbies, especially in the finance and insurance industry, were the driving forces behind this, with various 'think tanks', close politicians, media representatives, etc. (cf. Wehlau 2009). (cf. Wehlau 2009). Incidentally, the most recent scenarios in the coronavirus crisis, such as those of Imperial College London, also proved to be misguided and exaggerated (Ioannidis, Cripps, and Tanner 2022; Ioannidis and Powis 2022). Scientific crisis scenarios should therefore always be viewed skeptically, against the backdrop of economic or political interests and as a modern technique of domination. This also applies to the 'climate crisis', with conspicuous donations flowing to the climate protection movement from the financial sector, the IT industry and super-rich 'philanthropists' (Vighi 2023). However, these aspects will not be discussed further here, nor will any

⁵ In surveys in the USA, for example, around half of respondents regularly expressed concern that they themselves or someone in their family could become a victim of a terrorist attack (shortly after '9/11' the figure was even around 60%, see [Gallup Institute](#)). However, the probability of becoming a victim of a terrorist attack is very low: in the USA, there was an average of 151 deaths per year from terrorist attacks between 1995 and 2019, with approx. 318 million citizens (see [Global Terrorism Database](#)). Similarly, many overestimated the mortality rate of COVID-19, e.g. in the UK by about a hundred times (see Telegraph of 20.8.2020).

discussion on climate change or climate policy per se. It should also be emphasized that the following critical analyses of the construction of a 'climate crisis' do not call into question the goal of an ecologically sustainable economy.

3.2 *Is there a scientific consensus on climate change and what does this mean?*

The German media usually claim that the thesis of dramatic global warming primarily caused by humans is not questioned by scientific researchers. However, an analysis of around 3,000 climate science articles (peer-reviewed) shows that this is based on arbitrary interpretations: although very few articles (N=4 or < 0.2%) actually reject the prevailing thesis, the majority (70%) are neutral or uncertain and only 30% explicitly or implicitly support it (Dentelski et al. 2023). In a survey of all professors conducting scientific research on climate issues in Germany, 63% (of 131 respondents, 'response rate' 40%) agreed that the climate change of the last 50 years was "*predominantly* influenced by human behavior" (emphasis added, G.R); however, 30% of respondents thought that natural and human factors were *equally* responsible, one person (1%) even said "predominantly natural", 6% said it was impossible to say (Post 2019). Incidentally, majority or consensus in science is not proof of 'truth' and a study or argument is sufficient to refute assumptions (Kuhn 1967). In the environmental movement in particular, it should also be well remembered that the scientific 'mainstream' on nuclear energy was unanimously positive for a long time and critical theses and dissidents were consistently defamed, tabooed or excluded.

3.3 *Certainty or uncertainty in climate research?*

Furthermore, a content analysis of the 5th report of the so-called Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) shows that 57% of the statements contained therein contained references to uncertainty or probabilities, with 7.6% of all statements (with information on probabilities) remaining below the usual error probability of < 5% (cf. Hassler, Maurer, and Oschatz 2016, 131). However, the IPCC apparently ignored the scientific standard that theses with a probability of error >5% are rejected, e.g. by classifying assumptions with a probability of error of 5-10% as "very likely" (Hassler, Maurer, and Oschatz 2016). In addition, in summaries for political decision-makers, statements were sharpened as completely certain (Hassler, Maurer, and Oschatz 2016, 131 f.). Even in a survey of researchers on climate issues in Germany, only around 20% of respondents affirmed that the prerequisite of climate predictability as a basis for forecasts (precise models, understanding of processes and

empirical data) were already fulfilled, 60-80% considered this possible for the future, but a good 20% thought that climate models could never be precise enough (Post 2019). In addition, 72% of the German researchers surveyed agreed that it should be made clearer to the public that many climate change issues are still unresolved (Post 2016, 5). In this respect, it seems questionable to what extent the IPCC should be classified as a scientific or a political interest organization, although the latter undermines its objectivity and credibility. Incidentally, the trend towards 'engaged' science appears to be unstoppable: according to a survey by the German Association of University Professors and Lecturers, even in the natural sciences a majority, especially younger people, already see it as the task of science not only to generate and disseminate knowledge, but also to remedy social problems or grievances, initiate debates and provide political advice (Petersen 2021).

3.4 *Climate change: Selective reception of research by the media and politics*

Content analyses show that IPCC statements on climate change are reported selectively in media reports (see Hassler, Maurer, and Oschatz 2016): Overall, only 37% of IPCC statements with information on probabilities or uncertainties were correctly reproduced in media reports, 43% omitted this, 17% weakened the information on uncertainty, 4% strengthened it (ibid. p. 134). The *greater* the uncertainty of the statements in the IPCC report, the more frequently they were omitted, which should be exactly the opposite (ibid. 135). In other words, media reporting on climate change is deliberately distorted (see Hassler, Maurer, and Oschatz 2016). This tendency is particularly strong in left-liberal oriented media, on television and among political actors (cf. Hassler, Maurer, and Oschatz 2016, 136).⁶ The selection of topics on the ARD news program also follows this bias, while the economic concerns that are of primary importance to the people are pushed into the background.⁷ Accordingly, climate researchers receive much more resonance in the German media when they emphasize the inevitability of climate change, while researchers who see uncertainty report fewer contacts and resonance in the media (Post 2016, 2019). Incidentally, researchers consider contact with the media to be beneficial for their own careers (Post and Ramirez 2018).⁸ In this respect

⁶ This tendency is more prevalent in Europe than in the US, which could be due to the polarized political culture of the two-party system or the influence of the oil industry, which promotes sceptical positions (Maesele and Pepermans 2017). On the other hand, there is financial capital, which benefits from radical climate policies and mobilizes support for the climate movement (Vighi 2023).

⁷ Cf. <https://www.nzz.ch/visuals/tagesschau-klima-wichtiger-als-inflation-und-fluechtlingskrise-ld.1730650>.

⁸ Media corporations such as Reuters critically promote networks of activists in media and science, such as [Reuters' Oxford Climate Journalism Network: <https://dailysceptic.org/2023/12/28/bbc-disinformation-reporter-plans-six-month-sabbatical-to-go-on-climate-course-funded-by-green-billionaires/>](https://dailysceptic.org/2023/12/28/bbc-disinformation-reporter-plans-six-month-sabbatical-to-go-on-climate-course-funded-by-green-billionaires/).

The results of an experimental survey suggest that the distorted view of the media can have repercussions for scientific research: According to this, researchers on climate issues would withhold results that make climate change appear less dramatic, while they would be more likely to publish results that make climate change appear more dramatic (Post 2016). The self-disclosure of a climate scientist that he had exaggerated results in line with the prevailing opinion and omitted contrary aspects in order to increase the chances of acceptance in a top journal fits in with this (Brown 2023).

4 Background: Tendency towards technocratic-authoritarian crisis policy

4.1 Permanent crisis policy and the 'normalization' of the state of emergency

For decades, one 'crisis' has followed another in the public eye with ever new horror stories and scenarios: No sooner had the 'corona crisis' that raged from 2020-2022 been replaced by the war in Ukraine, than the crisis in

The escalating war in the Middle East dominates the news. As a result, the 'refugee crisis' that dominated the news in 2015 is also resurfacing and the 'crisis of the EU', including the financial, sovereign debt and euro crises, remain virulent (see Lepsius 2013). The fact that crises and states of emergency have virtually become the 'normal' means of politics in democracies was paradigmatically demonstrated in the 'war on terror' launched since '9-11', which legitimized wars of aggression, torture in extralegal prisons and killings without due process of law or global mass surveillance (see Agamben 2004; Förster 2017; Lemke 2017). States of emergency are defined by the fact that power is concentrated in the hands of the executive due to perceptions of crisis and that civil liberties, democratic participation and controls are restricted (Agamben 2004; Lemke 2017). The legitimization of states of emergency is based on (actual or constructed) existential threats that come from outside ('internal enemies' are considered not to belong), friend-foe thinking and the urgent necessity and efficiency of action (Förster and Lemke 2016). In crises, the people also rally behind the government ('rally round the flag') and reward decisive, energetic leadership, even or precisely because law and order are ignored (cf. Baekgaard et al. 2020; Feinstein 2020).⁹ In this respect, the statement and

⁹ Although executive orders in Germany were approved ex-post by parliaments and the constitutional court, the constitution initially remained unheeded, with informal rounds of federal and state governments, for example, making key decisions (see J. Hirsch 2020; Kneip and Merkel 2022; Roth 2021a).

The interpretation of 'crises' is of paramount importance, with governments having exclusive information and power of interpretation.

4.2 *Technocratic crisis policy: 'There is no alternative'*

The erosion of the rule of law and democracy under the sign of 'crises' goes back a long way, at least as far as the economic crisis of the 1970s, when Prime Minister Thatcher in Great Britain, with the thesis "*there is no alternative*", pushed through an 'austerity and supply policy' (in favor of capital) that was unpopular with the working people, which has since been used as a kind of magic formula to legitimize and shift blame by both center-right and center-left governments (see Roth 2021b; Schäfer 2008; Séville 2017). Pierre Bourdieu sums this up as a "game",

"... in which the powerful tend to falsify the truth and try to give the beliefs and the principles of vision and division that they want to impose, especially in the field of economics, the appearance of a scientific guarantee, a stamp of truth. They constantly claim that science is on their side, that the Nobel Prizes are on their side, just as people used to wage wars and shout: 'God is with us'. And they ask the common people to rely on those who are more competent, who know better, who claim the monopoly of handling the political goods of salvation, the monopoly of defining what is politically good and right, in the name of the monopoly of competence and truth." (Bourdieu 2001, 56)

The consequence of technocratic crisis policies, in particular a blatant increase in inequality, with the relative deterioration of the social situation of 'ordinary' workers, is in turn *the* main source of growing political disenchantment, abstention and drift to the right (Engler and Weisstanner 2020; Han 2016; Piketty 2018, 2019; Schäfer 2008).

4.3 *Unequal representation and the ruling 'Bloc Bourgeois'*

First and foremost, the fact that the selection and social composition of ruling elites is highly distorted must be taken into account: 87% of the members of the 20th German Bundestag have an academic degree, while 'ordinary working people' or poorer people are hardly represented here (cf. <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/parlamentsarchiv/datenhandbuch/03>). Similar distortions can be found in practically all areas of society, including business and administration (cf. Hartmann 2007, 2009, 2013). Media professionals have also all undergone an *academic* (mostly polyglot) socialization and come predominantly from privileged social classes (especially the educated bourgeoisie), which results in similar lifestyles, habits and attitudes, while the 'common people' are hardly actively represented here either (cf. Lueg 2012; Raabe 2005). As high-ranking journalists are in turn often close to political or economic elites

(at conferences and international organizations or think tanks such as 'World Economic Forum', 'Atlantic Bridge', World Bank, IPCC, etc., at receptions, award ceremonies, festivals, etc.), it is not surprising that the political views of top journalists and governments are so closely aligned, as Uwe Krüger has shown for foreign and security policy (cf. Krüger 2015). Especially on issues of war and peace or in crises such as Covid-19, major leading media largely support the views of governments (cf. Maurer, Reinemann, and Kruschinski 2021; Meyen 2021; cf. von Rossum 2020).¹⁰ Last but not least, 'career incentives' and privileges promote the often unconscious adaptation of media professionals by offering 'background information', 'exclusive interviews',¹¹ assignments as moderators or positions with the government as spokespersons or accompaniment on government planes.¹² Similar structures, incentives and pressure to conform are at work not least in academia, whose commissions and funding come primarily from the state or 'big business' (or 'charitable' foundations of the super-rich).

4.4 Concentration and distortion of information markets

Even in societies that are free in principle, propaganda can assert itself as the majority opinion by means of *inconspicuous* 'filters', while a certain diversity of opinions remains marginalized within the limits of what is permissible (see Bourdieu 1999; Chomsky and Herman 2006; Meyen 2021, 2023; Zollmann 2019). First and foremost, the enormous concentration of capital has an effect: "Freedom of the press is the freedom of two hundred rich people to spread their opinions", according to the journalist Paul Sethe (Meyen 2021). Although economic interests are competing, there are also commonalities, such as 'free' markets, to which Springer, for example, demands a commitment in employment contracts (Meyen 2021, cf. chapter 5, footnote 33). Overall, a considerable concentration of opinion markets is a problem for a free and democratic society: In Germany, only five corporations cover over 54% of the 'opinion market' (internet, television, radio, newspapers), while the public broadcasters (state and government-affiliated) cover around 30% (cf. Deck and Kluser 2021).¹³ The concentration in news agencies is extreme, with only a handful of

¹⁰ See the Swiss media group Ringier, whose management cooperated closely with the government with regard to the 'corona policy' and issued internal guidelines (see <https://www.nachdenkseiten.de/?p=79486>; see the 'Insider report' at: <https://multipolar-magazin.de/artikel/die-mainstream-blase>).

¹¹ About the information policy by Federal Chancellor Merkel in the Corona crisis critical: <https://www.nzz.ch/international/corona-angela-merkels-fragwuerdige-medienspolitik-in-krisenzeiten-ld.1715145>;

¹² See, for example, the revealing 'selfie' and the Twitter message of a young Spiegel journalist in front of the Foreign Minister's plane, critically: <https://www.nachdenkseiten.de/?p=86544>.

¹³ Thus, the state determines framework conditions (financing, law) and is also represented in management (broadcasting councils and administrative boards), even if direct influence is rare, e.g. in the Corona crisis (cf. e.g. <https://multipolar-magazin.de/artikel/ich-kann-nicht-mehr>, <https://www.nachdenkseiten.de/?p=80112>).

is internationally active, whose contributions are often adopted globally (cf. CEC 2021, 181). The Internet information market is also highly concentrated, with an estimated 84% of all search queries on the Internet being made on 'Google'¹⁴ and 86% of total usage on 0.003% of domains (cf. Deck and Kluser 2021; CEC 2021, 17). Google, YouTube etc. are also excessively suppressing or censoring information, as in the coronavirus crisis (cf. Hofbauer 2022, 2023; Klöckner 2021; Roth 2023b). A similar concentration can also be seen for scientific publications, where five groups cover over 50% of publications, with a strong US bias (Larivière, Haustein, and Mongeon 2015). In this respect, there is every indication that the 'knowledge of the world' is by no means provided in a politically neutral manner. The social sciences in particular are politically left-wing and left-liberal (Honeycutt and Jussim 2023), which has also been shown for IT programs such as 'Chat-GPT' (Rozado 2023; Sullivan-Paul 2023).

4.5 *Interim conclusion: "Government of the People, by the Elite, for the Rich"*

The above pointed headline is borrowed from a study on 'political *responsiveness*' between 1980 and 2013 and attests to a kind of bankruptcy of democracy: according to this study, the political demands of the rich (including civil servants and the self-employed) were much more likely to be perceived and implemented, especially in controversial issues such as pension and labor policy ('Riester reform', 'Hartz reform') (Elsässer, Hense, and Schäfer 2016, 2018). If the richest income group unanimously supported a political demand, it was implemented with a probability of 80%; if the majority of richer people were against it, the chance of implementation fell to around 20%; if, on the other hand, the majority of the poorest income group supported a demand, its chances of implementation *fell* (the same applies to the median voter) (Elsässer, Hense, and Schäfer 2016, 2018). The slippage or de facto erosion of democracy is not hidden from the masses of the politically marginalized lower classes. In a representative survey in Germany, for example, around a third of citizens see a "sham democracy" and only a small minority have the opportunity to exert political influence or for the government to protect their interests (cf. in detail: Roth 2021b).

¹⁴ <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/225953/umfrage/die-weltweit-meistgenutzten-suchmaschinen/>

5 New authoritarianism as a threat to freedom and democracy

5.1 Authoritarianism under the sign of the supposedly 'true and good'

For some time now, political decisions have been whipped through with reference to supposedly unavoidable constraints and crises as 'without alternative' (see Thatcher, Schröder or Merkel). This pattern of technocratic, authoritarian crisis policy reached its peak in the

'corona crisis' reached its peak for the time being (Roth 2021a, 2023a). In many countries, but especially in Germany, there was a surge in authoritarian, technocratic attitudes among the population (Amat, Arenas, and Falcó 2020; Filsinger and Freitag 2022;

M. Hirsch 2022; Maher et al. 2022; Wüstner 2022; Lavezzolo, Ramiro, and Fernández-Vázquez 2022; Cena and Roccato 2023). The growing authoritarianism, with a tendency towards conformity and aggression against dissenters (especially against unvaccinated people), was particularly strong among people with high fear of Covid-19, higher education and political left-wing orientation (Bor, Jørgensen, and Petersen 2023; M. Hirsch 2022; Maher et al. 2022; Manson 2020; Peng 2022; Roth 2023a). Even more than fear, however, the dogma of having to follow 'science' and practise solidarity was decisive for the increase in authoritarian attitudes (cf. Cena and Roccato 2023; M. Hirsch 2022; Lavezzolo, Ramiro, and Fernández-Vázquez 2022; Peng 2022). In this respect, a new type of authoritarianism is emerging, which comes politically from the left and is not understood as such by its protagonists, because only 'science', 'reason' or the morally seemingly unambiguous commandments are to be followed, so that any criticism is reflexively discriminated against and excluded as unreasonable, lacking solidarity or right-wing (in detail: Roth 2023a). At the same time, many statements made by those who are otherwise so vehemently opposed to discrimination, hatred and violence showed alarming traits of lack of tolerance, hatred and contempt, e.g. towards people who have not been vaccinated, who were described as 'social pests', to which the whole republic should point the finger (cf. Klöckner and Wernicke 2022; <https://ich-habe-mitgemacht.de>).¹⁵

5.2 Narrowing of freedom of expression and polarization along cultural 'fault lines'

A regular representative survey on freedom of opinion in Germany shows alarming tendencies towards a lack of freedom: according to the survey, only a minority of 40% recently said that people in Germany are free to express their political opinions,

¹⁵ A Green politician, herself a declared specialist in anti-discrimination, said on 6.12.2021 that she would "gladly punch people who are unwilling to be vaccinated in the mouth without comment" (ibid.), while the sociologist Heinz Bude commented on this particularly perfidiously on 7.12.21: "You can't ship them to Madagascar. What can you do?", implicitly alluding to the deportation plans of the National Socialists (ibid.).

a relative majority of 44% of respondents thought it was better to be cautious (in 1990, this was only 16%) (Petersen, Schatz, and Schmidt 2023). Concerns to this effect are expressed particularly by the formally less educated and politically more right-wing (AfD and FDP supporters), while 75% of Green Party supporters thought that people could speak freely in Germany (Petersen, Schatz, and Schmidt 2023). The most frequently mentioned topics where it is better to be careful are Islam, patriotism and equal rights for women. There is clearly a kind of *cultural struggle* or a line of conflict underlying social liberalization and internationalization, with the Greens, who have a particularly strong academic bias, on the one side and the AfD on the other, standing alone in the wide open (only the FDP voters are still close to the center, rather critical of migration and EU integration) (see Grande 2018, e.g. Figure 4, p. 32). In addition, the restriction of freedom of expression and polarization intensified during the coronavirus crisis, with a survey showing, for example, that only 25% of respondents agreed that dissenting academics should be heard at all, only 21% that media should carry controversial content and only 12% that critical content should not be censored (71% of respondents were students) (cf. Wüstner 2022), an alarm signal for a society that sees itself as liberal.

5.3 *Authoritarianism, conformity and the restriction of freedom of expression at universities*

Authoritarianism and conformism, including aggression against dissenters, under the banner of the supposedly only true and good, are apparently particularly rampant at and from universities. For example, according to a representative survey of students, only a minority of 38% found it unacceptable to remove notices from an event to protest against speakers at the university who believe that migration to Germany leads to problems in the social system and that it seems necessary to limit it; 35% found this behavior absolutely or somewhat acceptable, 27% partially acceptable (Hinz, Mozer, and Strauß 2023, 20). According to a survey at the University of Frankfurt, younger and female students who are politically left-wing are particularly intolerant (with a total of around 80% of respondents identifying themselves as left-wing and voting for the Left (38%), Greens (24%) or SPD (16%)) (Revers and Traunmüller 2020). Accordingly, (the few) politically center-right oriented students (and men) more frequently expressed the experience and concern of being attacked for political opinions and that they held back in this regard (the latter, however, applied more to women than to men) (Revers and Traunmüller 2020). Overall, around a third of all students said that they were reluctant to express political opinions, with issues of gender and identity politics again playing an important role.

played a primary role (Revers and Traunmüller 2020). In a survey, 70% of the professors and post-doctoral lecturers who responded to the question affirmed that the denial of climate change would also provoke fierce resistance at the university (Petersen 2021).

5.4 Technocratic-authoritarian climate protection movement as a threat to democracy

The theses of man-made climate change primarily affect younger, academically educated people, who are mostly female and come from the upper classes (see Buzogány and Scherhauser 2023; Sommer et al. 2019). In contrast, the majority of the population has primarily economic concerns (cf. Atkinson, Skinner, and Gebrekal 2023), presumably even more so in large parts of the world. Fears of a supposed end of the world, as expressed in the term "Last Generation", give rise to corresponding radical demands based on a firm belief in 'science', regardless of scientific controversy or uncertainty. Above all, Greta Thunberg, founder of the 'Fridays for Future' movement, reveals a "technocratic ecocentrism" of a one-sided, simplistic, 'Manichean' world view, from which she derives non-negotiable political demands (see Zulianello and Ceccobelli 2020): "You can't make deals with physics", she categorically stated in this regard (ARD- Tagesthemen, 16.10.2020). Incidentally, Chancellor Merkel also used the identical 'killer argument' to enforce tough restrictions on freedom in the 'corona crisis' ("The virus does not negotiate", see [Generalanzeiger 22.3.21](#)). Finally, Roger Hallam, co-founder of the 'Extinction Rebellion' movement, even declared democracy to be "irrelevant, claiming a superior morality and a right to resistance: "When a society acts so immorally, democracy becomes irrelevant." (Der SPIEGEL, 13.9.2019).

6 Conclusion and outlook

However, technocratic-authoritarian tendencies as a threat to democracy are not only coming from the radical climate protection movement and student, left-green milieus; representatives of the German government are also openly toying with more or less authoritarian ideas. Health Minister Lauterbach, for example, has already called for: "We therefore need measures to tackle climate change that are analogous to the restrictions on personal freedom in the fight against the pandemic" ([Die Welt 27.10.2020](#)). This means a kind of preventive state of emergency and 'lockdown' in the interests of 'climate protection', with measures such as curfews, bans on gatherings, rigid rules of conduct for daily life, including strict police controls and penalties, without any time limit.

limitation. The Federal Constitutional Court apparently does not set any limits to the authoritarian uprisings either, for example by interpreting conflicts of fundamental rights unilaterally when examining corona measures and strictly following the government and its selected experts without including controversial scientific views (see Hamed 2022; Kämmerer and Jischkowski 2020; Knieps 2020; Lucenti 2023). With its so-called 'climate decision', the high court has already legitimized a large scope for future, *preventive* restrictions on freedom in the interest of climate protection and thus further opened the 'Pandora's box' of the state of emergency ([24 March 2021, 1 BvR 2656/18](#)). Guiding principle 1b contains virtually unlimited possibilities for anticipatory restrictions of freedom, regardless of scientific controversy or uncertainty: "If there is scientific uncertainty about environmentally relevant causal relationships, the special duty of care imposed on the legislator by Article 20a of the Basic Law, also for the benefit of future generations, includes taking into account already reliable indications of the possibility of serious or irreversible impairments." This means that civil liberties can be restricted on mere suspicion and in the fictitious, constructed interest of unborn people, whereby the BVerfG again selectively chose scientific points of view in this decision and ignored critical voices (cf. Vahrenholt and Lüning 2021). Most recently, the announcement by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) at the beginning of his government shows how far the authoritarian furor in the coronavirus crisis has progressed (Die Zeit 2.12.21): "For my government, there are no more red lines in what to do. There is nothing we can rule out. You can't do that during a major natural disaster or a health disaster like a pandemic. Protecting the health of our citizens is paramount." The Federal Chancellor is thus revealing a tendentious interpretation of the Basic Law, which does indeed provide for 'red lines' and does not give priority to a 'super basic right' of health protection, but rather, in view of historical experience, to respect for human dignity and freedom. Based on the historical experience of democracy slipping into an authoritarian system, all Germans have the right to resist "anyone who undertakes to abolish this order" according to Article 20 (4). However, this right only applies "if no other remedy is possible" (ibid.), which, despite all the restrictions and erosion of democracy, can hardly be seriously asserted at present. However, a restoration of democracy, i.e. a reduction of its weakness through more direct, effective participation of the people, is urgently needed.

7 Literature

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