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**From Austerity to Solidarity?
German Discourse about Common Debt
during the Eurocrisis and the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Master Thesis
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Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that I have prepared this thesis independently. All contributions and views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been referenced. The thesis has been written in accordance with the requirements for final theses at the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies.

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Abstract

In the wake of unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the European Union member states collectively agreed on introducing common debt in 2020. In light of Germany's pivotal role for the agreement, this thesis explores Germany's policy shift from opposing collective borrowing during the eurocrisis a decade ago to endorsing common debt as a unified response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Using discursive institutionalism, the study introduces two variables: the status-quo bias of decision-makers and persuasion in discourse. Focusing on the two initial periods during both crises, the discourse in Germany is analyzed following a comparative research design. Critical Interpretive Synthesis and Critical Discourse Analysis are applied to examine scholarly articles and interviews, speeches, statements, position papers and newspaper editorials. The empirical analysis reveals that fewer different ideas for a common European policy response were presented in the German discourse during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the eurocrisis. This prevented choice overload, weakening the status-quo bias of decision-makers and facilitating policy change in form of introducing common debt. Further, results show that proponents of collective borrowing discursively aligned the policy outcome of common debt with the ideas of opposed actors during the Covid-19 pandemic, but not the eurocrisis. Employing this strategy increased the persuasion of proposals for common debt. The thesis concludes that Germany's policy shift is a result of a weaker status-quo bias of decision-makers and increased persuasion by proponents of common debt. The presentation of novel insights into the mechanisms and factors that determine how ideas and discourse influence policy-making provides an alternative explanation to account for policy continuity and change. For policy-makers, the findings come with valuable implications by demonstrating opportunities to strategically alter the status-quo bias of decision-makers and increase the own persuasiveness in discourse. Study limitations in comparability, transferability and causality provide points of departure for further research.

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Acronyms

AfD	Alternative for Germany
BDI	Federation of German Industries
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CDU	Christian Democratic Union
CIS	Critical Interpretive Synthesis
DIW	German Institute for Economic Research
ECB	European Central Bank
EFSF	European Financial Stability Facility
EIB	European Investment Bank
ESM	European Stability Mechanism
EU	European Union
FAZ	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
FDP	Free Democratic Party
ifo	ifo Institute for Economic Research
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
NGEU	NextGenerationEU
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
SPD	Social Democratic Party
SZ	Süddeutsche Zeitung

1 Introduction

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 not only posed a serious public health crisis in Europe and elsewhere, but triggered severe economic disruptions to national economies around the globe. Individuals and businesses struggled with the effects of an economic downturn as risk of business closures increased and unemployment was rising (Mileusnic 2023; Becker 2023). Simultaneously, national governments encountered a dual economic challenge: a decline in revenue collection was paired with the need to increase spending on healthcare and emergency support measures for citizens and businesses (Krotz & Schramm 2022). In her first televised speech during the Covid-19 pandemic, German Chancellor Angela Merkel underscored that "we can and will do whatever it takes to help our businesses and workers through this difficult test" (Merkel 2020a). For the national governments, this was the imperative not only in Germany, but across all European Union member states at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the European Union (EU) was facing serious crises throughout its history. For the past decade, the European project was put under pressure by the global financial and subsequent eurocrisis, increasing migration flows, the United Kingdom terminating its EU membership, rule of law concerns, the pandemic and steadily increasing aggression from Russia. The eurocrisis that unfolded in 2010 threatened the single currency and with it the EU's Economic and Monetary Union. Arrivals of migrants peaked for the first time around 2015 and questioned the Schengen system and the EU's key principle of free movement. In 2016, the citizens of the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU, a process that concluded in 2020. At the same time, scepticism towards the EU has been increasing. This has been accompanied by some EU member states acting against the Union's fundamental principles of democracy and rule of law. With the most recent crises of Russia's war on Ukraine, the EU is already faced with a new challenge that requires a common European policy response¹.

With the prominent role of crises, the focus of this thesis is on explaining variations in the policy outcomes agreed on by the EU member states response to crises. To do so, the following research contrasts the EU's common policy responses to the Covid-19 pandemic (hereafter also

¹In this thesis, a common European policy response is understood as the implementation of policy measures and instruments following their coordination and agreement between the member states of the European Union.

referred to as "pandemic") and the eurocrisis, respectively. Both cases reflect major economic crises to which the EU member states chose to adopt significantly different policy responses. The eurocrisis evolved when the global financial crisis hit European countries that already struggled with high public debt. Consequently, financial aid was required to enable these troubling countries to support their national economies (Frieden & Walter 2017). In exchange for providing aid, the EU member states agreed on several policy measures to strengthened the existing policy regime. This mainly included tighter requirements for fiscal consolidation, the imposition of austerity measures and strengthened oversight procedures (Ioannou et al. 2015; Bressanelli & Chelotti 2016). Meanwhile, policy proposals that called for common debt among the EU member states were not implemented. Doing so would have enabled financially constrained countries to keep access to resources, needed to finance domestic support measures, at lower costs. In context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the economic downturn was triggered by lockdowns and similar restrictions introduced in countries to prevent contagion with the pandemic-causing virus (Becker 2023; de la Porte & Heins 2022). To finance strongly needed support measures for their citizens and economy, some countries had less resources available (Mileusnic 2023; Krotz & Schramm 2022). This time, the EU member states reached an agreement on introducing common debt, providing all countries with cheap access to necessary resources for responding to the crisis (European Commission 2023). By collectively borrowing money from the financial markets and share the responsibility for repayment, the decision to introduce common debt reflects a major break with the EU's previous monetary and fiscal policy (Schelkle 2021).

To explain why the instrument of common debt was introduced during the pandemic but not the eurocrisis, several scholars emphasize the decisive role of Germany in guiding the EU's policy-making (Ferrera et al. 2021; Bulmer 2022; Krotz & Schramm 2022). Due to the country's economic strength and role as the EU's largest creditor, it is assigned a leading role in designing a common economic policy response (Paterson 2011). At the same time, Germany is often referred to as status quo-oriented "reluctant hegemon" (Bulmer & Paterson 2013, 1392). In this role, the German government was the driving force behind the introduction of policy measures to promote fiscal discipline of EU member states and strengthen oversight and control mechanisms in response of the eurocrisis (Bulmer 2022). In contrast, Germany's position regarding a common European economic response to the Covid-19 pandemic switched during the crisis. Initially opposed to collective borrowing, the country soon became an advocate for

introducing common debt on the European level. Against this background, the central research puzzle in this thesis revolves around the shift in Germany's policy stance from vehemently opposing collective borrowing during the eurocrisis to ultimately supporting the introduction of common debt for pandemic relief. The corresponding research question (RQ) asks:

Why did Germany agree to the introduction of common debt in context of the Covid-19 pandemic but not during the eurocrisis?

The objective of this thesis is to explain the change in Germany's position on common debt from the eurocrisis to the pandemic. This includes uncovering the factors and mechanisms that guided the country's stance on collective borrowing during both crises. On a more general scale, pursuing the research objective adds to the literature on explaining variations in European policy outcomes during crises. Overall, this thesis aims to contribute to a better understanding of factors and processes that shape European decision-making during crises.

The research puzzle spotlights a significant gap in the existing body of knowledge within European integration literature. While prior research has raised Germany's policy shift in its relation to common debt in the EU, crucial aspects remain unexplored. Most notably, the current literature lacks a comprehensive understanding of *how* and *why* this shift took place. Main theories of European integration come with major limitations for explaining policy-making during crises. Important shortcomings include the assumption of rational and fixed state preferences while neglecting the role of public opinion and discourse. This necessitates a fresh approach (Carstensen 2011). In light of an ideational turn in political science, the theoretical framework of discursive institutionalism emphasizes the significance of ideas and discourse alongside material factors (Schmidt 2008, 2011). Thus, this theoretical approach serves as the point of departure for examining the reasons behind Germany's policy shift.

With continuing disagreement among political scientists on *why* and *how* ideas matter in policy-making, this thesis focuses on the role of two factors related to ideas and discourse in explaining Germany's policy shift and the introduction of common debt in response to the pandemic (Boswell & Hampshire 2017, 2). Concerned with the status-quo bias of decision-makers, the first hypothesis states that the bias was weaker during the pandemic because fewer different ideas for a policy response were presented in the German discourse. The second hypothesis focuses on factors influencing persuasiveness and states that during the pandemic, the proposal

for common debt was more persuasive compared to the eurocrisis because proponents of collective borrowing highlighted greater alignment of common debt with the ideas of opposed actors in German discourse.

To investigate the research puzzle of Germany's policy shift regarding common debt, the thesis employs a qualitative comparative research design. A small-N most-similar-systems-design is applied to compare the initial discourses in Germany on a common European policy response during both crises. To analyze the discourse of relevant actors, the selected data covers political actors, economic experts and think tanks, media and businesses. For examining the German discourse during the eurocrisis, secondary sources in form of academic literature is collected. Besides providing a comprehensive corpus of data due to extensive availability of previous studies about the eurocrisis, the issue of primary data availability is addressed. The analysis of the German discourse during the pandemic rests on data from primary sources, including interviews and speeches of politicians, statements and parliamentary motions of political parties, policy and position papers of economic experts, think tanks and businesses as well as newspaper editorials.

Within the framework of discourse analysis, the methods of Critical Interpretive Synthesis and Critical Discourse Analysis are used to analyze the German discourse during the two crises. Critical Interpretive Synthesis is applied to critically review, interpret and synthesize the collected academic literature for the analysis of the eurocrisis discourse. Critical Discourse Analysis is applied to examine the written and spoken text of primary sources collected for the analysis of the pandemic discourse. Both methods enable to uncover the meanings, discursive strategies and practices expressed and employed by actors in context of discussing a common European policy response to the respective crisis. Open and iterative coding with constant comparison is conducted to retrieve the different ideas presented and used in discourse from the data. This allows to test the hypotheses and subsequently draw implications regarding the role of ideas and discourse in affecting the status-quo bias of decision-makers and the persuasiveness of common debt proponents.

The thesis proceeds as follows. The first chapter introduces the theoretical framework. The significance of the crisis context for the process of European integration and policy continuity and change is outlined, followed by a brief review of main European integration theories and their perspectives on crisis policy-making. Then, the turn to ideas and discourse in political

science is outlined before discursive institutionalism is introduced and subsequently expanded to constitute the theoretical framework for this thesis. The second chapter begins with an introduction of the research design. This includes the selection and presentation of the two cases to be compared, followed by the demonstration of the data selection and collection process. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the methods for analysis and a discussion of the overall research limitations. The third chapter contains the empirical analysis. To start, the German discourse on a common European policy response to the eurocrisis is examined to uncover the different ideas and discursive practices employed by actors. Subsequently, the process is repeated for the analysis of the German discourse during the Covid-19 pandemic. The final part of the chapter discusses the empirical results of the analysis in light of the two hypotheses and the overall theoretical framework to answer the research question. Further, implications and limitations of the conducted research are discussed. The last chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing the research puzzle and question, theoretical and methodological approach, the process of analysis and the findings.

2 Crisis Discourse, Policy Outcomes and the Role of Ideas

The following chapter introduces the theoretical framework for the research conducted in this thesis. To start, the concept of crises and its relevance for policy-making is presented. Subsequently, the chapter proceeds with an elaboration on how popular theories of European integration explain the European policy-making process. Then, the turn to ideas and discourse is introduced, justifying why a novel approach to explaining policy variations across crises is necessary. Against this background, discursive institutionalism is outlined and further developed to constitute the theoretical approach applied in this thesis. Two new variables are introduced to explain Germany's policy shift regarding common debt before the chapter concludes with the formulation of two hypotheses that guide the empirical analysis.

2.1 The Concept of Crisis

Crises are portrayed as a catalyst for change and facilitator of integration, although a consistent conceptualization is missing. Existing literature on European integration views crises as triggers for the revision of policies. Nevertheless, the effects of crises on policy-making are not uniform and policy outcomes continue to vary greatly across crises (Voltolini et al. 2020, 5). One fundamental aspect is to understand crises as critical moments for decision-making. This implies demand for immediate policy choices to prevent escalation and ensure the continued functioning of the affected policy area. Consequently, crises are periods of time in which political contention and uncertainty is high (Lahusen et al. 2016, 529; Ferrara & Kriesi 2022, 1354). Thus, crises influence the European integration process in numerous ways. On the one hand, they may expose shortcomings in established practices and institutional designs, which can lead to learning and the modification of policies in support of increased integration (Kamkhaji & Radaelli 2017, 714). On the other hand, crises may also cause disintegration by highlighting and reinforcing existing divides among the EU member states. This can prevent agreement on further integrative policies (Bulmer 2014). To explain the differences in policy outcomes across crises, political scientists assume various causes and processes to influence the choice for a policy response. (Schimmelfennig 2018, 972). These assumptions are then aggregated into theories.

Theories of European integration offer generalized approaches for explaining policy-making on the European level. They come with different perspectives regarding the origins, policy mechanisms, procedures and other factors that affect policy-making. By doing so, theories present distinctive ways to explain variances in integration outcomes across different crises. Thereby, the assumptions that each theory rests on may be contradictory to other approaches or complement them, enabling a combination for a more comprehensive theoretical framework (Schimmelfennig 2018, 972; Ioannou et al. 2015, 156). When examining crises, the integration theories provide different points of departure for the analysis. For example, this concerns the focus on specific actors, particular ways of inquiry and the inclusion of specific contextual factors. Overall, the theories help to advance the understanding of particular events and developments based on their distinctive assumptions. Nevertheless, they are not exhaustive in explaining every facet of the European integration process. This underscores the necessity for ongoing discussion, testing, and revision of these theories (Hooghe & Marks 2019).

2.2 European Integration Theories and Crises

To prepare the ground for a fresh theoretical approach to the introduction of common debt, the following section introduces main theories of European integration and how they explain policy outcomes during crises. The perspectives of intergovernmentalism, neofunctionalism, postfunctionalism and institutionalism are covered to provide a comprehensive overview of popular approaches to European integration.

Intergovernmentalism

Theories of intergovernmentalism generally assume that European integration depends on national preferences, which are bargained on the international level. Thus, member states remain the main actors in the process of European integration (Schimmelfennig & Rittberger 2006, 81). Focusing on the process of national preference formation and the role of supranational institutions, liberal intergovernmentalism as developed by Moravcsik (1993, 1997) constitutes the best known intergovernmentalist theory. It views member state preferences as the representation of issue-specific and mainly economic interests by the most powerful domestic groups

(Kleine & Pollack 2018a, 4). Preference formation is followed by intergovernmental bargaining between the EU member states. During this, national governments are concerned with rationally reaching an agreement that best reflects their position. However, asymmetric interdependence shapes the negotiations so that the bargaining power among the EU member states is unequal. More specifically, the countries that are the least committed to reaching an agreement have more powers to dictate the terms of an agreement (Moravcsik 1997, 523). Finally, liberal intergovernmentalism treats supranational institutions as tools to ensure compliance with agreements and making commitments credible. Thus, these institutions only gain as much competence as needed to effectively make sure the agreement is followed by all parties. Thereby, national governments remain the principal actors of the integration process (Hooghe & Marks 2019; Kleine & Pollack 2018b, 1116).

The factors of domestic preference formation, intergovernmental bargaining and delegation of powers to supranational institutions also account for policy-making and integration outcomes during crisis, according to liberal intergovernmentalism. Thus, even in times of crises national preferences will be determined by the domestically most powerful groups based on the costs and losses associated with the circumstances (Schimmelfennig 2018, 972). Further, the burdens that come with crisis situations, whether economically or as political costs, need to be distributed among the EU member states. At this stage of intergovernmental bargaining, countries that are least affected by crises and have little to lose from the lack of further integration are most likely to reach their preferred policy outcomes (Schimmelfennig 2018, 973). Last, the amount of competences delegated to supranational institutions is determined by the perceived value of the agreements for member states and the level of uncertainty regarding the policy commitment of others (Ferrara & Kriesi 2022, 1357). Overall, the framework of intergovernmentalism defines national preferences, bargaining power and commitment issues to be the decisive factors for explaining the policy outcomes of crises.

Neofunctionalism

Neofunctionalism describes European integration as a process that functions through spillovers and unintended consequences of past policy choices. Actors are defined as utility maximizers with dynamic interests that are capable of identifying policy interdependencies and limits to

national solutions. Meanwhile, supranational institutions gain autonomy over time and evade the control by the EU member states as their initial founders due to constant accumulation of additional resources intended to carry out their initial tasks of oversight and enforcement (Pierson 1996, 132). Paired with their interest in increasing own powers, supranational institutions become agents of integration (Niemann 1998, 429). Based on these assumptions, the concept of spillover serves as the mechanism to explain the policy-making process. First, functional spillover highlights functional pressures to be responsible for further integration. This type of spillover takes place when further integration is required to reach an initial objective, mostly due to existing interdependencies (Niemann & Ioannou 2015, 198). Second, political spillover occurs when societal actors shift their problem-solving expectations to the European level based on previous experiences. As a result, national decision-makers get pressured domestically to promote further integration as well (Niemann 1998, 430). Finally, cultivated spillover accounts for the integration pressures exerted by non-national institutions. Their mediation skills and neutral role facilitate agreements and the exchange of concessions between member states to promote integrative steps beyond the lowest common denominator (Niemann 1998, 430).

For crises situations, all three forms of spillover are at the core of neofunctionalism in explaining policy outcomes. Functional spillover comes to play when a crisis reveals that initial objectives are unattainable because of shortcomings of specific policies or the overall institutional architecture. To reach the original goal, increasing pressure on the EU member states to address the functional deficiencies promotes further integration as the solution. Thereby, integration usually trumps disintegration due to previous investments by countries in the integration process and the costs associated with leaving the EU (Schimmelfennig 2018, 974). In parallel, the capacity of supranational institutions in facilitating crisis coordination paired with their autonomous interest in further integration becomes a relevant factor for explaining crisis policy outcomes. Thereby, the influence of these institutions is expected to increase in policy areas where they already possess competencies (Ferrara & Kriesi 2022, 1358). Less discussed but equally relevant for making sense of the policy decisions during crisis is political spillover which suggests that interest groups may become strong advocates for centralized solutions to tackle imminent policy problems. If this demand becomes dominant domestically, it puts pressure on the member states to coordinate and eventually delegate authorities to centralized actors (Ioannou et al. 2015, 165). To conclude, crises may trigger each and different forms of spillover, which can be referenced to explain the variation in policy outcomes across crises.

Postfunctionalism

Postfunctionalism shifts the focus away from rational and elite-centered explanations of integration by highlighting the pivotal role of mass politicization and identity politics in shaping policy outcomes. First developed by Hooghe & Marks (2009), this increasingly prominent theory of European integration identifies politicization instead of effective problem-solving as the centerpiece of European integration processes. Thereby, politicization means the increased salience of European issues in public, rising polarization regarding European cooperation and increasing public mobilization around these two aspects (Börzel & Risse 2018, 85). Neofunctionalism already addresses this increased salience of European issues and links it to an ongoing shift of expectations by societal actors to the European level (Börzel & Risse 2009). Postfunctionalism, instead, replaces the “permissive consensus” assumption with a “constraining dissensus” to highlight the dangers of disintegration for cases in which public opinion is opposed to further integration (Hooghe & Marks 2019, 1117). While the permissive consensus denotes that political elites can advance European integration with minimal public debate, interpreting the absence of European issues from public discourse as silent support, a constraining dissensus emerges when heightened public scrutiny and growing concerns about further integration impede agreement on European policies. (Hooghe & Marks 2009; Down & Wilson 2008). Against this background, the theory argues that this role of mass opinion is strategically instrumentalized by political actors. Public mobilization along the lines of group-forming “identities” henceforth drives the European integration process (Statham & Trez 2015). Thus, postfunctionalism contrasts liberal intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism by primarily highlighting the negative consequences of European integration and conceiving the policy-making process as limited by mass public opinion.

In crises contexts, postfunctionalism highlights the politicization of affected policy area(s) and related public mobilization as key determinants for integration outcomes. In that, mobilization primarily takes place along the overarching line of collective “identities” that reflect the cleavage between anti-integration nationalists and pro-European transnationalists (Börzel & Risse 2018). With that, the theoretical approach works particularly well for explaining non-integrative policy outcomes as the result of an opposed mass public opinion (Hooghe & Marks 2019, 1117). Nevertheless, newer accounts of postfunctionalism also consider the capacity of transnational actors to strengthen supranationalism in the contest of nationalists versus transna-

tionalists in times of crises. Crises policy-making is therefore characterized by identity-driven conflict, in which each group seeks to defend their community interests. The variation in policy outcomes is ultimately defined by the mobilization efforts and ideological commitment of each group on the national level (Schimmelfennig 2023).

Institutionalism

The three so-called "new" institutionalisms – rational, historical and sociological – share the premise that institutions shape and constrain the actors of European integration processes. However, they apply different foci when explaining why and how institutions do so. Rational choice institutionalism points out the restricting effect of institutions for further actions of utility-maximizing actors (Pollack 2019). For example, the institutional structure and rules may prevent a deviation from a specific legislative procedure although that would increase time efficiency. Thus, policy outcomes are the result of the interplay between rational actor preferences and the institutional framework that structures decision-making (Immergut 1998). Historical institutionalism shares many of the rational choice assumptions but emphasizes time as pivotal factor. More precisely, the approach argues that past choices and historical legacies shape the development of institutions and lead to path-dependent policy outcomes. This is because of feedback processes and established practices that reinforce the existing setting while making change more difficult to implement (Pierson 1996; Christiansen & Verdun 2020). In contrast to rational choice and historical variants, sociological institutionalism defines institutions more broadly and considers actor choices to follow a “logic of appropriateness” rather than rational interests concerned with utility maximization. In this context, both formal and informal norms and conventional practices restrict and guide actor preferences and behaviour (Pollack 2009, 127).

Out of the three institutionalisms, historical institutionalism is the approach mostly used to explain policy outcomes during crises. The central argument is that a crisis constitutes a period in which the path-dependent logic is challenged due to the disruptive effect. New external pressures, reevaluation of existing practices and imminent need for policy decisions may lead to path-breaking policy choices (Peters et al. 2005). While exit costs are high during periods of stability, periods of uncertainty and disturbance lower the costs for rearrangements. Therefore,

crises are considered as “critical junctures” and enablers of policy change (Verdun 2015). Still, the existing institutional structure that builds on historic decisions narrows down the available options for a policy response. Current institutions may prove immune to change or incentivize specific policy choices. The most relevant factors to ultimately define the policy outcome therefore include the adaption capacity and flexibility of institutions, the availability of alternative policy ideas and the perceived effectiveness of continuity or change (Pollack 2009). Against this background, actors formulate policy responses that are influenced by the past while being likely to influence future policy-making themselves (Pollack 2019).

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the crisis context and integration theories in explaining policy responses and corresponding integration outcomes. Preceded by a shock, the key determinant of each above-presented theoretical approach for explaining the policy response is shown. Depending on the agreed measures, crises ultimately lead to more or less European integration.

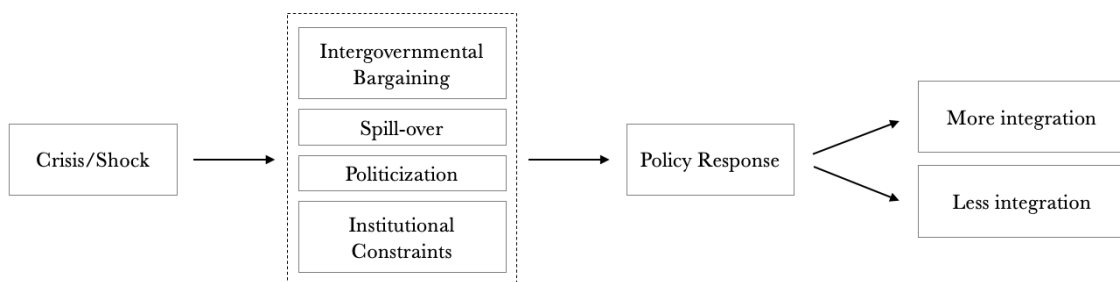


Figure 1: The relationship of crises, popular integration theories, policy responses and their effect on the European integration process (based on Ferrara & Kriesi (2022) and Schimmelfennig (2018)).

2.3 The Turn to Ideas and Discourse

Newer theories of European integration increasingly shift away from solely focusing on material determinants towards including ideational factors to explain political change and actor behaviour. One reason for this development is that the assumption of rational and interest-driven actors striving for utility maximization has proven insufficient to account for all instances of policy change (Schmidt 2011). Therefore, scholars increasingly focus on ideas and beliefs as a new set of factors – besides material interests and power dynamics – to explain actor choices

and policy outcomes (Carstensen 2011, 596). This ideational turn in political science has become particularly dominant among approaches for explaining crises policy-making. With crises previously defined as moments of high uncertainty, the formulation of own rational interests and ways for their effective maximization become increasingly difficult and unpredictable. In response, the significance of ideas in shaping actor behaviour and influencing policy preferences increases (Carstensen 2011, 596). Against this background, theories that focus on ideational explanations currently dominate the study of European integration in times of crises. Yet, ideas alone do not change institutions. Most studies that encompass the turn to ideas lack a concise explanation of *why* and *how* ideas are translated into real policy outcomes. When applying ideational theories, the aim must therefore be to determine factors and establish mechanisms that can explain the link between ideas and policy-making. That entails explaining why some ideas prevail over others in guiding policy choices and how these determine crisis outcomes (Blyth 2011; Boswell & Hampshire 2017).

Among scholars, this overall research goal caused a growing focus on discourse, its practices and its role as intermediary that connects ideas to policy choices. The turn to discourse can be understood as the increasing focus on communication, construction, and alteration of interests, meanings, understandings, and ideas in language and discourse (Wodak 2018, 6). In this capacity, examining discourses serves as a means to investigate the content of ideas and related interactive processes that drive policy-making. Thereby, discursive approaches usually encompass simultaneous analyses of text and context in the formulation of policies (Prior et al. 2012, 271). This focus on discourse contributes to a better understanding of the process that moves ideas from individual thought to group action (Schmidt 2010, 15). In light of the research objective to explain the change in Germany's policy towards supporting the introduction of common debt for pandemic relief, the turn to ideas and discourse provides the foundation for applying an ideational theoretical approach. Accordingly, the theoretical framework for this thesis focuses on ideas and discourse to make sense of Germany's policy shift.

2.4 Discursive Institutionalism

Discursive institutionalism is one alternative approach to the earlier presented theories for explaining variations in policy outcomes, emphasizing the role of ideas and discourse. According

to its main proponent, Vivien Schmidt, policy continuity and change depend on power that rests on the substantive content of ideas and discursive interactions surrounding these ideas (Schmidt 2010, 15). For that, she makes the case for ideational power as an additional form of power distinct from coercive, structural, and institutional power (Carstensen & Schmidt 2016). The ability to persuade people based on the possibility of punishment is what gives someone coercive power (Schmidt 2022, 983). Additionally, structural power is defined as the authority and control of subjects in structural interactions, such as the relationship between workers and owners in Marxism. Last, institutional power is the exercise of authority over others through formal and informal institutions that direct and constrain how individuals relate to one another (Carstensen & Schmidt 2016, 319). What the concept of ideational power adds to that is the capacity to account for the role of persuasion in political debate. It allows to explain how discursive practices and processes influence actor preferences and shape behaviour. In context of crises, this provides the basis for examining when, why and how ideas and discourse shape policy outcomes (Schmidt 2008, 305).

2.4.1 Types and Purposes of Ideas and Discourse

Ideas constitute the fundamental element of discursive institutionalism and, according to Schmidt (2008, 2013), exist on various levels while serving a variety of objectives. In general, ideas are presented, deliberated and contested in discourse. Cognitive ideas address the problem definition and potential solutions. They explain to others "what is and what to do". In contrast, the normative type of ideas serves (de-)legitimization purposes. These ideas support a particular viewpoint on which policies are good or undesirable (Schmidt 2008, 306). Schmidt further distinguishes between three levels of ideas, reflecting the generality of an idea: policies, programs, and philosophies (Schmidt 2013). Ideas on the first level contain specific proposals for immediate measures to be introduced regarding certain issues, for instance the introduction of a specific tax on a particular product (Schmidt 2013, 458). The second level reflects the more general understanding of problems, available policy instruments, and the goals to be reached by specific policies (Schmidt 2013, 457). An example for an idea on this level is to stimulate economic growth in the domestic photovoltaic industry through subsidies for their production, tax incentives for their purchase and imposition of tariffs on imported photovoltaic products. The third level refers to a specific *Weltanschauung* or ideology that comes with underlying as-

assumptions about the society (Schmidt 2013, 457). For example, this can be an economic theory which follows the assumption that avoiding any spending deficit is best to ensure a stable national economy. Figure 2 illustrates how an idea (top box) is rooted on either of the three levels of generality (second row of boxes) and can either reflect cognitive or normative thinking and argumentation (bottom boxes), according to Schmidt (2008, 2013).

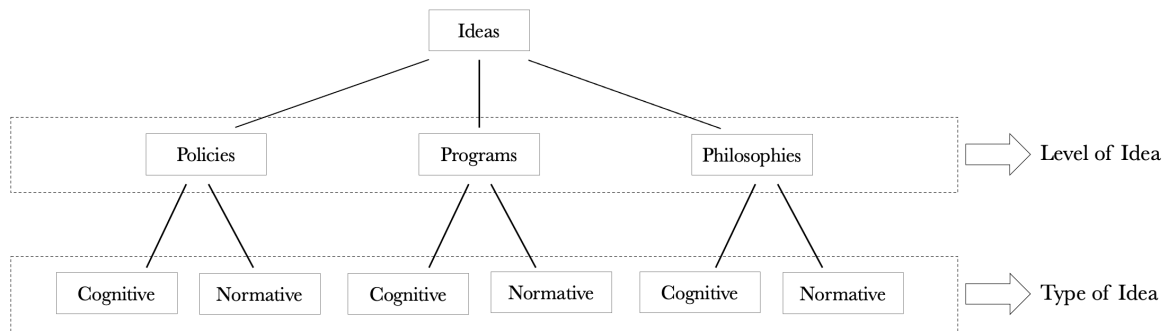


Figure 2: Own visualization of the concept of ideas based on Schmidt (2008, 2013).

Ideas simultaneously constrain actors in what they can imagine and think of in terms of policy-making while being instrumentalized by actors to promote their objectives (Boswell & Hampshire 2017, 1). Consequently, ideas on the first two levels are regularly discussed. More specifically, ideas on the level of policies are constantly exchanged and deliberated on specific policy issues. Ideas on the level of programs are frequently addressed in context of formulating political strategies, for example in preparation for elections. In contrast, philosophical ideas are rarely discussed, largely due to the limited time horizons for politicians and global concord of most countries that hampers a sustainable and stable change of philosophies (Goetz & Meyer-Sahling 2009). In times of crises, where political contention is even higher, the challenging of currently dominant ideas and the surfacing of and presentation of new ideas increases. The final policy outcome ultimately emerges from a competition between contrasting ideas for a policy response (Brunnermeier et al. 2016). Given this role of ideas, the essential question for academics to be answered is "why some ideas become the policies, programs, and philosophies that dominate political reality while others do not" (Schmidt 2008, 307).

Discourse constitutes the space in which ideas are presented, deliberated, contested and legitimized. That encompasses both the expression of ideas and the accompanying interactive

processes (Schmidt 2008; Boswell & Hampshire 2017). Thereby, language is employed as a tool to articulate the ideas that ultimately constitute the context of discourse. The examination of discourse therefore becomes necessary to identify and understand the content and use of ideas in structuring the thinking and behaviour of actors (Wilson 2015, 775). As highlighted in context of the turn to ideas, the examination incorporates both text and contextual elements (Prior et al. 2012, 271). Therefore, the concept of discourse not only includes what is being said, but also the actors involved and the circumstances (where, when, how and why) (Schmidt 2008, 305). Overall, analyzing discourse within the framework of discursive institutionalism means investigating the interplay between words, actors and context in order to understand how ideas shape behaviour and with it policy-making and outcomes (Boswell & Hampshire 2017).

To facilitate the analysis, Schmidt (2008, 2010, 2013) divides the previously defined space into separate coordinative and communicative discourses. Each of the discourses comes with a distinct purpose and includes different actors. The coordinative discourse is concerned with the construction and execution of policies and therefore takes place among policy-makers. Depending on the level of ideas that corresponds to the discussed issue, coalitions of like-minded policy-makers can differ. Further, their formation is influenced by structural factors, for instance access to policy-making (Schmidt 2013, 458). The goal of the communicative discourse between policy-makers and the public is to present, validate, and legitimize certain ideas. The deliberation of ideas may also be part of the communicative discourse. Depending on the audience and purpose of the discourse, ideas can be presented in various ways and with varying emphasis. Some actors may attempt to align the communicative and coordinative discourse in order to better support their ideas and direct the debate. Other actors, however, might seek for minimal communication regarding sensitive and divisive policy subjects (Schmidt 2013, 459).

2.4.2 The Link of Ideas to Power

The key task that follows from the conceptualizations of ideas and discourse is to understand the connection between these two concepts on the one hand and power on the other hand in ultimately shaping policy outcomes during crises. To do so, Carstensen & Schmidt (2016) provide a comprehensive typology of the different kinds of ideational power.

Power through ideas recognizes the ability of actors to persuade others of their viewpoints through the expression of their cognitive and normative ideas. This kind of power allows to influence what the public and policy-makers believe to be the most appropriate, suitable, and effective course of action by instrumentalizing language and ideas to persuade others (Carstensen & Schmidt 2016, 323). While coercion does not apply for this kind, it does play a role for the second type of ideational power, *power over ideas*. This kind of power indicates the ability of actors to shape how ideas are perceived and received by others based on their institutional standing. On the one hand, this means having the ability to manage the dissemination of information to prevent the appearance of competing viewpoints. Fighting against opposing views by building strong evidence in support of one's own opinions is another aspect of it (Carstensen & Schmidt 2016, 326). On the other hand, actors who are formally powerless might shame others into compliance. As the dismayed actor does not necessarily need to alter its belief system to comply, this can be seen as ideational coercion (Schmidt 2017, 252). Finally, *power in ideas* differs from the two previous types. Whereas power through ideas and over ideas are about the instrumentalization of ideas by actors, power in ideas addresses the inherent authority of ideas in consciously or unconsciously restricting the range of understandings, perceptions, and imaginative possibilities (Carstensen & Schmidt 2016, 329). For example, historical institutionalists refer to the similar aspect when emphasizing the role of institutions in promoting path-dependence. Overall, the typology helps to understand the ways in which ideas and discourse relate to power. It includes both how actors may use ideas to exercise power to shape policy outcomes and how ideas constrain actors in thinking about policy responses to crises.

2.4.3 Literature on the Eurocrisis and the Covid-19 Pandemic

Despite being a relatively new approach introduced in the late 2000s, discursive institutionalism has been applied to European crises on several occasions. This includes studies focused on explaining the EU's policy outcomes during the eurocrisis and the pandemic, particularly concerning the debate on whether or not to introduce common debt. In her two analyses of the eurocrisis, Schmidt (2013, 2014) describes the common crisis response on the European level to be the product of a contest between different ideas on the level of philosophies. She outlines the strong salience of different economic philosophies and a dominance of Germany's status-quo orientation that prevented an agreement on introducing common debt (Schmidt 2014, 199). In

addition, Schmidt (2013, 2014) shows that the communicative discourse on the European level was characterized by France's alignment with the German idea of austerity, ultimately resulting in the rejection of collective borrowing among the EU member states. Concerned with an analysis of the eurocrisis as well, Papadimitriou et al. (2019) show that the crisis period was characterized by a volatile communicative discourse with changing frames and arguments regarding a European policy response. Consequently, inconsistency among advocacy coalitions prevented the introduction of common debt.

Discursive institutionalist approaches have been equally applied to analyse the European policy-making process during the Covid-19 pandemic. Similar to the research puzzle addressed in this thesis, the studies aim to explain why the EU member states agreed on introducing common debt in response to the pandemic. For example, Fabbrini (2023) focuses on member state coalitions that formed around specific sets of ideas. His article outlines the discursive activities of each coalition employed to promote their ideas regarding the problem definition, possible solutions, and their appropriateness. He concludes that the introduction of common debt as the final policy outcome was shaped based on conflicts along four dimensions. These concerned the crisis causes, the need for resources, the post-crisis governance and the rule of law (Fabbrini 2023, 2). While Fabbrini argues that Germany's policy shift towards supporting common debt constituted the relevant factor for the instrument's introduction, an explanation of the causes for Germany's policy shift is missing (Fabbrini 2023, 7). Further, Ferrera et al. (2021) examine the communicative activities during the pandemic. The authors shed light on attempts by European political leaders to advocate for the necessity of common debt in the communicative discourse. The article concludes that German Chancellor Merkel justified her government's consent to collective borrowing by convincing the domestic public of the policy's necessity to maintain the EU as a polity (Ferrera et al. 2021, 1339).

Yet, only one study was found that already engages in a comparative study of the policy outcomes of the eurocrisis and the pandemic from a discursive institutionalist perspective. Schmidt (2022) explores how different types of ideational power were employed in the EU's discourse on common debt during both crises. Her article uncovers how Germany exercised power *in* ideas and *through* ideas to effectively employ crisis frames that made the policy outcome of the eurocrisis align with the EU's existing economic governance regime (Schmidt 2022, 985). In contrast, the pandemic discourse was marked by France's power *through* ideas that persuaded

the German government into shifting its policy towards supporting the introduction of common debt (Schmidt 2022, 987).

All reviewed articles provide useful insights into the relevance of ideas and discourse in shaping policy outcomes. The existing discursive institutionalist literature reflects that the decisions (not) to introduce common debt were influenced by the fragmentation of discourse and persuasion through ideas. While the findings support the argument *that* ideas matter for the design of policy outcomes, convincing explanations of *why* and *how* ideas matter are missing. Specifically, current literature does not provide a theoretically sound explanation of the mechanisms and reasons that justify how fragmented discourses prevent policy change and what makes persuasion work effectively. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of ideas and discourse in reasoning specific policy decisions and outcomes, explaining *why* and *how* ideas matter therefore constitutes the focus of this thesis in explaining Germany's policy shift from rejecting common debt during the eurocrisis to supporting it during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.5 Status-Quo Bias and Persuasion in Discourse

To address the shortcomings of current discursive institutionalist studies pointed out in the preceding section, this thesis aims to explain Germany's policy shift on the issue of common debt by introducing two new variables. As emphasized repeatedly throughout this chapter, not only the content of ideas but also the discursive context and interactive processes shape the policy outcome. Against this background, the two variables that are introduced reflect theoretical arguments to explain how the discursive context and interactive processes affect policy outcomes. First, it is argued that the number of different ideas presented by actors in discourse influences the resistance of decision-makers to policy change and the tendency of policy outcomes to reinforce the status-quo. Second, it is claimed that persuasion in discourse hinges on discursive practices regarding social validation and alignment of the policy outcome with ideas of opposed actors. The remainder of this section introduces both arguments more in detail, followed by the formulation of two corresponding hypotheses that guide the empirical analysis.

The presence of a multitude of different ideas in discussions complicates decision-making. This "choice overload" hypothesis is not new, although originally rooted in psychology liter-

ature (Jilke et al. 2015, 3). It posits that the more choices are provided to actors, the greater the struggles for them to process the information and make a reliable choice. Consequently, intuitive and less informed decision-making becomes dominant (Houdek et al. 2018, 424). To prevent these less informed choices from leading to unexpected and suboptimal policy outcomes, actors align their intuitive choices with the existing policy regime. That is, selected policies align with the content of previous decisions as the outcomes are expected to be better known and therefore less likely to turn out suboptimal. This tendency is also called "status-quo bias" (Jilke et al. 2015, 4). To prevent choice overload and an increased status-quo bias of decision-makers, actors form groups to aggregate their ideas. Consequently, decision-makers are confronted with fewer different ideas to process and choose from when working on a policy response to crises (Keck & Sikkink 1999; Lauber & Schenner 2011, 91). As described, the reduced fragmentation through fewer choices presented in discourse then leads to a weaker status-quo bias and makes policy change, such as the introduction of common debt, more likely (Hope & Raudla 2012, 412). Overall, the preceding paragraph shows the connection between the number of different ideas presented in discourse, the discursive context and how that influences the probability of policy continuity and change. To test this theoretical argument in context of explaining Germany's policy shift regarding common debt, the following first hypothesis (H1) is formulated:

(H1) Fewer different ideas for an economic policy response and the role of solidarity were presented in the German discourse during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the eurocrisis.

Persuasion is understood to be another factor that influences policy choices and shapes the policy outcome. Schmidt's (2008) *power through ideas* already emphasizes the relevance of an actor's ability to persuade others. Thereby, discursive institutionalism already acknowledges the resonance of ideas in discourse as crucial factor for the effectiveness of persuasion (Panizza & Miorelli 2013, 305). Hence, this thesis argues that desired policy outcomes are best promoted by showing how they accord with the ideas of opposed actors. Described as social validation in the persuasion literature, the practice to point out alignment between the policy outcome and the ideas of opposed actors increases concessions by the latter (Perreault & Kida 2011). In line, Lauber & Schenner (2011) contend that decision-makers tend to choose policy instruments that align with their understanding of the policy problem and solution. Boswell & Hampshire (2017) translate this aspect into a strategy that can be employed by actors in dis-

course to increase the persuasiveness of their own proposal vis-à-vis decision-makers. Termed "foregrounding" by the authors, this practice involves pointing out similarities between the own ideas and that of opponents when arguing for a policy response to increase the receptiveness of opponents (Boswell & Hampshire 2017, 4). Overall, the described discursive strategy provides an explanation of why persuasion in discourse matters for the policy outcome and how this mechanism works. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated to test whether this theoretical argument of increased persuasiveness is confirmed in context of Germany's policy shift towards supporting common debt:

(H2) During the Covid-19 pandemic, proponents of the common debt highlighted greater alignment of the policy outcome with the ideas of opposed actors in the German discourse, compared to the eurocrisis.

In light of the hypotheses, this thesis defines ideas as the rationale that guides actors in promoting specific policy instruments. Accordingly, policy-makers adjust their own policy preferences based on their ideas of how to solve a policy problem. As different policy measures can still have similar effects and contribute to the same goal, ideas as defined in this thesis best correspond to the programmatic level of ideas by (Schmidt 2008, 2013). Nevertheless, the definition of ideas employed here deviates from that of Schmidt's (2008, 2013) discursive institutionalism with the three levels of ideas for two reasons. Shifting the focus away from defining ideas as specific policies, the described conceptualization enables to go beyond a purely descriptive account of policy instruments proposed during both crises. This allows to focus on the key intentions of actors that determine their positioning towards policy instruments such as common debt. At the same time, the level of philosophies is left aside in the analysis due to the overly generality and assumed consistency. Rapid change of ideas on this level is unlikely during crises, which thwarts the relevance of this thesis' research (Carstensen & Schmidt 2016, 329).

With the two variables of status-quo bias and persuasion, the analysis framework for this thesis is established. The empirical analysis is guided by the two theoretical arguments amid the aim to test the two corresponding hypotheses. To do so, two tasks arise. First, the ideas for a policy response that were presented in the German discourse to react to the economic crises during the eurocrisis and pandemic, respectively, need to be identified. Secondly, the analysis has to map out how proponents of collective borrowing highlighted alignment of the policy outcome of common debt with the ideas of opposed actors in the German discourse during both crises.

3 Research Design, Data and Methods

This chapter outlines the practical realization of the research. It begins with a presentation and justification of a comparative design as overall research strategy. Then, it is elaborated on the choice to select Germany's initial economic and solidarity discourses during the eurocrisis and the Covid-19 pandemic as cases for the empirical analysis. Subsequently, the process of data selection and collection as well as the methods for analysis are outlined. The chapter concludes with a discussion of possible research limitations.

3.1 Research Design

To investigate the reasons for varying policy outcomes of the eurocrisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, the established theoretical framework is tested in context of a comparative case study. Thereby, the German discourse during the eurocrisis is compared to the German discourse during the pandemic. Here understood as a research strategy, this "small-N" design allows to study few cases in-depth and evaluate hypotheses despite limited time and resources (Lijphart 1971, 685). At the same time, the small number of cases results in a restricted capacity to comprehensively test theories. More specifically, few cases combined with a large number of variables makes the confirmation of causal inferences and the dismissal of rival explanations difficult, preventing reliable generalization (Gisselquist 2014, 479). Against this background, the choice for a small-N comparative design is justified by three reasons. First, as the research objective is to explain why common debt of EU member states was introduced in response to one crises but not another, the availability of cases that discuss this issue is limited (Collier 1993, 105). Second the strategy to compare few cases is recommended for research that is concerned with understanding and explaining the thinking and behaviour of actors (Nissen 1998, 415). Only then, detailed analysis is possible to provides a "thick description" that can sufficiently support specific interpretations of meaning and behaviour (Collier 1993, 110). Third, the theoretical framework of discursive institutionalism applied in this thesis requires to engage in discourse analysis to investigate the role of ideas in shaping policy outcomes. Only then, the substantive content of ideas and the use of discursive strategies can be examined (Schmidt 2011). In turn, the lengthy and detailed process of analyzing discourse restricts the number of cases that can be analyzed, especially within scope of a master's thesis.

Lijphart (1971) suggests to increase the comparability of cases in order to address the limitations resulting from the combination of few cases and many potential explanatory variables. To do so, the case selection aims to keep as many contextual factors as possible constant. Against this background, a most-similar-systems-approach is chosen to compare both cases. The most-similar-systems-design is based on the idea to compare two cases that differ in the dependent variable, i.e. policy outcome while all but one possible cause (independent variable) for this difference remain constant (Anckar 2008). In this thesis, the introduction of common debt as variation in policy outcome of the eurocrisis and the pandemic constitutes the dependent variable. The two new variables of status-quo bias and persuasion reflect the independent variables that are assumed to have caused the difference in policy outcomes. To test this relationship, the case selection in the next section follows the premises of the most-similar-systems-design.

3.2 Case Selection

In line with the research strategy, this thesis analyzes Germany's initial discourses on the issues of solidarity and economy during the eurocrisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. For the first crisis, this initial period lasted from February until 18 October 2010, whereas for the pandemic, the early phase spanned from 16 March to 18 May 2020. While the eurocrisis became imminent in Europe in early 2010, the Covid-19 pandemic was declared in March 2020 by the World Health Organization, with a first national lockdown announced by the German government on 16 March 2020. Focusing on these particular periods during both crises is further justified by their significance for the European decision-making process. The early phases of a discourse constitute the pivotal period for the formation of policy priorities and the evolution of crises narratives (Sellnow et al. 2019). As Clemons et al. (2012) outline, is the creation of policy narratives a central strategy for actors to present their views and ideas on a crisis. This practice allows to coherently link the assumed causes, relevant actors and proposed solutions of a crisis. Particularly in times of crises, policy narratives are used to support or criticize the existing rules and procedures (Clemons et al. 2012, 140). During initial stages of discourse, key themes, priorities, and narratives may be established that influence subsequent discussions and policy decisions (Sellnow et al. 2019, 3).

Further, both defined discourse periods last until a compromise was reached between Germany and France on a common European policy response. This is relevant as the centrality of both countries in the EU's decision-making process is mostly uncontested among scholars. Whereas Germany's economic strength gives the country significant authority especially on economic matters, France typically leads the group of member states that oppose Germany's policies in the economic domain (Miró 2022, 315; Bulmer 2014, 1245). Thus, agreements between the two nations simultaneously settle wider discussions among the EU member states by outlining a shared course of action that ultimately becomes supported by all national governments. Consequently, major debate on the EU's policy response to crises mostly recedes as soon as Germany and France agree on a joint path. During the eurocrisis, such compromise was found with the Deauville Declaration on 18 October 2010. Major debate on a common response to the pandemic was settled when France and Germany published a joint proposal for a common European recovery fund on 18 May 2020.

With the precise focus on the initial stages of discourse during both crises, the following part presents the nature and outcomes of the eurocrisis and the pandemic respectively. In general, the eurocrisis and the pandemic were each characterized by an economic downturn. The effects were diverse, including business closures, rising unemployment rates and an overall decrease in revenue collection for the national governments (Krotz & Schramm 2022). Although disputed, the economic downturn during both the eurocrisis and the pandemic was first brought on by external shocks (Crespy et al. 2023, 2). The first crisis resulted from the interdependence of financial markets and unmanageable public debt in countries which were then hit by the global financial crisis. Loan defaults in the US "sub-prime loans" market jeopardized the stability of the global financial system and triggered the need for countries to provide significant support to banks in order to keep them from collapsing. The trouble for banks also meant disruptions for those individuals and businesses relying on their financing and lending capacities. Consequently, national governments were faced with the need to provide comprehensive support measures (Sanders 2008; Tsoukalis 2011). The pandemic-related economic crisis was caused by the novel Covid-19 virus, whose containment required strict lockdowns. These mainly included the mandatory temporary closure of businesses and restricted freedom of movement. Again, this confronted national governments with the need to provide economic support to their citizens and businesses (Luo 2022).

Another similarity between the two crises was the variations in the financial resources available to each EU member state for their crisis response measures. Frieden & Walter (2017) highlight how the capital flows and wage dynamics in the years preceding the eurocrisis led to significant account disparities. As a result, countries with surpluses had less difficulties to shoulder the costs associated with support measures compared to countries with spending deficits. Therefore, the latter group had to resort to borrowing capital from the financial markets, increasing their national debt. In contrast, the surplus countries were able to introduce the support measures without major need for borrowing. This repeated in context of the Covid-19 pandemic, when financial resources were required to finance the extensive support measures that the majority of countries implemented in response to the crisis. Again, there were resource-based differences in the ability of EU member states to do so. This played out along similar lines compared to the eurocrisis, mainly because of the remaining public debt levels and spending needs as a left over from the eurocrisis (de la Porte & Heins 2022, 136; Luo 2022, 7).

To respond to the eurocrisis, various policy instruments were adjusted and newly designed. The EU's economic governance reforms, embodied in the "Six-Pack" and "Two-Pack," aimed to bolster fiscal discipline and economic coordination. The six-pack as the first set of measures entered into force in 2011 and included reforms on fiscal issues plus the introduction of procedures to detect macroeconomic imbalances, counteract on them, and sanction countries that continuously fail to conform the requirements. Fiscal rules became more binding and enforceable, for example through the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (Bressanelli & Chelotti 2016). The European Semester as an annual calendar for fiscal policy-making introduced in 2010 provides the framework for EU member states to discuss their budgets and reform plans with the EU institutions simultaneously. The European Commission was further authorized to impose reforms on eurozone countries that can hardly be blocked (Dunlop & Radaelli 2016, 114). The two-pack as a set of regulations supplemented the six-pack but only applied to the eurozone countries. It did not establish additional fiscal rules but focused on further policy coordination within the euro area. This included special surveillance for countries at risk and additional reporting requirements (Thygesen et al. 2019).

The European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF), established in 2010, provided temporary financial aid to eurozone countries facing public debt challenges. Funded by eurozone members and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the EFSF played a crucial role in maintaining

financial stability but with conditions tied to macroeconomic adjustments. The EFSF's responsibilities were later assumed by the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) in 2012, a permanent institution with a lending capacity of EUR 440 billion (Verdun 2015). The Fiscal Compact, or Treaty on Stability, Coordination, and Governance, effective from 2013, extended the Six-Pack and Two-Pack. As an intergovernmental agreement, it committed signatories to a permanent balanced budget norm, limited annual structural deficits to 0.5 percent of GDP, and mandated disclosure of public debt issuance plans. Only countries adhering to the Fiscal Compact are eligible for funds from the ESM (Ioannou et al. 2015).

The creation of the European Banking Union aimed to enhance the stability and resilience of the EU's banking sector. Its components include the Single Supervisory Mechanism, granting the European Central Bank (ECB) authority to oversee eurozone banks, the Single Resolution Mechanism for orderly bank resolutions and the Single Resolution Fund to finance these resolutions. The banking union harmonized rules and oversight procedures, reducing the likelihood of banking crises and promoting trust in the financial system (Ioannou et al. 2015; Leblond 2014). Collectively, these measures reflect a coordinated and disciplined approach to fiscal and monetary policy in the EU. They underscored a commitment to fiscal responsibility and financial stability. The EU's response to the euro crisis reflected a rule-based approach, prioritizing the prevention of excessive deficits to ensure long-term financial stability. At the same time, the agreed measures did not include any form of mutualizing existing national debt or collective borrowing to relieve burden off troubling countries. Instead, each member state remained solely responsible for borrowing and repaying loans.

The EU's economic response to the Covid-19 pandemic also encompassed a mix of different measures. The first agreement among the EU member states included a threefold approach to provide support in the domains of healthcare, employment and for small and medium enterprises. Within the framework of the ESM, a loan-based support instrument was introduced for eurozone member states to cover costs related to healthcare. Besides this measure with a capacity of EUR 240 billion, the member states also agreed on "temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency" (SURE). This initiative aimed at providing loans to employers in order to prevent rising unemployment. Third, a fund was created by the European Investment Bank (EIB) to support small and medium enterprises, being able to mobilize up to EUR 200 billion (Ladi & Tsarouhas 2020; Schelkle 2021; Tesche 2022, 1047).

Following the previous agreements, the European Commission ultimately proposed the NextGenerationEU (NGEU) initiative. As a comprehensive package with a capacity of EUR 750 billion, the objective of its introduction was to mitigate the negative socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. To finance its measures, the NGEU agreement authorized the European Commission to borrow money on the financial markets on behalf of the EU member states. As economically strong and reliable countries participated in this procedure of collective borrowing, the European Commission was able to borrow at more favourable rates. Consequently, this brought advantages for most of the EU member states that would have otherwise faced higher interest rates for their loans. Since then, the joint funding is distributed among the countries, with about EUR 390 billion in grants and EUR 360 billion in loans. While the NGEU supports several funds and programs, its centerpiece remains the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) of up to EUR 672.5 billion. Member states must create Recovery and Resilience Plans describing how they will use the funds. Only then, the countries are eligible to receive funding under the RRF. Additionally, the participating EU member states must meet the pertinent milestones and targets. Before any payments may be made through the Facility, the European Commission evaluates whether each milestone and target has been satisfactorily met (European Commission 2023).

The agreement to collectively borrow money on the financial markets reflects a major break with the EU's previous and long-lasting monetary and fiscal policy (Schelkle 2021). Until then, the EU member states explicitly avoided sharing the liability for debt. In contrast, with the decision to introduce common debt, the countries finally agreed to share the responsibility and risks for cases in which countries may become unable to repay their share of the collective debt. Although the European Commission had already borrowed money from the financial markets in previous instances, the NGEU agreement reflects the first time for the EU member states to finance projects by running a deficit (Miró 2022; Baccaro et al. 2023).

Amid these differences in policy outcomes of both crises, the focus on Germany in this thesis is for two reasons. First, the country's hegemonic role in European decision-making is almost undisputed among scholars. On the one hand, the continuing economic strength of Germany allowed the country to exercise major influence on the European level. As the biggest economy and creditor within the EU, the country has often been decisive for the design and success of most economic policies (Paterson 2011). Consequently, German leadership is con-

tinuously expected and especially economic policy-making remains subject to the country's interests (Bulmer & Paterson 2013, 1394). On the other hand, Angela Merkel as Germany's chancellor during both crises was characterized by her pragmatic and constructive leadership style (Van Esch 2017, 227). At the same time, her strong skills in forming interest coalitions and negotiating made it difficult for countries to remain opposed to Germany's preferred policy choice (Bulmer 2022). Overall, the economic strength of Germany paired with Merkel's strong leadership allowed to country to exercise significant control over the EU's decision-making.

Second, the consistency of Germany's political, economic, and social landscape across both crises reduces the role of possible intervening variables in distorting the analysis findings. Politically, both crises occurred under the leadership of Chancellor Angela Merkel and a coalition government led by her Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party. During the pandemic, the coalition was with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) whereas during the eurocrisis, the coalition partner was the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP). Despite the changing coalition, political decisions were characterized by Merkel's above-described pragmatic leadership style and continuity thereof on the national level as well. This stable and predictable way of governing remained valid also for the Germany's relation to France and their cooperation on the European level (Bulmer 2022). The main difference regarding the political dimension of both crises concerns the rise of the far-to-extreme-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD), which entered the German parliament in 2017 and polled at 12 to 15 percent in 2020. Part of this rise is attributed to increasing social divides, particularly on migration and the perception by some citizens that increasing migration worsened their life. Yet, the early stages of the pandemic did not result in a further increase of the vote share (Bayerlein & Metten 2022).

Economically, Germany's stability and resilience were evident during both crises. Its robust industrial base paired with an export-oriented economy were the foundations for its economic strength and available resources. Although weaker economic performance in other European countries meant losses also for Germany, resulting from a weaker export market environment, the country was still able to introduce comprehensive support measures for its citizens and businesses (Blyth 2013, 138)(Krotz & Schramm 2022, 9). During the eurocrisis, this ensured the stability of the financial sector and protected the people's savings (Storm & Naastepad 2015, 19). Throughout the pandemic, the support schemes ensured that employers could still pay their employees despite the decrease in working opportunities and economic activity due

to the lockdowns. Similarly to the eurocrisis, the government's support measures prevented a dangerous rise of unemployment and related social consequences (Naumann et al. 2020, 199). In summary, Germany's political and social landscape as well as economic performance were very similar during both crises. The political leadership remained stable and characterized by Chancellor Merkel. The sound economic performance enabled the government to introduce and finance comprehensive support measures for individuals and businesses. Nevertheless, existing research limitations in context of the comparability of both crises exist and will be addressed in the final section of this chapter.

Finally, the analysis exclusively focuses on the initial German discourses surrounding the issues of economy (ECO) and solidarity (SOLI). This thematic choice is made for practical reasons. While the multifaceted nature of both the eurocrisis and the pandemic is acknowledged, this detailed and focused approach ensures depth and relevance of the research amid the practical limitations regarding time constraints and space limitations. Focusing on the ECO discourse is justified by this thesis' overall research focus on the EU's economic policy response and outcomes in context of the eurocrisis and the pandemic. The SOLI focus is chosen for analysis due to the prominent role of the issue of solidarity in context of both crises. More specifically, several scholars emphasize and examine the German and European discourse on solidarity in explaining the policy choice of rejecting or approving the introduction of common debt. For example, Ferrera et al. (2021) discuss the argumentation for cross-national solidarity employed by several European political leaders during the pandemic to show the necessity of collective borrowing to prevent European disintegration. Wallaschek (2020b,a) analyzes how German media and political actors during the eurocrisis strategically constructed the meaning of solidarity to promote policies of austerity rather than the introduction of common debt. Lastly, Miró (2022) points out the pivotal role of member state solidarity in any European crisis context before discussing the discourse of European executives regarding fiscal solidarity during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.3 Data Selection and Collection

The rationale for the data selection process is to ensure that the actors relevant to Germany's ECO and SOLI discourses during both crises are included. In this regard, Schmidt (2010, 2013)

elaborates on the actors that constitute the communicative and coordinative discourses. Political institutions and leaders plus "knowledge regimes" belong to the coordinative discourse, with the latter group encompassing policy experts and thinkers who are capable of providing informed input and advice (Schmidt 2013, 458). The communicative discourse includes the group of those affected by policies, meaning civil society and businesses. Media outlets serve a two-fold purpose that justifies their inclusion in the analysis. First, they act as gatekeepers for the dissemination of information like policy proposals. Second, they can act as the voice of the general public, for example through opinion pieces and editorials (Wallaschek 2020a).

Government representatives and political parties constitute the first group of relevant discourse participants. Besides the German chancellor, also the German finance minister was responsible for the negotiations of a common European policy response during both crises. For the periods under investigation, both offices were held by the CDU² during the eurocrisis, whereas the CDU chancellor was supported by an SPD finance minister during the pandemic. For political parties, their relevance is measured in terms of access to policy-making. With parliamentary representation being the single exclusive criterion, only parties that were represented in the *Bundestag*, the German parliament, are included in the analysis. For the "knowledge regimes", relevant economic experts and think tanks are selected based on a literature review, media presence, diversity of perspectives and active contribution to the discourse. As a result, the German *ifo Institute for Economic Research (ifo)* and the German *German Institute for Economic Research (DIW)* with their respective presidents are included in the analysis. Both institutes lead the rankings of Germany's most influential economic think tanks and represent different policy orientations while focusing mainly on German and European economic and fiscal policy (McGann 2021; Ngo et al. 2015).

The interests and positions of businesses and civil society are usually represented by associations and organizations. Yet, civil society organizations and social movements that usually engage in bottom-up discourse do not represent a relevant voice as they are sidelined on the issue of European economic governance (Schmidt 2010; Pianta 2013, 3). In contrast, businesses join associations to aggregate their interests and contribute to the discourse. For the export-oriented

²In this thesis, reference to the CDU also includes reference to the regionally operating Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU), if not stated differently. Since 1949, the parties CDU and CSU form a faction in the German parliament.

Germany in particular, these associations exercise significant influence. Thus, the Federation of German Industries (BDI) is included in the analysis. As an association for industry and trade associations, it represents most of the country's largest enterprises across various business sectors (Deutschland.de 2023). Finally, the media is represented by German newspapers based on the criteria of readership size and political affiliation. As a result, the centre-left *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ) and the centre-right *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) are chosen. Besides large readership and distinct political affiliation, both sources are considered quality newspapers with sufficient expertise in economic policy that have also been selected for these reasons by other scholars (Miró 2022; Wallaschek et al. 2020; Eilders 2002).

The data selection and collection process is different for the two cases. The analysis of the eurocrisis case is based on secondary sources in the form of academic literature while the case of the pandemic is examined based on primary sources such as interviews, speeches, policy papers and newspaper editorials. Two arguments justify the decision not to use primary sources when analyzing the German eurocrisis discourse. First, the eurocrisis has already been extensively discussed by scholars. This also includes various analyses of the German discourse on a European economic policy response during the initial stage of the eurocrisis, i.e. Bickes et al. (2014a), Bulmer (2014), Degner (2016), Drewski (2015), Hurrelmann et al. (2020), Kutter (2014), Mussler (2011) and Wallaschek et al. (2020). Hence, existing academic literature provides a sound corpus of empirical data that can be reused for the research in this thesis. Further, the risk of overlooking relevant elements of discourse are satisfactorily minimized by as existing studies already cover various facets of the German discourse during the eurocrisis. In addition, to rely on secondary sources addresses the issue of primary data availability. More specifically, primary data such as interviews and newspaper editorials faces the risk of being removed from online databases, as preliminary research confirmed. As the probability of removal increases for older sources, severe constraints to the use of primary data for the analysis of the eurocrisis case exist (Chatfield 2020, 835).

To select the secondary sources in form of scholarly articles for analyzing the German ECO and SOLI discourses during the early stage of the eurocrisis, the criterion of relevance and applicability was deemed most relevant (Onwuegbuzie et al. 2012, 8). Accordingly, the data selection procedure followed the premise of only including sources that engage in the analysis of the German discourse during the eurocrisis. In addition, the methodological focus on dis-

course analysis was crucial for the selection of secondary sources. Ensuring the application of similar methods increases the comparability and transferability of findings, which in turn increases the rigor of the research in this thesis (Ruggiano & Perry 2019). Including a variety of perspectives served as the final premise for collecting academic literature. This contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the German discourse, increases the depth of the research and contributes to the overall credibility of the findings in this thesis (Onwuegbuzie et al. 2012; Chatfield 2020). To collect the secondary sources, Google scholar was used as a web search engine for scholarly literature. The search terms "eurocrisis", "German*" + "discourse", "solidar*" and "idea" were used in different configurations to create a preliminary data corpus of 88 sources. In a next step, the scholarly articles were manually reviewed to filter out sources that do not examine the German discourse during the period under investigation or do not engage in discourse analysis. The resulting body of literature was then expanded by identifying additional secondary sources based on cross-references. Appendix 1 lists the 30 scholarly contributions that ultimately informed this thesis' analysis of Germany's initial ECO and SOLI discourse during the eurocrisis.

For analyzing the pandemic case, primary sources were selected and collected based on the earlier definition of actors relevant to the German ECO and SOLI discourses. In addition, the selection aimed to cover both the coordinative and communicative discourse during the initial period of discourse, lasting from 16 March until 18 May 2020. Speeches and interviews are central for politicians to express their interests, proposals and ideas. Official speeches in front of parliament reflect contributions to the coordinative discourse whereas interviews to newspapers belong to the communicative discourse (Van Dijk 2015, 18). Therefore, speeches in parliament and interviews to newspapers by the German chancellor Merkel and finance minister Scholz were collected by accessing the government and ministry as well as personal website databases and archives. Contributions to the discourse by political parties were collected similarly. Specific forms of sources include interviews with party leaders and statements made by the party leader or party board members, covering the communicative discourse. In addition, official parliamentary motions were retrieved from the German parliament's web database to account for party contributions to the coordinative discourse. Again, access is provided by websites of the parties and corresponding parliamentary factions. To note, both the chancellor (CDU) and the finance minister (SPD) were considered not only government but also party representatives. Therefore, the collection of party contributions to discourse focused on the remaining parties

that are represented in parliament, including *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen [The Greens]*, *Die Linke [The Left]*, the *AfD* and the *FDP*. Contributions by the business association *BDI* and the economic think tanks *ifo* and *DIW* were also retrieved from the organizations' official websites. These contributions include position papers, personal statements of the *ifo* and *DIW* presidents and policy briefs. Finally, the collection of media contributions to discourse focused on opinion articles and editorials published online by the *SZ* and *FAZ*. Overall, 43 contributions by relevant actors to the German ECO and SOLI discourse were collected for the period from 16 March until 18 May 2020. These primary sources are listed in Appendix 2 and form the data corpus to analyze the pandemic case.

3.4 Methods

The exploration of the previously defined German discourses is done through the integration of two different methods. For the eurocrisis case, Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS) is applied to analyze the collected academic literature. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to examine the primary sources that were gathered for the analysis of the pandemic case. While the two methods differ in their focus on primary respectively secondary sources, both approaches allow for critical analysis of the German crisis discourses. With the framework of discursive institutionalism applied in this thesis, engaging in critical discourse analysis is pivotal to test the theoretical arguments and hypotheses formulated in the previous chapter. More specifically, critical discourse analysis is chosen as it understands discourse as not merely describing an external reality, but being constitutive for this reality, i.e. policy outcomes (Gill 2000, 172). Based on the collected academic literature that already engages in discourse analysis, CIS consists of critically reviewing, interpreting and synthesizing existing literature in light of new research questions (Xiao & Watson 2019). CDA allows for an in-depth analysis of language use and discursive strategies employed in discourse to understand underlying ideologies and power relations (Van Dijk 2015). Overall, applying both methods in context of their respective case enables to gain a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the role of ideas in discourse during the eurocrisis and the pandemic, despite different types of sources available for each case.

3.4.1 The Eurocrisis: Critical Interpretive Synthesis

CIS was conducted to analyze the initial German ECO and SOLI discourses during the euro-crisis. Commonly used to synthesize existing qualitative research, CIS allows to generate new insights and understanding from multiple previous studies to address and test new research questions and hypotheses (Xiao & Watson 2019, 100). The method allows to go beyond traditional literature reviews by incorporating a critical and interpretive perspective. More in detail, CIS not only involves the aggregation of findings from existing literature but includes a process of critical review and own interpretation (Jones 2004, 276). As a reflexive and iterative process, the method requires to constantly question and compare the findings extracted from existing research to refine the own synthesized argument. Thereby, CIS is particularly suitable for research questions that demand a critical examination and interpretation of qualitative evidence within a social and cultural context (Depraetere et al. 2021). In light of the research in this thesis, the exploratory nature of this iterative process allows to continuously detect, define and revise patterns in discourse (Xiao & Watson 2019, 101).

To apply CIS to the secondary sources discussing Germany's ECO and SOLI discourses during the eurocrisis, several steps were undertaken. Initially, a thorough reading of the collected scholarly articles was conducted to gain an overall understanding of the broader context and characteristics of the German discourse. Subsequently, directly and indirectly cited discourse contributions from relevant actors discussing the issue of an EU economic policy response and the role of solidarity in this respect were identified and retrieved. Additionally, claims made by scholars, reflecting their interpretations of actors' ideas in the discourse, were identified and retrieved. Each extracted discourse contribution and claim was then manually assigned a code that represented the main idea conveyed by the actor when discussing an economic policy response respectively the role of solidarity. Thereby, no pre-defined set of codes was applied but codes were generated following the interpretation of the retrieved data. To recall, ideas are defined as the rationale and intentions of actors regarding desired policy outcome that influences their policy preferences and stance on specific policy instruments, such as collective borrowing. While it is acknowledged that one contribution or claim can reference more than one idea, only the most apparent idea determined the code. Since ideas are referred to not only explicitly but also implicitly, the limitation to one code per statement is considered necessary to not engage in excessive and potentially counterproductive over-interpretation of the data.

Building upon the previous steps, the codes generated from the texts were constantly refined to allow for a continuous process of interpretation and re-interpretation. This practice of open coding and constant comparison enables to categorize different discourse contributions while constantly testing the fit of the generated codes and revise them if necessary (Böhm 2004). The screening and coding of retrieved contributions and claims was repeated several times until a final set of codes was considered to adequately reflect all ideas introduced to the respective initial ECO and SOLI discourse in Germany during the eurocrisis. The final codes and corresponding ideas are presented and justified in the analysis chapter. Overall, this process ultimately contributed to the testing of the first hypothesis, which stated that fewer different ideas for a policy response were presented in the German discourse during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the eurocrisis.

Based on the previously generated set of ideas presented in the investigated ECO and SOLI discourses, the second hypothesis was addressed by examining how the ideas of opponents to common debt were referenced by proponents when arguing for collective borrowing. To do so, the first step consisted of a thorough reading of the collected academic articles. Through this process, actors that supported the introduction of common debt in discourse as well as the actors that rejected collective borrowing were identified. In a next step, all cited discourse contributions and claims of scholars that relate to the promotion of common debt by proponents were retrieved from the collected sources. By this process, the extracted text passages allowed to reveal the previously identified ideas that were referenced when advocating for collective borrowing. On this basis, the next step consisted of identifying the ideas that were positively linked to common debt. Positive link means that the desired policy outcome reflected by an idea is achieved with the introduction of common debt. Once these ideas with a positive link were identified, the last step consisted of checking which of these ideas was not only supported by proponents but also opponents of common debt.

3.4.2 The Covid-19 Pandemic: Critical Discourse Analysis

To analyze the initial German ECO and SOLI discourses during the pandemic, CDA was employed to examine the collected primary sources. Drawing from the perspectives of Fairclough (2001, 2013) and Van Dijk (2015), the method focuses on explaining the social interactions and

ideologies that underlie the discourse by investigating the language use and discursive practices employed by actors (Van Dijk 2015). Thereby, the critical examination of written and spoken text is crucial for conducting the analysis (Wodak 2014, 303). CDA is therefore applied to the corpus of collected primary sources for the pandemic case in order to reveal the different expressions of thought and strategies for altering other's beliefs and behaviour in the German discourse.

To examine the collected written and spoken word of relevant actors in the discourse, the initial steps of the analysis were similar to that of CIS. First, an overall understanding of the discourse was gained by reading all contributions of actors. Second, any claim or statement discussing either a common European policy or the role of solidarity in responding to the pandemic was retrieved. Third, each retrieved claim or statement was assigned a code that reflects the main idea conveyed by the actor when discussing an economic policy response respectively the role of solidarity. Different to the previous analysis of the eurocrisis discourse, however, an initial set of codes was used. This set consisted of the codes that have previously been identified to reflect the ideas that were introduced to Germany's ECO and SOLI discourses during the eurocrisis. Doing so enabled to test whether these codes/ideas were present in the pandemic discourse as well. Consequently, this stage consisted of one corpus of statements and claims that fit to one of the initial codes and one group of text pieces that could not be assigned to any existing code. Pre-defined codes that were assigned to any claim or statement were disregarded. In a next step, the retrieved claims and statements that have not been assigned a code yet were coded following the iterative process and constant comparison described in the previous section on CIS (Wall et al. 2015, 265). The final set of codes ultimately consisted of predefined and newly developed codes. Together, the codes represented the ideas that were presented in the initial German pandemic discourse. They are discussed in light of the first hypothesis and argued for in the analysis chapter.

The analysis of primary sources to test the second hypothesis was approached similarly to the analysis of the eurocrisis discourse. To examine how the ideas of opponents to common debt were referenced by proponents when arguing for collective borrowing during the pandemic discourse, all collected sources were read in their entirety. This allowed to identify actors that were in favor of introducing common debt as a common European response to the pandemic. Subsequently, all claims of these actors were retrieved that argue for the introduction of com-

mon debt. This subset of statements and claims was then screened to identify references to any previously identified idea. In a final step, it was checked whether the expressed ideas of common debt proponents when advocating for collective borrowing have been raised by opponents as well.

Overall, the application of CIS and CDA as methods to analyze the initial German ECO and SOLI discourses during the eurocrisis respectively pandemic is central to the research in this thesis. Their application allowed to execute very similar steps despite different types of sources available for each of the two analyses. Thereby, employing the same procedure for analyzing both cases increases the rigor and coherence of the analysis process and significance of the findings (Kendall & Thangaraj 2013, 103). In the next chapter, the results of both analyses are presented and subsequently discussed in light of the two hypotheses and the research question.

3.5 Research Limitations

Despite the profound theoretical basis and the case selection and research design similar to that of other scholars, the research carried out in this thesis comes with some limitations. As Schmidt (2011) emphasizes herself, theoretical approaches based on discursive institutionalism come with several risks. One danger is the overly voluntaristic appearance of the approach as it may not adequately consider structural constraints like rationalist interests, historical paths, or cultural norms. That poses the danger of over-emphasizing the relevance of discursive construction in determining the reality, i.e. policy outcomes. This also includes power dynamics apart from ideational power, unintended consequences, and unconscious processes. These limitations emphasize the complexity of assessing the causal influence of ideas and discourse on policy outcomes and highlight the need for reflective and careful empirical analysis to determine when, why and how discourse matters in processes of change. Additionally, the research design comes with practical limitations. The first one, as already mentioned, concerns the comparability of the two cases. Despite general similarity, contextual factors still differ. For example, regarding the political environment, a rise of right-wing parties and populism in Germany and across Europe are likely to have impacted the discourse during the pandemic. Further, the eurocrisis unfolded over several years, involving changes in government coalitions. Urgency and time constraints were significantly higher during the pandemic, with a health crisis taking

place simultaneously. Finally, the eurocrisis primarily threatened the eurozone countries due to the structural implications that come with the presence of one currency but different fiscal policies. The pandemic, instead, affected all EU member states equally and made a common policy response more sensible than during the previous crisis.

Apart from these issues related to the comparability, further risks lie in potential biases in data collection. The sources used, such as speeches, interviews, and policy documents, can be influenced by the availability of data, making it challenging to ensure a comprehensive representation of all relevant actors and their contributions to the discourse. Moreover, the choice of actors for analysis could also introduce bias, as not all relevant actors may be included in the dataset. This can lead to an incomplete picture of the discourse. In line, the retrospective nature of the research prevents from following real-time dynamics, potentially missing critical moments of idea formulation and evolution. Last, the qualitative design makes the research to rely on subjective interpretation of the data. To address this, a precise description and justification of the analysis outcomes is necessary.

4 Empirical Analysis of the German Crisis Discourse

The analysis chapter is divided into three sections. The first part covers the analysis of the initial German ECO and SOLI discourses during the eurocrisis. On the one hand, this includes identifying the different ideas that were presented in discourse. On the other hand, it is revealed which of the ideas of opponents of collective borrowing are referenced by proponents when promoting the introduction of common debt. The second part follows a similar structure while containing the analysis of the pandemic discourse. The final part of the chapter discusses the analysis findings in light of the theoretical framework and the two hypotheses formulated to guide this thesis' research.

4.1 The Eurocrisis

The following examination of the ECO and SOLI discourses in Germany during the initial phase of the eurocrisis rests on the method of Critical Interpretive Synthesis as introduced in the previous chapter. The first part of the analysis focuses uncovering the different ideas for an economic policy response to the eurocrisis, as presented by relevant actors in the German ECO discourse. The second part focuses on the ideas that were introduced by the same group of actors when discussing the role of solidarity in context of a common European policy response. The final part of this section presents how proponents of collective borrowing positively linked ideas of opposed actors to the introduction of common debt. The subchapter concludes by summarizing the results and linking them to the theoretical arguments and hypothesis formulated to guide this thesis.

4.1.1 Economic Discourse: Resistance and Focus on Stability

The initial reaction of most German policy-makers to the economic worsening in Greece and other European countries in early 2010 was to stress the self-responsibility of these countries in tackling the crisis (Hurrelmann et al. 2020; Matthijs 2016; Zimmermann 2014, 325). This was mainly supported via two arguments. First, the “no-bailout clause” in the European treaties was pointed out to justify that other countries could not just step financially to support troubling

member states. Second, the existing European fiscal rules were seen as sufficient to handle the emerging eurocrisis (Degner & Leuffen 2019, 95). Both arguments were repeatedly raised in the German discourse. For example, Germany's chancellor Merkel argued that Greece is solely responsible to reform itself to overcome the negative economic developments. This was because "Greece would have to focus on meeting its fiscal consolidation targets" (Matthijs & McNamara 2015, 385). At the same time, the above-cited European treaty clause would leave Germany no other option than "stating clearly that it [Greece] has to fulfill its duties" (Matthijs 2016, 385). Further, media coverage initially highlighted national policy failure of troubling countries such as Greece to be the crisis trigger. National responsibility to respond to the crisis would thus be the logical consequence (Kutter 2014, 454). With these statements, self-responsibility continued to be one central idea regarding a policy response to the eurocrisis (Hurrelmann et al. 2020).

To prevent any contagion from troubling countries became another idea to guide the German discourse. This rationale evolved when the magnitude of the eurocrisis due to severe economic interdependencies became widely acknowledged. As a seemingly easy and obvious solution, the exclusion of Greece from the euro was quickly suggested. On the one hand, supporters of this stance could be found among the media (Drewski 2015). For instance, this was formulated in the campaign by Bild to "give the Greeks their old currency back" (Ervedosa 2017, 12; Bickes et al. 2014a, 426). On the other hand, political actors advocated for the Greek exit from the eurozone as well. For example, this stance was also supported by the governing party FDP (Zimmermann 2014, 326). In this context, most actors stressed that a so-called "Grexit" would avert contagion with the economic crisis that would otherwise be likely due to the nature and functioning of the eurozone (Papadimitriou et al. 2019).

Meanwhile, as it became apparent that Greece could not handle the crisis on its own, the idea of safeguarding stability became more visible in the contributions of various actors to the German discourse. Different strategies to provide support to Greece were discussed and justified by the need to safeguard the stability of the currency union and the overall EU's internal market. The domestic businesses and banking institutions advocated for coordinated German support measures. While businesses focused on preserving their export markets and stabilizing the demand, German banks aimed for protecting their own stability given their endangered investments in Greece (Degner 2016, 27; Degner & Leuffen 2020, 498). The media focused on preserving

the smooth functioning of markets as highly relevant for the German and European economy, which requires a policy response that ensures stability for the EU's internal market (Lahusen et al. 2016, 534). The governing parties in Germany used parliamentary debates to highlight their concept of stability and a "stability union" as their rationale for a policy response (Wendler 2014, 452). In line, Germany's finance minister Schäuble proposed the creation of a "European Monetary Fund", which was also supported among media (Kutter 2014, 457). Such institution would be needed for the stability of the eurozone, equipped with powers and skills similar to that of the IMF (Drewski 2015, 35). Thereby, the fund could have enabled the European community to provide loans to troubling countries in exchange for structural reforms - a mechanism that did not formally exist at that time (Brunnermeier et al. 2016, 20). Following the rationale of safeguarding stability, establishing this funding mechanism would have constituted a feasible countermeasure to avoid helplessly watching growing national debts threaten the stability of the EU's whole financial system.

Whereas Schäuble mentioned the IMF only as an institutional blueprint, other actors in Germany called for an involvement of this institution in any rescue program based on the idea of strengthening public and market trust in the agreed measures (Drewski 2015, 35). Already in early 2010, the confidence of the public and financial market actors in a recovery of troubling countries was very low (Wihlborg et al. 2010). The EU member states and European institutions were not seen as skilled, willing and objective enough to agree on adequate economic support measures (Papadimitriou et al. 2019, 446; Brunnermeier et al. 2016, 287). Against this background, the inclusion of the IMF was advocated using two central arguments. First, journalists, such as Torsten Riecke in his editorial "Involve the IMF now", but also politicians including German chancellor Merkel pointed at the extraordinary experience of the IMF in handling similar economic problems (Kutter 2014, 459; Brunnermeier et al. 2016, 297). Thus, the IMF could provide the necessary skills needed to implement large support programs. Second, the IMF's authority in enforcing agreed conditionality was emphasized. More in detail, Merkel repeatedly raised her concerns on whether the European countries themselves could ultimately agree on conditionality measures and enforce them if needed. In contrast, the IMF was considered independent and powerful enough to withstand political pressure (Bohn & de Jong 2011; Brunnermeier et al. 2016). Overall, involving the IMF was portrayed as increasing the trust of the public and market actors in the implementation and enforcement of an agreed policy response.

At the same time, measures proposed to safeguard stability and promote trust also carried the idea of increasing discipline, which was understood as respect for rules and remained highly salient in the German discourse (Bulmer 2014, 1253). First, this was reflected by the proposed conditional nature of financial support in context of a possible European Monetary Fund. Second, enforcing discipline and rule-following constitutes the IMF's central method of operation (Dreher 2009). Further, media articles created a connection between austerity measures and their disciplining purpose when promoting the former (Mylonas 2015, 259). To introduce a policy response that disciplines troubling countries through austerity was also supported by Chancellor Merkel. For example, in mid-March 2010 she stated that "the long lasting infringement of the stability pact has brought Greece into this situation and not the [financial] speculation . . . There is no alternative to a rigorous austerity programme" (Wallaschek 2020b, 1044). While bilateral aid would be the "last resort . . . when market financing is no longer possible", she reiterated that "a good European is the one who abides by European Treaties and national law" (Schmidt 2012, 182).

The idea of increasing control gained prominence when proposals to reform the EMU design surfaced, especially among the German governing parties (Wendler 2014, 451). In discussions about possible crisis response measures, further economic and fiscal integration and centralized control became visible as the primary objective for the German government (Degner & Leuffen 2020, 500). In the media, discussions took place as well regarding measures to improve coordination of economic and fiscal policies of the EU member states (Drewski 2015, 25). Thereby, deeper integration was stated as precondition for conditional assistance as it would include increasing oversight competencies (Kaiser & Kleinen-von Königslöw 2017, 13). The rationale of exercising greater control became most visible in an editorial pointing out that "there is no instrument available that would enforce solid fiscal management" while supporting an EMU reform (Kutter 2014, 458). In May 2020, a German government proposal called for three-fold reforms: Improvement of the Stability Pact, increased economic policy coordination and the creation of a crisis resolution framework (Mussler 2011, 55). Thereby, the plans for increased cooperation and the creation of permanent mechanisms largely reflected measures to improve monitoring capacities and introduce more streamlined and tighter sanctioning. With the latter point again emphasized by Schäuble in September 2010 by stating that "we [the EU] need a broader sanctions mechanism", this would reduce national autonomy and centralize control over their domestic economic and fiscal policies (Papadimitriou et al. 2019, 446).

Against the background of these different ideas that were introduced to the German discourse, the First Economic Adjustment Program for Greece was signed on 3 May 2010. The deal constituted the first major agreement on the European level regarding a joint policy response. It comprised EUR 110 billion as a financial assistance package in collaboration with the “troika” – the European Commission, the IMF and the ECB. The IMF contributed EUR 30 billion while the remaining EUR 80 billion were provided in relative parts by each eurozone member bilaterally. However, the support was conditional upon the implementation of specific policy adjustments that covered almost all policy areas. Measures included pension cuts and reform, staff reductions, closure of public entities, privatization and many more (Kyriakidis 2016, 14). Soon after, on 10 May 2010, the EU member states further agreed on the creation of the EFSF to help euro countries to refinance their debt (Verdun 2015, 226). German finance minister Schäuble commented the agreements by stating that “we [Germany] are not defending Greece, we are defending the stability of our currency” (Papadimitriou & Zartaloudis 2015, 39). Similarly, Chancellor Merkel emphasized that “I will take care that we make sure together with our partners that the whole of Europe commits herself to a new Stability Culture” (Bulmer 2014, 1254). Overall, the agreed measures and corresponding policy outcome ultimately acknowledged several of the previously discussed ideas.

Following the two above-described agreements, the only new idea introduced to the German discourse was that of enabling endurance through debt restructuring and private sector involvement. Thereby, the idea of endurance meant that the burden for troubling countries must be reduced to the extent that they would be able to successfully deal with the economic crisis. Most proponents of this idea were found among opinion writers and economists (Schneider & Slantchev 2018, 20; Kutter 2014, 449). Translated into action, creditors would accept lower repayments compared to the initial value of their lending to reduce the outstanding debt for troubling countries. In addition to financial experts and the media, also businesses supported this debt restructuring (Degner & Leuffen 2020, 500). The mandatory participation of the private sector in these efforts became the major theme in the second half of 2010. The government justified its opposing stance by arguing that obligating private actors to take haircuts by accepting lower repayment of their lent money, private sector involvement would bail-in actors who might needed to be bailed-out themselves at a later stage (Thompson 2015, 861). In contrast, proponents of debt restructuring with private sector involvement were among the largest German opposition party SPD, besides others. Their underlying argument was to pro-

tect taxpayers' money and disciplining financial market speculators by imposing cuts on their investments (Zimmermann 2014, 327).

The initial phase of the Germany's ECO discourse during the eurocrisis concluded when Merkel and then-French president Sarkozy agreed on the design of a future permanent rescue mechanism and institutional reforms on 18 October 2010. By doing so, the two political leaders compromised on the ideas and corresponding measures for a common European policy response to the eurocrisis. Most prominently, this included reforms of supervision and enforcement procedures to adhere to the ideas of increasing control and discipline as well as the creation of a future rescue mechanism in line with the idea of safeguarding stability (Schild 2013; Thompson 2015).

4.1.2 Solidarity Discourse: Stability over European Values

The role of solidarity in designing a common European policy response to the eurocrisis was continuously debated as well, with several ideas being presented in this regard during the initial period of Germany's eurocrisis discourse (Wallaschek 2020b, 10). The overall discussion thereby revolved around the arguments raised in debates about being supportive with other EU member states (Wallaschek et al. 2020, 264). First, the term solidarity was linked to the idea of self-responsibility, with the rejection of solidarity measures justified by the declared self-inflicted nature of the crisis. More specifically, as troubling countries were deemed self-responsible for the outbreak of the eurocrisis, they would also have to resolve it on their own. In this regard, Merkel commented on 18 March 2010 that "short-term solidarity was not the solution" because of Greece's own fault by breaching the existing rules (Wallaschek 2020a, 1044). In addition, solidarity measures were disregarded by emphasizing the responsibility of the German government to "not wasting "good" German hard-earned savings" for a crisis that the country was not responsible for (Schmidt 2012, 182; Bulmer 2014, 1257, Newman 2015, 118)

When self-responsibility was recognized to be insufficient to solve the eurocrisis, discussions about solidarity became associated with the idea of safeguarding stability. On the one hand, the German businesses and banks advocated for the provision of conditional financial aid to Greece. Their main rationale was to stabilize the economic environment in which they were

operating. For industries, this meant to safeguard foreign markets whereas for banks and other investors it meant to stabilize the financial system to prevent its meltdown (Degner & Leuffen 2020). Similarly, media overcame their resistance to back common support measures when the danger for the domestic economy became more visible (Wallaschek 2020b, 9). In parliament, both government and opposition parties highlighted the stabilization of the common currency when discussing solidarity in form of support to troubling countries (Riekmann & Wydra 2013, 573). Finally, also the German government followed the idea of stability when contributing to the SOLI discourse (Papadimitriou & Zartaloudis 2015, 39). In this context, Merkel repeatedly stressed that solidarity could only be granted in exchange for stabilizing policies, clarifying that "stability and solidarity are two sides of the same coin" and that "solidarity has to be coupled with solidity and stability" (Wallaschek 2020b, 9). The term solidity was used to describe the path of fiscal consolidation to increase stability. Against this background, solidarity was raised only in combination with proposals for institutional reform and austerity measures that were intended to increase economic stability for all countries (Maesse 2018, 13; Mylonas 2015, 260).

Solidarity based on the idea of acknowledging European values was the final position expressed in the German SOLI discourse. In practice, this idea advocated for unconditional solidarity in light of a common European belonging, shared values and thus responsibility for fellow member states. In the German discourse, the idea was exclusively invoked by the Greens and the Left among political actors (Wonka 2016, 138; Auer 2014, 8). The Left continuously criticized the austerity measures as inhumane towards the society in troubling countries (Wendler 2014, 452). The Greens invoked cultural solidarity while arguing for a common European policy response, reflecting emphasis on "shared norms, rights or a common identity" (Wallaschek 2020a, 1039, 1045). Among the media, most newspapers opposed solidarity and engaged in criticizing troubling countries. As one of few exceptions, the left-leaning *taz* newspaper joined calls for unconditional solidarity based on acknowledging European values. For example, the newspaper criticized that "cultural and social differences [among countries] are neglected" in discussing the causes and possible responses to the eurocrisis. Instead, these differences should be respected and accepted and not be used as a reason to not grant unconditional support (Bickes et al. 2014b, 116).

4.1.3 Isolated Argumentation of Common Debt Proponents

Amid the different ideas for a policy response to the eurocrisis and the role of solidarity in this regard, proponents of common debt had difficulties to highlight how the ideas of its opponents would be reflected in the policy outcome of common debt. Existing literature indicates that the subject of collective borrowing only started to be seriously debated from the end of 2010 onwards (Hülsemeyer 2016, 69). Among political actors, the Greens and the Left were the only ones to promote common debt in the Germany's initial ECO and SOLI discourses during the eurocrisis (Hurrelmann et al. 2020, 496). However, the analysis revealed only very limited attempts by these actors to foreground how collective borrowing aligns with the ideas of those opposed to common debt. The Left largely ignored the ideas put forward by common debt opponents in the ECO discourse. Instead, the party focused on advocating for the introduction of common debt by stressing the principles of social justice and humanity as part of the idea of acknowledging European values (Wendler 2014, 452). The German Green party similarly neglected most ideas in the ECO discourse and focused on "cultural solidarity" that should be granted based on shared norms and European values (Wallaschek 2020b, 9). Their main rationale for promoting common debt remained that of a European belonging and normative appropriateness to provide support to fellow EU member states (Wonka 2016, 139).

Among German media and economic experts, proposals for common debt experienced only very little support as well. Again, the argumentation of proponents followed none of the ideas that were put forward by opponents of collective borrowing. Instead, opinion articles mainly portrayed the introduction of common debt as an opportunity to advance European integration (Matthijs & McNamara 2015, 240). Overall, clear reference to opponents' ideas when promoting common debt to show how the policy outcome of collective borrowing aligns with the ideas of opposed actors remained absent in the German discourse. This occurred despite the fact that major proposals advocating for common debt already addressed most of the ideas that were present in the German ECO and SOLI discourses. One of the most cited policy proposals that suggests collective borrowing was that of Jacques Delpla and Jakob von Weizsäcker, two economists working for the Brussels based think-tank *Bruegel*. In their "Blue Bond Proposal", the two authors recommended the issuance of "blue bonds" with joint liability among the countries and "red bonds" for national debt exceeding 60 percent of GDP with countries bearing the sole responsibility. An "Independent Stability Council" would oversee annual blue

bond allocation. By adjusting the limits for countries to profit from blue bonds based on the sustainability of the national fiscal policies, discipline and solidity through fiscal consolidation would be encouraged. Meanwhile, the Independent Stability Council would reflect greater control of national policies while the common debt would provide the much needed liquidity for stabilizing the economies (Delpla & von Weizsäcker 2010, 2).

In summary, the eurocrisis was characterized by a multiplicity of ideas that were introduced to discourse for guiding a European policy response. In Germany's ECO discourse during the eurocrisis, the idea of self-responsibility was first introduced. Further, preventing contagion and safeguarding stability of the EU's economies became prominent ideas to justify policy measures. In addition, strengthening public and market trust in the EU's effective crisis responsiveness constituted a rationale for proposed action. Simultaneously, the ideas of increasing discipline and control were prominently reflected in discourse. As the final idea, enabling endurance through debt restructuring was introduced to Germany's initial ECO discourse during the eurocrisis. In the corresponding SOLI discourse, solidarity was associated with three different ideas. Initially, solidarity measures were rejected based on the idea of self-responsibility. Subsequently, the idea of safeguarding stability was linked to solidarity, which called for introducing policies assumed to lead to stability in exchange for support measures. Meanwhile, the idea of acknowledging European values was put forward to advocate for solidarity. This last idea was also predominantly used by proponents of collective borrowing to lobby for the introduction of common debt. Consequently, these proponents failed to establish a positive reference to any of the ideas supported by actors opposing common debt and therefore failed to show how the policy outcome of common debt aligns with the ideas of opposed actors.

With a view to the theoretical framework and formulated hypotheses in chapter two, the analysis findings indicate the presentation of several ideas in the German discourse during the eurocrisis. While this result does not yet confirm the first hypothesis, it suggests that the German eurocrisis discourse was indeed characterized by the discussion of many different ideas. To confirm the hypothesis, however, it first requires an analysis of the pandemic discourse in Germany. Concerning the second hypothesis, the analysis showed that proponents of common debt did not show any alignment of collective borrowing with the ideas of actors opposed to this policy measure. Against this background, the findings so far confirm the assumed scarcity of highlighting this alignment.

4.2 The Covid-19 Pandemic

In this subchapter, the initial ECO and SOLI discourses in Germany during the Covid-19 pandemic are analyzed. To do so, the collected primary sources are examined using the method of Critical Discourse Analysis. Again, the first part focuses on the ECO discourse and the ideas presented therein. Subsequently, the analysis of the SOLI discourse and the ideas that were linked to solidarity are revealed. The final part presents the ideas that actors invoked to promote common debt and whether this reflected discursive alignment of the policy outcome of common debt with the ideas of opposed actors. To conclude, the analysis findings are briefly summarized.

4.2.1 Economic Discourse: From Stability to Recovery

With the announcement of the first pandemic-related lockdown in Germany on 16 March 2020, the idea of safeguarding stability characterized the first contributions to the discourse. Proposed economic policy responses were discussed with a view to enable countries to adapt to their new economic needs. Most prominently, it was argued that without a stabilizing intervention, all EU member states would face a recession due to tedious disruptions of their interdependent economies. The first group of actors to recognize the crisis' implications for the national and European economies consisted of think tanks and economic experts. In an act of unity, the two leading German think tanks, ifo and DIW, together with similar institutions in other European countries published a first proposal soon after the lockdown announcement in March. It referred to the idea of safeguarding stability by suggesting a new credit line in the ESM. Providing loans to hard-hit countries would "reduce risks to economic and financial stability for all", according to the authors (DIW Berlin 2020b). The proposal added that from an economic perspective, "it is definitely in the interest of each Member State that a hardly hit country takes the necessary measures to control the pandemic" and to enable them to do so. At the same time, the ESM was portrayed as the suitable instrument due to its ready-to-use character (ifo Institut 2020b; DIW Berlin 2020b). The idea of stability was also put forward by representatives of the German government and opposition parties. For example, finance minister Scholz repeatedly used interviews to stress the suitability of the existing economic governance framework for adopting support measures (Marschall & Quadbeck 2020). In this context, he highlighted that "Europe

sticks together ... in maintaining the flow of goods and then also in stabilizing the national economy" (Bollmann & Meck 2020). Thus, stability was also twinned with safeguarding the functioning of the EU's internal market and prevent excessive fallouts.

Soon, the idea of increasing control and oversight became more visible in the German discourse as a rationale for designing a common European economic policy response to the crisis. This development became particularly apparent in context of discussions about using the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), meaning the EU's ordinary long-term budget, as a potential vehicle for providing economic support. Whether as loans or grants and despite financing considerations, proponents of using the MFF to provide a crisis response stressed the need to rely on its oversight mechanisms. For example, SZ journalist Kornelius wrote in an editorial that support "must be linked to the budget of the European Union ... and it must be linked to a strict set of rules" (Kornelius 2020c). In the same direction, Merkel stressed in a speech that every common response "should be considered together with the European budget from the outset, as the common European budget has been the tried and tested instrument for solidarity-based financing of common tasks in the European Union for decades" (Merkel 2020b). Also opposition parties emphasized the need for closely monitoring the distribution and use of possible financial support. For example, FDP party leader Lindner pointed out that providing support "without having an influence on local policies ... will not lead to sound finances" (Kummert & Harms 2020).

Meanwhile, representatives of the far-to-extrem-right populist party AfD advocated for the idea of self-responsibility. In contrast to generally promoting a common policy response on the European level, the party rejected support measures backed by German funding. This position was reiterated in several statements. For example, it is argued that "neither corona nor the euro justify German taxpayers being bled for the debts of the entire EU" (Meuthen 2020b). In a parliamentary motion, the party got even more explicit by emphasizing that "the aim of this treaty was to maintain the principle of personal responsibility within the monetary union" (Alternative für Deutschland 2020). With this idea constituting the central pillar of the AfD's discourse, the party remained largely isolated with its ideas in discourse.

On 9 April 2020, an agreement was reached among the 27 EU member states regarding a first mayor crisis response package in context of the pandemic. First, a "Pandemic Crisis Support" measure was introduced within the framework of the ESM, amounting to EUR 240 billion.

This measure went into effect in the following month to provide cheap loans of up to 2 percent of the GDP to eurozone members. Its scope was limited to only support measures related to direct and indirect healthcare expenses. Second, the EU member states agreed on an employment recovery package to help employers and self-employed to avoid mass lay-offs and rising unemployment. The instrument of “temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency” (SURE) would also work through the distribution of loans totalling EUR 100 billion. Although the SURE initiative was already planned before the pandemic outbreak, its adoption and implementation were accelerated as a consequence. Finally, it was agreed on a “European Guarantee Fund”, which was created by the EIB. Together with partners, it allowed to mobilize up to EUR 200 billion to support small and medium enterprises (Ladi & Tsarouhas 2020, 1047; Schelkle 2021; Tesche 2022). At the same time, however, the EU member states agreed on their intention to set up an innovative and far-reaching recovery fund that should include “innovative financial instruments” (Schelkle 2021, 48).

After the intention to set up a common European recover fund became public, the idea of enabling recovery became dominant in the German ECO discourse. The FDP soon recognized the need for “a rapid recovery of the European economies” in a resolution, since otherwise “the costs of the crisis can hardly be shouldered” (Freie Demokraten 2020a). At the same time, the party no longer refer to the idea of safeguarding stability as an overarching rationale for action. In a speech in parliament, German chancellor Merkel emphasized that higher German contributions to the European level should be expected “because we want all member states in the European Union to be able to recover economically” (Merkel 2020b). Similarly, finance minister Scholz emphasized the need for measures “to stimulate again” (Scholz 2020). From the business perspective, a joint statement by three of the biggest industry associations in Germany, France and Italy called for an “ambitious proposal for the next MFF, [to] create a European Recovery Fund large enough to provide Member States with a balance of loans and grants, and define further pan-European measures”. The business associations further specified that the policy response must “enable Member States to support the recovery of businesses through effective measures” (Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie 2020b). Newspaper editorials equally emphasized that enabling recovery should be the main rationale for adopting any future crisis response package. For example, SZ columnist Lübke-meier in an editorial pointed out that “we [Germany] will only recover if our European neighbors recover with us” (Lübke-meier 2020).

The main breakthrough for a common European crisis response was finally reached when the German and French governments published a joint proposal for a recovery fund on 18 May 2020. As its main element, the initiative proposed a EUR 500 billion budget to be distributed as grants. The plan, which suggested to link the recovery fund to the MFF and recognize it as a one-off instrument, was commonly regarded as a compromise deal between the German and French position. On the one hand, it followed the idea of stability by providing extensive economic resources and idea of control via its link to the MFF. On the other hand, recovery remained the key rationale for its creation. In detail, the agreement would enable the European Commission to raise money on the financial markets backed by guarantees of the member states. This was against Germany's long-lasting opposition to any common debt among the EU member states. At the same time, the proposal was explicit about the one-off nature of joint borrowing and its strong link to the existing institutional framework. In doing so, it opposed France's initial plan to create an independent instrument outside the established oversight structure and conditions. Further, the initiative proposed to only provide grants for projects that are in line with the EU's priorities and objectives, such as protecting the rule of law and promoting the sustainability objectives. The joint initiative ultimately set the general path for a common European policy response to be supported by all EU member states. As a consequence, the ECO discourse in Germany was no longer characterized by competing ideas but focused on the technical design of a common debt instrument (Tesche 2022; Krotz & Schramm 2022).

4.2.2 Solidarity Discourse: Existential Solidarity and Recovery

As the economic disruptions caused by the pandemic became visible to most of the relevant actors, calls for solidarity-based measures were quickly linked to the idea of safeguarding stability by most actors in discourse. Both of Germany's major economic think tanks, the ifo and the DIW, called for "some solidarity among member states" to "reduce risks to economic and financial stability" (ifo Institut 2020b; DIW Berlin 2020b). German finance minister Scholz regularly emphasized the need to "stick together as European countries" while "solidarity within Europe can be achieved in the existing ways" to "stabilize the public finances" (Braune 2020). Similarly, the opposition party FDP shared this line of argumentation. The party generally advocated for "European solidarity" with extraordinary support to be backed if the "stability of the euro currency area would be at danger" (Freie Demokraten 2020b).

Besides this emphasis on stability, the idea of an existential threat for the EU surfaced in the German SOLI discourse. The role of solidarity was linked to the very existence of the EU. More specifically, whether or not to agree on a solidarity-based European economic policy response to the pandemic was associated with either provoking or preventing a break-up of the EU. For example, SZ journalist Kornelius in an editorial argued that “European citizens want to feel solidarity. If they do not, the EU will fall apart” (Kornelius 2020c). In a statement, the Left agreed to this reading, saying that “cohesion of the EU depends on its solidarity. If, in the hour of need, the main interest of some EU states is to impose rules on other member states and to keep their own sheep out of harm’s way, the EU will not survive this unscathed” (Schindler & Schirdewan 2020). The Greens made similar statements. For example, in an interview, co-party leader Baerbock stated that “if everyone is their own neighbor and acts like that, it [the EU] will break. ... We need this solidarity. This also applies financially. Only a common European protective umbrella can prevent a deep division in the euro zone” (Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland 2020).

Following the first agreement, on an ESM credit line, the SURE initiative and a European Guarantee Fund, the idea of an existential threat dominated the German SOLI discourse, with the idea of safeguarding stability only scarcely raised as a consequence. Both the Left and the Greens continued to submit parliamentary motions highlighting the threat to the communal character of the EU in context of the pandemic. For example, the Left emphasized that the pandemic remains “an existential threat to the EU if it does not find solidarity-based answers to the challenges” (Die Linke 2020). Further, a “refusal of a solidarity-based solution would be another nail in the coffin for the EU”, especially considering the rise of global populism and nationalism (Kipping 2020). The Greens argued more nested, but with the same intention to point out the danger for the European endeavor. For example, a parliamentary motion stressed that “it is about whether Europe is perceived in the member states as part of a solidarity-based solution or as part of the problem” while it was noted that “approval rates for European integration are currently falling, even in traditionally pro-European countries such as Italy” (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen 2020). Similar need for solidarity to protect the EU’s continuing existence was raised by the media. For example, SZ guest columnist Lübke commented that “whatever can go wrong will go wrong at some point and that could also catch up with Europe”. Thus, “everyone’s solidarity for the European whole” was required to maintain the EU as an “autonomous Europe” vis-à-vis the United States, China and Russia (Lübke 2020).

In addition to the idea of an existential threat, the idea of enabling recovery became salient in the SOLI discourse, with calls to introduce solidarity-based measures being linked to the need for recovery. This new connection was invoked by various actors, including the governing parties CDU and SPD. In a speech held in parliament, Chancellor Merkel argued that “we should be prepared, in the spirit of solidarity, to make completely different, i.e. significantly higher, contributions to the European budget over a limited period of time. Because we want all member states in the European Union to be able to recover economically” (Merkel 2020b). In a similar direction, finance minister Scholz mentioned the role of solidarity in contributing to the economic recovery. For example, he raised this aspect in a speech in the Bundestag, where he argued that solidarity is needed to be able to pay for “very specific, identifiable expenses that have something to do with recovery, with reconstruction” (Scholz 2020).

Similarly, the idea of enabling recovery was supported by actors among the group of media, businesses and opposition parties when discussing the role of solidarity. In this regard, SZ columnist Lübke-meier cited a concept named “solidarity of action” in an editorial, which he considered pivotal for economically surviving the crisis. Further, he argued that for Germany, “we will only recover if our European neighbors recover with us”, which requires “European integration and solidarity” as key pillars of the EU (Lübke-meier 2020). The business association BDI published a position paper calling for a “strong fiscal policy response” that would need “a high degree of solidarity” to ensure the long-term recovery and prevention of long-term damage to the European businesses and industries (Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie 2020b). The Greens submitted a parliamentary motion to advocate for the introduction of measures that would “stabilize and revive the economy in a spirit of solidarity” (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen 2020).

4.2.3 Comprehensive Argumentation for Common Debt

To promote collective borrowing, actors in favor of this policy response engaged differently in highlighting how ideas of opponents would be reflected by introducing common debt. Among the political parties, the Left and the Greens were in favor of introducing the instrument of joint borrowing. Thereby, the former party constantly invoked the idea of an existential threat in order to promote common debt. For example, in a statement published soon before the heads

of state and government of the EU member states met, the Left argued that "today's meeting of the Eurogroup is about nothing less than the future of the EU. The [German] federal government must give up its blockade against Corona bonds [i.e. common debt]" (Schindler & Schirdewan 2020). Further, the Left stressed the negative effects that not introducing common debt would have on the stability of Germany's economy. Both of the Left's party leaders used this argument in interviews to promote introducing collective borrowing. In this context, co-leader Bernd Riexinger argued that Germany "as the economically strongest country in Europe with a strong export orientation ... cannot be interested in countries like Spain or Italy falling into the abyss" (Poschardt 2020a). Overall, the Left to some extent showed how introducing common debt aligns with the ideas of those who oppose common debt. Especially, by citing the idea of safeguarding stability as a justification for the introduction of common debt, the party referred to an idea that was crucial also to the governing parties, which initially opposed collective borrowing.

The Greens focused on the idea of safeguarding stability as well while also referring to the idea of enabling recovery to promote the introduction of common debt. For example, this became evident in the party's parliamentary motions, in which it called for measures to "stabilize and revive the economy in a spirit of solidarity" which should in turn be "financed once through joint bonds" (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen 2020). The key rationale for the Greens to support the introduction of common debt was to stabilize the EU's national economies. In this regard, Robert Habeck as one of the party's co-leaders commented that the "entirely legitimate concern for stability" of other actors, which "manifests itself in the rejection of common debt, itself endangers the stability of the euro area and thus also of Germany" (Habeck 2020). Further, the Green's co-leader Annalena Baerbock advocated for common debt to "prevent speculative attacks" and avoid another period of instability within the eurozone (Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland 2020). In summary, the Greens' line of argumentation primarily referred to the idea of safeguarding stability when advocating for common debt. Through this, reference was made to the ideas of opponents of collective borrowing, which were mainly among the CDU, SPD and FDP and repeatedly expressed the idea of safeguarding stability as well.

Economic experts, represented by the German think tanks ifo and DIW, mainly focused on the idea of enabling recovery while promoting the introduction of common debt. In a policy proposal published by prominent European economic experts, including the presidents of the

ifo and the DIW, the authors stressed the need for a long-term investment fund, which should be financed via collective borrowing. They do so based on the idea of enabling recovery by arguing that such fund is necessary to "finance the reconstruction of a more sustainable and resilient European economy" (DIW Berlin 2020a). After initial hesitation, the German businesses equally advocated for the introduction of common debt and linked their support to the idea of recovery. For example, the business association BDI implicitly called for common debt as "new and innovative" financing instruments would be needed to create a "European recovery fund large enough to offer member states a balance of loans and grants" (Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie 2020b).

Finally, the idea of ensuring control and oversight was addressed by several actors in their support for common debt. The joint paper of the ifo and DIW presidents, among others, emphasized that "the use of these funds" that were to be financed through collective borrowing "should be monitored closely" (DIW Berlin 2020a). This aspect was raised also by the media. The SZ editorials repeatedly referenced the idea of ensuring control and oversight. SZ columnist Kornelius early on argued that the introduction of common debt "must be carefully considered". While collective borrowing should be part of a "joint recovery program", it "must be coupled to a "strong rulebook" (Kornelius 2020c).

In summary, the analysis of the initial German ECO and SOLI discourses during the Covid-19 pandemic revealed that several different ideas were introduced by the relevant actors. Following the outbreak of the crisis, the ideas of safeguarding stability, ensuring control and oversight as well as self-responsibility guided the German debate on a European policy response. After first measures were agreed, however, the focus shifted almost exclusively towards the idea of enabling recovery. At the same time, the SOLI discourse was characterized by the presentation of three different ideas. Initially linked to safeguarding stability, solidarity soon became associated with the idea of an existential threat that the EU is facing. Thereby, discourse contributions focused on the role of solidarity in preventing the EU member states to break apart. Finally, the idea of enabling recovery surfaced in the SOLI discourse as well. In this context, the significance of solidarity for recovery was emphasized. To support the introduction of common debt, proponents of this measure highlighted several ideas that would be reflected in the corresponding policy outcome. These included safeguarding stability, enabling recovery, and ensuring oversight and control. In doing so, the supporters of collective borrowing used their

discourse contributions to emphasize how the policy outcome of common debt aligns with the ideas of opposed actors.

In light of the theoretical framework and two hypotheses formulated in this thesis, the analysis findings indicate confirmation of both assumed empirical results. First, the German ECO discourse during the pandemic was characterized by the presentation of fewer ideas compared to the eurocrisis. In addition, the discourse dynamics show that not all ideas remained in discourse at all times. Instead, the surfacing of the idea of recovery led to diminishing emphasis on the three other ideas. Second, the analysis showed that proponents of common debt referred to several ideas when arguing how common debt aligns with the ideas of common debt proponents.

4.3 Discussion, Implications and Limitations of Findings

The preceding empirical analyses provided valuable insights about the ideas presented and used by actors in the German discourse during the eurocrisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, allowing to assess the validity of the two hypotheses formulated in Chapter Two. The first hypothesis was that fewer different ideas for a policy response were presented in the German discourse during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the eurocrisis. This assumption can be confirmed based on the results of the empirical analysis. In detail, seven ideas were raised by relevant actors in the initial German ECO discourse during the eurocrisis. These were self-responsibility, preventing contagion, safeguarding stability, strengthening public and market trust, increasing discipline, increasing control and enabling endurance. In the initial German ECO discourse during the pandemic, only four ideas were identified: safeguarding stability, ensuring oversight and control, self-responsibility, and enabling recovery. For the SOLI discourses during both crises, the number of ideas associated with the role of solidarity remained constant, but different in content. In context of the eurocrisis, actors raised the ideas of self-responsibility, safeguarding stability and acknowledging European values. In contrast, ideas expressed by actors during the pandemic were stability, existential threat and recovery.

According to the second hypothesis, proponents of collective highlighted greater alignment of the policy outcome of common debt with the ideas of opposed actors by referencing more the latter group's ideas during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the eurocrisis. This can

be confirmed based on the analysis findings. To promote the introduction of common debt in Germany's initial discourse during the eurocrisis, advocates invoked the idea of acknowledging European values. However, actors opposed to collective borrowing were previously found to not support the idea linked to European values for a common policy response, as reflected in the discourse. Consequently, the argumentative focus of the proponents of common debt prevented these actors to highlight alignment between the policy outcome and the ideas of opposed actors. The analysis of the initial German discourse during the pandemic revealed that proponents of collective borrowing referenced four ideas to advocate for the introduction of common debt. These were safeguarding stability, ensuring oversight and control, an existential threat and enabling recovery. Apart from the idea of an existential threat, the other three ideas were also expressed by opponents of common debt. Thus, proponents of collective borrowing emphasized greater alignment of the policy outcome of common debt and the ideas of opposed actors when advocating for collective borrowing.

Against this background, the findings of the empirical analysis allow to reflect on the theoretical arguments established in this thesis to explain variations in policy outcomes across crises. Drawing on insights from psychology literature and policy paralysis studies, the first theoretical argument introduced in Chapter two proposed that presenting fewer ideas in discourse weakens the status-quo bias of decision-makers. This reduction in the number of ideas aims to alleviate choice overload, a phenomenon that typically strengthens resistance to change. The empirical findings regarding the research puzzle of explaining Germany's shift towards supporting common debt during the pandemic support the argument of a weaker status-quo bias. More specifically, actors during the eurocrisis presented a greater number of different ideas for a common policy response to the crisis compared to the pandemic, prompting the German decision-makers with an increased chance of selecting a suboptimal policy response. In this situation, policies that align with the existing policy regime are perceived to be better known and tested and therefore less likely to turn out suboptimal. Introducing common debt, which reflects a clear break with the EU's existing economic governance regime, was therefore rejected in context of the eurocrisis. Instead, the various measures constituting the policy outcome of the eurocrisis reflected a continuation and strengthening of the existing policy regime. In contrast, as fewer ideas were presented in discourse during the Covid-19 pandemic, decision-makers became less resistant to change and ultimately agreed to deviate from the existing policy regime by supporting the introduction of collective borrowing.

The second theoretical argument contends that during the pandemic, the proposal for common debt became more persuasive to decision-makers because its proponents strategically emphasized a stronger alignment between the policy outcome and the ideas of opposing actors. This increased reference to their ideas has two effects. First, opposed actors feel more validated in their thinking and preferences. This social validation increases concessions when discussing rival policy proposals. Second, emphasizing alignment with other actors' ideas increases their receptiveness to the proposed policy as the policy seems to contribute to the implementation of their rationale. The empirical analysis uncovered that advocates of common debt during the eurocrisis largely refrained from referencing ideas of opposing actors. Thus, concessions in form of supporting the previously undesired policy of common debt could not be expected. Similarly, actors opposed to collective borrowing were not given the impression that their ideas were acknowledged and reflected by introducing common debt. This minimized their receptiveness to proposals for collective borrowing. Conversely, in the pandemic discourse, proponents consistently underscored how the introduction of common debt would reflect the ideas presented by opponents. By foregrounding stability, control, oversight, and recovery, proponents signalled to opponents that their ideas were not only relevant but also incorporated into the proposed policy. This validation and acknowledgment fostered greater concessions and enhanced the receptiveness of opposing actors to proposals for collective borrowing.

The research question of why Germany agreed to the introduction of common debt among the member states of the European Union in context of the Covid-19 pandemic, but not during the eurocrisis can now be answered by relying the empirical results that confirm the relationship between ideas, discourse and policy outcomes as deduced from theory. The German policy shift becomes plausible based on a weaker status-bias of German decision-makers due to reduced choice overload and increased persuasion of proposals for common debt due to greater alignment of the policy outcome with the ideas of opposed actors.

Further, the empirical findings confirm and go beyond existing literature on the role of ideas and discourse in explaining Germany's policy shift towards common debt. Previous studies already find that the European debate on an economic policy response to the eurocrisis was characterized by the presentation of various ideas. For example, Schmidt (2014) concludes that European decision-makers faced difficulties in coordinating agreements and forming a cohesive crisis discourse. Similarly, Papadimitriou et al. (2019) highlight that a volatile European

discourse with constantly changing issues discussed marked the eurocrisis and prevented any comprehensive agreement. By this, both studies already show the relevance of fragmentation in discourse for explaining policy outcomes. This thesis goes beyond these findings *that* ideas and discourse matter in the formulation of policies by providing mechanisms to explain *why* and *how* the fragmentation of discourse and the number of different ideas shapes policy outcomes. More specifically, the newly developed variable concerning the status-quo bias allows to explain and determine the resistance of decision-makers to policy change.

Literature on the role of persuasion in explaining Germany's policy shift is equally aware of the significance of ideas and discourse in understanding changes in policy preferences. Among others, Schmidt (2022) and Becker (2023) point out that the German government was persuaded by its French counterpart to support the introduction of common debt in response to the pandemic. According to the authors, this was done by emphasizing the relevance of the instrument of collective borrowing for the economic recovery and stability. The analysis carried out in this thesis revealed similar importance of the ideas of safeguarding stability and enabling recovery in the German pandemic discourse, as both ideas were used by proponents of common debt to persuade the German decision-makers. Further, Seelkopf & Haffert (2023) and Schelkle (2021) highlight the increased efforts of EU member state leaders during the pandemic to directly address German decision-makers when promoting common debt. Based on these articles, the existing literature is complemented by explaining *how* and *why* the references to these ideas were successful in persuading Germany's decision-makers to support the introduction of common debt. This is done by showing how the effectiveness of persuasion depends on practices of social validation and discursive alignment of policies with the ideas of opposing actors, i.e. highlighting the need of common debt for recovery and stability.

The research carried out in this thesis further contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing in-depth analyses of the German domestic discourse during the eurocrisis and the pandemic. Previous studies that examine the role of ideas and discourse to explain the introduction of common debt almost exclusively focus on the European level. Thereby, Germany's policy shift is explained through discourse dynamics among the EU member states, EU institutions and other European-level actors. In viewing the countries as unitary actors represented by their government, processes of domestic preference formation and the role of ideas therein are neglected. Against this background, the thesis sheds light on the German discourse that

preceded the country's government's approval of common debt on the European level. By introducing mechanisms for reducing the status-quo bias and increasing the effectiveness of persuasion, a novel perspective on domestic preference formation in context of EU policy-making is provided. This contributes to a better understanding of seemingly sudden policy shifts of EU member states during and across crises even in cases where contextual factors remain similar. Thus, the thesis enables to explain how variations in policy outcomes come to exist despite unchanged crisis characteristics.

With these new insights on the role of ideas and discourse, the introduced theoretical framework is compatible to various other approaches for explaining the construction of policy outcomes, the reasons for policy change and the consequences for European integration. Even further, the complementary nature of discursive institutionalism and the newly generated knowledge within this framework in relation to other theoretical foci is not only possible but necessary. Schmidt (2008, 2013) and Carstensen & Schmidt (2016) clearly establish ideational power and the role of ideas and discourse as explanatory factor *in addition* to coercive, structural and institutional power, not *instead* of these other forms. Especially in times of crises, where rational explanations may encounter shortcomings, being able to explain policy developments by taking into account the mechanisms provided in this thesis adds to the general knowledge about policy-making processes. Overall, the broader theoretical implications of this thesis include that the effect of ideas and discourse on policy- and decision-making can be explained, that is, why and how they lead to specific outcomes.

In practical terms, the newly introduced variables and underlying mechanisms equip the variety of actors involved in policy-making with strategies to foster their policy objectives. The identification of the status-quo bias as a significant factor influencing decision-makers during crises has direct practical implications. Policy-makers can employ targeted strategies to address this bias, using concise and stable presentation of ideas to weaken the status-quo bias or overburdening decision-makers with possible choices in order to strengthen the bias. Social validation and alignment of policy outcomes with ideas of opponents can be employed as discursive strategies to increase the effectiveness of persuasion. By acknowledging diverse perspectives and intentions of other actors and highlighting their reflection in desired policy outcomes, the receptiveness of currently opposed actors to new policies such as common debt can be systematically increased. Overall, the gained insights into the role of ideas and discourse

allow policy-makers to more intentionally and effectively steer the policy-making process and promote policy continuity or change.

Although the conducted research offers valuable insights and provides an explanation of Germany's policy shift regarding common debt, the thesis comes with clear limitations. Most notably, constrained comparability of the two crises under investigation with the presence of several differences in context across the two cases limits the explanatory power of the findings in this thesis, as already outlined in Subchapter 3.5. In this regard, previous literature most prominently emphasizes the different legal frameworks within which a policy response had to be designed and the changing relevance of moral hazard across both crises. Concerning the changed legal framework, the German Federal Constitutional Court ruled against the legality of a major instrument introduced on the European level and intended to safeguard stability in response to the eurocrisis. Thus, to not breach the German constitution again, the German government could not agree to the introduction of a similar measure on the European level in response to the Covid-19 pandemic (Fabbrini 2023, 7; Luo 2022, 12). Since choosing the same policy response therefore became impossible, the German decision-makers inevitably had to consider other options, which limited their status-quo bias during the pandemic. This constitutes a rival explanation, contrasting the theoretical argument presented in this thesis, to account for a decreasing status-quo bias.

Besides that, existing research highlights the changed and less significant role of moral hazard concerns from the eurocrisis to the Covid-19 pandemic. On the one hand, introducing collective borrowing in response to the eurocrisis was perceived to incentivize troubling countries to proceed with their unsustainable economic and fiscal policies since the creditor countries demonstrated to step-in financially if needed (Pierret & Howarth 2023, 11). To prevent creating this incentive, collective borrowing was rejected. On the other hand, the pandemic reflected a crisis that cannot not be intentionally recreated by countries, which eliminated the risk for supporting countries to be deliberately exploited by other EU member states in the future. Consequently, the receptiveness of German decision-makers to proposals for common debt increased as the measure was no longer considered an incentive for exploitation (Pierret & Howarth 2023, 15). This argumentation constitutes an alternative explanation to the theoretical argument and findings in this thesis regarding the increased receptiveness of German decision-makers for introducing common debt during the pandemic.

The existence of alternative explanations links to the more general limitation of this thesis that correlation rather than causality between the newly developed independent variables and the policy outcome of common debt as dependent variable was found. The identified differences in the number of presented ideas and discursive practices to increase the persuasiveness of argumentation reveal interesting associations but do not themselves provide evidence of Germany's policy shift being directly caused by either of the two factors. Against this background, applying the methodology of process-tracing would allow to go beyond correlation to establish causal relationships. Although the analysis in this thesis already kept in mind the overall temporal dimension while identifying the ideas introduced to the discourse, only a systematic and detailed tracing of the two discourse periods under investigation allows to uncover causality (Ricks & Liu 2018). Nevertheless, this thesis is considered a useful point of departure as the proof of correlation reflects a necessary condition for causality.

Finally, the data selection and collection process carried out in this thesis carries the risk of potential biases. Regarding the selection of secondary sources for the analysis of the eurocrisis, a publication bias might have altered the used data. Mutually reinforcing research interests can produce incomplete literature that neglects important elements of the German discourse due to a lack of previous research interest. Although the data collection process in this thesis aimed to minimize this risk, future studies might consider complementing the data corpus with available primary sources to produce a more comprehensive dataset. By this, not solely relying on publications reduces the impact of a potential publication bias. However, a collection bias due to the availability of data constitutes a risk for both types of sources. Different practices and significance for relevant actors to make their data, such as speeches and statements, available online poses the risk of collecting an incomplete dataset not fully reflective of the discourse under investigation. Last, a selection bias constitutes a clear limitation of the research in this thesis. Most strikingly, the selection of primary sources for analysis excluded speeches held in parliament by political figures other than the German chancellor and finance minister. Yet, as parliamentary debates and speeches in particular are relevant to both the coordinative and communicative discourse, not including them in the analysis reflects a major limitation to the representativeness of the collected data. Overall, overcoming the discussed limitations does not constitute an impossible challenge but further research requires the necessary time and resources to engage more extensively in the data selection and collection process.

5 Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to explain Germany's policy shift from opposing collective borrowing during the eurocrisis to ultimately supporting the introduction of common debt during the Covid-19 pandemic. The specific research puzzle was situated within the broader framework of explaining variations in policy outcomes across crises. Discursive institutionalism constituted the theoretical framework to examine the role of ideas and discourse in context of the research question. To account for the role of ideas and discursive practices, two new variables were introduced, concerned with the status-quo bias of decision-makers and persuasion in discourse. The first hypothesis was that the status-quo bias of German decision-makers was weaker during the Covid-19 pandemic because fewer different ideas for a policy response were presented in the German discourse compared to the eurocrisis. The second hypothesis stated that during the pandemic, the proposal for common debt was more persuasive compared to the eurocrisis because proponents of collective borrowing highlighted greater alignment of common debt with the ideas of opposed actors in German discourse.

The first chapter introduced the theoretical framework, focused on discursive institutionalism and its increasing relevance for explaining policy-making during crises. It outlined the significance of crises for policy change and highlighted the perspectives of major European integration theories for explaining crisis outcomes. Against this background, the recent turn to ideas and discourse in political science was introduced. In light of an identified need for increased acknowledgement of ideas and discourse in explaining policy-making during crises, the theoretical framework of discursive institutionalism was presented. Studies that already apply this theory to examine the issue of common debt in context of the eurocrisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, respectively, were briefly reviewed. Subsequently, two new variables were introduced to address shortcomings in existing literature, providing mechanisms deduced from theory to explain *why* and *how* ideas and discursive practices influence policy outcomes, such as the agreement on common debt. Drawing on insights from research on psychology and policy paralysis, the first variable was concerned with the status-quo bias of decision-makers. Choice overload through the presentation of various different ideas in discourse was theorized to cause an increased status-quo bias of decision-makers, resulting in lower probability of policy change. The second variable focused on persuasion as discursive practice. Discursively aligning a de-

sired policy outcome with the ideas of opposed actors was theorized as a strategy to foster social validation and receptiveness, enhancing the persuasion of proponents advocating for common debt.

The second chapter presented and justified the research design, data and methods used to test the two new variables for explaining Germany's policy shift towards supporting common debt. Introducing the comparative small-N most-similar-systems-design for qualitative analysis, the thesis' focus on the initial periods of the German discourse on a common European policy response during both crises was justified. These periods, lasting from February to 18 October 2010 and 16 March to 18 May 2020, respectively, were chosen for their pivotal role in crisis communication and the structuring of subsequent discussions. In addition, both periods lasted until an agreement between opposed Germany and France as the EU's biggest member states was reached, thereby indicating general agreement among all EU member states. Then, the selection and collection of data was thoroughly explained. This encompassed the identification of key actors relevant to the discourses under investigation, including politicians and political parties, economic think tanks and experts, businesses and media. The data collection differed for the two cases, relying on secondary sources in form of scholarly literature for the eurocrisis and primary sources, including interviews, speeches, statements, policy papers, parliamentary motions and editorials, for the Covid-19 pandemic case. To not use primary but secondary sources for the eurocrisis analysis was justified by the richness of existing literature and potential issues of primary data availability. Relevance and applicability were presented as the key rationale for the selection and collection of data. Corresponding to the different type of sources, the methods of Critical Interpretive Synthesis and Critical Discourse Analysis were introduced for the analysis of the collected data. Lastly, possible research limitations concerning theory, the comparability of both cases, and data selection and collection were briefly addressed.

The third chapter contained the empirical analysis, in which the methods of Critical Interpretive Synthesis and Critical Discourse Analysis were applied to investigate the two cases in light of the hypotheses. A critical review and interpretation of the collected secondary sources was carried out to uncover the different ideas presented by actors in the German eurocrisis discourse. Thereby, a process of open coding and constant comparison was employed. Seven different ideas for a common European economic policy response to the eurocrisis were identified: self-responsibility, preventing contagion, safeguarding stability, strengthening public and market

trust, increasing discipline, increasing control and enabling endurance. Further, three ideas associated with the role of solidarity for a common European policy response were identified, including self-responsibility, safeguarding stability and acknowledging European values. The analysis further revealed that proponents of collective borrowing did not reference ideas of actors opposed to common debt to argue for its introduction. Further, no idea of opponents was referred to as being reflected by collective borrowing. Applied to the Covid-19 pandemic, iterative coding and constant comparison of claims and statements retrieved from primary sources revealed four ideas for an common European economic policy response to be presented in discourse. These were safeguarding stability, ensuring control and oversight, self-responsibility and enabling recovery. The discourse on the role of solidarity included three different ideas, namely safeguarding stability, an existential threat and enabling recovery. Further, the analysis uncovered that advocates for common debt referenced the ideas of safeguarding stability, ensuring control and oversight, and enabling recovery – ideas that were also supported by actors opposed to common debt – to promote collective borrowing.

The findings from the empirical analysis then allowed to evaluate the hypotheses and answer the research question. Fewer different ideas were presented in the German discourse during the eurocrisis compared to the Covid-19 pandemic, confirming the first hypothesis. Thus, the theoretical argument of reduced choice overload for decision-makers during the latter crisis, resulting in a weaker status-quo bias, was supported by the empirical findings. A change to the existing policy regime by introducing common debt was therefore faced with less resistance by the German government and became more likely to be implemented. The second hypothesis of greater alignment between the policy outcome of common debt and the ideas of opposed actors during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the eurocrisis was also confirmed. With proponents of common debt highlighting more of the opponents' ideas to be reflected in collective borrowing, social validation and alignment with the own preferences increased the receptiveness of opposed actors and greater persuasion to introduce common debt in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Against this background, the research question was answered, concluding that Germany's policy shift from opposing collective borrowing during the eurocrisis to ultimately supporting the introduction of common debt during the Covid-19 pandemic was the result of a weaker status-quo bias of German decision-makers and greater persuasion of the common debt proposals.

Valuable and novel insights into the role of ideas and discourse in shaping policy-making were produced by the research in this thesis, going beyond existing literature on Germany's policy shift and variations in EU policy outcomes across crises more generally. Besides confirming previous indications of other scholars that ideas and discursive practices matter, the thesis provided a theoretical explanation and mechanisms to elucidate why and how ideas and discourse are relevant. Particularly in times of crises, where rational decision-making is constrained and becomes less influential, the arguments presented and tested in the preceding chapters offer an alternative explanation to account for policy continuity and change. In addition to that, the newly introduced variables and mechanisms come with practical implications for policy-makers. The discourse and presentation of ideas can be instrumentalized by actors to provoke or prevent choice overload, thereby strengthening or weakening the status-quo bias of decision-makers. Acknowledging diverse perspectives and ideas of others in advocating for policies increases persuasion and receptiveness of opposed actors. This enables policy-makers to strategically employ discursive activities to effectively promote policy continuity or change.

The final part of the thesis discussed limitations to the conducted research, and provided points of departure for future studies. Comparability issues between the two crises limit explanatory power due to contextual differences that could not be eliminated within the research design. Thus, alternative explanations for the findings, such as a change in Germany's legal framework and the differing role of moral hazard concerns across both crises, cannot be ruled out. In line, while correlation between the new variables and the policy outcome of common debt was confirmed, establishing causality requires applying further methods, such as process-tracing, within a suitable research design. Potential biases resulted from the performed data selection and collection, posing a risk to the representativeness of the used data and limiting the reliability of the overall research conducted. Against this background, several points of departure for further research exist. First, future studies can employ a more in-depth analysis of the German discourse and its dynamics during the eurocrisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. This could allow to test the causal link between ideas raised in discourse and actual policy choices made by actors. Second, increasing the dataset and combining primary and secondary sources for analysis produces greater reliability of the findings used to explain Germany's policy shift. Third, the theoretical arguments can be applied to other countries and contexts. As the role of debate and discussion in domestic preference formation can differ across countries, testing the theoretical framework in other settings increases its reliability and allows greater generalizability.

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Appendix 1: Secondary Sources for Eurocrisis Case

Reference	Research Design	Relevant findings
Bickes et al. (2014b)	Critical Discourse Analysis of German media discourse on the Greek Financial Crisis 2009-2012	SOLI discourse: Most newspapers constructing Greece as "other" and the guilty; fewer and mainly politically left-leaning German newspapers, such as <i>taz</i> , emphasizing systemic causes for euro-crisis and arguing for solidarity instead
Bohn & de Jong (2011)	Process-tracing, incl. discourse analysis of French and German political leaders from 2009 to 6 May 2010	ECO discourse: German Chancellor Merkel advocating for the inclusion of the IMF in a common European policy response
Borriello & Crespy (2015)	Discourse analysis of French and German political leaders 2010-2013	ECO and SOLI discourse: German Chancellor Merkel justifying the choices regarding common European policy response
Brunnermeier et al. (2016)	Process-tracing, incl. discourse analysis of European discourse on the IMF involvement during the eurocrisis	ECO discourse: German finance minister Schäuble proposing European Monetary Fund; Chancellor Merkel advocating for IMF inclusion
Bulmer (2014)	Process-tracing, incl. discourse analysis of German discourse from 2009-2013	ECO discourse: Chancellor Merkel's discourse on the importance of stability to guide common European policy response
Degner (2016)	Process-tracing, incl. discourse analysis of European discourse 2009-2013	ECO discourse: Lobbying efforts of German industry and banks for support to Greece; finance minister Schäuble proposing European Monetary Fund

Degner & Leuffen (2019)	Process-tracing, incl. discourse analysis of French and German discourse from 2010-2015	ECO discourse: Reasons for initial resistance of German government to introduce support measures
Degner & Leuffen (2020)	Process-tracing, incl. discourse analysis of German discourse from 2010-2015	ECO discourse: Initial justifications for being unable to provide support to troubling countries; support of financial experts, media and businesses for debt restructuring
Drewski (2015)	Discourse analysis of German and Spanish newspaper editorials from December 2009 to 23 May 2010	ECO discourse: Existing discussions in media regarding Greek exit from eurozone and need for deeper economic and fiscal integration
Ervedosa (2017)	Discourse analysis of German discourse from 2010-2015	ECO discourse: Media campaign advocating for a Greek exit from the eurozone
Hurrelmann et al. (2020)	Discourse analysis of German, Austrian, Spanish and Irish parliamentary debates from 2009-2014	ECO and SOLI discourse: Centrality of economic self-responsibility in the German parliamentary debate; the Left and Greens as only political parties supporting introduction of common debt
Kaiser & Kleinen-von Königslöw (2017)	Discourse analysis of German and Spanish media discourse from 2010-2014	ECO discourse: Discussions in German media on economic policy response focusing on deeper integration to exercise control in exchange for support

Kutter (2014)	Critical Discourse Analysis of editorials from German financial press in 2010	ECO discourse: Presentation of different policy responses suggested in German fi- nancial press, including national respon- sibility, the inclusion of the IMF, EMU reforms to increase enforcement powers, and debt restructuring
Lahusen et al. (2016)	Discourse analysis of German and Greek newspapers from 2005-2014	ECO discourse: Focus of German news- papers on stability and smooth function- ing of markets
Maesse (2018)	Discourse analysis of European economic experts discourse	SOLI discourse: Policy proposals of economic experts almost exclusively calling for solidarity measures, but paired with institutional reform and/or austerity measures to correct flaws in current institutional architecture and en- sure future stability
Matthijs (2016)	Discourse analysis of German discourse from 2010-2012	ECO discourse: Emphasis of majority of German policy elite on national respon- sibility of troubling countries and rejec- tion of systemic response to crisis
Matthijs & McNamara (2015)	Discourse analysis of German discourse from 2009-2013	ECO Discourse: Emphasis on stability of German government actors and argu- ments for rejection of any form of com- mon debt
Mussler (2011)	Process-tracing, incl. discourse analysis of German discourse in 2010	ECO discourse: Chancellor Merkel and finance minister Schäuble arguing for introduction of tighter surveillance and control mechanisms concerning budget deficits in EU member states

Mylonas (2015)	Discourse analysis of German <i>Spiegel</i> magazine discourse from 2009-2014	ECO discourse: Framing by the media of eurocrisis as self-inflicted by troubling countries; proposing austerity measures and demanding disciplining policies in response
Papadimitriou et al. (2019)	Discourse analysis of European elite discourse from 2008-2015	ECO discourse: Risk of contagion as justification by German actors in arguing for a Greek exit from the eurozone; Chancellor Merkel and finance minister Schäuble emphasizing importance of control and surveillance in policy response
Papadimitriou & Zartaloudis (2015)	Discourse analysis of European discourse from 2007-2012	ECO and SOLI discourse: Chancellor Merkel and finance minister Schäuble emphasizing stability and discipline to justify first Greek bail-out package while rejecting solidarity measures
Riekmann & Wydra (2013)	Discourse analysis of German and Austrian parliament discourse from 2010-2012	SOLI discourse: German parliamentarians linking solidarity in form of support to troubling to the need for stability
Schmidt (2012)	Discourse analysis of EU member state leaders' discourse in 2010	ECO and SOLI discourse: Emphasis of Chancellor Merkel on the need for stability to justify policy response while stressing the necessity of introducing discipline-ensuring measures; initial resistance of German government to support solidarity measures

Thompson (2015)	Process-tracing, incl. discourse analysis of German discourse from 2007-2012	ECO discourse: Discussion among various German actors on the necessity and effects of debt restructuring
Wallaschek (2020a)	Discourse analysis of German discourse in media from 2010-2015	SOLI discourse: Chancellor Merkel arguing that self-inflicted crisis prevents unconditional solidarity, later arguing for austerity and stability measures in exchange for support; centrality of Merkel and marginalization of other actors in German discourse; Green party focusing on cultural solidarity
Wallaschek (2020b)	Discourse analysis of German discourse in media from 2010-2015	ECO and SOLI discourse: Stability as main theme of political executives and newspapers to support conditional solidarity; Green party focusing on cultural solidarity when advocating for common debt
Wallaschek et al. (2020)	Discourse analysis of German newspapers 2008-2017	ECO and SOLI discourse: Key role of national executives in discourse; Political executives arguing for disciplining policy response
Wendler (2014)	Discourse analysis of German government and parliament discourse from 2009-2013	ECO and SOLI discourse: German governing parties aiming to advance integration for more effective monitoring and sanctioning; stability as main theme of governing parties, solidarity-based response demanded among opposition parties

Wonka (2016)	Discourse analysis of German parliament and discourse and media coverage 2010-2013	ECO and SOLI discourse: Opposition parties and especially the Left and the Greens using cultural frames and advocating for solidarity with citizens in troubling countries to advocate common debt
Zimmermann (2014)	Process-tracing, incl. discourse analysis of German discourse from 2009-2013	ECO discourse: Stressing self-responsibility as initial discourse of German parties; interim support of governing party FDP for Greek exit from eurozone; debate among parties about debt restructuring as policy response

Appendix 2: Primary Sources for Covid-19 Pandemic Case

Source	Type
Merkel (2020a)	Speech
Dausend & Schieritz (2020)	Interview: Scholz (finance minister/SPD)
Poschardt (2020b)	Interview: Kipping (Left)
ifo Institut (2020b)	Policy Paper
Bollmann & Meck (2020)	Interview: Scholz (finance minister/SPD)
DIW Berlin (2020b)	Policy Paper
Chrupalla (2020)	Party Statement
Marschall & Quadbeck (2020)	Interview: Scholz (finance minister/SPD)
Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie (2020a)	Position Paper
Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland (2020)	Interview: Baerbock (Greens)
Kornelius (2020c)	Newspaper Editorial
Malzahn & Schuster (2020)	Interview: Habeck (Greens)
Von Storch (2020)	Party Statement
Krug (2020)	Interview: Lindner (FDP)
ifo Institut (2020a)	Party Statement
Braune (2020)	Interview: Scholz (finance minister/SPD)
Meuthen (2020b)	Party Statement
Freie Demokraten (2020b)	Party Resolution
Kornelius (2020a)	Newspaper Editorial
Schindler & Schirdewan (2020)	Party Statement
Mussler (2020)	Newspaper Editorial
Meuthen (2020a)	Party Statement
Teuteburg (2020)	Party Statement
DIW Berlin (2020a)	Statement
Kummert & Harms (2020)	Interview: Lindner (FDP)
Gammelín (2020)	Newspaper Editorial
Poschardt (2020a)	Interview: Riexinger (Left)
Sawicki (2020)	Interview: Kipping (Left)
Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie (2020c)	Position Paper

Piper (2020)	Newspaper Editorial
Freie Demokraten (2020a)	Party Resolution
Die Linke (2020)	Parliamentary Motion
Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (2020)	Parliamentary Motion
Merkel (2020b)	Speech
Kipping (2020)	Party Statement
Kornelius (2020b)	Newspaper Editorial
Meuthen & Chrupalla (2020)	Party Statement
Frühauf (2020)	Newspaper Editorial
Lübke-meier (2020)	Newspaper Editorial
Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie (2020b)	Position Paper
Alternative für Deutschland (2020)	Parliamentary Motion
Scholz (2020)	Speech
Kipping et al. (2020)	Party Statement

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