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Pledge of Honesty

"On my honor as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it."

X Callie Suzanne Patten

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Trust and Polycrisis in the EU: A Symbiotic Relationship

Callie Patten, Masters in Advanced International Studies

Diplomatische Akademie Wien, June 2024

This paper explores how crises impact trust levels and crisis management within the European Union (EU). By analyzing two major polycrises–the sovereign debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic–it uncovers the pivotal role of trust in shaping public opinion and compliance with crisis responses. High trust fosters cooperation and enhances crisis management, while low trust fuels skepticism and worsens crises. The paper underscores the necessity for future crisis management strategies to prioritize trust-building measures, including transparent communication and inclusive decision-making processes. By drawing lessons from past crises, the EU can fortify its resilience and responsiveness, fostering stability and cohesion amidst the uncertainties of future polycrises.

Dieses Papier untersucht, wie Krisen Vertrauensniveaus und Krisenmanagement innerhalb der Europäischen Union (EU) beeinflussen. Durch die Analyse von zwei bedeutenden Polycrises–der Staatsschuldenkrise und der COVID-19-Pandemie–wird die entscheidende Rolle des Vertrauens bei der Gestaltung der öffentlichen Meinung und der Einhaltung von Krisenreaktionen aufgedeckt. Hohes Vertrauen fördert Zusammenarbeit und verbessert das Krisenmanagement, während niedriges Vertrauen Skepsis verstärkt und Krisen verschlimmert. Das Papier betont die Notwendigkeit, dass zukünftige Krisenmanagementstrategien vertrauensbildende Maßnahmen priorisieren, einschließlich transparenter Kommunikation und inklusiver Entscheidungsfindungsprozesse. Durch die Ableitung von Lehren aus vergangenen Krisen kann die EU ihre Widerstandsfähigkeit und Reaktionsfähigkeit stärken und Stabilität und Zusammenhalt angesichts der Unsicherheiten zukünftiger Polycrises fördern.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper examines how crises affect interpersonal and institutional trust levels in the European Union to better understand the symbiotic relationship between these two factors. When crises occur, trust levels are inevitably affected, as stakeholders assess the reliability and competence of those involved in managing the situation. Conversely, the level of trust within an organization or community can profoundly impact the efficacy of crisis management efforts. Furthermore, the effectiveness of crisis management strategies can directly influence the future likelihood and severity of crises, creating a feedback loop wherein trust and crises continuously interact and shape each other. This has several implications for crisis management practices and societal resilience, including a better understanding of the dynamics between trust-building measures and crisis mitigation strategies.

The current age of polycrises further complicates this relationship. Polycrises tend to span across diverse domains including politics, economics, public health, and the environment. A disruption in one area can extend beyond the system’s boundaries, affecting the others. As such, polycrisis results in greater harm than the combined impact of each crisis occurring in isolation. Over the past decade, the EU has faced a series of these polycrises, beginning with the sovereign debt crisis that disproportionately affected southern member states and widened the center-periphery gap. These ongoing polycrises have not only strained the EU's institutional capacity but have also fractured the European political system, leading to increased polarization and challenging decision-making processes at both national and EU levels. By examining the EU's experiences with the sovereign debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, this study offers insights into how trust levels impact crisis management effectiveness and how effective crisis management can, in turn, rebuild or further erode trust.

The structure of the paper is as follows: the theory and methodology section outlines the theoretical underpinnings and the research methods employed by this study. The contextual framework section provides an overview of existing research on trust and crises, highlighting key findings in the literature. The first chapter, “Crisis Management in an Age of Polycrises,” explores the unique challenges presented by polycrises and the second chapter, “(Poly)crises in the EU,” examines two case studies, the sovereign debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to illustrate how these crises impacted trust and crisis management strategies. Finally, the discussion section draws upon these cases and the contextual framework to present an abductive argument concerning the interplay between crisis management and trust. Ultimately, a symbiotic relationship is discovered–crises affect trust levels, which in turn influence the effectiveness of crisis responses. High levels of trust facilitate compliance and cooperation, leading to more effective crisis management, while low trust levels result in non-compliance, misinformation, and skepticism, exacerbating the crisis. Effective crisis management not only resolves the immediate crisis but also enhances institutional credibility, strengthens societal cohesion, and prepares states to better handle future crises. Conversely, ineffective crisis management can erode trust, weaken institutions, and increase a state’s vulnerability to subsequent crises.

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

This paper examines how crises affect interpersonal and institutional trust levels in the European Union to better understand the symbiotic relationship between these two factors. Understanding the complex interplay between trust and crises in the context of polycrises is essential for developing robust crisis management strategies, fostering resilience in communities and institutions, and mitigating the cascading effects of interconnected crises. Ultimately, the paper aims to better understand how crises impact interpersonal and institutional trust levels within a multi-layered governance structure. The EU's susceptibility to crises is compounded by its institutional complexity, the interplay of divergent national interests, and the emergence of divisive political dynamics within and across member states. Thus, studying the EU offers valuable insights into the dynamics between trust and crises in a context where institutional intricacies and geopolitical complexities intersect, shedding light on broader implications for crisis management practices and societal resilience.

Theoretically, this study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, combining elements of international relations and sociology—primarily constructivism, conflict theory, and social network theory. Constructivism helps understand how individuals and communities construct and interpret their social realities, which is crucial for examining how perceptions of trust are formed and altered during crises. Conflict theory highlights how inequalities perpetuate social divisions, contributing to power imbalances and social stratification. It provides a lens to analyze how crises exacerbate existing social conflicts and impact trust dynamics within and between different societal groups. Social network theory explores how social connections influence individual and collective behaviors, information flow, and the diffusion of ideas. It is particularly useful for understanding how trust (or distrust) at the community level can affect trust at the state and institutional levels. These theories complement each other by providing a comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in human interactions, societal structures, and the construction of meaning.

The research strategy involves a case study analysis, focusing on two major crises: the sovereign debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. These cases were selected due to their significant and varied impacts on the EU, providing a comprehensive understanding of how different types of crises affect trust levels. Polycrises span multiple domains, including politics, economics, public health, and the environment, creating "crisis nodes" that are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. For example, political unrest can lead to economic downturns, which can exacerbate inequalities and social polarization, further intensifying political unrest. This interconnectedness means that a crisis in one area can quickly spread and amplify across other areas, resulting in greater harm than the sum of individual crises. Understanding the dynamics of polycrises is essential for developing robust crisis management strategies that can address the compounded effects of multiple, overlapping crises.

The EU is particularly susceptible to crises due to its complex institutional framework, which includes multiple member states with diverse political systems and interests. This complexity complicates decision-making and coordination during times of crisis. Over the past decade, the EU has faced a series of interconnected crises, starting with the sovereign debt crisis, which disproportionately affected southern member states and widened the center-periphery gap. These ongoing polycrises have strained the EU's institutional capacity and fractured the European political system, making decision-making even more challenging. As crises persist, political dissatisfaction has surged, leading to immense polarization within and across member states. This polarization threatens to deadlock decision-making processes, particularly as national leaders balance conflicting demands from domestic audiences and EU-level obligations. Studying the EU provides valuable insights into the dynamics between trust and crises in a context where institutional intricacies and geopolitical complexities intersect.

The sovereign debt crisis marked a pivotal moment for the EU, being the first major crisis the union encountered since its formation. This crisis exposed vulnerabilities within the Eurozone and tested the EU's institutional mechanisms and policy responses. By studying the sovereign debt crisis, we can gain valuable insights into how the EU initially grappled with managing a complex financial crisis and its implications for trust levels both within member states and towards EU institutions. The crisis highlighted the structural weaknesses in the Eurozone's financial architecture and prompted significant policy changes aimed at strengthening economic governance and fiscal discipline within the union.

The COVID-19 pandemic represents one of the largest-scale crises in modern history, posing unprecedented challenges to global health systems, economies, and societies. Within the context of the EU, the pandemic has further highlighted the complexities of coordinating crisis responses across multiple member states with varying healthcare infrastructures and policy approaches. The EU's response to the pandemic, including efforts to procure and distribute vaccines, has been closely scrutinized and has implications for trust in both EU institutions and national governments. By examining the EU's experience with the COVID-19 pandemic, we can explore how this novel crisis has influenced interpersonal and institutional trust dynamics within the union, as well as its broader implications for crisis management and resilience in the face of future challenges.

The data collection method used in this study involves a meta-analysis of existing social surveys and an extensive review of relevant publications. This approach was chosen to build upon the extensive previous data available on the topic and to provide a comprehensive understanding of trust dynamics during crises. The meta-analysis includes an analysis of data from the European Social Survey (ESS), which provides valuable longitudinal data on various aspects of social and political trust across EU member states. The meta-analysis allows for the identification of trends and patterns in trust levels over time, particularly about the sovereign debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, this study involves a thorough review of academic articles, books, and reports that discuss the impact of crises on trust within the EU. This review helps to contextualize the findings from the social surveys and provides additional insights into the theoretical and practical implications of the research. Furthermore, the analysis includes a review of media reports to understand the public discourse surrounding the crises, specifically how the general perception is influenced by the media. Using these various sources, the study aims to provide a robust and nuanced analysis of the impact of crises on trust within the EU. This comprehensive approach ensures that the research captures the multifaceted nature of trust dynamics and provides actionable insights for improving crisis management practices and enhancing societal resilience.

CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

A. Trust

Trust within a state, or system of states, can be split into two distinct, but interrelated dimensions: institutional trust and social trust. Institutional trust refers to the trust that individuals have in a society's formal structures. This includes the institutions that are established to fulfill specific functions and responsibilities within society, such as government bodies and legal systems.[1] Institutional trust reflects people's confidence in these institutions to fulfill their roles, duties, and promises reliably, effectively, and fairly. In other words, institutions provide the "rules of the game" and institutional trust reflects the confidence a society has in playing by those rules.[2] Social trust, on the other hand, refers to the general trust that individuals have in one another within a society or community, specifically those whom we know little to none about. It reflects the belief that, in our interactions with strangers, they will act in a trustworthy and cooperative manner.[3] Social trust is often based on shared norms, values, and experiences of reciprocity and cooperation among members of a community. This trust is often seen as having two parts: trusting beliefs, which involve how trustworthy others are perceived to be, and trusting intentions or behaviors, which involve actions taken despite potential risks to gain benefits.[4] It enables people to engage in cooperative endeavors, rely on one another for support, and navigate social interactions with confidence.

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[1] Giuliana Spadaro et al., "Enhancing Feelings of Security: How Institutional Trust Promotes Interpersonal Trust," *PLOS ONE* 15, no. 9 (September 11, 2020): e0237934, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0237934.

[2] Spadaro et al.

[3] Kim Mannemar Sønderskov and Peter Thisted Dinesen, "Trusting the State, Trusting Each Other? The Effect of Institutional Trust on Social Trust," *Political Behavior* 38, no. 1 (March 1, 2016): 179–202, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-015-9322-8.

[4] Spadaro et al., "Enhancing Feelings of Security."

In democratic political systems, trust is widely recognized as a crucial asset, essential for fostering a strong relationship between citizens and the state. It affords political leaders the space to govern efficiently and ensures that institutions receive a reservoir of backing that transcends the performance of any particular incumbent.[5] Because trustful citizens (those with high levels of institutional and social trust) tend to view others more positively, they are encouraged to engage in cooperative and helpful behaviors for the benefit of society, fostering positive outcomes for the entire community.[6] On an individual level, this can take the form of volunteering or giving to charity.[7] At the state level, trustful citizens are most likely to pay taxes, support the creation of public goods, and have high rates of political participation.[8] Previous studies associate a lack of institutional trust with anti-establishment, non-voting activities, such as protests and political consumerism.[9] These studies also connect high levels of institutional trust with lawfulness and fulfilling civic responsibilities on the individual level.[10] Additionally, insufficient institutional trust can impede the effectiveness of domestic policy implementation on the national level.[11] Moreover, many studies suggest that when people trust political figures and institutions, it helps

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[5] "Direct Democracy and Institutional Trust: Relationships and Differences Across Personality Traits on JSTOR," accessed May 1, 2024, https://www-jstor-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/stable/44132920.

[6] Sønderskov and Dinesen, "Trusting the State, Trusting Each Other?"

[7] Sønderskov and Dinesen.

[8] Spadaro et al., "Enhancing Feelings of Security."

[9] "Institutional Trust, Education, and Corruption: A Micro-Macro Interactive Approach on JSTOR," accessed April 4, 2024, https://www-jstor-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/stable/10.1017/s0022381612000412?searchText=institutional+trust&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dinstitutional%2Btrust%26so%3Drel&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3Ab66525198884e6641134458cb1f00e5e&seq=10.

[10] "Institutional Trust, Education, and Corruption: A Micro-Macro Interactive Approach on JSTOR."

[11] "Direct Democracy and Institutional Trust: Relationships and Differences Across Personality Traits on JSTOR."

strengthen democratic principles and contributes to democratic stability.[12] Furthermore, societies with high levels of trust are also associated with stronger economic growth[13]— people who have trust in one another are inclined to collaborate and this enhances participation in trade, innovation, and entrepreneurship.[14] Simply put, trust promotes beneficial collective results.[15] For this reason, trust is valuable for democracy and is often seen as a measure of its well-being.[16]

Conversely, when distrust becomes unhealthy, it undercuts democratic function. Studies on political polarization internationally found that when leaders depict rivals as immoral or corrupt, it results in societal divisions.[17] This "tribal dynamic" encourages distrust, prejudice, and hostility, causing each side to perceive the other as a threat. This leads to a perception of a zero-sum game, where one side's success is viewed as the other's failure.[18] As a result, supporters of the current leader may tolerate authoritarian actions to retain power, while opponents might resort to undemocratic methods to oust them, ultimately undermining democracy.[19] Furthermore, when these tensions are intensified by fears of extinction, violence can break out.[20]

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12 "Institutional Trust, Education, and Corruption: A Micro-Macro Interactive Approach on JSTOR."

13 Spadaro et al., "Enhancing Feelings of Security."

14 "The Economics of Trust," IMF, May 10, 2017, https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2017/05/10/the-economics-of-trust.

15 Sønderskov and Dinesen, "Trusting the State, Trusting Each Other?"

16 "Institutional Trust, Education, and Corruption: A Micro-Macro Interactive Approach on JSTOR."

17 "Polarization Harms Democracy and Society - Peace in Progress Magazine," accessed January 25, 2024, https://www.icip.cat/perlapau/en/article/polarization-harms-democracy-and-society/.

18 "Polarization Harms Democracy and Society - Peace in Progress Magazine."

19 "Polarization Harms Democracy and Society - Peace in Progress Magazine."

20 Lee Rainie Perrin Scott Keeter and Andrew, "Trust and Distrust in America," *Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy* (blog), July 22, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/07/22/trust-and-distrust-in-america/.

A. Institutional Trust

Citizens decide to either bestow or withhold institutional trust by assessing the performance of government actors and institutions.[21] Upon reviewing the literature on the factors influencing trust, one finds multiple factors shape the formation of these perceptions, including direct evaluations of institutional performance, assessments of institutional quality, and personal interactions with institutions. The first factor is institutional performance. Quite logically, when institutions perform well, people feel more positively towards them and, when their performance worsens, so too does public opinion. For this reason, transparency plays a vital role. Since the 2008 financial crisis, public institutions have received heightened demands for transparency and efficiency, especially those institutions that have a mixed track record.[22] Consequently, an organization with a long history of demonstrated commitment and capability to deliver high performance, even under significant challenges, is more likely to gain and sustain public confidence. Conversely, a newly established institution or one without a negative history may find it challenging to establish credibility and earn the necessary trust and confidence.[23]

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[21] "Institutional Trust, Education, and Corruption: A Micro-Macro Interactive Approach on JSTOR."

[22] "Measuring Trust in European Public Institutions on JSTOR," accessed April 8, 2024, https://www-jstor-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/stable/24721638?searchText=institutional+trust&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dinstitutional%2Btrust%26so%3Drel%26pagemark%3DeyJwYWdlIjoyLCJzdGFydHMiOnsiSlNUT1JCYXNpYyI6MjV9fQ%253D%253D%26groupefq%3DWyJyZXNlYXJjaF9yZXBvcnQiLCJjb250cmlidXRlZF92aWRlbyIsImNvbnRyaWJ1dGVkX2F1ZGlvIiwic2VhcmNoX2NoYXB0ZXIiLCJzZWFyY2hfYXJ0aWNsZSIsIm1wX3Jlc2VhcmNoX3JlcG9ydF9wYXJ0IiwicmV2aWV3IiwiY29udHJpYnV0ZWRfdGV4dCJd&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3Ac69b96da50aefb324bb015152f55c297&seq=16.

[23] Todd R. La Porte and Daniel S. Metlay, "Hazards and Institutional Trustworthiness: Facing a Deficit of Trust," *Public Administration Review* 56, no. 4 (1996): 341–47, https://doi.org/10.2307/976375.

The second factor is socioeconomic determinants, including power difference, or the degree to which less powerful members of society accept an unequal distribution of power,[24] and education. Being involved in decision-making is important: institutional trust is highest when citizens feel their interests are being considered and reflected at the state level and, on the other hand, a lack of involvement and perception of citizens being ignored undermines institutional trust.[25] For example, in societies where decisions are predominantly made by a select few without much input from the broader population, such as authoritarian regimes, citizens may feel alienated and mistrustful of institutions. Consequently, people in regions with high power distance, where authority figures are highly respected and hierarchical structures are prevalent; tend to trust institutions less.[26] Education can influence individuals' perceptions of power difference and their expectations regarding the distribution of power within society. Citizens with higher levels of education not only have a greater ability to recognize actions that might harm the smooth functioning of democratic institutions but also tend to be more troubled by such practices. Therefore, in countries where corruption is widespread, education tends to decrease political trust.[27] Conversely, in countries characterized by lower levels of corruption, education tends to boost political trust, as educated citizens are better able to appreciate and support the integrity and effectiveness of democratic institutions. Thus, education plays a crucial role in shaping political trust, especially when

[24] "Examples of Cultural Dimensions," accessed June 4, 2024, https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/professional-issues/cultural-responsiveness/examples-of-cultural-dimensions/.

[25] Anneli Kaasa and Luca Andriani, "Determinants of Institutional Trust: The Role of Cultural Context," *Journal of Institutional Economics* 18, no. 1 (February 2022): 45–65, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1744137421000199.

[26] Kaasa and Andriani.

[27] "Institutional Trust, Education, and Corruption: A Micro-Macro Interactive Approach on JSTOR."

considering the broader context of a country's democratic governance system and its level of corruption.[28]

The third factor is one’s personal experience, particularly significant and unfortunate life events. To have this type of negative personal experience associated with an institution was found to degrade one’s trust in institutions overall.[29] For example, unemployed individuals were found to exhibit diminished levels of trust not only in major economic institutions like governmental bodies and central banks but also in ancillary state apparatuses such as law enforcement agencies and judicial systems.[30] When individuals encounter hardships like unemployment, they may perceive institutional support as inadequate, fostering disillusionment and eroding overall trust in governance structures, suggesting a profound connection between personal adversities and perceptions of institutional efficacy.[31]

B. Social Trust

Just as with institutional trust, several factors influence social, or interpersonal, trust. The first is experiencing (real and perceived) injustice to be the most dominant factor shaping societal trust. Those who had recently experienced acts of injustice, such as illness, discrimination, or victimization were likely to report lower levels of social trust.[32] This was especially true for individuals residing in communities characterized by high levels of inequality, such as those living in areas with high crime rates – this pervasive insecurity was found to significantly undermine an

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[28] “Institutional Trust, Education, and Corruption: A Micro-Macro Interactive Approach on JSTOR.”

[29] John Hudson, “Institutional Trust and Subjective Well-Being across the EU,” *Kyklos* 59, no. 1 (2006): 43–62, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6435.2006.00319.x.

[30] Hudson.

[31] Hudson.

[32] Alberto Alesina and Eliana La Ferrara, “Who Trusts Others?,” *Journal of Public Economics* 85, no. 2 (August 1, 2002): 207–34, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0047-2727(01)00084-6.

individual's trust in other people.[33] A second, related factor is one's economic security. Economic stability can instill confidence and security, enhancing trust in oneself and others, whereas financial insecurity may lead to heightened stress and reduced trust.[34] For example, after German reunification, former East Germans initially exhibited significantly low levels of social trust. However, social trust was found to increase as the East experienced economic success over time.[35] This suggests that exposure to democracy alone may not suffice to inspire social trust. Only when exposure to democracy was coupled with individual economic prosperity, was it found to lead to notably higher levels of social trust.[36] Communities where members most frequently experience injustices tend to be those with high levels of inequality and pervasive financial misfortune, so experienced injustice and economic insecurity are often highly related determinants of social trust.[37]

Interestingly, institutional trust also plays a pivotal role, making it a third factor. Societies with efficient institutions tend to exhibit higher levels of interpersonal trust compared to those with inefficient institutions.[38] Conversely, negative experiences with formal institutions, such as encounters with corrupt public officials, can shape feelings of security and influence social trust.[39] The assumption is that, for people to trust each other, the government and public institutions must

[33] Luisa Blanco and Isabel Ruiz, "The Impact of Crime and Insecurity on Trust in Democracy and Institutions," *The American Economic Review* 103, no. 3 (2013): 284–88.

[34] Helmut Rainer and Thomas Siedler, "Does Democracy Foster Trust?," n.d.

[35] Rainer and Siedler.

[36] Rainer and Siedler.

[37] Alesina and La Ferrara, "Who Trusts Others?"

[38] Spadaro et al., "Enhancing Feelings of Security."

[39] Spadaro et al.

create a fair and effective environment where trust is acknowledged and rewarded.[40] If institutions signal that untrustworthy behavior is uncommon and will be sanctioned, social trust will diminish.[41] Hence, the foundation of social trust is thought to lie in how well public institutions perform within the political system.[42] Furthermore, scholars have emphasized the role of civil society participation in stimulating repeated social interactions between individuals, thereby strengthening social bonds and promoting trust among members of the community. This suggests that the factors that influence social trust form a positive feedback loop: social trust encourages greater community participation, and greater community participation encourages higher levels of social trust.[43]

B. Crises

There are many definitions for the word crisis—"a situation in which something or someone is affected by one or more very serious problems,"[44] "a state of feeling; an internal experience of confusion and anxiety to the degree that formerly successful coping mechanisms fail us and

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[40] "The Relation between Interpersonal and Institutional Trust in European Countries: Which Came First? Which Came First? On JSTOR," accessed April 8, 2024, https://www-jstor-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/stable/27093094?searchText=institutional+trust&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dinstitutional%2Btrust%26so%3Drel%26pagemark%3DeyJwYWdlIjoyLCJzdGFydHMiOnsiSlNUT1JCYXNpYyI6MjV9fQ%253D%253D%26groupefq%3DWyJyZXNlYXJjaF9yZXBvcnQiLCJjb250cmlidXRlZF92aWRlbyIsImNvbnRyaWJ1dGVkX2F1ZGlvIiwic2VhcmNoX2NoYXB0ZXIiLCJzZWFyY2hfYXJ0aWNsZSIsIm1wX3Jlc2VhcmNoX3JlcG9ydF9wYXJ0IiwicmV2aWV3IiwiY29udHJpYnV0ZWRfdGV4dCJd&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3Ac69b96da50aefb324bb015152f55c297&seq=13.

[41] Sønderskov and Dinesen, "Trusting the State, Trusting Each Other?"

[42] "The Relation between Interpersonal and Institutional Trust in European Countries: Which Came First? Which Came First? On JSTOR."

[43] Sønderskov and Dinesen, "Trusting the State, Trusting Each Other?"

[44] "National Fire and Aviation Critical Incident Stress Managment- Https://Gacc.Nifc.Gov/Cism," accessed April 30, 2024, https://gacc.nifc.gov/cism/cism1.html.

ineffective decisions and behaviors take their place,"[45] "an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending, especially one with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome,"[46] to name a few. These definitions reflect the nature of crises; as something uncertain and anxiety-inducing.

Despite this ambiguity, there are a few dimensions through which crises can be categorized and understood. First is the basics of the crisis: who or what exactly is experiencing a crisis (the subject), how the impacted party is being threatened (the cause), and the scope.[47] Crises result from vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities can be caused by endogenous factors, internal or inherent factors, or exogenous factors, factors that influence a system but originate outside of it.[48] Crises can be examined on the micro and macro levels. While the former looks at individual actors, the latter focuses on the role of the crisis in a larger system.[49] Once these have been identified, the next dimension, the severity of the crisis, can be determined. Severity measures how intense a crisis is from the start to the end. It shows how much conflict is happening among the people involved and

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[45] "Crisis Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster," accessed April 30, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/crisis.

[46] "CRISIS Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary," April 29, 2024, https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/crisis.

[47] Palle Svensson, "Stability, Crisis and Breakdown: Some Notes on the Concept of Crisis in Political Analysis*," *Scandinavian Political Studies*, January 1, 1986, https://tidsskrift.dk/scandinavian_political_studies/article/view/32537.

[48] "Endogenous and Exogenous Variables," accessed April 30, 2024, https://www.reed.edu/economics/course_pages.archive/red_spots/endogenous_and_exogenous_v.htm.

[49] "System and Crisis in International Politics on JSTOR," accessed April 3, 2024, https://www-jstor-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/stable/20097029?searchText=The+Concept+of+Crisis+in+International+Politics&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3DThe%2BConcept%2Bof%2BCrisis%2Bin%2BInternational%2BPolitics%26so%3Drel&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A409e1b14ae6544f0e8619c789d750199&seq=18.

how unstable the situation is. A crisis' severity is based on the scale, importance (within the pre-determined scope), the diversity of actors involved, and the sectors affected.[50]

A crisis is generally agreed to end when the system stabilizes again—either by going back to how things were before or by settling into a new state.[51] This stage introduces the last dimension, the crisis' impact. This dimension concerns how the system has changed due to the crisis, if at all.[52] If the system reverts to its original state without major changes, the crisis may have had minimal impact. If the system settles into a new state, the crisis has caused a significant change. In either case, if this system is unstable, vulnerability to future crises dramatically increases, making it likely another crisis will happen soon.[53]

Whether it's a personal struggle or a global catastrophe, crises disrupt the status quo and challenge our ability to cope effectively. They manifest in diverse forms, from individual turmoil to societal upheaval, and can escalate rapidly, threatening dire consequences. At their core, crises represent pivotal moments demanding decisive action and adaptation to avoid undesirable outcomes.[54] This fluidity in scale and impact underscores their pervasive nature, capable of affecting various sectors and stakeholders. At their most extreme, the system affected risks collapse unless significant changes are made either to the system itself or its surroundings.[55]

For this paper, a crisis will be defined as a situation in which the legitimacy, reliability, or effectiveness of political institutions, leaders, or processes is severely questioned or undermined,

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[50] "System and Crisis in International Politics on JSTOR."

[51] Michael Lawrence et al., "Global Polycrisis: The Causal Mechanisms of Crisis Entanglement," *Global Sustainability* 7 (January 2024): e6, https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2024.1.

[52] "System and Crisis in International Politics on JSTOR."

[53] Lawrence et al., "Global Polycrisis."

[54] Svensson, "Stability, Crisis and Breakdown."

[55] Svensson.

often in novel ways, leading to significant erosion of trust among citizens–toward institutions and/or each other. In this understanding, a crisis is the opposite of political stability, or the ability of a state to withstand challenges without undergoing significant challenges to its institution or population.[56]

[56] Svensson.

CHAPTER ONE: Crisis Management in An Age of Polycrises

"I have often used the Greek word 'polycrisis' to describe the current situation. Our various challenges…have not only arrived at the same time. They also feed each other."

- Jean-Claude Junker[57]

A. An Age of Polycrises

A polycrisis is a convergence of multiple crises—a series of events that begins abruptly and causes harm to the welfare of a population so that overall instability and uncertainty are exacerbated. Polycrises tend to span across diverse domains including politics, economics, public health, and the environment.[58] These 'crisis nodes' are often interconnected and mutually reinforcing.[59] For example, political unrest in a country may lead to an economic downturn and financial instability. This, in turn, could increase inequalities and social polarization, thereby worsening political unrest. Furthermore, a crisis node in a specific part of a system may quickly spread to the entire system. This initial disruption can also extend beyond the system's boundaries, affecting other interconnected systems.[60] To use the previous example of political unrest, the resulting financial instability is not constrained to the state in which it originates and may spread to any country that trades with or relies on the resources of that first state, thereby creating a ripple effect. As such, polycrisis results in greater harm than the combined impact of each crisis occurring in isolation.[61]

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[57] "Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the Annual General Meeting of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV)," Text, European Commission - European Commission, accessed June 1, 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_16_2293.

[58] Sønderskov and Dinesen, "Trusting the State, Trusting Each Other?"

[59] La Porte and Metlay, "Hazards and Institutional Trustworthiness."

[60] Sønderskov and Dinesen, "Trusting the State, Trusting Each Other?"

[61] La Porte and Metlay, "Hazards and Institutional Trustworthiness."

While polycrises are not necessarily a new phenomenon—take, for instance, the Great Depression—they are occurring in much more rapid succession. As the world becomes continuously connected, we have created, and have become increasingly reliant on global networks. The conduits of these networks, including airplanes, cargo ships, fiber optic cables, etc., are responsible for the mass flow of people, energy, and information.[62] These networks support global markets, driving increased standardization and uniformity.[63] This standardization, in turn, fuels even stronger interconnectivity, creating a positive feedback loop: creating crisis processes that transcend the sum and magnify the impact of their crisis node parts. The more interconnected a system is, the more susceptible it becomes to sudden, drastic changes.[64]

B. Crisis Management Strategy During Polycrises

As aforementioned, polycrises are complex challenges that cause widespread harm, potentially affecting multiple sectors or territories, which complicates their comprehensive resolution. Because polycrises have a simultaneity effect, with multiple crisis nodes occurring simultaneously, polycrisis response can greatly restrain resources.[65] Additionally, as polycrises are mutually reinforcing, only addressing one crisis node can hinder the resolution of another.[66] Again returning to our previous example of how nodes interact: if political unrest has resulted in an economic downturn, programs to increase financial stability may not necessarily solve the underlying political issue. In fact, ignoring the political element may worsen the situation,

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[62] Sønderskov and Dinesen, "Trusting the State, Trusting Each Other?"

[63] Sønderskov and Dinesen.

[64] Sønderskov and Dinesen.

[65] La Porte and Metlay, "Hazards and Institutional Trustworthiness."

[66] La Porte and Metlay.

overall.[67] While this seems simple, addressing underlying issues can be very complex, as the way crisis nodes interact with each other is not always clear. Furthermore, polycrises have an amplification effect, where the interaction of separate crisis nodes magnifies the impact of others. Failing to manage a polycrisis may lead to a loss of situational control and widespread panic. This can overwhelm institutions and societies and, in the most extreme cases, lead to failed states.[68] For this reason, traditional approaches to governance, policy-making, and crisis management may not be effective in response to a polycrisis.

Systemic disruptions leading to crises are unavoidable, but a system's resilience in managing these challenges can be enhanced.[69] Crisis management involves a strategic and methodical approach to handling unexpected and high-stakes situations effectively. It encompasses four key stages: preparedness, response, feedback, and institution-building; each plays a critical role in addressing crises.[70] Traditionally, crisis management involves learning from past crises to avoid repeating the same mistakes. In an age of polycrises, crisis management demands a more innovative and adaptive approach to explore and adequately respond to the complexities of polycrises.

During the preparedness phase, organizations and governments undertake proactive measures to anticipate and mitigate potential crises. Traditionally, this involves conducting risk assessments to identify and analyze major threats, hazards, and vulnerabilities. Early warning systems play a crucial role by detecting these threats and activating predefined emergency or

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[67] La Porte and Metlay.

[68] La Porte and Metlay.

[69] Arjen Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership Under Pressure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511490880.

[70] Charles Baubion, “OECD Risk Management: Strategic Crisis Management” (Paris: OECD, August 29, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1787/5k41rbd1lzr7-en.

contingency plans. However, these systems are designed to monitor specific parameters and issue alerts when predefined thresholds are surpassed, triggering predetermined actions.[71] Other preparedness activities include maintaining equipment and supplies and conducting training exercises. In traditional crisis preparedness, this again involves a pre-defined playbook, often involving the simulation of a historical crisis scenario. Perhaps unsurprisingly, detection capabilities are especially heightened in regions that have recently experienced attacks or emergencies – meaning they may be less effective in the face of novel crises.[72] Increased system complexity and modernization can also hinder organizations' ability to detect crises, allowing vulnerabilities to go unrecognized and fuel the lurking crisis.[73] Novel crisis management requires attention to how crises integrate and feed into each other. Simply working within established parameters is not sufficient. For instance, while the mobilization of resources and responders' training remains important, focusing on strengthening leadership and network coordination is more beneficial than simply repeating past crisis scenarios, for two reasons. Firstly, resources and trained staff are only helpful when they can be adequately distributed. Secondly, true polycrisis preparedness requires equipping oneself with the tools and capabilities to adapt and respond effectively to any way that a future crisis may evolve.[74]

Once a crisis has been detected or an unforeseen threat occurs, the response phase begins. Monitoring the crisis's progression and maintaining situational awareness to understand its characteristics and operational scope necessitates effective intelligence organization. This enables

[71] Baubion.

[72] Sarah Backman and Mark Rhinard, "The European Union's Capacities for Managing Crises," *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 26, no. 2 (2018): 261–71, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12190.

[73] Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management*.

[74] Baubion, "OECD Risk Management."

the selection of appropriate contingency plans and the activation of emergency response networks.[75] Traditionally, emergency response operations begin locally; however, due to the transnationality of polycrises, immediate strategic involvement from central government authorities becomes necessary. In both traditional and novel crisis management, standard operating procedures (SOPs) are critical to ensure a unified and coordinated response.[76] As crisis response usually begins locally, many SOPs are tailored to response on this level and therefore may not be easily scaled to the national or transnational level. For this reason, polycrisis SOPs must be adapted and expanded; particularly to establish effective mechanisms for cross-border coordination and response to manage the crisis across multiple jurisdictions and ensure a cohesive and unified approach.[77]

After response mechanisms have been implemented, the feedback stage begins. This involves evaluating response efforts, identifying lessons learned, and assessing areas for improvement.[78] This reflective process informs the adaptation of policies, procedures, and institutions to enhance resilience and preparedness for future crises. Integrating feedback into policy-making enables governments and organizations to evolve and strengthen their capacity to respond to emerging threats.[79] As during the previous two stages, novel crisis management requires a broad and complex approach, involving evaluating response efforts across multiple jurisdictions and diverse stakeholders. In particular, the feedback process for polycrises entails assessing the coordination and collaboration among different countries and international entities, identifying

[75] Baubion.

[76] Baubion.

[77] Baubion.

[78] Baubion.

[79] Baubion.

gaps or challenges in cross-border response mechanisms, and analyzing the effectiveness of global crisis management frameworks.[80]

There is a fourth phase that can occur during any of the previous phases: the introduction of new policies and institutions.[81] As the effects of a crisis begin to dwindle and the feedback phase begins, critical vulnerabilities may be identified. Based on these evaluations, new policies and/or institutions could be introduced to bolster future crisis management responses. Crises often relax the structural constraints that uphold institutions; as traditional ways of working and thinking are discredited, new ideas emerge, creating opportunities to implement lessons learned and strengthen the system.[82] If implemented, these new institutions and policies would then be tested during the preparedness phase. Again, this serves as an opportunity for gaps to be discovered. And, once again, regulatory frameworks, institutions, and policies may be established and/or enhanced. Once a new crisis occurs, and the response phase begins, new institutions or mechanisms may be introduced to streamline coordination and decision-making processes in real-time crisis scenarios. The ability to continuously innovate and adapt policies and institutions throughout all phases of crisis management is a crucial component in addressing evolving threats and challenges effectively.[83] Furthermore, actions taken during crisis management create new patterns of dependence that intentional institutional innovators may subsequently struggle to break free from.[84]

[80] Baubion.

[81] Baubion.

[82] Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management*.

[83] Baubion, "OECD Risk Management."

[84] Baubion.

Effective crisis management requires a comprehensive and dynamic strategy that evolves alongside the challenges presented by polycrises. The four key stages of crisis management—preparedness, response, feedback, and institution-building—remain and provide a structured framework, but polycrisis management requires innovation and adaptability at each of these steps. By embracing this, governments can enhance their readiness to handle the complexity and interconnection of modern crises.

Furthermore, legitimacy is also a determinant of effectiveness. Crucially, the legitimacy of the response, as perceived by the public, hinges on several factors, including institutional and social trust, as well as the perceived appropriateness and effectiveness of the crisis response procedures. High levels of trust in institutions managing the crisis and a sense of social solidarity among the public foster greater acceptance and cooperation. People are more likely to comply with directives and support response efforts when they believe in the credibility and intentions of those in charge. Furthermore, legitimacy is also determined by how well the response aligns with societal values and expectations. The public's perception of the appropriateness of the measures taken and their effectiveness in addressing the crisis plays a critical role. If the response is seen as proportionate, transparent, and successful in mitigating the crisis, it bolsters the legitimacy of the actions taken. Conversely, perceptions of inadequacy, incompetence, or unfairness can erode legitimacy, leading to skepticism, non-compliance, and hampered recovery efforts.[85]

C. Trust Levels in Crisis

[85] Arjen Boin and Mark Rhinard, “Crisis Management Performance and the European Union: The Case of COVID-19,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 30, no. 4 (April 3, 2023): 655–75, https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2022.2141304.

The effect of crises on trust seems logical. All of the factors influencing trust levels—perceived institutional performance, socialization, and experienced misfortune—can be profoundly impacted by crisis conditions. As many of these factors concern one's individual experience, the impact on institutional and social trust largely depends on the scale of the crisis. Experiencing economic misfortune, for example, is a determining factor in one's level of social and institutional trust. This is especially true when one perceives others as benefitting despite or even because of their loss.[86] As this crisis escalates, and the financial instability becomes more pervasive, this distrust will also be magnified. Additionally, as large-scale crises often strain the capacity of response systems and resources, perceived inefficiencies or mishandlings of the crisis and its effects can undermine public confidence in institutions, thereby also undermining social trust. As such, enhanced crisis preparedness correlates with a notable decrease in assigning blame to external parties, be that institutions, politicians, or other people.[87] Moreover, crises may reveal previously obscured systemic issues, further diminishing trust in societal structures and leadership. Ultimately, the larger the scale and impact of a crisis, the more profound and enduring the effect on trust.

However, this effect is not necessarily negative. The "rally-around-the-flag" effect refers to the public's tendency to show increased support for political leaders during times of crisis.[88] There are two main schools of thought explaining this phenomenon. The patriotism school suggests that crises evoke support for symbols or specific people, such as the president, as the general public is desperate for a sense of increased security in uncertain times.[89] The opinion leader school, on the

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[86] Rainer and Siedler, "Does Democracy Foster Trust?"

[87] Baubion, "OECD Risk Management."

[88] Bengt Johansson, David Nicolas Hopmann, and Adam Shehata, "When the Rally-around-the-Flag Effect Disappears, or: When the COVID-19 Pandemic Becomes 'Normalized,'" *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 31, no. sup1 (May 31, 2021): 321–34, https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2021.1924742.

[89] Johansson, Hopmann, and Shehata.

other hand, focuses on perceptions and communication of societal problems during crises. It argues that during crises, ideological differences are set aside to focus on the immediate matters at hand, leading to increased support based on crisis management rather than political preferences.[90] These schools of thought are not mutually exclusive: the patriotism school explains the initial rally-around-the-flag effect, while the opinion leader school helps understand its duration.[91]

This rally-around-the-flag effect can vary in magnitude; it is not always consistent in its strength or impact across different crises. On the individual level, the impact is most pronounced among those who anticipate the repercussions of a crisis but have not yet directly encountered its effects. While experiencing misfortune leads to diminished trust in institutions, those who fear the possibility of experiencing misfortune are most likely to turn towards institutions to maintain a sense of security.[92] On the state level, the magnitude of a crisis and its perceived threat to core societal values determine the potential for a rally effect. Regardless of the crisis type—the larger the threat, the more focus is on leaders and their crisis management strategies.[93]

It is important to note, however, that this effect is not permanent and support will decline as the crisis continues. Perceptions of how society handles crises significantly influence government support and affect the duration and decline of the rally effect. When citizens perceive the government to be handling the crisis poorly, the rally-around-the-flag effect diminishes quickly.[94]

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90 Johansson, Hopmann, and Shehata.

91 Johansson, Hopmann, and Shehata.

92 Tom van der Meer, Eefje Steenvoorden, and Ebe Ouattara, “Fear and the COVID-19 Rally Round the Flag: A Panel Study on Political Trust,” *West European Politics* 46, no. 6 (September 19, 2023): 1089–1105, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2171220.

93 Johansson, Hopmann, and Shehata, “When the Rally-around-the-Flag Effect Disappears, Or.”

94 Johansson, Hopmann, and Shehata.

For this reason, much of a crisis' effect on trust levels is determined by the way the crisis is managed.

Trust serves as the foundational element for effective crisis management, underpinning both coordination and communication among diverse stakeholders. Coordination is vital in crisis management as it ensures diverse perspectives are included in decision-making, efficient resource allocation, and timely response.[95] Likewise, communication is crucial as it enables the dissemination of critical information and helps manage public perceptions and expectations, ultimately improving the overall response to crises.[96] The two go hand in hand: effective coordination requires open communication and effective communication requires coordination. And trust serves as the foundation for both. In essence, trust, communication, and coordination form a symbiotic relationship critical for successful crisis management and fostering public confidence in response efforts.[97] This positive feedback loop is integral to crisis management: trust is essential for reaching solutions, and delivering successful solutions further strengthens trust.[98]

Social trust among crisis responders plays a pivotal role in shaping the effectiveness of coordination, in particular. When crisis responders trust each other, they are more likely to collaborate openly, share critical information, and delegate tasks effectively, leading to a more coordinated and cohesive response.[99] On the other hand, when trust is lacking, decision-making processes may be prolonged by disagreements and skepticism, leading to delays in implementing

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95 Baubion, "OECD Risk Management."

96 P. Longstaff and Sung-Un Yang, "Communication Management and Trust: Their Role in Building Resilience to 'Surprises' Such As Natural Disasters, Pandemic Flu, and Terrorism," *Ecology and Society* 1 (June 1, 2008), https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-02232-130103.

97 Baubion, "OECD Risk Management."

98 Baubion.

99 Longstaff and Yang, "Communication Management and Trust."

effective responses and prolonging the overall duration of the crisis. For this reason, solidarity, built through social trust among stakeholders, is also essential for leveraging resources and expertise.[100] When stakeholders trust each other's expertise, judgment, and intentions, they are more likely to engage in constructive dialogue, consider diverse perspectives, and collectively agree on decisive actions. This trust-based decision-making process accelerates the implementation of crisis solutions and enhances overall crisis response effectiveness.[101] Moreover, when crisis response bodies demonstrate trust towards each other, they boost credibility and public confidence in crisis response efforts, thereby increasing institutional trust.[102]

Institutional trust is critical for ensuring that the affected population believes responders act in their best interests. When the public maintains high trust in public institutions, it legitimizes the crisis management protocols and procedures, thereby fostering confidence in the overall crisis management effort. When this confidence is high, the public is more likely to comply with directives, seek assistance, and participate in recovery efforts.[103] This confidence is extremely delicate, however. Corruption, unethical behavior, or even just perceived inefficiencies among public officials can signal instability in the social order, eroding institutional trust[104] Even if only momentary, seeing such behavior can leave a massive imprint on the general public. Institutional distrust exhibits a spillover effect, where perceptions of corruption or untrustworthiness in one institution tend to negatively influence views of all institutions among citizens. As institutional trust degrades, the public may abandon crisis management protocols, exacerbating existing crisis

[100] Longstaff and Yang.

[101] Longstaff and Yang.

[102] Longstaff and Yang.

[103] Sønderskov and Dinesen, "Trusting the State, Trusting Each Other?"

[104] Sønderskov and Dinesen.

conditions.[105] This could also lead to heightened levels of protest and political disengagement.[106] In the most severe situations, diminished institutional trusts may cause increased support for nationalist positions and even for anti-social "replacement" institutions, such as the mafia so that citizens can regain a sense of security.[107]

Communication is one of the most critical channels in maintaining institutional trust. This is true for several reasons. First, open communication between institutions bolsters their ability to manage crises. Clear and timely communication helps stakeholders agree on the existence of common threats and challenges, creating a shared understanding of the crisis context. This "meaning-making" involves persuasive storytelling that explains what happened, how it can be resolved, and who is to blame, shaping public opinion and reducing uncertainty. Public discussions and the language used in these discussions play a crucial role in shaping how people perceive and assess a crisis.[108] Moreover, effective communication enables the drafting of a common narrative that resonates with stakeholders. How we talk about and describe a situation influences how we understand it. When we name, describe, and explain something, we shape its meaning and context.[109] Public discussions and the language used in these discussions play a crucial role in shaping how people perceive and assess a crisis. When we label a situation as a crisis, we are signaling that it requires immediate action to prevent it from getting worse.[110] This framing prompts collective decision-making and intervention to address the problem effectively.[111] In essence, the way we talk about a crisis can

[105] Spadaro et al., "Enhancing Feelings of Security."

[106] "Institutional Trust, Education, and Corruption: A Micro-Macro Interactive Approach on JSTOR."

[107] Spadaro et al., "Enhancing Feelings of Security."

[108] Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management*.

[109] Christian Lahusen et al., "Political Claims and Discourse Formations: A Comparative Account on Germany and Greece in the Eurozone Crisis," *Politics & Policy* 44, no. 3 (2016): 525–52, https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12162.

[110] Lahusen et al.

[111] Lahusen et al.

shape how we respond to it and the solutions we pursue. This shared narrative builds cohesion and empowers stakeholders to align their efforts toward unified crisis mitigation and response strategies.[112] Social networks play a crucial role in shaping a collective response by facilitating the dissemination of information and fostering connections among individuals and organizations involved in crisis management.[113] Additionally, these narratives are often most persuasive when they establish an emotional connection. In a polycrisis scenario, where complexities abound and the stakes are high, open communication, between a diverse array of stakeholders, is all the more crucial to ensure the best possible response to crises as they develop.

Second, effective communication is essential in reducing anxiety and reinstating a sense of normalcy during times of crisis. Leaders must provide a narrative that responds to public expectations and reduces uncertainty to persuade the public to accept and cooperate with crisis management procedures.[114] Meaning-making is crucial in securing or losing the public consensus leaders need to implement their policies and maintain their reputation.[115] In the absence of such communication, there is a much greater likelihood of panic among affected populations.[116] But for the public to accept these messages, some level of institutional trust must be maintained. This is because trust is reciprocal: the public is likely to trust institutions only if they believe these institutions are willing to share information openly and honestly.[117] Inconsistent messages, such as conflicting recommendations made by different government authorities or rescinded policies, can

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[112] Baubion, "OECD Risk Management."

[113] Baubion.

[114] Baubion.

[115] Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management*.

[116] Longstaff and Yang, "Communication Management and Trust."

[117] Longstaff and Yang.

significantly undermine trust and may prolong crisis conditions.[118] Furthermore, low levels of trust also increase vulnerability to misinformation and rumors, as stakeholders may turn to unreliable sources of information in the absence of trusted communication channels.[119] This misinformation further complicates crisis response efforts and undermines public confidence in official communications and response strategies.[120]

Trust forms the bedrock of effective crisis management, enabling coordinated responses, fostering solidarity, and reinforcing a collaborative approach to crisis mitigation and resolution. As crises unfold, trust plays a pivotal role in maintaining cohesion among stakeholders, promoting transparency, and sustaining public confidence in response efforts.[121] The interplay between trust, communication, and coordination creates a virtuous cycle where mutual trust enhances communication and coordination, leading to more effective crisis responses.[122] Moreover, the successful resolution of crises through coordinated efforts further bolsters trust, reinforcing the foundation for future crisis management endeavors.[123] Ultimately, cultivating and preserving trust remains essential for navigating complex crises and building resilient communities capable of responding effectively to emerging challenges.

Once lost, rebuilding trust is a challenging and arduous task. As stated by Paul Slovic, "Trust is fragile. It is typically created rather slowly, but it can be destroyed in an instant—by a

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[118] Baubion, "OECD Risk Management."

[119] Spadaro et al., "Enhancing Feelings of Security."

[120] Baubion, "OECD Risk Management."

[121] "Trust and Crisis Management in the European Union: An Institutionalist Account of Success and Failure in Program Countries | SpringerLink," accessed May 2, 2024, https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-69212-8.

[122] "Trust and Crisis Management in the European Union: An Institutionalist Account of Success and Failure in Program Countries | SpringerLink."

[123] Baubion, "OECD Risk Management."

single mishap or mistake…In some instances, lost trust may never be regained."[124] While trust can be rebuilt through crisis response, the process can be challenging and may take considerable time and effort.

One key aspect of rebuilding trust involves demonstrating a commitment over time. As aforementioned, institution building is a critical part of crisis management, which can occur at any phase. However, institution-building projects only work when a society feels institutions can be trusted.[125] Institutions can gain and maintain public confidence if they have a proven track record of consistently high performance, even under challenging circumstances. In this way, crisis conditions can actually be used to build institutional trust. For example, if a new institution is "tested" during crisis response, continuously functions well, and receives positive feedback, trust in that institution, as well as institutions overall, is likely to increase over time.[126] Another way institutions can establish a positive track record is through commitments to transparency, such as sharing performance data with the general public.[127]

Another important aspect is public involvement in decision-making. When the general public is allowed the opportunity to share their opinion with government officials, they are more likely to trust institutions.[128] This is likely to be due to the association between institutional trust and power difference. For example, implementing community currency programs, which reward

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[124] Paul Slovic, *Risk, Media and Stigma: Understanding Public Challenges to Modern Science and Technology* (Routledge, 2013).

[125] "The Relation between Interpersonal and Institutional Trust in European Countries: Which Came First? Which Came First? On JSTOR."

[126] La Porte and Metlay, "Hazards and Institutional Trustworthiness."

[127] "Measuring Trust in European Public Institutions on JSTOR."

[128] Sean Richey and Ken'ichi Ikeda, "Institutional Incentives and Trust: Marginalized Groups and the Creation of Trust in Local Government," *Social Science Quarterly* 90, no. 4 (2009): 911–26.

local volunteers for collaborating with their local government, has increased institutional trust levels, particularly among marginalized groups.[129] Including the public also helps the crisis response be accepted as legitimate, thereby making it more effective.[130] Once again, communication plays an important role. During times of crisis direct collaboration with the public may not be feasible; clearly explaining decision-making processes is key to making the public feel included.[131]

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[129] Richey and Ikeda.

[130] Boin and Rhinard, “Crisis Management Performance and the European Union.”

[131] Baubion, “OECD Risk Management.”

CHAPTER TWO: The European Union in Polycrises

"Europe would be built through crises and [it] would be the sum of their solutions"

- Jean Monnet[132]

From 1999 to 2008, the European Union (EU) experienced a period of relative stability and optimism, often referred to as the "Golden Age" of European integration. This era was characterized by significant milestones and achievements that contributed to a sense of cohesion and progress within the EU.[133] The adoption of the euro as the common currency for a growing number of member states symbolized a tangible manifestation of European unity and economic convergence.[134] The EU's enlargement with the accession of ten new member states in 2004, followed by two more in 2007, represented the largest expansion in its history, underscoring a commitment to promoting democracy, stability, and prosperity throughout Europe.[135] Moreover, EU institutions played a vital role in promoting cooperation and resolving disputes among member states, fostering trust and confidence in the European project. Against this backdrop of stability and optimism, the EU seemed to be on a trajectory of continued integration and success.[136]

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[132] Stefan Lehne, "The EU and the Creative and Destructive Impact of Crises," Carnegie Europe, accessed April 30, 2024, https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/10/18/eu-and-creative-and-destructive-impact-of-crises-pub-88145.

[133] "Golden Age of European Growth: A Review Essay | European Review of Economic History | Oxford Academic," accessed May 1, 2024, https://academic.oup.com/ereh/article-abstract/1/1/127/411853?redirectedFrom=fulltext.

[134] "Golden Age of European Growth: A Review Essay | European Review of Economic History | Oxford Academic."

[135] "Golden Age of European Growth: A Review Essay | European Review of Economic History | Oxford Academic."

[136] "Golden Age of European Growth: A Review Essay | European Review of Economic History | Oxford Academic."

During the early 2000s, trust in the EU was relatively high, reflecting optimism about the prospects of European integration and economic growth. While there were regional clusters of trust in the EU, the majority of Europeans were found to generally be trusting on all three levels—towards EU institutions, national institutions, and each other.[137] However, the onset of the financial crisis in 2008 ushered in a period of profound uncertainty and upheaval, which frequently tested the resilience of the EU. The EU left behind the "Golden Age" and entered a new one, of polycrises.[138] These crises, spanning economic, political, social, and institutional dimensions, have unfolded against shifting global dynamics, rising populism, and geopolitical uncertainties. They have exposed vulnerabilities in the EU's framework, presenting unprecedented challenges. These crises have also caused trust to plummet.[139]

Figure 1: Institutional Trust in the EU Parliament (2006)[140]

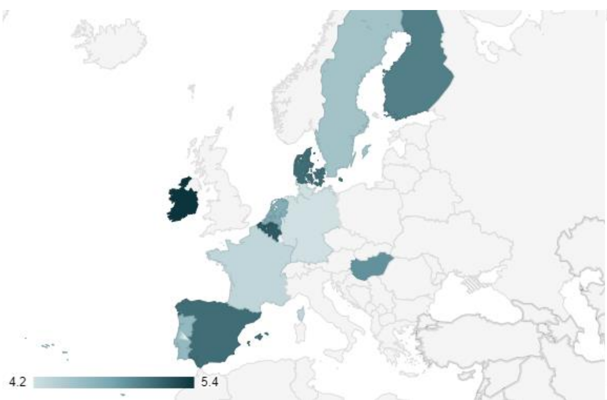
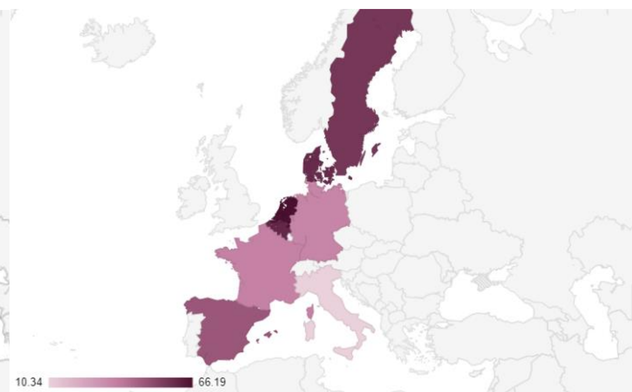


Figure 2: Institutional Trust in National Government (2006)[141]



[137] Peter, "How Regional Inequality Shapes Trust in the EU," *EUROPP* (blog), November 1, 2023, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2023/11/01/how-regional-inequality-shapes-trust-in-the-eu/.

[138] Lehne, "The EU and the Creative and Destructive Impact of Crises."

[139] Lehne.

[140] "ESS Data Portal | European Social Survey," accessed April 29, 2024, https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data-portal.

[141] "General Government - Trust in Government - OECD Data," accessed April 29, 2024, https://data.oecd.org/gga/trust-in-government.htm.

Figure 3: Interpersonal Trust (2004)[142]

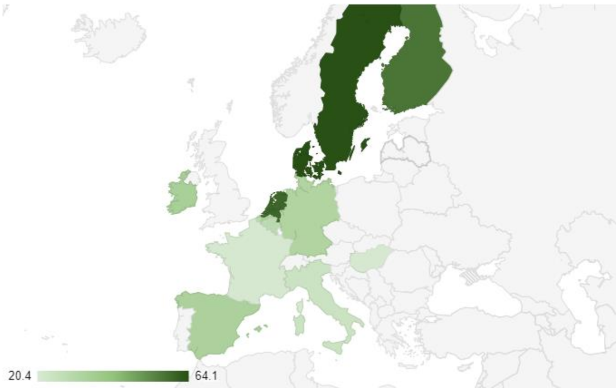
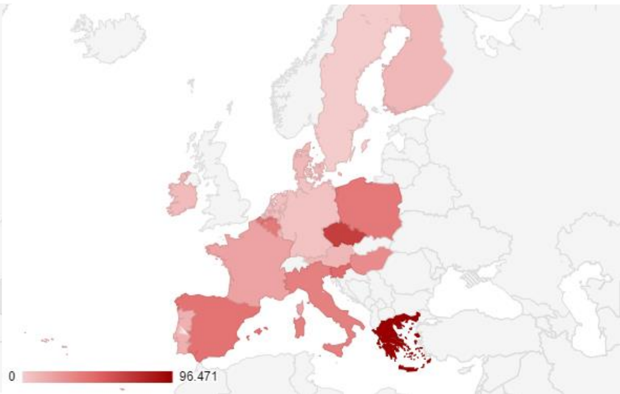


Figure 5: Percent Change in Institutional Trust (2007-2017)[143]



Economically, the EU continues to grapple with the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, which exposed deep-seated vulnerabilities within the Eurozone and laid bare the shortcomings of the EU's economic governance framework.[144] Socially, the EU is grappling with demographic shifts, cultural diversity, and social cohesion challenges that have strained social welfare systems and exposed fault lines within societies. Increased migration, fueled by conflicts, instability, and economic disparities in neighboring regions, has tested the EU's ability to manage external borders, ensure humanitarian protection, and promote integration and social cohesion.[145] Politically, the EU faces mounting pressures from populist movements, nationalist sentiments, and Eurosceptic parties that seek to undermine the principles of European integration and challenge the authority of EU institutions. Brexit, the UK's decision to leave the EU, represented a significant blow to European unity and has fueled debates over the future direction of the EU. The rise of populist

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[142] Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, Max Roser, and Pablo Arriagada, "Trust," *Our World in Data*, April 10, 2024, https://ourworldindata.org/trust.

[143] Eurofound (EU body or agency) et al., *Societal Change and Trust in Institutions* (Publications Office of the European Union, 2018), https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2806/736845.

[144] "A Decade on from the Crisis," n.d.

[145] Vihar Georgiev, "The Never-Ending Poly-Crisis: European Union Governance and Legitimacy Beyond COVID-19," in *Relevance of European Studies in Asia*, ed. Maria Stoicheva, S. G. Sreejith, and Indranath Gupta (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2023), 145–69, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-7786-4_9.

leaders and anti-establishment parties in several member states has further eroded trust in traditional political elites and institutions, posing a fundamental challenge to the EU's democratic values and principles.[146] Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic inflicted shocks on the EU, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and amplifying disparities within and among member states—across economic, social, and political sectors.[147]

Crises impact the EU in two primary ways, shaping its institutional evolution and influencing the dynamics of integration among member states. Firstly, crisis management often prompts the EU to introduce new institutions and procedures, necessitating expansions and changes to its powers and capabilities.[148] The EU generally favors gradual adjustments to its institutional framework. Significant reforms often only occur in response to crises that highlight gaps or weaknesses in existing arrangements.[149] In other words, change is only embraced when it becomes necessary. Significant external or internal pressures, urgent circumstances, and clear risks of inaction are often required to push the EU towards action.[150] Over the past thirteen years, characterized by a seemingly perpetual state of crisis, this pattern of innovation through crisis has intensified considerably. During this period, the EU underwent a significant transformation, gaining increased executive power. Direct operational involvement, like joint vaccine purchases and potential future collaborations on energy procurement and military support, would have been unimaginable not long ago.[151]

[146] Yann Algan et al., "The European Trust Crisis and the Rise of Populism," *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 2017, 309–82.

[147] Lorenzo Cicchi et al., "EU Solidarity in Times of Covid-19," n.d.

[148] Lehne, "The EU and the Creative and Destructive Impact of Crises."

[149] Lehne.

[150] Lehne.

[151] Lehne.

Secondly, polycrises have posed significant challenges for the future of European integration. While some crises have inspired the EU to come closer and deepen integration, others have driven it apart. In times of crisis, there is often increased pressure for collective action and solidarity among member states to address shared challenges. This can lead to deeper integration and cooperation in specific policy areas, such as economic governance or security.[152] On the other hand, some crises can strain relations and highlight divisions among member states, leading to tensions and disagreements that impede progress toward greater integration.[153] For example, the Brexit referendum, triggered by concerns over sovereignty and immigration, exemplified how crises can create rifts and drive member states toward more nationalist or Eurosceptic positions.[154] A crisis' effect on integration depends on three factors: the symmetry of the crisis, the comparative advantage of EU-level action, and the level of trust among member states and in EU institutions.[155]

In this way, trust plays a foundational role in shaping the impact of a crisis on European integration—influencing both perceptions of symmetry and the comparative advantage of EU-level action. In a context of high trust, member states are more likely to perceive a crisis as symmetric, meaning that they view it as a common challenge that affects all members equally. Additionally, there is often a greater willingness to delegate authority to EU institutions. Conversely, in asymmetric crises, Member States often feel isolated from each other, significantly degrading trust in EU institutions and feelings of European solidarity. This can also cause Member States to prefer national-level responses to crises, as they perceive EU institutions as less capable

[152] Lehne.

[153] Lehne.

[154] Algan et al., "The European Trust Crisis and the Rise of Populism," 2017.

[155] Lehne, "The EU and the Creative and Destructive Impact of Crises."

or trustworthy. This reduces the comparative advantage of EU-level action and can lead to fragmentation, inefficiencies, and delays in crisis responses.

As aforementioned, the larger the scale and impact of a crisis, the more profound and enduring the effect on trust. Trust levels and crisis response in the EU often form a positive feedback loop, where the level of trust influences the effectiveness of crisis response, and the effectiveness of crisis response, in turn, influences trust levels. A lack of trust, on the other hand, can undermine the effectiveness of crisis response efforts, leading to a downward spiral of distrust and dysfunctionality.

A. The Sovereign Debt Crisis

The sovereign debt crisis, which unfolded in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, marked a pivotal period in the economic history of the EU. The sovereign debt crisis was a balance-of-payments crisis—flows of foreign capital into countries that had substantial deficits and were dependent on foreign lending suddenly stopped.[156] Beginning around 2010, several Eurozone member countries, particularly Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Italy, faced severe fiscal challenges as their sovereign debt levels surged to unsustainable heights. The crisis exposed structural weaknesses within the Eurozone, including the inability of individual nations to control their currencies.[157] Moreover, economic disparities among Eurozone members, compounded by the absence of fiscal unity, further strained the cohesion of the currency union, rendering some countries economically vulnerable while others thrived. The crisis not only strained the economic and financial fabric of the affected nations but also tested the cohesion of the EU as member states

[156] "A Decade on from the Crisis."

[157] "A Decade on from the Crisis."

grappled with the need for collective action to stabilize the region's economies and restore investor confidence.[158]

The sovereign debt crisis had several factors, many of which influenced each other. As mentioned, the sovereign debt crisis followed and was caused in part by the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. The Global Financial Crisis began in the U.S. due to irresponsible lending, excessive leveraging of financial institutions, and regulatory failures and peaked with the collapse of the Lehman Brothers Bank in 2008.[159] The interconnectedness of the economy and financial sector facilitated the spread of the crisis from the US to Europe. And because European banks were heavily involved in subprime mortgage securitization in the US, they also suffered heavy losses. Simultaneously, sovereign debt began to accumulate in the Eurozone's peripheral states.[160] There had long been inequalities between Eurozone members—many of the peripheral states experienced lower productivity growth, high unemployment, and trade imbalances. The European Central Bank could implement only one interest rate, which resulted in high real interest rates in Germany (relative to inflation) and low rates in Southern Eurozone countries. This situation encouraged German investors to lend to the South, while Southern states were motivated to borrow due to the very low interest rates. Over time, this led to the accumulation of deficits in the South, mainly by private economic actors. The crisis was triggered in late 2009 when the Greek government disclosed that its budget deficits were far higher than previously thought.[161]

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[158] "A Decade on from the Crisis."

[159] Nicolas Hubé, Susana Salgado, and Liina Puustinen, "The Euro Crisis' Actors and Their Roles: Politicization and Personalization of the Press Coverage," *Politique Européenne* N° 52, no. 2 (November 7, 2016): 84–113, https://doi.org/10.3917/poeu.052.0084.

[160] Hubé, Salgado, and Puustinen.

[161] "A Decade on from the Crisis."

The crisis exposed the fragility of the Eurozone. For instance, there was no centralized fiscal authority to manage fiscal policy across the Eurozone. This lack of coordination meant that countries facing economic difficulties had limited tools at their disposal to respond to the crisis. Additionally, the crisis was exacerbated by the inability of states to devalue their national currencies, as they all shared the Euro. Furthermore, the absence of a unified banking supervision mechanism allowed problems in one country's banking sector to spill over and affect other countries.[162] Had some of these gaps been filled, the EU would have likely been able to manage this crisis more efficiently. Instead, a vicious cycle was exposed in which sovereign risks and bank risks fed each other.

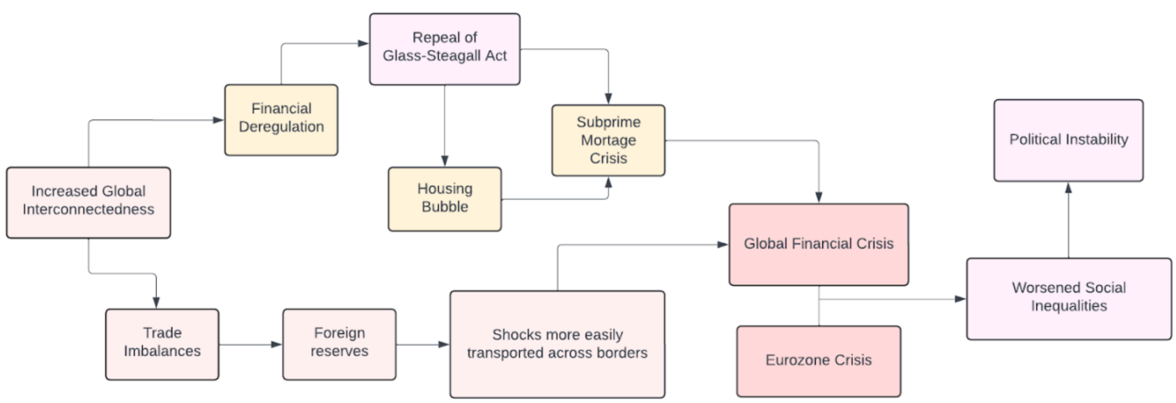

Figure 4: The Sovereign Debt Crisis as a Polycrisis

The sovereign debt crisis stands out as a polycrisis due to its multifaceted nature. Firstly, its causes were intricate, stemming from a combination of factors including unsustainable fiscal policies, structural economic weaknesses, and financial market vulnerabilities across multiple European countries. These issues transcended mere economic mismanagement to encompass political, regulatory, and institutional deficiencies. Secondly, the crisis's effects reverberated

[162] Hubé, Salgado, and Puustinen, "The Euro Crisis' Actors and Their Roles."

across various sectors, impacting not just finance but also employment, social welfare, and political stability within the Eurozone and beyond. The interconnectedness of these sectors exacerbated the crisis, amplifying its damaging consequences and highlighting its classification as a polycrisis.

In response to the sovereign debt crisis, the European Union implemented a series of management techniques aimed at stabilizing affected economies and restoring investor confidence. One of the primary mechanisms was the establishment of financial assistance programs through entities like the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and its successor, the European Stability Mechanism (ESM).[163] These institutions provided emergency funding to struggling Eurozone countries under strict conditionality, which required the implementation of austerity measures and structural reforms aimed at reducing fiscal deficits and improving economic competitiveness.[164] Additionally, the European Central Bank (ECB) played a crucial role by adopting unconventional monetary policies, including the Securities Markets Programme (SMP) and later the Outright Monetary Transactions (OMT) initiative, which involved purchasing sovereign bonds to lower borrowing costs for distressed nations.[165] The EU also strengthened its economic governance framework by introducing the Six-Pack and Two-Pack legislative packages, which enhanced fiscal surveillance and coordination among member states.[166] Furthermore, the Banking Union was established to centralize banking supervision and resolution, mitigating the

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[163] Friedrich Heinemann, "The Political Economy of Euro Area Sovereign Debt Restructuring," *Constitutional Political Economy* 32, no. 4 (2021): 502–22, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10602-021-09327-9.

[164] Klaus Armingeon and Lucio Baccaro, "The Sorrows of Young Euro: Policy Responses to the Sovereign Debt Crisis," n.d.

[165] Heinemann, "The Political Economy of Euro Area Sovereign Debt Restructuring."

[166] "Review of the 'Six-Pack' and 'Two-Pack,'" Epthinktank, December 13, 2014, https://epthinktank.eu/2014/12/13/review-of-the-six-pack-and-two-pack/.

risk of financial contagion.[167] Collectively, these measures helped to mitigate the crisis, albeit at the cost of significant social and economic challenges for the countries under assistance programs.[168]

a. Trust in EU Institutions

During the sovereign debt crisis, institutional trust levels plummeted, significantly influenced by perceptions of their performance during the crisis and financial experiences at the personal and national levels. In this period, significant gaps in trust emerged: between peripheral and non-peripheral states and between lower- and higher-income individuals across Member States. While the disparity in trust levels between states has narrowed over time, the divide between individuals has prevailed.[169] The struggle to regain trust has significant implications for the EU, affecting Central Bank effectiveness and public confidence in economic interpretations. Without prioritized trust in the ECB and EMU, the EU's crisis response could be compromised, leading to increased market volatility and undermining broader support for EU policies, potentially fragmenting EU solidarity and impeding collective decision-making.[170]

Of European institutions, the European Central Bank experienced one of the largest drops in trust during the sovereign debt crisis.[171] The European Central Bank (ECB) is the central bank

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[167] Heinemann, "The Political Economy of Euro Area Sovereign Debt Restructuring."

[168] Iain Begg, "The EU's Response to the Global Financial Crisis and Sovereign Debt Crisis," *Asia Europe Journal* 9, no. 2 (March 1, 2012): 107–24, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-012-0304-8.

[169] "When Trust Becomes a Luxury: How Economic Crises Undermine Political Trust among the Most Disadvantaged," Jacques Delors Centre, accessed April 17, 2024, https://www.delorscentre.eu/en/publications/political-trust-in-economic-crisis.

[170] Stephanie Bergbauer et al., "Citizens' Attitudes towards the ECB, the Euro and Economic and Monetary Union," June 15, 2020, https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/economic-bulletin/articles/2020/html/ecb.ebart202004_01~9e43ff2fb2.en.html.

[171] Bergbauer et al.

for the euro currency and is responsible for monetary policy in the Eurozone, which comprises countries using the euro. The ECB's primary objective is to maintain price stability and control inflation within the Eurozone. It achieves this by setting interest rates, conducting monetary operations, and managing the money supply. During the sovereign debt crisis, the ECB played a crucial role in stabilizing financial markets and supporting member states facing financial difficulties. The ECB implemented various measures to address the crisis, including providing liquidity to banks through lending facilities, purchasing government bonds to lower borrowing costs for struggling countries, and engaging in unconventional monetary policies like quantitative easing.[172] Additionally, the ECB worked alongside other European institutions and international lenders to design and oversee bailout programs for countries in need of financial assistance, intending to restore confidence in the euro and promote economic recovery across the Eurozone. The ECB's actions during the crisis were aimed at preserving the integrity of the euro currency and supporting the overall stability of the Eurozone economy.[173]

As aforementioned, having institutional trust is the belief an institution will fulfill its designated objectives and responsibilities. For the European Central Bank, this entails a strong belief that the ECB will effectively carry out its mandate of ensuring price stability, thereby safeguarding the economic well-being of the citizens it serves.[174] This is highly dependent on how well citizens understand the ECB as an institution; particularly its mandate and procedural framework,[175] highlighting the importance of clear communication from the ECB to enhance

[172] Bergbauer et al.

[173] Bergbauer et al.

[174] Michael Ehrmann, Michel Soudan, and Livio Stracca, "Explaining EU Citizens' Trust in the ECB in Normal and Crisis Times," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2012, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2187282.

[175] Bergbauer et al., "Citizens' Attitudes towards the ECB, the Euro and Economic and Monetary Union."

public trust and improve economic predictability for households.[176] While trust in the ECB declined across the Eurozone, it was not uniform; rather, it varied across regions depending on the impact of the crisis in each area. In the most severely affected peripheral states, support for the ECB dropped most severely.[177] Conversely, in less affected countries, including Austria, Belgium, Finland, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, and Slovakia, skepticism towards the ECB did increase, but overall remained a minority viewpoint, keeping institutional trust levels relatively stable.[178] A similar pattern can be seen regarding trust in the European Monetary Union (EMU). Those who were less affected, and viewed the ECB more favorably, were also found to be more supportive of the EMU, whereas, in peripheral states, people tend to be highly skeptical of the EMU.[179]

One should note that the aforementioned levels of decreased institutional trust did not reflect a loss of confidence in the euro currency. Support for the euro remained consistently high among citizens throughout the crisis, with 76% of euro area respondents expressing support for the currency in autumn 2019.[180] This indicates that, despite diminished overall trust in the ECB, public confidence in the Bank's capacity to manage inflation remained robust during the crisis.[181] Furthermore, net trust in the euro

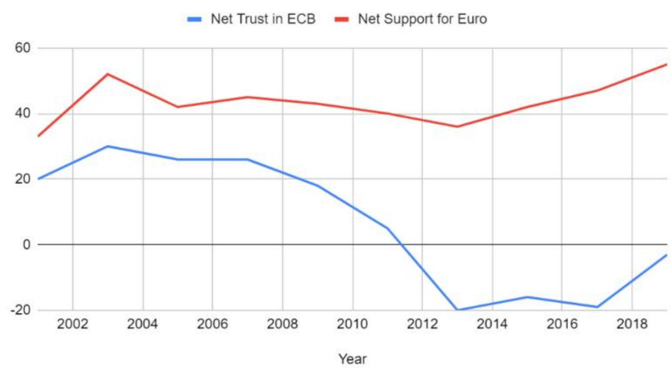

Figure 5: Trust in the European Central Bank and Support for the Euro

[176] Ehrmann, Soudan, and Stracca, "Explaining EU Citizens' Trust in the ECB in Normal and Crisis Times."

[177] Bergbauer et al., "Citizens' Attitudes towards the ECB, the Euro and Economic and Monetary Union."

[178] Bergbauer et al.

[179] Bergbauer et al.

[180] Bergbauer et al.

[181] Ehrmann, Soudan, and Stracca, "Explaining EU Citizens' Trust in the ECB in Normal and Crisis Times."

has increased progressively since 2013—especially among those who feel positively about the EU and its financial situation, suggesting that, as people recover from the crisis, so too does their trust.[182]

Diminished levels of trust were not reserved to financial institutions. During the peak of the crisis, between the Greek bailout and mid-2012, the European Council met frequently to address the worsening situation. Each meeting was hailed both before and after as a major success promising an end to the crisis.[183] However, these declarations were swiftly followed by renewed market turmoil, indicating that the decisions made were not effectively alleviating market concerns. This repeated market turmoil likely eroded confidence in the European Council's ability to manage the crisis effectively and deliver lasting solutions, highlighting once again the critical importance of trusted communication and transparency in crisis management to uphold institutional credibility and public trust.[184]

Additionally, trust in the EU Commission and Parliament dropped by a staggering 55% (from before the crisis to autumn 2011).[185] A trust gap has emerged between lower- and higher-income individuals, particularly in the European Parliament. While trust levels among higher-income individuals have been restored to their pre-crisis levels, low levels of institutional trust among lower-income individuals remain pervasive.[186] This phenomenon, together with patterns of decreased trust in the ECB and EMU, underscores the importance of personal experience in

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182 Bergbauer et al., "Citizens' Attitudes towards the ECB, the Euro and Economic and Monetary Union."

183 "The Eurozone Crisis: A Near-Perfect Case of Mismanagement | SpringerLink," accessed April 17, 2024, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-63706-8_2.

184 "The Eurozone Crisis: A Near-Perfect Case of Mismanagement | SpringerLink."

185 Hudson, "Institutional Trust and Subjective Well-Being across the EU."

186 Hudson.

determining institutional trust levels and emphasizes the enduring impact of the crisis on public perceptions and political engagement across Europe.[187]

Figure 6: Trust in Governments

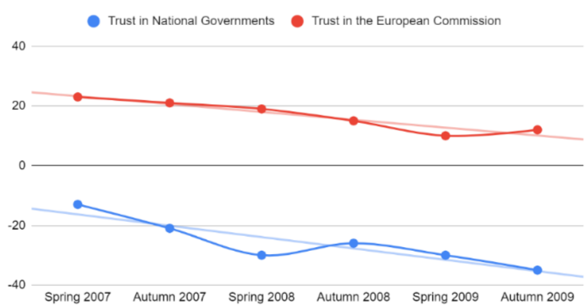
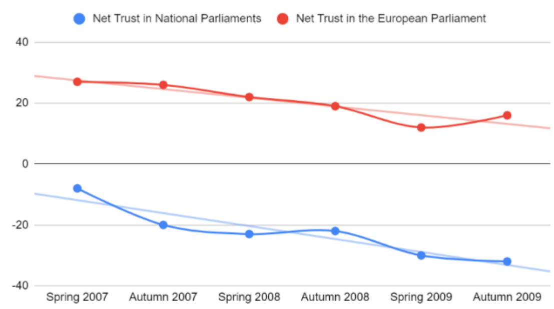


Figure 7: Trust in Parliaments



b. Trust in National Institutions

Despite this gap, trust in European institutions has generally remained higher than trust in national governments and parliaments. Institutional trust in national parliaments and governments was profoundly impacted by the Euro Crisis. Immediately after the crisis began, citizens' trust in national institutions increased, suggesting a "rally-around-the-flag" effect.[188] As aforementioned, the "rally-around-the-flag" effect commonly occurs during the initial stages of a crisis, where people unite in support of their government or national institutions in response to perceived external threats or impending crises.[189] However, as the financial crisis deepened and economic conditions deteriorated, this effect soon dissipated. Citizens progressively became disillusioned with government responses, and, by the autumn of 2011, public confidence in both nations hit unprecedented lows.[190]

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[187] Hudson.

[188] Felix Roth, Felicitas Nowak-Lehmann D., and Thomas Otter, "Has the Financial Crisis Shattered Citizens' Trust in National and European Governmental Institutions? Evidence from the EU Member States, 1999–2010," in *Public Support for the Euro: Essays on Labor Productivity, Monetary Economics, and Political Economy, Vol. 2*, ed. Felix Roth (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 187–217, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86024-0_10.

[189] van der Meer, Steenvoorden, and Ouattara, "Fear and the COVID-19 Rally Round the Flag."

[190] Ehrmann, Soudan, and Stracca, "Explaining EU Citizens' Trust in the ECB in Normal and Crisis Times."

Institutional trust at the national level was highly dependent on the economic situation and crisis response methods in each country. One prominent response was the implementation of austerity measures, which entailed reducing public spending, increasing taxes, and undertaking structural reforms to reduce budget deficits and stabilize economies. During the Eurozone debt crisis, countries like Greece, Portugal, and Ireland sought financial assistance from international lenders like the IMF and EU to stabilize their economies, and austerity measures were imposed as conditions for receiving these bailouts.[191] The goal was to restore fiscal discipline, regain investor confidence, and promote economic stability. However, austerity policies faced criticism for causing social hardships like unemployment and reduced public services.[192] The effectiveness of austerity in achieving long-term economic recovery has been debated, as the countries that implemented these policies struggled to meet fiscal targets and some continue to struggle to recover.[193]

Trust in national institutions especially plummeted in the states with austerity policies. Austerity policies were associated with cuts to public services and increased unemployment and citizens held their governments responsible for these outcomes.[194] According to Eurobarometer data, trust in national government institutions (both government and parliament) in Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain declined significantly, with a net trust value plummeting by 51% between spring 2008 and autumn 2011.[195] This was the most notable in Greece, where the net trust

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[191] Martin McKee et al., "Austerity: A Failed Experiment on the People of Europe," *Clinical Medicine* 12, no. 4 (August 2012): 346–50, https://doi.org/10.7861/clinmedicine.12-4-346.

[192] McKee et al.

[193] McKee et al.

[194] Felix Roth, "The Eurozone Crisis and Citizens' Shattered Systemic Trust" 2012, no. 3 (2012): 138–39.

[195] Roth.

value reached -82% in 2011.[196] Interestingly, austerity measures were not found to impact individuals' trust in EU institutions, showing that distrust is targeted toward the institutional-level citizens blamed most for their economic circumstances.[197]

This erosion of trust has had tangible political repercussions, exemplified by Greece's political turmoil, which has fueled citizen alienation towards national government institutions and paved the way for the rise of populist parties advocating for purely national interests over EU collaboration.[198] This trend suggests a challenging landscape for governance and economic policy in peripheral EU states, where rebuilding trust in both national and European institutions remains a critical and ongoing challenge. Conversely, countries like Germany and Italy saw a much more positive impact on citizen's trust in their governments due to the implementation of short-term work schemes to preserve employment levels.[199]

d. Social Trust during the Sovereign Debt Crisis

The sovereign debt crisis had a profound impact on social trust, with significant implications stemming from experiences of injustice and economic difficulty.[200] Analysis of European Social Survey data reveals that trust levels declined in 2008, reflected by a higher

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[196] Roth.

[197] Merve Biten, Theresa Kuhn, and Wouter van der Brug, "How Does Fiscal Austerity Affect Trust in the European Union? Analyzing the Role of Responsibility Attribution," *Journal of European Public Policy* 30, no. 6 (June 3, 2023): 1033–50, https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2022.2060282.

[198] Roth, Nowak-Lehmann D., and Otter, "Has the Financial Crisis Shattered Citizens' Trust in National and European Governmental Institutions?"

[199] Roth, Nowak-Lehmann D., and Otter.

[200] "When Trust Becomes a Luxury."

proportion of respondents expressing a lack of trust in others. While trust levels showed some improvement by 2010, they had not yet returned to pre-crisis levels.[201]

Notably, there was a stable percentage of respondents with the highest trust levels (rating 10), suggesting consistency among those with unwavering trust, while individuals who were previously ambivalent about trust (rating "sometimes" trustworthy) became less trusting during the crisis.[202] The most severe and enduring effects of declining social trust were observed in peripheral states heavily impacted by the crisis. For instance, in Spain in 2012, a country deeply affected by economic difficulties during the sovereign debt crisis, there was a notable reduction in social trust. This erosion of trust can be linked to income hardship, as individuals experiencing economic challenges became less trusting of others.[203] The crisis shifted the foundations of social trust from sociodemographic to economic considerations, highlighting how economic adversity contributed significantly to diminishing trust among individuals in affected regions.[204]

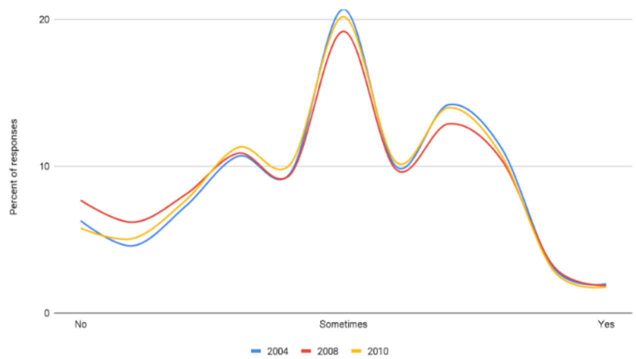

Figure 8: Social trust in the EU Before and During the Sovereign Debt Crisis

E. Crisis Narratives and Media Influence

The sovereign debt crisis underscored the critical role of constructing narratives in crisis management. A cohesive and inclusive crisis narrative is essential for guiding policy responses, building public confidence, and mobilizing collective action toward crisis mitigation and

[201] "ESS Data Portal | European Social Survey."

[202] "ESS Data Portal | European Social Survey."

[203] "When Trust Becomes a Luxury."

[204] "When Trust Becomes a Luxury."

resolution.[205] For most of the sovereign debt crisis, there was no cohesive narrative. During the peak of the crisis, its impacts were often downplayed. For example, as aforementioned, the Council's pattern of repeated messaging that everything was handled was followed by renewed market turmoil, indicating that the decisions had not actually been made effectively.[206] Without consensus on the root causes and nature of the crisis, policymakers struggled to agree on comprehensive and sustainable solutions.[207] This fragmented approach resulted in half-measures and messy compromises that failed to address underlying issues and restore growth effectively.

In the absence of one narrative at the EU level, diverse narratives were developed by Member States.[208] In Greece, which arguably faced the most severe economic and social consequences, the discourse focused on crisis-related harms, accountability, solidarity, and social justice due to the severe impact of the crisis on their economy and welfare state.[209] The severity of the crisis shaped Greece's crisis narrative, which focused on crisis-related harms, accountability for economic mismanagement, the importance of solidarity, and calls for social justice to address the widespread suffering caused by austerity measures.[210] Germany, on the other hand, which fared much better, emphasized monetary issues, the importance of fiscal discipline, and the need to preserve market stability and competitiveness. Germany's historical memory of hyperinflation and economic instability also contributed to a focus on maintaining sound monetary policies and market

[205] Baubion, "OECD Risk Management."

[206] "The Eurozone Crisis: A Near-Perfect Case of Mismanagement | SpringerLink."

[207] "Rebooting the Eurozone: Step 1 – Agreeing a Crisis Narrative | CEPR," accessed April 30, 2024, https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/rebooting-eurozone-step-1-agreeing-crisis-narrative.

[208] "Rebooting the Eurozone: Step 1 – Agreeing a Crisis Narrative | CEPR."

[209] Lahusen et al., "Political Claims and Discourse Formations."

[210] Isabelle Hertner and Alister Miskimmon, "Germany's Strategic Narrative of the Eurozone Crisis," *German Politics and Society* 33, no. 1 (June 1, 2015): 42–57, https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2015.330104.

architecture.[211] These contrasting narratives among Member States reflected the divergent national priorities within the Eurozone, contributing to challenges in achieving consensus on policy responses and reforms. Additionally, these narratives shaped attitudes toward European institutions and integration—many peripheral states felt they had been left behind or abandoned, while some non-peripheral states felt they shouldn't be punished for other states' irresponsibility.[212]

In times of crisis, media narratives play a crucial role in shaping public perception, influencing policy responses, and determining the overall direction of societal discourse. The media serves as a primary conduit through which information is disseminated to the public, providing context and framing for complex issues. The narratives crafted and propagated by the media can significantly impact how citizens and policymakers understand and address the crisis. During the sovereign debt crisis, the media exacerbated and magnified political divides. This, in turn, affected the levels of trust and cooperation between Member States.

In Germany, the media often portrayed Greece negatively, depicting the country as deceitful and irresponsible.[213] This narrative was epitomized by the infamous cover of the German magazine FOCUS, which showed the Greek goddess Aphrodite making an obscene gesture with the caption "Betrüger in der Euro-Familie" (*Betrayers in the Euro-family*).[214] Such portrayals reinforced

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[211] Hertner and Miskimmon.

[212] Lahusen et al., "Political Claims and Discourse Formations."

[213] Yiannis Mylonas, "Media and the Economic Crisis of the EU: The 'Culturalization' of a Systemic Crisis and Bild-Zeitung's Framing of Greece," *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society* 10, no. 2 (July 15, 2012): 646–71, https://doi.org/10.31269/triplec.v10i2.380.

[214] Hans Bickes, Tina Otten, and Laura Chelsea Weymann, "The Financial Crisis in the German and English Press: Metaphorical Structures in the Media Coverage on Greece, Spain and Italy," *Discourse & Society* 25, no. 4 (July 1, 2014): 424–45, https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926514536956.

stereotypes and fostered a narrative of moral superiority among German audiences, emphasizing fiscal discipline and painting Greece as a scapegoat for the Eurozone's troubles.[215] The media's portrayal of Greece as a profligate and irresponsible member of the Eurozone led to a hardening of public opinion against financial bailouts and lenient measures. German voters, influenced by these narratives, pressured their government to adopt a stringent stance on fiscal discipline and austerity.[216] This, in turn, shaped Germany's policy approach within the EU, advocating for rigorous economic reforms in crisis-hit countries as a precondition for financial assistance. The media's framing of the crisis thus contributed to a policy response that prioritized monetary stability and fiscal rectitude over immediate economic relief.[217]

Conversely, Greek media retaliated by demonizing German-led austerity measures, often drawing inflammatory comparisons to Nazism. A notable example is the Greek tabloid "Dimokratia," which published a photoshopped image of Angela Merkel in a Nazi uniform.[218] This extreme portrayal fed into a narrative of victimization and resistance against perceived economic oppression, amplifying public resentment and nationalist sentiments in Greece.[219] In this case, the media's depiction of austerity measures as a form of economic warfare perpetuated by Germany

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[215] Bickes, Otten, and Weymann.

[216] Bickes, Otten, and Weymann.

[217] Bickes, Otten, and Weymann.

[218] “Photo Gallery: Dredging Up the Nazi Past in Greece - DER SPIEGEL,” accessed June 3, 2024, https://www.spiegel.de/fotostrecke/photo-gallery-dredging-up-the-nazi-past-in-greece-fotostrecke-79189.html.

[219] Zinovia Lialiouti and Giorgos Bithymitris, “A Nation under Attack: Perceptions of Enmity and Victimhood in the Context of the Greek Crisis,” in *Dividing United Europe* (Routledge, 2019).

and the EU fostered a climate of distrust and resistance. Citizens perceived the EU as being more

concerned with financial orthodoxy than with human welfare, leading to skepticism about the benefits of EU membership.[220] Additionally, this narrative greatly galvanized public opposition to austerity, leading to widespread protests and social unrest, as aforementioned.[221] The media's influence in this context reinforced a narrative of national victimization and defiance.

The British media's exploitation of the crisis to critique the EU as a whole also had profound implications. Instead of targeting specific Member States, British publications critiqued the EU overall, using the tension between Germany and Greece as proof the Union was fundamentally flawed and incapable of addressing member states' diverse needs, fanning Euroskeptic attitudes in the U.K.[222] The sensationalist portrayal of the EU's handling of the crisis had long-term consequences, undermining trust in EU institutions and fostering a desire for greater national autonomy, which some would argue planted the early seeds for Brexit.[223]

In July 2012, Mario Draghi assured that the ECB would do "whatever it takes" to preserve the Eurozone's integrity. This was instrumental in alleviating concerns about the "doom loop" where national banks were heavily exposed to their governments' debt, resembling the circumstances that precipitated the crisis. This provided a turning point—a decisive, inclusive narrative opposing the

[220] Lialiouti and Bithymitris.

[221] Roth, Nowak-Lehmann D., and Otter, "Has the Financial Crisis Shattered Citizens' Trust in National and European Governmental Institutions?"

[222] Bickes, Otten, and Weymann, "The Financial Crisis in the German and English Press."

[223] Bickes, Otten, and Weymann.

circulating animosity. Notably, Draghi's speech coincided with agreements on the Banking Union and the Fiscal Compact, which directly targeted weaknesses that had exacerbated the crisis stemming from Greece's deficit deceit.[224] The tangible progress and political commitment to the Banking Union signaled a collective effort to mitigate risks and bolster financial stability within the Eurozone, complementing Draghi's communication strategy and contributing to the restoration of trust in the ECB's crisis management capabilities.[225] While trust in the ECB has yet to fully recover to pre-crisis levels, this speech allowed some trust to be regained.

The absence of a unified narrative during the crisis not only hindered effective crisis management but also significantly eroded institutional trust. The recurring pattern of optimistic political messaging, swiftly followed by market turbulence, starkly emphasized the urgent necessity for trusted communication and transparency to safeguard institutional credibility and cultivate public confidence. Media influence, magnifying distrust and animosity, substantially exacerbated the challenges in stabilizing the situation. Only when optimistic narratives were firmly coupled with a credible and resolute crisis response could trust be reestablished, as in the case of Mario Draghi’s speech. As such, the sovereign debt crisis underscores the paramount importance of crisis narratives on both crisis management and the maintenance of trust.

B. The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 Crisis, originating in late 2019, unfolded as a global pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. The onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic in Europe began with the detection of its initial case in Bordeaux, France, on January 24th, 2020. It swiftly propagated throughout the continent, with every European country reporting confirmed cases by

[224] “Rebooting the Eurozone: Step 1 – Agreeing a Crisis Narrative | CEPR.”

[225] “Rebooting the Eurozone: Step 1 – Agreeing a Crisis Narrative | CEPR.”

March 17th, 2020. That month, the World Health Organization declared Europe to be the pandemic's epicenter. Europe was the second hardest-hit continent, following North America.[226]

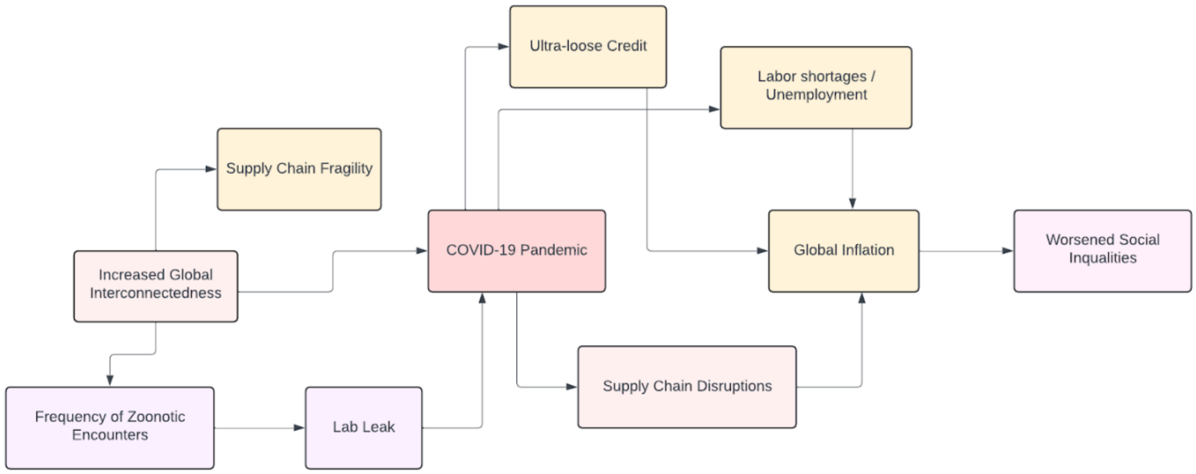

Figure 9: The COVID-19 Pandemic as a Polycrisis

In many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic is the 'poster child' of polycrises. At its core, the COVID-19 Crisis was a public health emergency. As the virus rapidly spread, it overwhelmed healthcare systems and resulted in significant loss of life.[227] The pandemic response strategies also precipitated significant economic repercussions. Widespread lockdown measures causing disruptions to businesses, supply chains, and employment across the EU. Moreover, the crisis exacerbated existing social inequalities, disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations and exacerbating socioeconomic disparities within and among Member States.[228] These crisis dimensions (public health, economic, and social) aggravated each other, making the crisis' effect

[226] "European and United Kingdom COVID-19 Pandemic Experience: The Same but Different - ScienceDirect," accessed May 1, 2024, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S152605422030097X.

[227] Rohit C. Khanna et al., "COVID-19 Pandemic: Lessons Learned and Future Directions," *Indian Journal of Ophthalmology* 68, no. 5 (May 2020): 703, https://doi.org/10.4103/ijo.IJO_843_20.

[228] Cicchi et al., "EU Solidarity in Times of Covid-19."

all the more severe. Facing these impacts, the pandemic posed a significant test for the cohesion of states and regions during crises, particularly the EU.

The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the EU's fragility by exposing significant shortcomings in its initial response and coordination among member states.[229] Early in the pandemic, the lack of a cohesive and unified strategy led to fragmented and often contradictory measures, as individual countries implemented their own policies on lockdowns, travel restrictions, and public health protocols. This disjointed approach not only undermined the effectiveness of efforts to control the virus's spread but also sowed confusion and mistrust among EU citizens.[230] Additionally, the crisis revealed the vulnerability of the EU's supply chains, particularly in the health sector, where shortages of critical medical supplies and equipment became evident.[231] The initial struggle to ensure adequate vaccine distribution further underscored the limitations of the EU's centralized procurement processes.[232] These challenges underscored the need for stronger coordination and more robust mechanisms for collective action in the face of transnational crises, highlighting the structural weaknesses within the EU's framework for managing such large-scale emergencies.[233]

The EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic involved a multi-faceted approach to manage and mitigate the crisis's widespread impacts. One of the key strategies was the establishment of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), a central component of the EU's larger €750 billion recovery plan, NextGenerationEU. The RRF aimed to support member states

[229] Boin and Rhinard, "Crisis Management Performance and the European Union."

[230] Boin and Rhinard.

[231] Boin and Rhinard.

[232] Boin and Rhinard.

[233] Boin and Rhinard.

in implementing reforms and investments to foster a sustainable recovery.[234] Additionally, the European Central Bank (ECB) launched the Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme (PEPP), a €1.85 trillion initiative designed to stabilize financial markets and ensure favorable financing conditions across the Eurozone.[235] Public health measures were coordinated through the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), which provided guidance on testing, contact tracing, and vaccination rollout. The EU also facilitated the procurement and distribution of vaccines through a joint purchasing agreement, ensuring equitable access for all member states.[236] Furthermore, various social protection measures were enacted, including the Support to Mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) program, which provided financial assistance to preserve employment and support workers.[237] Overall, crisis management performance improved significantly after an initial slow start. Due to the EU's limited health authority, this response largely focused on border security and the financial aspects of the crisis.[238]

A. Social Trust

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered social trust dynamics within the EU. During many previous crises the EU had faced, there was often someone or something tangible to blame. For example, individual country's irresponsible fiscal practices were frequently cited as the cause

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[234] Caroline de la Porte and Mads Dagnis Jensen, "The next Generation EU: An Analysis of the Dimensions of Conflict behind the Deal," *Social Policy & Administration* 55, no. 2 (2021): 388–402, https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12709.

[235] Philip R Lane, "The Market Stabilisation Role of the Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme," n.d.

[236] "EU Vaccines Strategy," accessed June 3, 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/coronavirus-response/public-health/eu-vaccines-strategy_en.

[237] "SURE - European Commission," June 2, 2023, https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/eu-financial-assistance/sure_en.

[238] Boin and Rhinard, "Crisis Management Performance and the European Union."

of the sovereign debt crisis.[239] However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was more challenging to assign blame. The fears and uncertainties associated with the pandemic were more abstract and pervasive—particularly due to the novel and evolving nature of the virus, its rapid spread, and the unprecedented societal disruptions it caused.[240] As such, the pandemic's impact was characterized by collective vulnerability and uncertainty. It is also distinguishable from other crises in that it directly challenges trust in fellow citizens due to the perceived threat of infection from close interactions.

During the pandemic, social trust was intricately linked to individuals' perceptions of the COVID-19 situation in their country and their evolving fears.[241] When individuals believed their country was performing better than other EU nations, they exhibited greater levels of social trust. Conversely, those who mistakenly thought their country was faring worse than others displayed the lowest levels of social trust. Initially, the primary public concern regarded contracting the virus, so a "better" situation meant lower rates of infection and mortality.[242] Those who perceived their countries as doing worse were often those who were more afraid of contracting COVID-19. The inherent risk of infection associated with social interactions created a scenario where fear of infection translated into heightened distrust towards others. This heightened fear and consequent distrust could lead individuals to perceive the COVID-19 situation in their country as dire or desperate, irrespective of the actual epidemiological circumstances.[243] Consequently, individuals

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[239] "Rebooting the Eurozone: Step 1 – Agreeing a Crisis Narrative | CEPR."

[240] Khanna et al., "COVID-19 Pandemic."

[241] Philipp Genschel et al., "Solidarity and Trust in Times of COVID-19," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY, November 26, 2021), https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3972283.

[242] Genschel et al.

[243] "In Trust We Trust: The Impact of Trust in Government on Excess Mortality during the COVID-19 Pandemic," accessed April 20, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1177/09520767211058003.

who harbored greater fears of infection tended to exhibit more pronounced feelings of social distrust, potentially coloring their perceptions of their country's pandemic situation towards a more negative outlook. As the pandemic progressed, concerns turned towards financial insecurities, and a "better" situation became increasingly reflected in the level of financial stability within a country. During this time, those facing unemployment were most likely to believe their country had mismanaged the pandemic response and to distrust others.[244] Intriguingly, individuals who accurately perceived their country as underperforming compared to others still demonstrated high rates of social trust and solidarity. Notably, this awareness was associated with increased generosity towards others, highlighting how recognizing challenges can promote a sense of unity and collective action.[245]

Social trust levels played a critical role in shaping the pandemic crisis response. Social trust and the stringency of COVID-19 measures were found to be negatively associated, suggesting that, in societies where individuals trust each other to act responsibly and in their collective interest, there may be less need for stringent government mandates.[246] Moreover, higher social trust contributes to easing the collective action problem by reducing the risks of cheating and free-riding. When individuals have greater confidence in each other's intentions and behaviors, they are more likely to cooperate voluntarily with crisis response methods—including those like lockdowns, which exacted a substantial toll on the public. This finding aligns with the notion that social trust fosters a sense of unity and solidarity, enabling communities to come together and

[244] "In Trust We Trust."

[245] "In Trust We Trust."

[246] Cicchi et al., "EU Solidarity in Times of Covid-19."

address challenges collectively without heavy reliance on government enforcement.[247] Moreover, social trust is interconnected with broader national and European trust levels, influencing attitudes toward government institutions, international collaboration, and solidarity across borders. Therefore, social trust levels during COVID-19 were found to have profound implications for crisis response and broader societal cohesion at both national and European levels.[248]

B. Trust in National Governments

Just as with social trust, the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on national trust within the EU, particularly concerning perceptions of institutional quality and performance. First, a "rally-around-the-flag" effect, where institutional trust towards national leaders is temporarily boosted in times of crisis, was found to have occurred. Many European countries witnessed a surge in approval ratings for their leaders as they navigated the early stages of the crisis.[249] As the pandemic continued, this effect diminished and individuals' trust in their national institutions, such as governments and healthcare systems, became closely tied to their assessments of how effectively these institutions managed the crisis.[250] Those who believed their country was handling the pandemic competently and efficiently were likelier to exhibit higher levels of institutional trust. Conversely, missteps or perceived failures in crisis management could erode trust in institutions and leadership, highlighting the delicate balance between performance and public confidence in

[247] "Social Trust and the Stringency of Public Policies against the COVID-19 Pandemic," accessed April 22, 2024, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/23745118.2024.2331156?needAccess=true.

[248] Daniele Paolini et al., "COVID-19 Lockdown in Italy: The Role of Social Identification and Social and Political Trust on Well-Being and Distress," *Current Psychology* 41, no. 8 (August 1, 2022): 5652–59, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-01141-0.

[249] van der Meer, Steenvoorden, and Ouattara, "Fear and the COVID-19 Rally Round the Flag."

[250] Johansson, Hopmann, and Shehata, "When the Rally-around-the-Flag Effect Disappears, Or."

times of uncertainty, and underscoring the importance of institutional performance in shaping public trust during crises.[251]

There was not just one crisis response found to increase institutional trust. Government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic varied widely across the EU, reflecting diverse approaches influenced by endogenous factors, including healthcare infrastructure, political considerations, and public trust levels. Some countries induced strict lockdowns early on, such as Italy and Greece, whereas others, such as Sweden, avoided lockdowns to protect the economy.[252] Governments that were perceived to be more effective, and had higher rates of institutional trust, often had more flexible responses, whereas governments that were perceived to be less effective and trustworthy often responded quicker and decisively, with more stringent measures.[253] For example, the Greek system was still fatigued by the enduring aftermath of the financial crisis and a lack of implementation of essential reforms. As a result, Greece embraced a centralized top-down approach primarily due to public health apprehensions and pervasive distrust in institutions. The country lacked the institutional capacity and resources required to manage a large influx of patients, necessitating a proactive strategy focused on prevention rather than treatment.[254] Sweden, on the other hand, had one of the most flexible responses of EU Member States. This approach was characterized by a reliance on voluntary guidelines rather than strict mandates and emphasized

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[251] Genschel et al., "Solidarity and Trust in Times of COVID-19."

[252] "In Trust We Trust."

[253] "Government Capacity, Societal Trust or Party Preferences: What Accounts for the Variety of National Policy Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Europe?," accessed April 22, 2024, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/13501763.2021.1928270?needAccess=true.

[254] Nikolaos Zahariadis et al., "Policy Styles and Political Trust in Europe's National Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis," *Policy Studies* 44, no. 1 (January 2, 2023): 46–67, https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2021.2019211.

personal freedoms.[255] This was also due, in part, to the aforementioned association between trust and collective action—those who trusted their governments more were likelier to voluntarily cooperate with crisis response methods, making more stringent measures unnecessary. Conversely, governments facing lower levels of trust may have encountered greater challenges in garnering public compliance with mere suggestions. Across countries and COVID-19 response strategies, increased institutional trust led to greater compliance.[256]

Pandemic responses could enhance or reinforce trust only if they were perceived to be necessary. There was no overall trend between the stringency of COVID-19 measures and diminished institutional trust.[257] The pre-existing fragility of the Greek system necessitated stringent lockdown policies and, because these policies were successful in containing the spread, institutional trust increased. Sweden, on the other hand, deemed stringent policies unnecessary. While Sweden had a relatively high COVID-19 mortality rate during the first stage of the pandemic, institutional trust in national institutions remained high and only increased as the pandemic progressed.[258] In other countries, such as France and Germany, where stringent lockdowns were induced as protective measures despite high levels of institutional capability, institutional trust diminished and there was less compliance with lockdowns.[259] In France, the imposition of strict lockdowns led to widespread dissatisfaction and protests, and in Germany, although the government's measures were effective in curbing the virus, skepticism and resistance

[255] Zahariadis et al.

[256] "Social Trust and the Stringency of Public Policies against the COVID-19 Pandemic."

[257] "In Trust We Trust."

[258] Zahariadis et al., "Policy Styles and Political Trust in Europe's National Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis."

[259] Lasse Falk et al., "Public Perceptions Of COVID-19 Lockdown Policies In Europe: Socioeconomic Status And Trust Were Factors," *Health Affairs* 42, no. 12 (December 2023): 1706–14, https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2023.00707.

increased over time.[260] As demonstrated by these examples, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' crisis management strategy; what matters most is how these measures are perceived by the public.

C. Trust in the European Union

The COVID-19 pandemic also significantly influenced trust in the EU. On the national level, trust in EU-level institutions was closely linked to individuals' assessments of how effectively the EU responded to the pandemic. Those who viewed the EU's response favorably tended to have higher levels of institutional trust at the European level.[261] However, there was a nuanced relationship between trust in national and EU institutions. Individuals who expressed confidence in their country's ability to manage the crisis independently were more likely to perceive EU-level action as unnecessary, indicating a trade-off effect between high EU-level institutional trust and lower trust at the national level.[262] Conversely, individuals who were more concerned about the pandemic and its impact were more open to EU-level interventions and coordination.[263] This interplay between perceptions of national and EU institutional effectiveness highlights the complex dynamics of trust formation during a crisis and underscores the importance of responsive and effective EU-level governance in maintaining public confidence and support.

The handling of previous crises played a significant role in conditioning the EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Lessons learned from past crises shaped policy approaches and

[260] Falk et al.

[261] Monika Bauhr and Nicholas Charron, "'All Hands on Deck' or Separate Lifeboats? Public Support for European Economic Solidarity during the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Journal of European Public Policy* 30, no. 6 (June 3, 2023): 1092–1118, https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2022.2077809.

[262] Cicchi et al., "EU Solidarity in Times of Covid-19."

[263] Bauhr and Charron, "'All Hands on Deck' or Separate Lifeboats?"

institutional frameworks that influenced the EU's pandemic response.[264] For instance, the sovereign debt crisis exposed weaknesses in the EU's economic governance and highlighted the need for greater fiscal integration and solidarity among member states. This experience contributed to the adoption of unprecedented measures during the pandemic, such as the establishment of the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility aimed at supporting member states' economic recovery through joint borrowing and investment.[265] Additionally, the challenges faced during the sovereign debt crisis, including disagreements over burden-sharing and austerity measures, informed discussions on pandemic response strategies, such as negotiations over the mutualization of debt and distribution of financial aid.[266] The EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic thus reflected a complex interplay between past crisis experiences, institutional adaptations, and evolving dynamics of solidarity and cooperation among member states, highlighting the enduring impact of historical contexts on EU governance and policy-making in times of crisis.[267]

The COVID-19 pandemic also had a notable impact on feelings of EU solidarity and a sense of European identity. As countries within the EU faced common challenges and collaborated on cross-border responses, there was a heightened sense of collective identity and solidarity among European citizens.[268] Initiatives such as joint procurement of vaccines, coordinated travel restrictions, and mutual support highlighted the interconnectedness of European nations in facing the pandemic.[269] At the same time, disparities in response strategies and resource distribution within the EU also brought to the forefront existing tensions and divisions, challenging the notion

[264] Stefan Lehne, “The EU in Crisis“ (lecture, Diplomatische Akademie Wien, Vienna, Austria, 2024).

[265] Lehne, “The EU in Crisis”

[266] Lehne.

[267] Lehne.

[268] Cicchi et al., “EU Solidarity in Times of Covid-19.”

[269] Cicchi et al.

of a unified European identity.[270] The pandemic thus served as both a catalyst for enhanced solidarity and cooperation among EU member states and a test of the EU's ability to foster a shared sense of European citizenship in times of crisis.

D. Trust in Science

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on trust in science, and conversely, trust in science played a critical role in shaping pandemic responses. Scientific expertise provides the foundation for understanding the virus, its transmission dynamics, and potential treatments or preventive measures.[271] Furthermore, trust in science helps to guide public health measures and policies, ensuring that interventions are evidence-based and grounded in rigorous research. As with other forms of institutional trust, the credibility of scientific expertise and evidence-based guidance is essential in driving public health measures.[272] Initially, as the pandemic unfolded and scientific information rapidly evolved, there were fluctuations in public trust in scientific institutions. Early uncertainties and changing recommendations surrounding issues such as mask-wearing and transmission dynamics led to some degree of skepticism or confusion among the public. Moreover, rapid vaccine development and emergency authorizations led some individuals to question the safety and long-term effects of the vaccines.[273] However, as scientific consensus solidified and effective vaccines were developed, some institutional trust was regained.

[270] Cicchi et al.

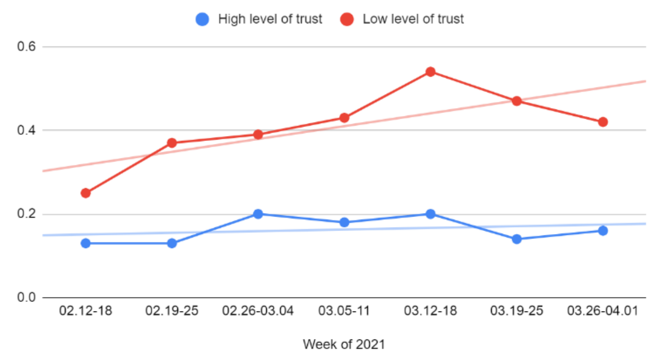
[271] Rainer Bromme et al., “An Anchor in Troubled Times: Trust in Science before and within the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *PLoS ONE* 17, no. 2 (February 9, 2022): e0262823, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0262823.

[272] Bromme et al.

[273] Vincenzo Carrieri, Sophie Guthmuller, and Ansgar Wübker, “Trust and COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy,” *Scientific Reports* 13, no. 1 (June 7, 2023): 9245, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-35974-z.

Countries with high levels of trust in scientific institutions tended to see greater adherence to evidence-based measures and public health recommendations. Because these counties were more trusting, they were more receptive to guidance from experts, resulting in increased compliance with preventive measures like mask-wearing, social distancing, and vaccination.[274] Additionally, societies with high trust in scientific institutions tended to have low rates of misinformation and conspiracy, as citizens are more likely to seek information from reliable sources.[275]

Figure 10: Vaccine Hesitancy vs. Trust in Science[276]



Trust in science also intersects with broader trust dynamics beyond healthcare and science institutions. Low trust in scientific information or institutions can spill over to erode trust at other levels—social, national, and EU. Skepticism towards scientific consensus may translate into broader societal distrust, impacting confidence in government responses and social cohesion. Conversely, high levels of trust in science can foster greater trust in public health institutions, government authorities, and international organizations.[277] Due to this, building and sustaining trust in science not only supports informed public health decisions but crisis management overall.

F. Crisis Narratives and Media Influence

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[274] Bromme et al., “An Anchor in Troubled Times.”

[275] Bauhr and Charron, “‘All Hands on Deck’ or Separate Lifeboats?”

[276] Carrieri, Guthmuller, and Wübker.

[277] Bromme et al., “An Anchor in Troubled Times.”

The COVID-19 pandemic presented the European Union (EU) with another test of its crisis management capabilities regarding the influence of crisis narratives. Just as during the Sovereign Debt Crisis, the absence of a unified narrative at the outset of the pandemic hindered effective coordination and response efforts. As aforementioned, the Member States, facing varying degrees of infection rates and healthcare challenges, adopted divergent approaches to containing the virus, reflecting their national interests and priorities. This fragmentation, reminiscent of the discord seen during the Sovereign Debt Crisis, once again underscored the challenges of achieving consensus and solidarity within the EU during times of crisis.

And, once again, the role of media and the way information is communicated played a critical role in shaping trust levels across dimensions—social, national, EU, and trust in science—during the COVID-19 pandemic and its response. Media coverage influenced public perceptions of the pandemic, government actions, and scientific developments, impacting trust dynamics at multiple levels.[278] The proliferation of news disseminated a wide range of information, often leading to varying interpretations and levels of concern among individuals. Significantly, much of this was accomplished through social media, in addition to traditional print media, allowing for diverse narratives to be rapidly spread to wide audiences. While these platforms served as valuable channels for sharing updates from health authorities and government agencies, they also became breeding grounds for conspiracy theories, misinformation campaigns, and sensationalist

[278] Carsten Reinemann, Alexander Haas, and Diana Rieger, "'I Don't Care, 'cause I Don't Trust Them!' The Impact of Information Sources, Institutional Trust, and Right-Wing Populist Attitudes on the Perception of the COVID-19 Pandemic during the First Lockdown in Germany.," *Studies in Communication and Media* 11 (July 1, 2022): 132–68, https://doi.org/10.5771/2192-4007-2022-1-132.

reporting.[279] To demonstrate this, the following are headlines for articles debunking disinformation and conspiracies that circulated on social media in the EU:

1. In Germany, “Es gibt keine Belege dafür, dass Nikotin gegen das Coronavirus hilft” (*There is no evidence that nicotine helps against the coronavirus*).[280]
2. In Italy, “No, non ci sono prove che i risciacqui con acqua calda e sale (o aceto) blocchino l’infezione da coronavirus nella gola” (*No, there is no evidence that warm water and salt (or vinegar) rinses stop coronavirus infection in the throat*).[281]
3. In France, “Non, Bill Gates n'a pas proposé d'implanter une puce électronique à la population” (*No, Bill Gates did not propose to implant a microchip in the population*).[282]

The rapid circulation of unverified information, fueled by algorithmic amplification and echo chambers, exacerbated public anxiety and eroded trust in traditional sources of authority, including EU institutions. The circulation of misinformation and conspiracy theories online erodes trust in official sources and scientific expertise, contributing to polarization and distrust within

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[279] An Nguyen and Daniel Catalan-Matamoros, “Anti-Vaccine Discourse on Social Media: An Exploratory Audit of Negative Tweets about Vaccines and Their Posters,” *Vaccines* 10, no. 12 (December 2022): 2067, https://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines10122067.

[280] Steffen Kutzner, “Es gibt keine Belege dafür, dass Nikotin gegen das Coronavirus hilft,” *correctiv.org* (blog), May 5, 2020, https://correctiv.org/faktencheck/2020/05/05/es-gibt-keine-belege-dafuer-dass-nikotin-gegen-das-coronavirus-hilft/.

[281] Camilla Vagnozzi, “No, non ci sono prove che i risciacqui con acqua calda e sale (o aceto) blocchino l’infezione da coronavirus nella gola,” *Facta* (blog), April 8, 2020, https://facta.news/notizia-falsa/2020/04/08/no-non-ci-sono-prove-che-i-gargarismi-con-acqua-calda-e-sale-o-aceto-blocchino-linfezione-da-coronavirus/.

[282] “Non, Bill Gates n’a pas proposé d’implanter une puce électronique à la population,” Factuel, May 8, 2020, https://factuel.afp.com/non-bill-gates-na-pas-propose-dimplanter-une-puce-electronique-la-population.

communities—when a significant amount of "knowledge" shared is revealed to be unfounded, all information becomes scrutinized.[283]

This considerably impacted crisis response. Vaccine hesitancy emerged as a significant obstacle to crisis management measures in the EU, exacerbating the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, with social media playing a large role in inspiring anti-vaccine attitudes. Anti-vaccine content was more liked, shared, and retweeted, than pro-vaccine content, which increased their visibility and influence.[284] On YouTube, while positive videos about vaccines outnumbered negative ones and were more viewed, the negative ones garnered more likes and shares.[285] Similarly, on Twitter, anti-vaccine tweets were four times more likely to be retweeted than neutral ones. This dynamic created an environment where misinformation could thrive. As such, people with high rates of social media usage were significantly more likely to exhibit vaccine hesitancy.[286] For instance, individuals using social media for three or more hours daily were 5 percentage points more likely to be vaccine-hesitant compared to those using it less frequently. This relationship was even more pronounced among those who relied on social media as their main news source, with a 20-percentage point increase in vaccine hesitancy compared to those who used traditional news sources.[287] This led to increased public anxiety, confusion, and resistance to health measures such as vaccination campaigns.[288] This hesitancy not only prolonged the duration of the

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[283] Reinemann, Haas, and Rieger, "'I Don't Care, 'cause I Don't Trust Them!' The Impact of Information Sources, Institutional Trust, and Right-Wing Populist Attitudes on the Perception of the COVID-19 Pandemic during the First Lockdown in Germany."

[284] Nguyen and Catalan-Matamoros, "Anti-Vaccine Discourse on Social Media."

[285] Nguyen and Catalan-Matamoros.

[286] Massimiliano Mascherini and Sanna Nivakoski, "Social Media Use and Vaccine Hesitancy in the European Union," *Vaccine* 40, no. 14 (March 25, 2022): 2215–25, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.vaccine.2022.02.059.

[287] Mascherini and Nivakoski.

[288] Mascherini and Nivakoski.

pandemic but also increased the risk of virus transmission and the emergence of new variants, prolonging the public health crisis and hindering economic recovery efforts. Additionally, vaccine hesitancy strained public health resources and undermined the effectiveness of vaccination campaigns, as efforts to combat misinformation and address concerns required additional time and resources.

Such media narratives also had significant ramifications on institutional trust. At the national level, the media influenced public perceptions of government responses and institutional effectiveness. Effective communication from government officials and healthcare experts through traditional and digital media channels was crucial in building public trust and fostering compliance with public health measures. Transparent and timely reporting of pandemic data and policy decisions contributed to perceptions of government accountability and responsiveness, which in turn influenced national trust levels. [289] Regarding the EU, media narratives shaped perceptions of EU-level actions and solidarity. Coverage of collaborative efforts among member states, such as joint vaccine procurement or cross-border aid initiatives, reinforced narratives of European solidarity and cooperation. Conversely, critical reporting highlighting challenges or disagreements within the EU could undermine trust in European institutions and the effectiveness of pan-European responses.[290] In the realm of science, the media played a dual role in communicating scientific findings and fostering trust in expert guidance. Clear and accurate reporting of scientific developments and public health recommendations helped to promote understanding and acceptance of preventive measures and vaccination efforts.[291] However, sensationalized or

[289] Sarah Grudzinski, *Mapping and Explaining the Development of Public Trust in the EU during the Covid-19 Pandemic*, 2022, https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:mau:diva-52460.

[290] Grudzinski.

[291] Falk et al., “Public Perceptions Of COVID-19 Lockdown Policies In Europe.”

conflicting media coverage of scientific debates and uncertainties could contribute to public confusion and distrust in scientific institutions.[292]

Overall, the media's influence on public perceptions of government actions, institutional effectiveness, and scientific guidance was significant. Media coverage influenced trust levels across social, national, and EU dimensions, with social media serving as a hub for misinformation. This spread of unverified information fueled public anxiety, eroded trust in traditional authorities and EU institutions, and exacerbated vaccine hesitancy, hindering crisis management. Media narratives also impacted institutional trust, shaping perceptions of government responses, EU actions, and scientific guidance. Clear, accurate reporting fostered trust, while misinformation eroded confidence and deepened polarization, thereby reinforcing the association between the construction of clear narratives, backed by action, and the maintenance of trust.

[292] Carrieri, Guthmuller, and Wübker, "Trust and COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy."

DISCUSSION

Trust is a fundamental component in the effective management of crises. It shapes the public's compliance with government directives, influences the perception of institutional competence, and impacts the overall efficacy of crisis response strategies. In the context of the EU, the sovereign debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic provide clear examples of how trust levels can be both a significant casualty and a crucial determinant of crisis outcomes. These crises exposed significant vulnerabilities within the EU and emphasized the critical role of trust in shaping the response and management of such high-stakes situations.[293] Analyzing these two crises reveals that as trust in the EU and national institutions fluctuates, so does the effectiveness of the responses implemented. Moreover, media narratives play a vital role in shaping public perceptions and trust, further influencing the dynamics of crisis management. This analysis underscores the interconnectedness of trust and crisis response, demonstrating that building and maintaining trust is essential for successful crisis management.

A. Diminished Trust Levels During (Poly)Crises

During the sovereign debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe, there was a noticeable decline in both institutional and social trust. This decline was not uniform across the EU and tends to be most pronounced in areas most severely affected by the crisis. During the sovereign debt crisis, the significant economic turmoil experienced by countries like Greece and Spain led to widespread disillusionment with national and EU institutions overall, not just in the financial sectors.[294] While there was an initial "rally-around-the-flag" effect where national unity and

[293] "Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament And The Council 2020 Strategic Foresight Report – Charting The Course Towards A More Resilient Europe" (2020), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0493.

[294] "The Eurozone Crisis: A Near-Perfect Case of Mismanagement | SpringerLink."

support for the government temporarily increased, this quickly dissipated as the crisis persisted and austerity measures took their toll. As economic misfortune and institutional trust levels are both critical determinants of social trust, this also plummeted.[295] During the COVID-19 pandemic, a similar phenomenon was observed: institutional trust levels tended to be lowest in those countries most severely affected by the crisis—due to high infection rates or economic turmoil—and this impacted social trust levels, as well.[296] Additionally, the media's crisis narratives influenced trust levels in both cases by shaping public perceptions of the crisis and exacerbating divides between Member States, increasing Euroscepticism and sentiments of disintegration.[297]

Crises conditions affected these trust levels in a variety of ways. Citizens evaluate how effectively governments respond to crises, including their ability to provide essential services, implement policies, and communicate transparently with the public. Failures in any of these areas can severely undermine trust in government institutions. For instance, during the sovereign debt crisis, the perceived inadequacy of national governments in managing economic turmoil and implementing fair austerity measures led to widespread disillusionment.[298] Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, inconsistent messaging, inadequate healthcare provisions, and slow vaccine rollouts in certain regions led to a decline in trust in both national and EU institutions.[299]

Individuals' personal experiences during crises also significantly shape trust dynamics.[300] Those who suffer disproportionately from the consequences of the crisis, whether economic,

[295] Roth, "The Eurozone Crisis and Citizens' Shattered Systemic Trust."

[296] Cicchi et al., "EU Solidarity in Times of Covid-19."

[297] "Rebooting the Eurozone: Step 1 – Agreeing a Crisis Narrative | CEPR."

[298] Biten, Kuhn, and van der Brug, "How Does Fiscal Austerity Affect Trust in the European Union?"

[299] Genschel et al., "Solidarity and Trust in Times of COVID-19."

[300] Alesina and La Ferrara, "Who Trusts Others?"

health-related, or social, may feel neglected or abandoned by societal institutions, leading to feelings of resentment and distrust. For example, during the sovereign debt crisis, those who lost jobs or faced severe economic hardship felt betrayed by both national governments and EU institutions.[301] During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals who experienced illness, loss of loved ones, or significant lifestyle disruptions often harbored distrust toward authorities they perceived as failing to protect them.[302]

Crisis conditions significantly degrade trust in institutions and social cohesion, with the severity of crises playing a crucial role. The sovereign debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe showed that key factors in trust degradation include government response and effectiveness, where failures in managing economic turmoil and healthcare provisions eroded trust, and economic hardship, personal suffering, and feelings of neglect also contributed to distrust. Additionally, media narratives influenced public perceptions, increasing divides and Euroscepticism. As such, polycrises like the sovereign debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, tend to cause institutional and social trust decline, especially in regions hardest hit by the crisis.

B. Trust as a Foundation for Crisis Management

Trust is fundamental for effective crisis management. High levels of institutional and social trust facilitate cooperation and compliance with crisis response measures, such as lockdowns, vaccination campaigns, and social distancing guidelines. Trust in government and public health authorities encourages individuals to adhere to recommended behaviors, reducing the spread of disease and minimizing the impact of the crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, regions with

[301] "When Trust Becomes a Luxury."

[302] Genschel et al., "Solidarity and Trust in Times of COVID-19."

higher trust in government saw better compliance with public health measures and higher vaccination rates.[303]

Conversely, low levels of trust can impede crisis management efforts. Skepticism towards government messaging, misinformation, and non-compliance with public health measures can exacerbate the crisis, leading to increased transmission rates, overwhelmed healthcare systems, and prolonged economic downturns. During the sovereign debt crisis, low trust levels led to widespread protests and social unrest, which further complicated the socioeconomic situation in affected states by undermining political stability.[304] During the COVID-19 pandemic, distrust in authorities and the proliferation of misinformation on social media led to vaccine hesitancy and non-compliance with public health guidelines, complicating efforts to control the virus's spread.[305]

Moreover, because the impact of crises on trust levels across the EU is not uniform, the development of cohesive measures is further complicated. Different levels of trust in governments and institutions across member states can lead to varied responses to crises, complicating efforts to implement cohesive and effective measures.[306] This lack of uniformity can result in fragmented policies and hinder collective action, ultimately weakening the EU's overall crisis management capabilities.[307] However, the increasing levels of economic integration could help mitigate these challenges. The interconnectedness of EU economies necessitates cooperation and coordination,

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[303] Falk et al., "Public Perceptions Of COVID-19 Lockdown Policies In Europe."

[304] Roth, Nowak-Lehmann D., and Otter, "Has the Financial Crisis Shattered Citizens' Trust in National and European Governmental Institutions?"

[305] Carrieri, Guthmuller, and Wübker, "Trust and COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy."

[306] Lehne, "The EU and the Creative and Destructive Impact of Crises."

[307] Lehne.

fostering a shared commitment to overcoming crises.[308] As this commitment is demonstrated, the EU Member States may help to rebuild and strengthen institutional trust, thereby enhancing their ability to address crises more effectively.[309]

Trust is essential for effective crisis management. High levels of trust help people cooperate and follow crisis response measures like lockdowns and vaccination campaigns, while low trust levels hinder crisis efforts. Skepticism, misinformation, and non-compliance can worsen crises, overwhelming crisis management systems. Furthermore, the unequal impact of crises on trust levels across the EU highlights the importance of fostering cohesion and cooperation among member states to address these challenges collectively. Therefore, building and maintaining trust is crucial for managing crises effectively.

C. Restoring Trust

Trust, once lost, is very difficult to restore—the persistence of low trust levels can impede future crisis management efforts, leaving societies more vulnerable to subsequent crises and perpetuating a cycle of distrust and ineffective governance.[310] In the aftermath of the sovereign debt crisis, anti-EU sentiment persisted in many affected countries, fueled by perceptions of economic inequality, loss of sovereignty, and austerity measures imposed by international creditors.[311] Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, conspiracy theories and misinformation

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[308] Lehne.

[309] Lehne.

[310] La Porte and Metlay, "Hazards and Institutional Trustworthiness."

[311] Lialiouti and Bithymitris, "A Nation under Attack."

undermined public trust in government authorities overall, potentially increasing anti-democratic and anti-institution attitudes in the EU.[312]

The crisis narrative plays an immense role in rebuilding trust, as transparent and clear communication can involve the public in decision-making and demonstrate an institution's sustained commitment to help. However, a narrative alone is not enough.[313] This was especially seen in the case of the sovereign debt crisis, where optimistic narratives were swiftly followed by economic turbulence, making communication channels appear untrustworthy.[314] A decisive message must be paired with concrete actions aimed at addressing the crisis head-on. This approach not only reassures the public but also demonstrates a commitment to resolve the situation, thereby laying the groundwork for rebuilding trust and fostering stability in times of uncertainty.[315]

Restoring trust is an arduous task. Even after immediate threats subside, the lasting effects of crises can hinder efforts to rebuild trust. This is extremely important for governments, as consistently low trust not only blocks future crisis management but also leaves societies more vulnerable, which can further diminish trust.[316] As demonstrated in the sovereign debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, perceived disunity continues to erode trust, but optimistic narratives, when paired with credible and decisive crisis responses, begin to rebuild trust and break this distrust cycle.

[312] Carrieri, Guthmuller, and Wübker, "Trust and COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy."

[313] "Rebooting the Eurozone: Step 1 – Agreeing a Crisis Narrative | CEPR."

[314] "The Eurozone Crisis: A Near-Perfect Case of Mismanagement | SpringerLink."

[315] "Rebooting the Eurozone: Step 1 – Agreeing a Crisis Narrative | CEPR."

[316] La Porte and Metlay, "Hazards and Institutional Trustworthiness."

D. Trust and Crises: A Symbiotic Relationship

Crisis narratives, shaped by political messaging and media coverage, play a pivotal role in framing public perceptions of crises and guiding their response. Given that trust in EU and national institutions is closely linked to perceived effectiveness, and that social trust is influenced by an individual's perception of their welfare relative to others, these public perceptions significantly impact trust levels. The narrative chosen to depict a particular crisis can shape the effectiveness of its response. The perceived effectiveness of this response, along with trust levels, determines compliance with crisis management procedures. High compliance with effective strategies accelerates crisis resolution, while low compliance or ineffective methods prolong the crisis. How the Member States manage a crisis further influences trust levels. Transparent and well-communicated crisis response strategies enhance trust and compliance, while perceived failures can erode trust and disillusion the public.

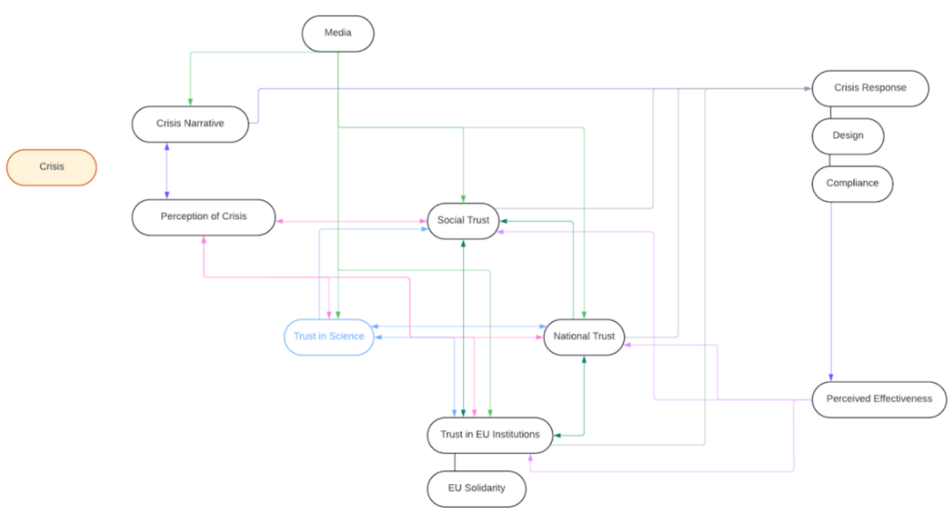

Figure 11: The Relationship between Crisis Management and Trust

The analysis of trust dynamics during the sovereign debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic in the EU highlights a symbiotic relationship between trust and crisis management.

Crises affect trust levels, which in turn influence the effectiveness of crisis responses. This cycle of trust and response impacts a state's vulnerability to future crises, emphasizing the importance of building and maintaining trust in institutions. Unified crisis narratives, particularly when supported by coordinated actions and clear communication, play a critical role in shaping public perceptions and trust. The media's portrayal of crises can significantly influence social and national trust levels, impacting compliance with crisis management strategies. Effective crisis management requires not only robust and transparent governmental responses but also the ability to communicate these efforts effectively to the public, fostering trust and cooperation. Trust is both a crucial casualty and a critical determinant in the management of crises. It shapes public compliance, influences institutional effectiveness, and ultimately determines the resilience of societies in the face of future challenges.

E. Implications for the European Union

The sovereign debt crisis has had significant implications for the European Union, highlighting immediate lessons and prompting long-term structural changes. The crisis revealed critical flaws in the EU's economic governance and fiscal oversight mechanisms.[317] The slow initial response and the contentious process of mobilizing financial aid underscored the need for a more unified and proactive approach to economic crises.[318] This experience emphasized the necessity for deeper fiscal integration, a stronger economic governance framework, and the establishment of permanent financial stability tools like the European Stability Mechanism (ESM).[319] Additionally, promoting economic convergence and resilience among member states is

[317] Roth, "The Eurozone Crisis and Citizens' Shattered Systemic Trust."

[318] Roth.

[319] Armingeon and Baccaro, "The Sorrows of Young Euro: Policy Responses to the Sovereign Debt Crisis."

crucial for preventing future crises and mitigating their impacts, strengthening the EU's overall financial stability and cohesion.[320] Likewise, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in the EU's crisis preparedness and response mechanisms, particularly the initial delays and shortages of essential supplies.[321] This experience underscores the need for a more integrated and agile approach to crisis management, potentially leading to reforms that enhance the EU’s capacity for rapid and coordinated action in future emergencies.[322] Strengthening the EU's health security framework, improving stockpiles of critical medical supplies, and ensuring quicker, more decisive political responses could be key focus areas.[323]

The trust gaps developed during these crises have had several long-lasting implications for the EU as a whole. Higher trust has been shown to lead to better functioning for institutions, and central banks in particular.[324] As aforementioned, trust levels have yet to recover from the sovereign debt crisis fully. This is problematic—impacting both the potential for future economic crises, by exacerbating market volatility and investor uncertainty, and future crisis management. The trust in the ECB ensures that its announcements and statements regarding economic interpretations are believed and can influence public expectations effectively.[325] Trust is especially vital during crises when the ECB may need to make confidential decisions for effective crisis management, relying on public support and legitimacy to operate independently from political pressures.[326] Additionally, citizens' support for the ECB provides legitimacy to the EMU,

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[320] Armingeon and Baccaro.

[321] Boin and Rhinard, “Crisis Management Performance and the European Union.”

[322] Boin and Rhinard.

[323] Boin and Rhinard.

[324] Ehrmann, Soudan, and Stracca, “Explaining EU Citizens’ Trust in the ECB in Normal and Crisis Times.”

[325] Ehrmann, Soudan, and Stracca.

[326] Ehrmann, Soudan, and Stracca.

reinforcing supranational governance in a domain traditionally handled by nation-states.[327] This support is essential for upholding the ECB's political independence and sustaining a sense of common purpose among member states within the euro area, particularly crucial during periods of economic uncertainty and political debates about European integration.[328] Therefore, if restoring trust in the ECB and EMU is not prioritized, the EU's crisis response could be dramatically altered. This could lead to increased market volatility, reduced investor confidence, and heightened economic uncertainty across the Eurozone.

Moreover, decreased trust institutional trust levels may exacerbate Euroscepticism. Research suggests that declines in confidence toward national and European political institutions, coupled with rising unemployment driven by crises, contribute to the rise of alternative political ideologies that promise immediate solutions or challenge established policies and institutions, such as nationalist sentiments and populist movements.[329] Furthermore, the indecisiveness of policymakers in responding to economic crises further exacerbates public disillusionment, perpetuating a cycle of declining trust in democratic institutions.[330] This scenario could fragment EU solidarity, and impede collective decision-making, ultimately posing significant challenges to the future of European integration and cooperation.[331] Therefore, sustaining trust in these institutions is essential for maintaining financial stability and fostering collective resilience within the EU. The rise of social media further complicated this erosion of trust. This unrestricted flow

[327] Bergbauer et al., “Citizens’ Attitudes towards the ECB, the Euro and Economic and Monetary Union.”

[328] Bergbauer et al.

[329] Yann Algan et al., “The European Trust Crisis and the Rise of Populism,” *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 2017, 309–82.

[330] Algan et al.

[331] Bergbauer et al., “Citizens’ Attitudes towards the ECB, the Euro and Economic and Monetary Union.”

of information contributed to the proliferation of false narratives and conspiracy theories, undermining trust in authoritative sources and exacerbating societal divisions.[332] Additionally, the echo chamber effect of social media algorithms tended to reinforce existing beliefs and biases, further entrenching mistrust.[333] Overall, growing Euroscepticism poses significant challenges for rebuilding trust and restoring confidence.

[332] Nguyen and Catalan-Matamoros, "Anti-Vaccine Discourse on Social Media."

[333] Nguyen and Catalan-Matamoros.

CONCLUSION

To better understand the intricate relationship between trust and crisis management within the European Union (EU), this paper examines how crises impact interpersonal and institutional trust levels and how these trust levels, in turn, influence crisis management effectiveness. The analysis of two significant polycrises, the sovereign debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, shows that crises significantly affect trust in national and EU institutions, as well as general social trust. These trust levels help shape public opinion of the crisis, impacting compliance with crisis response measures. By fostering high levels of trust, institutions can enhance compliance and cooperation, leading to more effective crisis management, whereas ineffective crisis management can undermine trust, weaken institutional integrity, and heighten a state’s susceptibility to future crises. The findings reveal a symbiotic relationship between crises and trust.

The analysis further highlights that the narrative and communication strategies employed during crises are pivotal in shaping public perceptions and trust. Transparent and well-coordinated crisis responses and clear and honest communication are essential for fostering trust and ensuring public cooperation. The case studies of the sovereign debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate that perceived failures and disunity can severely damage trust. At the same time, credible and decisive actions paired with optimistic but realistic narratives can begin to rebuild trust and break the cycle of distrust. These insights underscore the need for robust communication strategies and consistent, effective actions in managing crises.

Looking forward, the EU will likely face a range of future polycrises, including economic shocks, health emergencies, and environmental disasters. The findings of this paper suggest that the EU's ability to manage these crises effectively will heavily depend on the levels of trust in its institutions. Future crisis management strategies should prioritize trust-building measures, including transparent communication, inclusive decision-making processes, and decisive action. By learning from the experiences of past crises, the EU can develop more resilient and responsive systems that not only address immediate threats but also strengthen the long-term trust and cooperation of its member states and citizens. In doing so, the EU can better navigate the complexities of future polycrises, ensuring stability and cohesion in an increasingly interconnected and volatile world.

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