



trans4DEMO

Contentious Politics and Democratic Renewal
in Sustainability Transitions

Working Paper: Urgency, Crisis and Repertoires of Action

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3 Executive Summary

This working paper investigates the discursive interaction between crisis and urgency in climate governance and its influence on shaping political action. Drawing on a comprehensive literature review, it examines how urgency, often entangled with uncertainty, functions as a mobilizing or demobilizing discourse, shaping public and institutional responses. Crisis is conceptualized as a discursive strategy, and the paper identifies four dominant types of climate crisis narratives within the literature. Building on the literature, the paper argues that urgency operates as a prognostic tool for crisis discourses. The paper argues that varying degrees of urgency promote distinct forms of political engagement, establishing a spectrum divided in two overall categories of low urgency – denying climate governance as a field to govern – and high urgency – discourses actively promoting climate governance. By connecting specific crisis framings to corresponding repertoires of political action, the paper offers a nuanced understanding of how discourse not only reflects but actively structures the political dynamics of climate governance. In the conclusion, the paper suggests how to further analytically develop the spectrum to connect it to more specific uses of repertoires of action.

4 Introduction

Environmental and climate governance has long been a field of significant political contention. In recent years, this contestation has intensified, marked by the engagement of a broader range of actors, and the promotion of new discourses. Pro-environmental movements like Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion have mobilized large-scale, transnational protests. At the same time, opposition to environmental policies has emerged across Europe, including widespread farmers' protests opposing the European Green Deal in 2023–2024 (Casert, 2024; Grand Berthelsen, 2023). Political parties, including previously disengaged ones such as populist radical-right parties, have become more involved in climate debates, shifting from anti-environmentalism (Gemenis et al., 2012) to more nuanced positions like selective skepticism or conditional support (Caiani and Lubarda, 2024).

A notable feature shared by these competing actors is their use of urgency and crisis in political discourse, though the meaning and implications of these terms vary significantly. Notably, different actors employ varying discourses of urgency and crisis in climate governance to mobilize public opinion toward distinct political objectives. Proponents of strong climate governance tend to frame climate change as an imminent crisis that demands urgent action. Conversely, opponents often downplay the climate crisis by emphasizing alternative or competing crises they consider more urgent, reframing policy priorities (Ganga, 2023). Such uses of crisis discourse can either empower or disempower political actors, as well as shape how political action is pursued.

This paper investigates the link between the deliberate discursive use of urgency and crisis and the promotion of different forms of political action in climate governance by competing actors. It is structured in two main parts. The first section presents a literature review on the key conceptual areas of urgency and crisis. The second section builds on this review to examine how different discourses on the climate crisis are linked to various proposed approaches to political action in climate governance.

5 Literature review: urgency and crisis in global governance

5.1 Urgency as a discursive tool

Urgency is a core component in the conversation about climate change (Gills and Morgan, 2022). If we do not act swiftly, the risk of climate catastrophe is heightened (Ripple et al., 2023; de Lange, 2024). Indeed, even now, the effects of climate disruption have begun, spanning from unprecedented 2023-2024 surface temperatures (Terhaar, 2025) to an uptick of climate disasters (Funk, 2021). Climate scientists predict catastrophic and irreparable futures if action is not taken (Lenton et al., 2019). Hence, across academic studies as well as policy papers, an accelerated transition is seen as desperately and immediately needed (Borowiecki et al., 2023; IRENA, 2022; Rosenbloom and Meadowcroft, 2022; Roberts et al., 2018; de las Heras, 2024). This creates a tangible sense of urgency to act swiftly. However, alongside such concerns, uncertainty persists. In particular, accurately predicting the future of climate change remains a challenge. As Hulme (2019) points out, climate deadlines are often publicly set with the threat unrealized. Climate scientists remain divided about various tipping points leading to points of no return, with various ranges presented (Armstrong et al., 2022; Wunderling et al., 2024). Positive climate feedback loops create uncertain courses, such as a “tipping cascade”, in which multiple tipping dynamics impact each other (Klose et al., 2021). Overall, one faces unpredictability in tracing the complex impacts of climate change, ranging from biodiversity loss to sea level change. For example, uncertainty with regards to the future of economic situations and population growth contributes to the challenge of long-term environmental forecasts (Christensen et al., 2018).

Beyond scientific uncertainty, the concepts used to publicly express information about climate change have been questioned. Analyzing the concept of “carbon budgets”, Lahn (2020) concludes that the boundaries between climate science and policy are “highly permeable”, as climate scientists seek to adapt their results into clear policy actions that can be easily understood. Similarly, Cointe and Guillemot (2022) analyze the use of 1.5 Celsius temperature as a critical target and suggest that the relationship between climate science and politics is co-dependent, as the search for policy relevant information shapes science, as science itself provides legitimacy for policy action. Moreover, Integrated Assessment Models, which are used to provide insights into the future (such as those used to create the 1.5 °C target), are readjusted in light of political considerations (van Beek et al., 2022). Hence, the policymaking know-how about climate issues is socially shaped and constructed based on various considerations, spanning beyond “objective” science.

Similarly, others have questioned whether using terms associated with urgency is even the most efficient way to motivate climate action. An online survey experiment from the USA suggests that the framing of “climate emergency”, rather than “climate change” in social media news, reduced perceived news credibility, regardless of political ideology (Feldman and Hart, 2021). Moreover, a survey experiment in the United States and Germany suggests that the framing of urgency does not increase climate action policy support (Fesenfeld and Rinscheid, 2021). Indeed, there is a scholarly debate on the impact of using the term “climate emergency”, “climate crisis” or the less urgent “climate change” (Haueis, 2024; McHugh et al., 2021; Bruine de Bruin et al., 2024). Therefore, the framing of the climate as urgent has been challenged.

In light of these discussions about the perceived urgency of the climate crisis, some have analyzed the concept of urgency through socially constructive lens. That is, evaluating the socially ascribed meanings given to particular interpretations of reality. It has been noted that the climate is learned through terms such as thresholds, budgets and deadlines which foster a perception of urgency (Asayama, 2021). This is also seen in the increased use of urgency-related metaphors, such as the ticking clock utilized in the Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change (MCC) in Germany which indicates “how much time is left for political decision makers to take action” (Zurru, 2024).

Such rhetoric is also constructed across academic, journalist and activist sites. For example, Fossen (2025) recently claimed that academics have a responsibility to mobilize and take direct action to stop climate change. Similarly, Gardner et al. (2021) have advocated for universities to support climate activism. Capstick et al. (2022) expressed support for civil disobedience by scientists to fight the climate crisis. These examples within academia highlight the tangible sense of urgency pushed forward by academics. Moreover, these discourses of urgency are intended to create a public impact and motivate other actors to change their behavior. As Paglia (2018) has discussed, scientists are given a strategic and elevated place in the climate change conversation due to their ability to wield scientific facts. This has helped create a broader epistemological community with significant authority, especially due to the consensus based on urgency.

This urgency is also advocated by journalists and activists. A content analysis of American news outlets finds that climate change framing relating to risk has risen in recent years (Stecula and Merkley, 2019). Urgency is also one of the crucial elements of so-called vocabularies of motive providing for the activists’ the rationale to undertake actions. In his seminal work, R. Benford (1993) distinguishes between urgency, severity, efficacy and propriety as four major motivational framing mechanisms. The severity of the problem, positive moral justification and sense of agency require the construction of undesirable consequences as immediately forthcoming and the crisis as looming. Otherwise, it is easy to reconcile severity of the issue with the inclination to postpone the action. Similarly, Campos and Martins (2024) suggest activists use urgency as a rhetorical and political resource which allows them to gain support for their movement. Reichel, Plüschke-Altof and Plaan (2022) highlight that movements such as Fridays for

Future have sought to reframe climate change into a tangible issue that demands attention by utilizing these discourses of urgency. This can also be seen in Greta Thunberg's speeches, which are thought to establish "postapocalyptic anticipations". That is, presentations of a future full of crisis in an attempt to draw support for action immediately (Friberg, 2022).

Such discourses can be linked to "emergency politics", in which exceptional circumstances foster rationalizations for unique actions (Kreuder-Sonnen and White, 2022). That is, the framing of the climate as an urgent circumstance provides a powerful political tool. Indeed, discourses of urgency can be manufactured when strategically suitable, exploiting the public's belief in a risk (Maor 2012; 2020). As van Wijk and Fischhendler (2017) illustrate, actors can use urgency at moments that are beneficial for their agendas. Boin et al. (2009) have described a typology of behaviors of political actors employed in crises, highlighting how they can be exploited for political gain. Moreover, as urgency is a social construct, some seek to exploit such discourses in order to sow doubt about it (Fischer, 2019).

What are the effects of emergency framings? Patterson et al. (2021) present five dimensions of political effects of emergency frames in sustainability. First, "engagement among mass publics", which affects a wide range of emotions and behaviors, from hope to fear. Secondly, "empowerment or disempowerment of actors", as the creation of an emergency provides certain actors with increased power. Thirdly, "exercise of formal political authority" as the emergency creates validation for such uses. Fourthly, "reshaping of discourse". As the examples of thresholds, budgets and clocks show, a perceived emergency impacts the political imaginaries. Finally, frames of emergency include a political effect on institutions, as they respond to the emergency.

These discourses of emergency and urgency carry many risks. Urgency has a negative impact on decision-making skills, leading to rash and impulsive results (Billieux et al., 2010). When driven by urgency, decision makers are prone to poor policy decisions which are led by emotions and opportunities (Lorenzoni and Benson, 2014). The emotional responses to time stress often leads to more risk-taking, increasing the potential for irrational decision-making (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981).

Moreover, as terror management theory suggests, humans' psychological response to impending catastrophes leads to a substantial influence on people's cognitive functioning and behavioral reactions. In particular, it can lead to significant biases in decision making processes (Jonas et al., 2003) as well as denial and skepticism. It can also lead to worldview defense, in which one's out-group antagonism grows as they seek to reinforce their identity (Smith et al., 2022; Swanson and Landau, 2019). It has been suggested that these psychological defenses explain some responses to climate change, such as outright climate change denial, refusal to accept human responsibility for climate change, minimization of the climate related threats and objections to take cooperative actions with groups that hold different worldviews (Wolfe and Tubi, 2019). Similarly, a study of climate inaction discourses in the UK has highlighted that a sense of hopelessness and lack of belief that it is possible to create the necessary changes poses challenges

to reaching climate goals (Cherry, Verfuërth and Demsk, 2024). Hence, the discourses that emphasize urgency based on catastrophic futures pose risks to further climate action, implying a need to adapt the communication (Wolfe and Tubi, 2019).

Frames of urgency might lead to broader societal negative impacts: searching for quick solutions which do not truly mitigate global warming; increased authoritarianism due to creating “climate emergencies”; a false image of societal collapse when climate change is likely to be slow; reducing other considerations such as justice or social sustainability of policies in order to make it to the perceived deadline (Asayama et al., 2019; van Bommel and Höffken, 2023). In the same vein, Hulme (2019) suggests that the absolutism at the heart of urgency discourses reduces the capability to address a wider range of issues, such as advanced through the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Therefore, one can question the various political uses of urgency with regards to the climate. When do actors use urgency? Which actors do so? How are discourses of urgency used in different instances? Such questions are particularly relevant to the political arena. That is, how do different political actors utilize emergency politics to push forward their interests? What are the different strategies adopted by those supporting environmental policies and those opposing it? What impact does this have on the political system? In particular, how do discourses of urgency shape and reshape polarization, populism and other political challenges? Overall, understanding the complex dynamics and impact of urgency within politics is highly relevant for the study of climate change.

5.2 Varieties of discursive crisis in climate governance

Crisis is a widely discussed concept across disciplines, encompassing individual, social, ecological, political, and economic challenges (Boin et al., 2016). While approaches vary, most definitions center on crisis as a perceived critical juncture in a system's life, marking a significant disruption between the past and future. A crisis is a temporary event focused on one single critical juncture, distinct from “perma-crisis” (prolonged disruption) and “Polycrisis” (global system-wide phenomena) (Henig and Knight, 2023; Parnell et al., 2024). This definition highlights that crises are socially constructed, shaped by both context and strategic use of language (Boin et al., 2016), and subjective, interpreted differently from each stakeholder (Pauchant and Mitroff, 1990). They are often seen as transformative processes, marking a shift in history (Koselleck, 2006), or as Hay (1995) describes they are the passage from ‘Dusk to dawn.’ Krzyzanowski et al. (2023) argue that crises employed as deliberate discursive strategies empower signifying agents to profoundly redefine social reality, thus interpreting grievances and defining goals to mobilize audiences toward political objectives (Lindekilde, 2014). More specifically, Moffitt (2014) and Hay (1995) suggest that crises are the discursive representation of failure as an existential threat. Thus, crises are constructed through representation, and their strategic use, or “crisification,” elevates issues beyond everyday politics, justifying securitization and framing problems as existential threats (Paglia, 2018).

The literature categorizes crises in various ways, with typologies serving different purposes across disciplines (Boin et al., 2016). This paper identifies two main approaches to categorize crises as discursive strategies: the severity approach and the competing crises approach. The severity approach categorizes crises based on how severely actors define them to be, categorizing crises on a range from lower to higher severity (e.g. Bressanelli and Natali, 2024; Howarth and Shaman, 2015). Boin et al (2016) identify several severity categorizations based on three key features: threat, urgency, and uncertainty. In particular, urgency refers to the immediacy of action needed, distinguishing between creeping and sudden crises. The competing crises approach recognizes the simultaneous existence of numerous crises coexisting or overlapping (e.g., Caiani and Padoan, 2020). Currently, most literature views crises as the result of multiple interacting crises creating new existential threats (Boin et al., 2016). This approach debates whether multiple crises coexist, sum up, or compete to emerge within a system. A key concept is Polycrisis, where crises across global systems become entangled, worsening potential outcomes for humanity (Krzyzanowski et al., 2023; Lawrence et al., 2022). A relevant debate in this literature questions whether discussing individual crises in an interconnected society is now outdated and prevents identification of multifaceted responses (Parnell et al., 2024). Differently, Hay (1995) suggests that crises within a system compete discursively, with different narratives emerging based on ideological positions, leading to a dominant crisis narrative through ideological contestation. Similarly, in the constructivist approaches to public policy the widespread political usage of the very concept of crisis is exploiting the hazy line between mere problems and full-blown systemic challenge. As such, it allows us to establish a hierarchy of claims in the extremely competitive political environment of multifarious claim-makers (Rocheftort and Cobb, 1995).

Overall, crisis serves two main functions as a discursive strategy: diagnostic, identifying social problems and their causes, and prognostic, promoting proposed solutions (Benford and Snow, 2000). Crisis triggers an urgent call for collective action (Gkeredakis et al., 2021; Lawrence et al., 2024; Moffitt, 2014; Roitman 2011), potentially limiting debate and reinforcing biases through groupthink (O'Regan, 2023).

Various studies have explored discourses on climate change. In relation to crisis, such discourses can be distinguished based on their diverging diagnostic and prognostic functions, thus how different actors employing discourses of crisis define different social issues and promote diverging solutions. This paper presents a 2-dimensional typology of current studies on climate crisis discourses, based on the diagnostic and prognostic functions of crises as a discursive strategy. The diagnostic dimension focuses on identifying a social problem, distinguishing discourses that define climate change as a crisis from those that do not. The prognostic dimension concerns proposed solutions, categorizing discourses based on whether they promote political action. This typology defines four main types: Skeptical discourses, convinced depoliticized discourses, convinced politicized discourses, and fatalist discourses (see Table 1).

Table 1- typology of discourses on climate crisis

	Diagnostic Dimension
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Prognostic Dimension		Climate change is not a crisis	Climate change is a crisis
	Disincentivize political action	Skeptical discourses	Convinced depoliticized discourses
	Promotes political action	Fatalist discourses	Convinced politicized discourses

Skeptical discourses on climate change question or reject the idea of climate change as a crisis requiring political action. These discourses vary in skepticism, from outright denial to acknowledging some scientific conclusions but downplaying their urgency. The diagnosis often rejects climate change as a full-blown crisis, with proponents arguing it is less significant than other issues. In terms of prognosis, skeptics generally minimize the need for political action, advocating for reduced intervention or dismissing the need for climate policies. Skeptical discourses have been prominent in literature (Howarth and Sharman, 2015), involving political parties and civil society actors, including "anti-sustainability" groups across Europe. Right-wing populists (RWPs) are often linked to climate skepticism (e.g., Duijndam and van Beukering 2020), though some have recently shown a "green turn," advocating for environmental protection without sacrificing economic interests (Caiani and Lubarda, 2024). RWPs also emphasize green patriotism (Schwörer and Fernández-García 2023), also mentioned as patriotic ecology (Aiolfi 2024) green or resource nationalism (Conversi 2020), which focuses on protecting national environments and resources while resisting international climate governance. These parties link environmental protection to national sovereignty and cultural identity, framing the environment as part of their nativist heritage (Schwörer and Fernández-García, 2023; McCarthy 2019). Although they acknowledge human-induced climate change, RWPs argue that climate action should be managed at the national level, rather than through global policies, seeing international climate efforts as a threat to national sovereignty (Ruser and Machin, 2019).

Convinced depoliticized discourses view climate change as a serious crisis that requires immediate, technocratic solutions, typically separating the issue from political debates. These discourses are prevalent in mainstream climate discussions and platforms like the United Nations Common Agenda (UNCA), the IPCC, the UNFCCC, and the Lancet Countdown, and are often mentioned as mainstream, convinced or transnational climate crisis discourse (Howarth and Sharman, 2015; Paglia, 2019). They define human-induced climate change as an existential threat to life, heavily relying on scientific data to support their claims (Paglia, 2019; Howarth and Sharman, 2015; Maci in Parnell et al, 210; Bevitori and Russo, 2024). This approach aligns with a macro securitization framework, where climate change is elevated to a global security issue, emphasizing the survival of humanity as the central concern (Buzan et al. 1998). These discourses advocate for urgent action based on mitigation and adaptation policies, presenting these solutions as "common-sense" measures that should be accepted without much debate (Taylor 2014). These solutions are framed as neutral and objective, with a focus on convincing policymakers about the urgency of the climate crisis (Paglia, 2019). Furthermore, these discourses often use metaphors of war or conflict, portraying climate action as a moral obligation and emphasizing the existential nature of the crisis, which

intensifies the sense of urgency and the need for immediate collective action (Bevitori and Russo 2024). Depoliticized discourses on climate governance have raised several concerns. Critics argue that these discourses hinder the clear definition of political agency by focusing on the need for action without specifying who should take responsibility (Maci 2024). They have also been criticized for narrowing the focus to climate change alone, neglecting other interconnected crises, and oversimplifying global challenges (Maci 2024). These discourses often rely on polarizing labelling like "deniers" or "alarmists" to position themselves as central and moderate (Howarth and Sharman, 2015). Additionally, adaptation discourses within this framework have been seen as carrying "discursive violence," where vulnerable communities are both portrayed as needing transformation and as objects of intervention. This can lead to ethnocentric policies that disproportionately impact the global periphery, reinforcing existing power dynamics and inequalities (Mikulewicz 2020).

Convinced politicized discourses treat climate change as an urgent existential threat requiring immediate political action. They emphasize that climate change cannot be addressed alone and intersects with other crises, including social, economic, and cultural issues. This leads to the development of concepts such as ecofeminism, environmental racism, and climate migration, highlighting the complex link between environmental disruptions and societal inequalities (Maci 2024). In diagnosing the crisis, these discourses often identify the role of neoliberal capitalism in exacerbating climate change issues. They argue that there has been a shift in blame from governments and corporations to individuals (Mansfield, 2020; Hallam, 2019). These discourses are commonly advocated by green parties, left-wing populist groups, and social movements like Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future. However, politicized discourses can also include RWPs. This party family has often represented multiple crises as blended together, as in the case of the so-called migration crisis, presented both as both a cultural and as a socio-economic crisis (Caiani and Padoan 2020). Similarly, RWPs may represent environmental crisis as entangled with other simultaneous crises to demand political action. These discourses call for significant political action to address the crisis, with groups like Extinction Rebellion demanding systemic change, holding responsible parties accountable, and promoting democratic solutions like citizen assemblies (Mansfield, 2020).

Fatalist discourses depict climate crisis as an inevitable, pre-destined tragedy. These discourses view the crisis as so entrenched that the future seems unimaginable, limiting the potential for collective action. As such, I argue fatalism is not concerning a discursive crisis anymore, as it does not allow to diagnose a social issue nor to articulate a possible solution. Fatalism is more common among individuals than political or social actors, as it does not provide impetus for collective action, impeding the construction of political campaigns. Herbert (2021) describes this as a "lock-in crisis," where the scale of the crisis makes radical change seem impossible. This perspective highlights the failure of previous approaches, such as sustainable development, creating a psychological barrier to transformative solutions. The actions arising from these discourses are often immediate and disruptive but lack long-term strategies, risking alienation of the public and pushing the climate issue further from mainstream conversation.

6 Linking discourses on crisis and urgency to political action

Discourses of crisis can be categorized according to their use of urgency. As previously discussed, urgency is a crucial element to mobilizing audiences towards political action. Urgency is used by activists and social movements to promote positive moral justification to immediately solve an undesirable social issue, and similarly political actors can define their agenda as urgent to justify the employment of unique action in exceptional circumstances. Accordingly, this paper argues that urgency is a prognostic feature of crisis discourse, shaping how and when a social issue is considered actionable.

In the literature review, this paper identified four main discourses on climate crisis: skeptical, convinced depoliticized, convinced politicized, and fatalist. Each of these discourses defines urgency with a different degree of severity. Skeptical discourses downplay the urgency of climate change, often supporting environmental governance while dismissing climate-specific action. Convinced depoliticized discourses accept the crisis and its urgency but advocate technocratic solutions without clearly assigning agency, limiting prompt implementation. Convinced politicized discourses emphasize both urgency and political responsibility, promoting more immediate action. Fatalist discourses frame climate change as an inevitable tragedy, neutralizing urgency and possibly fostering inaction. Together, these four categories form a continuum based on how they construct urgency in relation to climate change (see figure 1).

Figure 1 – urgency spectrum of discourses on climate crisis



This spectrum distinguishes between discourses framing climate change as a critical policy issue that demands governance and those who downplay its significance. At one end of the continuum lie discourses with a low sense of urgency, where climate change is minimized or ignored. These discourses typically promote action to national environmental conservation efforts, such as protecting natural resources and landscapes, while opposing transnational climate governance. Conversely, at the high-urgency end, discourses frame climate change as a critical issue that must be governed, thereby supporting both environmental and climate governance efforts.

Crucially, different levels of urgency promote distinct forms of political action. At both ends of the urgency spectrum lie discourses promoting inaction, although for opposite reasons. At the low-urgency end, denialist discourses reject the significance of climate change, thus negating the need for governance. On the high-urgency end, fatalist discourses acknowledge the severity of climate change, but they portray the situation as irredeemable, ultimately concluding that political action is too late and ultimately futile. However, as previously mentioned, low-urgency positions are not devoid of political engagement but focused more on a national, environmental scale. These discourses may support preserving national landscapes and biodiversity, yet resisting international climate governance mechanisms, which they often view as threats to national sovereignty or economic autonomy. This has been the case for parties such as the German far-right Alternative für Deutschland for a long time, rejecting and even targeting climate agendas as reducing national sovereignty (Ruser and Machin, 2019). Similar takes differentiating between national

environmental and transnational climate governance have been shared by other far-right actors such as Law and justice in Poland or Fidesz in Hungary (Caiani and Lubarda, 2024). In contrast, high-urgency discourses promote the establishment and strengthening of climate governance frameworks, though they diverge in their approaches. Depoliticized high-urgency narratives prioritize technocratic solutions, relying on scientific expertise and neutral language to frame climate change as a problem requiring technocratic solution. This approach is commonly adopted by actors involved in international governance seeking to engage policy makers across the political spectrum, such as United Nations conferences or summits involving a wide range of actors. Politicized high-urgency discourses, on the other hand, emphasize the systemic roots of the climate crisis, linking it to other ongoing socio-economic or cultural crises. These perspectives advocate for structural change and could align with specific political ideologies or movements, assigning responsibility and demanding accountability. These discourses are common among green parties and left-wing populist parties such as the Spanish Podemos or the German Die Linke, who actively call for political action to rescue the people from the interests of global corporation as polluting and depleting resources (Schwörer and Fernández-García, 2024). Between the two overall categories lies conditional environmentalist discourses, which cautiously support limited climate governance while prioritizing national economic interests. This 'yes-but' environmentalism is typical of actors undergoing a strategic 'green turn,' where commitment to climate action is conditional upon its compatibility with economic growth and domestic political stability (Caiani and Lubarda, 2024). An example of this entails the right-wing Freedom party of Austria, who in 2019 announced a clear turn to include climate protection in their agenda, although in a 'sensitive' manner which would not hinder the economic interests of the Austrian people (Ruser and Machin 2019).

Overall, this spectrum presents several analytical advantages. It offers a structured framework for categorizing discursive patterns related to the climate crisis and perceived urgency, and for linking these patterns to different proposed political actions. Most importantly, the spectrum enables the development of theoretical inferences and empirical hypotheses about the relationship between discourse, urgency, and political behavior. Applying this spectrum to empirical cases could generate comparative insights, revealing how actors with different political positions may use crisis and urgency for similar discursive purposes.

7 Conclusion

This paper has examined the link between the discursive use of crisis and urgency in climate governance and the promotion of particular forms of political action. In the literature review on urgency, it explored the relationship between urgency and uncertainty. It further analysed the effectiveness of urgency as a discourse in climate governance, particularly its role in mobilizing or demobilizing audiences and the possible outcomes of urgency framing. In the literature review on crisis, it defined crisis as a discursive strategy, identified the main categorizations of crisis found in the literature, and categorized four primary types of discourses surrounding the climate crisis. Based on this review, the paper established that urgency, as a prognostic discursive tool, can be used to categorize different strategic uses of crisis. Different degrees of urgency promote different forms of political action, ranging from low urgency, which tends to ignore climate governance, to high urgency, which supports it as a necessary field of political engagement. The paper also nuanced this distinction by establishing more specific links between the crisis discourses identified in the literature and the forms of political action they suggest.

The next step in applying the proposed categorization of crisis discourses should link it to specific dimensions of repertoires of action. Repertoires of action are understood as relational sets of collective practices that become routinized but also might serve as a basis for innovation in challenging and unsettled situations (Gold 2022). Since one of the follow-up directions stemming from the findings presented in this paper is the investigation of political actions, including grassroots politics, we also reflect on how such mobilisations are addressed in the literature, particularly in terms of their repertoires. These include conventional, expressive, demonstrative, confrontational, and (even) violent actions, as well as more recent forms of online mobilisation (see, above all, Della Porta & Diani, 2020; for more nuanced definitions of these categories, see also Koopmans, 1993; Caiani et al., 2012; Caiani & Parenti, 2013; Tarrow, 1989). Also of relevance here is the realm of prefigurative politics (Monticelli, 2022). We eventually assume that real-life political actions and their repertoires—shaped by many interdependent factors—are also influenced by the urgency spectrum (ranging from a low to high sense of urgency) and by specific crisis discourses.

The recent surge in political contention and contestation within climate governance has coincided with a diversification of these repertoires, introducing increasingly variegated forms of action and resistance. Institutional actors have embraced participatory governance mechanisms, exemplified by the EU's 2018 Governance Regulation, European Commission guidelines (Oberthür et al., 2025), as well as by the promotion of citizens' assemblies by the European Climate Foundation and OECD (Tubiana, 2024). In contrast, climate-skeptical actors have shown disengagement from international frameworks, such as the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. Civil society actors have expanded their tactics beyond

traditional demonstrations, turning to disruptive and symbolic acts like paint-throwing or gluing themselves to artworks to attract public and media attention. This growing diversity of repertoires underscores the need to analyze how different degrees of urgency and crisis framing shape not only the motivations behind political actions but also the forms these actions take.

8 References

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