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Editors

Citizens and the Crisis

Experiences, Perceptions, and Responses to the Great Recession in Europe

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Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology
ISBN 978-3-319-68959-3 ISBN 978-3-319-68960-9 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68960-9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017962777

Cover illustration: Stuart Minzey / GettyImages

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgments

Results presented in this book have been obtained within the project "Living with Hard Times: How Citizens React to Economic Crises and Their Social and Political Consequences" (LIVEWHAT). This project was funded by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme (grant agreement no. 613237). The LIVEWHAT consortium was coordinated by the University of Geneva (Marco Giugni) and was formed, additionally, by the European University Institute, later replaced by the Scuola Normale Superiore (Lorenzo Bosi); Uppsala University (Katrin Uba); the University of Sheffield (Maria Grasso); the CEVIPOF-Sciences Po, Paris (Manlio Cinalli); the University of Siegen (Christian Lahusen); the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Eva Anduiza); the University of Crete (Maria Kousis); and the University of Warsaw (Maria Theiss). We thank all the members of the LIVEWHAT research consortium for their contribution to the project.

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PART III

The Social Bases of the Crisis

CHAPTER 8

An Island of Bliss—For Everyone? Perceptions and Experiences of the Crisis Across Social Classes in Germany

Johannes Kiess and Christian Lahusen

Introduction

In public debates and the literature, Germany is often pictured as a net beneficiary of the crisis. While experiencing a dramatic demand shock in 2009, which mostly hit the export-led industrial sectors, mechanisms of internal flexibility and the effects of targeted growth packages buffered the external shock. In the following years, the German economy was able to recover fast, building on stable employment and skilled personnel, robust domestic demand, as well as increasing demand for capital goods from world markets. Furthermore, state finances benefitted from low (or often even negative) interest rates due to the state debt crisis in Southern Europe and the resulting safe harbor effect for German state bonds. This allowed for budget consolidation without (more) pressure on welfare spending. However, at closer examination, all that glitters is not gold. After incisive labor market reforms in the 2000s, inequalities and insecurities were rising

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M. Giugni, M.T. Grasso (eds.), *Citizens and the Crisis*, Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68960-9_8

in Germany and the shock of the economic crisis was certainly not helping the middle classes to resolve their "status panic" (Goebel et al. 2010). Thus, while Germany as a whole may have "emerged stronger from the crisis" (Angela Merkel),[1] this optimistic picture potentially papers over the crisis experiences of many, especially in the middle and lower classes. Even without the crisis, the literature provides many findings of economic, social, and political exclusion of considerable proportions within the German public (e.g. Bude 2014; Decker et al. 2012; Schäfer 2015). These consequences are not only felt by those excluded, the lower classes, but also those feeling threatened by exclusion, that is, the (lower) middle classes, and the experience of the economic crisis 2008–2009 has added to this.

Clearly, there have been noticeable consequences of the crisis, both in terms of subjective experience and in terms of objective exposure. This is true, first and foremost, for experiences in the labor market. Admittedly, actual labor market numbers were kept relatively stable throughout the first phase of the crisis 2008–2009 and even improved in the subsequent phase. However, the exhaustive impact on the core industries with, at peak times, 1.5 million workers in short-time schemes (or 5.2% of the total working population, see Brenke et al. (2011); plus those working lesser hours within other internal flexibility measures) did have substantial psychological effects: this had simply not been experienced before in the industrial cores. It must also be kept in mind that the continuing dualization of the German labor market in objective terms, too, means increasingly less protection for growing numbers of workers. Furthermore, even in the recovery period since 2010 where pressures on job security declined, the pressure on working conditions and performances rose (Detje et al. 2013). Thus, we argue that in Germany, too, crisis experiences are part of people's day-to-day lives.

Moreover, we expect these experiences of crisis to be stratified by class. Indeed, the middle classes might feel the pressure because they have, compared to the lower classes, "something to lose" without the economic security of the upper classes. While middle class is a contested and woolly concept, higher levels of income, education, and social capital, predominantly service sector employment, political self-efficacy, and certain types of values are considered to be characterizing (Nolte and Hilpert 2007: 31–33). These resources come with expectations of status. The middle classes are in a position in between (Simmel 1908: 451–452) on the one hand, but have in Germany's postwar history always been the center of

attention and national self-assurance. Thus, potentially, the experience of (permanent) crisis touching the middle classes goes to the core of the self-understanding of a vast majority of the Germans—according to our data, 43.5% of the Germans consider themselves as middle class, another 22% as lower middle class (see below).

In this chapter, we aim to examine the experience and perception of crisis in Germany with an analytical focus on social classes. Our general research questions read as follows: which social groups and classes in Germany are particularly crisis sensitive and what factors amplify perceptions of crisis? Are the middle classes more susceptible to the crisis, when compared to the perceptions of other social classes? Or are other factors that cross class boundaries, for example, specific forms of individual deprivation or political attitudes, the driver for crisis susceptibility? To this end, in this chapter, we first review the literature on social vulnerability, precarity, and risks of social degradation in order to develop our research hypotheses. We proceed then with the presentation of our data and method. In what follows, we will present and discuss our findings. Finally we conclude with a contextualization of these findings.

Pressure on German Social Classes in Times of Crisis

We start this section with a summary of the history of the crisis in Germany to provide contextual knowledge as basis for our argument. We then review the state of the art on precarization in Germany, including insecurities in the middle classes and the effects of the continuing dualization of the German labor market. We will mainly limit ourselves to the German case and rely on mostly German literature which, however, should be to the benefit of the reader since we discuss it in English. Finally, we will develop our hypotheses at the end of this section leading to our empirical assessment of the perception of crisis in Germany.

The common depiction of Germany as a beneficiary of the crisis often overlooks the historical slump that the German economy went through in 2009. German GDP dropped by 5.6% in 2009 (EU 28: 4.4%) which was by far the sharpest decrease of GDP since World War II. Following the institutional legacy of the "German model" of a coordinated market economy (Hall and Soskice 2001) with strong industrial relations and a focus (at least in the export-led chemical as well as metal, automobile, and electronic industries) on high-skill, high-wage labor, external flexibility was used only on the fringes of the labor market. The unemployment

rate went up only slightly, mostly due to the dismissal of temporary workers, a relatively new phenomenon in the German labor market. The bulk of employment, however, was secured by measures of internal flexibility like working-time accounts and then short-time work schemes. It is reported that alone by granting short-time allowances for 1.5 million workers during the peak period in 2009, more than 300,000 full-time equivalents were secured (Brenke et al. 2011). Respectively, the stabilization of the labor market arguably also stabilized domestic demand and thus had further economic and labor market effects. Still, the thorough use of short-time work schemes and the exceptional growth packages also evince the pressure for action on policy makers. While the slump was dramatic, with 4.1% in 2010 and 3.7% GDP growth in 2011, the recovery was fast and strong as well and by 2011 the economy had compensated its losses.

Compared to other European countries and specifically the countries participating in LIVEWHAT the German crisis was over fast. While growth was restored in most countries by 2010, the discourse shifted from financial and economic crisis to state debt crisis. The high fiscal effort to rescue European banks unloaded in pressure on the state finances especially in Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece. This corresponded in Germany with the discursive externalization of the crisis (cf. Kiess 2015a). The German budget was, in the light of revitalized export industries, not considered problematic while financial markets now targeted the weaker economies. More importantly, in the debate, the origin of the crisis as a financial market crisis—strongly connected to the changing German model of capitalism from Teilhabekapitalismus (participatory capitalism) to competitive capitalism embedded in global financial capitalism (Busch and Land 2012)—was not a major subject anymore. The crisis, we argue, hit Germany in a phase where it consolidated its changed model of capitalism. This included most specifically a radicalization of its export orientation (export surplus increasing from 1.36% of GDP in 1998 to 7% in 2007, see Busch and Land 2012: 129) which at least partly was the result of strict wage restraints, liberalization of the labor market, and further pressures on labor like restrictions on welfare benefits and lower pensions (Agenda 2010 reforms).

Our analysis in this chapter builds on the assumption that the crisis did have an impact in German society, even though these effects are linked also to broader and long-standing transformations. The crisis seems to have amplified or accelerated the abovementioned changes in the structure

of capitalism and its implications for labor markets and living conditions. Scholarly writing helps us to specify more clearly the type of consequences this situation implies. Two strands of research in particular will be employed to identify competing research assumptions and hypotheses: studies addressing the transformations of the class structures, in particular the position of the middle classes therein, and research on social exclusion, vulnerability, and precarity, which, in its concern for social degradation, move beyond established class structure analysis.

A first important research strand is that related to the themes of the potential destabilization and fragmentation of the German middle classes. This research interest emanates from the traditional picture of German postwar society as a "leveled middle-class society" (nivellierte Mittelstandsgesellschaft, cf. Schelsky 1954). Even though it is not entirely clear what exactly "middle class" includes, ever since the postwar era, the notion is still cherished as a social norm. This is illustrated by the fact that in the 1990s 58% of the Germans considered themselves to be middle class (Noll 1996: 492). In 2008, this number only slightly changed to 56% (Noll and Weick 2011: 3). If we take income as reference point for social class position, we can see that in 2005 only 35.2% of the German population had between 100% and 200% of the median income and were statistically counted as "middle class" (Nolte and Hilpert 2007: 31). This suggests that considerably more people see themselves as belonging to the middle class than we might think of when looking at "hard" criteria. In this sense, self-proclaimed class-affiliation indicates also a sense of being placed in the middle of society, economically, socially, culturally, and politically.

This observation helps to identify the implications of crisis-driven transformations: if belonging to the middle class is a social norm, we might expect that the inability to fulfill this norm and to find a place in the middle of society will result in "status panic" (Bude 2014; Schimank et al. 2014). This follows from the specific situation of the middle class, having "an upper and a lower edge, in the sense of continuously giving and taking individuals to and from both the upper and lower classes", which has long been a topic in sociology (Simmel 1908: 451f, own translation). Other authors speak of the "exhausted" middle class (Heinze 2011; Mau 2012) in order to highlight that these strata are not necessarily confronted directly with downward social mobility, but experience growing challenges and try to keep their position and adequate future perspectives for their children. What is more, with the growing uncertainty and destabilization,

also the (peer) pressure to comply with the norm increases (Koppetsch 2013).

This research strand builds on a growing literature that is particularly interested in the economic situation of households and the growing precarity of living conditions as well as that on the hollowing out of the middle class (Geiling et al. 2001; Bude and Willisch 2006; Lessenich 2009; Vogel 2009). The most apparent result of this process is the polarization of incomes, which is characterized particularly by a decrease of middle-range households with a simultaneous increase of the groups with lowest and highest incomes. Following the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW), this trend is definitely to be interpreted as shrinkage of the middle class (Grabka and Frick 2008), since the polarization of incomes results in the losing of middle-class members (Goebel et al. 2010). Similar findings have been presented in comparative studies (Mau 2014; Pressman 2007).

Even though some studies do not agree with the outright polarization hypothesis, they still acknowledge the explosive nature of such growing pressures in the center of society (Vogel 2010; Marg 2014). Apparently, in the most recent economic upswing the size of the middle class is not increasing again (Bosch and Kalina 2015). And even the number of the poor is not going down after the crisis: in 2014, 15.4% of the population was considered poor compared to 14.7% in 2005 (Wohlfahrtsverband 2016: 14). This is connected to what has been discussed as dualization of the labor market, of industrial relations and of social security, all of which tend to serve insiders and disadvantage outsiders (Jackson and Sorge 2012; Palier 2012; Palier and Thelen 2010). As Haug and Stoy (2015) argue, the crisis management and changes in welfare policies continued to follow the path of dualization. Consequently, some authors speak of the crisis of a model of society (Heinze 2011: 8), even more so in the light of globalization and the re-measurement of inequality (Beck 2008). Globalization, many observers argue, produces a new cleavage between winners and losers (Kriesi et al. 2012; Teney et al. 2014; Kiess et al. 2017).

A second research strand focuses more intensively on risks of social exclusion and degradation, which are not necessarily restricted to income structures and social classes. Scholars argue that ongoing transformations of modern societies are increasing the social vulnerability of large parts of the population: they augment hardships and contribute to the social exclusion of less privileged strata (Kronauer 1998; Kieselbach 2003), but

they generalize risks also by subjecting more settled strata of the population to status instabilities and uncertain biographic transitions (Ranci 2010). In fact, the range of groups affected by risks of social exclusion increases and comprises, for instance, single parents, young adults in transition from school to work, families in cities with a tight housing market, women and men in caregiving responsibilities, migrants, aged employees threatened by dismissals, old-age pensioners, and citizens living in deprived neighborhoods or regions. Research has highlighted a number of reasons for this development: most importantly transformations of work and employment, of informal networks and social capital, and of welfare state benefits (Esping-Anderson 1999; Castel 2002; Ranci 2010).

In regard to work and employment more specifically, we see a continuous deregulation and flexibilization of labor markets (Countouris 2007) that increase the instability of employment and enlarge the range of atypical and precarious jobs. The "zone of precariousness" has severely expanded into the general population (Ehrenreich 1989; Furlong 2007) and has increased the experiences of instability and insecurity among the middle classes as well (Burzan 2008; Castel and Dörre 2009). Risks of social degradation and exclusion increase also through a potential weakening of informal networks of sociability and support. In fact, research has shown that social isolation and the perception of being left out of society is stronger among those groups with a more vulnerable social position, for example, the poor and the jobless, single parents and households, sick and disabled people (Böhnke 2006, 2008 2015). Moreover, the transformation of gender roles, family models, and household structures also affects patterns of sociability, for example, by putting family-based networks under strain and placing more emphasis on peers and friends (Baas 2008). This might well lead to social isolation and solitude across various social classes and groups (e.g. among single households, men, and single partners), thus increasing fears about social degradation and the susceptibility to economic shocks. Finally, scholarly writing has insisted that the reform of the welfare state is boosting uncertainties and instabilities (Clayton and Pontusson 1998; Steijn et al. 1998; Wacquant 2010). In this regard, we can point to the retrenchment of social rights and benefits, the increased conditionality of services and provisions, and the growing importance of private pension and insurance schemes to the detriment of state-led redistribution. Also in this regard, we might expect that these retrenchments increase the susceptibility for economic threats among recipients of social benefits across various social classes.

The political implications of this increased vulnerability have moved to the center stage in scholarly writing, particularly because increased anxieties and frustrations now also affect what are understood as "the middle classes" (Heitmeyer and Anhut 2008; Burzan 2008; Castel and Dörre 2009; Decker et al. 2012). This is especially true of (perceived) downward mobility. Consequently, perceived deprivation is repeatedly found to increase authoritarian, anti-democratic, and anti-immigrant attitudes (Pettigrew 2002; Rippl and Baier 2005; Decker and Brähler 2006; Buraczynska et al. in press). Furthermore, polarization can, combined with decreasing experiences of alienation, lead to general societal disintegration (Heitmeyer and Anhut 2008). In this context, new forms of political protest, including "occupy", mobilization against infrastructure projects, but also right-wing extremist protests against immigration, have made their appearance (Geiges et al. 2015; Butzlaff 2016; Kiess 2015b). These political implications are of particular relevance for our study, because they also might entail a stronger sensitivity for economic shocks. In particular, crisis susceptibility may be a question of political attitudes rather than social factors. Those who already are critical toward the government and the political system might as well be more critical about the economic situation, regardless of social background and across classes.

In sum, previous research has assembled enough evidence in order to corroborate the assumption that the crisis has affected German society in a more substantial manner than we might expect when looking at macroeconomic indicators. The crisis might accentuate the sensitivity to economic shocks, because they reinforce ongoing transformations of social reality in the "middle" of German society. Before this backdrop, we wish to approach the public perception of the economic crisis. Building on the literature addressing the precarious state of the middle classes in Germany, we ask: which groups and classes in Germany are particularly crisis sensitive, and what factors amplify perceptions of crisis? In order to answer these questions, we propose to test a number of research assumptions and hypotheses, which are directly linked to the previous description of available scientific evidence. Overall, we suggest distinguishing between three sets of assumptions with related factors.

First, it is plausible to assume that the social-structural position of respondents will be a determinant of crisis perceptions. In this regard, we propose to distinguish between objective and subjective components of class positions. On the one hand, we argue that crisis perceptions might be determined by objective class position in three different ways: crisis sensi-

tivity will be distributed in a curvilinear pattern along the social ladder, when focusing on occupational status groups, income, and education. The guiding hypothesis resides on the notion that middle classes might have a stronger feeling of having something to lose in times of crisis when compared to the underprivileged classes. Additionally, this feeling may also be stronger among the middle classes when compared to the upper strata, which might be at levels that prevent them from worrying about economic shocks. On the other hand, we suggest that crisis sensitivity is not directly linked to objective class positions, but rather to the subjective perception of class alignments. Hence, it is not the specific amount of income or education that matters for crisis sensitivity, but rather if respondents feel themselves to be a member of society's core, that is, the middle class, that is threatened by economic shocks. In this respect, it is probable that the class background of the family might play an important role, because parents' social class and the social habitus transmitted by them will shape subjective class affiliation.

Second, we argue that social vulnerability will impact on crisis perceptions, too. Here, we wish to add those factors that are not linked to social class in the strict sense, but might increase the risks of social degradation and exclusion, namely, economic and social deprivation. In the first instance, it might not be the professional status and income that matter, but the objective employment status in general and perceived employment stability in particular. In other words: precarity is the factor to be taken into consideration. This includes relative deprivation, that is, the feeling of being worse off compared to other reference groups or compared to earlier times. Moreover, we assume that social isolation will increase crisis susceptibility, because it deprives people from the material or emotional support of informal networks and increases the feeling of being exposed directly to economic shocks. In this sense, household structure, family constellations, and social contact networks will be decisive factors.

Finally, it is necessary to address also the political dimension of crisis perceptions. On the one hand, this political dimension has to do with political institutions and their public perceptions. As we have seen before, studies have put an emphasis on welfare retrenchment and the contribution of these reforms to the growing anxieties about social degradation within the public sphere. Therefore, we can assume that the confidence with the performance of the welfare state will be directly linked to the trust in its ability to buffer off economic shocks and collective harms.

Consequently, we assume that respondents being less confident with the performance of the state in policy fields directly linked to social security might also be those citizens more sensitive to the crisis. On the other hand, we need to be aware that crisis perceptions are mediated by political ideas and preferences. Economic threats, social risks, and increased vulnerabilities might not determine the crisis susceptibility, because it is rather the frustration with the political establishment in its willingness and ability to respond to the needs of the affected population that increases the worries of living in times of (uncontrolled and harmful) crisis. Crisis perceptions should consequently be higher among supporters of populist or right-wing ideologies.

A number of control variables will be included into the analysis, because crisis perceptions might vary also by other sociodemographic and contextual factors, such as age, gender, religion, migrant background, and residency.

Measuring Crisis Perception and Class Affiliation

We use a unique data set prepared within the EU project LIVEWHAT across nine European countries. For each country, an online survey was conducted (for more details, see Chap. 1 to this volume) including more than 2000 cases in each country. In Germany, 2.108 persons participated in the survey.

In order to test our hypothesis, we employ multinominal and binominal logistic regression models. Our dependent variable is a measure of whether people think that there is an economic crisis in their country. The original question reads as follows: "Some say that Germany is suffering a very serious economic crisis, others say that we are suffering a crisis but it is not very serious, while others say that there isn't any economic crisis. What do you think?" The variable includes four categories (plus "don't know") and Table 8.1 shows the distribution of answers across nine countries. In comparison, it strikes that German respondents have among the lowest sensitivity to crisis. Only 16.7% think that their country suffers a severe crisis and another 32.2% thinks there is a crisis but that it is not severe. Together, less people in Germany think that there is a crisis at all, even compared to Swedish and Swiss respondents, which have in many respects a similar perception of the crisis. However, if we consider that the question is on the national economy, not about the European economic situation, and that the German economy has not only compensated for the

Table 8.1 Is your country suffering an economic crisis?

Country	*Suffering severe crisis*	*Crisis but not severe*	*No economic crisis*	*Others*	*DN*
UK	37.3%	43.2%	9.7%	1.8%	8%
France	66.9%	16.8%	3.5%	3%	9.8%
Germany	**16.7%**	**32.2%**	**35.3%**	**2.5%**	**13.2%**
Sweden	16.2%	41.8%	24.4%	1.6%	16%
Poland	23.6%	41.7%	22.9%	1.7%	10.1%
Italy	79%	11.8%	3.5%	1.9%	3.8%
Spain	73.6%	17.4%	2.5%	3.8%	2.8%
Greece	88.1%	5.4%	2.5%	2.8%	1.2%
Switzerland	15.3%	51.9%	21.1%	3%	8.7%
Total	46.2%	29.1%	14%	2.5%	8.2%

losses in 2009 but has since been booming, crisis sensitivity still seems quite high. We take this as reason to proceed with our investigation.

As proposed above, we first focus on subjective and objective class belonging as independent variables. Our first variable is occupational class and is based on a range of occupations for self-placement. We assume that occupational status is an important measure for social stratification (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Faunce 1990) and that it affects the way in which individuals cope with change (Hooghe and Marks 2007). Furthermore, occupational status is key for accounting for class-specific fears (Kiess et al. 2017), especially if they are related to job security (Lengfeld and Hirschle 2009) which, we assume, is highly relevant for individuals in times of economic crisis. We recoded this variable into four categories from upper to lower class. Second, we include income class as an independent variable. The original variable used in the survey allowed for self-placement along income deciles. We recoded this in order to have four groups, higher net household incomes exceeding 3.160 €, middle incomes between 2.160 and 3.160 €, lower middle incomes between 1.240 and 2.160 €, and lower incomes below 1.240 € (for distribution see Table 8.2 below). Third, we use education as measure for class belonging. We recoded an inclusive list of educational degrees to three categories, namely, less than secondary education, secondary education, and higher education.

In addition to these objective measures of class belonging, we propose to include a variable measuring subjective association to class on a scale including "upper class", "upper middle class", "middle class", "lower

Table 8.2 Perceived class belonging in nine European countries

Country	*Upper class*	*Middle class*	*Lower middle class*	*Lower middle class*	*Total*
UK	4.1%	36.3%	22.6	37.0	100.0%
France	2.1%	42.5	4.2%	51.3%	100.0%
Germany	**10.4%**	**47.7%**	**24.1%**	**17.8%**	**100.0%**
Sweden	12.3%	46.9%	12.2%	28.5%	100.0%
Poland	6.4%	33.7%	22.0%	38.0%	100.0%
Italy	1.0%	14.8%	30.7%	53.5%	100.0%
Spain	6.4%	37.8%	20.2%	35.6%	100.0%
Greece	3.2%	37.9%	30.4%	28.5%	100.0%
Switzerland	10.7%	43.9%	23.0%	22.5%	100.0%
Total	6.3%	38.1%	21.1%	34.5%	100.0%

middle class", "working class", "lower class", and "other class". Only 0.6% of the respondents placed themselves in the category of "upper class", so we had to combine this one with the next category, namely, "upper middle class" (8.9% of the German cases). This seems justified since both groups should not feel subjected to polarization processes, as assumed for the (lower) middle classes in the section above. In line with findings in the literature, the biggest group places itself as being "middle class" (43.5%), which is more than in all other countries participating in the LIVEWHAT project (see Table 8.2). Another 22% consider themselves "lower middle class", which we keep as category. We combined the 10.4% of the respondents choosing "working class" with the 5.7% choosing "lower class". The remaining answered "other class" (1.7%) or "don't know" (7.2%). Additionally, we propose to consider that the class background of the respondent's family might influence the subjective class affiliation as well. For this purpose, we include a variable measuring the education of the respondent's father (same recoding as education variable above) into the model as a control.

Another set of hypotheses relates to social, economic, and especially job-related deprivation in order to test whether vulnerabilities might be more relevant, when compared to objective and subjective class belonging in a strict sense. Thus, we include a scale measuring relative economic deprivation compiled of five items ($r^2 = 0.75$). To measure social deprivation, we include variables measuring living alone (single item, dummy), frequency of meeting friends (single item, dummy), life satisfaction (ordinal), social trust (single item, ordinal), and social deprivation (two

single items, ordinal, reading "If I have difficulties, someone could take care of me" and "If I have difficulties, someone could take care of me financially").

Finally, we include a number of variables measuring the political dimension of crisis susceptibility, namely, a scale measuring political institutional trust ($r^2 = 0.96$), a left-right scale ($r^2 = 0.67$), left-right self-placement (single item, ordinal), satisfaction with democracy (single item, ordinal), an index measuring support of democracy ($r^2 = 0.75$), libertarian-authoritarian scale (aggregate index), a populism scale ($r^2 = 0.88$), political interest (single item, ordinal), political knowledge (dummies), scales for internal ($r^2 = 0.85$) and external political efficacy ($r^2 = 0.55$), and satisfaction with government performance on various topics (eight single items, ordinal).

As sociodemographic controls, we included age (ordinal), gender (dummy), father's educational attainment (dummy), migrant background (dummy), religion (dummy), religiosity (ordinal), and residency (two single items, dummy). All variables were standardized in order to allow for comparison of coefficients in the models.

What Affects People's Perception of Crisis?

We start this further analytical section with a brief look at the relation between the four dimensions of class (occupation, income, education, and perceived belonging) and crisis perception. The simple cross-tabulation shows expected results in all four dimensions. In the occupational dimension, we see stronger support of the "severe crisis" narrative among the middle classes. This supports the claim that it is the middle classes that fear crises even if they have higher status employment than the unskilled workers. Furthermore, the descriptive findings suggest that there is an interrelation between income and crisis susceptibility, that is, the lower the income class, the more people see a severe economic crisis. In regard to education, there is a clear distinction between those holding no or a degree less than secondary education and the higher groups. Finally, people that perceive they belong to the higher and to the middle classes are less eager to think that there is a severe crisis.

Multinominal regression analysis revealed that there are no big differences between the answer categories "no crisis" and "crisis but not severe". Thus, we decided to recode the dependent variable for the subsequent analyses, by merging the two categories. Moreover, it seems advisable to

center our focus on differences between the respondents opting for "severe crisis" and the groups being less alarmed by the current situation. For this purpose, we conducted four binominal logistic regression analyses, the findings being summarized in Table 8.4.

Model 1a consists only of the variables measuring social class affiliation. The findings restate the results of Table 8.3. It supports the interpretation that lower classes are more crisis sensitive, at least if we concentrate on subjective class affiliation: the more we move down the social ladder, the stronger the opinion that we are experiencing a severe crisis.[2] It is interesting to note, however, that these effects decrease and are not statistically significant anymore, once we include a set of variables measuring different forms of deprivation (Model 2a): the model gives us an improved picture as relative deprivation and social trust show significant effects along what we have hypothesized above: higher social trust seems to imply lower crisis sensitivity, though with a comparatively low coefficient, and higher relative deprivation seems to imply higher crisis sensitivity.

In Model 3a we included political attitudes as well as items for satisfaction with government performance in various policy fields. General satis-

Table 8.3 Class belonging along three dimensions and perception of crisis (without "other" and "don't know")

Class dimension	*Class belonging*	*Suffering severe crisis*	*Crisis but not severe*	*No economic crisis*	*Total*
Occupational class	Higher class	19.3%	35.8%	44.9%	100.0%
	Service class	20.4%	39.2%	40.4%	100.0%
	Skilled manual	23%	36.4%	40.7%	100.0%
	Unskilled	16.3%	43.1%	40.6%	100.0%
Income class	Upper class	14.7%	35.1%	50.2%	100.0%
	Middle class	16%	37.1%	47%	100.0%
	Lower middle	21.5%	36%	42.6%	100.0%
	Lower class	23.1%	41%	35.9%	100.0%
Educational class	Higher education	18.2%	38%	43.9%	100.0%
	Secondary	18.7%	38.8%	42.3%	100.0%
	Less than secondary	36.8%	36.8%	26.3%	100.0%
Perceived class	Higher class	14.4%	38.7%	47%	100.0%
	Middle class	14.1%	38.4%	47.6%	100.0%
	Lower middle	24%	39.5%	36.5%	100.0%
	Lower class	29.6%	36.8%	33.7%	100.0%

Table 8.4 Logistic regression Models 1a to 4a with upper class as base

	Model 1a $R^2 = 0.0347$	*Model 2a* $R^2 = 0.1281$	*Model 3a* $R^2 = 0.2405$	*Model 4a* $R^2 = 0.254$
Middle class	0.135	0.062	0.009	0.011
Lower middle class	0.735*	0.371	0.269	0.262
Lower class	1.252**	0.656	0.274	0.260
Lower service class	−0.359	−0.421	−0.538	−0.702**
Skilled manual worker	−0.479	−0.472	−0.510	−0.504
Unskilled worker	−0.839*	−0.772*	−0.654	−0.824
Middle income	0.001	−0.162	−0.283	−0.335
Lower middle income	0.200	−0.059	−0.301	−0.343
Lower income	0.092	−0.352	−0.562	−0.633
Secondary education	0.182	0.265	0.472*	0.587*
Less than secondary	0.441	0.388	0.384	0.490
Relative deprivation		0.791**	0.532**	0.514**
Living alone		−0.068	−0.109	−0.079
Social trust		−0.245**	−0.119	−0.133
Friends regularly		0.058	0.105	0.099
Life satisfaction		−0.023	0.107	0.082
Confident in assistance		−0.145	−0.164	−0.127
Financial assistance		0.081	0.140	0.138
More right wing			0.015	0.012
High political trust			0.031	−0.025
Satisfied w/ democracy			−0.325**	−0.330**
Less support for democracy			0.053	0.033
Culturally left wing			−0.130	−0.139
Economically right wing			−0.218*	−0.225*
Higher populism			0.452**	0.437**
Politically interested			−0.057	−0.027
Higher internal efficacy			−0.138	−0.098
Higher external efficacy			0.009	0.027
Political knowledge			−0.250*	−0.190
Satisfied how government deals with economy			−0.519**	−0.539**
Satisfied how government deals with poverty			0.023	0.019
Satisfied how government deals with education			−0.086	−0.073
Satisfied how government deals with unemployment			−0.338	−0.316
Satisfied how government deals with healthcare			0.156	0.167

(*continued*)

Table 8.4 (continued)

	Model 1a $R^2 = 0.0347$	*Model 2a* $R^2 = 0.1281$	*Model 3a* $R^2 = 0.2405$	*Model 4a* $R^2 = 0.254$
Satisfied how government deals with precemployment			0.114	0.113
Satisfied how government deals with immigration			0.031	0.047
Satisfied how government deals with childcare			0.057	0.050
Father secondary education				−0.153
Father less educated				0.163
Female				0.284**
Older				−0.057
Living in East Germany				0.124
Living in rural area				0.087
Migrant background				−0.001
More religious				0.186
Member of any religion				−0.060
_cons	−1.997**	−1.659**	−1.685**	−1.592**
N	1060	1060	1060	1060

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

faction with democracy decreases crisis sensitivity, which may imply that if people perceive democracy as working and problem solving they are less troubled by crises. Furthermore, interest in politics shows no significant effect but political knowledge, right-wing economic attitudes (both weak effect), satisfaction with democracy, populism, and at least one item measuring satisfaction with government performance (with stronger effects) do as expected. Holding populist opinions on politics increases and satisfaction with how the government deals with economic issues and with democracy overall decreases the perception of a severe crisis. This shows how crisis perception is dependent on the perception of government to act and to handle crisis and nicely fits with the observation we made regarding satisfaction with democracy. If people have the impression that the government is acting, for example, only on behalf of the elites and not for the common good, or just isn't doing a good job on economic issues, they perceive crisis as more severe and frightening. Other policy fields, including poverty and immigration, do not have a significant effect, which may imply that these issues are not connected to a severe economic crisis in the perception of people.[3] Interestingly, political interest and internal and

external political efficacy have no significant effect and the (weak) effect of political knowledge disappears when we include controls (see Model 4a). Secondary education (base, tertiary education) and lower service class occupation (base, higher service class) are significant now on the 0.05 level. The coefficients suggest that lower service class workers are less crisis sensitive but that people with middle class education are more crisis sensitive—more than the less educated (see also Model 4b). Compared to Model 2a, all other significant effects disappeared.

Last but not least, in Model 4a we included a number of socioeconomic control variables. Only gender has a significant effect in our model: women are more likely to see a crisis. Especially the effects of political variables stay stable (populism, satisfaction with democracy, and satisfaction with government dealing with economy), strengthening this core finding of Model 3a. In sum, the explained variance of the models leads us to conclude that deprivation (variables added in Model 2a) and political attitudes (variables added in Model 3a) contribute strongly to crisis susceptibility. Also, the relative stability of the non-importance of class (with the exception of lower service class and secondary education, see paragraph above) leads us to believe that crisis susceptibility is something we can find throughout the social strata, explicitly including the idealized middle classes.

We also conducted a number of binominal regressions varying the respective class reference category to shed light not only on linear effects in the class dimension but also on the relation between them. Since one of our main interests lies on the crisis perceptions by German social classes, and one may expect the lower middle classes to feel under pressure the most, we now turn to a series of models in which we set the lower middle classes (instead of upper class in Table 8.4) as the reference categories for the first set of independent variables (i.e. class belonging along the four dimensions). The results are shown in Table 8.5 and hold some interesting findings.

We observe that subjective affiliation to the saturated middle class instead of the lower middle class decreases the likelihood of seeing a severe economic crisis in Germany (Model 1b). Interestingly, this effect can be observed, to a lesser extent, in Models 2b and 3b, but not if socioeconomic variables are employed. We thus conclude that it is relatively stable. Class along educational attainment is again significant in Model 4b, and we can, combining the Models 4 and 4b with varying reference categories, conclude that there is a linear (and significant) effect. However, both the other class variables do not generate significant effects. Hence, other

Table 8.5 Logistic regression Models 1b to 4b with lower middle class as base

	Model 1b $R^2 = 0.0347$	*Model 2b* $R^2 = 0.1281$	*Model 3b* $R^2 = 0.2405$	*Model 4b* $R^2 = 0.254$
Upper middle class	−0.735*	−0.371	−0.269	−0.262
Middle class	−0.601**	−0.309	−0.260	−0.251
Lower class	0.517*	0.285	0.006	−0.002
Higher service class	0.479	0.472	0.510	0.504
Lower service class	0.119	0.050	−0.028	−0.198
Unskilled worker	−0.361	−0.300	−0.144	−0.319
Higher income	−0.200	0.059	0.301	0.343
Middle income	−0.199	−0.103	0.019	0.008
Lower income	−0.108	−0.293	−0.261	−0.290
Higher education	−0.182	−0.265	−0.472*	−0.587*
Less than secondary	0.259	0.123	−0.089	−0.097
Relative deprivation		0.791**	0.532**	0.514**
Living alone		−0.068	−0.109	−0.079
Social trust		−0.245**	−0.119	−0.133
Friends regularly		0.058	0.105	0.099
Life satisfaction		−0.023	0.107	0.082
Confident in assistance		−0.145	−0.164	−0.127
Financial assistance		0.081	0.140	0.138
More right wing			0.015	0.012
High political trust			0.031	−0.025
Satisfied w/ democracy			−0.325**	−0.330**
Less support for democracy			0.053	0.033
Culturally left wing			−0.130	−0.139
Economically right wing			−0.218*	−0.225*
Higher populism			0.452**	0.437**
Politically interested			−0.057	−0.027
Higher internal efficacy			−0.138	−0.098
Higher external efficacy			0.009	0.027
Political knowledge			−0.250*	−0.190
Satisfied how government deals with economy			−0.519**	−0.539**
Satisfied how government deals with poverty			0.023	0.019
Satisfied how government deals with education			−0.086	−0.073
Satisfied how government deals with unemployment			−0.338	−0.316
Satisfied how government deals with healthcare			0.156	0.167

(*continued*)

Table 8.5 (continued)

	Model 1b $R^2 = 0.0347$	*Model 2b* $R^2 = 0.1281$	*Model 3b* $R^2 = 0.2405$	*Model 4b* $R^2 = 0.254$
Satisfied how government deals with precarious employment			0.114	0.113
Satisfied how government deals with immigration			0.031	0.047
Satisfied how government deals with childcare			0.057	0.050
Father secondary education				−0.153
Father less educated				0.163
Female				0.284**
Older				−0.057
Living in East Germany				0.124
Living in rural area				0.087
Migrant background				−0.001
More religious				0.186
Member of any religion				−0.060
cons	−1.359**	−1.553**	−1.755**	−1.591**
N	1060	1060	1060	1060

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

objective indicators (income, occupation) of social class do not seem to determine crisis sensitivity alone—and we may argue that education aligns here more closely with subjective affiliation with class than with "objective" class. We are not including the other variables employed in the different models in our further discussion since their effects stay more or less the same.

In sum, we found some evidence to support the claim that the lower the social status of a person is and, thus, the more he or she experiences economic pressure, the more will this person perceive of a severe economic crisis in Germany. However, this evidence is only partly viable, because when we include different measures for class, it is mostly subjective class affiliation that matters. In fact, those who perceive themselves to belong to the lower middle class are more crisis sensitive. It is obviously more important to see oneself in a certain societal position (viz. lower middle class) and to perceive deprivation than actually being part of the lower middle class in terms of the "objective" dimensions we applied. Thus, we reject our first hypothesis. But the findings support our claim

that parts of the middle classes, more specifically: those who place themselves on the lower fringe, are more crisis sensitive. This could be explained by the continuing dualization of the German model of capitalism, including its labor market and welfare system (Jackson and Sorge 2012; Palier 2012; Palier and Thelen 2010).

A second finding, however, seems to deliver more exhaustive explanations for crisis sensitivity. Regardless which reference group we choose, three variables came out significant, namely, satisfaction with democracy, populism, and satisfaction with government performance regarding the economy (see Models 4a and 4b). Including these measures (with and without the variables added in Model 2) led to class variables becoming insignificant. People who are satisfied with democracy in general and particularly how the government deals with economic issues are less likely to see a crisis. In return, people holding populist attitudes and who are not convinced by crisis solving capacities of democratic government have higher odds of seeing a "severe economic crisis". Hence, we confirm hypotheses 5 and 6. If we think of recent developments in German politics, this finding seems to be very plausible. The new right-wing populist party "Alternative für Deutschland" is benefiting not only from the currently heated debate about refugees but also from a more substantial frustration with the established parties and alienation from democratic politics (Kiess et al. 2015; Decker et al. 2016). Accordingly, Detje et al. (2013), among others, argue that most political actors continued to lose trust after the crisis, even though many aspects of the actual crisis management are perceived as being successful. We would even argue that the narrative of crisis plays an important role as catalyst for developments that have their origin in the pre-crisis period. Furthermore, relative deprivation does indeed increase crisis susceptibility, though we could not find clear indications for factors of resilience (e.g. social ties).

Finally, while our findings regarding differences between classes seem not very strong at first sight, our claim that crisis is perceived not only by the lowest status groups because they are the ones subjected to economic hardship is actually supported quite firmly: crisis sensitivity is not something we just find among the lower classes. Quite the opposite, the more saturated classes, too, may perceive of a "severe crisis" in the country, depending, among others, on their political views. This goes along with findings in the literature of "status panic" even among the (upper) middle classes (Bude 2014; Ehrenreich 1989; Furlong 2007; Koppetsch 2013;

Schimank et al. 2014) including experiences of instability and insecurity (Burzan 2008; Castel and Dörre 2009).

Conclusion

We set out to investigate whether social status has an effect on the way people perceive the current situation and define the severity of economic crisis in Germany. We started from the observation that a considerable proportion of German respondents testify that they are living a "severe crisis". This fact raises questions about the factors determining crisis sensitivity among the German population. With reference to scholarly writing, we proposed three complementary readings: the susceptibility for economic threats is determined by social class affiliation, and here in particular concerns about social degradation among the middle classes; by exposure to precarity, vulnerabilities, and instabilities in the respondents living conditions; and/or by the political orientations toward the political system and its performance.

Our findings corroborate that class belonging has an effect but that the effect is to be attributed to subjective class affiliations rather than to objective indicators of social status. Perceived class belonging has the expected effect, that is, those seeing themselves as lower middle class are more likely to see a severe crisis. The importance of social class, however, is qualified substantially, because our analysis uncovered, along with previous findings in the literature, that it is other and at least to some part even independent factors that make the difference. The clearest factor seems to be political positions and attitudes—in particular populist orientations and the evaluation of government performance regarding the economy. Furthermore, another important factor seems to be perceived relative economic deprivation. People who feel worse off compared to the past or others are more susceptible to crisis.

However, in our view, this reading of the role of class would be underestimating our findings. The fact that we find a linear effect only for perceived class belonging (and educational attainment) suggests that crisis sensitivity is spread through income groups and occupational classes. Depending on indicators of social status, our descriptive findings underlined that a considerable minority of respondents is sensitive for the threat of economic crisis, with at least 15% of the sample. While the economic situation was stable and promising in Germany during 2015 (the year of our survey), the feeling that something might be wrong is vivid in all lay-

ers of society. This crisis susceptibility is stronger among the disappointed and alienated (Decker et al. 2016). Our results suggest that these feelings have reached the core of German society. Feelings of disappointment and alienation have become more salient and maybe even widespread with the crisis which urges us not to downplay the long-term implications of the crisis.

Notes

1. Speech at the German Bundestag, September 8th 2009, https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Bulletin/2009/09/93-4-bk-bt.html
2. If we test the class dimensions separately, only income and perceived class show significant effects.
3. The only policy field significant when all others are excluded is unemployment. We can assume collinearity between economy and unemployment here.

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