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Lenz, Alexa

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Alexa Lenz

## Trust in times of crisis: opportunities and pitfalls of cooperation between volunteers and local governments

### Abstract

During the so-called refugee crisis of 2015/16 an estimated 25% of the German population was actively engaged as volunteers. Volunteers thus constitute a group of citizens who are high stake actors in crisis management due to their personal experience and direct interaction with the local public administration. This paper scrutinizes how the interaction between volunteers and local administrations in crisis management affects volunteers' trust in the local public administration. Following the literature on administrative crisis management and cross-sector collaboration, the paper defines relevant features of crisis management performance. Methodologically, the paper relies on regression analysis using online survey data from a snowballing sample comprising 900 volunteers who engaged during Germany's 2015/16 migration crisis. The results show that performance perception of the local administration, and the formalization of the different volunteer organizations explain how volunteers' trust in the public administration changes over the course of the crisis.

**Keywords:** Crisis management, trust, voluntary engagement, cross-sectoral cooperation

### Zusammenfassung

*Vertrauen in Krisenzeiten: Chancen und Fallstricke der Zusammenarbeit zwischen Ehrenamtlichen und Kommunalverwaltungen*  
Während der sogenannten Flüchtlingskrise 2015/16 engagierten sich schätzungsweise 25% der Bevölkerung in Deutschland ehrenamtlich. Ehrenamtliche stellen somit eine Gruppe von Bürgerinnen und Bürgern dar, die aufgrund ihrer persönlichen Erfahrung und direkter Interaktion mit der lokalen öffentlichen Verwaltung eine wichtige Rolle im Krisenmanagement spielten. In diesem Beitrag wird untersucht, wie sich die Interaktion zwischen Ehrenamtlichen und Kommunalverwaltungen beim Krisenmanagement auf das Vertrauen der Ehrenamtlichen in die Kommunalverwaltung auswirkt. In Anlehnung an die Literatur zum administrativen Krisenmanagement und zu sektorenübergreifender Zusammenarbeit definiert das Papier relevante Leistungsmerkmale des Krisenmanagements. Methodisch stützt sich das Papier auf Regressionsanalysen mit Online-Befragungsdaten einer Schneeballstichprobe von 900 Freiwilligen, die während der Migrationskrise 2015/16 in Deutschland engagiert waren. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass sowohl die wahrgenommene Leistungsfähigkeit der Kommunalverwaltung als auch der Grad an Formalisierung der verschiedenen Freiwilligenorganisationen erklären, wie sich das Vertrauen der Freiwilligen in die öffentliche Verwaltung im Verlauf der Krise verändert.

**Schlagworte:** Krisenmanagement, Vertrauen, Freiwilliges Engagement, Kooperation

## 1 Introduction

Trust in institutions is a central element for the functioning of democratic systems and affects citizens' political behaviour. When people trust the political institutions in their country, they generally ascribe them universalistic values, such as non-partisanship or power-sharing. This tends to have positive effects on political behaviour, as they trust in their efficacy and participation, free and incorruptible elections, among other things (e.g. Freitag & Bühlmann, 2009; Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012). Institutional trust is also, and maybe especially, relevant in times of crisis, where two main issues arise concerning trust: Firstly, the presence of trust is relevant for crisis governance, as higher levels of trust increase government capacity as well as citizen compliance to law and new regulations (Marien & Hooghe, 2011; Schraff, 2020). Secondly, crises can also directly impact trust within the population. The effects of crises on trust can be driven by the salience of the crisis issue, fairness aspects, or government performance, among others (Hetherington & Husser, 2012; Mazepus & van Leeuwen, 2019; Van de Walle & Migchelbrink, 2020). Regarding local level performance, crises can expose deficits in local administrations, like a lack of digitalization, understaffed bureaucratic administration, or local overburdening.

This paper zooms in and looks at a particular group of citizens, namely citizen volunteers, and how their trust in local administrations changes due to the interaction with administrations in crisis management. When the number of refuge-seeking people arriving in Europe grew exponentially over a short period between 2014 and 2016, the German government struggled. The situation developed into a crisis for the political system, featuring the common crisis characteristics (Meyer, 2016). Administrative crisis management was not enough to deal with the situation; instead, authorities were overwhelmed by the sudden increase in the number of refugees. The local level administrations, responsible for the accommodation, provision of care, and first aid were publicly perceived as paralyzed and dependent on voluntary engagement before recovering operational capacities. Voluntary engagement evolved to be one of the central resources for local administrations to overcome the challenges created by the massive influx of asylum seekers in 2015/16 (Dittmer & Lorenz, 2020). Local public administrations (PA) were dependent on cooperation with volunteer organizations to gather surge capacity and additional resources. At the same time, they saw themselves confronted with an excessive number of volunteers, willing to take over tasks to alleviate the crisis. The response differed in local administrations across Germany, leaving a significant variation of crisis management performance and cooperation success (Bogumil, Hafner, & Kastilan, 2017; Eckhard, Lenz, Seibel, Roth, & Fatke, 2021; Lenz & Eckhard, 2020).

An estimated 25% of the German population was engaged actively in volunteering for refugees (Allensbach, 2017). For many observers, this implied a renaissance of civil society and the beginning of a new division of responsibilities between the state, economic and private actors (Allensbach, 2017; Beck, 2016). Thus, volunteers constitute a particular group of citizens who are high stake actors in crisis management due to their personal experience, direct interaction with the local public administration, and emotional attachment to the topic (Eikenberry, Arroyave, & Cooper, 2007). Because of their direct involvement in crisis management through their work as volunteers, they have direct and intensive contact with the local administration (Schmidt, 2019). This

makes them co-producers and heavily influences their subjective experiences of local crisis management (Fehsenfeld & Levinsen, 2019).

This paper aims at understanding the effects of volunteering during the 2015/16 refugee crisis on the level of trust that engaged citizens have in their local administrations. Following the literature on administrative crisis management and organizational performance (Eckhard, Lenz, Seibel, Roth, & Fatke, 2021; Schomaker & Bauer, 2020), the paper defines three relevant features of crisis management performance that are theorized to directly affect volunteers' trust in the public administration during the time of crisis, *inclusion*, *flexibility*, and *communication*. Furthermore, the type of volunteer organization is expected to matter regarding changing trust in the public administration (Johansson, Danielsson, Kvarnlöf, Eriksson, & Karlsson, 2018; Whittaker, McLennan, & Handmer, 2015). To analyse the hypothesized effects, regression analysis is conducted. The data was retrieved from a German-wide online survey conducted after the refugee crisis among volunteers who were actively engaged during that time.

The contribution of the paper is twofold: It highlights the relevance of performance perception and trust-building potential of good crisis management; and adds the volunteer perspective to crisis management literature, where a growing field of research is concerned with conditions for good collaboration between volunteers and crisis management organizations (e.g. Ferguson, Schmidt, & Boersma, 2018; Kapucu, 2006). So far, hardly any study assumes the volunteer perspective and investigates the opportunities and pitfalls of cooperation between volunteers and public administration, particularly not regarding trust.

## 2 Perspectives on volunteering and trust in public administrations during crises

### 2.1 Volunteering and crisis management

Volunteers play an essential role in crisis management. Among other features, they can 'fill the void' when the administrative emergency response is not sufficient (Drabek & McEntire, 2003). They constitute relevant surge capacity for administrations (Ansell & Boin, 2019) and are a characteristic of community resilience, strengthening the community and cohesion through their active engagement (Roth & Prior, 2019). Crises are a particularly fertile context for the active engagement of communities, volunteer organizations, and spontaneous citizens. For the so-called refugee crisis of 2015/16, the body of literature on voluntary engagement and social movements is constantly growing (e.g. Rast, Younes, Smets, & Ghorashi, 2019; Schmidt, 2019; Simsa, Rameder, Aghamanoukjan, & Totter, 2018). The main topics of research are structures and motives of voluntary engagement (Karakayali & Kleist, 2015), collaboration with authorities and networks (Aumüller, Daphi, & Biesenkamp, 2015), and societal effects of volunteering, such as resilience and community building (Rast, Younes, Smets, & Ghorashi, 2019).

If the institutions responsible for organizing a swift organizational response, however, were perceived to be overburdened and failing with regards to crisis management, the effects of volunteering on the engaged individual might not always be positive.

Volunteers, who are covering this institutional void, and who often felt confronted with the failure of response organizations to react to the reinforced conditions of the refugee crisis, are subject to experiencing such adverse effects. Jonas Toubøl (2019) shows that the consequence of political activism during the 2015/16 migration crisis was discontent with the institutional reactions causing civic resistance. However, the direct effects for the citizen volunteer participating in crisis management action on trust have been understudied so far.

## 2.2 The effects of volunteering on trust in institutions

According to social capital research (Delhey & Newton, 2005; Putnam, 2000; Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1994) and interaction theory (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), volunteering (and civic engagement more generally) fosters social trust and vertical trust in institutions. Repeated face-to-face interactions between different groups and personal experiences are the main driver for this effect, as they reduce pre-defined stereotypes towards the whole group of people. While the theory originates from research of ethnic in- and out-groups, research in the context of public administration's interactions with civil society seems to back up contact theory assumptions (Frederickson, 1997; Strüngmann, 2020). Hence, voluntary engagement as a form of interaction between volunteers and administrative personnel fosters understanding and satisfaction through cooperation (Delhey & Newton, 2005; Putnam, 2000).

Nevertheless, the positive effect of volunteering on trust is contested. The trust literature gives some insights on the potential causes for this effect: Interactions between citizens and the state can challenge how citizens view the institution in terms of fairness of the outcome and procedures as well as external efficacy, i.e., whether the institution reacts responsively to citizens' demands and engagement (Freitag & Bühlmann, 2009). The personal experience of encounters and interactions with individual actors of the institutions mainly determines legitimacy and trust in those institutions (Sivesind, Pospíšilová, & Frič, 2013; Tankebe, 2013). Therefore, changes in trust are driven by the perceived performance of the public administration. For the interaction with volunteers and public administration, in particular, Karl Sivesind, Tereza Pospíšilová and Pavol Frič (2013) found a positive effect of volunteering on trust if the volunteers experienced well-functioning institutions.

## 2.3 Trust in public administrations and the role of administrative performance

This is also reflected with a particular link to literature that deals more broadly with citizen trust in the public administration in general (e.g. Kampen, Van De Walle, & Bouckaert, 2006; Mizrahi, Vigoda-Gadot, & Van Ryzin, 2010; Strüngmann, 2020; Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003; Van De Walle & Six, 2014). Here, the argument is that citizen satisfaction with administrative performance directly influences their attitudes towards the state and public administration. Further, the role of the administrative process seems to matter more than actual outcomes. Local administrations that are perceived as unfair, bureaucratic, or suffer from low external efficacy, potentially provoke a loss of satisfaction and encourage distrust. Well-working performance perceptions

(e.g. fairness, inclusion), in contrast, potentially produce positive societal effects with regards to trust (Rölle, 2009; 2010; Van de Walle & Migchelbrink, 2020; Van Ryzin, 2009; 2015).

While the effect of performance perceptions on trust in the public administration is mainly studied for the general population, even more pronounced effects can be expected for volunteers. Literature on the effects of performance perceptions on trust in public administrations has found that they are particularly influential for forming general attitudes towards the government when they a) involve direct personal experiences and b) involve emotional or existential issues, that are of greater importance to the individual (e.g. Rölle, 2009; Strüngmann, 2020). Compared to ‘regular’ citizens, volunteers are high-stake actors in crisis management. Due to their direct experiences, emotional attachment, and personal interactions, they perceive crisis management on the frontline. Therefore, what they experience and how they view the performance of the local administration will influence their attitudes and trust level to a greater extent.

## 2.4 Trust of volunteers in local administrations during crisis

While the theory featured above linked arguments on citizen trust in the public administration with volunteer trust and volunteering in crisis management, this section aims to understand what features of public administration behaviour affect volunteers’ trust in these institutions and draws on cross-sector collaboration and crisis management literature (Nolte, Martin, & Boenigk, 2012; Simo & Bies, 2007).<sup>1</sup> If cooperation and interaction between local authorities in crisis management and citizen volunteers run smoothly, positive societal effects are expected. Nevertheless, a successful collaboration with volunteers during a crisis response is challenging and subject to a set of dilemmas and obstacles for effectiveness and accountability (Barsky, Trainor, Torres, & Aguirre, 2007; Linnell, 2014). Therefore, scholars have scrutinized the facilitating factors for cooperation in such multi-actor contexts. Issues such as levels of formalization of volunteer organizations (Johansson, Danielsson, Kvarnlöf, Eriksson, & Karlsson, 2018), quality of cooperation between formal and unaffiliated volunteers (Waldman, Yumagulova, Mackwani, Benson, & Stone, 2018), and particular governance responses leading to successful outcomes when engaging with citizen volunteers (Schmidt, 2019) have been investigated. In that line, this paper identifies three features of administrative behaviour that potentially lead to beneficial effects on trust, fostering mutual support and complementation (Kapucu, 2006; Nolte, Martin, & Boenigk, 2012):

The first and most crucial feature is successful *inclusion* in the management response. Administrations that display good quality of networks generally perform better in crisis management (Eckhard, Lenz, Seibel, Roth, & Fatke, 2021; Schomaker & Bauer, 2020). While inclusion is essential for collaboration between volunteers and public administration, it is challenging to achieve. Initially, cooperation takes place outside of an official crisis management operation. On the one hand, practitioners on the inside are officially responsible for managing a situation. On the other hand, volunteers, either organized in formal organizations or spontaneous, are willing to become part of the solution: “All prospective volunteers are outsiders with regard to the official response operation until someone makes a decision to let them in” (Johansson, Danielsson, Kvarnlöf, Eriksson, & Karlsson, 2018, p. 523). Inclusion into the crisis

management response can be more exclusive or less exclusive, and in the worst-case volunteers might be rejected entirely. The extent of inclusion depends on specific governance responses and the willingness and the ability of the public administration. Characteristics for successful inclusion were guidance and support provided by the public administration, an appropriate division of labour, and clear distribution of responsibilities. Therefore, streamlining the government process, adequate resource distribution and effective governance have been established as key to successful volunteer integration. The consequences are different governance outputs generating different perspectives on the legitimacy of the response (Ferguson, Schmidt, & Boersma, 2018; Johansson, Danielsson, Kvarnlöf, Eriksson, & Karlsson, 2018; Schmidt, 2019).

*H1: The more volunteers feel included in the administrative crisis management, the more positive is the effect on trust and vice versa.*

The second factor refers to *flexibility* as a necessary administrative feature to adapt to the necessities and different organizational logics of volunteer organizations and to organize a quick and effective crisis management reaction (Lenz & Eckhard, 2021; Nowell, Steelman, Velez, & Yang, 2018; Webb & Chevreau, 2006). Indeed, flexibility has been identified as an essential facilitator for crisis management effectiveness (Eckhard, Lenz, Seibel, Roth, & Fatke, 2021) and cross-sector collaboration (Nolte, Martin, & Boenigk, 2012). Flexibility is, among other factors, characterized through creative and fast-coping strategies, mobilization of staff capacities, and a decentralization of decision structures. Flexibility in administrative behaviour can substantially improve the collaboration between public administrations and volunteers, as it directly affects the quality of cooperation. For instance, Rast, Younes, Smets and Ghorashi (2019) show for the refugee crisis that flexibility enables the integration of volunteers in crisis management solutions and consequently enhances the capacity of local administrations to adapt to different organization types and logics. If the administration is perceived to react flexible, volunteers usually encounter fewer bureaucratic barriers, and it is easier for the different organizations to adapt to each other. Finally, flexibility by the public administration can also be perceived as a willingness to handle the situation and help the affected persons (Karakayali & Kleist, 2015). Therefore, the second hypothesis refers to how volunteers perceived flexibility within local crisis management.

*H2: The more flexible the administrative crisis management is perceived, the more positive is the effect on trust and vice versa.*

Finally, crisis *communication* plays a crucial role in good crisis performance (Coombs, 2008). By shaping public perceptions and perspectives on related issues, communication facilitates and shapes cross-sector collaboration (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2015; Koschmann, Kuhn, & Pfarrer, 2012). Rahel Schomaker and Michael Bauer (2020) link knowledge sharing and communication to successful crisis management performance for the 2015/16 refugee crisis, in particular. However, including volunteers in official crisis responses is complex and difficult and the dynamics might change from crisis to crisis and even within the same crisis. The difficulty is also the “disintegration of the dividing wall between professional communicators and the engaged audiences in crisis communication” (Saputro, 2016, p. 64). The communicators in crisis management are usually not trained public relations managers, but they still need to adopt the role of

professional communicators who are aware of the audience's need (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005). Therefore, open and transparent communication is another key to good and fruitful cooperation between public administrations and volunteers. A solution-oriented communication strategy by the local public administration can even promote further willingness to actively engage (Aumüller, Daphi, & Biesenkamp, 2015).

However, the trust enhancing potential of good communication has so far only been shown in quantitative studies from different fields of trust literature. There, transparency and well-functioning information channels have been found to increase trust through shaping expectations and increasing levels of satisfaction (James, 2011; Wu & Jung, 2016). This finding can potentially be transferred to the context of volunteers, indicating that transparent communication by the public administration and openness towards knowledge sharing should increase volunteer trust in the public administration, respectively.

*H3: The better volunteers perceive the communication by the local public administration, the more positive is the effect on trust and vice versa.*

## 2.5 Clashing organizational logics: The moderating effect of volunteer organization types

Next to the defined features of public administration behaviour, different types of volunteer organizations may affect trust between public administration and volunteers. In particular, structures of cross-sector cooperation that go along with the degree of formalization of the volunteer organization are necessary to include actors in crisis responses (Kapucu, 2006; Nolte, Martin, & Boenigk, 2012). Previous studies showed that the more formalized volunteer organizations are, the more rapidly they are included in official crisis management. Hence, different institutional forms of volunteer organizations affect their ability to successfully cooperate with public authorities (Ferguson, Schmidt, & Boersma, 2018; Johansson, Danielsson, Kvarnlöf, Eriksson, & Karlsson, 2018; Whittaker, McLennan, & Handmer, 2015). Especially spontaneous and informal volunteers face high barriers to being integrated into official responses. Studies on different forms and types of voluntary engagement classify volunteer organizations into four groups according to their degree of formalization (descending order): Established organizations, extending organizations, emergent organizations and unaffiliated volunteers (Johansson, Danielsson, Kvarnlöf, Eriksson, & Karlsson, 2018; Whittaker, McLennan, & Handmer, 2015).

Established forms and cooperation between the public and the 'third' or 'no-profit' sector have a long-standing tradition in the German system and therefore fall back on an existing set of mechanisms for collaboration and experience. This form of meso- and micro-corporatism between the third sector and public administration facilitates cooperation between the state and established volunteer organizations in particular (Anheier & Seibel, 2013; Seibel, 2016). Established and extending types of volunteer organizations are likely to be more efficient due to prior experience, a formalized set of rules, hierarchy, and accountability within the volunteer organization. Existing channels of communication and coordination between the volunteer organization and the public administration can be best exploited by formalized volunteer organizations and make cooperation and guidance easier. Furthermore, formalization and the often-times



year-long experience of volunteers make collaboration fast and feasible, and the potential for frustration is reduced, as less conflict between organizational logics can be expected (Simsa, Rameder, Aghamanoukjan, & Totter, 2018; Whittaker, McLennan, & Handmer, 2015).

In contrast, spontaneous and emergent volunteer groups are a more recent phenomenon and have been a more recent challenge to administrations. Emergent organizations are groups created in the context of the crisis, grassroots organizations with new structures and new tasks, and described as rather loose networks of active citizens who engage over a shorter period in a specific event. Spontaneous volunteers lack any relevant organizational affiliation at all (Johansson, Danielsson, Kvarnlöf, Eriksson, & Karlsson, 2018; Stallings & Quarantelli, 1985). Such organizations do not rely on a pre-existing network of cooperation and collaboration, and they do not possess established communication channels with the local administration (Simsa, Rameder, Aghamanoukjan, & Totter, 2018; Whittaker, McLennan, & Handmer, 2015). Consequently, they potentially suffer more from the clashes of organizational logics. Volunteers in emergent organizations or unbound spontaneous volunteers are often less experienced, engage over shorter periods, rely on loose coordination instead of formalization and expose high degrees of flexibility and uncertainty. For public administrations, integrating those types of volunteers creates more difficulties (Ferguson, Schmidt, & Boersma, 2018; Roth & Prior, 2019; Simsa, Rameder, Aghamanoukjan, & Totter, 2018).

Consequently, and adding to the performance hypothesis, I argue that the type of volunteer organization moderates how volunteers perceive the performance of their public administration in crisis management. As a result, collaboration between the local public administration and more formalized volunteer organizations should produce less potential for conflict and frustration and reduce the effect of performance on trust in the public administration.

*H4: The more formalized the type of volunteer organization people are engaged in, the less pronounced is the effect of performance on trust in the public administration.*

### 3 Data and Method

To find out about the volunteers' performance perceptions of administrative crisis management and respective changes in trust, survey data of engaged citizens who volunteered during the influx of asylum seekers in 2015/2016 is used. The data was conducted via a web-based survey between December 2018 and February 2019 to systematically map the experiences made by volunteers during the influx of asylum seekers in 2015/2016. Email addresses of welfare organizations and civil society organizations, that were active in the field of refugee migration in 2015/16, were manually collected for all German districts (NUTS3 level).<sup>2</sup> The district-level was chosen as this administrative level had to supply the basic needs of arriving asylum seekers. An official invitation email with project information and an access link for the online survey on the *UniPark* platform was then sent to all volunteer organizations. Based on the snowball principle, the addressees were asked to forward the link via membership and volunteer mailing lists. The advantage of this approach is that not only people with a central management or coordination function can be reached (these are typically the recipients

of the general email), but a large number of volunteers can also be reached through dissemination. In total, 1,065 survey responses were received. After data processing and deletion of missing values, the final sample for the analysis contained 900 respondents in total. The sample is not representative of the German population in general, as women, older people and higher educated people are overrepresented.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.1 Operationalization of Variables

All dependent and independent variables of the analysis were collected via the same survey. Recommendations mentioned in the literature on how to avoid common-method biases were considered (Spector, 2006): instead of relying on single items, indices were constructed for all variables to improve robustness. The response variable of the study is individual change in trust in the Public Administration (PA). Trust before and after the crisis was measured via two items asking how much respondents trusted their PA before and after the crisis 2015/16. The change in trust was calculated by using the difference of trust after the crisis minus the trust before the crisis, resulting in a scale from -10 to 10 with negative values indicating a decrease of trust from before the crisis to after the crisis, 0 indicating no change and positive values indicating increased trust levels. The average change of trust in the sample is -0.47, indicating a slight tendency towards decreases in trust.

Three explanatory variables are included in the models as proxies for the perceived performance of the local PA during crisis management. *Inclusion (1)* describes how well volunteers felt integrated into the crisis management response by the PA. Similar to previous studies on the inclusion or participation of volunteers in crisis management (Eckhard, Lenz, Seibel, Roth, & Fatke, 2021), the index of inclusion consists of two items: 1. *How elaborated were the formal and informal structures of cooperation between your organization and the county's public administration in your district?* 2. *To what extent did the public administration in your district provide ways to incorporate volunteers in the field of asylum?*<sup>4</sup> Both items were measured on a scale from 0 (= not at all) to 10 (= very much). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of the index is 0.74.

The second indicator for administrative performance in crisis management is *flexibility (2)*. Flexibility in crisis management literature is often associated with pragmatism (Ansell & Boin, 2019), and innovation or creativity for better development of coping strategies (Webb & Chevreau, 2006). Certainly, volunteers lack insight with regard to organizational processes within the administration. However, it can indeed be expected that volunteers perceive flexibility and willingness to adapt to the situation on the part of PA. The index measuring perceived flexibility of PA is thus composed of a total of four items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.87$ ): *creative handling of bureaucratic hurdles, the willingness of the bureaucrats to do extra work, the ability to find quick and effective solutions to problems, and flexible governance style in general*. Again, all items were measured in a Likert scale from 0 (= not at all) to 10 (= very much).

With regards to *communication (3)* items capturing the extent of availability and openness of the PA were used. Previous studies showed that the degree of knowledge sharing, openness for communication and transparency matter in this context (James, 2011; Schomaker & Bauer, 2020). The items of the communication index comprise 1) whether the administration reacted to requests and inquiries by the volunteers and 2)

whether volunteers felt adequately and sufficiently informed by the public administration (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.79$ ). The scales ranged from not at all (0) to permanent availability/very detailed information (10). The Likert items are treated as interval data which can be used for parametrical analysis.

In addition to the effects of inclusion, flexibility, and communication on changes in trust in the PA (H1-H3), the fourth hypothesis also suggested more pronounced effects of those performance dimensions depending on the *type of volunteer organization* people were engaged in. For the categorization of the different organizational types and their degrees of formalization, the classifications of Whittaker, McLennan and Handmer (2015) and Johansson, Danielsson, Kvarnlöf, Eriksson and Karlsson (2018) were adopted for the analysis: Organizations were categorized according to their degree of formalization in 1) established organizations as the most formalized type of organization, followed by 2) local clubs as extending organizations, 3) new initiatives as emergent groups, and finally and with the least degree of formalization 4) spontaneous volunteers as unaffiliated individuals.<sup>5</sup> The survey participants are distributed within the four categories as follows: Established organizations = 126, local clubs = 70, new initiatives = 610, spontaneous volunteers = 110.

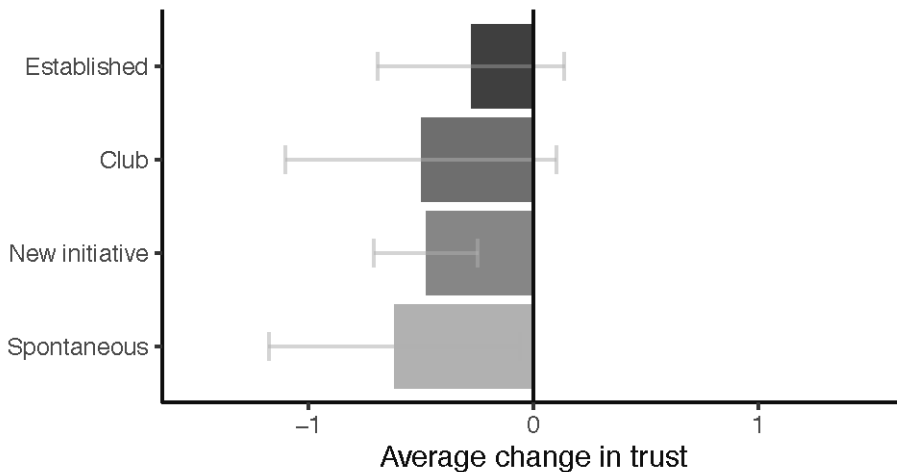
As control variables, three standard demographics – age, gender, and education –, and the motivation for volunteering are used in the full model. The control variables are influential variables for trust in institutions in the literature (e.g. Delhey & Newton, 2005; Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012). First, the literature suggests a gender effect with women being more likely to trust institutions and public administration. Based on findings from other studies, age is also an influential variable, usually pointing in the direction that older people show more trust in institutions than younger people (e.g. Christensen & Lægheid, 2005). Furthermore, previous research has shown that opportunity structures and resources matter for institutional trust: People with higher education levels tend to better reflect the quality of politics and thus are more trustworthy in democratic systems (e.g. Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012). Finally, motivation is used as an additional control variable, as it is argued that especially informal and new volunteer organizations and initiatives are often built out of grievances or deficiencies (Pott, 2002) and during the refugee crisis of 2015/16 many organizations became active to react to the insufficiencies of the public administration to meet the basic needs of the arriving asylum seekers and to the overall urgency of the situation (Karakayali & Kleist, 2015). This implies that an analysis of changes in trust in the PA should at least control for volunteer motivation during this specific crisis. This study, therefore, includes motivation as a categorical variable with three factors: a) support, for volunteers willing to lend their helping hands, b) shape, for people aiming to shape and change crisis management and the interaction with refugees, and c) other, for all volunteers who could not class themselves in either category. A further set of control variables including urban or rural living areas, federal states, East or West Germany, as well as the weekly timeshare of volunteering are reported in the *Appendix*.

## 4 Results

This paper follows two main arguments: First, volunteering during the refugee crisis changed trust in the PA based on how volunteers perceived the crisis management performance (H1-3); and second, this performance perception is dependent on the type of volunteer organization people are engaged in (H4). This section presents the results of the quantitative analysis.

Firstly, descriptive evidence on the dependent variable *changes in trust* shows a small tendency towards decreased trust levels consequential to voluntary engagement in the 2015/16 refugee crisis in Germany. The distribution of the dependent variable shows that, on average, volunteer trust in the public administration decreased by 0.47 points (mean = -0.47, t-test for difference in means:  $p < 0.001$ ) from before to after the crisis. The average changes in trust are depicted in *Figure 1* for all four types of volunteer organizations. Overall, volunteers who were engaged in established organizations show slightly smaller decreases in trust.

*Figure 1:* Changes in trust in local administration by type of volunteer organization



*Note:* Descriptive bivariate depiction for average change in trust reported for each type of volunteer organization. 95% confidence intervals. N = 900.

*Source:* Own illustration.

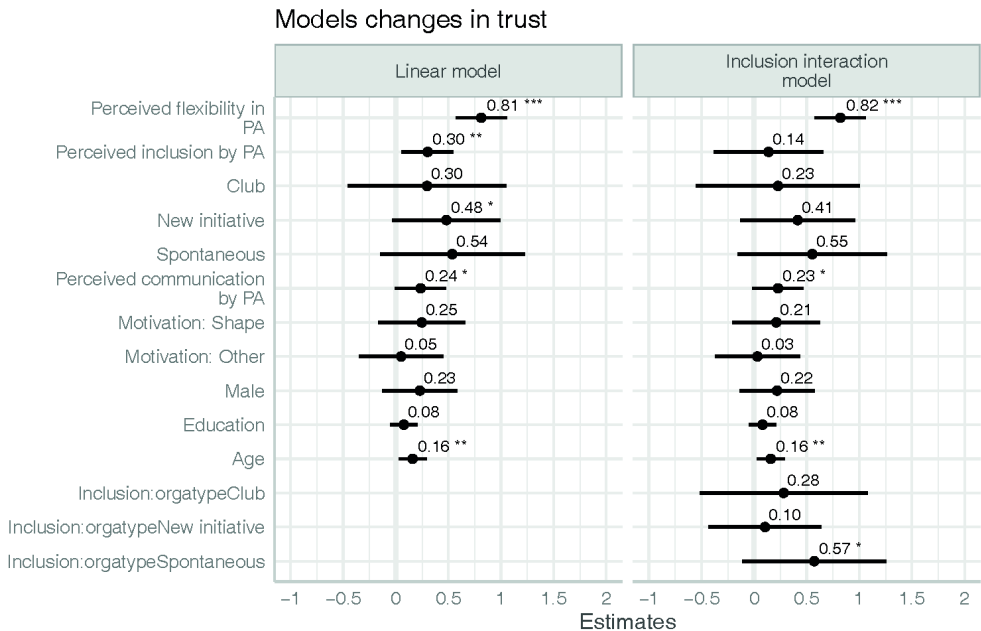
Yet, and more importantly, the regression analysis puts this finding into perspective by indicating that the perceived quality of cooperation matters. To analyse the effects of three performance variables, flexibility, inclusion, and communication, OLS (ordinary least squares) analysis with interaction effects is used in this paper. Four different models were calculated, one full model including all the performance predictors (H1-H3), organization type and the control variables, as well as three interaction models for the performance effects conditional on the type of volunteer organization (H4). Following Gelman and Hill (2006), all numerical explaining and control variables were standardized.<sup>6</sup> All models show a good fit with regards to the overall model statistics, the F-statistics were all significant with rejectable F-tests, and the adjusted R-squared scores

are performing quite well (Full Model: 0.181 | Interaction Model Flexibility: 0.180 | Interaction Model Inclusion: 0.182 | Interaction Model Communication: 0.181). As the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> accounts for the variance that is explained by the model, while penalizing the number of terms, the models explain about 18% of the variance in changes of trust in the PA (all regression tables in the *Appendix*).

### 4.1 The relevance of performance for trust (H1-H3)

*Figure 2* shows the coefficient plots of the full linear model and one interaction model. The linear model tests the effects hypothesized in H1 – H3 of PA performance on volunteer trust without the interactions suggested by H4. Due to conditional effects of interactions, the average effects of the explaining variables on changes in trust in the public administration can only be interpreted in the unconditional linear model. The coefficients of flexibility, inclusion, and communication are all significant and positive (*Figure 2*, left). The results of the full model confirm that flexibility within the public administration and inclusion of volunteers by the PA are both positively associated with increasing trust in the PA (0.813,  $p < 0.01$  and 0.303,  $p < 0.05$  respectively). The result for communication also suggests this positive relationship, but only on a 10% significance level.<sup>7</sup> Hence, while hypotheses one and two can be confirmed, hypothesis three points towards the same direction, but is not significant enough to be confirmed.

*Figure 2:* Coefficient plot for linear and interaction model inclusion



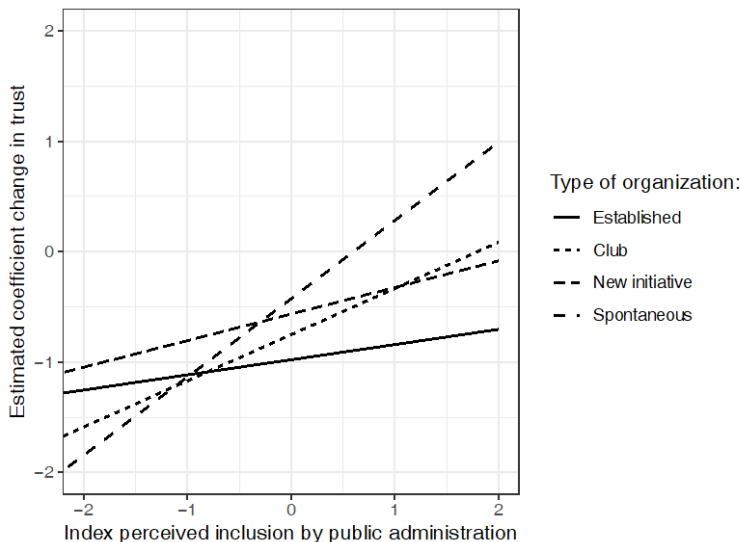
*Note:* Results of OLS regression analysis (DV = change in trust). Full regression table is reported in the *Appendix*. All numerical explanatory variables are standardized. N= 900 for both models. \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

*Source:* Own illustration.

## 4.2 The moderating role of types of volunteer organizations (H4)

The fourth hypothesis suggested that the performance effect on changes in trust is dependent on the type of volunteer organization people are engaged in. To show such an effect, interaction terms are chosen to best describe this relationship. Three interaction models are estimated, all based on the full linear model, but including one interaction term for each performance predictor, inclusion, flexibility, and communication (full regression tables in *online Appendix*). The moderations between organization type and flexibility, and organization type and communication are not significant, and all respective results are only reported in the *online Appendix*. The interaction term between inclusion and spontaneous volunteers with established organizations as reference category is positive and significant (0.572,  $p < 0.1$ ). The coefficients are reported in *Figure 2* on the right. *Figure 3* features a graphical depiction of the predicted values of the interaction. Average marginal effect graphs supporting the significant and positive interaction of the terms are reported in the *online Appendix* (Brambor, Clark, & Golder, 2006).

*Figure 3:* Predicted values for changes in trust and inclusion by organization type



*Note:* Predicted values for interaction model inclusion & type of volunteer organization (DV = change in trust). Full regression table and average marginal effect plots to support the findings are reported in the *Appendix*. All numerical explanatory variables are standardized. N= 900.

*Source:* Own illustration.

The results confirm the expectation that the effect of inclusion on changes in trust is dependent on the type of organization the volunteers are engaged in. When volunteers perceive the public administration to be particularly inclusive (high levels of inclusion), spontaneous volunteers show significantly higher associated values of changes in trust than established organizations (reference category).

Hence, while no significant interactions were found between the different types of organizations and the two performance indicators, flexibility and communication, a

moderation effect was shown for the effects of inclusion on changes in trust, conditional on the types of volunteer organization.

Hypothesis four can therefore be only partly confirmed. It is particularly spontaneous volunteers who, when they feel included in the administrative crisis management, gain additional trust in the public administration. If they feel badly included, however, they also show a higher decrease in trust compared to the other groups. In contrast to all other organizational types, spontaneous volunteers are the only ones who are not organized in some sort of (more or less) formalized organization, which is why they appear to be more dependent on inclusion than all other groups.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper investigates the effects of organizational performance of the public administration on volunteer trust in the public administration. It features three relevant aspects of crisis management performance that affect how volunteers perceive the administrative response. First, the results showed that whether volunteers' trust in the administration decreases or increases from before to after the crisis is dependent on how the local administration manages the crisis. Administrations that reacted flexible, unbureaucratic, and cared about inclusive structures and extensive communication, positively influenced how much volunteers trust them. Thus, good performance can absorb decreases in trust, or even increase trust levels of volunteers in the public administration. Second, the degree of formalization of the volunteer organization also matters: Spontaneous volunteers experienced the most pronounced increases in trust when they felt included by the public administration. With poor inclusion, however, the loss of trust was more pronounced for spontaneous volunteers than for those of more formalized organizations. Due to the lower degree of formalization, spontaneous volunteers are more dependent on an inclusive public administration; they are also less adapted to hierarchical processes and possess fewer channels for cooperation with the public administration, on which they can rely.

Given the relevant role that volunteering and resilience play in current debates around crises, studying volunteer perceptions as compared to citizens in general, holds important value. Unlike in population-representative studies, this paper focused on volunteers as a particular group of high-stake citizens who experience crisis management by direct interaction. Compared to citizens who usually perceive crisis management indirectly, the unique position of volunteers as co-producers of crisis management offers a compelling and promising approach to better understand the effects of direct interactions with the public administration on trust in more general terms. Although the results cannot be directly transferred to the general population, the sample displays a similar distribution to previous studies on volunteers in Germany showing that volunteers are more likely to be educated, female, and slightly older (Simonson et al., 2021). Therefore, further research on the effects of crisis management perception in the general population is necessary.

Future research on the effects of volunteering during crises on trust should also extend to broader data with additional information on local community characteristics and account for time variance, ideally through panel data based on a larger sample – both of which are critical limitations of this paper: The variation between the districts with regards to the size of the local migrant population or prior experience with migrant integration (in terms of language, equipment, interpreting services, etc.) cannot

be accounted for in this study. The sampling strategy of the paper bears additional limitations: due to snowballing effects in the recruitment of respondents, self-selection biases cannot be entirely excluded, and the time-lag introduced by the retrospective volunteer perspective potentially suffers from overlay of more recent volunteer tasks. Yet, it is particularly crucial personal experiences and threats that change attitudes toward the public administration (Strüngmann, 2020). The migration crisis of 2015/16 triggered an unprecedented wave of voluntary engagement with high personal commitment to the issue of migration (Karakayali, 2019), which will be remembered more easily as unique event by the volunteers involved.

Overall, the study presents a starting point for a better understanding of the effects of volunteering during crises and highlights the importance of administrative performance on changes in trust in public administration. In contrast to existing studies on cooperation between crisis response organizations and volunteers, this paper shifts the focus on the volunteer perspective and associated changes in trust. Volunteering does not automatically contribute to higher levels of trust or increased resilience but depends on whether the administration manages to perform flexibly and inclusively and establishes functioning channels of communication. Thus, this paper also bears practical relevance for local administrations: Firstly, administrative performance during crises matters for volunteers' trust. Secondly, the successful inclusion of informal volunteers, compared to other types of volunteers, has the most positive effects on generating trust in the public administration. Instead of focusing on established forms of cooperation, investing in the inclusion of spontaneous and informal volunteers can prove to be a valuable tool for generating trust. Hence, to utilize the potential for creating trust in public administrations, more emphasis should be put on improving cooperation with initiatives and spontaneous volunteers.

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## Notes

\* The *online appendix* to this article can be retrieved from the dms website.

1 For a more general overview of cross-sector collaboration see e.g. Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2015).

2 Further information can be found in *online Appendix A*.

3 A detailed description of the data collection, cleaning, and a comparison of sample characteristics with other volunteer studies in Germany and the overall population can be found in the online Appendix.

4 The survey was conducted in German. The original wording of the items is reported in the Appendix D.



- 5 Spontaneous volunteers do not actually present a type of organization, but individual volunteers. For reasons of simplicity, they are subsumed under the 'organization type' term.
- 6 Scale function in R (centering via subtraction of column mean; scaling via standard deviations).
- 7 Checks for non-linearities and multicollinearity are reported in the online Appendix, no conspicuous results were found.

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*Contact the author:*

Alexa Lenz, Universität Konstanz, Research Group for Public Administration & Organization Theory, Universitätsstraße 10, 78464 Konstanz, email: alexa.lenz@uni-konstanz.de.