

Political Trust in the Time of COVID-19 in Germany

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1. GOVERNMENTAL DECISION MAKING AND PUBLIC SUPPORT

During the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis in Germany that lasted from March to May 2020, parliamentary participation in political decisions declined in the face of executive-dominated decision making. However, the majority of citizens supported the measures taken and the governmental actions at federal and state levels, which thus underlines a high degree of output legitimacy. Moreover, the input legitimacy in the sense of specific support for the governing staff has increased during the COVID-19 crisis. At least regarding the first wave of COVID-19,² citizens in Germany had confidence in the government's problem-solving capacities. This development is a glimmer of hope for the current federal coalition government, because findings on the permanence of political support in times of crises are equivocal.³ Before March 2020, support for the federal government parties had sunk to a historic low but increased significantly after the COVID-19 pandemic started in Germany, whereas the opposition parties lost the favour of the electorate across the board.⁴

¹ I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Dirk Lüddecke, Dr. Wiebke Drews and Rabea Barth for their helpful comments on the paper.

² The paper was written in August 2020, when the second wave slowly started.

³ Healy, Andrew, and Malhorta, Neil. 2009. "Myopic Voters and Natural Disaster Policy". *American Political Science Review*, 103 (3): 400; Bechtel, Michael M., and Hainmueller, Jens. 2011. "How Lasting Is Voter Gratitude? An Analysis of the Short- and Long-Term Electoral Returns to Beneficial Policy". *American Journal of Political Science*, 55 (4): 865–866.

⁴ IfD Allensbach Institut für Demoskopie. 2020. *Sonntagsfrage*, (<https://www.ifd-allensbach.de/studien-und-berichte/sonntagsfrage/gesamt.html>), accessed 30 July 2020.

This trend is also evident in other European countries.⁵ Against this background, the present paper wants to examine the reasons behind the comparatively high levels of political trust in German coalition government in times of Covid-19.

Times of crisis are not just times when governments are at the centre of attention and political decisions are (largely) made without parliamentary involvement – for example, by decrees or orders. They are above all also times of short-term cross-party consensus. This is the only reason why this kind of executive-driven governing is possible in Germany:⁶ members of parliament are willing to put competition and rivalry aside for a short time period. Party colours have become pastel shades.

Crises increase the urgency to act, especially those crises with an overwhelming, widespread economic impact. This is the case with the COVID-19 pandemic, of course in conjunction with the massive health challenges. In addition to the urgency, voters are particularly aware of how well politicians cooperate. Party-political skirmishes are perceived as unnecessary in these times. The party-political debate, which is generally essential from a democratic point of view, is then quickly interpreted as poor prioritisation. The electorate punishes the elected quickly and effectively by withdrawing votes. In particular, voters expect the representatives to be able to act.⁷ If expectations are not fulfilled, the incumbency effect – according to the retrospective voting assumption – can have a negative impact during the next election.⁸ Conversely, if representatives fulfil their responsibilities, “retrospective performance evaluation”⁹ can strengthen trust in political actors, and those in government have an advantage, because they are officially in charge and can more easily reap the rewards for successful action.

In the course of the COVID-19 crisis, the population in Germany has had to accept significant limitations: week-long exit restrictions (but no nationwide curfew),

⁵ Bol, Damien, Giani, Marco, Blais, André, and Loewen, Peter John. 2020. “The effect of COVID-19 lockdowns on political support: Some good news for democracy?”. *European Journal of Political Research*.

⁶ Riedl, Jasmin. 2019. “Uncovering legislative pace in Germany: A methodical and computational application to answer temporal questions of law-making”. *Government Information Quarterly*, 36 (4).

⁷ Healy and Malhorta. Op. cit.: 388.

⁸ Achen, Christopher H., and Bartels, Larry M. 2004. “Blind Retrospection. Electoral Responses to Drought, Flue, and Shark Attacks”. *Estudio/Working Paper*; Fiorina, Morris Paul. 1981. *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

⁹ Bol et al. Op. cit.: 6.

home schooling, short-time work, business closures, and the obligation to wear masks. Visits to nursing homes and hospitals were prohibited. The deceased could not be buried as usual. These measures do not only have short-term economic and social consequences; the medium- and long-term consequences are already becoming evident.¹⁰ Despite these restrictions, the federal and state governments – insofar as they followed a strict course of action – have garnered enormous support. However, this support goes beyond the mere voter’s consent to laws passed and infection control measures taken: trust in the federal government with regard to the management of the COVID-19 crisis has been extraordinarily high. At least temporarily, there was little sign of a crisis of confidence in politics.

The federal government has been considered capable in overcoming the greatest health crisis since the Federal Republic of Germany was founded, although the competence in infection control measures in the federal system of Germany was and still is mainly in the hands of the German Länder. The COVID-19 crisis in Germany shows that political actors can win the support of the people they represent, but they must demonstrate their ability to act and convince the electorate of the necessity of measures taken and policies adopted. Here, media coverage has helped to assess politics by showing that countries such as Italy, Spain and France were being overrun by COVID-19 and that populist behaviour by heads of state in countries like the USA and Brazil was exacerbating the disaster. Thus, developments in other countries have made it easier for the people to assess the quality of German decision making. At the very beginning of the crisis, this was the primary reference point against which government action and measures were positively assessed, which subsequently increased trust in the coalition government. This paper explores this phenomenon. It shows that the COVID-19 crisis has created very specific conditions that have made it easier for citizens to trust the government in advance. The latter is fostered further by governmental actions to deal with the pandemic. Chapter 2 briefly explains the general importance of trust and distrust in democratic states and highlights the specific characteristics regarding political trust during the COVID-19 pandemic. This reveals that and why the people initially trusted the federal government to deal with COVID-19 independent of a retrospective performance evaluation. Chapter 3 is then based on a survey by the GESIS Leibniz Institute and focuses on the policy evaluation. The results show that the retrospectively awarded high level of trust in the federal government in the

¹⁰ Fetzer, Thiemo, Hensel, Lukas, Hermle, Johannes, and Roth, Christopher. 2020. “Coronavirus Perceptions and Economic Anxiety”. arXiv, (arXiv:2003.03848v4).

COVID-19 crisis resulted from the following factors: the assessment of the effectiveness of government action in various areas, (to some degree) the assessment of the effectiveness of concrete measures, voting intentions, and the willingness to obey further measures.

2. POLITICAL TRUST IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

In recent years, research on trust has become a popular topic in political sciences, sociology, and philosophy. This chapter cannot fully capture these debates; thus, after a few general remarks, I focus on a small section of the topic: specific trust in political actors, which is strengthened by the individual, positive evaluation of policy outputs.

Trust is an accomplishment for the future. Generally speaking, it is given because past experience and possible futures cannot be brought into complete alignment; otherwise, we would not have to trust, we could align both by calculation. However, trust is granted due to uncertainty in order to close the gap between the past and the future. Trust insures uncertainty. During the first COVID-19 wave, this gap between the experienced past and the expected future was particularly pronounced. In general, crises make people more sensitive to uncertainty.

Trust can refer to different aspects of political life: trust in the political system, trust in political processes, and trust in political actors. The latter is closely linked to the responsibility for an entrusted office¹¹ and thus representation.¹² Consequently, trust is a core concept of democracy: modern democracies only function if the people can and will trust that representatives will responsibly use the power delegated to them. By the same token, mistrust is also part of democracy. With distrust, a society fulfils its control function over the elected actors: “democracies emerged from *distrust*, particularly of elite power-holders.”¹³

Citizens place their trust in advance. In doing so, they act in advance for the future actions of their elected representatives. From an individual perspective, political trust is usually also based on individual experience. However, at the beginning of the pandemic, there was a lack of concrete experience regarding the federal

¹¹ Rosanvallon, Pierre. 2018. *Die gute Regierung*. Berlin: Suhrkamp: 283–285.

¹² Ottmann, Henning. 1993. Verantwortung und Vertrauen als normative Prinzipien der Politik. In: *Philosophie der Gegenwart – Gegenwart der Philosophie*, Schnädelbach, Herbert, and Keil, Geert, ed. Hamburg: Junius Verlag GmbH: 368.

¹³ Warren, Mark. 2018. Trust and Democracy. In: *The Oxford handbook of social and political trust*, Uslaner, Eric M., ed. New York: Oxford University Press: 76.

government's ability to act in this area. Instead, there was first alarming reporting from abroad and second a large consensus in and between politics, science, and the media. This is a major difference from other crisis situations: climate crisis and the so-called refugee crisis offer significantly more space for ideological critique and political conflict. In the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, the absence of the ideological loading of the debate made it easier for citizens to place their trust in the government.

Political actors can strengthen or weaken the trust of those represented.¹⁴ In times of crises, political personnel's ability to shape the public debate is even higher.¹⁵ Political actors, especially governments, can demonstrate their performance more immediately: the time lag between the problem and the answer is extremely short, and the public attentively follows crisis management and communication. This enables political actors to shape the debate more directly. Crises are therefore particularly suitable for gaining trust if citizens approve the measures taken to overcome the crisis and if they consider a government's action effective. On the other hand, the negative evaluation of policies and their implementation can cost political trust.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the people in Germany have placed a significant, high level of trust in the federal government. This has been given on the basis of crisis management, which has been perceived as successful. Prior to this, months of party political and personnel disputes within the CDU/CSU and SPD tended to cast doubt on whether the governmental actors do their jobs. However, in March 2020 the public debate shifted towards the question of how political actors are dealing with the challenges of the pandemic. The public debate began to be more oriented towards policy outputs.

The trust attribution with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic can in principle be either a consequence of the "rally around the flag"¹⁶ – which means it is the crisis it-

¹⁴ Bechtel and Hainmueller. 2011. Op. cit.

¹⁵ Healy and Malhorta. 2009. Op. cit.: 399; Sibley, Chris G., Greaves, Lara M., and Satherley, Nicole et al. 2020. "Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown on trust, attitudes toward government, and well-being". *The American psychologist*, 75 (5): 619–620; van Bavel, Jay J., Baicker, Katherine, and Boggio, Paulo S. et al. 2020. "Using social and behavioural science to support COVID-19 pandemic response". *Nature Human Behaviour* (4).

¹⁶ Skitka, Linda J. 2005. "Patriotism or Nationalism? Understanding Post-September 11, 2001, Flag-Display Behavior". *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 35 (10): 1995–2011; Hetherington, Marc J., and Nelson, Michael. 2003. "Anatomy of a Rally Effect: George W. Bush and the War on Terrorism". *Political Science and Politics*, 36 (01): 37–42.

self that increases trust in politics – or the evaluation of policies.¹⁷ This could only be tested in a longitudinal study, which is not possible with the cross-sectional nature of the data used here. However, Bol et al. found no evidence for the “rally around the flag” effect but rather for “retrospective policy evaluation”.¹⁸

3. TRUST IN THE GERMAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT DURING THE FIRST WAVE OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS

At the beginning of the pandemic, specific conditions were certainly helpful for the initial attribution of trust to the federal government. Media coverage showed that Germany was doing well in coping with the pandemic. In addition, there was a broad consensus between politics and science. If such actors had different positions, these were not substantially ideological. This increased the federal government’s credibility and thereby strengthened citizens’ willingness to trust the government to deal with the COVID-19 crisis.¹⁹ After this initial phase, however, fostering said trust through concrete political action which could be evaluated directly by the public was essential and is examined in more detail here.

In this chapter, trust in the federal government’s coping with the COVID-19 crisis is considered from an individual perspective. In a first explanatory model based on a special survey by the GESIS Panel,²⁰ government-specific trust as the dependent variable is measured on a scale from 1 (“don’t trust at all”) to 5 (“entirely trust”). The explanatory variables are derived from five areas: (1) evaluation of the effectiveness of governmental action, (2) evaluation of the effectiveness of concrete measures, (3) willingness to obey future measures, (4) voting intention, and (5) socio-economic status (SES), all of which are explained in more detail below. The regression analysis includes 2,223 respondents who expressed their opinions on the relevant items between 17 March and 29 March 2020. The coefficient of determination (R^2) provides information about the models’ explained variance: with a value

¹⁷ Sibley et al. Op. cit.: 626; Bol et al. Op. cit.: 6; Kumlin, Staffan, Stadelmann-Steffen, Isabelle, and Atle Haugsgjerd. 2018. “Trust and the Welfare State”. In: *The Oxford handbook of social and political trust*, Eric M. Uslaner, ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁸ Bol et al. Op. cit.: 6.

¹⁹ The anti-Corona demonstrations as a sign of dissatisfaction and criticism of the government followed much later. Moreover, although they are an expression of the change of mood in a part of the population, they are by no means capable of winning a majority.

²⁰ GESIS Panel Team. 2020. GESIS Panel Special Survey on the Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 Outbreak in Germany, Cologne.

of 0.459, this is particularly high and shows that the independent variables explain approximately 46% of the variance in government-specific trust. The enumerated variables will be explained below.

The table presents the results of the linear regression analysis. All variables are treated categorically.²¹

Trust in the Federal Government in Dealing with COVID-19

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>
Government Measures		
<i>Provision of Medical Care</i>		
Too few		<i>Reference Category</i>
Rather too few	.273***	.062
Just right	.543***	.064
Rather too many	.219	.180
Too many	.888*	.376
<i>Restriction of Social Life</i>		
Too few		<i>Reference Category</i>
Rather too few	-.029	.070
Just right	.106	.067
Rather too many	-.007	.090
Too many	-.312†	.179
<i>Reduction of Economic Damage</i>		
Too few		<i>Reference Category</i>
Rather too few	.309***	.064
Just right	.456***	.066
Rather too many	.171†	.093
Too many	.200	.192
<i>Communication with Population</i>		
Too few		<i>Reference Category</i>
Rather too few	.560***	.075
Just right	.966***	.075
Rather too many	.700***	.097
Too many	.898***	.186
Concrete Measures		
<i>Closure of Day-Care Centres, Kindergartens, and Schools</i>		
Not effective at all		<i>Reference Category</i>
Less effective	.733†	.435
Partly effective	.897*	.437
Quite effective	1.061*	.435
Very effective	1.108*	.437

²¹ An overview of all items can be found in the survey's codebook.

	Coefficients	Standard Error
Closure of Shops		
Not effective at all		<i>Reference Category</i>
Less effective	-.556*	.217
Partly effective	-.370 [†]	.217
Quite effective	-.201	.219
Very effective	-.095	.221
Closure of Bars, Cafés, and Restaurants		
Not effective at all		<i>Reference Category</i>
Less effective	-.373	.436
Partly effective	-.133	.444
Quite effective	-.086	.444
Very effective	-.137	.446
Closure of Sports Clubs and Fitness Centres		
Not effective at all		<i>Reference Category</i>
Less effective	1.042*	.520
Partly effective	.925 [†]	.520
Quite effective	.827	.517
Very effective	.822	.520
Ban on Visiting Hospitals, Nursing Homes, and Old People's Homes		
Not effective at all		<i>Reference Category</i>
Less effective	-.052	.294
Partly effective	-.032	.278
Quite effective	-.054	.275
Very effective	.038	.274
Future Measures		
Obey Curfew		
Yes		<i>Reference Category</i>
No	-.249***	.066
Work in a critical profession	-.071	.054
Voting Intentions		
Intention to Vote		
No, would not cast vote		<i>Reference Category</i>
Yes, would cast vote	.377*	.166
Choice of Party		
Government Parties (CDU, CSU, SPD)		<i>Reference Category</i>
FDP	-.079	.059
Die Linke	-.285***	.056
Bündnis 90/Die Grünen	-.082*	.040
AfD	-.716***	.059
Other	-.454***	.100
SES		
Education		
Low		<i>Reference Category</i>
Moderate	.011	.059
High	.015	.056
Constant	.370	.398
R ²		0.459
N		2,223

[†]p = .10, *p = .05, **p = .01, ***p = .001

1. Trust in the federal government is first and foremost trust in the governing personnel.²² The federal government must be perceived as a responsible actor and in its communication activities must demonstrate that diverse interests, concerns and needs are considered in governmental actions. The government must therefore prove that it fulfils its representative functions. Consequently, trust should be high among those respondents who rated the government's actions in different fields as effective. The respondents' evaluation of governmental action was measured with four items: the effectiveness of government action with regard to (1) the provision of medical care, (2) the restriction of social life, (3) the reduction of economic damage, and (4) communication with the population. The scale ranges from 1 ("too few") to 5 ("too many").

Regarding the evaluation of communication behaviour, trust in the federal government is significantly and substantially higher for all respondents who did not evaluate measures as being "too few". Trust is highest among those considering communication to be "just right" ($\beta = 0.966^{***}$). Those respondents are almost one point higher on the 5-point Likert scale compared to the "too few" category. A similar picture emerges with regard to government action to reduce economic damage. Again, all respondents who do not consider the efforts to be "too few" trust more. Trust is highest among those who consider economic policy action to be "just right" ($\beta = 0.456^{***}$). The evaluation of government measures regarding medical care also covaries with governmental trust: interestingly, however, those responding that the government took "too many" measures trust most ($\beta = 0.888^*$). In terms of restrictions on social life, the only statistically significant relationship exists between respondents rating measures as "too many" ($\beta = -0.312^\dagger$) compared to "too few", with the former demonstrating a substantial loss in trust.

2. Support is also based on the evaluation of concrete measures that have an immediate impact on daily life and work. Consequently, trust in the federal government should also be based on individual evaluations of the effectiveness of such concrete measures. Here, a direct effect of policy evaluation on trust should become visible, especially because the federal government has been highly present in the media and has been perceived as a rigorous mediator and coordinator between the sometimes-diverging interests of the German Länder.²³ Accordingly, trust in

²² Newton, Kenneth, Stolle, Dietlind, and Zmerli, Sonja. 2018. "Social and Political Trust". In: *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, Uslaner, Eric M., ed. New York: Oxford University Press: 41.

²³ Käppner, Joachim, and Rossbach, Henrike. 2020. "Kontaktverbot in Deutschland". *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 23 March 2020: 1.

the federal government should be high among those respondents who consider concrete measures effective, even if responsibility lies at the state level due to the administrative federalism (“Verwaltungsföderalismus”).²⁴ Hence, citizens in the German states, districts, and cities have been affected by the measures to varying degrees, especially in the initial phase of the pandemic.

To measure the individual evaluation of concrete measures, five items were included in the model: the evaluation of the effectiveness of (1) the closure of day-care centres, kindergartens, and schools; (2) closure of all shops except supermarkets and pharmacies; (3) closure of bars, cafés, and restaurants; (4) closure of sports clubs and fitness centres; and (5) ban on visiting hospitals, nursing homes, and old people’s homes. The scale ranges from 1 (“not effective at all”) to 5 (“very effective”).

Significant correlations with trust in the federal government exist for three measures. In this respect, the results differ from those of other researchers who have not found any effect of such “policy responses of smaller scale” on “political support”.²⁵ Overall, the results are less clear-cut than is the case for government action, and the effects are in part negative. A clear, positive, and significant correlation exists only with regard to the closure of kindergartens and schools. Here, all response categories are significant: compared to those who considered such closures “not effective at all”, all other respondents have significantly and substantially more trust in the government. The more effective the measure was considered, the stronger both the substantial and statistical significance. Those who consider such closures “very effective” ($\beta = 1.108^*$) demonstrated the highest trust. They are more than one point higher on the 5-point Likert scale than respondents who rated the measure “not effective at all”.

The evaluation of sports clubs closures also shows a correlation with trust in the government. However, compared to those who believe those measures to be “not effective at all”, respondents deeming them “less effective” ($\beta = 1.042^*$) or “partly” effective ($\beta = 0.925^{\dagger}$), revealed a higher level of trust. In contrast, there is a negative and in some cases significant correlation in the evaluation of store closure. Respondents who consider shop closures “not effective at all” trust the federal government more than those respondents who consider them “less effective” ($\beta = -0.556^*$) or “partly effective” ($\beta = -.370^{\dagger}$). The evaluation of restaurant closures

²⁴ Whereby a reform in the end of March shifted some competencies toward the federal level.

²⁵ Bol et al. Op. cit.: 7.

or hospital visitation bans are not statistically significant and thus do not contribute to the explanation of trust in the federal government.

The lack of clarity of the connection between concrete measures in the local area and the attribution of trust to the federal government seems to indicate that the measures are associated with different territorial levels and are weighted differently for the attribution of trust. Whereas day-care centres, schools, shops, and sports are (partly) important and are associated with the government, restaurants and hospitals seem to be less relevant for the attribution of trust. However, it is also possible that the respondents tend to attribute measures concerning hospitals and restaurants locally – that is, to responsible local actors – rather than associating them with the federal government.

3. People who would be willing to obey curfews – which have not been enforced nationwide in Germany – should have more trust in the federal government. There is a reciprocal effect here: curfews are a possible future measure. For this reason, their acceptance is, on the one hand, a consequence of the infectiological situation and the individual assessment of whether or not a curfew could be appropriate. On the other hand, it can also be assumed that respondents would comply with a curfew because they support the current executive approach to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the answer to the question “Would you obey the curfew?” is also an expression of confidence that such a drastic measure would not be taken imprudently. Overall, the willingness to obey curfews should correlate positively with trust in the federal government.

The willingness to obey curfews has a positive and significant correlation with trust. Those who would be willing to obey a curfew trust the federal government more than those who would not. Thus, those who refuse to comply are about 0.25 points lower on the confidence scale ($\beta = -0.249^{***}$). This also shows that the willingness to follow drastic infectiological measures can be positively influenced by the trust given. To this extent, the federal government can strengthen the people's willingness to comply with infectiological measures if it succeeds in winning their trust.

4. Voting intention influences trust in the federal government. People affiliated with governing parties evaluate their policies more positively than supporters of opposition parties. There is also a reciprocal effect here: voters who support the government's actions should be more likely to vote for those parties. During the COVID-19 pandemic, all opposition parties have lost voters' support in favour of the governing coalition. Differences in the attribution of trust should be most clearly visible compared to AfD voters. Accordingly, trust in the federal government should

be higher among those respondents who answered the “Sonntagsfrage”²⁶ in favour of the governing parties. Both the respondents’ answers regarding their intention to vote (“no, would not cast vote”, “yes, would cast vote”) as well as the party they would cast their ballot for were included in the model. Thereby, cabinet parties (CDU/CSU and SPD) were counted as one entity.

The individual voting behaviour is statistically significant. Voters with voting intentions ($\beta = 0.377^{***}$) trust the federal government more than people who do not want to vote. The disenchantment with politics expressed in the act of not voting and the associated lack of trust in political personnel is also evident in the time of COVID-19. The effect of the intended voting decision is also clear. Those who would cast their ballot for one of the governing parties trust the federal government the most, which resonates with other empirical findings.²⁷

There is no significant difference in levels of trust in the federal government between FDP voters and cabinet parties. With regard to all other parties, the loss of trust seems to be lowest among the supporters of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen ($\beta = -0.082^*$): green voters trust the federal government in the COVID-19 crisis less than government supporters but more than supporters of the left ($\beta = -0.285^{***}$) and “other” parties ($\beta = -0.454^{***}$). The differences are greatest between AfD (-0.716^{***}) and cabinet parties’ supporters. The former trust the federal government the least.

5. Finally, one argument is that those who are economically and socially better off are more likely to trust political actors, because they are more capable of coping with potential disappointments as they have more resources to handle disappointment.²⁸ If one assumes that the better off have this status because they enjoyed more education, then a high level of educational attainment among respondents should have a positive effect on trust during this pandemic.

However, contrary to this assumption, educational background has no relevance for political trust and is not statistically significant. Regarding trust in the time of COVID-19, educational attainment is apparently irrelevant when it is modelled together with the evaluation of government action, the effectiveness of concrete measures, and party affiliation.

²⁶ The Sunday question is a standard question for voting intention in Germany. It asks: “If next Sunday there was a parliamentary election, which of the following parties would you choose?”.

²⁷ Bol et al. 2020. Op. cit.

²⁸ Zmerli, Sonja, and Newton, Ken. 2011. “Winners, Losers and Three Types of Trust”. In: *Political Trust: Why Context Matters*. Zmerli, Sonja and Hooghe, Marc, ed. Colchester: ECPR Press: 67–94.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper presents a brief initial explanation for the reasons of trust in the coalition government during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany. It shows that the federal government was able to gain the people's trust. Trust increased because people positively evaluated the government's action and (to some extent) concrete past and possible future measures. Moreover, trust is given by those who are willing to give their vote to the governing parties.

Trust is an achievement for the future. Generally speaking, it is given because past experience and possible futures cannot be brought into complete alignment. This is especially virulent in times of crises. Therefore, people need governments who take their responsibility for the entrusted office seriously and act effectively and transparently. As Sibley et al. concluded concerning the COVID-19 pandemic in New Zealand, the "results suggest that in the short term, bold and decisive action – even that which puts the economy at risk – has the potential to bring people together at the national or state level."²⁹ The German government was able to increase the peoples' willingness to bear the costs³⁰ to combat the pandemic.

The optimistic view drawn in this paper has its limits though, which is reflected in recent anti-COVID-19 demonstrations in Germany. The infectiological measures taken by the government to cope with the pandemic also provoke anxieties and, simultaneously, bring together very different (ideological) perspectives that seemed incompatible before: For some demonstrators the sheer obligation to wear a mask is unbearable. Others are scared of compulsory vaccination. These positions are partly mixed with conspiracy theory and right-wing extremism. Such individuals are united by the perception that the measures are a sign for the government's alleged intention to curtail individual freedoms and basic civil rights and to increase the state's power over society. However, the demonstrations are no symptom for a general and decreasing lack of governmental trust of society at large. On the contrary, support and trust remains high as various polls report. The demonstrations, therefore, reflect by no means a majority opinion. Nevertheless, politicians need to take measures carefully and explain their necessity patiently as communication is key here. Independent of the demonstrations, criticism is already increasing as the pandemic confronts many citizens, businesses, students, and parents among others with wide-ranging consequences in both private and public spheres.

²⁹ Sibley et al. Op. cit.: 625.

³⁰ Tomankova, Ivana. 2019. "An Empirically-Aligned Concept of Trust in Government". NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy, 12 (1): 169.

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