Enlightened trust in governance

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Social movements' Role in Trust building: Citizens' Empowerment and the Limits of Social inclusion. Insights from Germany

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Enlightened Trust: An Examination of Trust and Distrust in Governance – Conditions, Effects and Remedies

Social movements' Role in Trust building: Citizens' Empowerment and the Limits of Social inclusion. Insights from Germany

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1. Introduction

1.1 Social movements' scene in contemporary Germany

The social movements' scene in Germany is vivid and multifarious; it is routed in a long tradition of collective action and has substantially shaped society and policymaking in this country (Roth/Rucht 2008). During the past decade, social movements have been active in Germany on behalf of various issues and in manifold forms of political activism and protest. Some of them are more closely related to local or regional problems, but have gained considerable national visibility. Others are locally organised, but address more general issues and belong to national (and transnational) networks and alliances. Issues addressed during the past decade include, for instance, democratic participation and citizens' rights, capitalism and economic globalisation, austerity policies during the financial crisis, workers' and social rights, ecological damage and climate change, housing rights, gender equality, women's and LGBTQI rights, antiracism and refugee rights, and concerns expressed by right-wing social movements regarding, for instance, migration issues and the role of Islam in Germany. In the following, we describe several examples that have been particularly salient in the public sphere. One of the movements that originally formed around a local issue is the Action Alliance against Stuttgart 21. Since 2010, civic initiatives and groups (including many citizens from the middle class) have mobilised against the major construction project "Stuttgart 21" aimed at relocating the Stuttgart main station underground, and regaining attractive construction areas above ground. Protest has not only been directed against the highly expensive project, regarded as needless by its opponents. It was additionally fuelled by and targeted against the way in which the regional government sought to push its plan through despite many voicing concern. Against this backdrop, "Stuttgart 21" is widely perceived as a negative example of insufficient open dialogue, citizens' consultation and democratic participation (see e.g., Gualini 2015).

In the last decade, several movements that are critical of capitalism have gained public visibility. In the context of the global financial crisis, the Occupy Germany movement engaged in protest calling for global justice and protesting against the (speculation) practices of the financial and banking sector between 2011 and 2013. In Germany, the centre of protest was in front of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt/Main to raise

awareness about the deficits of global capitalism. Protest camps were also established at symbolic sites in other German cities. Moreover, anti-capitalist protest was organised by the Blockupy movement in reaction to the financial crisis. In comparison to the barely structured Occupy movement, Blockupy was rather an alliance of existing anti-capitalist groups (e.g., Attac, Antifa), trade unions and various left-wing parties which mobilised strongly against the European austerity policy during the financial crisis. The movement was active until 2016, with the centre of protest being mainly in Frankfurt/Main. Blockupy engaged in protest demonstrations, blockades and other forms of civil disobedience. In contrast to the relatively peaceful protest of Occupy, Blockupy was criticised because a number of its activists behaved in more radical and verging on violent ways. On different occasions, protesters clashed with the police. The movement itself distanced itself in particular from violent activists who attacked police officers and committed vandalism. Furthermore, a broad alliance of civil society groups and organisations, critical of capitalist globalisation and demanding fair global trade, engaged in protest demonstrations against TTIP and CETA in various German cities, mainly during 2015 and 2016. Of high national visibility was also the G20 counter summit of 2017. In July 2017, a broad range of civil society organisations, initiatives and social movement activists critical of capitalist globalisation gathered for protests against the G20 summit in Hamburg, criticising the leading industrial nations as the chiefly responsible actors for the devastating impact of the current capitalist world order in terms of global injustice, poverty, war and ecocide (Ullrich/Knopp/Frenzel 2018). Protest forms were varied, including major demonstrations, public discussion rounds, art happenings and civil disobedience. However, what gained most public attention were the more radical forms of protest that eventually escalated into massive violent clashes between protesters and the police (Malthaner/Teune/Ullrich et al. 2018).

Furthermore, the increase in refugee arrivals since 2013, and the opening of borders during the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015/2016, led to noteworthy protest in various German cities by xenophobic and Islamophobic movements, while at the same time counter protest was organised widely by anti-racism movements demonstrating against far-right agitation and for a pluralistic, tolerant society in solidarity with refugees (see also Schmitz/Marg 2017). In particular, the so-called "refugee crisis" gave rise to the emergence of many local solidarity initiatives and groups across Germany, providing direct help and support to newly arrived refugees, running parallel to political activism opposing the German (and European) asylum policy (Zschache 2021).

In recent years, the issues of climate protection and affordable housing have gained particular relevance. While protest against coal mining and the climate crisis are not new on the agenda of social movements in Germany, they have gained increased visibility and mobilisation power over the past years. Of national reach are, in particular, Fridays for Future (FFF), as well as groups like Ende Gelände or Extinction Rebellion. While most of the activities are locally implemented (yet often nationally and internationally

coordinated, e.g., FFF Global Strike for Climate Protection), some instances of protest became particularly salient on a national level. In 2018, for instance, media attention was high when protest camps of Ende Gelände against deforestation, for the sake of new coal mining areas in the Hambach Forest, were cleared rather violently by the police. Among the climate protection movements, Fridays for Future puts particular emphasis on peaceful protest and applies a rather dialogue-oriented approach towards the state, while maintaining its independence and impartiality. For Ende Gelände and Extinction Rebellion, civil disobedience constitutes a central form of protest (e.g. blockages of public spaces, chaining), but they also strive to abstain from violent forms of action (see Ruser 2020; Teune 2019).

Housing is by far not a new issue for social protest in Germany. In fact, the German housing movement has its origins in the 1960s. Yet, in recent times, mobilisation against housing problems has gained new impetus. Since 2018, the housing movement has become particularly active in the form of a nation-wide alliance against gentrification, displacement and expensive rents ("rental insanity"), organising major demonstrations in various German cities (see Rink/Vollmer 2019). On the one hand, protest is directed at the unscrupulous practices of the big powerful private housing and investment companies. On the other hand, it addresses the state demanding that politics should take action to diminish the power of these companies, impose regulations in favour of affordable rents and social housing, invest in public housing cooperatives and/or expropriate private housing landlord companies. While major demonstrations on the streets are the most visible form of protest, members of the housing movements are also engaged in forms of resistance at the ground level, such as house squatting, on the one hand, and political engagement such as organising petitions, on the other.

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, social protest has also evolved around the lock-down and anti-Covid 19 policy of the German government. While the early stages of demonstrations involved a broader variety of groups and concerned citizens, including people from the political centre, as well as alternative, green, esoteric and anti-vaccination milieus (Grande et al. 2021), increasing polarisation and radicalisation have taken place within the movement, with right-wing, conspiracy-related, anti-government and anti-democratic ideas on the rise.

Overall, social movements in Germany make use of a multitude of protest forms, reaching from public demonstrations, flash mobs, chants and singing, posters, stickers and banners, petitions and discussion rounds, to sit-ins, camps, blockades, occupations and other forms of civil disobedience. Lately, mobilisation, exchange and protesting on the Internet and in social media have increasingly gained importance. This trend was further enhanced during the height of the pandemic.

1.2   Case studies and organisation of research

After an initial round of open research into possible case studies, sampling concentrated on environmental movements and housing politics movements, as these promised to fulfil the criteria for comparative analysis across countries. The specific cases we chose to study are Fridays for Future (FFF) and a local initiative in the field of tenant rights and the right to the city (for reasons of anonymisation, we use the broad label Housing Movement [HM] here) that is part of the countrywide *Action alliance against displacement and rent madness*. Both climate protection and housing issues were high on the public and political agenda during fieldwork, and both groups campaigned very actively at the time of data gathering.

As regards Fridays for Future, we contacted a local FFF group in a large German city in the east of the country. Here, we experienced a great deal of support for our research endeavour by both the individual contact persons and the plenary assembly. Still, it took some time to recruit participants, agree on suitable meeting dates, and complete the interview with a core member and focus groups discussions with core members and followers because group members were highly engaged in other activities. The focus group discussion with local core members of FFF consisted of four female participants who were between 17 years of age and in their early 20s (unfortunately, two male participants dropped out shortly before the agreed date), and took place online in a secured DFN conference room. The focus group discussion with local FFF followers involved three male and two female participants aged 17 or 18 years, and was conducted in a face-to-face meeting.

Regarding HM, we approached several initiatives in different cities over the course of four months. The response rate was rather disappointing. Although individual contact persons were very supportive of our endeavour and circulated our call widely among their networks, it took a considerable and persistent effort to come in contact with further members and agree on a date for the focus group discussions. In contrast to FFF, we had the impression that these difficulties were not only related to the busyness of group members, but might additionally have been influenced by a certain cautious attitude towards scientists among some of the members of this movement. We eventually conducted one interview with a core member and two small focus group discussions, one with core members and one with followers of a local group in a larger city in the west of the country. [1] The interviews were conducted online in a secured DFN conference room. The focus group discussion with core members consisted of three male participants (unfortunately, the only female participant had to cancel shortly

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[1] Additionally, we conducted an individual interview with a core member of a local initiative in another large city that is also part of the countrywide *Action alliance*. It provided useful background information, but was not systematically analysed for this report.

before the scheduled meeting) who were in their thirties, or of retirement age. The focus group discussion with followers involved a young female and a retired male.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted by Ulrike Zschache (FFF) and Stephanie Schneider (HM). Interviews lasted approximately one hour, focus group discussions lasted approximately two hours. At the outset, we both coded the same transcript, discussed the coding process and each other's coding, and exchanged initial ideas regarding the analysis of the most salient issues. Subsequent focus groups were coded separately by the researcher who moderated the discussion, but we continued the exchange regarding interpretation and analysis and first findings while drafting this report. In the coding process, we generated several memos providing a valuable basis for comparing and contrasting findings.

2.   Analysis of focus groups

2.1   Introductory note

FFF is a global, but decentrally structured, climate strike movement that is mostly organised by pupils and other young people who fight for climate protection and seek to raise awareness about the need to take urgent action on the climate crisis. In particular, FFF aims to put pressure on governments so that they take immediate and effective action in order to meet the climate goals, as agreed by the Paris climate conference, where limits for global warming and global emissions were adopted. The most common form of protest are the school strikes for climate on Fridays, from which the movement takes its name. FFF was initiated in Sweden by the activist Greta Thunberg, in summer 2018. Soon after, local FFF groups were founded across many countries worldwide, including Germany. According to FFF, there were about 500 local groups in Germany by summer 2021. The German local FFF group taking part in our study was established in January 2019. Basically, this group ascribes to the general goals of the FFF movement. In addition, it has developed further aims that are more specifically oriented towards local needs and demands. For instance, crucial aims relate to an early fossil-fuel phase-out (by 2030), the establishment of climate protection as a key priority in political decision-making, an ecological traffic turn and issues of climate justice. Apart from school strikes and demonstrations (in crucial local places, but also by bike), other common forms of action are vigils, climate camps, workshops, participation in discussion rounds and conferences, open plenary discussions, visiting sites (e.g., coal mining areas), hanging banners and posters, participation in civic dialogue formats or contributing to open letters and petitions. FFF explicitly distances itself from more radical forms of action and civil disobedience in order to remain a social movement for the young, but also older people and others seeking to protest peacefully. The local group consists of about 50 members (organised in a WhatsApp group), among whom 20

persons are very active and form the core organisational team of the local FFF group. In the last global strike before the Covid-19 pandemic, on 20th September 2019, the local group was able to mobilise 15,000 people in its city. One year later, during the Covid-19 pandemic, about 4,000 people participated locally in a global strike. While pupils and young people remain the main target group, the local FFF group (like many others) has increasingly mobilised people from various other age groups, too. In line with this development, a local group, Scientists for Future, Parents for Future and Students for Future, has been established.

The local HM-group is part of a movement focusing on housing politics that aims to support people affected by urban restructuring, energetic modernisation, rising rents, forced evictions, and homelessness. It mobilises in support of individual cases, but also engages intensively in public awareness raising through demonstrations, protest campaigns, petitions, etc. The local group that participated in our study formed in 2013, and is part of national and international convergence processes of different initiatives fighting for a right to housing and the city (e.g., the national *Action alliance against displacement and rent madness*, or the *European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City*). Although there is a long history of housing movements in Germany, the issue is prominently on the agenda, and the movement has grown substantially over the last five years, particularly in terms of networking and breadth. According to our interviewees, professed aims of the movement are the representation of interests of the inhabitants of particular quarters, defending the right to the city, and, in more general terms, legal changes regarding property rights and tenant rights, and changing the neoliberal system of housing politics towards greater regulation. During preliminary conversations and interviews, the urban sociologist Andrej Holm and his studies (commissioned by the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung) were mentioned as important elements of expertise to the movement. The movement is also influenced by the works of Henri Lefebvre. According to an interviewee, their translation into German was part of the founding moment of the movement in Germany. The most important forms of public action of the local group that participated in the study are demonstrations, including the international housing action day, in which a number of initiatives in several cities across the country take part. While the active core of the local HM group is rather small (interviewees speak of three to ten core members), they have succeeded in mobilising roughly 2,000 people at local protest events and demonstrations. Other important forms of action mentioned during interviews include workshops and nationwide networking events, and local acts of civil disobedience, such as squatting and anti-eviction actions, although interviewees carefully evaluate and discuss the signalling effects of such actions before deciding to participate or not.

2.2 Structure of the movement

Regarding their formal structure, both FFF and HM are associations of individuals, and do not have the status of a legal entity. They regard themselves as grassroots movements and are decentrally organised in local groups that, in principle, are open to everyone. Local groups are self-organised, self-responsible, and structured **horizontally,** without formal hierarchies.[2] This also means that there is no elected leader or board. While both movements are part of larger nation-wide alliances, networking, information exchange and coordination on the federal level seem less formalised and more issue- or situation-specific with HM than with FFF.[3]

Concerning the functional structure, the picture is somewhat mixed with regard to FFF. On the one hand, there are elements of a **predetermined structure** because members can have specific roles, such as being a delegate to the federal conference, or being a member of a permanent working group (dealing with long-term tasks such as politics, finances, PR, social media, photography, IT-support). On the other hand, there are **dynamic** elements because working groups can be established for time-limited periods and very specific purposes (e.g., planning and organisation of a specific protest event or activity), and may also depend on the interests of groups members. This means that the roles within the group can be interchangeable and more fluid. Moreover, the assignment of roles is grounded in **both practice- and merit-based** reasons. Becoming active in a working group is shaped by the specific long-term and short-term needs of the movement, and also by given circumstances and pressing issues. At the same time, the participation of individuals in a working group depends on their own abilities, preferences and time resources:

> *Well, we have different working groups, for instance, Social Media; we have a PR working group, we have a Politics working group, we have a Finances working group, we have a group dealing with formalities, e-mails and such things, taking photographs during demonstrations. New working groups are built every now and then. For instance, before a Global Strike or so, it's always the case that certain people who just feel like it team-up with each other* (DE_FFF_C).

Within FFF, decision-making takes place at various levels. Basic decisions, or those that are critical or contentious, are discussed and voted on in a plenary (either at a weekly plenary assembly, where the number of participants varies according to members' availability, or also via the WhatsApp group and/or a Doodle list). In comparison,

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[2] However, in practice, informal hierarchies tend to play a role that has to do with the intensity of engagement, knowledge and length of experience in the group.

[3] In the case of FFF, local groups send delegates to conferences and working groups at the federal level. The federal conference of delegates is responsible for decisions and activities of national reach or relevance. As with the local groups, there is no elected leader or board of FFF Germany, even if, in practical terms, some individual activists are particularly visible in the public sphere.

decisions that are related to more ongoing, practical, implementation-related issues are subject to the core organisational team ("orga team") and the specialised functional or thematic working groups that work relatively autonomously in their area if no contentious issues are addressed. Thus, the core members of the "orga team" and the various working group members have considerable scope for action. At the same time, the "orga team" and the working groups are fully open to anybody who wants to engage more actively in the movement:

> *I think for people who are interested in getting more strongly engaged within the orga team, there are good contact points where one can become familiar with the orga team and network. For a while, I quite intensively took pictures for them during demonstrations, and then they asked me if I wanted to join the orga team. […] In my eyes, this showed that it is quite easy and does not require certain preconditions to be able to engage oneself more strongly* (DE_FFF_F).

In comparison to the local FFF group, the interviewed local HM group does not have a very pronounced division of labour. Interviewees attribute this to the relatively small size of the local group. Members meet twice a month on a regular basis; the number of participants in those meetings varies, depending on time resources and the availability of members. There are **no formal hierarchies** or positions; tasks and responsibilities (for keeping minutes, moderating discussions, etc.) are allocated anew each time they meet. Decisions are taken in the plenary, and according to the principles of grassroots democracy. During the focus group discussion, core members state that when more people are involved (e.g., in the planning of larger demonstrations), **informal hierarchies** – in terms of knowledge and length of involvement – tend to become more important, suggesting that responsibilities are to some extent based on a **merit-based structure**. The interviewed followers problematise what they perceive as a tendency to use informal, bilateral communication channels between core members, and say they sometimes have difficulties in understanding how, where and by whom decisions are taken. They attribute this mostly to the size of the group, and the fact that a small number of very active core members does almost everything. In their view, these limitations have also been aggravated during the Covid-19 pandemic's restrictions on face-to-face meetings:

> *[The division of tasks], as is often the case within such small groups of activists, is strongly shaped by the activists, I would say. There are probably also a lot of sympathisers who show up every now and then, and get involved in concrete action. But those who have long breath and build the organisational […] background, those are only very few. On the one hand, this is understandable, on the other not without problems […] The ambition to be grassroots-democratic quickly reaches its limit whenever something is supposed to be decided in the short-term. […] And this is often at the detriment of a […]*

broader opinion formation. […] During Covid-19, this is of course twice as difficult because we do not see each other regularly or have a beer before or afterwards or so, where we could informally talk on the side-lines (DE_HM_F).

Regarding membership, there is consensus in both movements that, in principle, they are **fully inclusive** and open to everyone. According to an interviewee from FFF, they reject excluding anybody from the group because 'nobody is legitimised to do so' (DE_FFF_C). If conflict emerges, for instance, because of internal disputes or decreasing commitment, they seek to solve the issue by means of discussion (and, in the case of FFF, sometimes even with the help of external mediators). However, following their key principles of independence and non-partisanship, FFF avoids having members who apply for or already hold a political office (e.g., MEP of a specific party). At the same time, sharing basic values seems important, in particular the rejection of racism, discrimination and social exclusion.[4] In the case of HM, belonging to right-wing parties or groups would constitute a reason to reject people willing to join the group, although this is not something that happens in practice anyway.[5] In this respect, both movements seem to apply a membership approach that is at least to some extent **conditionally inclusive**:

So far, it did not occur. We also aren't expecting it, but […] there is no place for AfD [Alternative for Germany) or some ultra-right-wing forces with us. But this applies to the entire – to all that somehow belongs to movement, if this is 'Traffic turn" or climate people or anything else, this applies to all (DE_HM_C).

When it comes to the question of who **initiates actions** of the movement, core members and followers mostly agree that **any member of the movement** can make proposals which are then discussed and voted on in the plenum. In the case of HM, core members differentiate between local actions and coordinated actions across the country. Regarding the former, they usually start from a local problem or an individual case, and try to mobilise different forces, using their extended network to organise small to medium-sized protests. In this sense, actions may also be initiated by affected citizens from outside the movement. Regarding the latter, dates are usually predetermined, and the decision they take locally only concerns the question of whether to take part or not. Core members agree that usually there is little dissent concerning the nature and breadth of actions, adding that Covid-19 reduced the number of people involved in initiating action and, in this sense, led to even more consensus and less debate. Overall,

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[4] Followers highlight that many FFF activists have a critical opinion about Extinction Rebellion since they would not sufficiently distance themselves from right-wing groups and ideas within their movement.

[5] Apart from that, interviewees from HM mention Covid-19, the complexity of the issue, inappropriate communication styles, and the lack of social-media channels or chat groups as factors not restricting membership, but forming obstacles for people to become involved more intensely.

interviewed core members and followers agree that the movement has the ambition to be grassroots, democratically-organised and inclusive, while they are also aware that, in practical terms, this is not always realised. According to discussants, a member's role in the movement and their individual influence depends largely on one's own commitment in the group, suggesting that decision-making processes are also shaped by a **merit-based structure**.

Core members of FFF highlight that it is important for them to lead a lengthy debate in the plenum to deliberate on an issue and take account of all arguments, in order to find a compromise and a solution most members are satisfied with instead of seeking a simple majority.[6] While both core members and followers describe the process of **action initiation** as open and democratic, indicating that **any member of the movement may initiate action**, one follower, nevertheless, wonders if group members who do not belong to the core organisational team have, practically speaking, the same chances to promote their ideas, or whether it is necessary to get support from a core member in order to make one's proposal visible and put it on the agenda.

2.3 Attitudes towards and relations of (dis)trust

2.3.1 The perception of (dis)trust and their role in the eyes of social movement members

Regarding their perception of **trust in society**, interviewed activists agree that some bedrock of **trust is essential and important**. It is considered as 'the basis of all human coexistence' (DE_FFF_C) and 'life in societies is not possible without trust' (DE_HM_C). This concerns not only trust in friends, or people in general and their benevolence and willingness to contribute to the functioning of society (DE_FFF_C), 'but […] I also have to trust that the bridge I am crossing will hold' (DE_HM_C), and trust in the decisions of politics and government: 'for example, now in the context of Corona, I have to trust that these are the right measures to protect us humans' (DE_HM_C). Participants of the focus group (FG) with core members of HM add that trust and a certain leap of faith are essential for the work of the movement, too. Hence, they underline that trust has an important **function** in that it constitutes a **basic foundation of the movement**. This applies not only to trust among its members, but also to trust between different initiatives when joining forces, in particular protest campaigns. 'Without such trust, we wouldn't get anything done at all. That is a very, very important factor' (DE_HM_C). **The function of trust**, in this sense, is to reduce uncertainties and complexities (concerning the intentions and the capability of actors involved) so that collective action becomes

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[6] Contentiously and lengthily discussed was, for instance, the question as to whether the group should solidarise with and participate in protest events that are not directly related with the issue of climate protection, but target other, partly interrelated goals, such as anti-racism.

possible. Trust concerns keeping each other informed, but also knowing – without having to discuss it – that people stand on the same side and share certain basic attitudes, e.g., towards the police, other state actors, or political parties.

Furthermore, activists argue that trust is **crucial for the functioning of democratic systems**. Indeed, it is considered as the **basis of (political action in) democracy,** insofar as it is essential that we can trust 'in citizens who are aware of their political responsibility and act accordingly' (DE_FFF_C). This includes trusting in societal institutions, in society in general, 'although some of its members may hold opinions one does not approve' (DE_FFF_F).

When reflecting about **distrust**, FG participants distinguish between positive and negative forms of distrust. First of all, both core members and followers underline that a certain **"healthy" extent of distrust is important**, highlighting that it is **essential for living together in society as much as trust**. Some distrust is considered wise and healthy because living together in society involves uncertainties and risks, due to the fact that people are different, and we 'cannot look into each other's head' (DE_FFF_C). In this respect, distrust is seen as a means of self-protection and a kind of survival technique:

> *Social human co-existence is based on trust, but, in fact, also on distrust. Of course, I do not like to live together with someone I know is dangerous. Well, it is just […] a healthy survival technique that we actually also scrutinise and mistrust* (DE_FFF_C).

Moreover, distrust is considered positive insofar as it makes people deal with and discuss an issue from various perspectives, query and control things. This involves a critical stance, a continuous questioning of the positions from which people speak, or the interests that they represent:

> *Trust in politics, hence, if political parties say something and the government decides something, for example, now in the context of Corona, then I have to trust that those are the right measures protecting us humans, for instance. […] I've also learnt […] trust is good, but control is better. That such unconditional trust is not always the best way, and that control is sometimes necessary and important* (DE_HM_C).

In all four focus group discussions, such critical, reflective forms of distrust are also highlighted as a **crucial element of democracy**:

> *If you distrust someone, then you question them. And that, well, that is also very democratic. To not just believe everything, but also to think twice for yourself, or to form your own opinion on something* (DE_FFF_C).

Participants add that such forms of distrust are not only important on the level of the individual citizen, but are also built in the institutions of democracy, for example in the

form of parliamentary investigation committees, and provide a form of control of those in power.

In sum, both core members and followers share the view that healthy distrust is useful not only as a social survival technique, but also as a core element of democracy as it makes people **attentive and alert** to what is happening around them and in politics. Moreover, it can work as a **corrective factor in society, and in democracy in particular**, insofar as it stimulates reflection and revision, thus contributing to the improvement of social relations and democracy.

In contrast, there is consensus that **distrust** turns into something **negative,** and even **destructive and dangerous for society,** when it manifests itself as a generalised, fundamental attitude that makes people categorically deny and reject everything and stops them from listening to each other. Our interviewees share the diagnosis that trust has been eroded substantially over the last few decades, and that **society is increasingly divided**. In the perception of a follower, an uncritical, naïve generalised trust in authorities has given way to a generalised distrust of authorities, especially in science (DE_HM_F). Particularly in the FGs with HM, these trends are attributed to growing social inequalities. Furthermore, the interviewed activists from both movements raise concerns about populist parties like the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland), or populist movements such as "Querdenken" ("lateral thinking", which mobilises against the governmental measures against Covid-19 and related scientific expertise), arguing that they mobilise, fuel and take advantage of generalised distrust in governance, and contribute to social disruption:

> *What shapes these people a lot, for example "Querdenken" or such, is distrust, which does not necessarily work on a basis, in the form of […] evidence that trust has been abused or something, but rather on a general "I'm distrusting now everyone who is not me" and so on. And I think that is really very dangerous. […] The distrust we are seeing a lot of in current politics, is […] distrust that divides, that is not supposed to make people think and question, but rather to encourage people to say "no" to listening to each other. And that's really, really dangerous (DE_FFF_C).*

When movement members are asked about their **own trust in various social and political actors**, considerable differences between FFF and HM emerge. While the interviewed activists of HM express a **general mistrust of powerful actors and institutions**, even though they acknowledge this is not always justified, FFF-activists draw a nuanced picture of trust that is rather based on **individual-level criteria** than on systemic or structural features.

HM-participants agree that it is first and foremost the ruling relations of capitalism and the increasingly deregulated, neoliberal system of housing politics that they distrust:

I am very suspicious when the public space belonging to the people is misused for capitalist purposes. So, if the public space is supposed to serve, yes, to increase people's capital or to support their interests. I'm really, really, really very suspicious of that (DE_HM_C).

Discussants of HM state they distrust actors who follow the logic of profit maximisation, or aim to preserve the status quo. Besides market actors, and in the political sphere, this includes the "usual suspects" (Liberals, Christian-Democrats), but also parties on the left (Social Democrats, Greens, Left Party) that in the past became accomplices to political compromise with housing companies, and 'sold the silverware' (DE_HM_C). One participant elaborates that, in his view, distrust is related to two logics of domination: profit-orientation and hierarchical organisation, including state institutions, and sums up: 'The higher the hierarchical level, the higher the mistrust' (DE_HM_C).

In comparison, FFF-participants have more nuanced views and highlight **criteria of trustworthiness and factors that help them to build trust**. For both core members and followers, credibility, reliability, coherence, independence, integrity, incorruption and the absence of conflicts of interest rank highly as criteria that make **institutions and politicians** trustworthy in their eyes: 'So, if politicians are really politicians […], if you can rely on that, that generates more trust for me than if I always have to ask myself: Is there something else behind the decisions?' (DE_FFF_C). In this context, both core members and followers argue that they have become less trustful of individual politicians in recent years because their own enhanced political engagement made them more aware of instances where conflicts of interest, accepting or granting advantages, or corruption played a role. While FFF-discussants still trust the institutions or the political system, some of the followers, nevertheless, wonder if there is something wrong with the political system when for those in power it appears to be relatively easy – and often remains without serious consequences – to take advantage of their position and betray citizens' trust. In their eyes, individual **untrustworthy representatives undermine trust in institutions**:

A1: Would you then say that your trust is generally eroding with regard to the system of democracy, […] the system how we practice it in Germany, in the representatives or so? […]

A2: To some extent this goes hand in hand.

A3: Exactly, I was going to say the same. So, if you just look at this scandal with face masks where people somehow pinch money from it. Of course, then you wonder: Well, what's going on there? Why is someone like this not yet removed from its office. […]

A1: I would agree. […] Because a system that makes it that easy for politicians, there must be a defect (DE_FFF_F).

From an even more critical standpoint, HM-interviewees start out from the premise that as soon as somebody represents an institution, a party, or an association, their loyalties lie not with the affected citizenry or the "clients" of the institution, but also, and often in the first place, with the institution they represent, or the "club" they belong to (DE_HM_F). In this regard, they rather recount experiences where their initial mistrust had transformed into more trustful relations through discussion and exchange on the local level of politics (DE_HM_C).

The local level, closeness and personal experiences and contacts are an important factor underscored by activists from both movements. They agree to be much more trustful towards institutions and politicians at the local or regional level, and less trusting with regard to the national and EU level. Indeed, personal connections and experiences, and direct insights into political and governance processes and structures emerge as key pillars of building trust in governance:

> *For me, personal connections or experiences, or something like this, are closely linked to the extent to which I trust someone. I'm active for Fridays for Future in [name of anonymised town]. […] There, you can just attend the town council [meeting], what I already did several times. And then you just see what they say about it, in parts how they prove it, into which direction they argue, what they vote for. And this helps me personally a lot to judge someone or so. To see effectively how a person works there, and not to notice it in a distorted way, for instance, via the press, how this person behaves (DE_FFF_C).*

In comparison to governments and politicians, interviewed activists express higher **trust towards social movements** and their form of organisation (i.e., flat hierarchies), although they stress that this strongly depends on content, too. Nationalist and right-wing social movements are mentioned as examples of social movements not to be trusted, even though they might have flat hierarchies, too. A basic precondition for trust in social movements, civil society organisations or other initiatives – that is sometimes implicitly taken for granted – is a minimum of shared values and ideas:

> *Organisational forms, just like social movements, initiatives that represent their interests with a minimal hierarchy, well, there I would generally have trust […]. But next to the kind of organisation it has, of course, always a strong content-related dimension. Hence, if some evidently autonomous nationalists with flat hierarchies were in favour of affordable rents for white Germans, then I would still not trust them (DE_HM_C).*

Some discussants also state more explicitly that the closer another civil society organisation, initiative or movement is, both in geographical and content-/value-related terms, the more they are inclined to trust it. A follower of HM emphasises that she is always distrustful when particular social groups (e.g., women, LGBTQI, migrants, people

with handicaps) are not represented or not sufficiently heard, pointing to the importance of a movement's inclusiveness. Other factors that contribute to trustworthiness, particularly in the eyes of interviewees from FFF, is the perception that they have a clear position and clear objectives; it is easy to see what they stand for and they 'do not beat about the bush' (DE_FFF_C).

What is striking for FFF is their explicit **trust in science and scientists**. Indeed, the movement grounds its demands strongly on scientific, fact-based evidence, and values this expertise highly. Some discussants even say they trust scientists the most among the various social and political actors. Nevertheless, even trust in science and expertise is not unconditional. As with governments and politicians, independence, integrity, incorruption, the absence of conflicts of interest, as well as transparency about purposes, funding sources and contracting entities are relevant factors for trust building:

> *Q: Which social and political actors do you trust the most?*
>
> *A: I personally would say, scientific figures, facts, as long it can be verified by whom or from where they have been financed. Hence, if I have a proof that these are people who gained their PhD title in a legal way, and not sponsored by any right-wing party. […] If the research work looks as independent as possible, then I trust even a little more* (DE_FFF_C).

Finally, **trust in the media** is addressed by both core members and followers. Here, discussants distinguish between trustworthy quality journalism (particularly appreciating independent investigation formats), and less trustworthy media sources (e.g., tabloid newspapers, alternative media, social media channels, other outlets that are sensational and aim to catch attention, rather than inform citizens).

Concerning their **perceptions of citizens' (dis-)trust**, focus group participants find the question difficult to answer due to the heterogeneity of the population, ranging from citizens completely distrusting of citizens fully trusting the government and other state institutions. Overall, they share the impression that, in recent years, society has become more divided between (the majority of) those who trust in **government** and other established actors, such as **traditional mass media** (e.g. national broadsheet newspapers, public broadcasting), **mainstream political parties**, the established **science community** with its **experts**, institutions and associations, and (the minority of) those who distrust the "establishment" and tend to trust in alternative actors, like anti-establishment social movements and political parties, alternative/anti-mainstream experts or media. Social inequalities, a lack of knowledge and media competence are mentioned as factors contributing to this trend. In addition, FG-participants assume that citizens' trust or distrust are shaped by **criteria of un/trustworthiness** similar to their own. In particular, they believe that closeness – both geographical and thematic-ideological – and hence a certain degree of connectivity, comprehensibility and identification, are crucial factors that align with why people trust:

I think you trust those where you say they are like me. Well, I think there is a tendency there to give a lot of credit of trust. This is sometimes justified, sometimes guaranteed to be unjustified. But it probably depends a lot on your own coordinate system, or whatever you want to call it. If someone fits in there, then you are probably much more open than with other people who come from a completely different - in quotation marks - camp. There, the down-to-earth mistrust is almost inevitable. Yes, both are probably not always completely unproblematic, no! (DE_HM_F).

In addition, they assume that citizens' trust in government representatives, politicians and other publicly visible actors is also influenced by the aforementioned criteria of trustworthiness, such as credibility, reliability and coherence, integrity and incorruptness, while a violation of these principles would decrease trust or fuel distrust. One core member of FFF also underscores the admission of one's own mistakes, assuming responsibility and revising one's own positions as trust-generating forms of behaviour, referring to the example when Angela Merkel apologised for her government's short-sighted change in Covid-19 regulations shortly before the Easter holidays, 2021.

3.2.2   The impact of cooperation on (dis)trust building

The social movements of our study cooperate with other collective actors to varying degrees, and suggest that **different kinds of cooperation** have different implications on the extent of trust their members and broader constituencies have in their movement. To start with, participants of both movements emphasise that they cooperate with **governmental institutions and political parties** only to a very limited extent and, **as a principle**, only insofar as there is no political influence,[7] but a clear advantage for promoting the movements' goals (e.g., in the sense of creating publicity, raising public awareness and pressurising or motivating state actors to engage with the movement's concerns in the form of agenda-setting). For instance, representatives of the local FFF group participated in a local round table in order to help improve the municipality's climate protection concept; the local HM group has had positive experiences with getting the city council and administration to support projects that, initially, started off with protests in the form of civil disobedience, like squatting.

Regarding the **effects of cooperation with political actors** in terms of sustaining or promoting trust in their movement, they find that it may arouse a certain form of **mistrust** from more radical left-wing movements, or can lead to internal discussions. However, discussants from both movements find that being on speaking terms with

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[7] The interviewed local FFF members explicitly mention that a core principle of FFF is to remain impartial and independent.

members of the city council, the mayor, or the administration can contribute to actually moving and changing things. In the sense that they succeed in alleviating problems and furthering citizens' interests, therefore, such forms of cooperation are perceived as **increasing citizens' trust**:

> *I think that these examples of cooperation, in which we are currently in-volved, tend to be received positively in urban society, while internally they give us one or the other problem ourselves. […] Well, internally it can rattle a bit then. But I think that, overall, it helps us because it also shows that it - you can make things happen if you try to pull forward with enough strength and with enough support. And that's something positive, something that cre-ates trust, too* (DE_HM_C).

With regard to **political parties**, FG-participants from FFF follow the **principle to reject engaging in joint protest or other forms of political action,** or to express support for certain political parties, while they do accept support from political parties (e.g., the Greens), for example, by using their meeting or storage rooms, or accepting their invitations to intervene at city council meetings. More far-reaching cooperation with political actors is seen very critically because this might undermine their credibility in terms of impartiality and independence, and could eventually lead to a **decrease in their followers' trust**.

FG-participants from HM also, as a principle, distance themselves from party politics, but do not outrightly reject joining forces with individual politicians on the basis of shared goals and for the purpose of furthering the movement's aims. They do emphasise, however, that one needs to be very cautious regarding lending politicians a stage for furthering party interests, especially during election times. In their view, the same can apply to cooperation with established CSOs. One follower puts it very explicitly:

> *There is always the risk that they will put their club in the foreground - in quotation marks. And, of course, there can easily be an imbalance. So, you really have to be careful because they are also players who like to instrumen-talise the movement, according to the motto: Yes, yes, nice that you exist, as long as you represent what we also represent - wonderful! Because you can always adorn yourself and say: Ah yes, that's not just us as [name of CSO], but the activists […] they also agree. Of course, that can always be sold well in public. In this respect, I think that such a basic mistrust is appropriate, you have to be careful. And as I said, the same applies of course to political par-ties. Sure, parties have an interest in saying: We are very close to the move-ment. Excellent! Always sounds great. […] So, to take a closer look and say: Where is he still acting as a cooperation partner in the alliance, or where is his association/club now spilling over heavily - in quotation marks? I think that is always necessary in principle* (DE_HM_F).

Both interviewed movements state that **cooperation with other civil society groups and social movements** is much more common. It takes place particularly at the local level, and is used to build alliances and join forces, e.g., in joint protest events, open letters or petitions to policymakers. In this respect, cooperation is to some extent **instrumental**. At the same time, it is based on certain **principles**. In particular, such cooperation is based on shared goals and ideas of solidarity. However, according to both core members and followers, it is not always clear and indisputable what shared goals are. In all our focus group discussions, core members and followers agree that questions of cooperation with other civil society actors are among those most contentiously discussed at the plenum.

With regard to FFF, for example, a narrow understanding according to which cooperation and solidarisation should take place only with regard to ecological and climate protection issues, contrasts with a broader approach shared by many, but not all members of the local FFF group. According to the latter, cooperation should reach out to groups and movements concerned with intersectional and neighbouring issue fields, such as social justice and anti-racism[8]:

> *What just comes to my mind is the repeated discussion as to what extent we are only a climate movement, or how far do we also solidarise with movements such as Seebrücke9 or so. Repeatedly, this leads to big discussions about where do we participate, where do we give support, or in how far do we have to stay a typical Fridays-for-Future movement. In my view, that is a big issue, contentiously debated not only in our local group, but also at the federal level and in many other local groups [...]. If you cooperate with NGOs or other initiatives representing other issues, I agree [...] that you can also lose people. [...] At the same time, what's also the argument of the other side among us, [...] we also lose people if we do not take a clear position with regard to other issues and that people then say: "They are too one-dimensional in my view"* (DE_FFF_C).

Beyond that, there has also been a debate about whether cooperation with ecological or climate protection groups should be confined to those that, in addition to the common goals, also share the same basic values and ideas (Extinction Rebellion being a particularly contentious example).

With regard to **related effects on citizen trust in the movements**, our focus group participants from FFF believe that cooperation with similar civic groups or movements will certainly be **beneficial** because it strengthens their voice and can help to increase

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[8] This development goes along with a somewhat revised focus from "climate protection" to "climate justice", which took place not only in the FFF group of this study, but is more widespread in the FFF and the wider ecological movement.

[9] English: "Create safe havens", movement for safe routes for refugees and against the criminalisation of sea rescue.

their influence and success, and this would probably contribute to fostering the citizens' trust in FFF in order to achieve its goals. Similarly, HM members argue that cooperation with other social movements (e.g., addressing climate change and transport politics) usually **strengthens citizen trust** since the movements are united in their quest for wanting politics to actually act and implement movements' claims. While joining forces with other social movements is perceived by all FG participants as a positive factor that can enhance the citizens' trust, views are divided as to whether cooperation should involve a narrower or broader range of social movements. Some of the interviewed FFF members wonder, for instance, if citizens would take them more seriously when they stick to their issue field, or if it would be better to shift more attention to intersectional and contextual issues and actors, thus dealing more pointedly with the complexities of climate protection.

Apart from the effects on citizens' or their constituencies' trust, HM members also point to cooperation effects on their relationship with other civil society actors. In particular, they suggest that cooperation or exchange with established civil society organisations, such as the tenant association, helps to strengthen other actors' (the 'big tanks' like the DGB, the Partitätischer Wohlfahrtsverband, Caritas, Diakonie, etc.) trust in the movement:

> *When they sat at a table with one of us, which has happened, and we had been invited by the tenants' association, then they think to themselves: Yes, okay, yes, these are not really extreme left-wing radicals, but you can still talk to them somehow. And maybe that's not so bad after all, it might help to reach a wider audience, which is our goal, too* (DE_HM_C).

3.2.3 Improving citizens' trust in governance

Concerning the question of what institutions can do to increase trust, interviewed activists from both movements put a strong focus on the **local level** of politics. According to both core members and followers, trust in governmental institutions is strongly shaped by the extent to which institutions and their representatives are **approachable and close to the citizens** (both in terms of geography and in terms of issue-related connectivity). In their perception, the local level provides various low threshold opportunities for direct experiences and encounters of citizens with local government (e.g., open city council meetings, consultation hours, various forms of civic engagement, and opportunities for personal encounters with representatives). However, they emphasise that local institutions should do much more to become more approachable and create more points of contact, for instance by strengthening citizens' dialogue and other forms of discussion and exchange with citizens. This should also involve better communication and explanation of the institutions' responsibilities, tasks, and procedures in an accessible, easily comprehensible way:

I think transparency and closeness are the magic words. So, simply to be approachable for the citizens, showing what one is doing, engaging in dialogue, possibly, and also to be transparent about how things work, what one is doing. Not only for public institutions, but generally for politics, political parties and whatsoever, this is what is missing and what often quickly leads to mistrust (DE_FFF_C).

HM members, in particular, but also core members of FFF, stress there should also be more opportunities for the **direct involvement of citizens in decision-making**, particularly at the local level where citizens and their lived environment are directly affected by those decisions:

In any case, elections are a basic requirement. But it is, of course, also correct that it won't work if we do that every four years and during the time between elections, we lie down on the couch [...]. That's not democracy. Direct democracy, [...] hence, do we want to make it like the Swiss? Do we want to exert more influence on the everyday decisions taken on various levels? Sure, I am in favour of it. [...] regularly to cast our vote, the people's vote, for or against, let's say, Glyphosate, or brown coal surface mining or affordable housing (DE_HM_C).

Accessibility, approachability and closeness are also considered crucial factors influencing trust in **national governments and the EU**. Yet, our discussants consider this to be more difficult at these levels. In fact, they believe that the citizens perceive them as remote, over-bureaucratic, complex, opaque and difficult to connect and identify with, and are consequently more hesitant and cautious to build trust in national or European institutions. They suggest that national and European institutions should develop more suitable strategies and means of connecting with citizens and of entering into exchange and dialogue that may compensate for the geographical remoteness and the related perceived lack of direct experiences and connectivity:

My own trust is eroding with regard to the federal level, because [...] it is somehow far away. [...] Looking at the federal state parliament, there are more realistic debates somehow concerning myself or my environment, my fellow people. And also, at the city level (DE_FFF_F).

Q: And these approaches, do they apply to the different levels, hence local, national, EU, equally? Or would you perceive differences in this regard?

A1: Of course, it always depends on the opportunities, to what extent these means are available. Simply, when there are obstacles of distance and language [...].

A2: I think there are opportunities. I just thought, well, citizens dialogue is more difficult at EU-level. But if they were, for instance, conducted step-wise? There are opportunities. Citizens' consultations. And if they were done staggered according to languages. […] The question is in how far this is actually possible in terms of the extent of time (DE_FFF_C).

Even more than local institutions, national and European institutions would need to inform citizens in a more accessible way, helping them not only to better understand the structures and procedures, but also to better comprehend the direct relevance and consequences of their policymaking:

Q: Looking once again at the EU-level, […] do you see means and ways to strengthen the citizens' trust? What should be done?

A: Well, I would say everything mentioned before, but perhaps in parts in an amplified form, such things like approachability. Because it is really very far away. I would describe myself as a person with political interest; still I find it partly very difficult to understand what's going on there. […] And they don't really make it more transparent. Instead, you have the feeling that they like to be somewhat more inscrutable and that everything is a bit complicated, bureaucratised […] In this respect, I just think that an enhanced transparency, disclosure of what is done, […] what can we actually do [is necessary]. Then, an understanding can be gained in terms of when something is done, what consequences it can have, and which not. Because otherwise, it is difficult to make claims (DE_FFF_C).

Closely interlinked with the aforementioned elements are **transparency and openness** which are underscored as further important factors for trust-building. They are perceived as a matter of opportunities for gaining direct insights into policymaking (e.g., public city council meetings), of comprehensibility of issues and decisions, of overcoming bureaucratic complexities and opaqueness, and of improving controllability and accountability:

Q: What can institutions do to regain trust?

A: Transparency of decision-making processes, in particular; also, with regard to administration. In my opinion, how I perceive it, this is very untransparent and very strongly shaped by internal orientations and power games […]. My impression is that it can perhaps be achieved more easily at the local level, that the people can experience it and perhaps also comprehend. It is always desired that transparency also exists at the federal state level, or European level, but […] I think that this is all/there are many very complex procedures (DE_HM_C).

Transparency. Well, if they just manage to disclose things. Well, it's always about the same examples. […] Where there are files that cannot be consulted (DE_FFF_F).

Discussants suggest that citizens' trust in governance at all levels can be enhanced by increasing institutions' communication about and explanation of institutional structures and procedures, and of responsibilities and tasks. In particular, political institutions should reveal to the citizens clearer information about the functioning of politics and the challenges and limits of policymaking (e.g., the necessity to find compromise).

FG-participants from HM stress that there should also be a more positive and productive use and display of **conflict and debate** on all levels, to show that things can be changed from within civil society. In the face of a perceived diminished capacity of the state to steer and reign global capital and a loss of democratic power of the people, greater transparency on the local level, and conflict, discussion and debate on all levels, would lead to greater politicisation of the people:

I think I would rather say that the subject of conflicts is a subject where I think that it would also be quite fruitful at higher hierarchical levels, i.e., at the federal or European level, to put a bit more focus on it there. Because I think that politicises more people again. […] I believe, a more conflictual contestation of positions is required, but that also creates a chance for more people to understand themselves again (...) politically and to become active (DE_HM_C).

In this regard, interviewed activists from both movements shift particular attention to the importance of **civic education** and the need to improve and strengthen the role of **political education** at school: 'Because trust always comes from understanding' (DE_FFF_C). In addition to awareness raising about political structures and processes, FG-participants find it crucial that citizens are **well informed** about current societal issues. Apart from institutional information campaigns, they consider it decisive that citizens have access to and use a plurality of information channels and journalistic media to acquire knowledge and form their opinion. Echo chambers and filter bubbles spreading one-sided, biased information or even fuelling fake news and conspiracy in social media communication, are seen as relevant factors of distrust in governance. Members of both movements also emphasise that the citizens' level of information and knowledge is strongly affected by social inequalities and the pressures of the labour market. In particular, the lack of time and resources are seen as a major obstacle for many people to educate themselves and to actively participate in politics. In this context, they also formulate a critique of the lack of representation of particular social groups, both within politics and within social movements themselves.

Furthermore, there is broad agreement that **authenticity, coherence and promise-keeping** of political representatives or institutions across the various levels are key to

trust-building, while the widespread discrepancy between announcements and their implementation is perceived as a major reason why citizens find it hard to trust. In the activists' view, citizens' trust in governance might be improved or distrust diminished if governmental institutions and policymakers were more cautious when making promises and announcements. In addition, they assume that dashed expectations could be prevented by strengthening civic education and raising public awareness about the conditions and limits of policymaking.

Moreover, **integrity, honesty, incorruptness, credibility and reliability** are repeatedly addressed as core pillars of trust in governance, but first and foremost, with regard to the national level. Here, various examples are given where governmental representatives or politicians failed to comply with these principles, either because they took advantage of their position, were dishonest or hid information, gave priority to their own personal interests rather than to comply with their mandate and represent the interests of their institution and the citizens, were unreliable or corrupt. According to our discussants, such misconduct should be prevented more strongly by strengthening independent control mechanisms and by making the respective persons more seriously accountable.

Finally, an aspect that is less extensively discussed, but nevertheless found important by both core members and followers, is that politicians should **respect all citizens alike,** and they should have a sincere interest in their opinions and input rather than engage in citizens' dialogue as mere symbolic policy without consequences. With regard to their own experiences, FFF members complain that they have often been treated like children whose demands and concerns were not to be taken seriously. HM members stress that particular social groups are not represented and heard, and that the institutions should be more proactive in making information accessible without barriers, and involving all affected groups in decision-making processes.

When it comes to the **capacity and role of social movements to enhance trust in society**, different aspects are highlighted. Core members of both movements underline that social movements can and should **help building or sustaining citizens' trust in democratic governance** by contributing to a critical reflection about and **correction of deficiencies in current policymaking**, for instance, through constant control and critique of governance at various levels, but also through productive input into the development or revision of political concepts and policy drafts. In this context, core members also argue that social movements should encounter a decline in citizen's trust in policymaking and their disinterest in and disenchantment with politics by offering an 'alternative to hierarchically organised political acting and administering' (DE_HM_C), promoting citizens' democratic participation and showing that civic collective action can actually move things. In this sense, an HM core member underscores:

Political disenchantment does not automatically make someone say "Well, now I have to get engaged and do something against it". Instead, on the contrary "It does not interest me, I don't care about it". And this is bad. And to get people out of this [reasoning], of course, this makes/ happens also in social movements. But way too little and, eventually, much too weakly. What you hear mostly is: "I am not interested, I don't care. Sure, I am against it but still I do not get engaged." And it is our job, at least how I see it, to change this (DE_HM_C).

Overall, strong emphasis is put on the **role of direct action**, such as demonstrations, camps in public spaces and other self-organised awareness raising and information campaigns. Indeed, core members highlight that their movements' main strategy is to raise awareness and inform citizens about the issues and concerns they address. FFF core members, for instance, draw attention to their effort to increase the citizens' knowledge about the climate crisis and climate protection, and thus to enhance their understanding of and support for the measures to be taken to fight climate change. In this regard, they assume that their actions indirectly contribute to enhancing citizens' trust in and support of climate protection policies. Attention is also shifted to the role of citizens' engagement in social movements, or other forms of political activism. Here, it is argued that citizens' political engagement leads to a better understanding of political processes and structures, among themselves and their direct social environment, and may thus increase trust in politics. At the same time, however, these insights might, to some extent or in certain instances, also cause some distrust because politically active citizens are more aware about failures and weaknesses of political institutions and policymakers. Yet, when speaking about distrust, core members first and foremost refer to anti-government or anti-establishment movements like those that emerged during the Covid 19 pandemic, which they criticise for fuelling anti-establishment and anti-mainstream resentments and generalised distrust in governance, science and the mass media, for being anti-democratic and provoking divisions within society. In comparison, followers accentuate that also democratically-oriented social movements do and should have the function of **channelling citizens' distrust of government** because it is their purpose to criticise the government and utter discontent. Moreover, they consider distrust of the government, or certain politics, as a main reason why citizens become active in social movements, either in order to protest against existing policymaking, or to demand different policies.

2.4 Expertise

Concerning the role of scientific expertise in society in general, interviewed activists agree that policymakers need to consult **scientists in their role as authorities** from the respective relevant fields, and seek their advice before taking decisions on complex

issues they have no expertise in. Collecting a sound basis of evidence is seen as crucial for legitimising and securing decisions, particularly in cases where basic rights are concerned, or when in crisis situations executive forces gain exceptional power and parliamentary influence is narrowed. Discussants underline that policymakers should consult a variety of scientists in order to get a more comprehensive and solidified picture. At the same time, they find transparency about the used evidence important. Not only should the names of consulted experts or the sources of scientific evidence be made public, but also funding sources and the period of research. In this regard, they call for a certain amount of caution and a critical reading of scientific statements:

> *So, scientific findings are not necessarily immediately believable because they are scientific findings of some sort, but you always have to check: who gave the order? From whose pens did what was written down come and such? So, you have to be a bit critical and careful* (DE_HM_C).

They are critical of the simplification and one-sidedness they observe in medial representations of science/scientists and the dominance of individual scientists. Overall, political and mass media communication should enhance citizen awareness of scientific evidence as not being absolute fact, but that it should be revised and, hence, can be refuted and corrected, and that verification and contradicting evidence are not something that should decrease, but, on the contrary, strengthen trust in science and expertise. In this respect, education and informing citizens about the principles and functioning of science is regarded important:

> *In terms of trust, I also find it highly important that it is made transparent for the people how scientific evidence comes about. In my view, […] mistrust of science […] also emerges because scientific findings get disproved and re-placed by new scientific evidence, and is sometimes only temporary. […] It is reported too little how scientific hypothesis, evidence and refutation actually work* (DE_FFF_C).

Particularly for FFF, experts and scientific expertise play a **key role in the movement** since all critique of current policies and FFF's political demands are grounded in scientific evidence. In this respect, experts on climate change appear to be an important **authority for this movement**. While at the very start, FFF mainly referred to expertise of climate change experts from the scientific community, they soon got more powerful support from climate experts who joined the movement, establishing the Scientists for Future as part of FFF. Expertise is used to legitimise FFF's demands, building their central foundation for debate. Experts, and particularly those who are members of Scientists for Future, are regularly consulted as advisors, for instance, when a new catalogue of demands has to be elaborated on in detail by a working group. Moreover, Scientists for Future serve as important advocates for the movement, and help FFF to be taken seriously by policymakers and other adults questioning whether pupils have the

knowledge to challenge politics. In this sense, they contribute to enhancing the legitimacy of FFF and its demands, meanwhile strengthening citizens' trust in the movement. Scientists for Future members also intervene as speakers at public events, in political discussions or in the media, and thus play a considerable role for FFF public relations activities.

Core members of the local HM group, too, state that **expertise is an essential basis for the work of the movement,** and a prerequisite for trust to develop:

> *Because there is nothing worse - trust again, which is lost very quickly - if you make a statement and afterwards it turns out: This is complete nonsense. That doesn't fit at all. So expert knowledge is, I believe, a major requirement here - a prerequisite for success, in order to maintain positive contact with people* (DE_HM_C).

Scientific expertise and knowledge are seen as providing a sound basis for the movement to develop and justify its claims. Interviewed core members of HM state they regularly read scientific studies and try to stay up to date with legal and scientific developments. They also feel they have to become experts themselves in order to act and be perceived as trustworthy on the local level of action. Interviewed followers, in contrast, emphasise that, especially **when it comes to housing issues, everyone is an expert**:

> *What I find when it comes to renting, I mean, that's what every person expe-riences for themselves. So, everyone needs a house or a roof over their heads. And can experience for themselves what the situation is like. I think, yes, that's why I think - so many people can experience that first-hand, that's why I think it's much closer to citizens than other topics, like climate change, for example, which you may not notice so much now. But everyone can tell whether rents are rising. How much rent you have to pay. How much - yes, what your rights are - most people notice because they are simply exposed to it. So, I think that almost everyone who is in a tenancy is actually an expert in that sense* (DE_HM_F).

Nevertheless, when it comes to politics on the federal level, another follower adds that personal, subjective affectedness and experience are not enough, and that one needs experts to generate and argue more general claims. In sum, followers of HM agree that **science and expertise are important, but argue that it does, or should not, stand above politics and cannot replace politics**.

2.5 Democracy and engagement

Participants agree that **voting at elections is an important element,** a necessary foundation of democracy, **but** they are also convinced that democracy is more than that and requires continuous efforts in other, **additional forms of political participation**. Here, attention is drawn to the **role of a strong civil society** (particularly in terms of democratic control, critique, awareness raising), and **citizens' engagement in social movements, participating in petitions, and taking part in protests and demonstrations**. As a core member of HM puts it: 'The first duty of the citizen is to demonstrate. Namely expressing one's opinion in public space […] I think it's important that democracy can be experienced on the street and shape politics' (DE_HM_C).

In this context, the importance of **basic rights** such as freedom of speech, gathering, demonstrations and the press are repeatedly highlighted as crucial pillars of political participation in a democracy. **Referenda** are also mentioned as another form of political participation. However, discussants have ambivalent views on their usefulness. In their opinion, such forms of direct democracy can be suitable at the local or regional level where citizens are more directly concerned with the political decisions at stake. At the same time, concerns are raised as to whether citizens would base their decisions on the facts and the available scientific evidence, or if their decisions would rather be led by fear, anger, or gut feeling.

When explicitly asked about their perception of **citizens' capabilities to make political decisions**, core members of FFF emphasise that democratic participation should not be a question of a person's capability because democracy means political self-determination of the people and an equal right to vote for all citizens. Across FGs, participants share the opinion that de facto **citizens' capabilities vary,** and may be severely restricted by social inequalities in various dimensions – in particular, citizens' social and educational backgrounds, access to information and time resources. In addition, some of the FFF-followers are rather sceptical about citizens' capabilities to make democratic decisions because they feel that many would base their political views and voting decisions more on emotions rather than on rationality and facts. In the followers' viewpoint, this impression is particularly nurtured by recent negative examples such as the Brexit referendum (June 2016, the UK), or the German anti-government Querdenker movement during the Covid 19 pandemic.

When reflecting on the ways in which citizens can be empowered to participate in political decision-making more actively, our discussants highlight three dimensions where **institutions should do more to involve citizens**. First, discussants from both movements argue that **institutions should improve the legal framework** to alleviate social inequalities and enable citizens to participate in democracy more equally. In their view, **democracy is severely flawed when particular groups of citizens** (the working poor, women, migrants, or people with handicaps) **are systematically excluded from**

the formation of the political will. Vice versa, **social justice is seen as an important prerequisite for democratic participation**. While in the discussions with FFF, the focus lies on ways to enhance the political participation of marginalised citizens, by helping them overcome survival mode and gain more freedom for dealing with political issues (e.g., through higher minimum pay, or the introduction of a basic income so that nobody has to commit to several jobs in parallel), the discussion with HM followers goes beyond that, in that it also includes reflections on how the political participation of all could be enhanced – e.g., through a reduction in the working week to four days, or less:

> *I think you would just have to, in order to be politically active at all, be able to participate, well, in a democracy, you simply cannot have a full-time job and children. You have to have a different system where you simply have more time for things like that. That kind of thing takes time. To get involved in politics. To inform yourself. It takes time. And most people don't have the time when they're in a full-time job* (DE_HM_F).

In addition, members of FFF argue strongly in favour of reducing the general voting age for participating in federal, regional and local elections to 16 years (or even lower), rejecting the argument that young people would not be capable of voting because of insufficient knowledge, while adults do not have to prove sufficient knowledge to be entitled to vote. According to FFF members, the climate protection policy shows, in particular, how important it would be that all age groups have equal rights to represent their interests. At the same time, they consider an equal participation of young people in democratic elections as an important means to foster their interest in politics, and to make them engage more actively in political processes and issues, thus experiencing the practical relevance of political education in school.

Secondly, they agree that the political **institutions have a major responsibility to inform citizens more and better,** and argue that they have to improve the distribution, accessibility and comprehensibility of information in order to make politics more transparent and accountable. Furthermore, the institutions should **improve education in general, and enhance civic or political education, in particular**. Discussants argue that it is the responsibility of the political and educational system to empower everybody to represent their own interests. In this context, discussants from both movements criticise the domestic school system for its systematic insufficiencies in the provision of political education and opportunities for a lived democracy. FFF members explicitly favour a school policy that introduces civic education at school at a relatively early stage, makes it obligatory until the completion of school education, and offers opportunities for more practical engagement, such as democracy weeks or Model United Nations simulations:

> *I believe that you really have to start with political education at school be-cause you do not get the people in the afternoon, well, somewhere to a*

workshop that is voluntary. "Everybody, please, go there!" That's not work-ing. Therefore, I really think that you have to do this at school; we always have democracy days each year, where you are informed about different is-sues, engage practically – such things, that such things are established in all schools. That the focus is shifted more strongly on this (DE_FFF_F).

Thirdly, **institutions and individual politicians should engage more directly with citizens, create more and better tools to increase citizens' participation** (especially on the local level), and demonstrate that politics is actually capable of initiating change, and a matter concerning everybody. Here, both core members and followers argue that political institutions should considerably strengthen citizens' dialogue and consultations, not as a mere symbolic act of participation, but as a serious form of taking citizens' views into account:

> *One thing that I sometimes saw, and that could be strengthened more, would be citizens' dialogue or citizens' discussions or so. Yet, perhaps with a possi-bility – well, this would imply another vote – to bring up issues. Not to just go there and complain, and to be taken along as a complaint. But through the citizens' dialogue to really get an active opportunity as a citizen to address matters that are really forwarded to the level of parliament, hence locally the city council, or the federal state parliament, and that are really listened to. Because currently, even with petitions, it does not necessarily happen […] that they reach the plenum* (DE_FFF_C).

While positive developments in this regard are mentioned for the local level, clearer deficits are perceived for the higher political levels that are more remote from the citizens. With regard to FFF's role as representatives of children and youth, for example, it is suggested that more youth parliaments should be established to give young people more opportunities for direct political participation. Concerning housing issues, inhabitants of particular quarters should receive more information, and have more say concerning land-use, building projects, remodelling of public spaces, etc. Discussants from FFF also underline that the conditions and procedures of petitioning should be simplified and improved. This would help, in particular, to give social movements a more effective voice in policymaking.

In evaluating the **capacity of social movements to enhance democratic participation**, participants have a differentiated view. Core members and followers share the impression that many citizens have no interest in politics, feel excluded and detached from it, and find it difficult to understand its mechanisms. Social movements would encourage their members and followers to directly engage with a political topic, and provide **low-threshold occasions** to get immediate experiences with, access to and insights into processes of policymaking, helping citizens to gain a better understanding

of political structures and procedures and, in general, to become more critical, politicised and prepared to act as responsible citizens. One FFF members puts it like this:

> *I really believe that there are people across all age groups who are not inter-*
> *ested in politics at all because it is too boring and too difficult to get into, and*
> *simply because the way in which politics works here is not inclusive at all. […]*
> *I believe that social movements offer a different form of access for every-*
> *body. […] And when you go out onto the streets, then you see just more*
> *quickly that reactions take place. I believe that is something that often at-*
> *tracts different people and many more people* (DE_FFF_C).

Members of both movements underscore that social movements are there to channel and represent the interests, concerns and views of individual citizens with common goals (such as climate protection), or shared concerns (such as rising rents) and, by joining forces and becoming a mass of people, make them **more visible and powerful** in the public and political sphere. Core members highlight that social movements are a mediator and give voice to their members' perspectives by directly engaging with policymakers in discussion rounds and other forms of exchange. On a more critical note, they suggest, however, that social movements should **make more of their potential by becoming more inclusive for citizens**. For instance, they should not only take account of their members' views (e.g., through plena), but should provide more diverse and inclusive access points, opportunities for input and forms of dialogue with interested citizens. In addition, some followers are of the opinion that the strong public visibility of a movement does not always translate into substantial political results, and wonder how an actual influence on political decision-making and a contribution to policy-change could be achieved.

Finally, one of the issues more diversely discussed was the question about discussants' perception of **social movements' success in bringing more citizens' voices to governmental institutions**. Interviewed activists share the view that the respective movements were **successful in raising awareness and sensitising** politicians, policymakers, and the public alike, to climate change and housing issues, respectively. In comparison, **views divide about the actual success of social movements with regard to their influence on policymaking** (but also on people's everyday behaviour). Core members of FFF emphasise that both FFF and many other social movements have already achieved a great deal, and contributed considerably to a change in public awareness and policymaking. Without the engagement of social movements, we would not stand where we are, they argue:

> *So first of all, I would say on the subject of "Role in society and in democracy",*
> *as a movement we are, of course, an incredibly important functional element*
> *of democracy because that is exactly what democracy lives from. Democracy*
> *means, means confrontation and we try to live that. [...] I believe that our*

future would look super different if there weren't any such social movements because I think we have already achieved a lot, changed a lot. And we would definitely not stand where we stand if we didn't exist, and other social movements in other areas (DE_FFF_C).

Core members of FFF consider their own movement, as well as other social movements, as important and effective voices for the concerns of citizens with regard to policymaking, as they unite a considerable mass behind them, have gained high visibility in the public sphere (including in media coverage), and are in exchange with policymakers, variously. In line with this positive view, one follower also suggests that FFF has certainly contributed, to some extent, to recent electoral results at the regional 'Länder' level and the participation of the Green party in regional governments. In contrast, other followers are less enthusiastic about FFF's success. They agree that FFF was very successful in mobilising civil society and attracting attention to the climate crisis. Yet, they find that social movements have little influence on policymaking, and wonder how social movements could increase their pressure on government so that they take their demands more strongly into account.

Discussants of the local HM group, too, are of the opinion that social movements are important and do succeed in giving citizens' concerns and interests a voice, in making them heard, and feeding them into the political sphere. However, despite this generally positive assessment, they consider them only as partially successful. A core member of HM attributes this to the greater strength of counterforces:

> *Yes, there are many positive examples; that is something that you can always build on when you have achieved such a success somewhere. On the other hand, we're just way too weak. And there is far too little movement. Or you can also express it the other way round: The opposing forces [i.e., powerful business interests] - and those are again the forces that don't make money from it [i.e., issues in the interest of the common good], but from other things. As a rule, earnings are generated from other things than such general tasks [oriented at the common good]-. They are way too strong and have a lobby that is way too big* (DE_HM_C).

Activists of both movements draw renewed attention to the **question of representation and inclusiveness,** and emphasise that social movements are eventually limited in their efforts since their work requires resources (above all, time) that only a privileged segment of the population has access to, so they never represent the citizenry as a whole:

> *In this respect, this political engagement in initiatives, in I-don't-know-where, is actually something. Who do you see there? This is the educated bourgeoisie, these are the people who don't have stomach-aches about money every day, who have the problem to some extent under control. Hopefully, they'll*

be able to pay their rent and are not under total pressure because of that. It's a very small group. You have to be clear about that (DE_HM_F).

In this context, followers of HM argue most clearly that political participation might have become a form of luxury that only the privileged can enjoy. They also relate this to trust, in the sense that researching information that one can trust in, acquiring the competencies so that one trusts in oneself, takes time, too. Trust is not just there; it needs to be built on knowledge, experience, information, etc. As one follower puts it:

You can only have confidence/trust in yourself that you are informed well enough to make a decision that makes sense to you - that is, so that you can say: this is the decision and I have confidence in/trust the decision (DE_HM_F).

In addition, followers of FFF raise the point that ecological movements tend to represent and mobilise only the privileged middle classes because their living conditions allow them to be concerned with environmental and climate protection, while less privileged groups in society have to deal with more immediate existential issues:

In my view, a large number of the people participating in the demonstrations are people who live in relatively secure financial circumstances and have also socially a quite stable basic framework. […] Fridays for Future is for people who do not have financial worries in their lives, and who mostly are from the middle class, if not upper middle class. […] If you are a person who receives social benefit, then you definitely have other problems: How do I pay my rent? What can I do so that my children have enough to eat? And you do not think: Well, now there is the climate issue, what can I do about it? (DE_FFF_F).

Thus, overall, activists from both movements highlight structural barriers to participation in social movements, underscoring in particular socio-economic inequalities as a major factor affecting citizens' participation and restricting the representation and inclusiveness of social movements.

3.   Summary and conclusions

In sum, interviewed social movement members agree that a certain bedrock of trust is essential for living and acting together in society, and for the functioning of democracy because trust helps to reduce uncertainties and complexities, making interaction possible. In comparison, the role of distrust is perceived in a more nuanced way. On the one hand, FG-participants share the opinion that a "healthy" degree of distrust is an equally important element of both social coexistence and the democratic political system because it renders people attentive and alert, and stimulates revision and

improvement. On the other hand, distrust is regarded as something negative, destructive and dangerous when it takes the form of generalised, fundamental distrust that leads to categorical rejection and denial, and a polarisation of society.

When it comes to their own trust and distrust, there are more remarkable differences between the two movements. HM members have a general distrust in the capitalist system, the involved mechanisms of profit-orientation and neoliberal deregulation. They also tend to distrust powerful actors and institutions as a default position because they are perceived as representatives of the existing system and established power asymmetries. In contrast, FFF members have basic trust in the political system and its institutions (despite being aware of the negative ecological effects of existing capitalism). At the same time, they take a differentiated stance towards political actors and individual institutions with their representatives, highlighting that key criteria of trustworthiness must be met, most importantly credibility, reliability, coherence, independence, integrity, incorruptness and the absence of conflicts of interest. Thus, while HM members base their distrust on systemic or structural features, FFF members rather make their judgements on the individual level, and distinguish between trustworthy and less trustworthy actors. More converging views can be found with regard to other societal actors. Activists of both movements have considerably more confidence in civil society groups and scientists. Yet, trust in these actors is not unconditional. In fact, principles of trustworthiness, like credibility, independence and the absence of conflicts of interest, play a relevant role, too. As for other civil society groups and social movements, trusting is particularly encouraged if they share the same goals and values.

Generally, there is a consensus that trust-building is easier, or more likely, at the local level, while it is perceived as more difficult and contingent at higher, more remote levels. Activists unanimously emphasise that trust-building is decisively bound to direct personal experiences, first-hand information, closeness, connectivity and comprehensibility, and that these criteria are most likely met within the direct local environment and at the local level of policymaking.

For governmental institutions, this means that they have to be approachable, open, inclusive, transparent and close to the citizens, for instance by communicating in accessible, easily understandable way, offering low threshold opportunities for direct, practical insights and encounters with citizens, strengthening citizens' dialogue and exchange, and direct involvement of citizens in decision-making. Because understanding is considered as a key precondition of trust, activists also underscore the importance of awareness raising about political structures and processes, the functioning of politics and the challenges and limits of policymaking, as well as sufficient and clear information about current societal and political issues. Here, civic education and an extensive and vivid, practice-oriented political education at school are perceived as key pillars.

Furthermore, FG-participants shift emphasis to the role of authenticity and coherence between communication, on the one hand, and acting and results, on the other, including the need to either keep or make fewer promises.

Overall, FG-participants have a consensus that trust in governance and the functioning of democracy depend considerably on lively, lived forms of political participation that go beyond the act of voting. Apart from the access points that need to be provided by governmental institutions, activists emphasise the importance of civil society activism and social movements. In their view, social movements not only play a crucial role in democracy because they criticise societal and political deficiencies, mobilise protest and give voice to citizens' concerns and political claims, they also constitute an important social arena for awareness raising, politicisation and lived, directly-experienced democracy. For FFF, this also involves relevant opportunities for building informed trust in governance, exactly because of their assumption that this lived experience of democratic participation and enhanced engagement with current issues leads to a better understanding of ongoing political decisions and the functioning of democracy, in general, while the immediate sense of the movement's achievement in moving things and shaping policymaking also seems to improve the political trust of engaged citizens.

At the same time, FG-participants from both movements point to the limits and obstacles of democratic inclusion and participation, and citizens' representation, in both social movements and political decision-making. Social inequalities are seen as the main reason why particular societal groups tend to be systematically disadvantaged when it comes to their chances of gaining adequate information and knowledge, engaging actively in civil society, fighting for, or even being adequately represented regarding their concerns, and making use of the various opportunities for citizens' engagement in politics. While FG-participants most explicitly highlight socio-economic and time constrains (both relating to the pressures and inequalities of the labour market) as core issues, their arguments and examples suggest that the unequal availability of cultural and social resources plays a relevant role, too, so that insufficient inclusiveness and participation across the various dimensions of democratic citizenship appear to be routed in multi-layered discrimination. These observations resonate well with social movement and democracy research where attention is shifted to the role of resource availability (first and foremost, time and money) as an important prerequisite of collective action (e.g., Edwards/McCarthy 2004; Schäfer 2010). According to the FG-participants, these social inequalities have direct and indirect implications for citizens' trust in their own capacities, collective action and governance. With regard to the interlinkages with trust in governance, FFF members argue that inclusion in the various dimensions of democratic citizenship, and awareness raising about opportunities of democratic participation and influence, are important factors, if not substantial prerequisites for developing informed political trust. Moreover, they make the point that the well-functioning of democracy and the maintenance of a basic bedrock of trust

require the enhanced empowerment of citizens at various levels, including better education and information, and changes in economic and employment policies (e.g., increase in minimum wage, reduction of working hours) to enable all citizens to participate in democracy and exercise citizenship. Hence, while existing scholarship has already suggested that differences in socio-economic and other resources are interlinked with differences in trust of governance (e.g., Goubin/Hooghe 2020; Schäfer 2010), our FGs participants draw particular attention to the intermediary role of democratic inclusion and participation in civil society and politics, and the role of social movements as an important social arena of low-threshold awareness-raising and direct experiences of lived democracy. While they perceive resource inequality as a serious problem for both democratic participation/representation and trust in governance, they also suggest various solutions that may help to improve democratic inclusiveness and citizens' trust.

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