Informal Volunteering in Kyrgyzstan: Covid-19 Case

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by

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Declaration

Herewith I declare that I clearly understand §11 of the Academic Regulations and that the submitted paper is accepted by the OSCE Academy in Bishkek on the understanding that it is my own effort without falsification of any kind. I declare that I am aware of the consequences of plagiarism or/ and cheating.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is focused on studying informal volunteering in Kyrgyzstan during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research aims to understand how informal volunteering manifested in Kyrgyzstan during Covid-19, and what motivated individuals to engage in self-organized volunteer activities within this context. It also seeks to explore the perceptions of informal volunteers towards the government's response to the pandemic and the role of established organizations. The main theory the research considers volunteer work as a combination of human, social, and cultural capital. This framework helps to understand the diverse motivations behind volunteering and the influence of individual beliefs, values, and social conventions. Additionally, the research applies community resilience theory to evaluate the capacity of individuals, groups, and institutions within the Kyrgyz community to respond effectively to the Covid-19 crisis, and to check how volunteering promotes better governance via creation of a more engaged and active citizenry. This approach will expand the existing literature on crisis management which is predominantly state-centric. Meanwhile the case study shows that sometimes state is not the key actor in crisis management. While studying motivations, I primarily focus on cognitive dimension of social capital, as suggested by Dr. Chiara Pierobon in her research. This means that volunteer groups are analyzed not as formalized structures/institutions but as 'shared representations, interpretations, and systems of meaning, mainly codes and narratives, shared values and other cultural elements.' In general, informal volunteering as a phenomenon and its role for the state has not been sufficiently studied in the literature. Moreover, the available articles cover the regions remote from Central Asia. Therefore, it seems relevant to study informal volunteering in Kyrgyzstan, to assess the level of activity of the population, their readiness to react on crises, and state communication with this group.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The star on the "Valley of Fame" dedicated to remarkable people and movements in Kyrgyzstan (see Figure 1) encapsulates the spirit of dedication and communal effort that underlies the core of my thesis.

Figure 1
(March, 2023, Bishkek;
"To the volunteers of the Kyrgyz Republic for the fight against Covid-19")

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter investigates the landscape of informal volunteering in Kyrgyzstan, with a particular focus on the challenging context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Beginning with subchapter 1.1, the exploration delves into the principles of altruism, religious influences, and the cultural concept of 'ashar' in Kyrgyzstan, highlighting volunteering as a communal and social endeavor integral to social policies in various countries. The choice of Kyrgyzstan as a case study is grounded in my personal experience and belief in the pivotal role volunteers play in shaping societal dynamics. This subsection further establishes the rationale for selecting the Covid-19 case, emphasizing the importance of ordinary people – volunteers – in crisis management. The subsequent section 1.2 provides an overview of volunteering in Kyrgyzstan within the communal understanding of civil society. It examines the motivations, types, and relationships between volunteers and the state, considering influential organizations and the preference for informal volunteering over formal channels. The research time framework spans from March 2020 to March 2021, encompassing the pandemic's initial response and subsequent mitigation efforts. The central research question seeks to understand how informal volunteering manifested during Covid-19 and what motivated individuals to engage in self-organized volunteer activities. Employing theoretical frameworks such as the integrated theory of volunteer work and community resilience theory, the thesis aims to unravel the motivations, challenges, and contributions of informal volunteers, shedding light on their perceptions of the government's response, organizational networks, and the role of trust in shaping their engagement.

1.1.Volunteering and its types. Why Kyrgyzstan? Why Covid-19 case?

Human benevolence has consistently captivated my scholarly interest. The principles of giving and receiving are forming an essential part of human existence. However, these processes are not necessarily symmetrical or synchronous. Those who offer assistance freely and without expecting anything in return are sometimes referred to as altruists. The idea of altruism is controversial; although some see it as a positive force; others claim that there is always a reason and a personal benefit to help somebody else. However, my research deviates from the altruism dichotomy. My attention is focused on

volunteering. The importance attributed to volunteering in the development of social capital and the cultivation of civil society has resulted in its essential integration into social policies in a multitude of countries. Therefore, my research interest specifically centers around volunteering.

Volunteering is willingness to give time to help organizations or individuals to whom a volunteer is unrelated without any financial gain.[1] This practice is reflected in many traditions and religions. For example, in Hinduism there is a concept of *Sewa*, which means "selfless act that aims to protect, help, and provide underprivileged human beings and animals a service."[2] There is an Indian song from which one can understand the purpose of Sewa:

<div align="center">
Give me sewa overtime;
To cleanse my heart, and cleanse my mind <…>
I'm grateful, I'm blessed.[3]
</div>

Christians in Western Europe also volunteer more often than non-believers, as found in the *Paxton's et al.* study.[4] Muslim community offers plenty of volunteering projects and opportunities as well.[5] Since any religion is aimed at developing virtue and compassion, helping those in need and willingness to sacrifice, the connection between religion and volunteering becomes clear.

At the same time, non-religious people who share the values inherent in religions and encouraged in society are also often included in volunteer movements and projects. An example of social norms that favor volunteering is the concept of Ashar in Kyrgyzstan. Ashar means 'jointly solving a common problem or task.'[6] In the spring,

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[1] "What Is Volunteering?," What is volunteering? - Volunteer Centre Sheffield, accessed August 20, 2023, https://www.sheffieldvolunteercentre.org.uk/what-is-volunteering

[2] "What Is Sewa?," Concept Of Sewa, accessed August 20, 2023, https://sewajyoti.com/CONCEPT-OF-SEWA

[3] Amanda J. Lucia, "'Give Me Sevā Overtime': Selfless Service and Humanitarianism in Mata Amritanandamayi's Transnational Guru Movement," *History of Religions* 54, no. 2 (2014): 190, https://doi.org/10.1086/677812

[4] Pamela Paxton, Nicholas E. Reith, and Jennifer L. Glanville, "Volunteering and the Dimensions of Religiosity: A Cross-National Analysis," *Review of Religious Research* 56, no. 4 (December 2014): 598, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43186290

[5] "The Benefits of Volunteering," Muslim Aid, accessed August 20, 2023, https://www.muslimaid.org/media-centre/blog/the-benefits-of-volunteering/

[6] "Ashar App mobilizirujet soobshchestvo perevodchikov I rasshirit bazu kyrgyzskih tehnologicheskih terminov: United Nations Development Programme [Ashar App mobilizes translators community and will widen the base of kyrgyz technological terminology]," UNDP, March 26, 2021,

people in the villages get together, repair aqueducts and other objects of social importance. Ashar also means to help a specific person to build the house or help with housework. "This is a way to jointly, amicably and cheerfully solve a common problem or task"[7], what is close to the essence of volunteering. The concept of 'ashar' goes beyond its traditional understanding in Central Asia today. For example, this year, a free language classes initiative was announced by a 10th-grade student in Kyrgyzstan. "The principle of mutual assistance is rooted in the tradition of the Kyrgyz people. According to the 'ashar' principle, the entire community and their relatives used to help each other. So why not help each other to learn", the leader of the project said[8]. Thus, volunteering is commonly regarded as a communal and social endeavor that enriches social capital, fortifies the community, and contributes to the delivery of services that might otherwise be more costly or inadequately provided.[9]

I consider volunteers as a cognitive dimension of social capital, which means "resources providing 'shared representations, interpretations, and systems of meaning, mainly codes and narratives, shared values and other cultural elements.'"[10] In the opposite of structural dimension, this view does not include analyses of the linkages and relations between "organizations and institutions created and/or strengthened."[11] This thesis explores why volunteers get involved in activism, focusing on their personal

https://www.undp.org/ru/kyrgyzstan/news/ashar-app-mobilizuet-soobschestvo-perevodchikov-i-rasshirit-bazu-kyrgyzskikh-tekhnologicheskikh-terminov

[7] "Ashar App mobilizirujet soobshchestvo perevodchikov I rasshirit bazu kyrgyzskih tehnologicheskih terminov: United Nations Development Programme [Ashar App mobilizes translators community and will widen the base of kyrgyz technological terminology]," UNDP, March 26, 2021, https://www.undp.org/ru/kyrgyzstan/news/ashar-app-mobilizuet-soobschestvo-perevodchikov-i-rasshirit-bazu-kyrgyzskikh-tekhnologicheskikh-terminov

[8] "Shkolniki Kyrgyzstana metodom ashara provodiat obychaushie kyrsy [Schoolchildren of Kyrgyzstan conduct training courses using the "ashar" method]," Vechernij Bishkek, accessed December 20, 2023, https://www.vb.kg/doc/429538_shkolniki_kyrgyzstana_metodom_ashara_provodiat_obychaushie_kyrsy.html

[9] Robert D. Putnam, "Chapter 7. Altruism, Volunteering, and Philanthropy," essay, in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York ; London ; Toronto ; Sydney ; New Delhi: Simon et Schuster Paperbacks, 2020), 128, https://books.google.lu/books?hl=ru&lr=&id=rd2ibodep7UC&oi=fnd&pg=PA13&dq=Putnam,+2000&ots=G7D8rYrkR0&sig=3M-9COsrmzPATlGYPqXLfcEsoSM&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=volunteering&f=false.

[10] Chiara Pierobon, "EU's Support to Civil Society in Kazakhstan: A Pilot Evaluation of the Social Capital Generated," *Evaluation* 25, no. 2 (2019): 5, https://doi.org/10.1177/1356389018796023.

[11] Chiara Pierobon, "EU's Support to Civil Society in Kazakhstan: A Pilot Evaluation of the Social Capital Generated," *Evaluation* 25, no. 2 (2019): 5, https://doi.org/10.1177/1356389018796023.

motivations rather than institutional structures. Interviews revealed that some volunteers later joined organizations, but this does not lessen the importance of their initial independent efforts. The key takeaway is understanding how individuals start on their own or in self-organized groups, even if later some of them became parts of more organized structures.

Why Kyrgyzstan?

The reason I have chosen Kyrgyzstan as the focal point of my research is deeply rooted in my personal experience of residing in the country for a year. During this time, I have been exposed to the unique spirit and resilience of the Kyrgyz people, exemplified by phrases like "Give me a hundred Kyrgyz and I will make you a revolution"[12] or "The spring is the time of tulips and revolutions in Kyrgyzstan."[13] These expressions reflect a societal readiness for politically significant movements, often driven by a collective consciousness and a range of motivations. Kyrgyzstan distinguishes itself from both immediate and distant neighbors by fostering an environment where numerous international human rights organizations, domestic non-governmental entities, oppositional forces, political parties, and some independent media coexist. This distinctive characteristic, prevailing until the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, occurs within the context of a political framework that occasionally reflects a conventional patriarchal state.[14]

My fascination with Kyrgyzstan extends beyond its historical civil society movements. It is grounded in the belief that volunteers play a pivotal role in shaping the societal landscape. In essence, this thesis seeks to understand better volunteer actions and motivations, particularly in the challenging backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic. As Kyrgyzstan confronts new challenges, the study aims to explore the ongoing contributions of volunteers to the nation's self-regulation, mobilization, and democratic movements. By delving into the actions and motivations of volunteers, this research

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[12] I heard it from the EU diplomats when our group of the OSCE Academy students visited the office of Delegation of the European Union to the Kyrgyz Republic

[13] I heard it from Dr.Emil Dzhuraev

[14] Anvar Bugazov, *Socio-Cultural Characteristics of Civil Society Formation in Kyrgyzstan*, 8, accessed December 20, 2023, https://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/SilkRoadPapers/2013_07_SRP_Bugazov_Civil-Society-Kyrgyzstan.pdf.

aspires to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamic interplay between civic engagement, societal resilience, and democratic processes in Kyrgyzstan. In essence, my choice of Kyrgyzstan as a case study stems from a desire to explore and comprehend the diverse factors influencing the nation's socio-political dynamics.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the shifting dynamics in Kyrgyzstan's political landscape, especially concerning human rights and democratic principles. Recent events, such as for example the abrupt change in the state flag, highlight a concerning trend where public opinions seem to be disregarded, signaling a potential regression from a fragile democracy to a more stable autocracy. The diminishing space for civic engagement and the apparent erosion of democratic values raise questions about the future trajectory of Kyrgyzstan's governance. The evolving political climate begs scrutiny, particularly in understanding the implications for active citizens who have historically played a vital role in shaping the nation's socio-political landscape. As we observe this potential backsliding, it becomes interesting to explore whether a meaningful dialogue can be organized to address the concerns of the citizenry or if the current situation poses challenges that may hinder such initiatives. This raises critical questions about the adaptability and transformation of the active citizenry (especially volunteerism) in the face of changing political realities, prompting a deeper exploration of the possibilities for civic engagement and the preservation of democratic ideals in Kyrgyzstan.

Why Covid-19 case?

In many countries on the front lines fighting against Covid-19 we saw mostly ordinary people – volunteers. Covid-19 crisis is the most recent occasion when the importance of volunteers' work was raised again at the global level. Serious crises usually bring humanity back to the understanding that only people can save themselves and help themselves. Other agencies such as the state do not work equally quickly and successfully everywhere. In this context volunteering is the most necessary form of active civic participation in different forms, some of which are not currently included in the

available statistics on volunteers.[15]As *Gaston* defined, volunteering is the willing of individuals to give their time, efforts, and resources to help others, and "volunteers constitute ... a big unrecognized army."[16] Such a rescue "army" played a significant role in Kyrgyzstan during Covid-19.

Cai et al. observed civil society's crucial role in fighting against Covid-19. According to their research, civil society actors contributed to social resilience by "donating money and medical supplies, providing imperative social services, disseminating needed information, and advocating for marginalized groups in society."[17] They claimed also that "the existing literature on crisis management is state-centric, with only a few exceptions systematically documenting civil society's contributions."[18] Little remains understood about the precise mechanisms by which civil society responses had such favorable results.

The extensive media coverage of Kyrgyz society during Covid-19 in Central Asia[19] has motivated me to explore the pandemic's impact as a case study in self-help dynamics within Kyrgyzstan. Unlike some neighboring countries, Kyrgyzstan experienced a significant rise in mutual assistance during the pandemic. This raises important questions: What drove this sense of community support? Was it due to a lack of government support, or does it reflect the proactive nature of Kyrgyz people? I aim to investigate the individuals behind this spontaneous volunteer effort. Who were the key contributors, and what factors influenced their involvement? I will also delve into why people chose informal volunteering over organizational type. By addressing these questions, I will

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[15] John A. Turner, Bruce W. Klein, and Constance Sorrentino, "Making Volunteer Work Visible," *Monthly Labor Review*, July 2020, 2 https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26929515.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A243fb1a1c0097b7e4effba0f8f689755&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=.

[16] Kevin Gaston and Jackie A. Alexander, "Effective Organisation and Management of Public Sector Volunteer Workers," *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 14, no. 1 (2001): 59–74, https://doi.org/10.1108/09513550110387075.

[17] Qihai Cai et al., "Civil Society Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic," China Review 21, no. 1 (February 2021): 118, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/27005557.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A6fa31dc71d5b9032d6156fd489fdf068&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1.

[18] Qihai Cai et al., "Civil Society Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic," China Review 21, no. 1 (February 2021): 108, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/27005557.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A6fa31dc71d5b9032d6156fd489fdf068&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1.

[19] "Kyrgyzstan: Volunteers Play Heroic Role in Battle against COVID-19," Eurasianet, accessed December 20, 2023, https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstan-volunteers-play-heroic-role-in-battle-against-covid-19.

study the motivations and societal dynamics that led to the exceptional self-help response in Kyrgyzstan during Covid-19.Thus, this research delves into the relatively unexplored area of informal volunteering during a crisis in Kyrgyzstan. This is particularly interesting as it provides a unique perspective on civic activism in a Central Asian context.

Types of volunteering

Volunteering can be defined differently depending on the type one is considering. For example, there are direct and indirect types of volunteering. Direct volunteering involves hands-on activities where individuals contribute their time and skills directly to a cause or organization. This can include activities such as working in a community garden, providing assistance at a local shelter, or participating in educational programs. According to *Cnaan and Amrofell*, direct volunteering fosters a sense of immediate impact and personal connection to the cause, making it a powerful form of civic engagement.[20] In contrast, indirect volunteering encompasses activities that support a cause without direct contact with beneficiaries. This may involve tasks such as fundraising, event planning, or administrative work. *Smith and Wilson* argue that indirect volunteering provides critical support for organizations by leveraging diverse skills and expertise, allowing individuals to contribute in ways that align with their strengths and interests.[21] For the purpose of my thesis I will refer to direct volunteering mostly.

Another type of volunteering is virtual volunteering, also known as online or remote volunteering. This kind has emerged as a significant dimension of civic engagement in the digital age. It involves individuals contributing their time and skills through online platforms, enabling them to make a meaningful impact without geographical constraints. According to *Handy et al.*, virtual volunteering expands the scope of volunteerism, providing opportunities for individuals to engage in diverse

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[20] Ram A. Cnaan and Laura Amrofell, "Mapping Volunteer Activity," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1994): 342, https://doi.org/10.1177/089976409402300404.
[21] Vicki Smith, "Review Article: Enhancing Employability: Human, Cultural, and Social Capital in an Era of Turbulent Unpredictability," *Human Relations* 63, no. 2 (2010): 292, https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726709353639.

activities that align with their skills and interests.[22] The flexibility of virtual volunteering has been particularly evident during the Covid-19 pandemic when traditional, on-site volunteering faced limitations due to social distancing measures. Individuals turned to virtual platforms to contribute to various causes, from offering virtual tutoring and mentorship to assisting with online research and data analysis. For this thesis I will not consider virtual volunteering as such but 'classical' volunteering that I am analyzing still contains digital tools of communication and information exchange.

The most relevant for current research and, perhaps, the broadest division of volunteering types is into formal and informal. Formal volunteering entails activities performed at an organizational level, whereas informal volunteering entails actions performed outside of an organizational framework.[23] This research aims at studying informal (spontaneous, ad hoc, unaffiliated[24] - will be used in this work interchangeably) volunteering in Kyrgyzstan during Covid-19. This part of society composed of the individuals or groups engaged in volunteer work independently, without being formally affiliated with a specific nonprofit or charitable organization is interesting to study and yet studied insufficiently. These volunteers are going the way neither the easiest nor conventional for those who want to help. Considering the Covid-19 case, there were plenty of challenges posed by the pandemic; however, those volunteers opted for self-organization, demonstrating a remarkable and valued by the world community commitment. By focusing exclusively on the Covid-19 case, I can gather comprehensive empirical data specific to this crisis, enabling a more accurate analysis of the factors that contributed to the surge in mutual assistance in Kyrgyzstan during this period. At the same time, in the future this research can work as a foundation for further study and can be expanded by including comparative analyses of other crises and responses of Kyrgyz society to them, or different states of Central Asia and beyond.

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[22] Femida Handy and Laurie Mook, "Volunteering and Volunteers: Benefit-Cost Analyses," *Research on Social Work Practice* 21, no. 4 (2010): 413, https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731510386625.

[23] K.J. Ajrouch and C. Tesch-Roemer, "Formal and Informal Volunteering in Later Life: Two Sides of the Same Coin?," Innovation in Aging 1, no. suppl_1 (2017): pp. 1395-1396, https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igx004.5137.

[24] Leila Daddoust et al., "Spontaneous Volunteer Coordination during Disasters and Emergencies: Opportunities, Challenges, and Risks," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 65 (2021): p. 102546, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2021.102546.

Investigating the reasons to volunteer informally rather than join established organizations can show the limitations or gaps in existing formal structures. Perhaps volunteers are skeptical towards organizations' work, or formal structures have not been able to make calls visible for different segments of the population. It is not known whether informal volunteering was the choice of people or, in fact, they did not know any other option amid Covid-19. Informal volunteering can also shed the light on the areas where the state and government could improve communication and collaboration with active citizens by examining the challenges they faced and the strategies they used. Thus, despite a lack of formal resources and support, these volunteers were critical in assisting their communities during a crisis. Understanding their motivations, methods, successes, and challenges can help shape the understanding of Kyrgyz community resilience.

1.2. An overview of volunteering in Kyrgyzstan. Re-conceptualization of civil society

Understanding the landscape of volunteering in Kyrgyzstan necessitates a nuanced exploration of civil society, a term that takes on distinctive forms within the Central Asian context. Beyond the neo-liberal interpretation, Babajanian et al. advocate for a communal understanding of civil society, a perspective particularly pertinent to the region.[25] Within this framework, civil society manifests itself within familial structures, communities, friendship networks, solidaristic workplace ties, voluntarism, and spontaneous groups and movements.[26] This communal interpretation aligns with the efforts of scholars from the Islamic world who seek to re-conceptualize civil society, emphasizing the interconnectedness and shared ideas and practices within these local spheres.[27] It is within these intimate bonds and spontaneous associations that voluntarism finds a natural home, contributing to the understanding of civic engagement in Kyrgyzstan.

In Kyrgyzstan, civil society manifests in the myriad forms of volunteering that occur within communities, reflecting a commitment to shared values and a collective

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[25] Babajanian, Babken; Freizer, Sabine; Stevens, Daniel (2005). "Introduction: Civil Society in Central Asia and the Caucasus". Cent. Asian Survey, 24(3), 209-24.

[26] Dekker, Paul; van den Broek, Andries (1998). "Civil Society in Comparative Perspective: Involvement in Voluntary Associations in North America and Western Europe". Voluntas, 9(1), 13.

[27] Babajanian, Babken; Freizer, Sabine; Stevens, Daniel (2005). "Introduction: Civil Society in Central Asia and the Caucasus". Cent. Asian Survey, 24(3), 212

vision for societal well-being.[28] As we delve into the motivations driving volunteering in Kyrgyzstan, it becomes imperative to recognize and contextualize these actions within the communal and global dimensions of civil society. Volunteers, as active citizens, contribute significantly to the social fabric of Kyrgyzstan, becoming unsung heroes in their communities. It's essential to recognize and appreciate their dynamism, even if it defies easy quantification. In the countries that emerged from the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the modern interpretation of 'volunteering' began to take shape in the early 1990s, marking it as a relatively recent phenomenon. However, it is worth noting that while the contemporary concept emerged during this period, volunteering, in various forms, existed previously, as illustrated by examples such as the 'ashar' concept.[29] As I explore the motivations behind volunteering, it becomes clear that these individuals are a crucial part of civil society, extending their influence beyond traditional structures and often leading to broader forms of activism. This continuity of engagement, as revealed in subsequent interviews, underscores the enduring importance of these mobilized citizens in shaping the societal landscape.

In general, the volunteer movement is very developed in Kyrgyzstan, but it is not possible to name the exact number of organizations and informal movements. The largest volunteer group in Kyrgyzstan is associated with the National Red Crescent Society (more than 3,000 people).[30] Another popular platform for volunteers is the Public Association 'Center for Initiative Youth' where the number of volunteers during the Covid-19 reached 2,000 people.[31] UNICEF with around 700 activists across the country closes the Top-3 places for volunteers in Kyrgyzstan.

As we can see influential organizations often recruit volunteers to represent them and to help people. It might be easier for volunteers to join such agencies and help people

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[28] Chiara Pierobon, The development of civil society in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan: An Analysis of the National and International Context, accessed December 20, 2023, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325943131_The_Development_of_Civil_Society_in_Post-Soviet_Kyrgyzstan_An_Analysis_of_the_National_and_International_Context.

[29] J. Moldokeeva, Sh. Mamytova, and A. Sagyndykova., rep., *Volunteering in the Kyrgyz Republic: Status, Challenges, Prospects* (Hanns Seidel Foundation, 2023), https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ha2okaseNm6lBvC8Zkjt1OzKYv4GZZEF.

[30] J. Moldokeeva, Sh. Mamytova, and A. Sagyndykova., rep., *Volunteering in the Kyrgyz Republic: Status, Challenges, Prospects* (Hanns Seidel Foundation, 2023), https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ha2okaseNm6lBvC8Zkjt1OzKYv4GZZEF.

[31] J. Moldokeeva, Sh. Mamytova, and A. Sagyndykova., rep., *Volunteering in the Kyrgyz Republic: Status, Challenges, Prospects.*

just by performing the tasks assigned by organizations and using the facilities of these organizations. My research will target individuals who organized and provided assistance during Covid-19 mostly not upon a formal request from an organization. During non-crisis time, these informal volunteers even though are active citizens but often hidden from public view because they do not have any famous or recognizable name as, for instance, international organizations. Nevertheless, their readiness to offer their services to their communities can be organically used in the normal cycle of governing the country, and not only in crisis situations.

Volunteer motivations vary, among other things, depending on the area of volunteer assistance. According to the recent research by International University of Kyrgyzstan, the activities of volunteer organizations in Kyrgyzstan are mainly aimed at charity (66.9%), social protection and assistance (49.7%), ecology (46.4%), education (42.4%), warning and response to emergencies (35.1%), civil activism (32.5%).[32] Interestingly, that the organizational type of volunteering is more common for the capital and other big cities while in villages people cooperate mostly informally, for solving a particular problem[33] (it reminds 'ashar' principle mentioned above). For this research only volunteers from the capital Bishkek have been interviewed. Although the topic is labeled as 'Kyrgyzstan' it is important to note that the focus is made mostly on the capital city. This limitation should be taken into account by readers.

According to Olson (as his argument explained by Lars Udehn), naturally, the most rational choice for a person in case of provided public goods would take a free-ride and enjoy benefits without contributing.[34] Especially, it is relevant for large groups when coordination and organization is much more difficult than free-riding to prefer the former to the latter.[35] At the same time, motives of people sometimes are not so rational or obvious. For example, Amartya Sen names sympathy and commitment as the reasons to

[32] J. Moldokeeva, Sh. Mamytova, and A. Sagyndykova, rep., *VOLUNTEERING IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC: STATUS, CHALLENGES, PROSPECTS* (Hanns Seidel Foundation, 2023), https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ha2okaseNm6lBvC8Zkjt1OzKYv4GZZEF, 19.
[33] J. Moldokeeva, Sh. Mamytova, and A. Sagyndykova, rep., *VOLUNTEERING IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC: STATUS, CHALLENGES, PROSPECTS* (Hanns Seidel Foundation, 2023), https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ha2okaseNm6lBvC8Zkjt1OzKYv4GZZEF, 19.
[34] Lars Udehn, "Twenty-Five Years with the Logic of Collective Action," *Acta Sociologica* 36, no. 3 (1993): 239–61, https://doi.org/10.1177/000169939303600307, 239.
[35] Lars Udehn, "Twenty-Five Years with the Logic of Collective Action," *Acta Sociologica* 36, no. 3 (1993): 239–61, https://doi.org/10.1177/000169939303600307, 240.

cooperate.[36] Sympathy means to feel pain when one hears about torture while commitment refers to the situation when one does not feel pain but understands that it is wrong and that s/he is ready to do something to stop it.[37] Thus, on the one hand, free-riding cases are inevitable, on the other hand, this is not such a popular phenomenon among volunteers, since they join voluntarily, and accordingly, if they do not want to help, they simply do not come.

In Kyrgyzstan people usually mobilize for different reasons including practical ones - the opportunity to gain work experience (50%), gain skills (45%), networking and meeting new people (30%), find friends and like-minded people (15%), gain experience in organizations and events working in projects (15%), get a certificate and letter of recommendation (15%).[38] I think these motivations could not fully work in Covid-19 case because of the level of danger. It is unlikely that people were guided by the desire to gain experience when they worked 24/7 and delivered oxygen condensates around the city during the curfew hour at the peak of Covid-19, which was subsequently called "black July" due to the number of deaths. In this case sympathy and commitment sound as more plausible reasons why people joined volunteering movements.

Who are the volunteers that I will be researching?

If look at the scope of volunteering, it varies from helping in hospitals to helping in the field of food delivery or in the educational field (setting up online learning). All directions are united by the main reason for volunteering (a trigger) - the Covid-19 epidemic. In general, from the above we see theories underscore the dual nature of volunteering, encompassing both self-understanding motives rooted in moral dimensions and rational motives driven by practical considerations and cost-benefit analysis.[39]

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[36] Amartya K. Sen, "Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 6, no. 4 (1977): 326.

[37] Amartya K. Sen, "Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 6, no. 4 (1977): 326.

[38] J. Moldokeeva, Sh. Mamytova, and A. Sagyndykova, rep., *VOLUNTEERING IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC: STATUS, CHALLENGES, PROSPECTS* (Hanns Seidel Foundation, 2023), https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ha2okaseNm6lBvC8Zkjt1OzKYv4GZZEF

[39] John Wilson , "Volunteering," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 215, https://www.jstor.org/stable/223443.

When it comes to the age of volunteers, it differs quite greatly but I will focus mostly on the youth as "the main force defining Kyrgyzstan's future."[40] According to the United Nations' definition youth includes people from 15 to 24 years old.[41] However, for my surveys and interviews I will consider the youth only as people from 18 years old. Limiting the scope of my surveys and interviews to individuals aged 18 and above is motivated by the practical advantages of easier communication and the relative scarcity of minors actively participating in volunteer efforts during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy", young people included citizens of the Republic and stateless persons aged to 28 years.[42] On 4th August 2023 the Law "On Youth" was signed by the President and now the age limit for the youth is increased to 35 years old.[43] Thus, I will include into youth category people from 18 to 35 years old. However, when I started distribution of a small 'experimental' survey among volunteers I noticed that initially more than 50% of all responses were given by volunteers of 35+ age group. I will also use their thoughts and insights in my analysis referring to them as to 'participants aged 35+'. The youth makes up 24% of the Kyrgyz population, i.e. more than 1 million 600 thousand people[44], therefore it is important to focus on them as on the potential resource for the development of Kyrgyzstan. At the same time it is important not to ignore completely informal volunteers of other age groups.

Another interesting question for me is why did not volunteers of Kyrgyzstan respond to the call of Red Crescent and join organized volunteering. Undoubtedly, there were people who did it. However, my particular interest lies in those who organized

[40] Marius Harring et al., rep., *YOUTH STUDY KYRGYZSTAN: LOST IN TRANSITION? 2020/2021* (The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Foundation, 2021), https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bischkek/18899.pdf, 9.

[41] "Youth," United Nations, accessed December 22, 2023, https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth#:~:text=Who%20Are%20the%20Youth%3F,of%2015%20and%2024%20years.

[42] "Mezhdunarodnyj Den Molodezhi: Cifry i Fakty [International Youth Day: Numbers and Facts]," *Statistika Kyrgyzstana*, accessed December 22, 2023, http://www.stat.kg/ru/news/mezhdunarodnyj-den-molodezhi-cifry-i-fakty/.

[43] "Molodej Do 35 - Chto Dast Kyrgyzstantsam Uvelichenije Molodejnogo Vozrasta? [Youth till 35 - What Will the Increase of Youth Age Give to Kyrgyzstani People?]," Economist.kg, August 17, 2023, https://economist.kg/ekonomika/2023/08/17/kak-zakon-o-molodiezhi-otrazitsia-na-ekonomikie-kr-i-vozmozhnostiakh-kyrghyzstantsiev/.

[44] Priniat projekt Zakona Kyrgyzskoj Respubliki "O molodeji" v pervom chtenji [The draft Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On Youth" was adopted in the first reading], Zhogorky Kenesh, accessed December 22, 2023, http://kenesh.kg/ru/news/show/13136/prinyat-proekt-zakona-kirgizskoy-respubliki-o-molodezhi-v-pervom-chtenii.

themselves, went out on the calls of other volunteers in social networks, joined the movements via telegram channels. Such informal volunteers had to trust certain people to coordinate, monitor the situation on the equipment and finances entrusted to them in order to prevent free-riding.

Several factors contribute to the preference for informal volunteering over formal channels in Kyrgyzstan. Firstly, there may be a lack of awareness regarding formal volunteering opportunities, such as those offered by the Red Crescent, resulting in a lower response rate from potential volunteers. Secondly, trust issues may play a role, with some individuals expressing concerns about how formal organizations utilize their contributions. Lastly, the appeal of flexibility and autonomy provided by informal volunteering becomes apparent. Unlike formal structures, informal volunteering allows individuals to choose when and how to contribute, granting a sense of control that resonates with those navigating busy schedules or possessing specific skills. These factors collectively shape the landscape of informal volunteering in Kyrgyzstan, underscoring the intricate motivations and choices within the realm of civic engagement.

Another point is that the relationship between volunteers and the state can also affect the motivation of the population to be included in the processes of public assistance. Volunteering promotes better governance as it can help to create a more engaged and active citizenry, increase accountability, and improve the level of trust between citizens and government.[45] However, not all the states have established productive cooperation with volunteers. In Kyrgyzstan for more than 10 years, deputies and public organizations have been trying to determine the legal status of volunteers, to establish the principles for the implementation of volunteering activities.[46] In March 2023 after several attempts the law 'On Volunteering' was adopted and signed by the President.[47] On the one hand, the legal status of a group of volunteers will contribute to their recognition by the state as a certain group of activists who will have certain rights,

[45] rep., *2022 State of the World's Volunteerism Report: Building Equal and Inclusive Societies* (United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, 2021), https://swvr2022.unv.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/UNV_SWVR_2022.pdf, 5.

[46] J. Moldokeeva, Sh. Mamytova, and A. Sagyndykova, rep., *VOLUNTEERING IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC: STATUS, CHALLENGES, PROSPECTS* (Hanns Seidel Foundation, 2023), https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ha2okaseNm6lBvC8Zkjt1OzKYv4GZZEF

[47] "The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic 'On Volunteer Activities' Was Adopted," Information and legal portal TOKTOM, March 31, 2023, https://online.toktom.kg/NewsTopic/6840.

powers and finances. On the other hand, it is important not to allow excessive regulation of volunteer activities, so that volunteers still remain in the state without a fear of the burden of too much responsibilities, duties and requirements of doing reports. Thus, countries often establish policies and laws to define the roles and support for volunteers, especially when their activities potentially conflict with the state's authority. For instance, President Bush in 2001 emphasized that volunteer groups should complement rather than replace government agencies.[48]

For the state and the authorities (given that the elected authorities serve the people), volunteers might be a huge support and help. A volunteers' work helps the state quickly and effectively solve the problems that arise in crisis periods.[49] The help of volunteers is important for the state regardless of its political course. For example, a volunteer Kuba Myrzabekov during 2020 protests in Kyrgyzstan (undoubtedly, more political issue than the Covid-19) said that even though every person had their own political views, for volunteers and combatants (druzhinniki)[50] "It is better to be out of politics. If you want to express your political views, it is better to take off [the combatant's] vest."[51] It means that the main goal of volunteers is to help in resolving a problem situation. Such assistance to people in need is, accordingly, assistance to the state. While volunteers in Kyrgyzstan, like individuals worldwide, retain their right to hold political opinions, it is inspiring to witness their resilience and activation, even in the face of government disappointments, as they continue to contribute to positive change in their communities.

There were some positive examples of state and volunteers interactions during Covid-19 in Kyrgyzstan. For example, in November 2020 Republican headquarters of voluntary doctors and volunteers opened in Bishkek.[52] Twenty volunteer movements,

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[48] Sanni T. Adebayo, *Volunteering: The Impact on Civil Society*, accessed 2023, https://www.civicus.org/media/volunteering-the-impact-on-civil-society-Tajudeen-Adebayo.pdf, 5.
[49] J. Moldokeeva, Sh. Mamytova, and A. Sagyndykova, rep., *VOLUNTEERING IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC: STATUS, CHALLENGES, PROSPECTS* (Hanns Seidel Foundation, 2023), https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ha2okaseNm6lBvC8Zkjt1OzKYv4GZZEF
[49] John Wilson , "Volunteering," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 215, https://www.jstor.org/stable/223443.
[50] people who maintain public order amid protests, "police from the people"
[51] Aleksandra Li, "When the State Disappeared. How Volunteers and Vigilantes Defended Bishkek," KLOOP.KG - News of Kyrgyzstan, October 20, 2020, https://kloop.kg/blog/2020/10/17/kogda-gosudarstvo-propalo-kak-volontery-i-druzhinniki-zashhishhali-bishkek/.
[52] The headquarters of voluntary doctors and volunteers opened in the capital, 2020, https://www.meria.kg/ru/post/21090.

fifteen public foundations, charitable and non-governmental first aid organizations were consolidated there.[53] However, in this case again the most attention was paid to organized forms of volunteering. Another example can be that The Ministry of Health and Social Development of the Kyrgyz Republic had launched an electronic portal for registering organizations and people wishing to become volunteers in response to Covid-19 (www.dobro.med.kg.) [54] In this case the platform served for both organizations and individuals willing to help. In addition, some representatives of the government expressed their appreciation and respect to volunteers in social media[55] and by organizing meeting with volunteers.[56]

Thus, a certain interaction between the state and volunteers took place. However, given that Covid-19 was an unexpected crisis and test for everyone, some of the steps taken by the authorities were widely criticized. The purpose of my work is not to analyze the state response to Covid-19. I focus on the volunteer movement, namely on the motivations and schemes for organizing informal volunteering. At the same time, the issue of governance and the importance of informal volunteers for this process will be touched upon. I consider the participants in management processes to be an important link in the development of governance.

Research time framework and question

I center my focus on the critical role of volunteering amidst the unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic in Kyrgyzstan, delving specifically into the period of the most intensive battle against the outbreak, spanning from March 2020 to March 2021. This temporal scope encapsulates not only the initial governmental response to the pandemic but also subsequent endeavors to alleviate its impact, including the

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[53] The headquarters of voluntary doctors and volunteers opened in the capital, 2020, https://www.meria.kg/ru/post/21090.

[54] "An Electronic Portal for Volunteers Was Launched in Kyrgyzstan," News of Kyrgyzstan - KNIA "Kabar," accessed December 22, 2023, https://kabar.kg/news/v-kyrgyzstane-zapustili-portal-dlia-volonterov-v-reagirovanii-na-covid-19/.

[55] Almazbek Kydyrmaevich Orozaliev, n.d., https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid026cVNfTy6o4d2XAvqyVeANMK2ButNHnBCcyXpj3uWVt4nCbydZeMfkv1SQZY6XNaql&id=100049180763859.

[56] Darya Podolskaja, "The Main Thing Is Dialogue. The President's Meeting with Volunteers: How the Press Service Saw It," 24.kg, July 22, 2020, https://24.kg/vlast/160230_glavnoe_dialog_vstrecha_prezidenta_svolonterami_kak_eeuvidela_press-slujba/.

establishment of volunteer programs and initiatives dedicated to aiding those in distress. This one year period will show what the government of Kyrgyzstan managed to do, how they formulated the response to the crisis. However, more importantly Covid-19 as a crisis event will help to understand the informal volunteers as a layer of society in Kyrgyzstan better.

Formulating my research questions with precision, I inquire, "How did informal volunteering manifest in Kyrgyzstan during Covid-19, and what motivated individuals to engage in self-organized volunteer activities within this context?" By delving into the motivations and modalities of self-organization, my objective is to gain insights into how informal volunteers, particularly those categorized into three distinct groups—production and delivery volunteers, medical support volunteers, and community care volunteers— perceive the government's crisis response and their perspectives on the network of organizations colloquially known as volunteers during the Covid-19 era. It is plausible that a perceived lack of trust in larger organizations and the Kyrgyz government served as a catalyst for individuals to initiate self-organized efforts. Nevertheless, my investigation extends beyond this premise, exploring additional contributing factors that may have spurred proactive engagement. Furthermore, I seek to unravel the reasons behind their choice to actively participate rather than opting for the safety of remaining at home. To provide a robust theoretical framework for my inquiry, I will employ the integrated theory of volunteer work, delving into the motivations driving individuals to contribute to the common good and addressing the challenges associated with free-riding. Additionally, I will apply the community resilience theory to assess the capacity of individuals, groups, and institutions within the Kyrgyz community to anticipate, adapt, and effectively respond to adverse situations.

In essence, this study aspires to unveil the nuanced facets of informal volunteering in Kyrgyzstan during the Covid-19 crisis. Beyond merely celebrating the heroism of Kyrgyz volunteers, my research endeavors to conduct a detailed analysis, transcending generalized narratives to reveal the distinctive attributes and societal roles of these ad-hoc volunteers. The ultimate goal of this exploration is to offer a comprehensive understanding of how Kyrgyzstan navigated different challenges imposed by the pandemic, scrutinized through the lens of informal volunteerism.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter illustrates that the thesis employs a comprehensive theoretical framework to analyze informal volunteering motivations during the Covid-19 pandemic in Kyrgyzstan. Drawing on Clary et al.'s functionalist theory, it emphasizes social integration and cohesion. Owen's insights highlight the vital role of self-organized citizens in the absence of state support. Integrating Wilson and Musick's theory, the study considers volunteer work as a mix of human, social, and cultural capital, exploring altruistic and egoistic motives. Einolf et al.'s perspectives on informal volunteering as social capital contribute to a holistic understanding. The inclusion of community resilience theory underscores elements such as inclusive decision-making, social cohesion, adaptive governance, crisis communication, and resourcefulness. Aligning with Chadwik et al.'s perspective on local volunteering and community resilience, the thesis adopts a dynamic view of resilience as an ongoing adaptive process. Emphasizing power dynamics and the importance of dialogue, this framework aims to provide a nuanced analysis of informal volunteering in Kyrgyzstan during the Covid-19 crisis.

2.1. Informal volunteering, motivations: what does literature say?

There are different approaches in the literature how to define informal volunteering. *Mitani (2014)* claimed that informal volunteering is mostly about private assistance to friends and neighbors, so it is local and unorganized.[57] The scale of informal volunteers in Kyrgyzstan amid Covid-19 was much bigger than assistance to friends. It means that either there was another motivation rather than to help 'a friend' or all Kyrgyz people perceive each other as friends so this motivation can be justified if understood in a broader context. According to David Horton Smith, informal volunteering should be unpaid and not coordinated by an organization or institution; "it is evident in helping individuals outside one's household, informal political participation, informal religious

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[57] Haruyo Mitani, "Influences of Resources and Subjective Dispositions on Formal and Informal Volunteering," Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations 25, no. 4 (2013): 1024, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-013-9384-3.

activity, and membership in informal mutual assistance groups."[58] This is the understanding I share in this work.

A number of authors divide formal and informal volunteering on the basis of the object to which assistance is provided. For example, if volunteers help neighbors with gardening or shopping, or other similar assistance is provided to households, then such volunteering can be considered informal. If assistance is provided to organizations (hospitals, kindergartens, etc.), then such assistance is considered formal, and, accordingly, this is formal volunteering.[59] However, this division is not suitable for the current research, since object of help is not the prior issue as such. The focus of the study is on the volunteers themselves and the informality of their association. Therefore, I mentioned that the words 'spontaneous' and 'informal' are used as synonyms in this work.

Exploring the distinction between informal and formal volunteering and understanding volunteers' perceptions of this dichotomy is crucial for my research. *Ruth Simsa et al. (2019)* studied the experience of spontaneous volunteering in comparison with organized work by civil society organizations (CSOs). Their argument is that informal volunteering "partly substitute official response systems and it results in a high degree of self-organization."[60] They claimed that the level of coordination can be as high and well-working as on the CSOs level. I also include the question of work coordination in the interviews with volunteers in Kyrgyzstan in order to see if the processes of organization were smooth.

Guanlan Mao et al. (2021) examined different types of volunteering, including informal volunteering. They described its effectiveness in terms of "speed, democratic nature, and ability to meet the needs of those excluded from other services."[61] The researchers claimed that mutual aid groups undoubtedly played a life-saving role in the

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[58] "IAVE - The International Association for Volunteer Effort," IAVE the International Association for Volunteer Effort, accessed December 22, 2023, https://www.iave.org/.

[59] Sara Helms and Tom McKenzie, "Gender Differences in Formal and Informal Volunteering in Germany," *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 25, no. 4 (2013): 889, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-013-9378-1.

[60] Simsa, Rameder, and Aghamanoukjan, "Spontaneous Volunteering in Social Crises: Self-Organization and Coordination," https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764018785472.

[61] Guanlan Mao, Maria Fernandes-Jesus, and Evangelos Ntontis, "What have we learned about COVID-19 volunteering in the UK? A rapid review of the literature," *BMC Public Health* 21, no.1470 (2021): 9, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12889-021-11390-8.

UK's Covid-19 response. In addition, the study analyzed how authorities cooperated with local communities in the UK. The government organized special "community champions programs", several consultations to understand community needs and to provide its involvement in the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of services.[62]

The literature on informal volunteering and motivations reveals a multifaceted landscape shaped by various factors. Scholars have explored the diverse reasons individuals engage in volunteer activities outside formal structures. Here are some of them:

1)   Many volunteers are driven by intrinsic factors such as a sense of altruism, personal fulfillment, and a desire to contribute positively to their communities.[63]

2)   Also, informal volunteering often thrives on social networks, with individuals motivated by a sense of community and the opportunity to build and strengthen social ties. This encompasses broadening one's social connections, engaging in volunteering due to the influence of friends or colleagues, and responding to societal expectations or pressures to participate in volunteer activities.[64]

3)   Third type of motivations can be called personal development. The literature suggests that individuals engage in informal volunteering for personal development, including the acquisition of new skills, experiences, and a sense of personal growth.[65]

4)   For some people the main motivation to do informal volunteering lies in its flexibility and autonomy. Unlike formal volunteering structures, informal volunteering provides individuals with greater flexibility and autonomy in choosing when, where, and how they contribute, appealing to those with busy schedules or specific skills to offer.

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[62] Mao, Fernandes-Jesus, and Ntontis, "What have we learned about COVID-19 volunteering in the UK? A rapid review of the literature," 2, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12889-021-11390-8.
[63] E. Gil Clary et al., "Understanding and Assessing the Motivations of Volunteers: A Functional Approach.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74, no. 6 (1998): 1518, https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.6.1516.
[64] Femida Handy et al., "A Cross-Cultural Examination of Student Volunteering: Is It All About Resume Building?," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, n.d., accessed 2023, https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764009344353, 499.
[65] E. Gil Clary et al., "Understanding and Assessing the Motivations of Volunteers: A Functional Approach.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74, no. 6 (1998): 1518, https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.6.1516.

5)	Volunteers are often motivated by a broader commitment to societal well-being, reflecting a sense of civic duty and a desire to contribute to positive social change.[66]

6)	Among other things, informal volunteering relies heavily on trust and reciprocity. Individuals engage in volunteer activities based on trust in the community, reciprocal relationships, and a sense of responsibility.

7)	Some individuals engage in informal volunteering for the long term, driven by sustained altruistic motives and a dedication to a particular cause.[67]

8)	Factors such as lack of awareness about formal volunteering opportunities and trust issues with formal organizations can lead individuals to choose informal volunteering.[68]

Intrinsic factors, social influences, personal development goals, flexibility, commitment to societal well-being, trust dynamics, sustained dedication, and responses to awareness and trust issues collectively underscore the complexity of motivations. Recognizing these varied incentives is crucial for understanding the big range of informal volunteering, providing a solid foundation for the subsequent exploration of volunteerism in Kyrgyzstan within this framework.

There is a growing body of literature that emphasizes the critical role of informal volunteering in crisis response. However, relatively fewer studies have focused specifically on motivations and perceptions of volunteers, especially during Covid-19. Recently, a report on volunteering in Kyrgyzstan was published[69], providing valuable insights into the volunteering landscape in the country. However, the report primarily focuses on general statistics and tendencies of volunteering, rather than specifically addressing the informal volunteering sector or its association with Covid-19. While this information may not directly align with the objectives of my research, it still holds

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[66] Helen Bussell and Deborah Forbes, "Understanding the Volunteer Market: The What, Where, Who and Why of Volunteering," *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 7, no. 3 (2002): 249, https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.183.
[67] John Wilson and Marc Musick, "Who Cares? Toward an Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work," *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 5 (1997): 694, https://doi.org/10.2307/2657355.
[68] Femida Handy et al., "A Cross-Cultural Examination of Student Volunteering: Is It All About Resume Building?," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, n.d., accessed 2023, https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764009344353, 499.
[69] J. Moldokeeva, Sh. Mamytova, and A. Sagyndykova., rep., *Volunteering in the Kyrgyz Republic: Status, Challenges, Prospects.*

significance as a foundation for understanding the broader volunteering context in Kyrgyzstan.

The topic of motivations to volunteer has been studied by several authors. For instance, *Debashish Sengupta (2022)* classified volunteering motivations into utilitarian (gaining knowledge and skills), affective (improved interpersonal relationships) and normative (a desire to promote the welfare of others) incentives.[70] Interestingly, he made a conclusion that millennials (youth) prefer volunteering more for its core purposes (values) rather than for helping to a certain organization, which also testifies that informal volunteering is a more attractive way to be useful in youngsters' understandings (at least, in Bahrain where the research was conducted).[71] In my research I will focus mostly on youth as well. I want to analyze why the common belief that disasters create chaos and helplessness did not become an obstacle for Kyrgyz citizens to become even more connected and united tackling the Covid-19 crisis. *Jo Barraket et al.* in their research also studied characteristics and motivations of spontaneous volunteers who responded to a crisis event.[72] This research was conducted in Australia, thus I assume the societies are different and the motivations can vary. Moreover, it was devoted to natural disasters analysis while the Covid-19 case was something unique.

Shye studied the altruistic-egoistic duality of volunteering explaining that both these factors could be incentives for volunteering.[73] The classification of motivations into altruistic and selfish seems important for the study of volunteering in Kyrgyzstan during the period of Covid-19, since it is interesting what benefits volunteers saw for themselves in providing assistance. It is essential to clarify that my research does not intend to undermine the significance of volunteering or establish egocentric motivations. Rather,

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[70] Debashish Sengupta and Dwa Al-Khalifa, "Motivations of Young Women Volunteers during COVID-19: A Qualitative Inquiry in Bahrain," *Adm. Sci. 12*(2), no.65 (2022), https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci12020065, 1.

[71] Sengupta and Al-Khalifa, "Motivations of Young Women Volunteers during COVID-19: A Qualitative Inquiry in Bahrain," *2.*

[72] Jo Barraket, Robyn Keast, Cameron Newton, "Spontaneous Volunteering During Natural Disasters," The Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies (Jun. 2013), https://researchportal.scu.edu.au/esploro/outputs/report/Spontaneous-volunteering-during-natural-disasters/991012821791902368.

[73] Samuel Shye, "The Motivation to Volunteer: A Systemic Quality of Life Theory," *Social Indicators Research* 98, no. 2 (September 2010): 184, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40800966.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Abe038658b3e335dd884cb7ecd38d74a1&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1Samuel Shye.

its primary focus is to comprehensively explore the perspectives of volunteers concerning Kyrgyzstan. Volunteers, being proactive agents, constitute a substantial segment of the civil society. Among these, informal volunteers can be identified as 'lifelong activists' who engage in altruistic endeavors without formal affiliations to specific organizations, guided by their inherent active life position. The manner in which governmental bodies engage with this part of society holds immense significance. A deeper understanding of this engagement can be achieved by investigating volunteers' perceptions of the state's response during the Covid-19 crisis. In essence, the examination of motivations among volunteers, whether characterized by altruistic or selfish tendencies, serves as a pivotal lens to analyze the dynamics of volunteerism in Kyrgyzstan during the pandemic.

Holdsworth also emphasized both individualistic and collective motives, and volunteer engagement orientation influenced by those factors. The author discussed that not just collective aspirations but a blend of motivations led people to volunteer. Moreover, contemporary trends show a rise in volunteering that leverages personal skills and interests, aiming to maximize individual gains.[74]

Thus, there is a sufficient amount of literature that allows us to analyze the motivations for volunteering in general. At the same time, according to *Perry et al.*, "informal volunteering is often overlooked, though the amount likely rivals the extent of formal volunteering to organizations."[75] The surge in popularity of informal volunteering warrants a more comprehensive investigation, particularly through the utilization of case study methodologies. Examining the context of Covid-19 as a case study offers valuable insights into the specific characteristics and intricacies of informal volunteering. The distinct features observed within informal volunteering during the pandemic serve as a significant lens through which to deepen understanding of this phenomenon, advocating

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[74] Clare Holdsworth, "Why Volunteer? Understanding Motivations for Student Volunteering," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 58, no. 4 (December 2010): 422, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40980910.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A4ca917ce7b1b2d1caad0a19040fb9e6d&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=search-results&acceptTC=1.

[75] James L. Perry et al., "What Drives Morally Committed Citizens? A Study of the Antecedents of Public Service Motivation," *Public Administration Review* 68, no. 3 (2008): 445–58, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/25145623.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Aa6c72b60cbd6998bba7f76887bb6295c&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1.

for, inter alia, comparative studies across different cases, countries and time periods and highlighting the need for further scholarly exploration.

Volunteer-government interactions

In this thesis, I will explore the complex dynamics between authorities and informal volunteers, emphasizing their potential impact on motivational factors. As previously suggested, the erosion of trust in governmental institutions or the perceived fragility of the state can trigger spontaneous mobilization among individuals, contingent upon the response of the authorities. To delve deeper, the scholarly perspectives advanced by Haski-Leventhal et al underscore the pivotal role of volunteering in sustaining a vibrant and engaged civil society, a viewpoint recognized and deemed essential by governments globally.[76] Consequently, it is imperative to scrutinize the interaction between formal authorities and informal volunteers.

According to *Guanlan Mao et al. (2021)*, three kinds of authorities' involvement can be distinguished - micromanage, indifferent, and facilitative.[77] In the micromanaged approach councils closely control what volunteers do. In the indifferent approach councils do not help volunteers at all, what can stop volunteering and make people lose trust in the government. For example, a volunteering group called Locality said the government did not share information or plan how to help, which led to confusion and made it difficult to get funding. The third approach is called the facilitative approach. Here, local governments help communities without taking over. They give practical support like supplying phones and helping groups connect with each other. [78] Kyrgyz authorities were not indifferent; however, it is important to research whether their assistance was perceived as provided within micromanaged or facilitative approach. It is important as according to the *2022 state of the world's volunteerism UN report*, "By engaging volunteers in deliberative processes, state authorities facilitate their inclusion and enable them to contribute to finding viable solutions to complex challenges." *Nick*

[76] Karen Smith et al., "Motivations and Benefits of Student Volunteering: Comparing Regular, Occasional, and Non-Volunteers in Five Countries," Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research 1, no. 1 (2010), https://doi.org/10.22230/cjnser.2010v1n1a2.

[77] Mao, Fernandes-Jesus, and Ntontis, "What have we learned about COVID-19 volunteering in the UK? A rapid review of the literature," 11, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12889-021-11390-8.

[78] Mao, Fernandes-Jesus, and Ntontis, "What have we learned about COVID-19 volunteering in the UK? A rapid review of the literature," 11, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12889-021-11390-8.

Ockenden (2022) evaluated the impact of informal volunteering on governance processes such as "inclusiveness and equity, social capital, cultural understanding and exchange, trust, inspiration and optimism"[79], which are the important factors of good governance.

However, there is a problem with an enormous encouragement to volunteer - in a neoliberal economic framework, the act of volunteering might incentivize governments to privatize services and retreat from their fundamental responsibilities to citizens. Instead, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human services organizations step in to deliver essential services to populations in need, utilizing volunteers.[80] This nuance offers opportunities for more exploration and detailed discussions about finding the right balance between volunteerism, government duties, and the role of informal volunteers in providing services.

In the context of volunteering-government relations in Kyrgyzstan during the Covid-19 pandemic, the dynamics can be shaped by various models of cooperation, drawing inspiration from global experiences and strategies. One interesting concept to explore is Alternative Service Delivery (ASD), a dynamic process that involves restructuring public sector functions to enhance service delivery. It differs from privatization, encompassing a spectrum of changes that redefine government roles and responsibilities.[81] ASD, as articulated by the definition provided by IPAC and KPMG, involves a creative and dynamic process of restructuring public sector functions.[82] It aims to improve service delivery by involving individuals, community groups, the private sector, and other government entities.

Importantly, this definition underscores the idea that government, in implementing ASD, does not completely relinquish responsibility and accountability for services. Instead, it seeks to redefine its role with the goal of enhancing service delivery. In the

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[79] Nick Ockenden, "A New Dawn: Strategic Pathways for the Future of Volunteering in Development" (IVCO 2022 Framing paper, August 2022), https://forum-ids.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/IVCO-2022-Framing-Paper-A-New-Dawn-Strategic-Pathways-for-the-Future-of-Volunteering-in-Development.pdf.

[80] Debbie Haski-Leventhal, Lucas C. Meijs, and Lesley Hustinx, "The Third-Party Model: Enhancing Volunteering through Governments, Corporations and Educational Institutes," *Journal of Social Policy* 39, no. 1 (2009): 140, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047279409990377.

[81] Jeffrey L. Brudney and Nara Yoon, "Don't You Want My Help? Volunteer Involvement and Management in Local Government," *The American Review of Public Administration* 51, no. 5 (2021): 331–44, https://doi.org/10.1177/02750740211002343.

[82] rep., *Alternative Service Delivery (ASD) - Policy and Framework* (Toronto City Council, 2001), https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2001/agendas/council/cc011106/pof14rpt/cl001.pdf.

specific case of Kyrgyzstan during the Covid-19 crisis, this redefined government role could work at different levels. Firstly, the government could act as a regulator, setting guidelines and standards for volunteer activities to ensure their effectiveness and alignment with public health priorities. Secondly, the government could function as a funder, providing financial support to volunteer initiatives and community groups actively involved in addressing pandemic-related challenges. Moreover, the government could play a managerial role, coordinating efforts, and facilitating communication between informal volunteers and various stakeholders. Lastly, the government could continue to act as a service deliverer, particularly in areas where its direct involvement is crucial for effective response. This approach would allow the government to optimize its resources and capabilities while leveraging the strengths of volunteers, community groups, and the private sector.

Drawing insights from the experiences of organizations like ASD in the United States and Canada, Kyrgyzstan could explore innovative ways of involving volunteers in the provision of essential services during the pandemic. By adopting an ASD framework, Kyrgyzstan's government could collaborate with individuals, community groups, and other entities to enhance the overall effectiveness and reach of its Covid-19 response. This model not only empowers local communities but also fosters a sense of shared responsibility and collaboration in times of crisis.

While the government and municipal bodies in Kyrgyzstan increasingly acknowledge the role and significance of volunteer work in the country's development, a lack of clear measures and mechanisms for state support persists. This deficiency includes organizational and legal support, information and methodological guidance, infrastructure, incentives for volunteers, and financial backing. Despite this challenge, some positive practices and instances of collaboration between government agencies and volunteer groups did exist.[83] Thus, some acknowledgment of the crucial role played by volunteers in addressing critical challenges was noticed in Kyrgyzstan. In October 2020, individuals contributing to the fight against Covid-19 were among the recipients of state awards from President Jeenbekov. Additionally, in June 2021, the Ministry of Health of

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[83] J. Moldokeeva, Sh. Mamytova, and A. Sagyndykova., rep., *Volunteering in the Kyrgyz Republic: Status, Challenges, Prospects,* 15.

the Kyrgyz Republic took a significant step toward formalizing volunteer efforts by launching an electronic portal. This platform facilitates the registration of organizations and individuals willing to volunteer in response to Covid-19, offering a structured approach to coordination. The State Agency for Youth Affairs, Physical Culture, and Sports, under the Ministry of Culture, Information, Sports, and Youth Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic, oversees national-level support for volunteering activities, particularly those aimed at the youth.[84]

To sum up, the existing literature highlights the potential benefits of informal volunteering, its importance in crisis situations (mostly, natural disasters), the role of young people, and the broader context of governance and community development in Kyrgyzstan. Even though all these findings are helpful for studying the motivations and ways of self-organizing of spontaneous volunteering in Kyrgyzstan, yet the topic has not been sufficiently studied. There is no answer why people in Kyrgyzstan preferred this (more difficult to my mind) type of providing help, how they did it, what they are doing nowadays, and how this data can be useful for civil society understanding. Also, in navigating the delicate balance between volunteerism, government duties, and the role of informal volunteers, this thesis encourages innovative strategies that empower communities, enhance service delivery, and build resilience during crises. Analyzing these relationships is essential for shaping effective and sustainable approaches to volunteering-government dynamics in diverse contexts.

2.2. Theoretical perspectives for analysis

In this thesis, I aim to grasp the motivations observed in previous studies and apply them to the specific case of Covid-19 in Kyrgyzstan. Clary et al.'s use of the functionalist theory will help me explain why individuals choose to volunteer during this particular situation. Functionalism, a sociological perspective developed by theorists like Emile Durkheim, views society as a complex system comprised of interrelated parts that work together to maintain stability and order. When applied to volunteering, the functionalist approach emphasizes the positive functions that volunteering serves within the social

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[84] J. Moldokeeva, Sh. Mamytova, and A. Sagyndykova., rep., *Volunteering in the Kyrgyz Republic: Status, Challenges, Prospects,* 15.

structure. Functionalists argue that volunteering plays a crucial role in promoting social integration. By engaging in volunteer activities, individuals become connected to their communities, fostering a sense of belonging and shared values. This, in turn, contributes to social cohesion and stability. Volunteering provides a platform for socialization, enabling individuals to interact with diverse groups of people and develop a sense of social identity. Through these interactions, volunteers learn about different perspectives, values, and norms, contributing to their overall social development.

Functionalism suggests that volunteering reinforces social roles and norms. By participating in volunteer work, individuals often embrace roles that align with societal expectations, reinforcing a sense of duty, responsibility, and civic engagement. The functionalist perspective contends that volunteering contributes to the overall stability of society. As individuals invest time and effort in volunteer activities, they contribute to the functioning of various social institutions, promoting order and equilibrium. And most important, volunteering is seen as a mechanism for addressing social needs. Functionalists argue that volunteers play a vital role in filling gaps within society, whether through supporting vulnerable populations, addressing community issues, or contributing to social welfare programs. *Clary et al.* discussed functionalist theory to explain why individuals choose to volunteer and they considered how practically organizations could recruit and retain volunteers by understanding their motivations.[85]

Within the theoretical framework of this thesis, the insights derived from Owen's article contribute two pivotal dimensions.[86] Firstly, the article challenges the conventional perspective held by non-liberal governments, which tends to view self-organized citizens as a destabilizing force. In the Kyrgyz context, these initiatives were not perceived as destabilizing as there were no alternative from the government, and in fact, it was the only way out to save population. This support is premised on the understanding that these autonomous citizens play a crucial role by undertaking tasks and providing services in the

[85] E. Gil Clary and Mark Snyder, "The Motivations to Volunteer: Theoretical and Practical Considerations," Current Directions in Psychological Science 8, no. 5 (October 1999): 156–59, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20182591.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A4ca917ce7b1b2d1caad0a19040fb9e6d&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=search-results&acceptTC=1.
[86] Catherine Owen, "Active Citizens in a Weak State: 'Self-Help' Groups and the Post-Soviet Neoliberal Subject in Contemporary Kyrgyzstan," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 14, no. 3 (2020): 464–79, https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2020.1802560.

absence of a robust state. In situations where the state struggles to offer adequate services, autonomous citizens become indispensable in taking responsibility for their own welfare. Consequently, leaders of weak states strategically recontextualize global neoliberal discourses of active citizenship, which emphasize the importance of autonomous and rational citizens, to legitimize their functional inadequacies.

Secondly, Owen challenges the dichotomy prevalent in government and international NGO discourses that distinguish between the 'passive Soviet citizen' and the modern, post-Soviet active citizen. This oversimplified binary classification is revealed as a discursive trope utilized to differentiate between desirable and undesirable subjectivities within the post-Soviet market state. By problematizing this distinction, Owen underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of citizen engagement and subjectivity in the contemporary socio-political landscape of Kyrgyzstan.[87] These insights enrich the theoretical framework by providing a deeper comprehension of the complexities surrounding citizen initiatives, governmental responses, and discursive constructions of citizenship within the Kyrgyz context.

Thus, while functionalist theory focuses on motivations within organized volunteering structures, Owen's work extends this understanding to encompass the motivations and initiatives of self-organized citizens, offering a broader and more nuanced perspective on civic engagement. Together, these theories contribute to a comprehensive understanding of motivations and citizen roles within societal structures.

There is a complex work 'An Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work' conducted by John Wilson and Marc Musick.[88] They considered volunteer work as a sum of human capital, social capital and cultural capital. Such model is relevant for both formal and informal volunteering, however, forms of capital are connected in different ways for each model. Thus, when it comes to social capital required by collective behavior, Wilson and Musick argue that sense of obligations is more powerful in informal helping. Formal volunteers say: "We feel . . . that it is important to help others in general, but we do not

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[87] Catherine Owen, "Active Citizens in a Weak State: 'Self-Help' Groups and the Post-Soviet Neoliberal Subject in Contemporary Kyrgyzstan," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 14, no. 3 (2020): 464–79, https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2020.1802560.
[88] John Wilson and Marc Musick, "Who Cares? Toward an Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work," *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 5 (1997): 694, https://doi.org/10.2307/2657355.

feel obligated to give a specific service to a specific individual."[89] At the same time informal volunteers organize themselves into groups to provide assistance, which means they have increased responsibility, since there is no 'mandate' or 'debt of service / membership in the organization.' The authors created an extensive understanding of volunteerism through analyzing different perspectives on theory and incorporating them into a single framework. They depicted volunteer work as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by individual, social, and organizational factors, and by this found certain explanations of volunteer behavior.

In addition, exploring the nature of volunteerism, Wilson and Musick argued that volunteering and selfishness did not have opposite meanings. Hence, volunteering does not equal altruism. The authors considered both altruistic and egoistic motives, as volunteers might look for their own satisfaction or benefits while genuinely caring about the welfare of others. There is nothing contradictory in it. They also highlight the influence of individual beliefs, values, and social conventions on volunteerism, as well as the influence of organizational structures.

This theory will be useful to me because it covers a wide range of motivations, and I will take into account when conducting interviews or desk research that altruistic premises is not the only reason for volunteering, as one might immediately think. In addition, since I am investigating a specific type of volunteering - informal, it will be interesting for me what factors replace the need indicated in the theory of volunteering to follow the instructions of the organization. Since the members of a particular organization are activists who are expected to help, their motivations are also conditioned by social expectation. However, volunteers who no one knew they were volunteers are not subject to such expectations. Accordingly, they have other motives.

According to *Einolf et al*., three theoretical perspectives help us understand why people engage in informal volunteering, such as social capital, social networks, and evolutionary theory.[90] Informal volunteering can be regarded as a type of social capital since it fosters the creation of connections, common norms, and trust among people.

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[89] John Wilson and Marc Musick, "Who Cares? Toward an Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work," 700.
[90] David Horton Smith, Robert A. Stebbins, and Jurgen Grotz, *The Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 224.

Social networks theory investigates how individuals provide assistance to others, anticipating a form of reciprocity, either immediate or indirect.[91] Evolutionary biology offers insights into the existence of informal volunteering, underscoring its importance for the survival of our early human ancestors and its intrinsic presence in human behavior.[92] *Einolf et al*. state that informal volunteering predates formal voluntary organizations and has been observed in all human societies. It appears to be instinctive behavior among humans, not limited to specific cultures. Throughout history, informal volunteering has been a crucial means of support, especially before the development of formal welfare systems in industrialized societies.[93]

Collectively, these theories contribute to a comprehensive understanding of volunteer motivations, acknowledging the complexity of human behavior within the volunteerism landscape. By integrating insights from functionalism, self-organization, multidimensional theories, and specific perspectives on informal volunteering, this study aspires to provide a nuanced and thorough analysis of motivations and citizen roles within societal structures, particularly in the context of informal volunteering during the Covid-19 pandemic in Kyrgyzstan.

Another theory which will be implemented in this study connected with Covid-19 is community resilience theory, which is an interdisciplinary field that covers the components contributing to a community's resilience in the face of challenges or fluctuations. For example, in Judith Rodin's book 'The Resilience Dividend: Being Strong in a World Where Things Go Wrong' (*2014*) she assessed the value of inclusive and participatory decision-making, as well as social cohesion.[94] The theory of community resilience includes many different factors, and in general is a combination of theories of various authors and approaches. In this case, I will need to understand what factors (i.e. crisis communication, social capital, adaptive governance, social cohesion) are relevant for the society of Kyrgyzstan, in particular, during the response to the Covid-19.

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[91] Smith, Stebbins, and Grotz, *The Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations*, 224.
[92] Smith, Stebbins, and Grotz, *The Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations*, 224.
[93] Smith, Stebbins, and Grotz, *The Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations*, 224.
[94] Saleh Ahmed, "The Resilience Dividend: Being Strong in a World Where Things Go Wrong," *Resilience* 5, no. 3 (2016): 222–24, https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2016.1153775.

The main argument of community resilience theory is that communities can develop the capacity to adapt, respond, and thrive in the face of adversity and challenges.[95] This theory suggests that resilience is not simply the ability to bounce back from disruptions but also the ability to learn, grow, and even enhance community strengths in the aftermath of crises. Community resilience is seen as a dynamic process that involves various social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors working together to promote the well-being and sustainability of a community. Key components of community resilience theory often include:

1) Inclusive Decision-Making. Resilient communities involve diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes, ensuring that a broad range of perspectives and expertise contribute to collective strategies. Application: The study investigates how informal volunteering groups in Kyrgyzstan make decisions collectively, ensuring inclusivity and diverse perspectives in their decision-making processes. Significance: Understanding inclusive decision-making provides insights into the effectiveness and sustainability of informal volunteer initiatives and their resonance within the community.

2) Social Cohesion. Resilient communities exhibit strong social bonds and connections. Individuals within the community support each other, fostering a sense of solidarity and shared responsibility. Application: The research explores how informal volunteering fosters social bonds and shared responsibility within Kyrgyz communities, analyzing the impact on solidarity among volunteers. Significance: Examining social cohesion helps assess the role of volunteering in building a supportive network, crucial for community resilience during crises.

3) Adaptive Governance. Resilience involves adaptive governance structures that can respond effectively to changing circumstances. This may include flexible policies, decentralized decision-making, and the ability to learn from experiences. Application: The study delves into the adaptability of informal volunteering structures in Kyrgyzstan, assessing their response to changing circumstances and mechanisms for continuous learning. Significance: Understanding adaptive governance in informal

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[95] Smith, Stebbins, and Grotz, *The Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations*, 224.

volunteering provides insights into the sustainability and responsiveness of these grassroots initiatives.

4)   Crisis Communication. Effective communication is crucial during crises. Resilient communities prioritize transparent and timely communication to disseminate information, build trust, and coordinate responses. Application: An analysis of communication strategies employed by informal volunteering groups during the Covid-19 pandemic examines transparency, effectiveness, and timeliness. Significance: Effective crisis communication is pivotal for the success of volunteer efforts, influencing community perceptions and engagement.

5)   Resourcefulness. Resilient communities are resourceful, utilizing local assets and capacities to address challenges. This may involve the mobilization of community members, local organizations, and existing networks.

In the context of my thesis the principles of community resilience theory serve as a crucial theoretical framework to comprehensively analyze and interpret the dynamics of informal volunteering. By applying these key components within the Kyrgyzstani context, I aim to shed light on the diverse aspects of volunteerism during the Covid-19 pandemic. Application: The study explores how informal volunteering leverages local assets and capacities to address Covid-19 challenges, evaluating the mobilization of community members and networks. Significance: Assessing resourcefulness in informal volunteering elucidates the sustainability of these efforts and their ability to harness local strengths.

In general, by integrating these components of community resilience theory into the analysis, this thesis aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of how informal volunteering enhances the resilience of Kyrgyz communities amid the Covid-19 crisis. This theoretical framework provides a nuanced perspective on the motivations, actions, and impacts of informal volunteering within the specific socio-cultural context of Kyrgyzstan.

Chadwik et al. (2020) argued that local (community-based) volunteering can strengthen resilience and allow communities to develop beyond crises. In their work community-based volunteering is in its essence close to the informal volunteering I am focusing on. Their understanding of the linkages between resilience and community

development has prompted "a shift from models of external intervention to those inculcating societal agency and responsibility from within communities."[96] Thus, the authors emphasized the importance of inside movements and defined the role of external actors and agencies as listening and understanding "existing community-based models of social support and voluntary action." Here the issue of a necessity of a dialogue between government, local and community stakeholders rises.

I believe that adopting the perspective of understanding resilient individuals and communities as "an ongoing process of power shifting and adapting to change"[97] is a valuable approach for my research. This viewpoint sees resilience as a continuous process rather than a static state, providing a framework to better comprehend how individuals and communities in Kyrgyzstan respond and adapt to challenges, particularly within the realm of informal volunteering during the Covid-19 pandemic.

[96] Alice Chadwick and Bianca Fadel, rep., *Volunteerism and Community Resilience: Locally Owned Solutions Delivering Impact*, July 2020, https://www.iave.org/iavewp/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Volunteerism-and-Community-Resilience-Locally-Owned-Solutions-Delivering-Impact.pdf.

[97] Alice Chadwick and Bianca Fadel, rep., *Volunteerism and Community Resilience: Locally Owned Solutions Delivering Impact*, July 2020, https://www.iave.org/iavewp/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Volunteerism-and-Community-Resilience-Locally-Owned-Solutions-Delivering-Impact.pdf.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This thesis employs a comprehensive mixed-methods approach, including interviews, desk research, and a mock survey, to explore motivations and dynamics in informal volunteering during the Covid-19 pandemic in Kyrgyzstan. The research, guided by diverse theoretical frameworks, examines the roles of different volunteer groups, encompassing production and delivery, medical support, and community care. The study reveals nuanced insights into the motivations, self-organizing behaviors, and challenges faced by informal volunteers. While acknowledging limitations in generalizability, the research methodology provides a well-rounded perspective. The findings highlight the transformative impact of crisis-driven volunteerism on individuals and suggest potential collaborations between informal volunteers and the government, challenging assumptions about such partnerships only thriving in democratic states. Overall, this study contributes valuable insights into Kyrgyzstan's community response to the pandemic and establishes a foundation for future research on crisis-driven volunteerism.

3.1. Introduction of the desk-research data and interviews

As my research question is aimed at understanding motivations, types of self-organizing and other volunteers' attitudes, it is conducted by using qualitative methods. In particular, I apply triangulation as a research methodology, which means that the data collected from interviews is analyzed along with other sources (desk research), such as content analysis and documents related to volunteer movements in Kyrgyzstan.

Interviews allow for in-depth exploration of the experiences, motivations, and perspectives of informal volunteers. There is no exact number of informal volunteers in Kyrgyzstan, moreover, it would be very difficult to count the people who have not had any organizational structures. Therefore, I used mostly a snow-ball method of finding people. My main aim was to cover at least several diverse groups of volunteers. I searched for volunteers using different social media platforms (for example, groups for Covid-19 activists in Facebook or Telegram chats). The sample size of 10 people should have allowed me to capture generally participants' perspectives. I prepared a set of open-ended questions that, firstly, assessed the level of involvement and verify volunteer status, and secondly, explored motivations, types of self-organizing, challenges faced,

strategies used, and perceptions of the government's response to the Covid-19 crisis. The in-depth interviews conducted with a sample size of 10 participants have provided valuable insights, offering a nuanced understanding of perspectives. While the small sample size allowed for a more in-depth exploration, it is essential to acknowledge potential limitations in generalizability. Nevertheless, the qualitative nature of these interviews facilitates a richer exploration of individual experiences and motivations. In addition to the in-depth interviews, a mock survey involving 22 participants was conducted, adding a quantitative dimension to the research. This complementary approach strengthens the overall validity and reliability of the findings, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the volunteer-government dynamics during the pandemic. When it comes to the ethical concern, I obtained informed consent from all participants prior to conducting interviews (sometimes it was orally or by mail, sometimes in a handwritten form (in live interviews)).

To ensure a manageable sample size that allows for thorough analysis and comprehensive insights, I created a sample framework that focuses on three distinct categories of informal volunteers: production and delivery volunteers, medical support volunteers, and community care volunteers. These volunteers opted for activities that necessitated close interaction with potentially infected individuals, thereby placing them at greater personal risk. Understanding the motivations behind their choices and the impact of their actions contributes to a nuanced comprehension of crisis volunteering dynamics. This serves as a guide for selecting interviewees from various segments of the population.

At the outset of my research, I conducted a preliminary survey involving 22 volunteers. It is important to note that this survey does not provide quantitative data but offers qualitative insights into general trends. Through this survey, I identified distinct volunteer groups, including the bicycle movement, housewives movement, hospital assistants, online education assistants, business owners, and youth and student initiatives. Each group was dedicated to specific tasks during the Covid-19 pandemic, and notably, these groups operated independently without overlapping or interacting with one another. This aspect is beneficial for my research as it prevents me from falling into the trap of solely focusing on one particular group of people. By engaging with various groups, I

could gather diverse perspectives on the processes, gaps, and other relevant aspects related to volunteering.

A significant part of my work is occupied by desk research. Recently, a comprehensive study on the situation with volunteering in general was published in Kyrgyzstan.[98] This study helps form the big picture, but does not focus on informal volunteers, and also only scratches the surface of Covid-19 timeframe. Thus, I studied the existing literature on the topic of volunteering, informal volunteering, volunteering in Kyrgyzstan (desk research), as well as I apply qualitative research methods (interviews with volunteers in Kyrgyzstan).

My desk research is focused on examining relevant materials that shed light on the context, challenges, and existing structures of volunteering in Kyrgyzstan, with a particular emphasis on the Covid-19 period. Key findings and themes from the literature help with the interpretation and discussion of the interview data. In the interviews I covered three involved into volunteering groups amid the active phase of the fight against Covid-19 (2020-2021) – it is not the whole amount of volunteers and not the whole crisis period, that is my main limitations in the study. In addition, I analyzed media content, such as news articles, social media posts, and public discourse to see the insights into public perceptions related to informal volunteering during Covid-19. This method helps me contextualize my findings and understand how volunteers were portrayed in the broader societal discourse.

In conclusion, the research methodology I have chosen offers a comprehensive way to understand informal volunteering during the Covid-19 pandemic in Kyrgyzstan. Using qualitative methods like interviews, polls, I will explore the motivations, self-organizing behaviors, challenges, and views of three particular groups of informal volunteers. By combining interview data with content analysis and desk research, I aim to provide a well-rounded perspective. While there are limitations, such as not having an exact count of volunteers and the passage of time, this approach contributes valuable insights into the diverse groups that played a crucial role in Kyrgyzstan's community response to the pandemic. Additionally, these discoveries hold the potential to go beyond the current

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[98] J. Moldokeeva, Sh. Mamytova, and A. Sagyndykova., rep., *Volunteering in the Kyrgyz Republic: Status, Challenges, Prospects.*

situation, providing valuable knowledge that can strengthen community resilience during different challenging situations. This study also establishes a basis for potential future explorations, encouraging comparisons with other crises, even though the distinct characteristics make Covid-19 unique in terms of its scope and recent occurrence.

3.2. Motivations, self-organized structures, personalities

In April 2023, my contemplation on dissertation topics deepened, and I became increasingly fascinated by activism in Kyrgyzstan. This interest was sparked by the remarkable engagement and passion displayed by the Kyrgyz people in response to events in their country. Conversations with a great professional in human rights field and OSCE Academy professor Dr. Anja Mihr further fueled my curiosity. Professor expressed skepticism about the continuous support of Kyrgyzstan's NGOs by Western funds (in particular, EU funds), suggesting that the financial resources were not effectively utilized, leading to corruption and limited impact on democracy. These discussions prompted me to ponder the broader concept of civil society.

While civil society is often equated with NGOs, I became curious about other activists not affiliated with specific organizations, those without donors, but who simply wished to contribute to their country. As I explored the general activism landscape in Kyrgyzstan, I encountered numerous instances of people coming together to provide assistance during challenging times. This exploration led me to contemplate the concept of volunteering, even before formalizing its classification into formal and informal categories, which proved to be a relevant distinction, particularly when separating grant-based activism from activities undertaken without Western funding.

To formulate my research topic more precisely, I conducted five pilot interviews with Kyrgyzstani peers, initially considering a connection between activism and education. However, as I didn't find a direct correlation between educational levels and activism, I eventually abandoned this idea. The interviews revealed a well-developed NGO sector in Kyrgyzstan, but with some skepticism about its existence. Nevertheless, all interviewees acknowledged the sector's effectiveness, highlighting its vital role in the country. Interestingly, when asked about what they would do without this sector,

respondents emphasized the innate activism within Kyrgyz society, suggesting that even without NGOs, people would find ways to contribute. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers united and provided assistance nationwide. This concept resonated with me, leading to my decision to delve deeper into the study of volunteering in Kyrgyzstan, specifically focusing on informal volunteering. This decision stemmed from the initial dissonance I experienced between the NGO sector and other parts of civil society, prompting me to separate informal volunteering for research purposes. Moreover, conversations with students revealed that universities with foreign capital, such as AUCA, Manas, and UCA (and I believe, many more), played a significant role in shaping active citizens. The influence of readings on philosophy and literature during university years was evident, impacting personal development and worldview. I believe that education significantly shapes individuals, and if values of advocating for human rights and freedoms are instilled during university, the chances are higher that current students and future professionals will not remain indifferent when facing societal challenges. This pertains not only to political activism but also to broader social activism, as evident in initiatives providing aid during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, after these initial interviews my journey led me to the theme of informal volunteering in Kyrgyzstan for my research.

In May 2023, I initiated a mock survey still as a (still) preliminary step in my research, aiming to capture diverse perspectives from different volunteer groups. The survey was strategically disseminated across various social media platforms, including Facebook groups and Telegram chats, with the assistance of my Kyrgyz groupmates who played a crucial role in expanding the questionnaire's reach. Notably, 95.5% of the respondents revealed their engagement in volunteering within the capital, Bishkek. This realization prompted a recognition of a territorial limitation, acknowledging that my research would predominantly focus on Bishkek due to time constraints and logistical challenges preventing on-site visits to other regions.

While the survey's participant pool was not fully representative, subsequent communication with volunteers and additional desk research revealed a critical insight challenging initial assumptions. Contrary to the initial presumption that volunteers in Kyrgyzstan were predominantly young, individuals aged 30 to 50, constituting the

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working groups, emerged as highly responsible and active citizens. This revelation prompted a strategic decision to include their perspectives in the polls, recognizing the significant contribution of this demographic.

A pivotal aspect of the survey centered around discerning the formal and informal division among volunteers. The key question posed was, "During Covid-19, have you worked with any non-governmental organization (NGO), association, or other entity (e.g., UNICEF/Red Cross)?" Half of the respondents answered negatively, categorizing them as informal volunteers, with whom I subsequently conducted interviews. However, it is essential to note that responses indicating the creation of independent movements, such as a bicycling group or a collective of like-minded women, were also considered as instances of informal volunteering. These groups lacked formal structures associated with volunteering, and their decision to engage in volunteer activities was spontaneous. Additionally, some of these organizational forms emerged after the onset of Covid-19, underscoring their informal nature at the initial stages of their formation.

Among other reasons, also my interest in spontaneous volunteers stems from a revealing small-scale survey that showed the trend wherein approximately 70% of respondents had either not volunteered before or possessed less than one year of volunteering experience. This data suggests an unanticipated surge in volunteerism, propelled by the crisis, demonstrating how individuals, unprepared and unplanned for such activities, discovered new dimensions of activism for themselves. Leveraging their intrinsic activeness and a profound appreciation for freedom of expression, Kyrgyz people found a compelling reason to unite and extend assistance to the population during the challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic. Remarkably, a significant proportion of respondents continued their involvement in volunteer activities, with some transitioning to organized activism, delving into politics, or exploring alternative avenues of civic engagement. This shift raises intriguing questions about the transformative impact of crisis-driven volunteerism on individuals' subsequent civic and political trajectories.

The dynamics of volunteer-government cooperation emerged as a crucial aspect of this inquiry. When evaluating the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, over 90% of respondents expressed negative or neutral assessments, potentially serving as a catalyst for their independent mobilization. Interviews conducted during the research

process revealed a notable disconnect between volunteers and governmental support. A prevalent sentiment among respondents was the absence of substantial support, with some even considering the absence of hindrance as a positive scenario. In terms of recognition, the majority of respondents did not feel valued or acknowledged by the government, but at the same time this did not emerge as a priority for them. This apparent no willingness toward official recognition underscores selfless motivations that drive informal volunteers, distinguishing them from individuals seeking acknowledgment or rewards.

However, there is a positive aspect to the interaction between volunteers and the government. As I could notice from the test survey as well as desk-research, they worked together on certain pandemic-related issues. For instance, volunteers experienced smoother checkpoints thanks to special state laws, the government provided medicines, and volunteers delivered them. There were also joint efforts with state clinics and the mayor's office (for instance, the mayor's office participated in the delivery and distribution of concentrators from the Kyrgyz diaspora from Ohio, USA). While these collaborations faced challenges, they suggest a basis for building future relationships between the government and active citizens.

 For my research, this dynamic is not merely a retrospective observation but a prospective lens through which to envision future collaborations. Successful cooperation with the government could potentially reshape the motivations of active citizens, emphasizing a willingness to contribute to state responses, fostering a sense of teamwork, and productive cooperation. Importantly, this phenomenon is not confined to democratic states alone, challenging prevailing assumptions and suggesting that collaborative efforts can thrive in diverse political contexts. Authorities in non-democratic states, in particular, may find such collaborations beneficial, potentially enhancing their legitimacy and fostering improved citizen-state relations, provided that perceived threats, political competition, and other hindrances are appropriately addressed.

Thus, having gained a preliminary understanding of activists and activism in Kyrgyzstan, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with volunteers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Five women and five men from Bishkek participated in the interviews, with five individuals in the age category below 35 and five in the category above 35. I

prepared a set of questions that can be conditionally divided into two parts – the first aims to comprehend the volunteer's personality, answering questions of who, how, and why, thereby revealing motivations. The second part focuses on understanding the interaction between the state and volunteers.

Some volunteers joined movements because of the connections with their hobby or profession. For example, M., aged 29, initiated his volunteering journey during the Covid-19 pandemic. Initially drawn to cycling, his motivation shifted towards aiding people due to restrictions on alternative transportation. Joining organizations (not as a constant member but as "a guest"/informal assistant) such as "Veterans 365," "Volunteer Rescue Squad," and the "Grandmother Adoption Foundation," he actively participated in assisting vulnerable populations, distributing food packages. Despite not joining any organization as a member, during the pandemic, M. believed he contributed to help amid Covid-19. Another volunteer, G., a housewife, along with several women, united and decided to volunteer during the Covid-19 pandemic on cooking. Before for quite long time she volunteered in the field of culture and art, though it is completely different dimension from first sight, the willingness to invest/give for free unites all her experiences. G. explained her motivation as follows "We were motivated by the fact that we are mothers, seeing how our youth all stood up and walked forward to all this horror, we also did not stand aside." E., a software engineer, found herself with extra time during the pandemic due to remote work. Frustrated by the isolation, she decided to channel her skills into helping others. Together with other IT specialists, E. developed an app to facilitate contactless food deliveries for elderly individuals in her community.

Some people were more experienced in volunteering before Covid-19 happened, so they joined during the crisis without any hesitations feeling sense of duty to do so. A volunteer S. was 27 years old when the Covid-19 started. By that time she had already a volunteering experience of 8 years (since 19 she regularly helps at different occasions). During the Covid-19 pandemic, she worked in a restaurant but later left job, and started seeking for opportunities of Covid-19 volunteering. She joined the Center for Initiative Youth (CIY) in Bishkek, contributing to delivering humanitarian aid, issuing invoices, and providing food assistance. I asked her also if she acted as S. or as a member of CIY. She said that definitely as S., as she organized people herself, created some chats.

Despite facing plenty of challenges, she continued her efforts, even volunteering in the red zone. S. received support from various sources, including restaurants and companies like "Toibos," "Narodny," and "Kulikovsky." S. also shared that she grew up in a single-parent family. Even though she had mother she was always abroad (in Russia) to earn money. S. says it affected her a lot also, and now she understands the importance of love and support even more. She said that people take love and care for granted though actually it is a big gift and quite rare case in reality. Another example, with two decades of volunteer experience, L., who also runs a private kindergarten, intensified her involvement during the pandemic when her kindergarten was closed. Engaged in various volunteer activities, including aiding HIV-infected children and providing assistance after revolutions and earthquakes, L. embraced the challenges presented by the pandemic. When local businesses closed, she collaborated with a group organizing the collection and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) and transformed her kindergarten into a hub for packaging, stamping, sorting, and distributing PPE.

There were also individuals who embarked on their volunteering journey due to personal experiences. Some started volunteering because their relatives or friends faced serious consequences, such as a lack of medical treatment and insufficient help from overloaded hospitals. Despite the fear, many people joined volunteering after the loss of family and friends. An examination of 33 articles on emergency volunteering reveals that a significant motivator is the sense of connection to a cause.[99] Additionally, individuals often find emotional catharsis when personally affected and seek comfort through collaborative efforts with others sharing the same objective. A., previously working in the road construction sector, became involved in volunteering during the pandemic motivated by his father's illness and inspired by the enthusiasm of Askar Almaz, the founder of the Center for Initiative Youth, A. "was shocked by the power of individual efforts in crisis moments." Despite his initial lack of interest in volunteering, he felt compelled to contribute and address problems independently. These personal experiences fueled their commitment to making a difference, underscoring the profound impact that individual

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[99] "Volunteering during the COVID-19 Pandemic: What Are the Potential Benefits to People's Well-Being?," Oxford Social Prescribing Research Network, December 21, 2020, https://socialprescribing.phc.ox.ac.uk/news-views/views/volunteering-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-what-are-the-potential-benefits-to-people2019s-well-being.

connections and shared empathy can have on mobilizing community-driven responses during times of crisis.

Thus, some volunteers were able to leverage their professional skills or hobbies to provide assistance to those in need during the Covid-19 pandemic. Others routinely engaged in volunteer work during various periods, indicating their ongoing commitment to public charitable initiatives. Some of them self-organized or joined various emerging volunteer initiatives, while others were affiliated with the Center for Initiative Youth. In this organization, volunteers enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, and some even organized their own chat groups and leadership, adding additional layers to informal organization. It is interesting to note that individual volunteers at times function as informal groups, particularly in the initial stages of their activities. Some members of these groups, concurrently participating in various organizations and providing assistance in different areas, exhibit significant autonomy in decision-making and initiative implementation. This underscores that informal volunteer groups can effectively operate based on personal initiative and self-organization. A distinct group of volunteers can be identified by their response to the severity of the problem and personal experiences with the insufficient government response. This category of individuals initiated active efforts after realizing the magnitude of the problem and the inadequacy of official institutions. This aspect opens up intriguing possibilities for further investigation, particularly in the context of the "weak state-strong society" correlation, which appears particularly captivating for additional analysis and exploration in the thesis.

M., along with fellow volunteers, persevered in delivering aid amid city curfews and checkpoints during the pandemic. The volunteers faced challenges as authorities began verifying their status, but they managed to organize food distribution campaigns through social media platforms like Facebook, VKontakte, WhatsApp, and Telegram, and got a permission from the authorities to move across the city amid curfew. Initially spontaneous, their volunteering efforts evolved into a cohesive community initiative, providing crucial support during challenging times despite pandemic-induced restrictions. S.'s altruistic inclinations, stemming from childhood trauma, motivated her to engage in volunteer activities during the pandemic. Once, experiencing exhaustion, she found herself sleeping in a corridor, a moment captured by a journalist and shared on social

media. This led to a dual response: on one hand, people rallied to offer assistance; while on the other hand, the government approached her for discussions. Her image was perceived as provocative, prompting scrutiny of how such situations were allowed to occur. This scenario encapsulates the contrasting dynamics of social and governmental dissemination. G's account reflects the immediate and selfless response of volunteers during the pandemic. Despite facing obstacles, they obtained permits to deliver fresh compote and hot roast to observation centers. The Turkish diaspora and authorities supported their efforts, providing 100 kg of beef in total. Acts of generosity extended beyond their immediate actions, as they received additional contributions like gloves, masks, apples, soap, and hygiene products. The spontaneous and collaborative nature of their actions underscores the resilience and resourcefulness of volunteers in times of crisis.

A. provided various forms of assistance, initially transporting medical professionals when Bishkek went into lockdown and public transport ceased. Facing challenges with permits and roadblocks during the lockdown, the transportation of patients from closed-off areas, where major medical facilities were situated, became intricate. L.started helping when she saw a group organizing the collection and distribution of PPE. She offered her space (a kindergarten), and became a volunteer in the hub for packing, stamping, sorting, and distributing PPE. Operating from March to June, the hub processed suits stitched across the city, providing them to medical institutions. Additionally, L. participated in providing lunches for the mobile brigade in the October district of Bishkek. She also joined the people's charity movement "Biz barbyz," (established in March 2020 amid Covid-19) delivering medicines and PPE to hospitals nationwide during the lockdown. According to L., the volunteers faced challenges due to the unpreparedness of the government, having to create PPE from greenhouse cover materials. Despite these hurdles, coordination through large chat groups facilitated quick problem-solving, allowing volunteers to obtain necessary passes during curfew hours. The headquarters had separate coordinators for PPE and medicine delivery, providing meals to medical professionals, handling food projects during the lockdown, and distributing first aid and oxygen concentrators, each led by designated leaders.

In response to the pressing challenges posed by the lockdown, a group of dedicated individuals identified an immediate need for community care, particularly for the overlooked elderly population. Witnessing a lack of official outreach, they decided to take matters into their own hands and established an organized system through local social media groups. As one of the organizers expressed, "We saw the immediate need for community care during the lockdown. No one was reaching out to the elderly, so we took matters into our own hands. We organized through local social media groups, making sure every volunteer knew their responsibilities." Similarly, faced with a critical shortage of medical supplies, another group recognized the urgency of the situation and couldn't afford to wait for official channels. To address this, they mobilized quickly through online communication platforms, sharing skills inventories and setting up makeshift clinics in collaboration with hospitals. One member involved in this effort explained, "There was a shortage of medical supplies, and we couldn't wait for official channels. We mobilized through chats online, shared skills inventories, and set up makeshift clinics in collaboration with hospitals." These firsthand accounts not only highlight the resourcefulness and adaptability of the community but also underscore the effectiveness of self-organized structures within informal volunteering during crises.

Thus, there are various entry points into volunteering. Some participants, like M., joined movements based on their hobbies or professions, with a shift in motivation towards aiding people due to pandemic-induced restrictions. Others, such as G., leveraged their skills and experiences to contribute to pandemic-related efforts. Furthermore, individuals like E. utilized their professional expertise to help. Experience and a sense of duty also played a significant role, as seen in volunteers like S., who had eight years of prior volunteering experience and actively sought opportunities during the pandemic. Similarly, individuals like L., with two decades of volunteering experience, intensified their involvement in response to the challenges presented by the pandemic. The test survey and interviews revealed a shift in the demographic profile of volunteers. Contrary to initial assumptions, individuals aged 30 to 50, constituting working groups, emerged as highly responsible and active citizens.

The dynamics of volunteer-government cooperation were explored, indicating a significant disconnect between volunteers and government support during the Covid-19

pandemic. Looking forward, the study suggests that successful cooperation with the government could potentially reshape the motivations of active citizens, fostering a sense of teamwork and collaboration. The positive collaborations observed during the pandemic, despite challenges, serve as a foundation for building future relationships between the government and informal volunteers. This phenomenon challenges assumptions about collaborative efforts thriving only in democratic states and suggests that such partnerships can be beneficial in diverse political contexts, potentially enhancing legitimacy and citizen-state relations. In conclusion, the motivations of informal volunteers in Kyrgyzstan during the Covid-19 pandemic are diverse and driven by personal experiences, skills, a sense of duty, and a profound appreciation for freedom of expression. The study not only provides insights into the dynamics of volunteerism during a crisis but also opens avenues for future exploration, particularly in understanding the impact of crisis-driven volunteerism on individuals and the potential for collaborative efforts between volunteers and the government.

CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter delves into the interpretation of findings from desk research and conducted interviews, shedding light on the concept of informal volunteering during the Covid-19 pandemic in Kyrgyzstan. The study defines informal volunteering as voluntary activities outside formal organizational structures, emphasizing individuals' contributions driven by personal convictions, altruism, and a desire to address community needs without formal affiliations. The chapter sets the stage for a comprehensive analysis, providing a foundation for exploring motivations, challenges, and the transformative impact of crisis-driven volunteerism in the Kyrgyzstani context.

4.1. Interpretation of findings

From desk research and conducted interviews I again highlight what to understand under informal volunteering in this paper. Thus, informal volunteering refers to a type of volunteer activity that occurs outside formal organizational structures, without explicit contracts or structured roles. It involves individuals voluntarily contributing their time, skills, and efforts to address community needs and challenges. Informal volunteers are motivated by personal convictions, altruism, and a desire to make a positive impact without being affiliated with established non-profit organizations or government entities.

This form of volunteering often emerges spontaneously in response to specific events, crises, or local needs. Informal volunteers may collaborate with neighbors, friends, or like-minded individuals to address issues such as disaster relief, community development, or social support. Unlike formal volunteering within structured organizations, informal volunteering lacks predefined rules, hierarchies, and standardized processes. Several studies highlight the significance and impact of informal volunteering. For instance, research by Einolf et al. explores the motivations behind informal volunteering, emphasizing factors such as social capital, social networks, and evolutionary theories. This perspective sheds light on the diverse reasons individuals

engage in informal volunteering, offering a nuanced understanding of community dynamics and individual motivations.[100]

In the context of Kyrgyzstan, where my research focuses on informal volunteering during the Covid-19 pandemic, the dynamics of self-organized citizens and community-driven initiatives played a crucial role. Owen's work[101], as mentioned earlier, extends the understanding of motivations beyond formal structures, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the initiatives of self-organized citizens. Analyzing my small survey data and interviews, the identification of distinct groups such as bicycle movements, housewives' initiatives, and youth groups showcases the diversity and spontaneity characterizing informal volunteering in Kyrgyzstan. This aligns with the broader literature on the multidimensional nature of volunteer work influenced by individual, social, and organizational factors.

The transition from initial contemplations in April 2023 to the interviews and surveys conducted has provided valuable insights into the dynamics of activism and volunteering in Kyrgyzstan, particularly during the challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic. The descriptive part of the study, encompassing interviews, surveys, and initial observations, lays the foundation for a more in-depth analysis of the motivations, challenges, and implications of informal volunteering in the Kyrgyz context.

One notable aspect that emerges from the interview data is the nature of volunteer motivations. While some volunteers joined due to personal experiences or a sense of duty, others leveraged their professional skills or found new avenues for contribution during the pandemic. The diverse range of motivations suggests that informal volunteering is a complex and dynamic phenomenon, influenced by individual experiences, societal connections, and the immediate context of a crisis. The unexpected surge in volunteerism, particularly among those with less than one year of experience, raises intriguing questions about the transformative impact of crisis-driven volunteerism. How does this surge influence the subsequent civic and political trajectories of

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[100] Christopher J. Einolf et al., "Informal, Unorganized Volunteering," *The Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations*, 2016, 223–41, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-26317-9_10.
[101] Catherine Owen, "Active Citizens in a Weak State: 'Self-Help' Groups and the Post-Soviet Neoliberal Subject in Contemporary Kyrgyzstan," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 14, no. 3 (2020): 464–79, https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2020.1802560.

individuals? Exploring the long-term effects of crisis-driven volunteerism on the civic engagement and activism of participants could provide valuable insights into the lasting impact of such experiences.

The (dis)connect between volunteers and governmental support, as highlighted by the survey data, points to both challenges and opportunities. Analyzing the factors that hinder or facilitate effective cooperation between volunteers and the government could offer valuable recommendations for improving citizen-state relations during crises. The emergence of informal volunteer groups with a high degree of autonomy and self-organization presents an interesting dimension. Understanding how these informal groups function and the role they play in community-driven responses adds depth to the analysis. Additionally, the identification of a distinct group of volunteers responding to the inadequacy of official institutions raises questions about the broader "weak state-strong society" correlation in the Kyrgyz context. Exploring the implications of such dynamics for governance structures and civil society could contribute to a nuanced understanding of the power dynamics at play.

Thus, the exploration of motivations behind informal volunteering during the Covid-19 pandemic in Kyrgyzstan has uncovered a rich amount of reasons propelling individuals to engage in spontaneous acts of altruism. The interviews conducted as part of this research reveal a diverse range of motivations, echoing existing literature on volunteerism (Smith et al., 2007; Clary et al., 1998). Among the key themes that emerged are the sense of community solidarity, a desire to contribute during a crisis, and a spontaneous response to the urgent needs of fellow citizens. The funding has facilitated the exploration of these nuances, shedding light on the unique cultural and social factors influencing volunteer motivations in Kyrgyzstan. However, all these motives on the background or in parallel go with dissatisfaction of volunteers with governmental response. In simpler terms, many volunteers are not happy with how the government is handling things. It's hard to say if this is the main concern or just one of many, but the fact that everyone agrees on this problem makes it important.

As per Einolf et al., throughout history, informal volunteering has held a paramount role in offering assistance to individuals in need, surpassing the significance of formal volunteering or state aid. In preindustrial Europe, local communities relied on traditional

forms of mutual support to fulfill each other's needs. The advent of industrialization and urbanization in the 19th century led to the gradual breakdown of these traditional networks, which were then partially supplanted by formal voluntary and mutual aid associations. However, these formal networks were not flawless in meeting human needs. Consequently, by the early 20th century, many European societies initiated the development of welfare states. Although the nonprofit sector persisted, identifying service gaps and emerging needs, informal volunteerism witnessed a decline in importance with industrialization. While it endured in the form of small favors, it was no longer deemed indispensable for survival.[102]

Vanessa Ruget and Burul Usmanalieva's insightful examination, drawing from interviews conducted as far back as 2007 (with the understanding that the general patterns persist), illuminates the enduring nature of civic responsibilities among individuals.[103] The comprehensive findings from the 30 respondents reveal a categorization of their civic duties into four primary domains: consistently paying taxes (mentioned 12 times), adhering to laws (seven times), fulfilling military service obligations (seven times), and contributing in diverse ways to the overall development of the country.[104] This commitment to actively contribute to the nation's progress is eloquently expressed approximately 11 times through statements like "I want to do anything for my country," "I want to provide help to other citizens of my country," or "I must help society with whatever I do."[105] Remarkably, in more recent interviews conducted in 2023, these sentiments endure and resonate among respondents, showcasing a persistent sense of duty towards aiding others.[106] This strong commitment reflects a

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[102] Christopher J. Einolf et al., "Informal, Unorganized Volunteering," *The Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations*, 2016, 223–41, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-26317-9_10.

[103] Vanessa Ruget and Burul Usmanalieva, "The Impact of State Weakness on Citizenship a Case Study of Kyrgyzstan," Communist and Post-Communist Studies 40, no. 4 (2007): 446–47, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2007.10.002.

[104] Ruget and Usmanalieva, "The Impact of State Weakness on Citizenship a Case Study of Kyrgyzstan," https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2007.10.002.

[105] Ruget and Usmanalieva, "The Impact of State Weakness on Citizenship a Case Study of Kyrgyzstan," https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2007.10.002.

[106] Ruget and Usmanalieva, "The Impact of State Weakness on Citizenship a Case Study of Kyrgyzstan," https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2007.10.002.

sense of being an active citizen, emphasizing how civic duties have a lasting impact on the shared values of the community. The enduring nature of these expressions of duty provides a compelling backdrop to the exploration of informal volunteering during the Covid-19 pandemic in Kyrgyzstan. Aligning with the theoretical perspectives integrated into the broader framework of the thesis, these expressions of civic responsibility offer valuable insights into the motivations driving individuals to engage in voluntary activities.

4.2. Addressing research question

In addressing the research question, I need to analyze the lasting impact of spontaneous volunteering during Covid-19 crisis in Kyrgyzstan. For this I am exploring why people stepped up and organized themselves into volunteer groups, especially focusing on distinct categories like production and delivery volunteers, medical support volunteers, and community care volunteers. My goal was to uncover if a lack of trust in bigger organizations and the government motivated individuals to take the lead in self-organized volunteer efforts.

In the comprehensive exploration of motivations underlying volunteerism, particularly focusing on the distinctive realm of informal volunteering, the literature review has unraveled a plenty of reasons propelling individuals toward self-organized efforts. Beyond the fundamental altruistic impulses and communal bonds commonly associated with volunteering, a spectrum of intricate motivations emerges, revealing a nuanced interplay of individual aspirations and societal dynamics. Volunteers, driven by a profound sense of altruism, an eagerness to contribute, and a connection to community welfare, form the foundational motivations of volunteerism. However, volunteering extends beyond the altruistic ethos, encompassing a vast range of individual objectives. Some seek to forge and fortify social connections, viewing volunteering as an avenue to strengthen communal ties. Others embark on a quest for personal development, entailing the acquisition of novel skills, diverse experiences, and an overarching sense of self-evolution, with an ancillary aim to augment their curriculum vitae and professional credentials.

Delving into the nuanced realm of informal volunteering reveals its magnetic appeal, rooted in the liberating flexibility it offers individuals. This flexibility empowers them to decide when, where, and how they contribute, creating a dynamic landscape where seasoned volunteers emerge as stalwart champions, fueled by enduring altruism and steadfast commitments to specific causes. The aftermath of the Covid-19 era witnesses the solidification of lasting structures, a testament to their unwavering dedication. Simultaneously, the inclination toward informal volunteering is steered by factors such as a lack of awareness about formal volunteering opportunities and a prevailing skepticism toward formal organizations. Unraveling this conceptual framework through interviews and survey analyses uncovers three distinct motivational currents. Firstly, a group of perennially active volunteers strategically employs their skills and expertise from the crisis's onset. A second cohort, spurred by the crisis's gravity, embarks on their inaugural volunteering journey, contributing professional skills or dedicating time to community service. Spontaneous initiatives organically flourish, often communicated through platforms like Telegram and Facebook groups. The third group, prompted by the personal impact of Covid-19, feels a profound duty to enact community change, motivated by perceived shortcomings in state protection. Crucially, irrespective of the diverse motivations propelling volunteers, a common thread of mistrust in state-driven solutions permeates their perspectives. This skepticism, though not exclusive globally, assumes a distinctive prominence in the Central Asian context, particularly within the context of an active civic response to crises. The range of motivations unveil profound insights into the individual choices, societal dynamics, and the transformative capacity of volunteerism, constructing a robust foundation for the ensuing research exploration.

In my thesis, I employed theoretical frameworks, notably the integrated theory of volunteer work, to comprehend individuals' motivations for contributing despite challenges such as free-riding. Furthermore, the application of the community resilience theory facilitated an assessment of how effectively individuals and groups within the community adapted and responded to challenging situations. My focus extended beyond immediate crisis responses; I aimed to delve into the enduring impact on both individuals and society. Observing a pervasive desire among individuals to sustain their involvement

in the volunteering movement, I noted their continued engagement in subsequent crises. However, I contend that their potential for contributing to broader societal changes and supporting local governments could be further harnessed. I want to understand if, after being informal volunteers during the crisis, some individuals moved into formal political roles, why they had this willingness. I see that experiences in crises can shape future civic engagement and leadership which might be very helpful for the government.

In the exploration of the interplay between government efficacy and citizen-led initiatives, it is noteworthy that concerns about weak or nonexistent government have long been a subject of discourse. As early as 2004, Fukuyama underscored the challenges faced by the developing world due to inadequate governance, particularly in managing essential sectors like health programs. [107] This perspective gains contemporary relevance when scrutinizing the responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, as highlighted by the staggering statistics in Kyrgyzstan—206,897 confirmed cases and approximately 3000 deaths (Worldometers)[108]. The relevance of government capacity, especially in the management of health crises, serves as a pertinent backdrop to reconsider the potential collaboration between governmental bodies and informal volunteers or community leaders.

Fukuyama said that "another important aspect is the government capacity to manage health programs," [109] which is still a relevant checkpoint in assessing the contemporary response to the Covid-19 crisis. Could a collaborative approach, integrating the strengths of both formal governmental structures and grassroots initiatives, offer a more resilient and effective response? This inquiry beckons an examination of alternative frameworks wherein the government collaborates more proactively with volunteers and informal leaders. How can such partnerships be structured to maximize impact? What policies and mechanisms need to be in place to facilitate a synergistic relationship between the state and community-driven initiatives? Exploring these questions is crucial not only for deciphering the current landscape but

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[107] Francis Fukuyama, "The Imperative of State-Building," *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 2 (2004): 17–31, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2004.0026.

[108] "Kyrgyzstan," Worldometer, accessed December 22, 2023, https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/kyrgyzstan/.

[109] Francis Fukuyama, "The Imperative of State-Building," *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 2 (2004): 17–31, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2004.0026.

also for envisioning a more robust and adaptive approach to crisis management, where the strengths of formal governance and the dynamism of citizen-led efforts converge for the greater good. However, I have not set such aim for this particular paper. This perspective aligns with the broader global discourse on reevaluating the role of governments and fostering collaborative, resilient models that can withstand the challenges posed by crises such as the pandemic.

In accordance with Migdal's work "Strong societies, weak states", states exhibiting weakness find themselves positioned on the "low end of a spectrum of compatibilities," struggling to effectively penetrate society, regulate social relationships, and manage resources in a determined manner.[110] Such states, often characterized as weak or failing, tend to embody predatory, neo-patrimonial regimes, blurring the lines between the private and public domains, with prevalent issues of nepotism and corruption. [111] Consequently, the legitimacy of these states is notably minimal. Luong's examination of Central Asia (2004, 280) introduces a paradox of "strong-weak" states, where governmental strength in terms of population control and regulation coexists with a weakness in policy implementation. [112]

Kyrgyzstan, within the Central Asian context, has been a focal point of scholarly attention due to its institutional and political instability since 2005 (International Crisis Group, 2006). [113] Scholarly discourse has delved into issues such as widespread corruption, the capture of state institutions by business interests and criminal organizations (Marat, 2006a), the central government's struggle to assert its monopoly

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[110] Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* in Ruget and Usmanalieva, "The Impact of State Weakness on Citizenship a Case Study of Kyrgyzstan," https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2007.10.002.

[111] Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* in Ruget and Usmanalieva, "The Impact of State Weakness on Citizenship a Case Study of Kyrgyzstan," https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2007.10.002.

[112] Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* in Ruget and Usmanalieva, "The Impact of State Weakness on Citizenship a Case Study of Kyrgyzstan," https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2007.10.002.

[113] Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* in Ruget and Usmanalieva, "The Impact of State Weakness on Citizenship a Case Study of Kyrgyzstan," https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2007.10.002.

over the use of force (Blank, 2006; Engvall, 2006), insufficient institutionalization, particularly among political parties (Abazov, 2006; Institute for Public Policy, 2006b), low salaries and morale among government employees, and the state's overarching inability to provide essential services to citizens, especially in terms of security and social benefits. [114]

These observations made Ruget and Usmanalieva conclude that this environment, viewed through the lens of citizenship as "calculation," suggests an anticipation of citizens defecting from their obligations to the state. [115] Widespread phenomena such as tax evasion, disregard for authority and laws, corrupt practices, and reduced participation in the military are foreseeable outcomes. Levi (1997: 19) conceptualized this as a "contingent consent" or "refusal to consent".

According to Joel S. Migdal, a prevailing assumption has traditionally been that those occupying positions of power can effectively suppress or reshape the broader societal landscape. [116] This implies, on one hand, that the dominant entities wield the authority to impose rules upon the less influential, suggesting that a state characterized by authoritative power can dictate regulations for the civil society within its boundaries. However, Migdal goes on to emphasize that over the past generation, there has been significant transformation in all "Third World countries," albeit not always aligned with the intentions of state leaders.

Taking the case of Kyrgyzstan as an illustrative example, one can discern a dynamic citizenry that remains active despite the backdrop of authoritarian power. Yet, an examination of current trends in Kyrgyzstan reveals a shifting landscape where it becomes increasingly challenging to assert that citizens will sustain their previous levels of activism. This transformation stems from a growing perception that it has become perilous for citizens to maintain an active stance and a willingness to extend assistance in the face of diverse crises, including political ones. Paradoxically, the very citizens who

[114] Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* in Ruget and Usmanalieva, "The Impact of State Weakness on Citizenship a Case Study of Kyrgyzstan," https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2007.10.002.
[115] Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* in Ruget and Usmanalieva, "The Impact of State Weakness on Citizenship a Case Study of Kyrgyzstan," https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2007.10.002.
[116] Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 16.

were once viewed as active contributors and allies are now confronted with a changing governmental narrative. The prevailing sentiment is one where citizens, instead of being embraced as friends, find themselves as adversaries to the state. Consequently, the landscape that once celebrated civic engagement now appears to be laden with potential risks, discouraging citizens from maintaining their erstwhile levels of active participation. Migdal's insights prompt us to reevaluate traditional assumptions about power dynamics, urging a nuanced understanding of how societal and political shifts, unintended consequences, and changing perceptions influence the delicate balance between state authority and citizen engagement. Thus, the contemporary socio-political landscape in Kyrgyzstan unfolds as a multifaceted tableau, where the narrative of active citizenry contends with the emerging challenges and risks that accompany a shifting perception of civic participation amid authoritarian governance.

In the realm of informal volunteering, individuals actively confronted the issues at hand. In response to the perceived inadequacies, these informal volunteers took to the streets, proactively seeking opportunities to extend their aid. The dynamic between citizen dissatisfaction and volunteering, particularly the informal variant, challenges conventional notions of compliance. It underscores the resilience and agency inherent in civic responses, as individuals, dissatisfied with the status quo, not only refrained from noncompliance but actively engaged in altruistic endeavors to address the prevailing challenges. This intricate interplay between civic action, discontent, and informal volunteering forms a nuanced narrative that transcends simplistic models of citizen compliance, delving into the complexities of human agency and community-driven responses to crisis situations.

4.3. Conclusion

The exploration into the dynamics of informal volunteering during the Covid-19 pandemic in Kyrgyzstan has unraveled motivations, challenges, and implications. From the conceptualization of informal volunteering as a form of volunteer activity occurring outside formal organizational structures to its manifestation in self-organized citizens and community-driven initiatives during the crisis, this study has delved into the landscape of

altruistic engagement. The findings from interviews, surveys, and desk research contributed to a nuanced understanding of the diverse reasons propelling individuals toward spontaneous acts of goodwill.

One of the central themes that emerged from the study is the complex interplay of motivations driving informal volunteers. The motivations span a wide spectrum, including a profound sense of altruism, a desire to contribute during a crisis, and a spontaneous response to urgent community needs. These motivations reflect the diverse cultural and social factors influencing volunteerism in Kyrgyzstan. Importantly, these motives often coexist with a pervasive dissatisfaction with the government's response, highlighting a crucial backdrop to the surge in volunteerism.

While each volunteer may have a unique set of reasons, the collective sentiment of mistrust in state-driven solutions emerges as a unifying thread. The research also sheds light on the complex nature of volunteer engagement, emphasizing the role of distinct categories of informal volunteers, such as production and delivery volunteers, medical support volunteers, and community care volunteers. The study delves into the motivations behind these categories, uncovering how a lack of trust in larger organizations and the government motivated individuals to take a lead in self-organized volunteer efforts. The landscape of informal volunteering, characterized by autonomous initiatives, collaborative networks, and grassroots responses, challenges traditional models of civic engagement.

The analysis extends beyond immediate crisis responses, prompting a reflection on the lasting impact of spontaneous volunteering on both individuals and society. The exploration of why some individuals transition from informal volunteering during the crisis to formal political roles opens avenues for understanding the transformative potential of crisis-driven volunteerism. This phenomenon suggests that experiences in crises can shape future civic engagement and leadership, presenting opportunities for societal changes and supporting local governments.

In the broader context, the study resonates with global discussions on the role of governments and the potential for collaborative models that integrate formal governance with grassroots initiatives. The examination of government efficacy and citizen-led initiatives pointed to both challenges and opportunities. Analyzing factors that hinder or

facilitate effective cooperation between volunteers and the government could offer valuable insights for improving citizen-state relations during crises. This research underscores the importance of recognizing the initiatives of self-organized citizens, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach to community development. The different motivations, varied modes of engagement, and the transformative impact of crisis-driven volunteerism lay the foundation for further exploration. As Kyrgyzstan navigates the intricate dynamics of state-volunteer interactions, understanding the power dynamics, challenges, and opportunities will be crucial for fostering resilient and adaptive approaches to crisis management. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the rich nature of volunteer work, individual motivations, and the transformative potential of civic engagement in the face of unprecedented challenges.

In my research, I have explored why people in Kyrgyzstan volunteer during the Covid-19 pandemic. The focus has been on informal volunteering, a phenomenon where individuals choose to contribute altruistically outside the confines of established organizations. Kyrgyzstan's societal landscape reveals a fascinating dichotomy between two distinct groups of activists. The first cohort aligns themselves with various organizations, predominantly non-governmental organizations (NGOs), wielding influence to shape political decisions within these structured entities. In contrast, the second group consists of proactive citizens who consciously distance themselves from organizational affiliations. These individuals, propelled by a sense of civic duty and a desire to address immediate community needs, emerge as spontaneous contributors, often bypassing established structures due to a prevailing lack of trust in the government's efficacy.

The dynamics between the government and these two distinct groups of volunteers manifest in diverse and nuanced ways. The initial cohort, aligned with NGOs and established organizations, operates within a framework marked by advocacy and policy influence in their interactions with the government. Leveraging their positions and extensive networks, these activists actively pursue transformative change, urging more effective government responses, particularly in the context of crises such as the pandemic. This engagement occasionally blossoms into collaborative endeavors, fostering a partnership between the state and NGOs to collectively address pressing

societal issues. Conversely, the second group of independent activists adopts a markedly different approach in their engagement with the government. Their interactions are emblematic of a grassroots ethos, wherein they proactively address immediate community needs. Operating independently of formal organizations, these activists exemplify a 'bottom-up' governance style, bridging the gaps left by the government's perceived inefficiencies or a lack of trust. While their direct engagement with government officials may be limited, their actions indelibly contribute to bolstering the community's resilience during times of crisis. Their localized, community-centric efforts serve as an indirect yet impactful force in fortifying the societal fabric.

This comprehensive understanding of motivations and engagement modalities illuminates the nuanced interplay between the state and volunteers in Kyrgyzstan. It underscores the imperative for a holistic approach to community development, one that acknowledges and integrates the diverse modes of civic engagement. Embracing these various dimensions is pivotal in fostering resilience, fortifying community bonds, and forging pathways toward a more robust and inclusive societal development paradigm.

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Questions for an in-depth interview on the topic of spontaneous volunteering during the Covid-19 epidemic in Kyrgyzstan

1) VOLUNTEERS – who, why, how:

- How old are you?

- What was your main occupation during Covid volunteering (study/work, in what field)?

- Did you volunteer before the Covid epidemic? What kind of volunteering?

- Why did you decide to volunteer during Covid? What motivated you the most?

- What kind of assistance did you provide during the Covid epidemic (delivering food for medical institutions, helping with finding medicines for patients, delivering medicines to patients, volunteering in a hospital, other options)?

- Were you afraid of contracting with people who had Covid-19 while volunteering? Did you realize that you might be risking your life and health?

- How did the people you helped react? Did they ask what organization you are from, who you represent, etc.?

- How long did volunteering take you (how many days/how many hours per day)?

- How did you combine volunteering with your main job?

- Have you ever wanted to join an organization that does volunteer work? To which? Have you joined?

- If not, then why didn't you look for which organization to join, but started helping on your own?

- What difficulties have you encountered as a volunteer?

- How did you coordinate the work, given that this is an organization-independent volunteer effort? How did you know when to come/where exactly you needed help?

- How did the interaction between volunteers take place? Did you have a leader/coordinator? How did he appear?

2) THE STATE AND VOLUNTEERS

- From your point of view, was there any control or restrictions on your activities by the state? What kind of controls or restrictions did you encounter?
- Did you have any ideas for improving (optimizing) the assistance system during the Covid period with the help of the state? Have you proposed any ideas to the authorities?
- Did you try to somehow communicate with the authorities? Through what channels?
- If you had ideas for optimizing assistance, but did not offer them, then for what reason?
- If you proposed ideas for optimizing assistance and conducted a dialogue with the authorities, you could talk about the outcomes (results).

3) THE FUTURE OF SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERING
- Would you say that volunteering during the Covid epidemic was spontaneous for you? Why?
- What did the experience of volunteering during the Covid period give you in terms of activism? Would you say that this experience changed you? How? Have you become more active/passive in social/political activities since Covid?
- Are you still involved in volunteer activities after Covid? Which?
- Do you continue to keep in touch with other "spontaneous" volunteers?

APPENDIX B

Questions for the small test survey (22 respondents)

- How old are you?

- In which region of Kyrgyzstan were you a volunteer during Covid-19?

- In 2020-2021, during the Covid-19 period, what did you do?

- During Covid-19, have you worked with any non-governmental organization (NGO), association or other entity? (eg UNICEF/Red Cross...)

- If you answered "yes", please write the name of your NGO, association and explain what type of activities this organization carries out.

- If you answered "no", skip this question.

- How long had you been a volunteer for this organization before the pandemic began? (If you are not affiliated with any organization, please skip to the next question)

- How would you rate your level of volunteering involvement BEFORE Covid-19 started (in hours)?

- How much time per week did you spend volunteering during Covid-19?

- What kind of assistance did you provide during the Covid-19 epidemic?

- How can you evaluate the government's actions during the Covid-19 crisis?

- Have you received any support or resources from the government to support your volunteer activities?

- Do you feel that your contributions as an informal volunteer have been valued or recognized by the government?

- Please explain your answer to the previous question: why do you think your contribution was appreciated or why it was not?

- Have you seen any cases where volunteers and the government worked together to solve any specific problems related to the pandemic?

- If you selected "yes" in the previous question, please provide an example of interaction between volunteers and government from your experience.

- If you would like to share any other thoughts about the topic of this survey, please leave a comment. You can also leave your contact information if you would like to take part in the interview.