

# Credibility of Human Rights Organizations: Brazil

## Overview

As attacks on human rights organizations (HROs) increase, it is imperative for them to establish and nurture local support networks to sustain their vital work and continue advancing global rights, even amid a dwindling space for civic engagement. Despite the important role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), many people perceive them as having hidden agendas, not genuinely representing local interests, or potentially being corrupt. This perception significantly hampers HROs' efforts to broaden their constituencies. Consequently, Freedom House conducted a multi-country survey to identify specific attributes that shape public perceptions of HROs in Africa, Asia, Eurasia, and Latin America.

Freedom House structured the survey to detect the attributes of HROs that drive public perception in ways that mimic real-world choices. Individual respondents were shown two profiles of hypothetical HROs that varied across four attributes: funding source, recent activity, mission statement, and years established. In this head-to-head matchup, Freedom House asked respondents to choose which of the two HROs they thought was more trustworthy based only on the attributes listed for those HROs. Analyzing the results allowed Freedom House to determine which attributes were more important for respondents in determining trustworthiness and, for each attribute, the values that enhanced or decreased trustworthiness of HROs. While the focus of the study was human rights organizations, the survey used the term "nongovernmental organization" or its acronym "NGO" based on the assumption that it is more commonly understood and used.

## Key takeaways from the Brazil survey



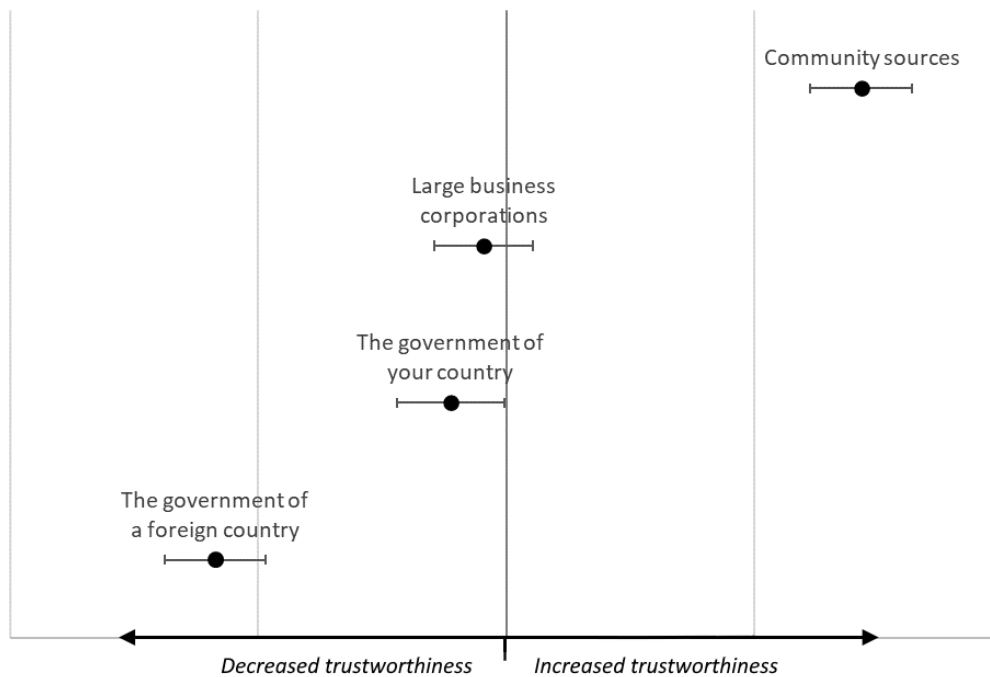
1. Funding source was the primary driver of perceptions around HROs in Brazil, followed closely by the year the HRO was established. An organization's mission statement and its recent activity were less important factors in respondents' assessments. The source of funding influenced 38 percent of a person's preference of HRO, followed by the number of years established (31 percent), mission statement (22 percent), and recent activity (10 percent).

2. Funding by community sources increased trustworthiness in head-to-head matchups, while funding by foreign governments decreased trustworthiness.
3. Compared with one- and five-year-old HROs, ten-year-old HROs were 10 percent more likely to be chosen as the most trustworthy, and twenty-year-old HROs were approximately 20 percent more likely to be chosen as the more trustworthy HRO.
4. Brazilian respondents thought that HROs aiming to increase women's economic empowerment were less trustworthy than HROs with other mission statements.
5. Providing direct aid and services increased trustworthiness, while meeting with government officials decreased trustworthiness. The difference, however, was small.

## Ranked attributes that affect the perception of trustworthiness of HROs

### 1. Funding

Among the attributes examined in the survey, funding was the most prominent driver of trustworthiness. The survey varied funding across four levels: community sources, large business corporations, the Brazilian government, and foreign governments.



When choosing the more trustworthy of two comparable HROs, Brazilian respondents typically chose HROs that were funded by community sources. Those funded by foreign governments were much less likely to be chosen as the more trustworthy HRO in the head-to-head matchups. Compared with HROs funded by community sources, Brazilian respondents were 15 percent, 16 percent, and 26 percent less likely to choose HROs funded by large business corporations, their own government, and foreign governments as the more trustworthy HRO, respectively.

To provide additional context, the survey asked Brazilians how they think HROs they interacted with are usually funded, and close to 80 percent believed that HROs are funded through community sources. It also asked Brazilians their perceptions of government and civil society institutions, and more than 90 percent of respondents thought that at least “some of them” are corrupt, with more than 40 percent thinking that “most of them” are corrupt.

## 2. Years established

Age of HRO was the second-most important factor for Brazilian respondents in deciding the trustworthiness of HROs. The survey varied how many years the HRO has been established: one year, five years, ten years, and twenty years.

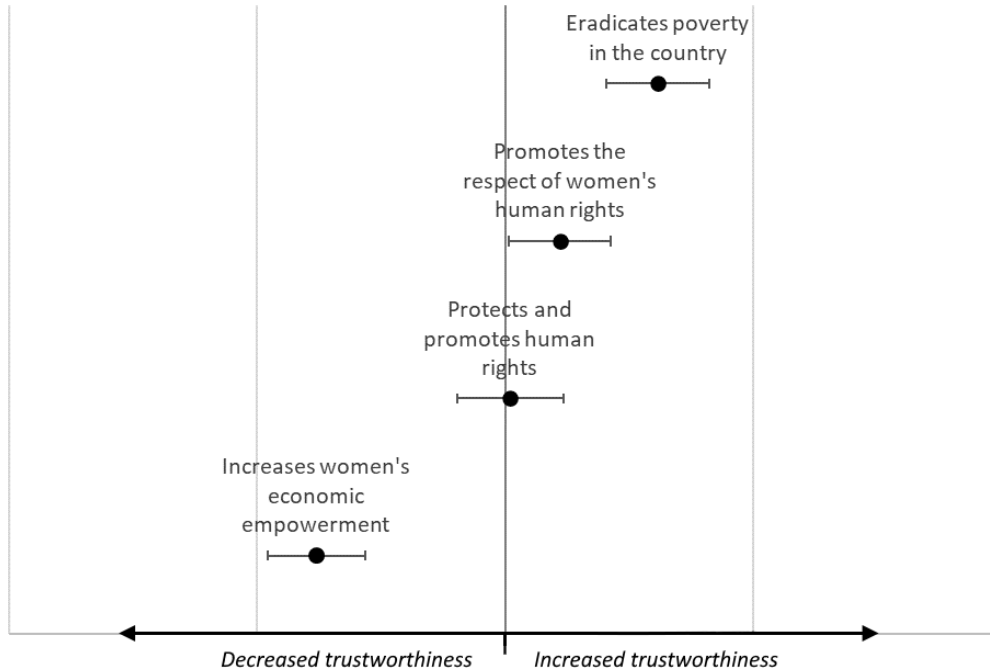


Brazilians tended to choose older HROs as more trustworthy over younger HROs. HROs that were one and five years old were far less likely to be chosen as trustworthy in the head-to-head matchups. Compared with one- and five-year-old HROs, twenty-year-old HROs were approximately 20 percent more likely to be chosen as the more trustworthy HRO.

## 3. Mission statement

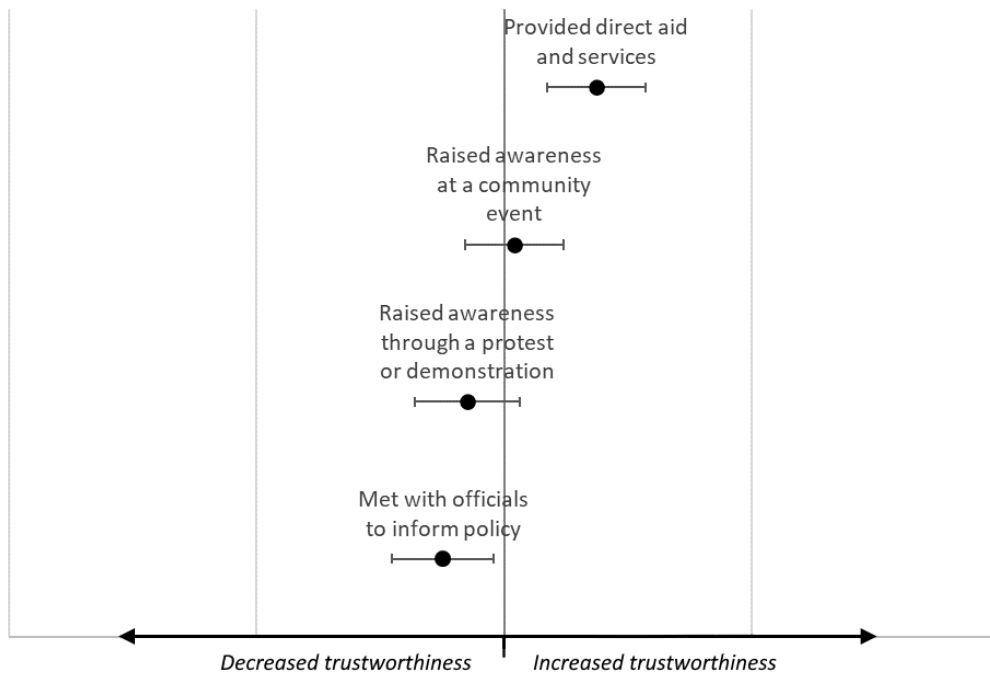
Mission statement was the third-most important factor influencing perceptions of trustworthiness. The survey varied mission statement across four levels: promotes the respect of women’s human rights, protects and promotes human rights, increases women’s economic empowerment, and eradicates poverty in the country.

Women’s economic empowerment was the least trustworthy mission statement among Brazilian respondents. HROs with this mission statement were 10 to 15 percent less likely to be chosen as more trustworthy than HROs with other mission statements. Men and women in Brazil do not significantly diverge in their perceptions of trustworthiness of HROs across most attributes. When considering the mission statements of HROs, however, women were approximately 7 percent more likely than men to choose HROs that aim to increase women’s economic empowerment in head-to-head matchups. Men were approximately 7 percent more likely than women to choose HROs that aim to eradicate poverty as the more trustworthy HRO.



#### 4. Recent activity

Among the attributes examined, recent activity of HROs was the least important attribute driving decisions on trustworthiness. Along this dimension, the HROs shown to respondents provided direct aid and services, raised awareness at community events, raised awareness through hosting peaceful protests or public demonstrations, or met with government officials to inform policy.



Brazilians were slightly more likely to choose HROs that provide direct aid and services as more trustworthy than those that raise awareness through public demonstrations and those that meet with government officials to inform policy.

Because this attribute was the least important in Brazilian's decision-making process, the differences between types of activity were very small.

## Methodology

This survey was executed under the Human Rights Support Mechanism (HRSM), a USAID-funded and Freedom House-led Leader with Associates cooperative agreement. HRSM is implemented by the PROGRESS Consortium, a group of five organizations that support and implement human rights programming. To study perceptions of HROs, Freedom House worked with survey vendor Pollfish to conduct an online survey in nine countries, including Brazil. Freedom House developed this brief as a resource for the consortium; other democracy, human rights, and governance implementers; and USAID Missions.

The survey employed a conjoint experimental design to best understand the attribute-level determinants of public opinion on HROs. A conjoint experiment is a research method used to understand how individuals make choices by presenting them with hypothetical scenarios featuring multiple attributes or features. Participants are asked to select their preferred option from two alternatives, each varying in specific attributes. By analyzing the choices made, researchers can deduce the relative importance of these attributes and how they influence decision-making. In this case, individual survey respondents were asked to judge the profiles of two hypothetical HROs and select the organization that they think is most trustworthy and best reflects the opinions of people like them. Based on conversations with human rights practitioners, the HRSM learning specialist identified several attributes to study in the conjoint experiment: nascency of the organization, funding sources, mission statement, and style of recent activities. By asking people to choose the more trustworthy alternative in head-to-head matchups, HRSM can infer the importance of certain attributes, both alone and in context with one another.

The sample included one thousand Brazilian respondents, but the sample used in the study is not representative of the Brazilian population. Pollfish collects survey responses through partnership with mobile applications that offer in-app incentives, such as a token in a game or a free yoga class in a fitness application, to respondents in exchange for their participation. While this sample avoids using so-called career survey takers, the sample typically skews younger and urban, as only mobile phone users can participate and surveys should be fewer than 10 questions. Because of these factors, the results may have limited applicability for rural and older populations. Pollfish is compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation and is based in California.