

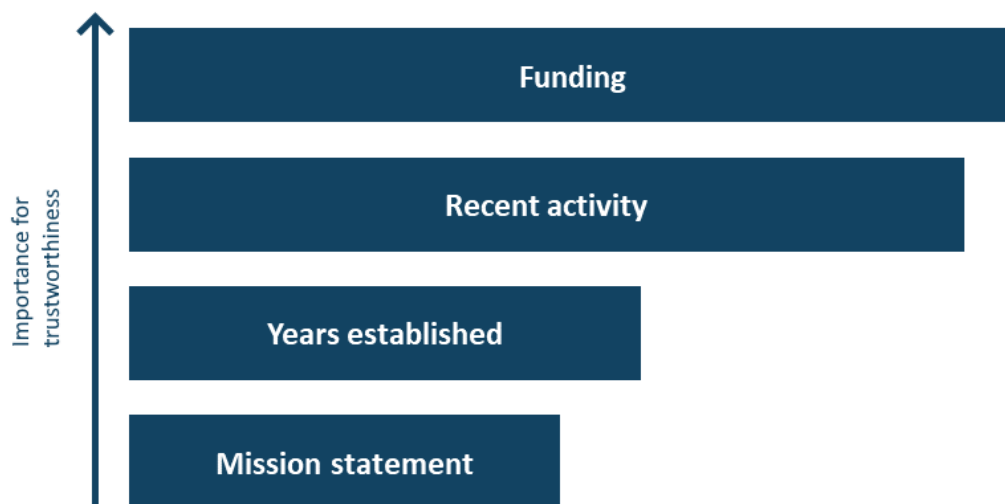
Credibility of Human Rights Organizations: Colombia

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 activities, mission statement, and year 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 Colombia survey



1. Funding source was the primary driver of perceptions around HROs in Colombia, followed closely by their recent activity. An organization's mission statement and the number of years it has been established were less important factors in respondent's assessments. The source of funding influenced 33 percent of a person's preference of

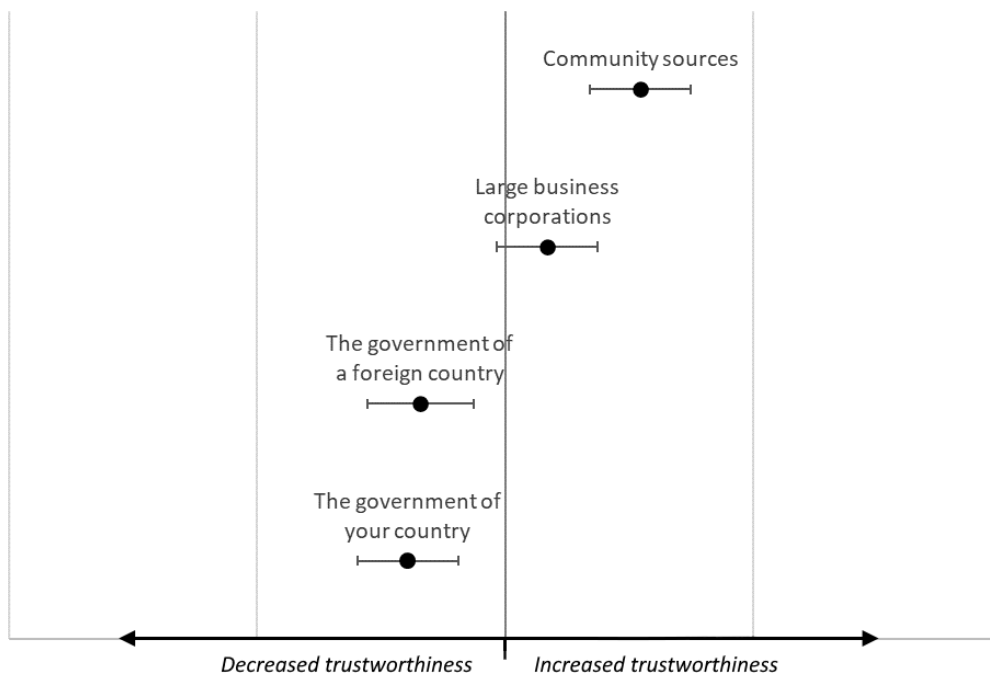
HRO, followed by an HRO's recent activity (31 percent), years established (19 percent), and mission statement (16 percent).

2. Funding through community sources increased trustworthiness of HROs, while government funding, both foreign and domestic, decreased trustworthiness. Most Colombians believed that HROs they interacted with were funded through community sources, while very few believed these HROs were funded by their own government.
3. Providing direct aid and services increased trustworthiness, while meeting with officials to inform policy decreased trustworthiness.
4. Men and women in Colombia do not substantially diverge in their perceptions of trustworthiness of HROs across most attributes. With regard to mission statements, however, women are approximately 8 percent more likely than men to choose HROs that aim to increase women's economic empowerment as the more trustworthy HRO.
5. As years established increased, so did trustworthiness of HROs.

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 Colombian government, and foreign governments.



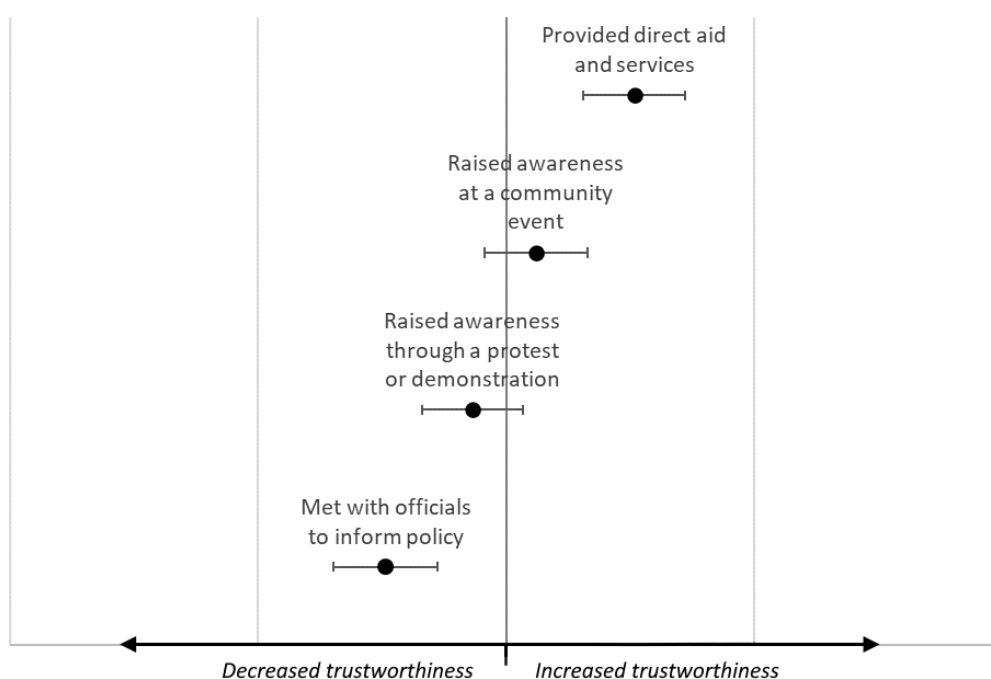
When choosing the more trustworthy of two comparable HROs, Colombian respondents typically chose HROs funded by community sources and those funded by large business corporations as the more trustworthy HROs compared with HROs funded by foreign governments and their own government. Compared with HROs funded through community sources,

Colombians were 8 to 9 percent less likely to choose HROs funded by foreign governments and their own government as the more trustworthy HRO in head-to-head matchups.

To provide additional context, the survey asked Colombians how they think HROs they interacted with are usually funded, and most Colombians believed that HROs are funded through community or international sources. It also asked Colombians about 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 just over 40 percent thinking that “most of them” are corrupt.

2. Recent activity

Among the attributes examined, recent activity of HROs was the second most important attribute driving decisions around 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.

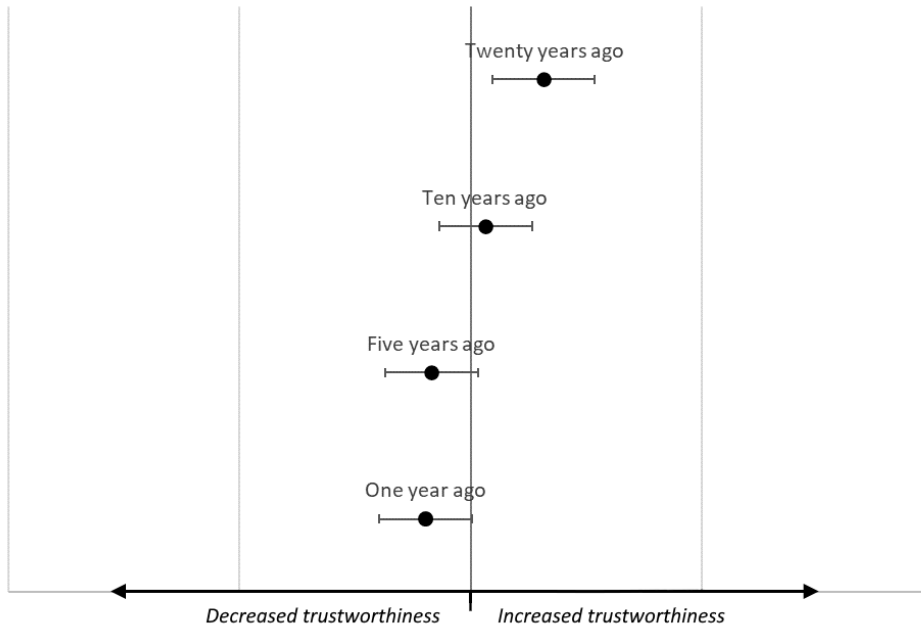


HROs that provide direct aid and services were the most likely to be chosen as trustworthy in head-to-head matchups, while those who meet with government officials to inform policy were the least likely to be chosen. Colombians were 10 percent more likely to choose HROs that provide direct aid than those that meet with officials to inform policy.

Most of the Colombian respondents had little interaction with HROs. Two-thirds of them responded either “never” or “rarely” when asked how frequently they interacted with HROs. The survey found that most Colombians engage with HROs through reading HRO awareness materials, and very few engage with HROs through signing petitions or direct aid and services.

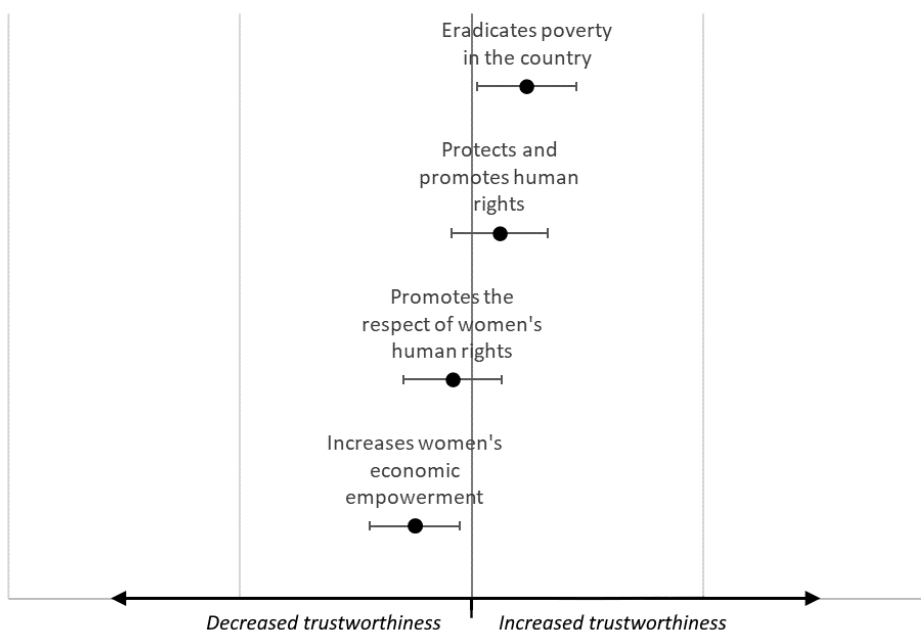
3. Years established

Age of an HRO was the third-most important factor for Colombian 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.



Colombians tended to choose older HROs as the more trustworthy HRO when compared with younger HROs, but the differences were very small. HROs that are 20 years old were more likely to be chosen as trustworthy in head-to-head matchups; however, respondents were at most only 5 percent more likely to choose the 20-year-old organization compared with a younger one.

4. Mission statement



Mission statement was the least important attribute 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.

Colombians did not seem to have a strong preference when it came to mission statements. Eradication of poverty slightly increased the likelihood of an HRO being chosen as more trustworthy, while increasing women's economic empowerment slightly decreased the likelihood of an HRO being chosen. While men and women in Colombia typically did not diverge in their perceptions of trustworthiness, women were about 8 percent more likely than men to think that HROs that aim to increase women's economic empowerment are more trustworthy.

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 Colombia. 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 Colombian respondents, but the sample used in the study is not representative of the Colombian 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.