

Credibility of Human Rights Organizations: Philippines

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 Philippines survey



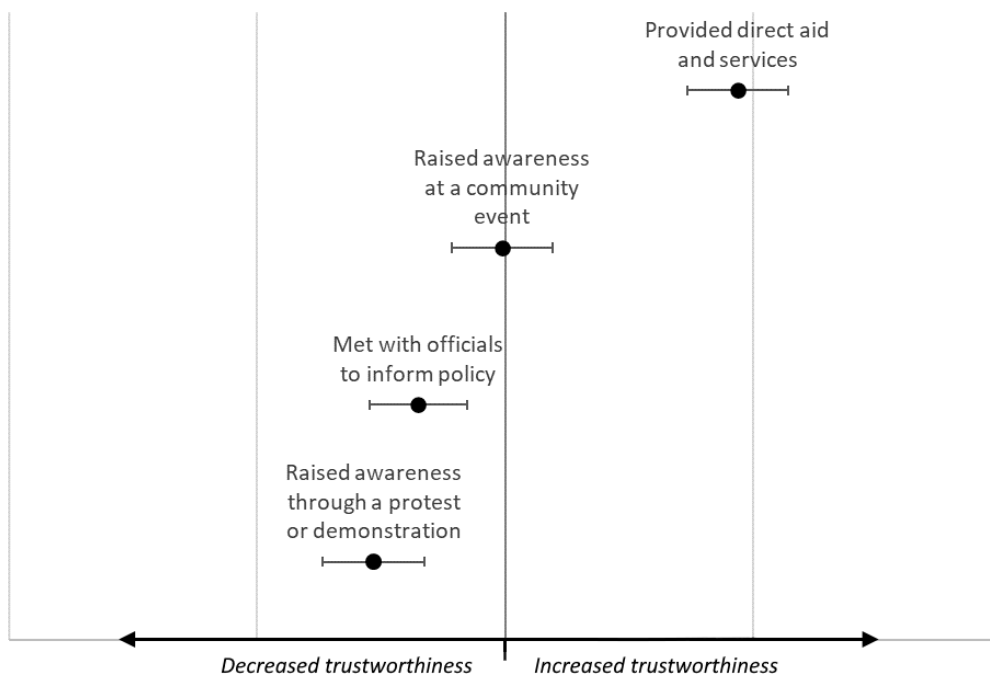
1. An HRO's recent activity was by far the primary driver of people's perceptions around HROs in the Philippines. An organization's mission statement, funding source, and the number of years established were less important factors in respondent's assessments. Recent activity influenced 35 percent of a person's preference of HRO, followed by mission statement (25 percent), funding source (22 percent), and years established (18 percent).

2. HROs that provide direct aid and services were more likely to be chosen in head-to-head matchups than all other types of activities.
3. Filipinos thought that HROs with a mission statement of increasing women's economic empowerment were less trustworthy than HROs with all other mission statements.
4. Community sources and government funding increased trustworthiness, while funding by large business corporations and foreign governments decreased trustworthiness.
5. HROs that were established 10 or 20 years ago were more likely to be seen as trustworthy, while more recently established HROs were less likely to be seen as trustworthy.

Ranked attributes that affect the perception of trustworthiness of HROs

1. Recent activity

Among the attributes examined, recent activity of HROs was the most 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.

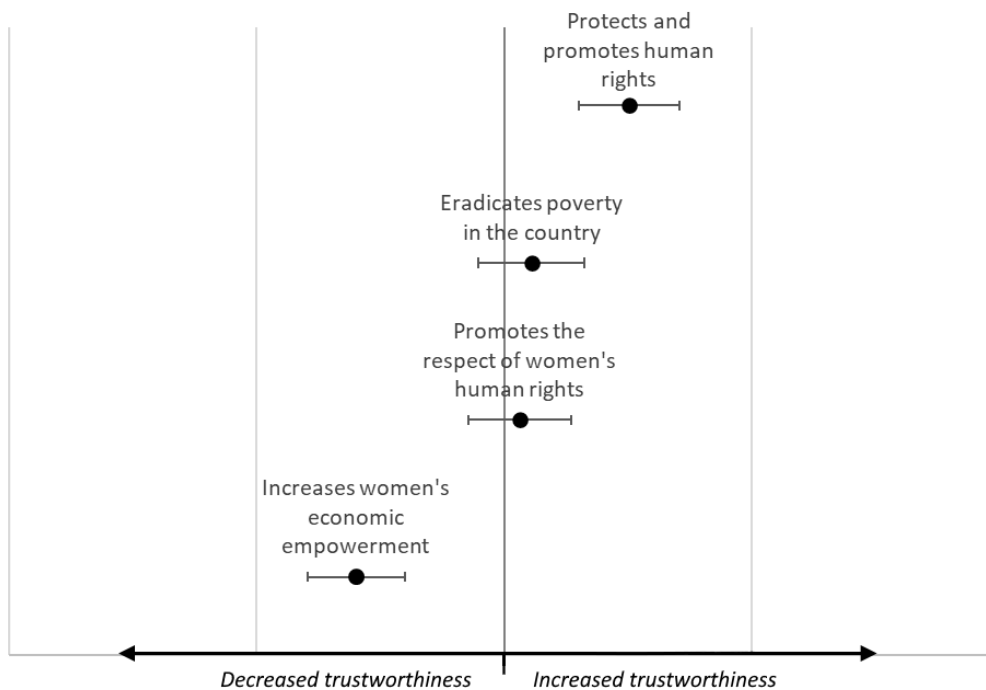


HROs that provide direct aid and services were by far the most likely to be chosen in head-to-head matchups with HROs of any other activity type. Compared with this activity, Filipino respondents were 9 percent, 13 percent, and 14 percent less likely to choose HROs raising awareness through community events, meeting with officials to inform policy, and raising awareness through peaceful protests or public demonstrations as the more trustworthy HRO, respectively.

The survey found that most Filipinos engaged with HROs through attending HRO events, reading HRO awareness materials, and participating in direct aid and services. They were almost three times as likely to engage with HROs in these ways than signing an HRO petition.

2. Mission statement

Mission statement was the second-most 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.

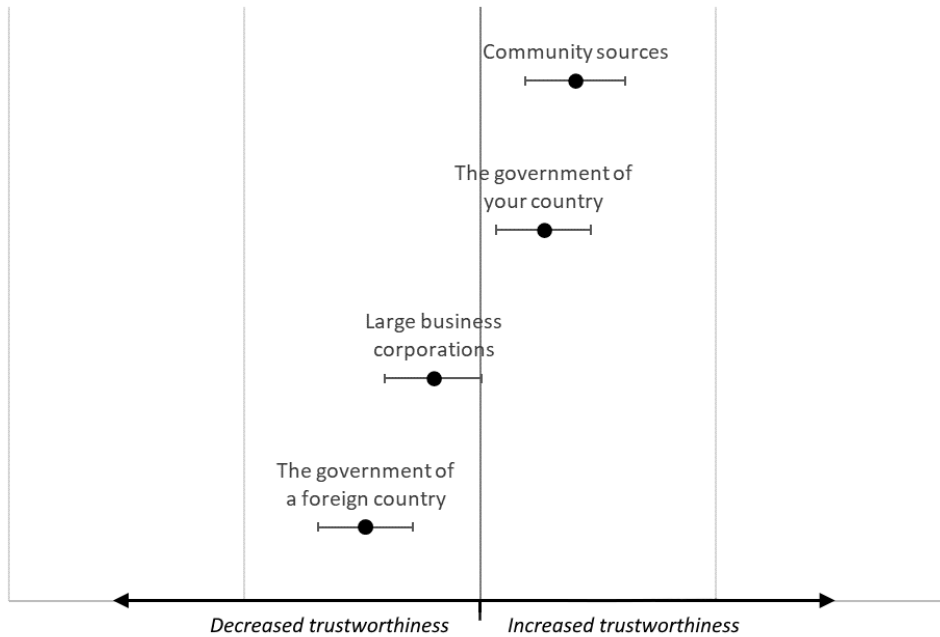


HROs with a mission statement of increasing women’s economic empowerment were the least likely to be chosen in head-to-head matchups of all the tested mission statements. Filipinos were most likely to choose HROs that protect human rights. Compared with women’s economic empowerment, Filipino respondents were 7 percent, 7 percent, and 11 percent more likely to choose HROs promoting respect of women’s human rights, eradicating poverty, and protecting human rights as the more trustworthy HRO, respectively.

3. Funding

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

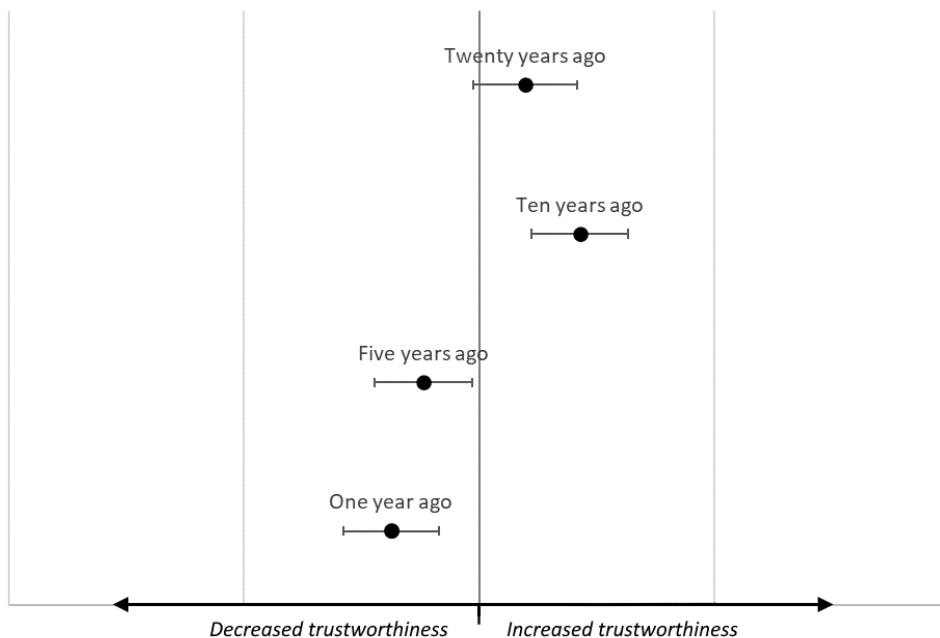
When choosing the more trustworthy of two comparable HROs, Filipino respondents were slightly more likely to choose HROs funded by community sources and their own government than large business corporations and foreign governments.



Compared with funding by community sources or their own government, Filipinos were 5 to 10 percent less likely to choose HROs funded by large business corporations and foreign governments. For additional context, the survey asked Filipinos how they think HROs they interacted with are usually funded and found that most thought these HROs are funded through community sources. It also asked Filipinos 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.

4. Years established

Age of HRO was the least important factor for Filipino 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. Regarding HROs’ age, Filipinos were slightly more likely to choose older HROs as the more trustworthy HRO than younger HROs.



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 the Philippines. 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 Filipino respondents, but the sample used in the study is not representative of the Filipino 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.