

Credibility of Human Rights Organizations: Poland

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 Poland survey



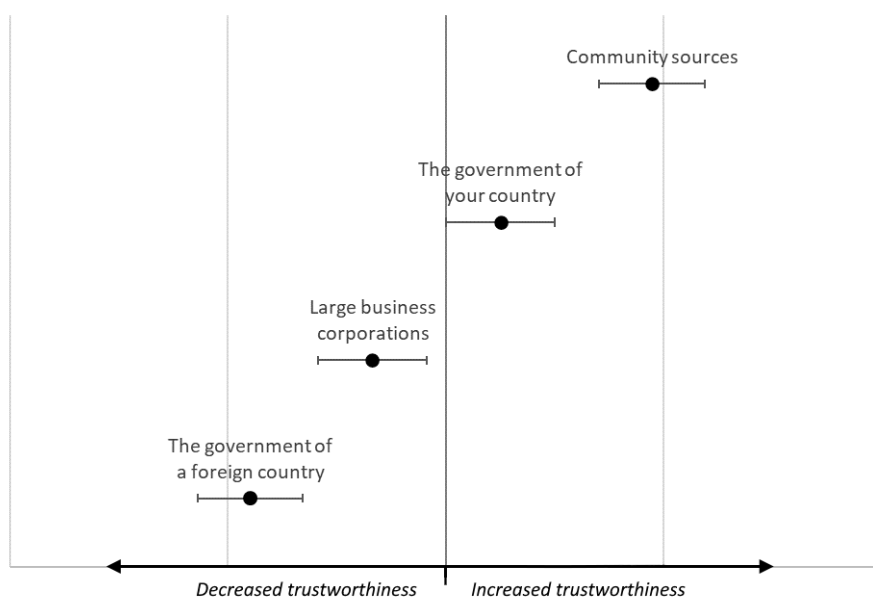
1. Funding source was the primary driver of people's perceptions around HROs in Poland, followed closely by their recent activity and mission statement. An organization's funding source influenced 29 percent of a person's perception of an HRO's trustworthiness, followed by recent activity (28 percent) and mission statement (27 percent). Years established (17 percent) was the least important attribute.

2. Funding by community sources increased trustworthiness of HROs, while foreign government funding decreased trustworthiness. Most Polish respondents believed that HROs are funded through community sources, while few think they are funded by international sources.
3. Providing direct aid and services increased trustworthiness, while all other activity types decreased trustworthiness or had no effect.
4. Mission statements that include eradicating poverty or promoting human rights increased trustworthiness, while mission statements that include increasing women's economic empowerment decreased trustworthiness. Compared with men, women were about 4 percent and 8 percent more likely to choose HROs that aim to promote women's human rights and increase women's economic empowerment, respectively, as the more trustworthy HRO.
5. Older HROs were seen as more trustworthy, while younger HROs were seen as less trustworthy.

Ranked attributes that affect the perception of trustworthiness of HROs

1. Funding

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

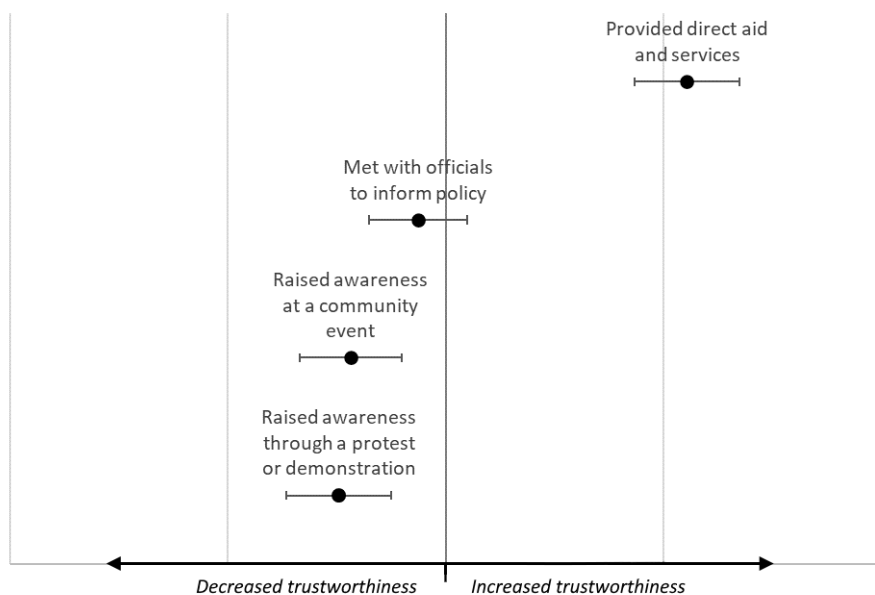


When choosing the more trustworthy of two comparable HROs, Polish respondents were most likely to choose HROs funded by community sources, followed by those funded by their own government and then large business corporations. Among funding models, HROs funded by foreign governments were the least likely to be chosen. Compared with HROs funded by community sources, Polish respondents were 6 percent, 12 percent, and 18 percent less likely to choose HROs funded by their own government, large business corporations, and foreign governments, respectively, as the more trustworthy HRO in head-to-head matchups.

To provide additional context, the survey asked Polish respondents how they think HROs they interacted with are usually funded and found that most thought HROs are funded through community sources, while very few thought they are funded by international sources. It also asked respondents about their perceptions of government and civil society institutions, and more than 80 percent of respondents thought that at least “some of them” are corrupt. Of all the government institutions, Polish respondents thought that their current ruling party represented them the least.

2. Recent activity

Among the attributes examined, recent activity of HROs was the second-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.

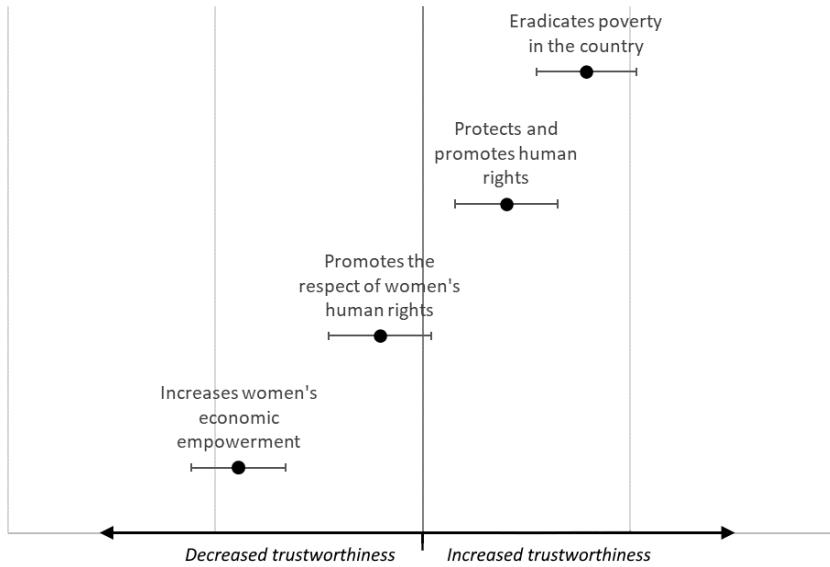


Compared with other activities, HROs that provide direct aid and services were by far the most likely to be chosen as the more trustworthy HRO in head-to-head matchups. Polish respondents did not have a strong preference between the rest of the activities. Those who meet with government officials to inform policy were the least likely to be chosen as the more trustworthy HRO. Compared with providing direct aid and services, Polish respondents were 12 percent, 15 percent, and 16 percent less likely to choose HROs meeting with government officials to inform policy, raising awareness through community events, and raising awareness through peaceful protests or public demonstrations, respectively.

Most of the Polish respondents had little interaction with HROs. Almost three-quarters of them responded either “never” or “rarely” when asked how frequently they interacted with HROs. The survey found that Polish respondents were most likely to engage with HROs through reading HRO awareness materials. They were least likely to engage with HROs through direct aid and services. They were almost one-quarter as likely to engage with HROs this way than reading HRO materials.

3. Mission statement

Mission statement was the third-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.

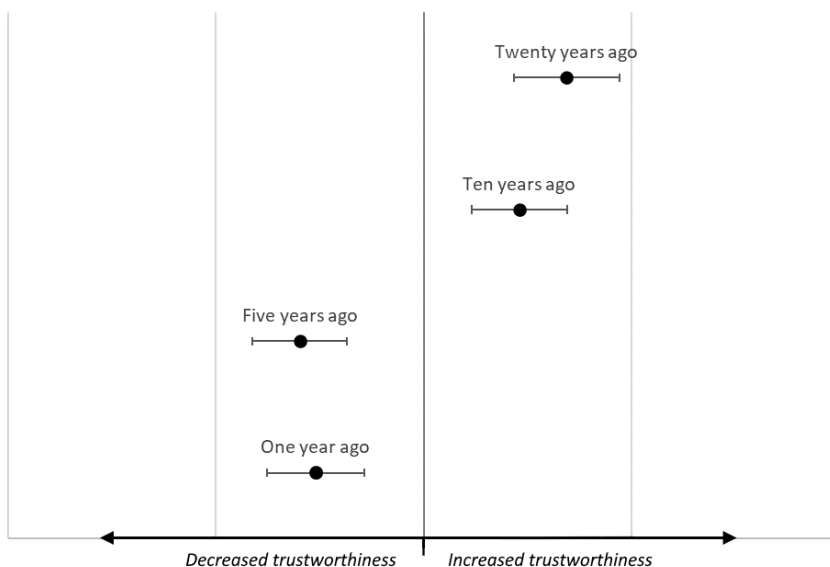


Polish respondents were more likely to choose HROs aiming to eradicate poverty and protect human rights as the more trustworthy HRO than those promoting women’s human rights and economic empowerment. HROs aiming to increase women’s economic empowerment were the least likely to be chosen of all the mission statements. Compared with this mission statement, Polish respondents were 7 percent, 13 percent, and 17 percent more likely to choose HROs aiming to promote respect of women’s human rights, protect human rights, and eradicate poverty, respectively.

Men and women in Poland did not diverge in their perceptions of trustworthiness of HROs significantly, except on the mission statement attribute. Compared with women, men were about 4 percent and 9 percent more likely to choose HROs that aim to protect human rights and eradicate poverty, respectively, as the more trustworthy HRO. Compared with men, women were about 4 percent and 8 percent more likely to choose HROs that aim to promote respect of women’s human rights and increase women’s economic empowerment, respectively, as the more trustworthy HRO.

4. Years established

Age of an HRO was the least important factor for Polish 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' ages, Polish respondents were significantly more likely to choose older HROs as more trustworthy than those that are one and five years old.

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 Poland. 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 750 Polish respondents, but the sample used in the study is not representative of the Polish 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.