

# Credibility of Human Rights Organizations: Turkey

## 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 Turkey survey



1. Funding source was the primary driver of people’s perceptions around HROs in Turkey. This was followed by an HRO’s mission statement and number of years established, which had similar levels of influence. An organization’s recent activity was the least important factor in respondents’ assessments. The source of funding influenced 34

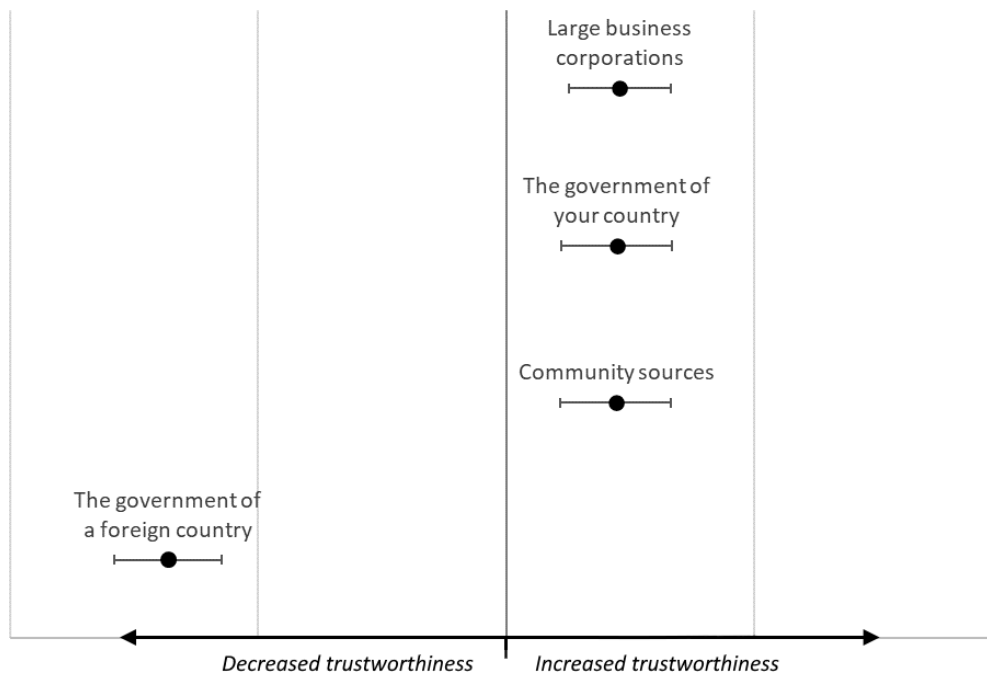
percent of a person's preference of HRO, followed by an HRO's mission statement (25 percent), years established (24 percent), and recent activity (17 percent).

2. Foreign government funding substantially decreased trustworthiness of HROs among survey respondents.
3. Turkish respondents overall were far less likely to choose HROs aiming to increase women's economic empowerment as the more trustworthy HRO in head-to-head matchups with HROs with other mission statement attributes. Turkish women, however, were about 11 percent more likely than men to choose HROs that aim to increase women's economic empowerment as the more trustworthy HRO in head-to-head matchups.
4. Being established for one year significantly decreased the trustworthiness of HROs compared with HROs of all other ages.

## 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 of, large business corporations, the Turkish government, and foreign governments.

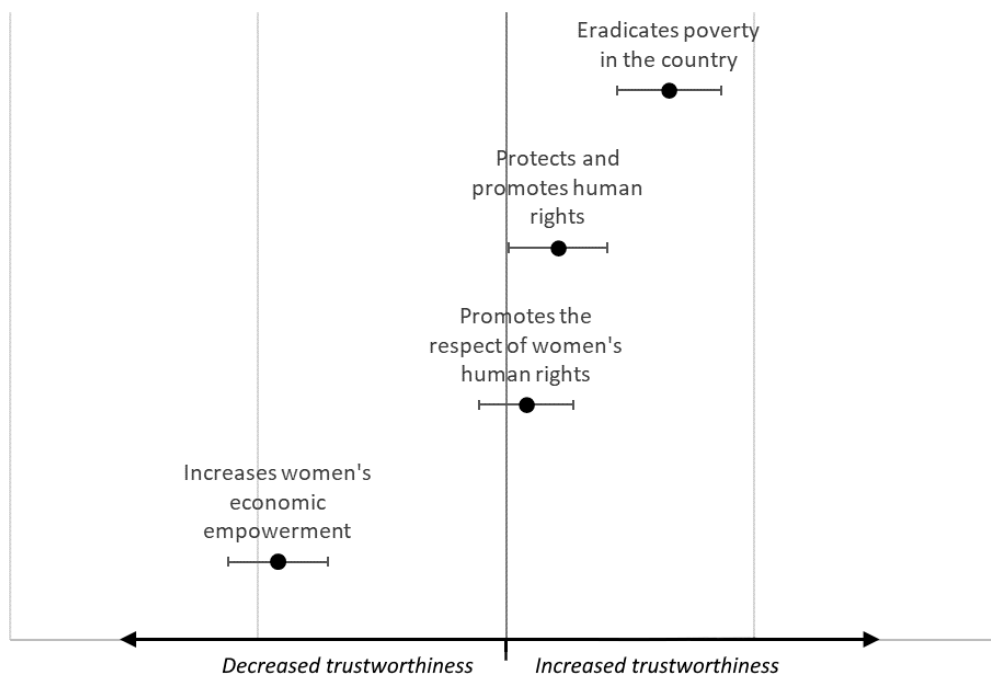


When choosing the more trustworthy of two comparable HROs, Turkish respondents were least likely to choose HROs funded by foreign governments. The results showed no preference between the other three sources of funding.

For additional context, the survey asked Turkish respondents how they think HROs they interacted with are usually funded and found that most thought HROs are funded through community sources, while fewer thought HROs are funded by international sources. It also asked Turkish 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.

## 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.



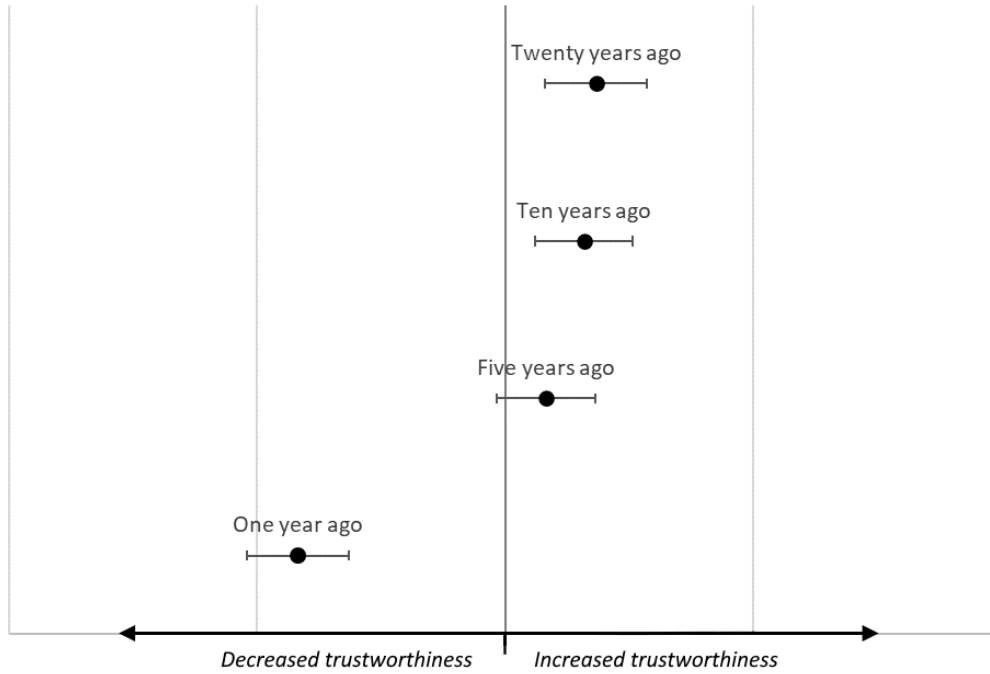
Turkish respondents were far less likely to choose HROs aiming to increase women’s economic empowerment as the more trustworthy HRO in head-to-head matchups. Compared with this mission statement attribute, respondents were between 10 and 20 percent more likely to choose HROs aiming to promote the respect of women’s human rights, protect and promote human rights, and eradicate poverty. Eradication of poverty was seen as the most trustworthy mission statement.

Mission statement was the one attribute on which men and women in Turkey diverged in their perceptions of trustworthiness of HROs. Women were about 11 percent more likely than men to choose HROs that aim to increase women’s economic empowerment as the more trustworthy HRO in head-to-head matchups. Men were about 7 percent more likely than women to choose HROs that aim to eradicate poverty.

## 3. Years established

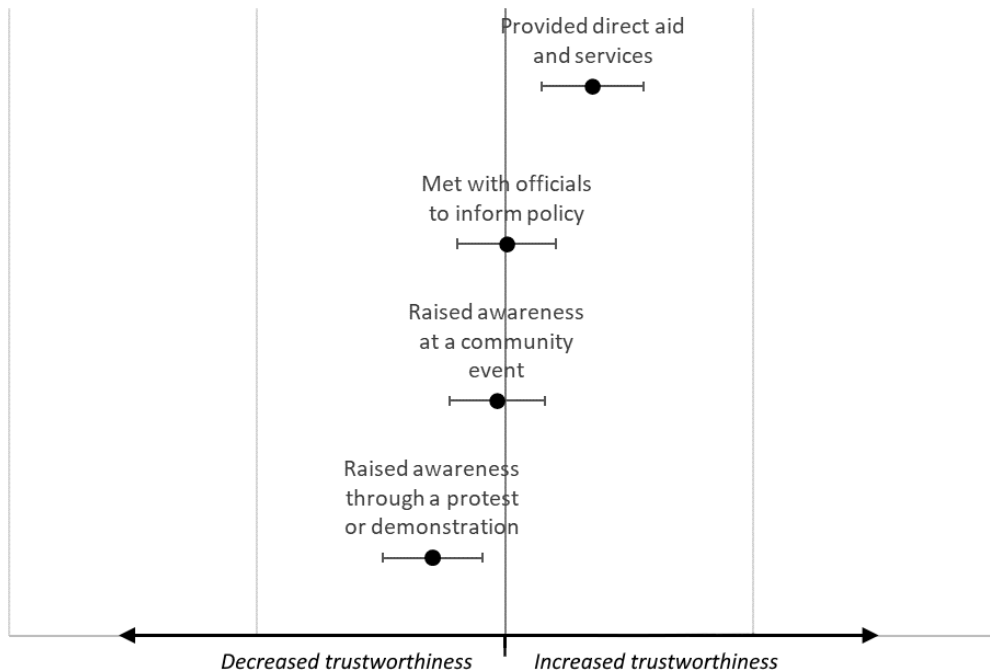
Age of HRO was the third-most important factor for Turkish respondents in deciding the trustworthiness of HROs. The survey varied how many years the HRO has been established: one year, five years, ten years, and twenty years.

Turkish respondents were significantly less likely to choose HROs that have been established for one year as more trustworthy compared with older HROs. Otherwise, Turkish respondents did not show a strong preference for HROs based on this attribute.



#### 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.



While Turkish respondents did not express strong preferences among HROs' recent activities, they slightly preferred those that provide direct aid and services to those that raise awareness through protests or demonstrations. Respondents were

7 percent more likely to choose HROs providing direct aid and services as the more trustworthy HRO compared with those that raise awareness through protests or demonstrations.

Most of the Turkish respondents had little interaction with HROs. Almost two-thirds of them responded either “never” or “rarely” when asked how frequently they interacted with HROs. The survey found that Turkish respondents were most likely to engage with HROs through reading HROs’ awareness materials, and they were least likely to engage with HROs through signing an HRO’s petition.

## 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 Turkey. 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 Turkish respondents, but the sample used in the study is not representative of the Turkish 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.