

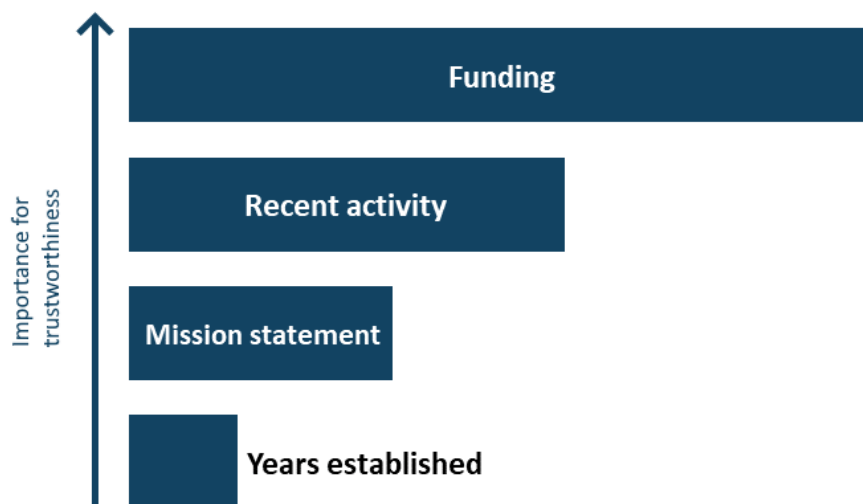
Credibility of Human Rights Organizations: Venezuela

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 Venezuela survey



1. Funding source was the primary driver of people's perceptions around HROs, followed by recent activity. An organization's mission statement and the number of years it has been established were less important factors in respondents' assessments. The source of funding is by far the attribute that had the most impact on whether a respondent perceived an HRO as trustworthy. This attribute influenced 48 percent of a person's preference of

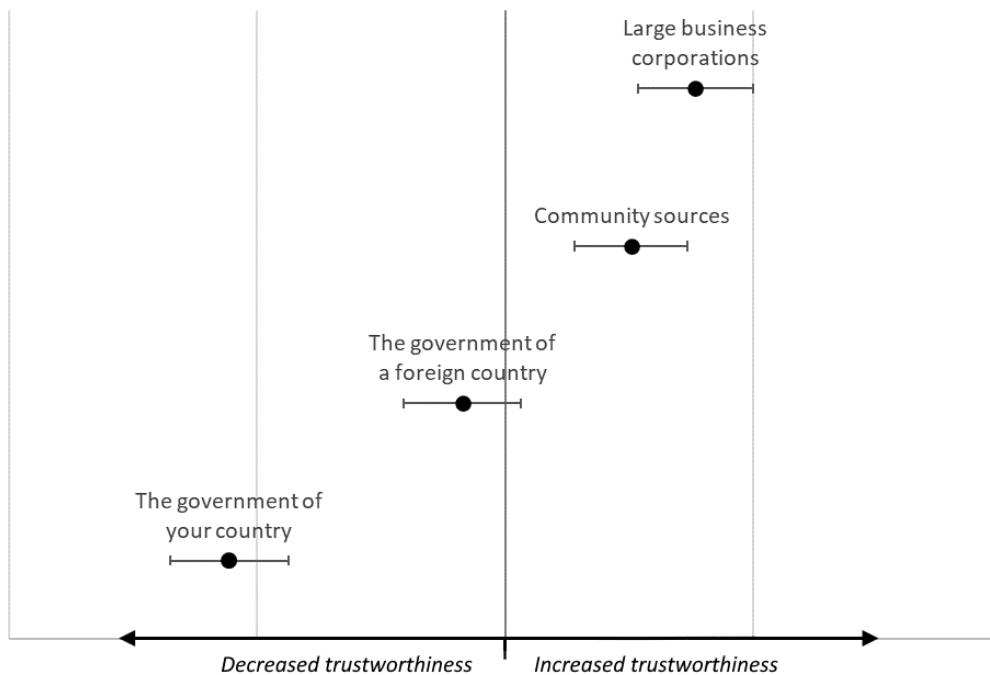
HRO, followed by an HRO's recent activity (28 percent), mission statement (17 percent), and years established (7 percent).

2. Among funding sources, funding by business corporations and communities increased trustworthiness, while funding by the Venezuelan government decreased trustworthiness. Most Venezuelans believed that the HROs they interacted with are funded through community and international sources, while very few thought they are funded by their own government.
3. Providing direct aid and services and raising awareness at community events increased trustworthiness, while meeting with government officials to inform policy and raising awareness through protests or demonstrations decreased trustworthiness.
4. Venezuelan respondents did not have a strong preference between different mission statements.
5. When comparing HROs of different ages, HROs that have been established for ten years were much less likely to be chosen as the more trustworthy HRO in head-to-head matchups. Venezuelans were more likely to choose HROs that have been established for one year and twenty years.

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 Venezuelan government, and foreign governments.

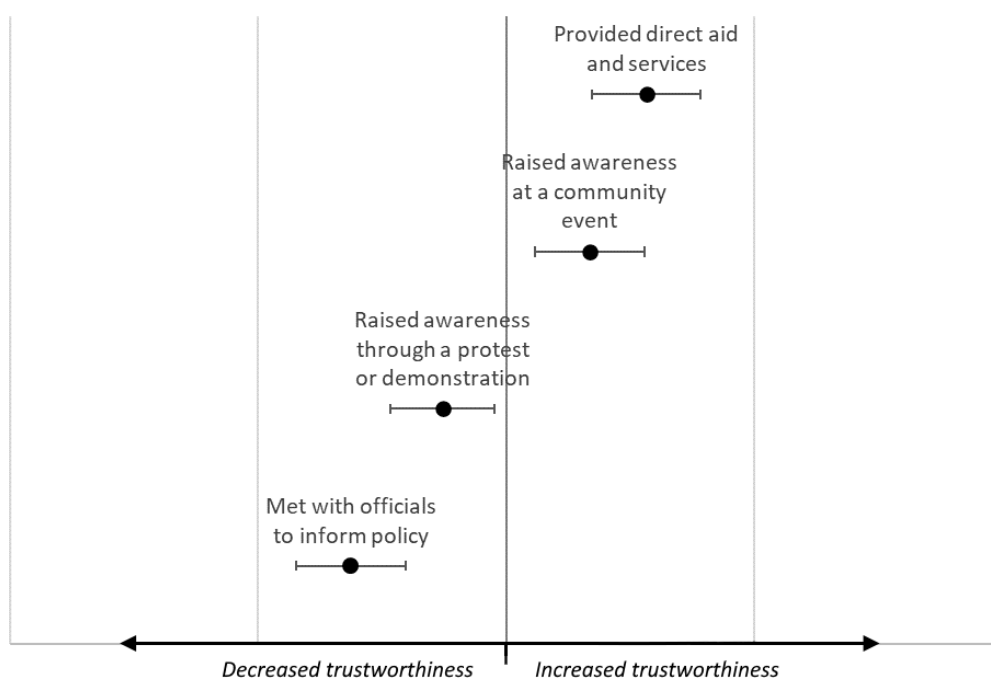


When choosing the more trustworthy of two comparable HROs, Venezuelans were more likely to choose HROs funded by large business corporations or community sources over those funded by foreign governments or their own government. Compared with large business corporations, Venezuelans were 19 percent less likely to choose HROs funded by their own government as the more trustworthy HRO in the head-to-head matchups.

To provide additional context, the survey asked Venezuelans how they think HROs they interacted with are usually funded and found that most thought are funded through community (46 percent) and international (43 percent) sources, while very few thought they are funded by their own government. The survey also asked Venezuelans about their perceptions of government and civil society institutions, and a majority of respondents thought that either “most of them” or “all of them” are corrupt.

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.

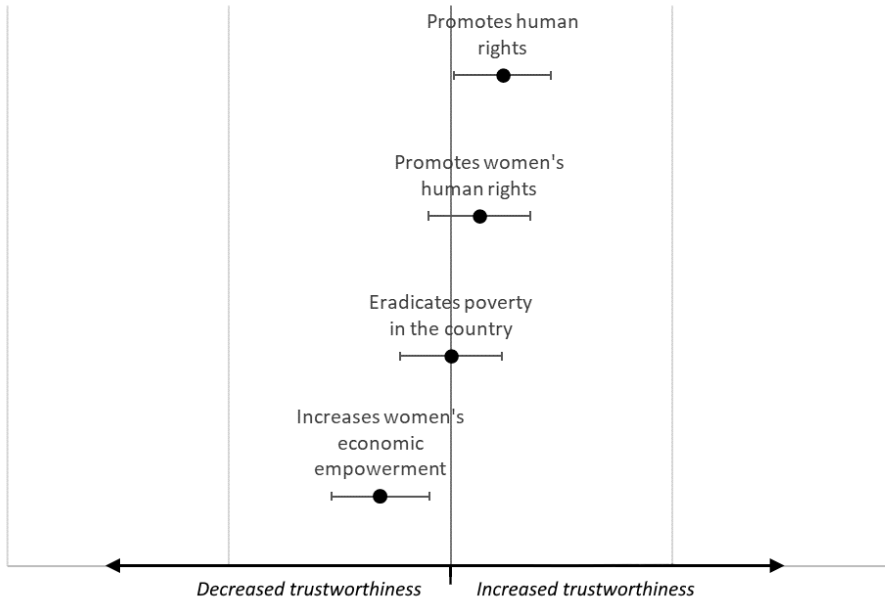


HROs that provide direct aid and services or raise awareness at community events were more likely to be chosen in head-to-head matchups than other types of HRO activity. HROs that met with government officials to inform policy were the least likely to be chosen. Venezuelans were 12 percent more likely to choose HROs that provide direct aid as the more trustworthy HRO compared with those that meet with officials to inform policy.

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.

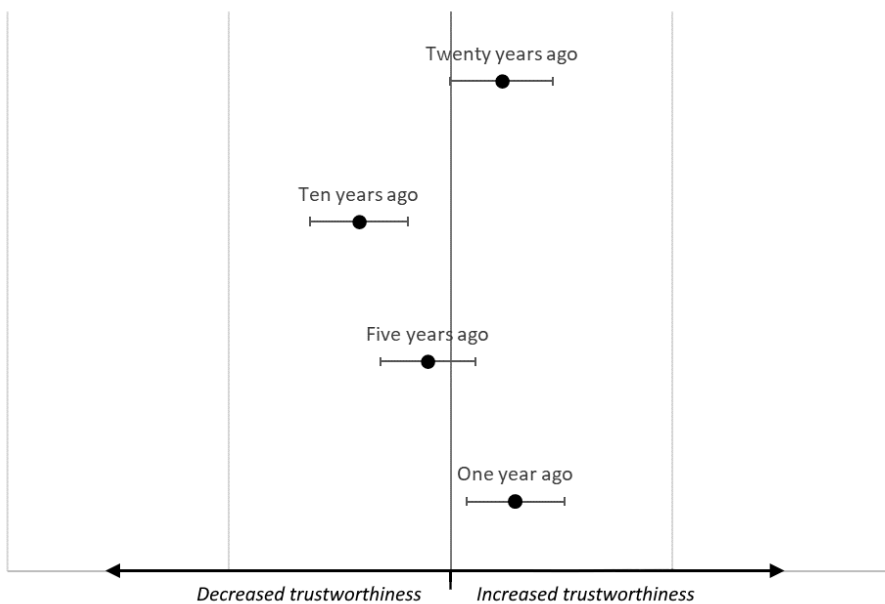
Venezuelan respondents did not have a strong preference between different mission statements. HROs that promote human rights were more likely to be chosen as trustworthy in head-to-head matchups compared with HROs that aim to increase women’s economic empowerment, but the difference was small.



Men and women in Venezuela did not diverge in their perceptions of trustworthiness of HROs significantly, except on the mission statement attribute. Women were nearly 10 percent more likely than men to choose HROs that aim to increase women’s economic empowerment as the more trustworthy HRO, while men were about 5 percent more likely than women to choose HROs that aim to eradicate poverty as the more trustworthy HRO.

4. Years established

Age of HRO was the least important factor for Venezuelan 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.



When comparing HROs of different ages, Venezuelans were more likely to choose HROs that have been established for one year and twenty years. HROs that have been established for ten years were much less likely to be chosen as the more trustworthy HRO in head-to-head matchups.

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 Venezuela. 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 845 Venezuelan respondents, but the sample used in the study is not representative of the Venezuelan 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.