

TRUST IN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN BULGARIA

This analysis is based on data from a national representative survey conducted in April 2018. The survey was organized and financed by the Open Society Institute – Sofia.

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SUMMARY

This analysis is based on the findings of nationally representative public opinion polls carried out among adults aged over 18 in April 2018 by means of the method of a face-to-face interview using a standardized questionnaire. The respondents were selected through random two-stage cluster sample. 1179 out of 1200 planned interviews were carried. The maximum stochastic error is $\pm 2,8\%$. The survey was implemented and financed by Open Society Institute – Sofia.

The findings of the survey have been examined against findings of similar international surveys based on the existing theories of public and institutional trust.

The main findings are as follows:

- ▶ NGOs in Bulgaria face greater difficulties gaining the trust of different social groups than it is common for NGOs across the world. However, the general level of institutional and social trust in Bulgaria is quite low compared to the level across the world.
- ▶ NGOs in Bulgaria are among the institutions that are less well known. Half of the adults have no specific opinion of NGOs because they are not familiar with their activity.
- ▶ Two thirds of the people who have had first-hand experience with NGOs or have received information about them from the media have developed a positive attitude and are willing to trust them.
- ▶ Positive first-hand experience and positive information from the media are the two main factors that influence the existing trust in NGOs. Lack of information is the main reason for distrust and undecidedness.
- ▶ NGOs in Bulgaria can in principle rely to a certain extent on trust and support for their work by approximately 1.2 million adults. Active supporters account for a little above 200 000 among them.
- ▶ Overall trust in NGOs, as measured according to the number of supporters, is not considerable compared with the other institutions, however, so is distrust. NGOs enjoy a good position in the balance between trust and distrust with 8% percentage points of distrust surpassing trust. With such balance NGOs are ahead of most main public institutions, banks, the media and hospitals.
- ▶ NGOs enjoy greater trust among young people, people with higher income and higher education. The majority of people who trust NGOs have secondary or higher education and income above 450 BGN per household member but they are not young, as 65% of the adult population is above 45. People with income in excess of 700 BGN per household member are also few among those who trust NGOs because only 1/4 of the population belongs to this income group.
- ▶ NGOs enjoy much greater trust in cities than in villages and trust in NGOs among urban population is higher outside Sofia City and is highest in district cities.
- ▶ Charity is the most recognizable NGO activity followed at a great distance by volunteering, environment protection and work with young people.
- ▶ There is no visible connection between trust in NGOs and democratic attitudes. Persons ready to accept a temporary compromise with democratic rights and freedoms in the name of other public policy goals are just as common among those who trust NGOs as among those who distrust them. The same is valid for the judgment whether a change of the political parties in power will result in a real political change: there is no difference between those who trust and those who don't trust NGOs.
- ▶ Those who trust NGOs are slightly more tolerant to the members of the main discriminated groups, people with disabilities in particular, people with different sexual orientation, though to a lesser extent, and the Roma, with a slight difference.

WHAT IS TRUST AND HOW IS IT MEASURED?

Trust is a complex and multi-layered concept. It overlaps with such concepts as predictability, familiarity, usefulness and gain, personal and group vulnerability, reciprocity and cooperation, reliability, competence. Trust is usually studied through sociological surveys where the participants declare their trust or distrust of people, institutions and circumstances or through experiments, most often in the form of games¹. Experiments are used more often to study trust in economic terms; economists show greater belief in what people actually do than what they say they wish or intend to do. This analysis is based on a sociological survey and it mainly relies on the respondents sharing their beliefs, values and attitudes in good faith.

Analyses of the ways to build trust in NGOs, which have solid theoretical and empirical foundations, distinguish between cognitive and affective trust, which we can also somewhat provisionally call “rational” and “emotional” trust. Analogy is drawn with interpersonal trust over which psychology has long established the influence of these two components of trust. Cognitive trust is based to a great extent on knowledge of organizations and institutions which makes it possible to make a rational assessment of their capacity, trustworthiness and predictability. Trustworthiness and predictability, as a component of trust, show that readiness to trust also involves certain acceptance of taking risks². Some economists compare trust in strangers and trust in general in a situation of incomplete information to a risky bet³. Trust actually presupposes a certain shortage of information; otherwise, if everything were known about the actions of the other

party, trust would not be needed at all⁴. You provide some resources on credit or agree to be vulnerable to the decisions of others for some time and rely in exchange on their reciprocal goodwill and competence without being sure of them. Cognitive trust is also related to planning, organization, decision making and effectiveness⁵.

Trust, however, also has a component which does not involve rational evaluation but is “unconditional kindness”⁶. The emotional component of trust is often related to shared values and concern about the same causes. Shared values and common causes which prompt an emotional response are often predetermined and building greater trust depends only on the extent to which an organization seems to be genuinely and deeply devoted to the cause and spends the available resources in a honest and transparent manner. Some studies claim that trust levels measured in sociological surveys might predict better even economic behaviour⁷.

Trust can be also regarded as a skill which, just like all skills, can be acquired and improved depending on cognitive abilities. Even authors who compare trust to a skill note that the context is the most important factor for its development⁸. Trust is also a process where trustfulness (ability to trust) of some meets the ability of others to inspire trust and be trustworthy, i.e. be able to live up in the long term to the trust placed in them. Deceitful promises can eventually put off a person who has been initially willing to trust, even change the person’s general attitude from trust to distrust. On the contrary, someone may respond honestly even without having the trust of the other party and thus win him/her, though this is much more difficult to achieve especially if distrust is deeply rooted in values. Some empirical analyses show that the behaviour of the party that can gain and be worthy of trust is decisive, i.e. the trustworthy party. The idea that it is only one’s actions that make one trustworthy is tempting;

¹ Fehr, E., Fischbacher, U., Schupp, J., von Rosenblatt, B. and Wagner, G. G. “A Nationwide Laboratory Examining Trust and Trustworthiness by Integrating Behavioural Experiments into Representative Surveys”(3858), Technical report, C.E.P.R. Discussion Papers, 2003. See for an example of a game experiment and a review of sources Lazzarini, S. G., Madalozzo, R. C., Artes, R. and Siqueira, J. O. „Measuring trust: An experiment in Brazil”(wpe_42), Technical report, Insper Working Paper, Insper Instituto de Ensino e Pesquisa, 2004.

² Eckel, C. C. and Wilson, R. K. “Is trust a risky decision?,” *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* (55:4), 2004, pp. 447-465.

³ Bohnet, I. and Zeckhauser, R. “Trust, risk and betrayal,” *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* (55:4), 2004, pp. 467-484.

⁴ Weber, L. *The Social Construction of Trust*, Springer, 2003. Weber notes that perception of trust as a risky bet can be traced to the works of the prominent German sociologist Niklas Luhmann.

⁵ Burt, C. D. B., Carr, S., (eds.) *Managing the Public’s Trust in Non-profit Organizations*, Springer, Heidelberg, 2014

⁶ Ashraf, N., Bohnet, I. and Piankov, N. “Decomposing trust and trustworthiness,” *Experimental Economics* (9:3), 2006, pp. 193-208.

⁷ Ben-Ner, A. and Halldorsson, F. “Measuring Trust: Which Measure Can Be Trusted?,” *Industrial Relations Center, University of Minnesota* (), 2007.

⁸ TAMILINA, L. and TAMILINA, N. “Trust as a Skill,” *Psychology and Developing Societies* (30:1), 2018, pp. 44-80.

however, other studies show that what is still more important is the ability to place trust, i.e. the attitude of the trustful party⁹.

Some authors claim that trust and distrust are not the poles of the same psychological phenomenon but completely different attitudes related to different feelings and experiences. For instance (McKnight & Associates: 2004), following other authors, differentiate dispositional trust from dispositional distrust and carry out an empirical test to check whether the two concepts are two different constructs based on a material on user behaviour in the internet¹⁰. They believe that distrust is based on fear and worry, while trust is based on feelings of calm and security. They believe that trusting attitude (i.e. dispositional trust) is particularly important in the early stages of contact with others, as more detailed information is absent then. Afterwards trust can be further built on a more rational foundation and based on personal experience.

Disposition to trust most likely depends on previous instances of trust and the response to it as well as experience with regard to reciprocity¹¹.

This analysis addresses trust in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs are hereinafter used as a general concept referring to various kinds of civil society organizations with a clear understanding that the concept can cover various subjects of trust and various types of trust. The UN Toolkit for Civic Engagement in Public Policies uses simultaneously the terms civil society organizations (CSOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs)¹². Such fine distinctions would have been to a large extent unjustified in our study using a sample of the whole adult population because knowledge of the essence and work of NGOs would allow for an in-depth review only among some active but smaller population groups.

⁹ See examples illustrating both cases and empirical corroboration of how important the ability to gain trust is in Tullberg, J. „Trust–The importance of trustfulness versus trustworthiness,” *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics (formerly The Journal of Socio-Economics)* (37:5), 2008, pp. 2059-2071.

¹⁰ McKnight, D. H., Kacmar, C. and Choudhury, V. “Dispositional Trust and Distrust Distinctions in Predicting High- and Low-Risk Internet Expert Advice Site Perceptions,” *e-Service Journal* (3:2), 2004, pp. 35-55.

¹¹ Cox, J. C. “How to identify trust and reciprocity,” *Games and Economic Behavior* (46:2), 2004, pp. 260-281.

¹² Karabornni, N., Mekdad, H. and Aid-Accache, N. *Civic Engagement in Public Policies: A Toolkit*, United Nations, 2007.

Most guides providing advice to NGOs about management of trust address such issues that are important but quite often are not the main ones. This is the case in Bulgaria and perhaps in other places as well, at least in other CEE countries, where the issue of trust does not involve only operational issues but has to do to a large extent with more essential public relations. Management of trust in such a situation is a much more difficult and multifaceted task. Let us take, for instance, attracting new supporters of a cause, which is possible, but much more difficult than mobilizing already developed and convinced supporters. This process of building trust starts a long distance away and it is much more problematic. This process mobilizes both emotional and rational mechanisms of trust. It is most difficult to start building trust in the absence of shared values. In such cases it is more about reaching a compromise about certain initiatives or causes that can serve simultaneously or at least do not contradict different value systems.

It has to be noted that building greater trust of an audience which does not share the values of certain organizations, protection of the rights of ethnic minorities, for instance, is quite an ambitious task, so that part of distrust in NGOs might be due simply to failure to accept the values and the cause the organizations uphold. This deep source of distrust might potentially affect each organization involved in advocacy in its broadest sense, apart from charity and volunteering. In such cases showing good results from a specific initiative naturally contributes to improving the attitude of the informed audience but it does not necessarily have impact on the attitude towards advocacy requests related to amendments to the legislation or existing policies.

WHAT TRUST DO NGOs IN BULGARIA ENJOY?

Civil society organizations have traditionally been ranked among the first together with businesses by the popular global survey of trust, Edelman Trust Barometer, enjoying in 2018 slightly more than 50% of trust from the population compared to slightly above 40% for governments and the media. Among the so-

called “informed audience” in the survey (people with good education, high income and active media use) trust in all institutions is approximately higher by 10%, though the differences remain. In 2018 trust in NGOs registered a drop in 14 out of 28 countries and distrust was greater than trust in 10 of the countries, while in 7 of the countries trust was higher than distrust. There is balance between trust and distrust in the rest of the examined countries¹³.

Civil society organizations in Bulgaria are more challenged in receiving a credit of trust by many social strata than in other countries. Credit of trust is given following rational research into the extent to which someone or something is reputable or trustworthy. Afterwards the organizations in question are carefully monitored whether they meet their commitments and the level of trust is adjusted accordingly. Some credits are granted easier taking a greater risk, while others are more difficult to give following a thorough check. The same is valid for the credit of trust.

Edelman Trust Barometer does not allow respondents to answer with I don't know/cannot decide or ignore a certain question. The assumption is that everyone is aware of what non-governmental organizations are and has an opinion about them. When comparing with the situation in Bulgaria, the way we have measured it with our tools, it should be also noted that the methodology of Edelman does not use a representative sample for the whole population but puts questions to a panel of respondents interviewed electronically. The authors of the survey believe that the representative online panel is similar to a random sample of the population in the developed countries but considerable differences might be observed with regard to the urbanization rate, education and income in countries with less internet penetration.

Our own survey shows that non-governmental organizations in Bulgaria are least known of all institutions. Almost half of the respondents admit that they have not formed an opinion about NGOs (32.5%) or have not answered the question (16.6%). 30% of the respondents do not trust NGOs to a greater (15.5%) or lesser (14.7%) extent, 22% trust them and 3.5% fully trust them.

As expected, trust in NGOs is related to trust in the other institutions. In terms of the absolute number,

most numerous are those who trust 3 or more institutions but cannot decide whether or not they should trust NGOs. They account for approximately 1.4 million people in total. The people who trust NGOs amount to more than 1.2 million and the majority of them are people who trust in principle: they trust three or more institutions (fig. 1).

If we look at the break down by shares instead of absolute numbers, we can see that only 20% of those who trust no more than 2 institutions also trust NGOs. Half of those, who trust at least 3 institutions, also trust NGOs (fig. 2). It has to be noted, though, that trust in institutions in Bulgaria is very low in general.

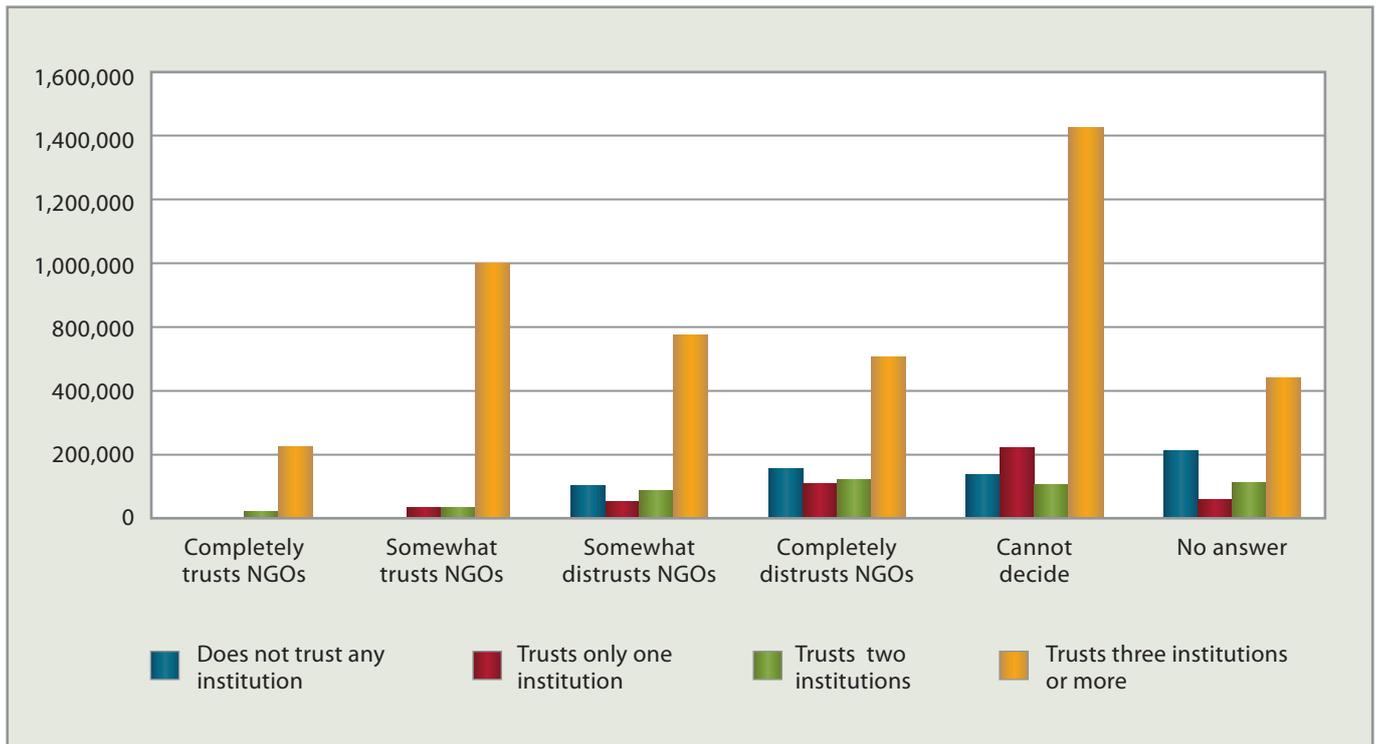
Institutional trust is an important component of general public trust but it has its own logic. Trust in institutions means also trust in the overall environment and specific individuals who at a certain point embody a given institution. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the President are at present the only institutions in Bulgaria that enjoy the trust of approximately half of Bulgarian citizens. That is comparable to trust in the EU which has traditionally been very high, even though at present it is not at its highest level. Hospitals and higher education institutions follow in trust, higher education establishments being the only other institution that enjoys a slightly positive balance of trust, while hospitals and the police enjoy very high trust (approximately and slightly over 40%) and even higher distrust (approximately 50% of the people do not trust them). Key state institutions such as the National Assembly, the government and court enjoy very low trust and a markedly negative balance (fig. 3).

The balance between trust and distrust shows that NGOs fare well on this indicator. Distrust in NGOs is higher than trust by 8% of the adult population (fig. 4). NGOs rank among the institutions with minimum negative balance, immediately after the police, ahead of hospitals and the media and ahead of major public institutions.

Unlike many other institutions, trust in NGOs entails in part the so-called social trust, i.e. trust among people and trust in strangers. Social trust is assessed in many surveys with the following types of questions: “Do you believe that most people are trustworthy or do you think that it always pays to be wary in relations with others?” or different variations of such questions with more or fewer clarifications (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2002). Trust in smaller organizations in particu-

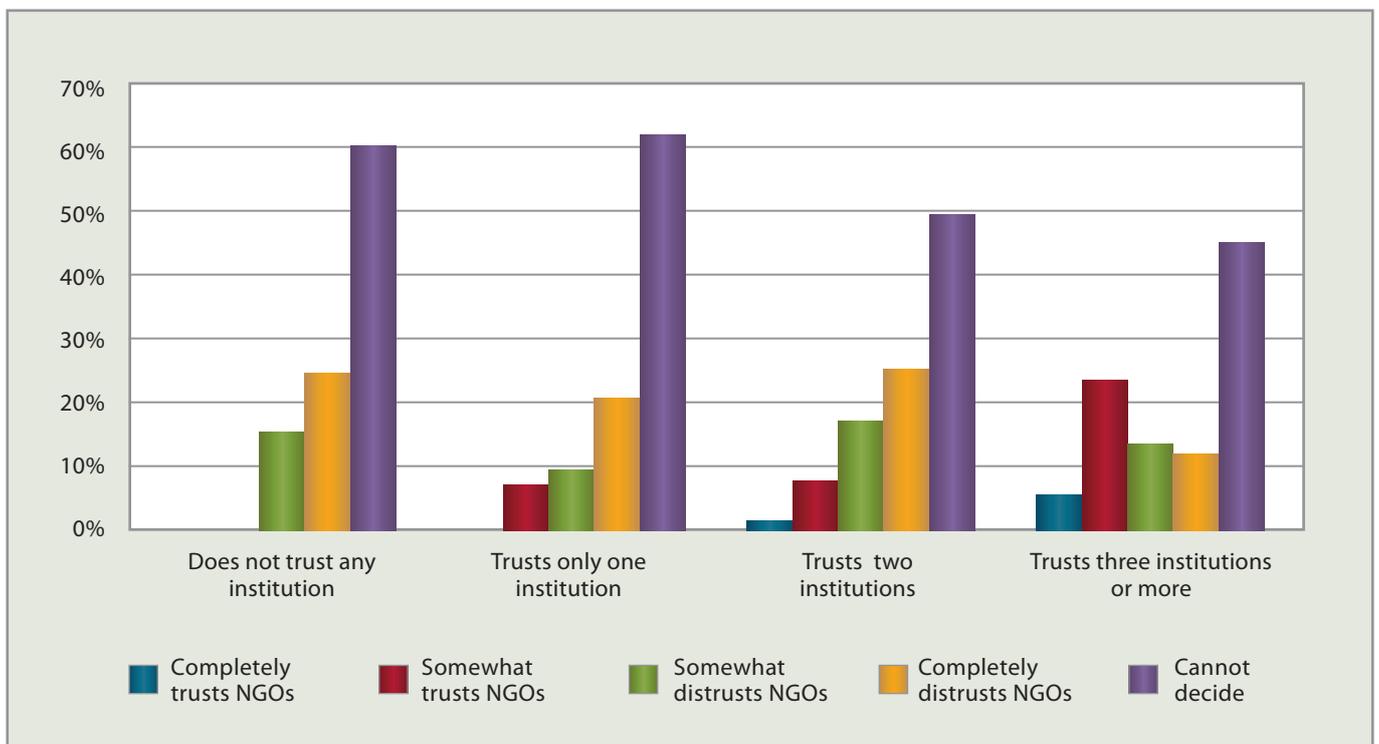
¹³ 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer, Edelman, 2018

Figure 1. Generalized trust in other main institutions according to trust in NGOs



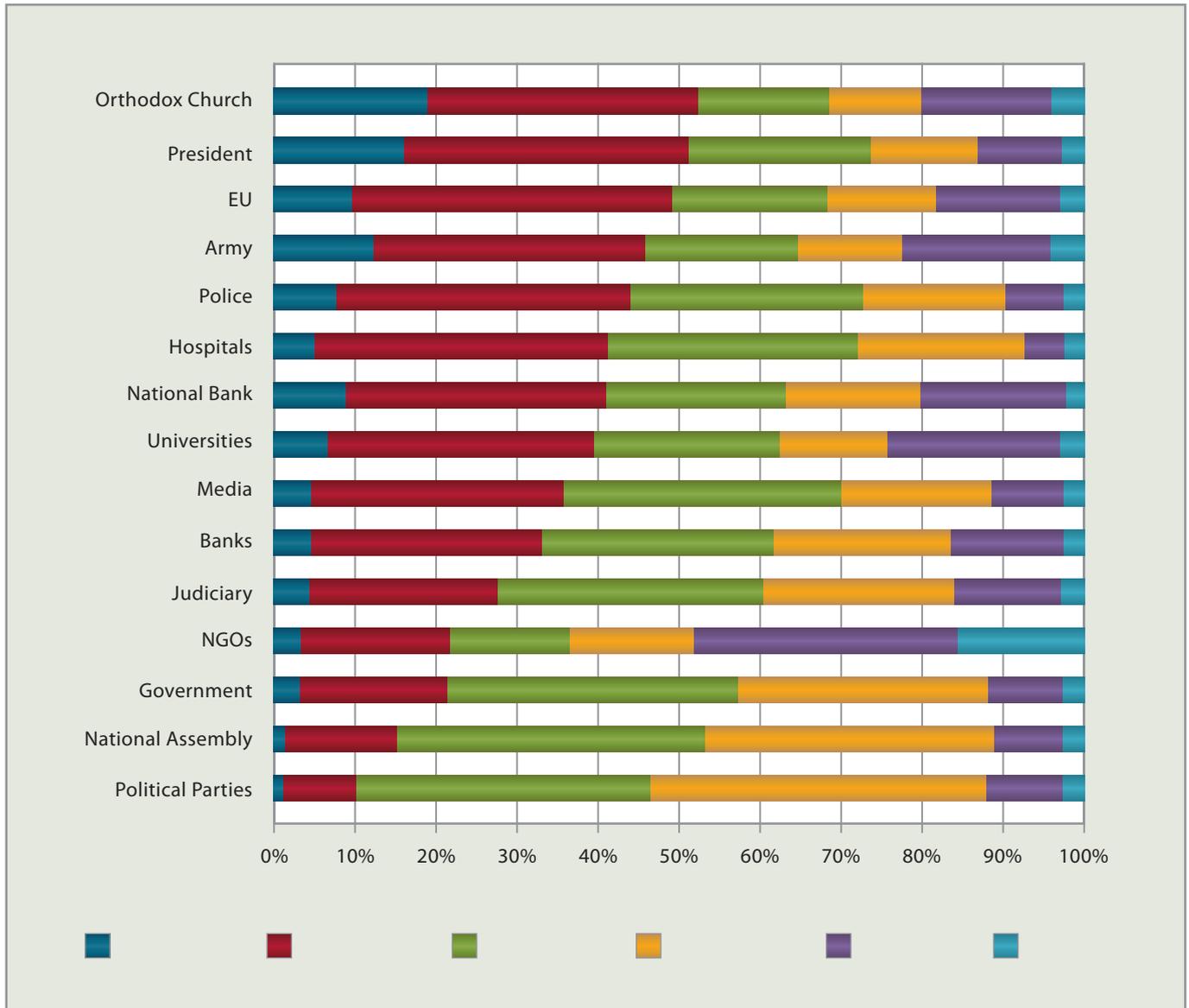
Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

Figure 2. Trust in NGOs according to aggregate trust in other main institutions



Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

Figure 3. Trust in institutions in Bulgaria



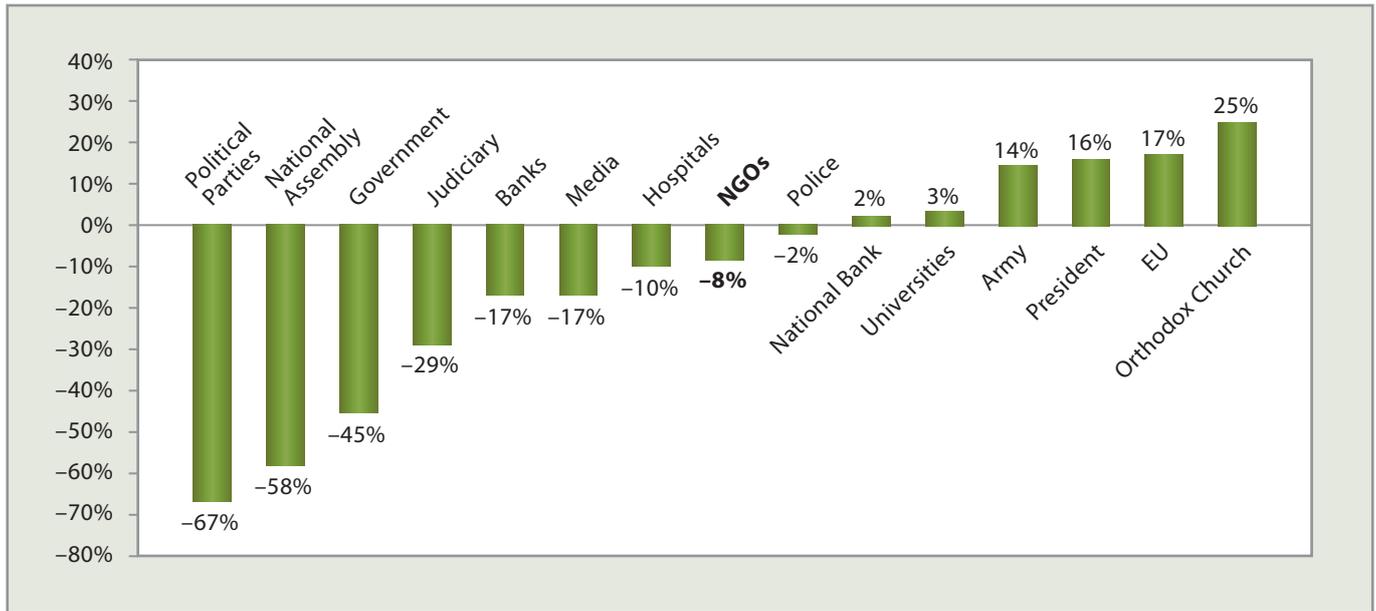
Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

lar, based in their communities, resembles more social than institutional trust but in this survey we do not have a direct measurement method for this indicator. Social trust and institutional trust are not necessarily bound together and they can change in an uncoordinated fashion, i.e. one can go up, while the other can remain unchanged or both can move in the opposite direction. This phenomenon has been observed in ex-communist countries in particular such as Bulgaria where overall levels of trust are lower in general than in the more developed democracies. Even if we take the most beneficial example at a first glance of West and East Germany, where expectations for social and institutional cohesion are most prominent, we can see

that not long after the reunification the public trust levels in East Germany measured by German General Social Survey (ALLBUS) were much lower than in West Germany. Over a decade after the reunification, it was established again that differences in the levels of social trust between the two parts of reunited Germany were kept completely unchanged, though some approximation was observed in the levels of trust in institutions¹⁴. These differences have remained stable ever since. One of the possible explanations is that the economic results from reunification have not been good for many East Germans, which has a negative ef-

¹⁴ Reiner, H. and Siedler, T. "Does Democracy Foster Trust?," DIW Berlin, Discussion paper 609 (), 2006.

Figure 4. Balance of trust in institutions in Bulgaria



Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

fect on the level of public trust. We might assume in the case of Bulgaria that poverty and economic disappointment of some people, especially outside the biggest cities, have most probably had impact on the ability of small local organizations relying on social trust to generate support and attract resources.

WHO HAS AND WHO HAS NO TRUST?

A considerable age difference can be observed between those who trust NGOs and those who do not.

The median age of those who have full distrust of NGOs is almost 60, while the median age of those who have full or partial trust is about 45 years (fig. 5 & 6). Trust turns out often to be empirically connected with age but the connection is not necessarily the way we see it in our survey. Under different social and economic circumstances, people of more advanced age (over 65) turn out to be more trustful than the young (below 35)¹⁵.

¹⁵ There is such an example from Germany - Fehr, E., Fischbacher, U., Schupp, J., von Rosenblatt, B. and Wagner, G. G. „A Nationwide Laboratory Examining Trust and Trustworthiness by Integrating Behavioural Experiments into Representative Surveys”(3858), Technical report, C.E.P.R. Discussion Papers, 2003.

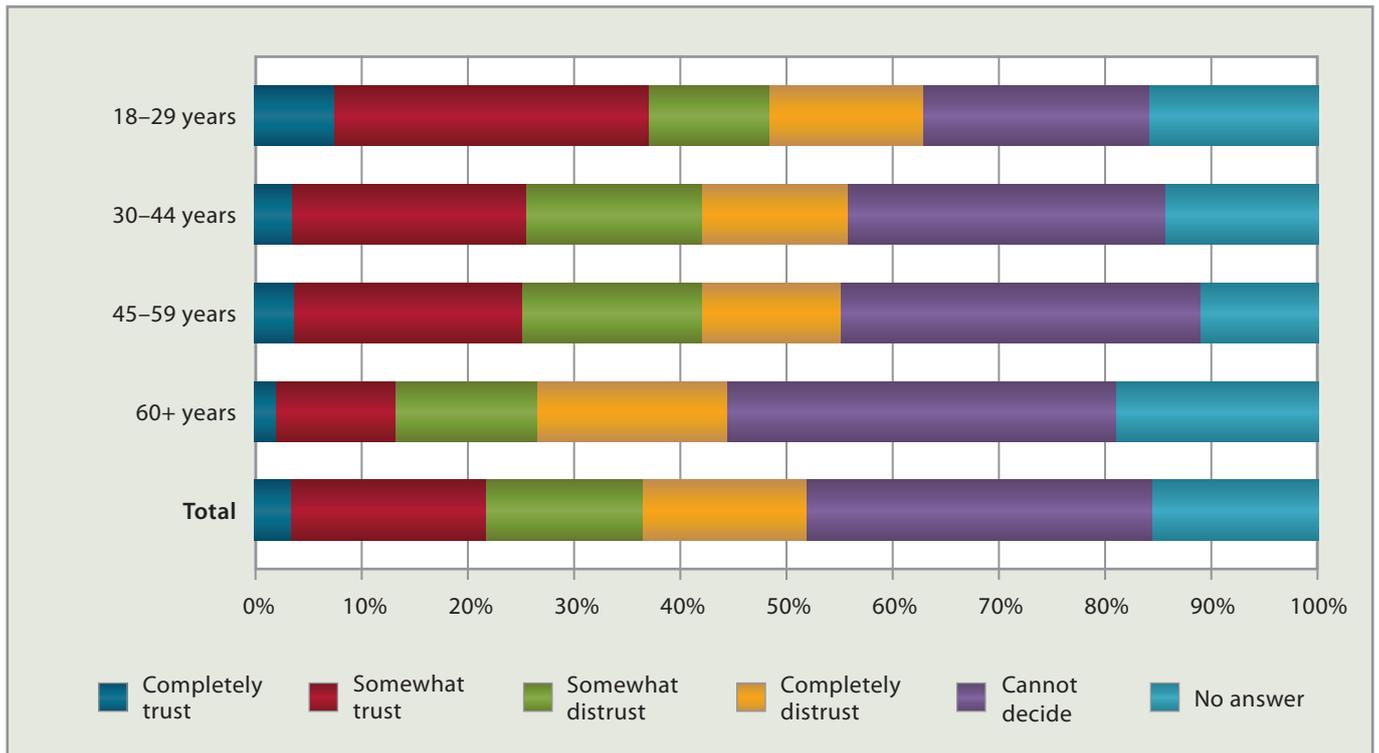
The groups that trust or do not trust NGOs have a different profile.

People with higher income levels have greater trust in NGOs as a whole: people with a monthly income of more than 700 BGN are twice more likely to trust NGOs than people with an income of not more than 300 BGN (fig. 7). The people in the first group are more trustful in principle. It will be just as correct to say that people who are more trustful have on average higher income; the direction of the causal relationship is not clear and the relationship itself, as seen from the chart, is not linear.

A similar result can be seen with regard to education, a more marked difference in the likelihood to trust can be observed, while trust grows in quite an unvaried manner with the reached education level. More than 30% of people with university or college education trust NGOs, while the share of people who trust NGOs among people with primary or lower education is three times lower (fig. 8).

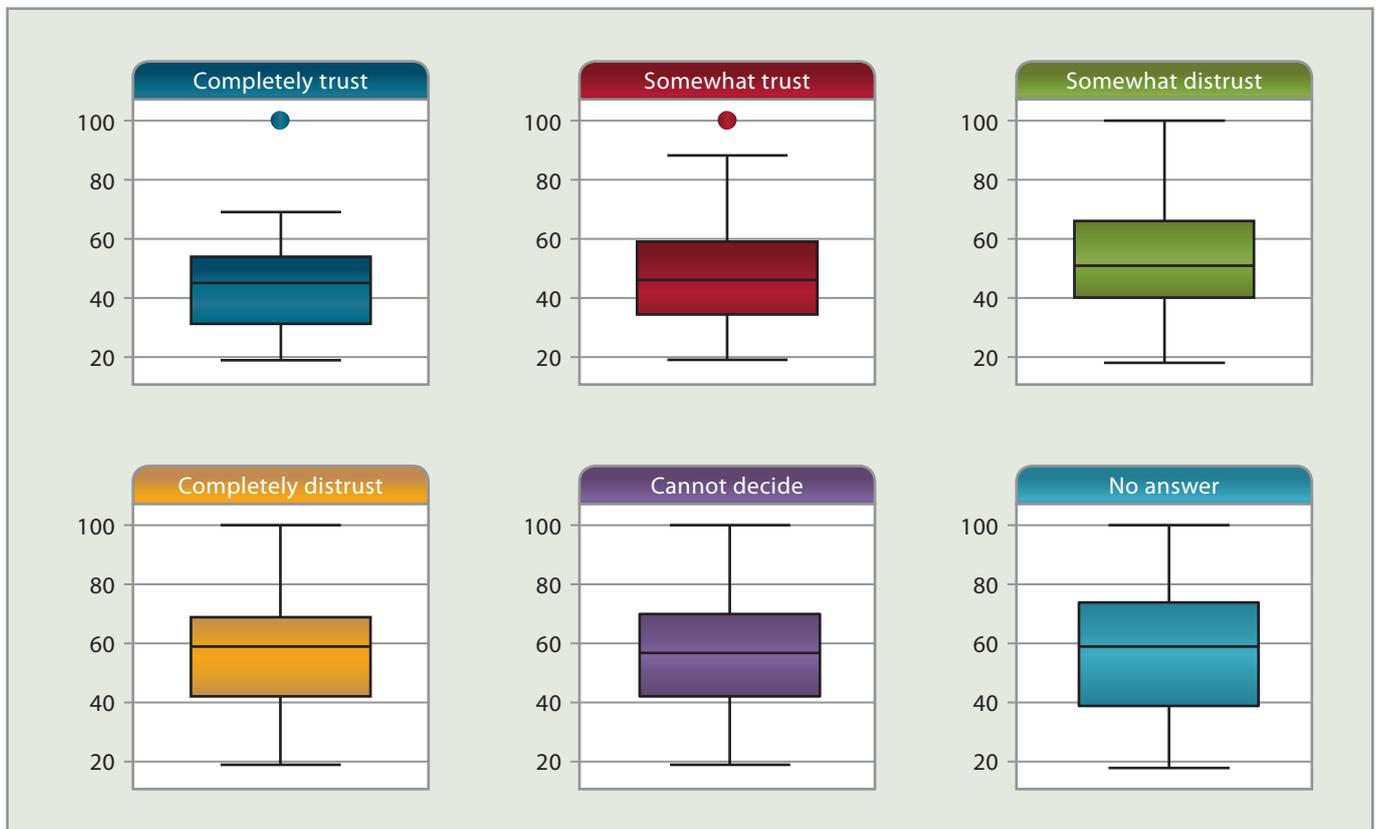
With regard to trust based on the level of urbanization, differences are smaller. Data exit on a global level that urban population shows greater institutional trust. This effect is intertwined with the effect of income and education. Our survey makes prominent distinction between trust of citizens living in regional centres (cities) (except for Sofia City) and in villages (fig. 9).

Figure 5. Breakdown of trust in NGOs according to age



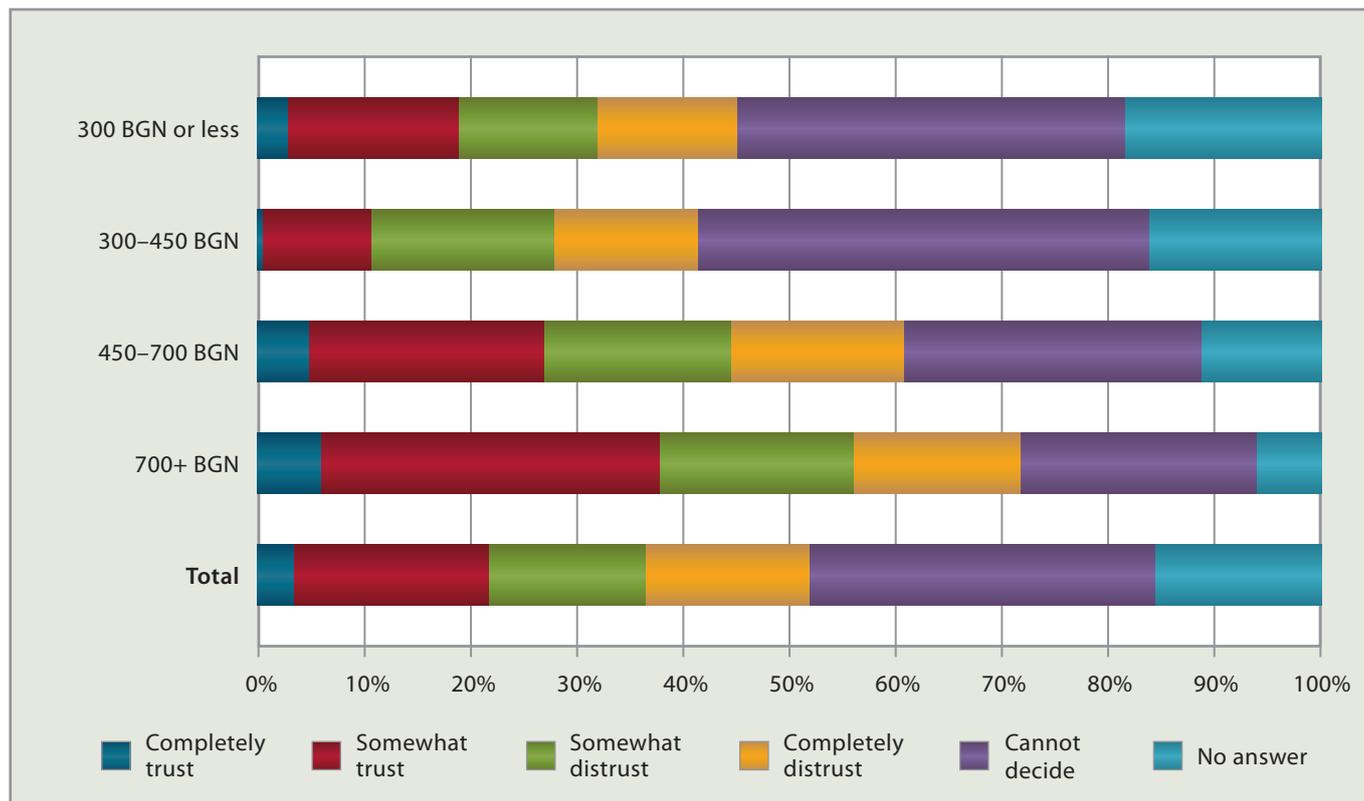
Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

Figure 6. Breakdown by age groups according to trust in NGOs



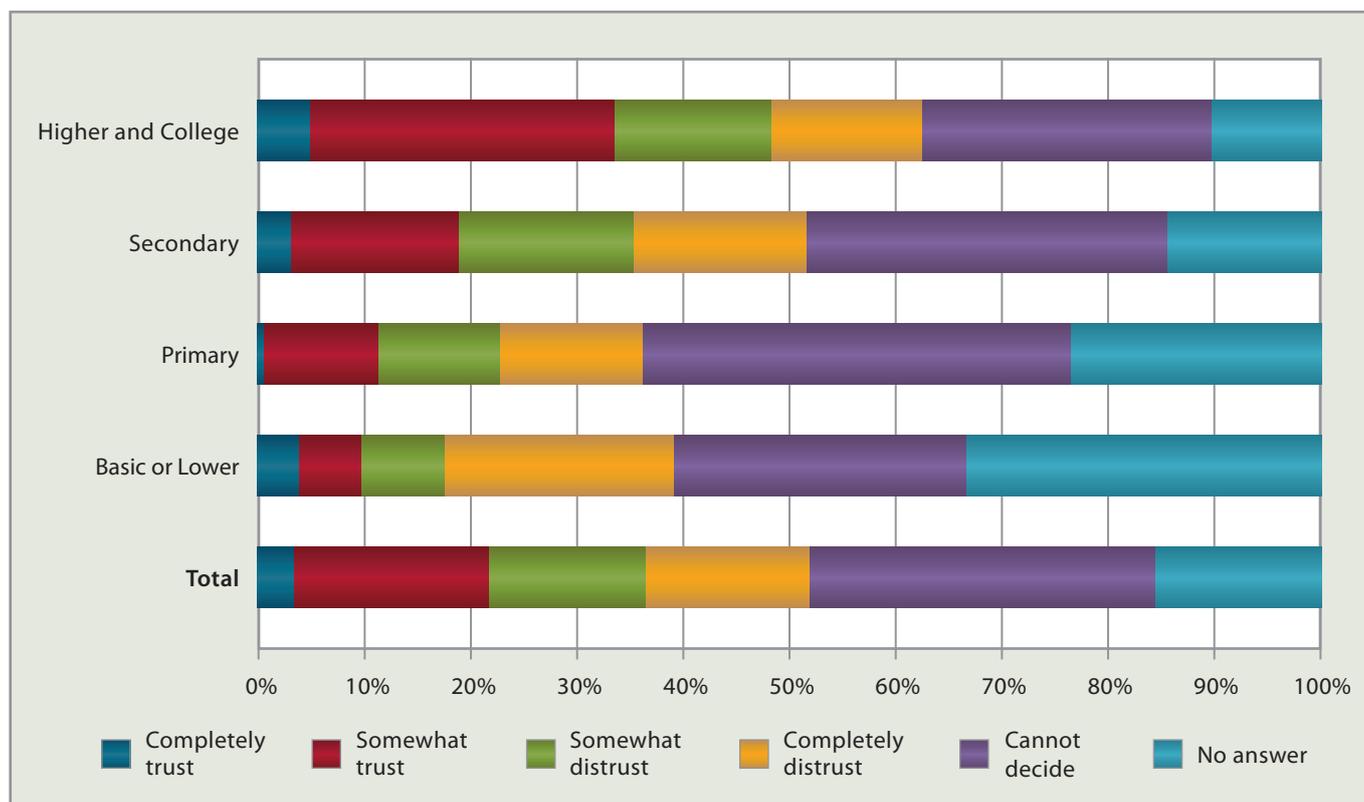
Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

Figure 7. Trust in NGOs according to income



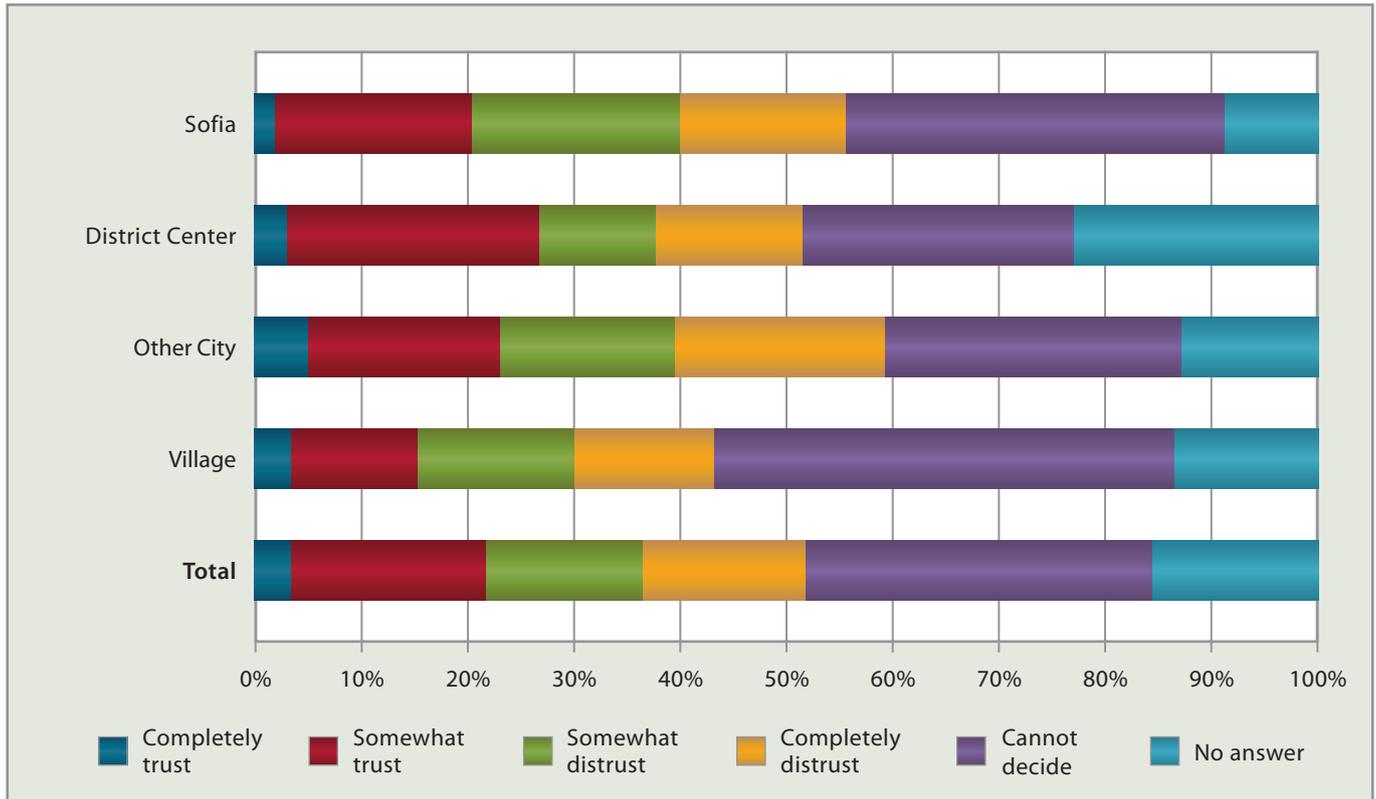
Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

Figure 8. Trust in NGOs according to education



Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

Figure 9. Trust in NGOs according to the level of urbanization



Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

KNOWLEDGE OF THE NGO ACTIVITY

The review of the core activity of non-profit NGOs shows that sport definitely dominates; as of the beginning of 2017 almost 3 500 sports clubs were registered in Bulgaria.

Approximately 1700 of the registered NGOs have education and culture as core activities. They are followed by organizations active in the field of health-care, social services, human rights, environment and think tanks¹⁶.

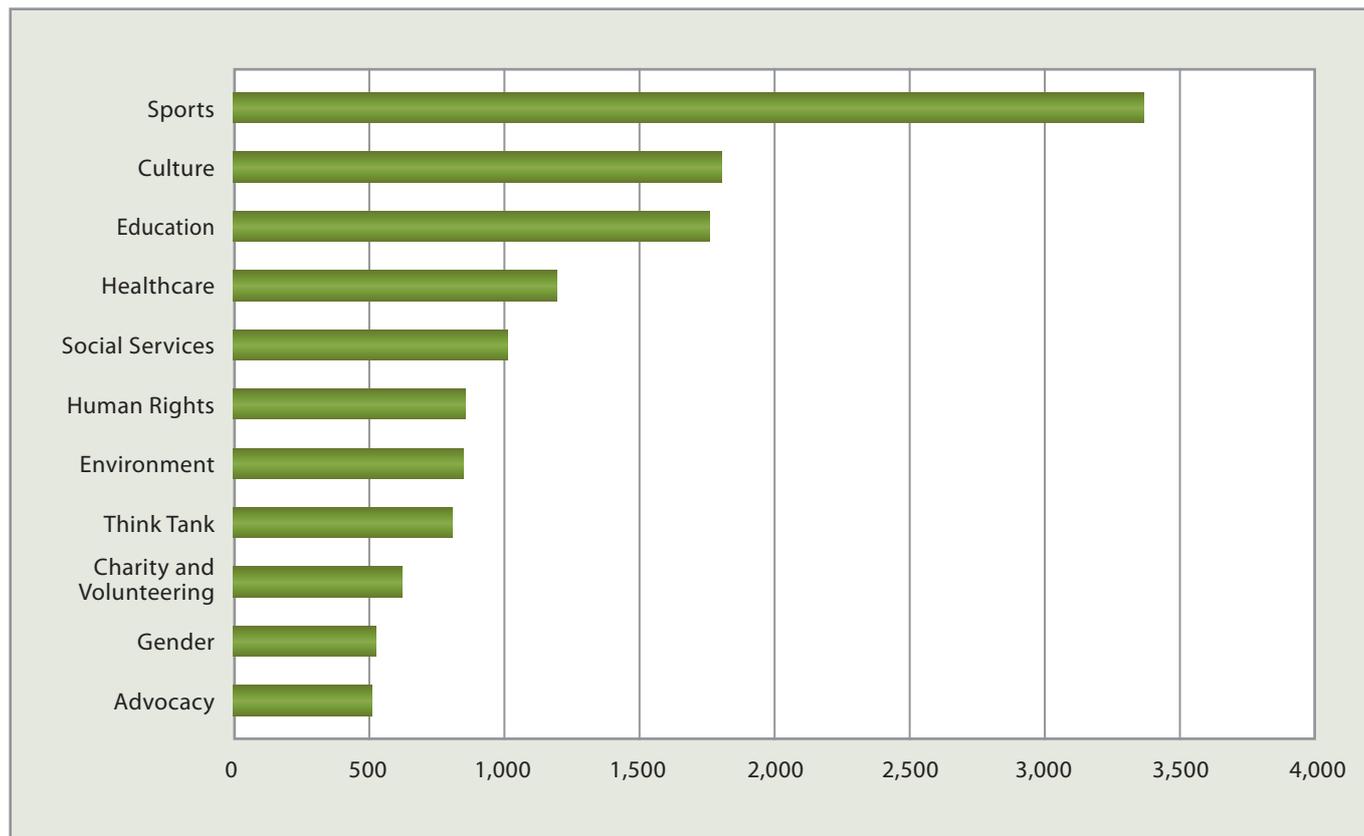
The organizations that are registered with giving and volunteering as a core activity are few, in fact,

¹⁶ Боян Захариев, Илко. Йорданов. *Активните неправителствени организации в България през 2017 г. (Active nongovernmental organizations in Bulgaria in 2017)*, ИОО-София, 2017. The data used from the quoted survey are from the Central Register of Public-Benefit Non-profit Legal Entities which remains a valuable source of information about NGOs, though it is not active as of 2018 and the Registry Agency carries out the registration, changes and reporting of the activity of non-profit legal entities. See information about the Register on the website of the Ministry of Justice <http://www.justice.government.bg/41/>.

compared to all the other fields with the exception of gender and advocacy (fig. 10). Of course, this does not preclude organizations that have not explicitly stated giving and volunteering from using volunteers in their activity and raising funds for charity causes. Nevertheless, it can be noted that these two activities are much more visible and recognizable than the others as if they “overshadow” other activities that compete for public attention.

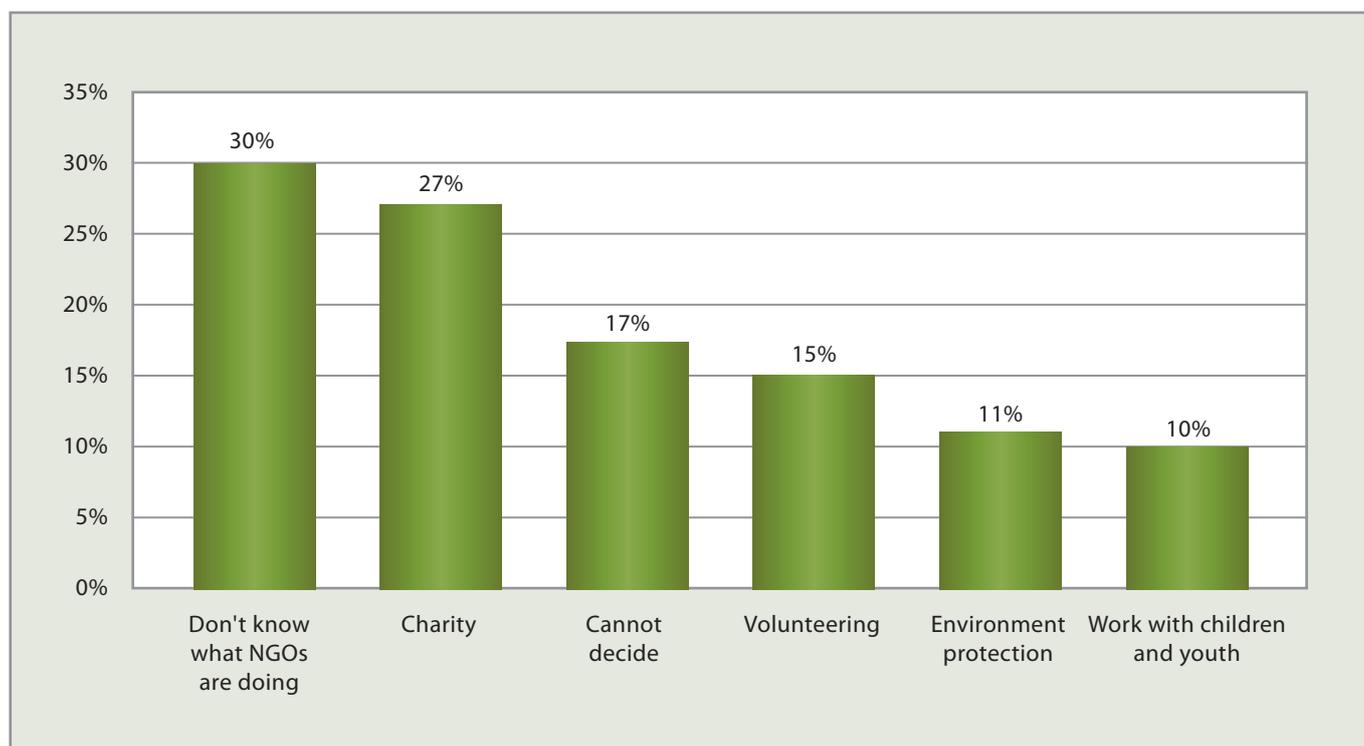
The fields of activities of NGOs that are positively recognized do not coincide with those that are most often declared during registration. The most frequent answers about the fields of activity in which NGOs are most useful include charity, volunteering, ecology and environment and work with children and youth. Out of the latter, only work with children and youth considerably coincides with the three fields of activity most common among registered NGOs, i.e. sport, culture and education. More than half of the respondents admit in one way or another that they lack sufficient knowledge of NGOs in order to decide how useful they are in certain fields. This position confirms the observation that information about

Figure 10. Public-benefit organizations according to their core activity (number)



Source: Ministry of Justice, Central Register of Public-benefit Non-profit Legal Entities

Figure 11. Areas in which NGOs are most useful



Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

NGOs is highly fragmented among the adult population in general; there are groups that are well aware of the activity of NGOs, others have no information, yet others, most probably out of their experience and the information available to them, have most probably formed not quite faithful impressions about the work of NGOs.

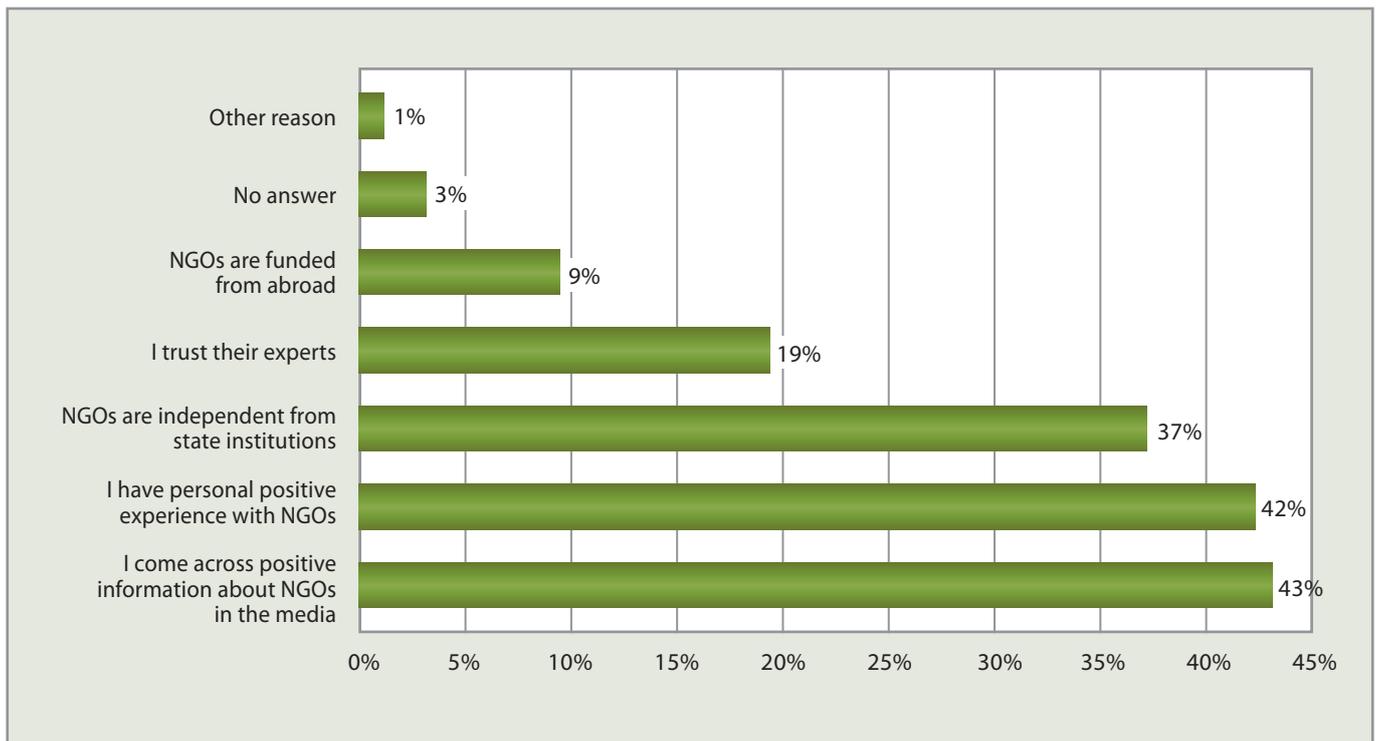
About 1/3 of the respondents have shared in one way or another that they are not aware of the activity of NGOs or have not heard about initiatives with a prominent outcome. Among the respondents informed of such initiatives, those who have heard over the last year about charity by NGOs prevail (26.8%), followed by those who have heard of volunteering (15.2%). It should be noted that these are traditionally the most common activities of civil society organizations across the world. Ecology and environment protection (mentioned by 11.6%) as well as work with children and youth (mentioned by 9.7%) seem to be more recognizable among the other fields of work (fig. 11). Roma integration, prevention of violence against women, social services, education and human rights protection are identifiable for 5%-7% of the interviewees.

People who have had first-hand negative impressions from NGOs are two times fewer than those who have had first-hand positive impressions. In other words, 2/3 of those, who have had first-hand experience with NGOs, have positive impressions. It is interesting to note that the same pattern of trust can be observed also when information is obtained from the media.

With regard to the reasons for trust in NGOs, positive media coverage, positive first-hand experience and independence from public institutions are mentioned equally frequently (fig. 12).

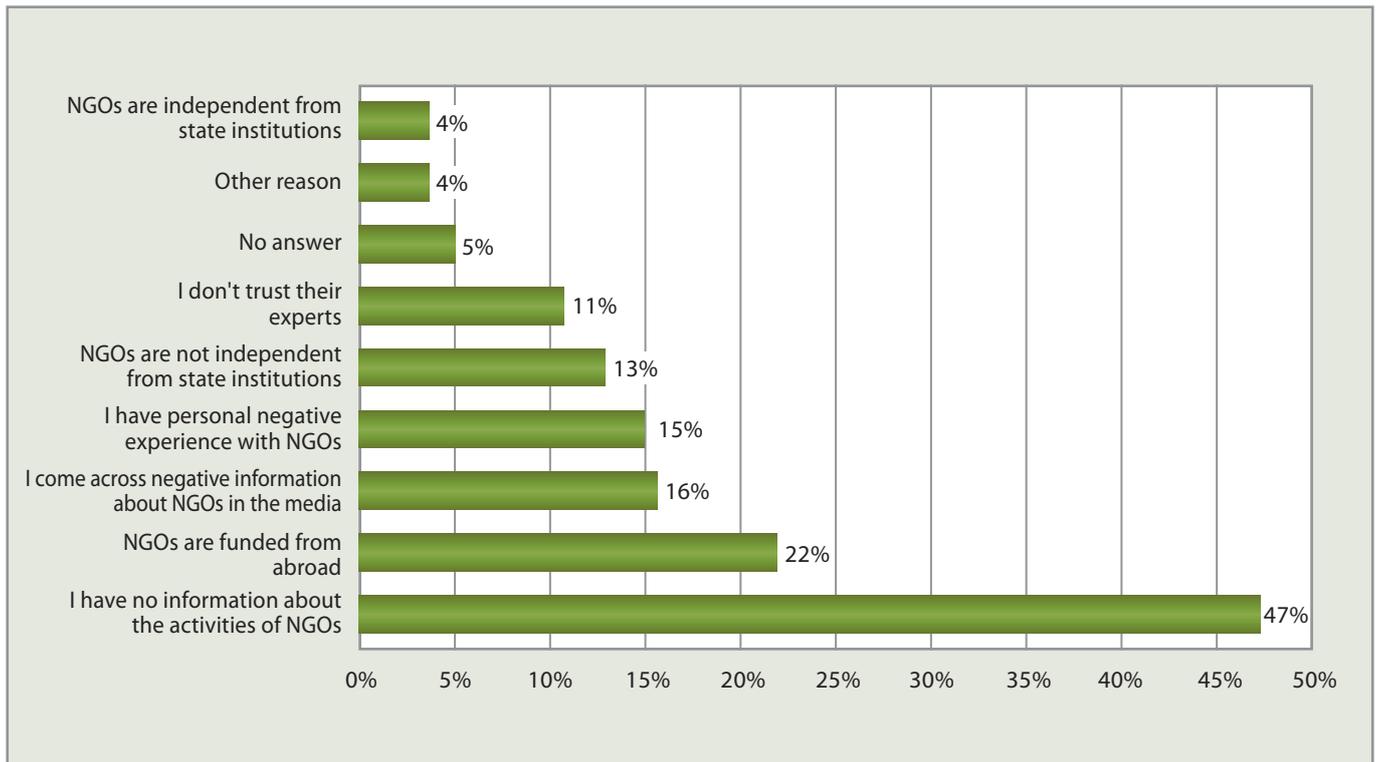
Distrust has been motivated mainly by lack of information about the work of NGOs. Foreign funding as a reason for distrust, which is quite common in countries with more authoritarian rule and greater restrictions of the work of civil society organizations, is not a major reason for distrust of NGOs in Bulgaria. Those who do not trust NGOs because of foreign funding as a reason are fewer than 7% of the adult population (a little more than 400 000 people) which equals a little over 20% of people who distrust NGOs. We notice also that what is a reason to trust for some is a reason to distrust for others (fig. 13).

Figure 12. Reasons for trust in NGOs



Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

Figure 13. Reasons for distrust of NGOs



Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

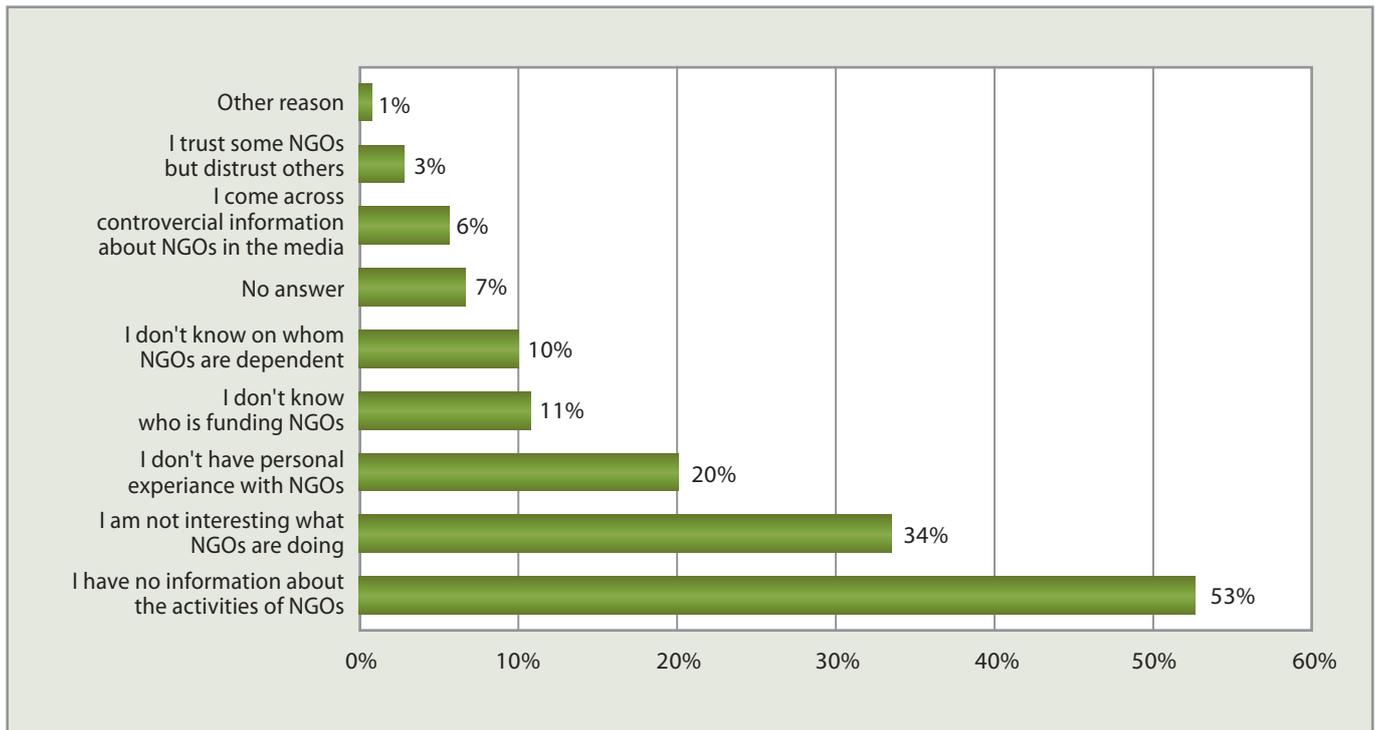
Undecidedness about NGOs (lack of either trust or distrust) is mainly due according to the respondents to lack of information and first-hand impressions from their work. Some of the respondents admit that they are not interested to learn more about NGOs so that information provided via the media, social networks or other communication channels does not stand a high chance of drawing their attention (fig. 14).

Data from our empirical survey confirms to a certain extent the idea that trust and distrust may stem from a different source and allow for reference to passive and active trust. The questionnaire we used is not tailored to capture these nuances in their complexity; nevertheless, the available scale makes it possible for several important distinctions. Thus, for instance, it is worth noting that lack of information or first-hand impressions about NGOs makes some people (24% of the adult population) refrain from an opinion, while for others (14% of the adult population) lack of information is directly transformed into distrust. We can safely assume that the second group is susceptible to distrust to a certain degree. This susceptibility is probably not irrational but stems from previous experience.

The negative attitude of others might be determined by first-hand negative impressions or negative media coverage. The influence of negative media coverage is also not one-sided and predetermined. People who trust NGOs based on personal conviction and personal impressions would hardly change their attitude owing to negative media coverage. People would question the trustworthiness or goodwill of the coverage in some cases, in others people would consider that negative information about certain organizations is not a reason for weakening general institutional trust in the civil society sector the way negative information about certain companies is not necessarily a reason for losing overall trust in the business sector.

Similarly positive attitude of trust might be passive but unstable, based on encountered positive media coverage but without having become deep personal belief, position or a cause. Trust may have become active trust expressed in the form of support, dissemination of positive messages, provision of positive feedback, defense of positions. Maintaining active trust as well as reaffirming passive trust and turning it into energy for action might require different approaches. People who feel passive trust might change their atti-

Figure 14. Reasons for lack of opinion about NGOs (undecidedness)



Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

tude relatively easily with the help of positive publications and communication that does not even have to be particularly in-depth. Of course, trust that is gained in such manner might, without more durable or meaningful communication, be quite unstable. Finally, it might not be possible at all to change active distrust rooted for instance in deep differences in values. However, it is possible to communicate with all groups that feel some trust or distrust on the basis of the simple fact that these groups are either actively looking for information about NGOs or at least are willing to pay some attention when they come across it. This is definitely not so with the large group of uninformed people. People actively looking for information about NGOs nowadays do not have serious difficulties finding information.

MEDIA AND NGOs

Trust is deeply connected to knowledge and awareness. Some cognitive theories of trust maintain that to distrust the unknown, it is not enough to lack information about it, you need also to have bad expect-

tations or premonition of what to anticipate. This leads us to the idea that the connection of trust in NGOs with the media coverage of their activity is not as direct as it would seem. People with an initial positive or negative attitude to NGOs might often be prone to navigate through the available media information in a way that takes them directly to materials that support their position. This does not preclude the opportunity for highly popular media materials with negative or positive information to be noticed by many people and even change their opinion of NGOs.

Half of the people who trust NGOs do it due to the influence of positive media publications. Half of the people who do not trust NGOs claim that they do not have any information about them. It seems that the respondents are led by the presumption of distrust to the unknown instead of the presumption of trust. Lack of information about a subject might not be necessarily a precondition for distrust, the latter is more typical of societies with low trust levels in general. Still, half of the people who do not trust NGOs have developed their opinion based on some new information they encountered. They do not approve of foreign funding or they have come across negative information in the media or they have had first-hand

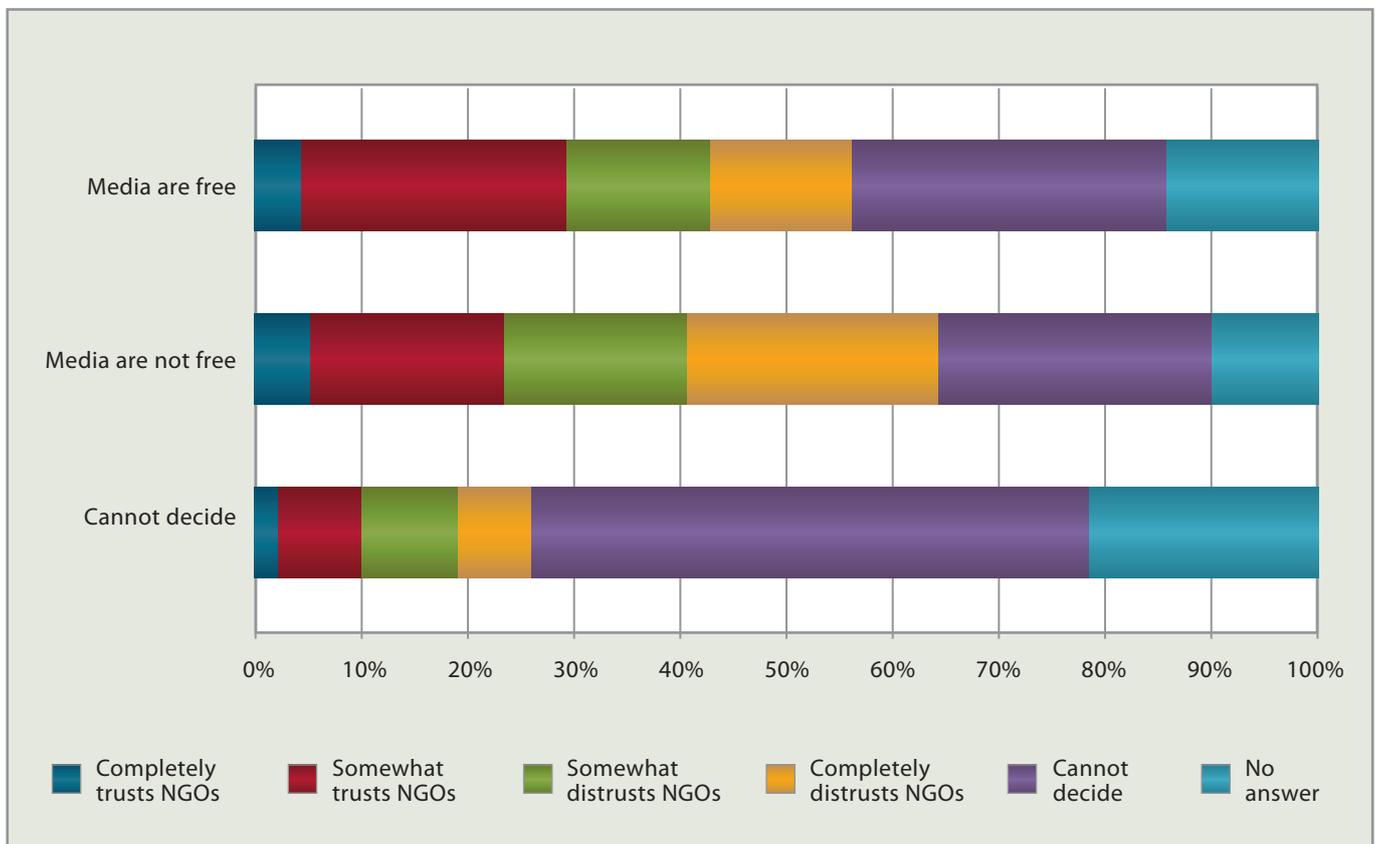
negative impressions from their work, or they do not approve of dependence on state institutions, or they do not trust NGO experts. There is also a small number of people who disapprove of independence from state institutions.

Our survey shows that approximately 16% of the respondents or slightly below 1 million people of the adult population have come across some information about NGOs in the media. Slightly below 10% of the respondents or approximately 570 000 people have come across positive information about NGOs in the media. The rest have come across negative or contradictory information in the media. This means that 2/3 of the media materials have been positive. It does not necessarily mean that 2/3 of the media materials in fact are positive; the share might be higher or lower particularly when we examine different media segments. As already mentioned, finding certain information depends not only on the available content but also on the strategies used by the public to look

for information. It should be noted that media users who are confused by contradictory information might not have another basis for assessment. Positive and negative coverage of NGOs by the Bulgarian media as a whole can be encountered in separate publications, even in separate media that have largely different audiences. The user of information is left with the challenge to assess how faithful and in-depth the materials are each time. Markedly analytical materials that examine contradictory facts within the same publication seem to be less common in the Bulgarian press. The conclusion therefore might be that encountering only negative coverage of NGOs is quite likely connected to the use only of certain media that have in general a negative attitude to NGOs.

Building trust through the media cannot be independent of trust in the media themselves. The intermediary in building trust has to enjoy trust itself. Moderate trust in NGOs is slightly more common among people who believe that the media are free to criticize

Figure 15. Trust in NGOs according to the answer to the question whether the media are free to criticize the government?



Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

the government. Distrust of NGOs among those who believe in media freedom is considerably lower than among those who do not (fig. 15).

At present trust in the media is in crisis across the world due to disintegration of the very idea of journalistic professionalism and multiplied dissemination of information from unreliable sources and fake news. Our survey shows that this trend has also affected Bulgaria. The media have a negative balance of about 35% trust against 55% distrust.

CONNECTION OF TRUST IN NGOs WITH LIBERAL VALUES AND SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

A heated debate has been going on recently about the connection between liberal values that undoubtedly make the work of a prominent number of NGOs legitimate, democracy and civic engagement. A growing number of analyses have noted the emergence of trends of separation of democracy from liberalism. Take for instance Berman's observation about oligarchic and technocratic motives in liberalism without democracy¹⁷. At the same time examples of illiberal democracies, advanced or budding, seem to be everywhere. The experimental survey of Juan Barrios in six Latin American cities does not establish a prominent connection between trust and civic engagement (social participation)¹⁸. At the same time historians often remind us of the important role of active and convinced civic engagement for the rise to power of some of the most frightening and deadly political regimes in history. The connection between civil society and democracy might not be either necessary or universal¹⁹.

Our survey shows that trust in NGOs is divided approximately equally between those in favour of re-

stricting democratic freedoms in the name of other goals and those against it (fig. 16).

Trust in NGOs is not connected with a particular attitude to democratic rights and freedoms of citizens. Those who firmly disapprove of any curbing of democratic rights and freedoms are equally divided between those who trust and those who distrust NGOs.

Another possible indicator is trust in elections as an instrument of change. Failure to believe that the change of parties results in a change of the state policy means being highly skeptical of the way democracy works. A lot of criticism has been raised over the last decades against purely "electoral" understanding of democracy that might reduce the notion of democracy to the organization of fair elections (fig. 17).

The belief that the change of political parties does not change the policies prevails with a great preponderance both among those who trust NGOs and those who do not. This belief is considered to be one of the main signs of distrust in the work of democracy. Still, those who trust NGOs are slightly more likely to believe (by a difference of about 10 percentage points) in the meaning of holding democratic elections.

There is nevertheless an important indicator based on which people who trust in NGOs stand out as greater supporters of democracy with a statistically significant and socially prominent difference (fig. 18).

Support for democracy is higher among people who trust NGOs by 20 percentage points. The whole difference between trust and distrust of democracy, in fact, relies on people who trust NGOs; public opinions about the subject are highly divided with a slightly higher result of 44.5% in favour of democracy versus 34.1% against, the remaining more than 20% not being able to decide. In surveys of trust the undecided quite often are included in the group of those who distrust.

Trust in NGOs does not draw a clear dividing line between those who share liberal values and those who do not.

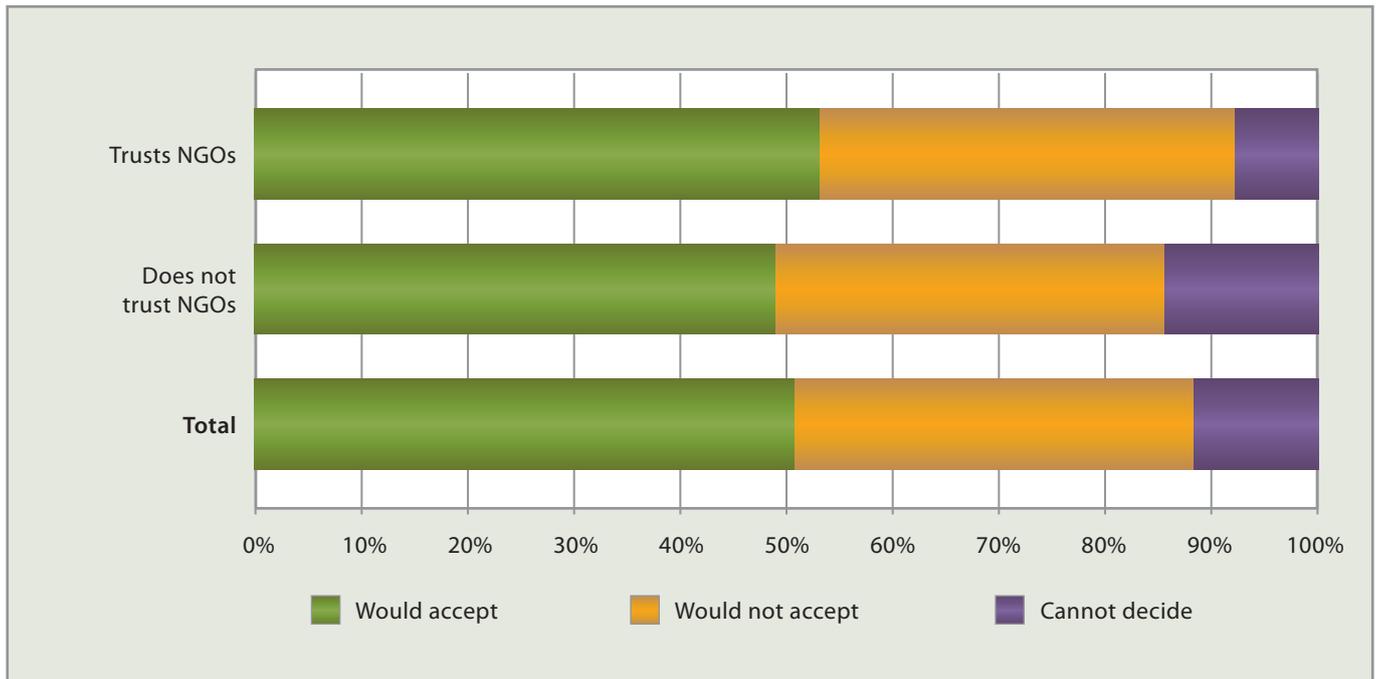
One of the signs is that there is no major difference between those who trust NGOs and those who do not with regard to the belief that poverty in Bulgaria within the EU is due to privileges granted to minorities. Viewing minorities as a privileged group falls definitely out of the scope of liberal views on the protection of rights of minorities.

¹⁷ Berman, S. "The Pipe Dream of Undemocratic Liberalism," *Journal of Democracy* (28:3), 2017.

¹⁸ Barrios, J. J. "Trust and civic engagement: Evidence from six Latin American cities," *Journal of Trust Research* (7:2), 2017, pp. 187-203.

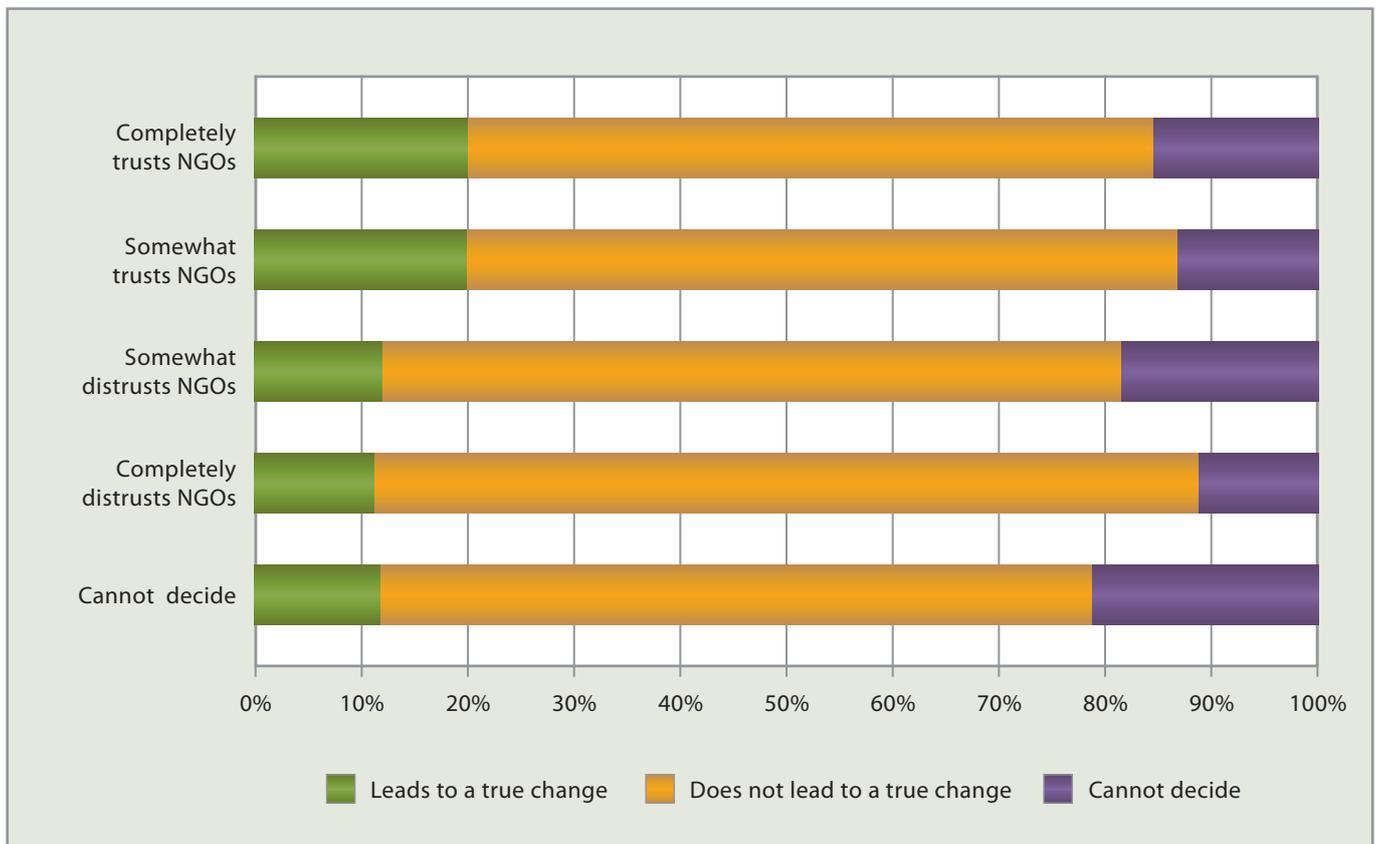
¹⁹ For a review of some of the historical materials and contemporary examples, see, for instance, Armony, A. *The Dubious Link*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2004.

Figure 16. Trust in NGOs according to the approval (readiness) to restrict democratic rights and freedoms to bring order



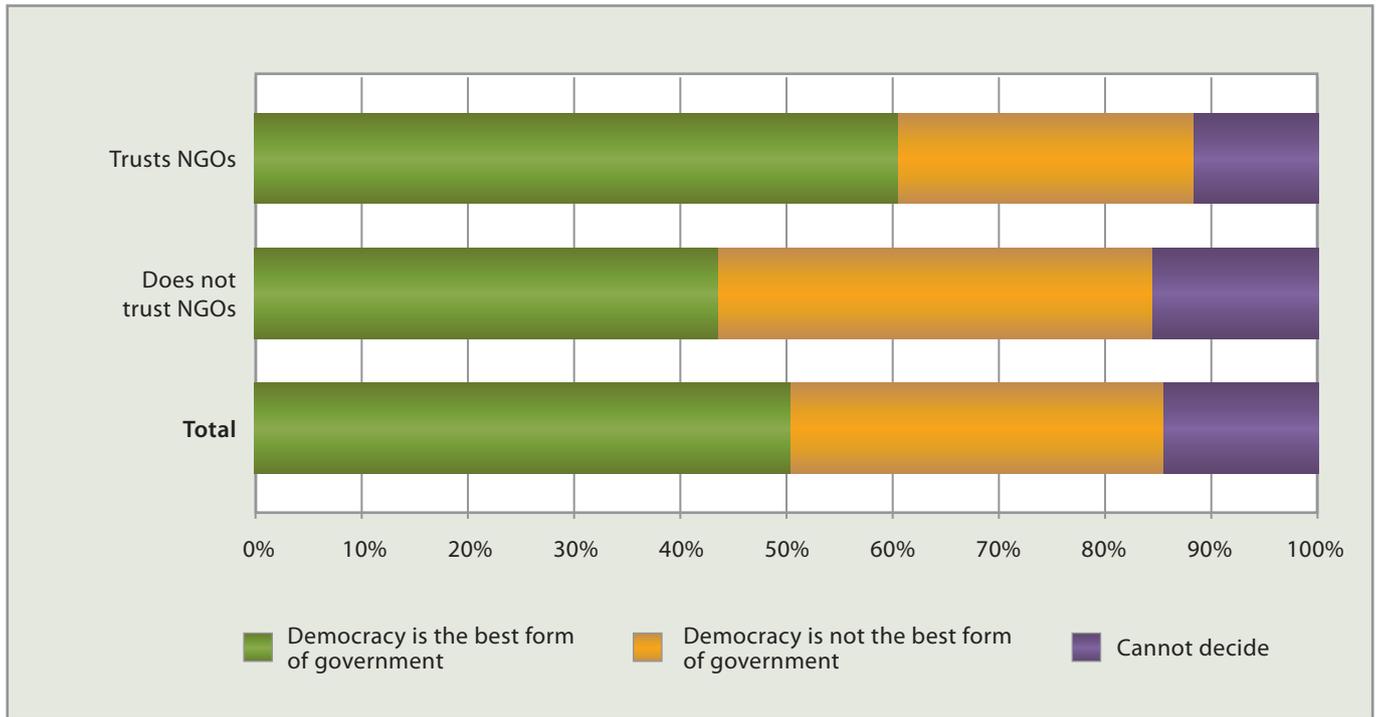
Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

Figure 17. Trust in NGOs according to the belief that the change of political parties changes the policies



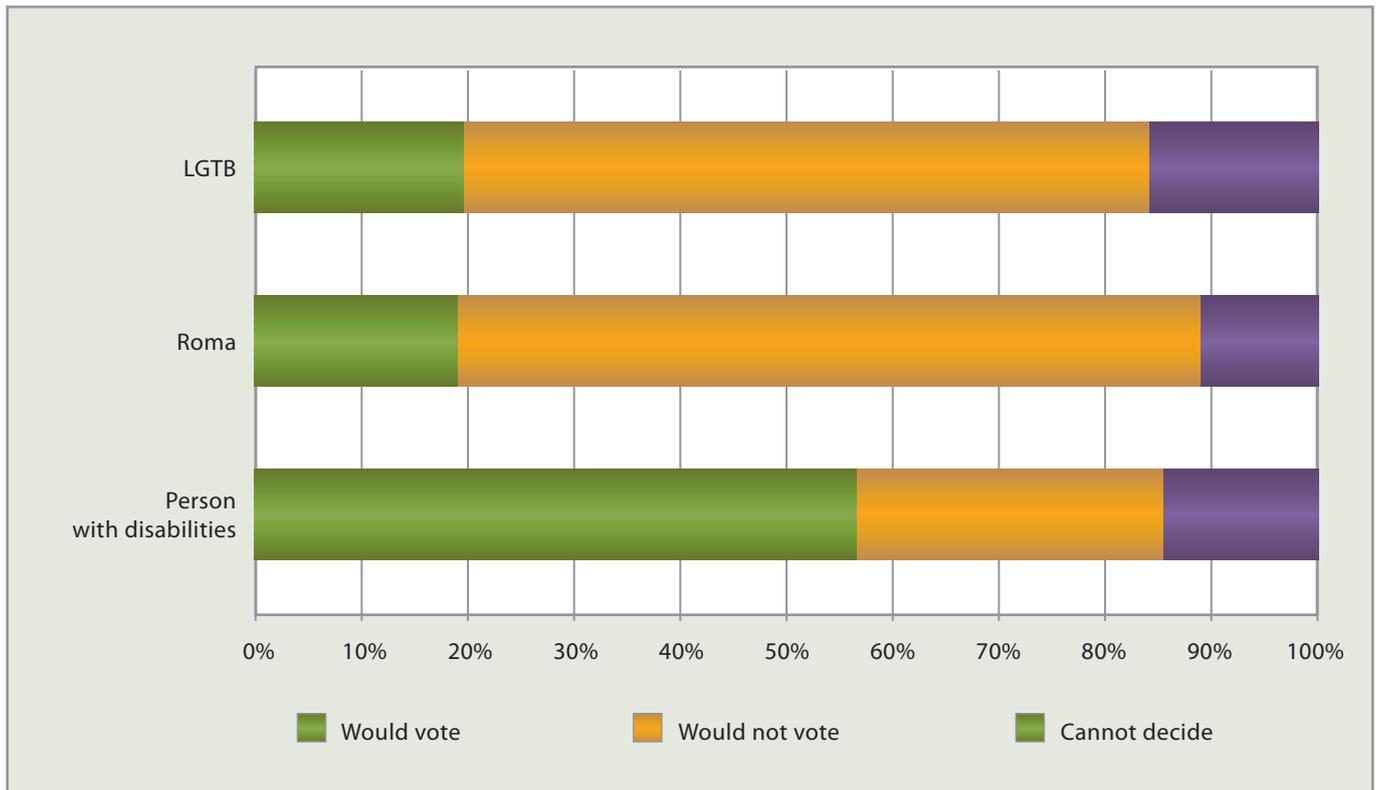
Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

Figure 18. Trust in NGOs according to the answer to the question whether democracy is the best form of governance for Bulgaria



Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

Figure 19. Willingness to vote for a member of the LGBT community, a candidate with Roma background and a person with a disability



Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

In addition, no difference has been registered in trust for NGOs between those who believe that the rights of minorities in Bulgaria are protected and those who maintain the opposite. In general the people who have stricter criteria for protection of the rights of minorities and do not believe that the rights are sufficiently protected account only for a fifth of the respondents and 60% of them identify themselves as ethnic Bulgarians. Almost two thirds agree that the rights are protected well.

Acceptance of members of some of the most discriminated groups in Bulgaria also does not register great differences between those who trust NGOs and those who do not. Let me focus on three of the groups that are challenged in their full participation in different aspects of public life: the Roma, LGBT and people with disabilities. Let me illustrate this with their chance to win when applying for an elective office, all other conditions being equal.

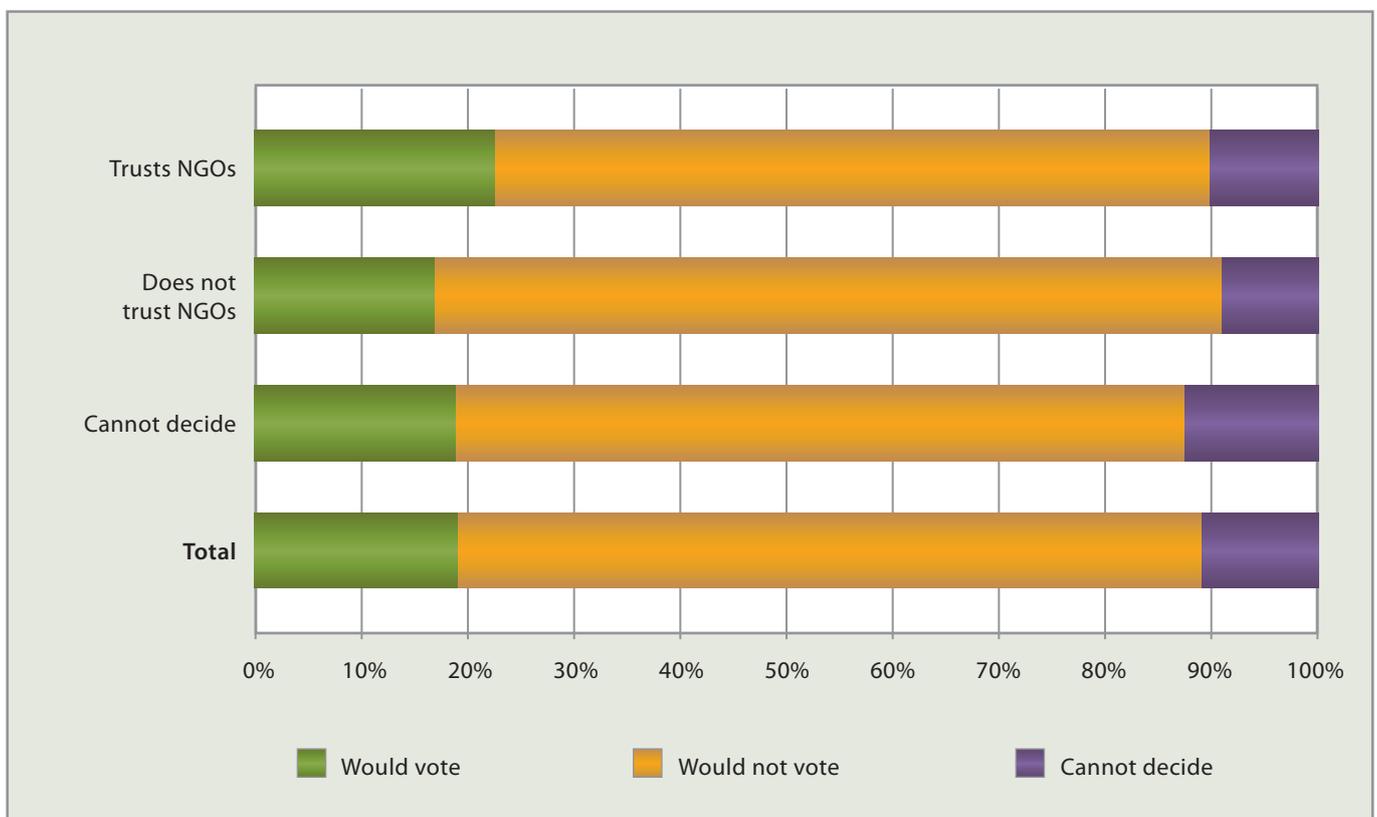
As seen from Figure 19, people have quite different attitudes to accepting members of the three groups

experiencing various degrees of discrimination. The attitude towards people with disabilities is positive in general, while it is just the opposite with the community of LGBT and the Roma: only 20% of the adult population would support such a candidate during a vote for an elective office.

This can be seen in particular from the question whether the respondents would vote for a candidate (for a mayor) who is a member of the Roma community (Fig. 20), all the other conditions being equal. There is no difference between the answers of the people who trust NGOs and those who do not. It can be seen from the answers to the same question but with regard to a candidate from the LGBT community that people who would vote for such a candidate have a higher trust in NGOs of more than 15% but such people are very few. The majority of those who trust NGOs would not vote for such a candidate (Fig. 21).

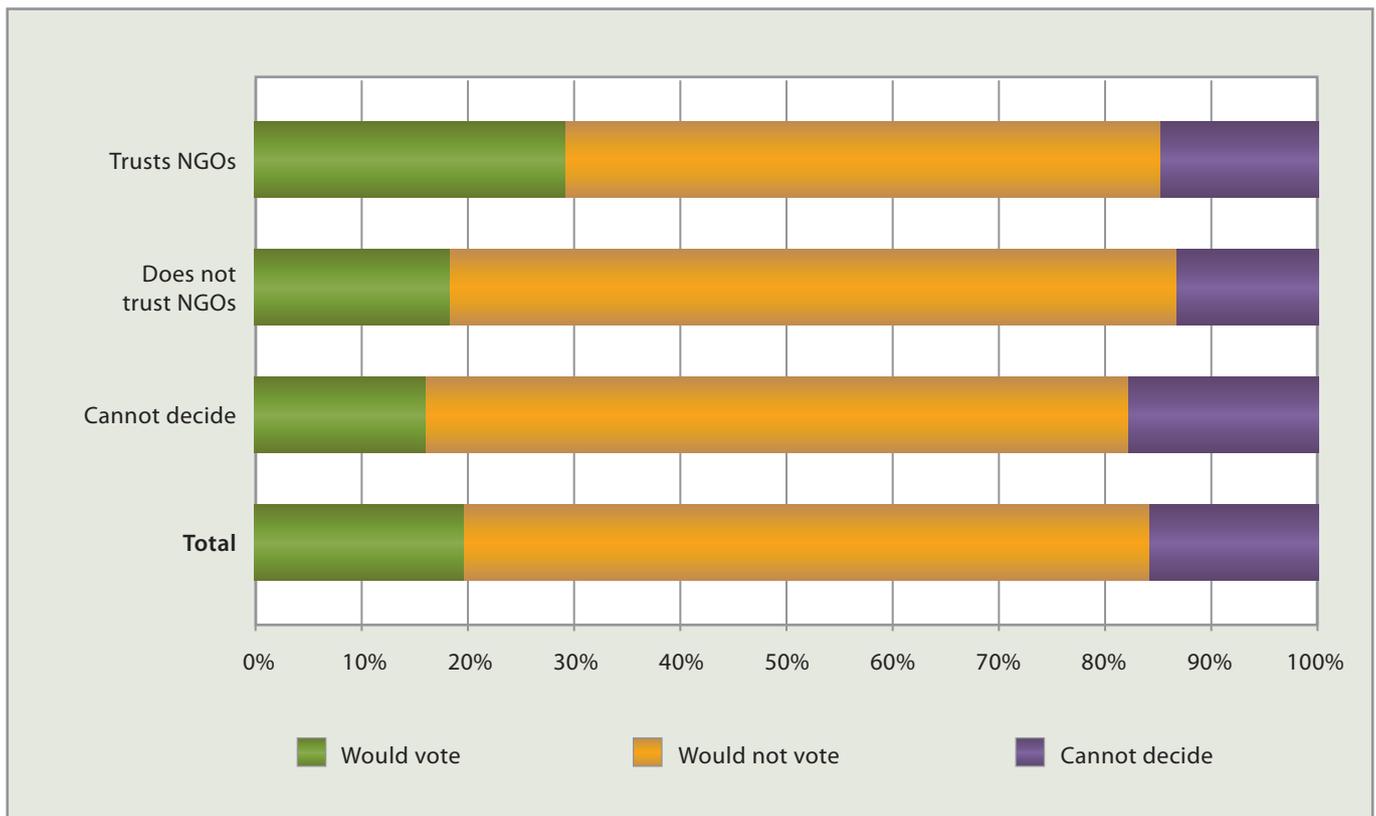
In response to the question about willingness to vote for people with disabilities, all other conditions being equal, the difference between those who fully

Figure 20. Trust in NGOs according to willingness to vote for a candidate of Roma background



Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

Figure 21. Trust in NGOs according to the readiness to vote for a gay/lesbian candidate



Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

trust NGOs and those who do not trust at all amounts to almost 25 percentage points (Fig. 22).

It is also worth mentioning the attitude to expertise and expert knowledge underlying deliberative democracy which relies on public awareness and in-depth public debate. Expert knowledge has always played an important role in civic engagement and the activity of some types of NGOs. Analyses recently published in the USA note with concern loss of trust in public policy experts and point out that this social problem is much deeper and has started to penetrate areas such as healthcare, education, law²⁰. The popularity this thesis gained across the world suggests that this problem is not only American. Tom Nichols believes that the problem is aggravated by the Internet where the majority of the “expertise” is fake (literally junk) and where quite a few of the “facts” are not real. However, lost faith in expertise seems to a great extent to be a common phenomenon in the contemporary

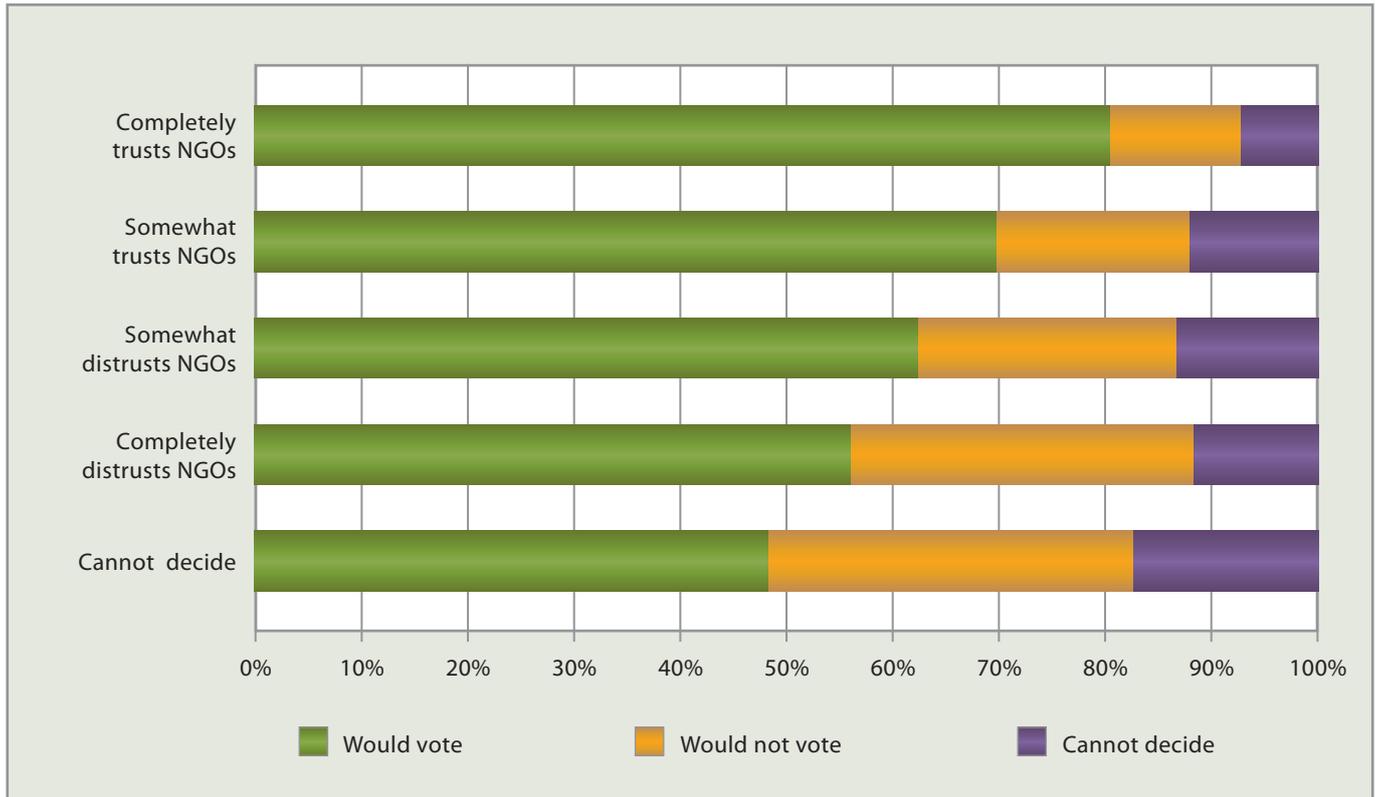
world where the individual faces an increasingly complex world in which one can understand and do less and less things. This problem has been observed by historians long before the arrival of the Internet. Distrust in expertise is also a liberating force enhanced by individualism. Refusal to accept expert opinion is somewhat of a proof that one can do perfectly on one’s own and protection against the need to admit that one is wrong²¹.

It seems that expertise at present in Bulgaria is not a major factor for trust or distrust of NGOs even though it is on the list of reasons for trust and distrust. About a fifth of those who trust NGOs share that they do it because of the NGO experts. The distrust of about a tenth of the people who do not trust is also due to the experts working for NGOs. However, both groups stating expertise as a reason for trust or distrust account for less than 8% in total of the adult population.

²⁰ Nichols, T. *How America Lost Faith in Expertise: And Why That’s a Giant Problem*, Foreign Affairs March/April 2017, 2017.

²¹ Nichols, T. *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters*, Oxford University Press, 2017.

Figure 22. Trust in NGOs according to the readiness to vote for a person with disabilities



Source: OSI-Sofia, Survey of public attitudes, 2018

WHOSE TRUST?

No clear-cut groups can be distinguished among NGO supporters, i.e. among those who trust NGOs, according to adherence to liberal values and support for democracy: people who trust NGOs have diverse background. They are not a homogeneous group.

In general, the group of people who trust NGOs resembles to a great extent the rest of the public except for a slightly greater support for democracy, though measured only through a direct question. This can be expected of people who are supposed to believe in civic engagement. All indirect indicators of trust in the democratic political process and institutions are quite similar.

A contemporary way to view civil society is to consider it a place where different ideas and policy proposals clash. According to this view, a battle is waged in the public space for access to public resources as well as for political and social influence. Civil society can also be viewed as a place of creating some minimum public consensus. The first view provides for

greater segmentation of support and of the public in general, the second provides for less. Both of them do not rule out fully each other but cannot be both fully true at the same time.

The answer to the strategic question whether a particular NGO or groups of NGOs with similar goals and views have to compete for broad trust depends on which of the two views is more valid. Focusing on the trust of a sufficiently large community of like-minded supporters and followers can be enough to achieve the goals of the organization. In such case the overall trust in NGOs will be simply a (heterogeneous) sum total of trust otherwise segmented into individual causes and organizations. The state of trust in NGOs registered by our survey probably is closest to this particular representation.

However, there are always goals which require by default a broad public support to achieve them. Such goals include many of the advocacy campaigns which aim at changing certain policies. With such goals at hand it is difficult to avoid communication with people who do not share the cause and the underlying values.

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