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ture to dominate the public and private realms. Surely, this is not an isolated game, since it is also part of the defeat of the Western ideological stance in most of post-Soviet space.

It remains unclear when, and whether, the emerging new groups will exert hegemony over civil society

in Azerbaijan, or at least be able to restart the competition over it. So far, the tendency is in the direction of the conservative groups remaining in charge.

About the Author

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NGOs and the Georgian Public: Why Communication Matters

By Dustin Gilbreath and David Sichinava, Tbilisi

Abstract

The civil society sector in Georgia has gone from near non-existent at independence to a vibrant sector with a multitude of competing voices aiming to affect change. While cynicism towards the third sector was pronounced in the 1990s in Georgia, relatively positive attitudes toward NGOs have developed in Georgia over time. Today though, these attitudes have likely been endangered by Bidzina Ivanishvili’s statement that one of his organizations was preparing reports on the heads of three of Georgia’s most active NGOs. This article looks at knowledge and perceptions of NGOs in Georgia using data from the 2011 and 2014 Volunteering and Civic Participation in Georgia surveys funded by USAID and implemented by CRRC-Georgia. Survey results indicate that while knowledge of the third sector is relatively low, Georgians are generally not misinformed, and that those who have interacted with NGOs have more positive impressions of NGOs than those who have not. With these findings in mind, the article suggests that if NGOs want to maintain or improve the positive attitudes that have accrued toward them over time in Georgia, especially in light of the recent and widely discussed accusations against NGOs, an active communications and engagement strategy is critical.

Introduction

While cynicism towards the third sector was pronounced in Georgia in the years following independence, as in Armenia as discussed in this issue, relatively positive atti-

tudes toward NGOs have developed over time. Today, the civil society sector in Georgia is populated by a wide diversity of actors. They include national chapters of well-known international NGOs like Transparency

International—Georgia, local NGOs, such as the Civil Society Institute, and NGOs which have unclear motivations, such as Bidzina Ivanishvili's Mokalake.

Today though, these positive attitudes have been endangered by a number of accusations made against prominent NGOs in Georgia. In February 2015, Bidzina Ivanishvili, the former Prime Minister and billionaire, suggested that his organization, Georgia 2030, held compromising information on the heads of three of the most important NGOs in Georgia: Transparency International—Georgia's Eka Gigauri (TIG), the Georgian Young Lawyers Association's Kakha Kozhoridze (GYLA), and the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy's Nino Lomjaria (ISFED). Adding impetus to the situation, Goga Khaindrava, former Minister in Charge of Conflict Solutions, accused the same three NGOs of corrupt relations with the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) aimed at supporting the previously governing United National Movement. These claims, however, have yet to be substantiated, and significantly, the NGOs accused of wrong doing have released all pertinent information in regards to their interactions with SIDA. On April 26, the day Ivanishvili claimed he would release the 'research' on these NGO leaders, he instead backed away to a certain extent from Lomjaria and Kozhoridze, but claimed that Gigauri backed the United National Movement.

Complicating matters, many experts believe that Russia has begun to fund a number of civil society organizations in the country, including the Eurasian Institute and the Georgian–Russian Public Center. As William Dunbar reported for *Newsweek*, the Eurasian Institute funded a transvestite protest in the lead up to the signing of the anti-discrimination bill required for the signing of the Visa Liberalization Action Plan with the EU, with the goal of disrupting further Georgia–EU integration. Since then, the same organization has also engaged in anti-NATO protests.

In light of this great diversity of voices and the threats at hand to the third sector in Georgia, this article explores the population's knowledge of NGOs in Georgia, what Georgians think NGOs do compared to what they think they should be doing, and attitudes towards NGOs in light of the impact of communicating with the public.

Knowing What You Don't Know

To understand how susceptible Georgians may be to misinformation from different local and international actors, it is important to examine the Georgian population's knowledge of NGOs. On the 2014 Volunteering and Civic Participation in Georgia survey funded by USAID, respondents were asked, "Please tell me which

of these, in your opinion, is an NGO, and which is not," and a list of 15 organizations, some NGOs, some state agencies, and some commercial enterprises, was read to them (see Figures 1a and 1b on p. 13). Answer options for each organization included NGO, not an NGO, never heard [of the organization], don't know, and refuse to answer.

Survey results demonstrate that the Georgian public is more informed than misinformed, but they are most informed about the limits of their knowledge, i.e. they know that they don't know. Socrates might smile. Of 2,140 respondents, 151 responded "Don't know" to every organization, which, when weighted, corresponds to almost 6% of the population. For individual organizations, "Don't know" responses varied from 11% (Parliament of Georgia) to 40% (Open Society Georgia Foundation).

Georgians were most likely to correctly identify the Parliament of Georgia (85%) as not an NGO, but still, 15% failed to provide a correct answer. The Georgian Young Lawyers Association was the second most correctly identified organization with 67% of the public correctly identifying them as an NGO. (also meaning that it is probably the most widely recognized NGO in Georgia). GYLA aside, other NGOs were correctly identified by between 30% (Identoba) and 47% (Liberty Institute) of the population. Georgians were least likely to know that USAID and British Petroleum are not NGOs.

In order to gain a better understanding of Georgians' knowledge of NGOs, a scale was generated based on the 15 NGO identification questions (see Figure 2 on p. 14). The scale ranges from -15 to 15, with -15 being an incorrect response to each of the 15 questions and 15 being a correct response to every question. "Don't know", "Refuse to answer" and "Never heard of" responses were coded as 0, since respondents presumably reported accurately that they did not know or had never heard of an organization. Among the 15 questions, there was one trick question. The organization "Association of Unemployed People" does not actually exist, and was included in the list of 15 organizations to check how thoughtfully respondents answered the questions. In the case of the Association of Unemployed People, the answer "never heard of" was coded as a correct answer, while both "NGO" and "not an NGO" were coded as incorrect answers. Other responses were coded as 0.

The results are positive in that, generally, while Georgians do not necessarily know a great deal about whether an organization is or is not an NGO, they do know that they don't know this, and report accordingly. Overall, Georgians reported more correct answers than incorrect ones. The highest score on the scale was 15 (4 respon-

dents in total) and the lowest was -8 (1 respondent), with an average score of 4.6. Approximately 4% of the population scored below 0, 12% scored 0 (meaning that they report not knowing about NGOs, but are not necessarily misinformed), and 84% scored 1 or above.

Considering the above, the question who knows more and who knows less about NGOs in Georgia comes to the fore. One difference that appears when looking at average scores is that those with some higher education know more about NGOs than those with either secondary technical education or secondary or lower education (average scores 5.99, 4.17 and 3.56, respectively). Age is another interesting characteristic which shows some difference between groups, although the differences by age are smaller than those by education. The most knowledgeable age group is those between the ages of 36 and 55 (average score 5.03), while the least knowledgeable age group includes those 56 years old and older (average score 4.05). The youngest age group (18–35 year olds) scores between the two, with an average score of 4.61.

The Gap

Not only do Georgians frequently report not knowing whether an organization is an NGO or not, but 22% also report they don't know what NGOs do (see Figure 3 on p. 14). Despite not knowing what NGOs do, Georgians do have opinions about what NGOs should be doing, with only 6% of the population reporting that they don't know. In the 2014 survey, Georgians were asked, "In your opinion, what issues do the NGOs in Georgia address most frequently?" and "What issues would you like to see NGOs addressing more often?" Georgians reported that NGOs most frequently address elections, healthcare and/or social assistance, minority rights, and media and freedom of speech. In contrast, Georgians most often mention increasing prices, poverty or unemployment, combined in a single answer option, as issues which they think NGOs should address more often. They also think that NGOs should focus more on healthcare/social assistance and education, even though they believe that NGOs already work on these issues to a certain extent.

Notably, there are a number of gaps between what Georgians think NGOs should be doing more often and what they think NGOs actually do. The largest of such gaps is on issues related to increasing prices, poverty or unemployment. While NGOs may not be the right agents to affect change on the economy, policy issues aside, this expectation coincides generally with what Georgians consistently report to be the greatest problems in the country – unemployment and poverty. Answers "healthcare and social assistance" and "education" come in next. Georgians think that NGOs work on elections,

minority rights, and freedom of speech more often than they report these as issues NGOs should work on more.

What accounts for these gaps? The fact that NGOs and their activities are frequently funded by donors rather than the general public in Georgia may explain some of the discrepancies. While donor priorities often coincide with what the population demands, this is not always the case and hence, NGOs may address particular issue(s) that donors believe to be important, but which the population may be unaware of or uninterested in.

A second potential factor is the role of the mass media. Two of the issues which Georgians are most likely to think are covered by NGOs—elections and minority rights—receive concentrated media attention, clustered around specific events. The protests against the May 17, 2013, International Day of Homophobia and Transphobia demonstration and every election in recent memory come to mind in this regard.

A closely related third factor which could contribute to these gaps is the communication strategies of NGOs. Considering that Georgians often lack knowledge of NGOs, this may imply that information on what NGOs are working on does not reach the general public. Hence, there may be a number of NGOs working on poverty, healthcare, and/or education, but compared to those working on elections and minority rights, their communication efforts are less effective.

Communication and Outreach Work

While there may be a communication gap, communicating works. Surprisingly, roughly 20% of Georgians were contacted by NGOs between 2012 and 2014, according to the Volunteering and Civic Participation survey, compared with only 13% between 2009 and 2011. "Contact" includes participation in trainings or meetings organized by the NGOs, receiving a call or a visit at home from an NGO representative, and visiting an organization's office(s). Over the same period of time, the public's trust in NGOs increased from 22% to 38%. Importantly, Georgians contacted by NGOs were more likely to trust NGOs and their staffs. In 2014, half of the contacted group expressed positive attitudes towards NGO staff and NGOs, while only 35% in the non-contacted group did so. Further exemplifying the value of communication with the public is the difference in knowledge between the two groups (see Figure 4 on p. 15). Using the same scale given above, the mean score of the contacted group was one point higher than that of the non-contacted group (5.42 and 4.34 respectively).

Knowing that communication is effective at increasing trust, the question which comes to the fore is—which segments of the population do NGOs tend to and tend not to contact? This is of particular impor-

tance given that, if a specific group is under-contacted, it presents NGOs with a clear target demographic to aim communications at with the goal of increasing societal support.

While it is commonly believed that NGO activities are concentrated mainly in urban areas, and especially in Tbilisi, the survey data shows that there is no visible regional gap in terms of contact rates. Nor is there a gender gap, but representatives of the older generation (65+) are less involved with NGOs. While there are no differences between those contacted and not contacted by NGOs in terms of reported household monetary income, there are differences between perceptions of financial well-being. Those contacted by NGOs report to be well-off more often than their non-contacted fellows. Almost half of the contacted group reports they have enough money to purchase food or clothes, while only 34% of the other group reported the same. Educational attainment is higher for those involved in NGO activities than those not. The contacted group also possesses better self-reported skills in English and Russian languages and are more computer literate. Finally, NGO-involved people are more likely to have highly educated parent(s), commonly considered to be a class marker, compared with non-involved people.

Given the above, it appears that NGOs have successfully communicated to the relatively well off and members of higher social classes than they have with other groups. This suggests that NGOs may need to expand outreach efforts to those Georgian citizens in most need if they intend to gain a greater level of trust, thus enabling them to affect wider change.

Conclusion

Georgians do not know much about NGOs, but they know that they do not know. When it comes to what Georgians think NGOs do and what NGOs should do, there are a number of notable mismatches with Georgians reporting that NGOs should focus more on economic issues, education, and healthcare. While NGOs in Georgia are collectively well trusted, they still need to expand their communications and outreach efforts in order to maintain or garner greater public trust. This issue is especially important in light of recent accusations against NGOs, which despite any demonstrated veracity have likely discredited NGOs in the public eye, on the one hand, and Russian involvement in the NGO sector, on the other hand.

About the Authors

Dustin Gilbreath is a Research Consultant at CRRC-Georgia.

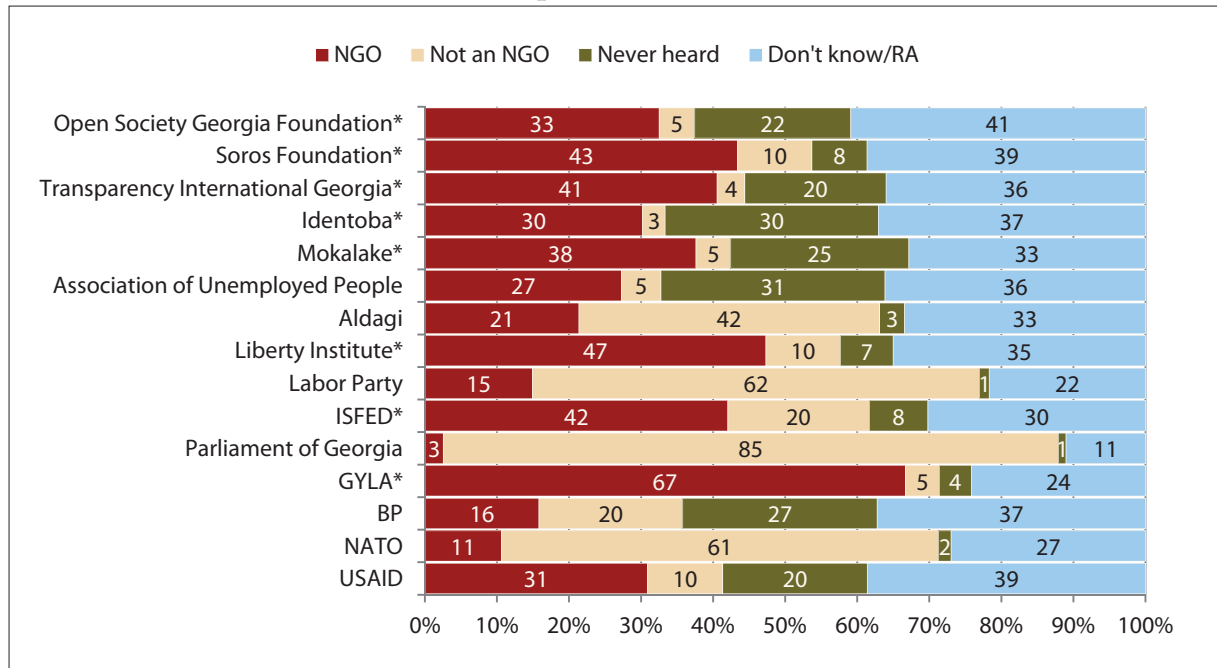
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The opinions expressed in this article are the authors' own and do not reflect the views of CRRC-Georgia. Some sections of the present article originally appeared on the CRRC's Social Science in the Caucasus blog.

Further Reading:

- Policy, Advocacy, and Civil Society Development in Georgia (G-PAC) 2014 Follow-up Report on Civic Engagement, <http://www.crrc.ge/uploads/files/reports/FINAL_GPAC_2014_Civic_Engagement_Report_04.08.2014_ENG.pdf>
- Volunteering Survey, <<http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/vl2014ge/codebook/>>

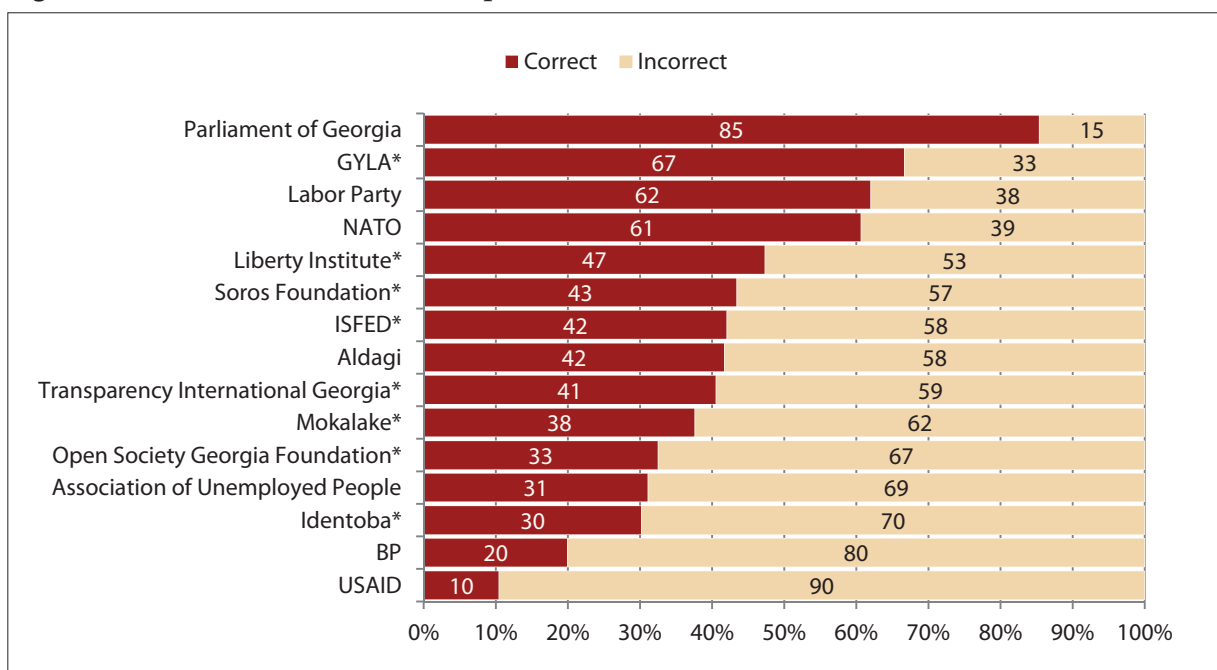
Figure 1a: Which of These, In Your Opinion, Is an NGO, and Which Is Not? (Volunteerism and Civic Participation, 2014)



* organization is an NGO

Source: CRRC Volunteering and Civic Participation in Georgia Survey 2014, <<http://www.crrc.ge/20563/Volunteering-and-Civic-participation-in-Georgia>>

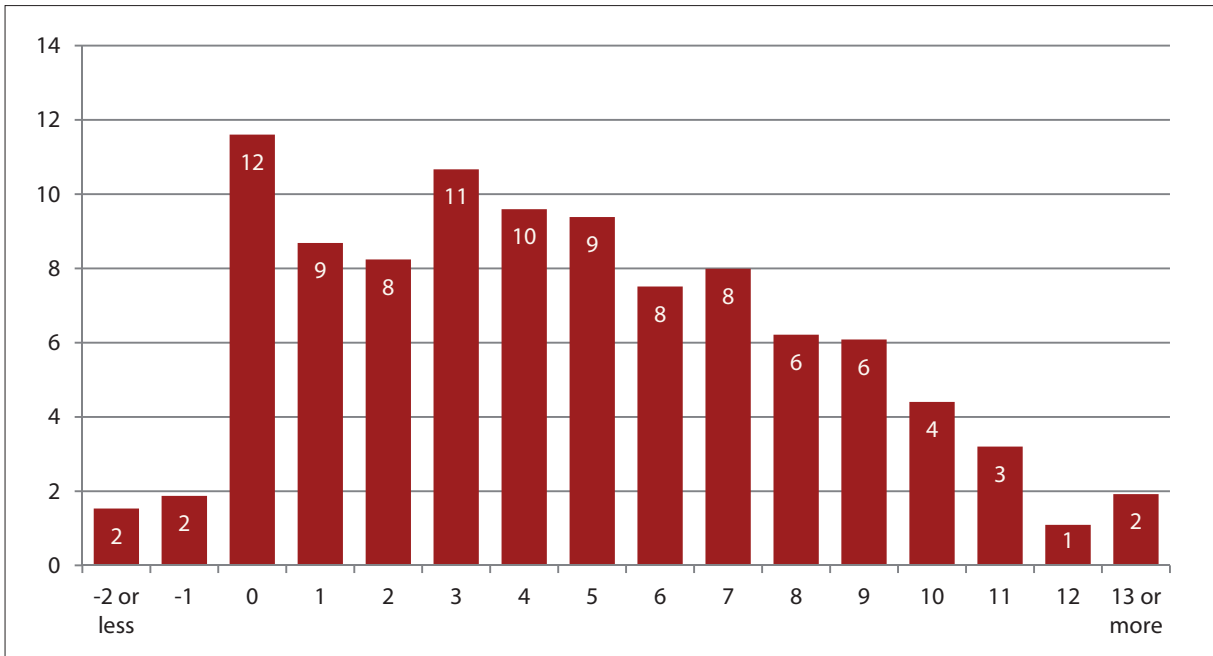
Figure 1b: Which of These, In Your Opinion, Is an NGO, and Which Is Not?



* organization is an NGO

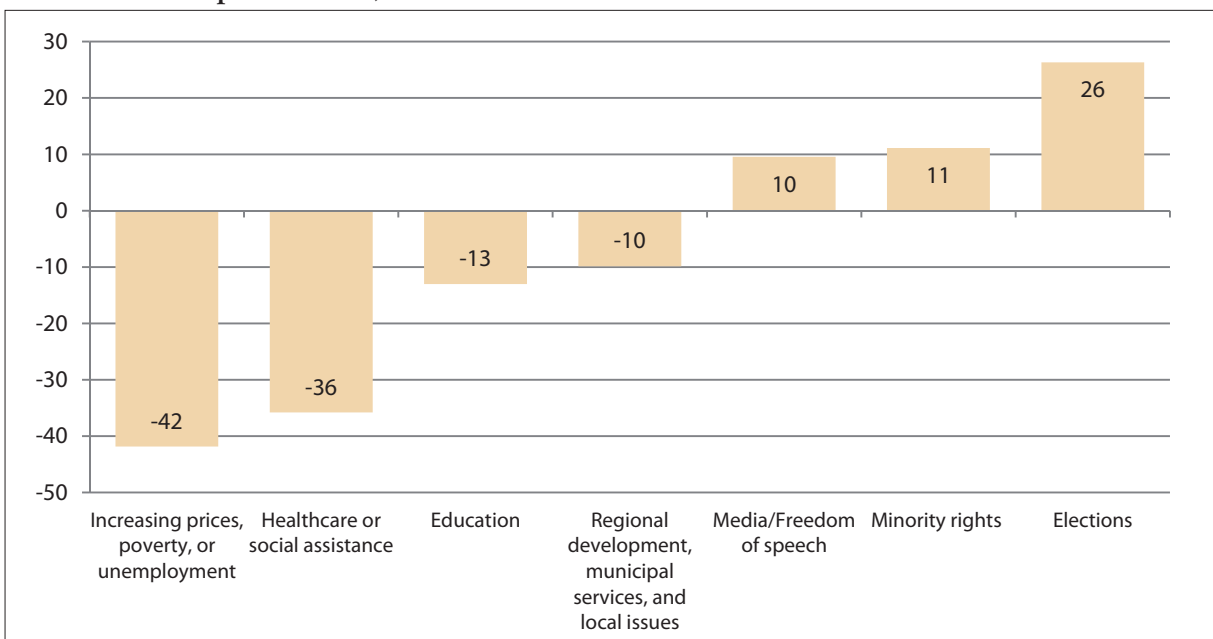
Source: CRRC Volunteering and Civic Participation in Georgia Survey 2014, <<http://www.crrc.ge/20563/Volunteering-and-Civic-participation-in-Georgia>>

Figure 2: Knowledge of NGO scale (%) (Volunteerism and Civic Participation, 2014)



Source: CRRC Volunteering and Civic Participation in Georgia Survey 2014, <<http://www.crrc.ge/20563/Volunteering-and-Civic-participation-in-Georgia>>

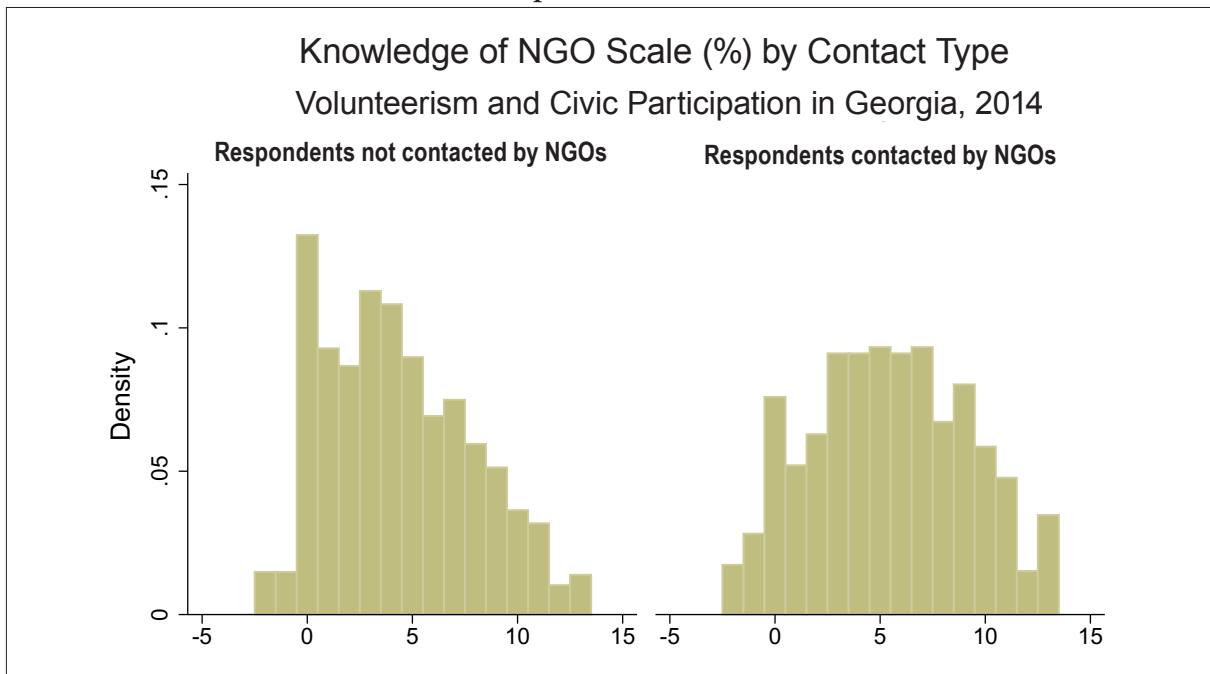
Figure 3: Gaps Between the Issues the NGOs in Georgia Address Most Frequently and Issues People Would Like to See NGOs Address More Often (%) (Volunteerism and Civic Participation, 2014)



Note: The gaps are calculated as simple differences in the shares of answers to the two questions given above. Only gaps larger than 10% are shown.

Source: CRRC Volunteering and Civic Participation in Georgia Survey 2014, <<http://www.crrc.ge/20563/Volunteering-and-Civic-participation-in-Georgia>>

Figure 4: Knowledge of NGO Scale (%) by Contact Type
(Volunteerism and Civic Participation, 2014)



Source: CRRC Volunteering and Civic Participation in Georgia Survey 2014, <<http://www.crrc.ge/20563/Volunteering-and-Civic-participation-in-Georgia>>