Public scepticism of internationally supported civil society organisations: norms, citizen priorities, and local groups in post-socialist Serbia

Sladjana Danković & Paula M. Pickering

⊕ View supplementary material ⏧

▦ Published online: 12 Jan 2017.

✐ Submit your article to this journal ⏧

◍ View related articles ⏧

▣ View Crossmark data ⏧

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Public scepticism of internationally supported civil society organisations: norms, citizen priorities, and local groups in post-socialist Serbia

Sladjana Danković[a] and Paula M. Pickering[b]

[a]Independent Researcher, Washington, DC, USA; [b]College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA, USA

ABSTRACT

Despite decades of Western assistance seeking to develop civil societies in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, many local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) lack strong bases in their societies. This field-based study of citizens' views of Western-aided women's organisations in four Serbian towns uses frame resonance to explore why. In interviews, many citizens felt that NGOs worked on issues that are abstract, unimportant, narrowly focused, and/or imported, even imposed. Serbian NGOs could increase ties to the public by pursuing activities that better resonate with local norms and priorities, as well as by framing and demonstrating their work as locally responsive.

Existing research suggests that despite Western countries' decades-long efforts to support vibrant civic activism in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, many Western-aided local civic organisations in the region lack strong bases in their societies (Carothers 1999; Howard 2011). "Success stories" of civic activism touted by donors clash with negative attitudes toward non-governmental organisations (NGOs) captured by more systematically gathered data. Our field-based study of citizens' views of women's and local NGOs that receive Western aid in comparable, medium-sized towns in Serbia provides a window into why local organisations have achieved only modest, but varying, levels of public support. This research does what studies of civil society development rarely do by focusing on the views of citizens, who are both the ultimate recipients of this aid and who influence NGOs' sustainability. Unlike literature that has emphasised those East European countries that have become members of the European Union (EU) (Mishler and Rose 1997; Marinova 2011), this study investigates an East European country that is an EU candidate but more sceptical of the intentions of the West, which has played a substantial role as donors to civil society in the region. Because Serbia is the largest country of former Yugoslavia and a country key to the security and development of the region, efforts to improve its political and social development deserve special attention.

Scholars have offered several reasons why it is difficult for civil society to develop in post-socialist settings, including domestic political interests (Žeravčić 2008) and the

---

flaws in Western implementation of assistance (Carothers 1999; Sali-Terzić 2001; Brown 2009; Ker-Lindsay 2013). Other scholars have challenged the dismal assessment of post-socialist development of civil society as overly critical, arguing instead that well-connected advocacy groups have engaged in transactional activism by advocating their goals to politicians, achieving some policy victories (Petrova and Tarrow 2007; Marinova 2011). While recognising these policy changes, this article focuses on public acceptance of internationally supported NGOs. It studies Western-aided NGOs founded and registered in Serbia because research found 75% of NGOs in Serbia identify foreign donors as their main source of funding (Howard 2011). Because policy change induced by transactional activism without public support or European conditionality can be superficial or short-lived (Mungiu-Pippidi 2010) and focused on elites (Fagan and Sircar 2015), public acceptance is needed for NGOs to sustainably improve local communities and policy. We draw on the focus on frame resonance from Social Movement Theory (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Sundstrom 2005; Collins 2007) to examine how the resonance among recipient societies of the norms pursued by Western-aided civil society organisations affects their ability to obtain society's support. Literature on trust in and the impact of aid to local NGOs complements this theory. We find that women's NGOs in Serbia that are better in aligning and explaining how their goals and activities meet local priorities and that pursue locally resonant norms, particularly improvement of community well-being, are more likely to gain public acceptance. Gender and educational background also influence public acceptance of NGOs.

Our research makes several contributions to literature on civil society in post-socialist states. First, it focuses directly on citizens' views of civil society organisations and priority concerns, rather than on the frequently studied work of activists, to better assess how well NGO frames resonate with citizens. This allows the study to uncover the conditions under which Western-aided local organisations can sustainably improve policy and communities in post-socialist states that are sceptical of the West's intentions. Second, it suggests that the resonance of NGO work depends on the extent to which the norms of NGOs are consistent with local norms; the way NGO leaders frame and communicate NGOs' work as responsive and meaningful to citizens; and how NGOs follow through on promises by engaging in concrete, visible activities. Third, it demonstrates that there is public demand in Serbia for NGOs to engage in activities that improve community welfare. This desire could adversely affect democracy by drawing attention away from NGO work on political accountability. NGO responsiveness to citizens' priorities could alternatively encourage trust in NGOs that could build more broad-based support for civic activism that promotes better governance.

After a discussion of the Serbian context that shapes the outcome of Western aid for local and women's groups, we review the literature on public views of civil society and aid for civil society in post-authoritarian societies. From this literature, we derive our research propositions, sketch our methodology for exploring them, and describe our findings. The final section of our article discusses our contribution to understanding the conditions under which Western aid can better empower civil society organisations and improve their impact on post-socialist societies sceptical of the West.

Local context

Attention to Serbia's development during and after the fall of socialism reveals how the post-authoritarian Serbian context and norms shape efforts to promote local and women's organisations. After Tito's break with Stalin, Yugoslavia was considered the most open socialist regime. Socialist Yugoslavia created opportunities for participation in voluntary civic associations (*udruženje građana*) that focused on sports or culture and were only loosely tied with the Communist Party. But the one-party state constrained other opportunities for voluntary participation until the 1980s (Križan 1989; Pusić 1992). With government support, women in socialist Yugoslavia made large gains, including civil and political rights and access to education, jobs, social welfare, and political posts. In the 1970s, young women advocated narrowing the discrepancy between the socialist rhetoric of equality and women's actual positions in the economy and politics and exchanged ideas with Western feminists (Nikolić-Ristanović 2002). Even though young women in Serbia sought to participate equally in all spheres of society in a way close to ideals described in feminist theories, most disliked being labelled as feminist.[1]

The economic transition, Serbia's repressive regime, and war in the 1990s produced set-backs for civil society groups and women. The transition away from socialism (Einhorn and Sever 2003; Bunce 2015) and war (Ramet 2002) created opportunities for politicians to gain power by using nationalism, which discouraged criticism of the government and empha-sised traditional roles of women. Western governments and NGOs provided assistance to civil society in post-socialist Serbia to oppose Serbia's political regime in the 1990s and encourage democratisation (Carothers 1999). Women's groups like Women in Black weathered nationalists' criticisms of their actions to be one of the few civil society groups in the 1990s to protest against the war and violence against women (Einhorn and Sever 2003; Irvine 2013).

Western-promoted sanctions and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) bombing of Serbia in 1999, as well as American and European support for Kosovo's inde-pendence, soured Serbian views of these Western organisations and governments. After the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in late 1995, the death of Tuđman in 1999, and the fall of Milošević in 2000, Western donors stepped up assistance for NGOs considered to support democratisation, encouraging what Stubbs (2012) describes as a wave of "NGOization" (Alvarez 1999), or the professionalisation of civil society groups. Amongst such NGOs were the Humanitarian Law Centre in Belgrade and the Helsinki Com-mittee for Human Rights in Serbia that have worked on transitional justice issues, including evidence against Serbs indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia. Acti-vism on this issue, which many Serbs perceive to ignore Serb grievances, along with largely negative media portrayals of it, has encouraged Serbs to question the motives of NGO leaders (Obradović-Wochnik 2013; Mikuš 2015).

In focus groups from several large towns in Serbia in 2004, citizens expressed predomi-nantly negative views (47% of participants) about NGOs because they viewed them as either politicised, failing to achieve results, or selfish and closed (Grødeland 2006).[2] Com-paring views about women's organisations expressed in nationally representative sample surveys in Serbia to those in other parts of Europe finds Serbian respondents slightly more likely to express confidence in women's organisations than in the South Eastern European countries of Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria, but less likely to express confidence than in

Hungary, Spain, and Germany (World Values Survey 2005). Of respondents across 28 post-socialist countries polled in 2010, Serbians expressed the third lowest level of trust in NGOs – 20%, which is lower than all East European countries except Bulgaria (17%) (EBRD 2010). This slightly improved in 2014, with 28% of citizens in a different survey expressing confidence in civil society organisations (TASCO 2016, 35). Indicating distrust of those NGOs that receive international assistance, 41% of respondents believed NGOs were paid by the international community to propagate the interests of the foreign donors in Serbia (Građanske Iniciajative 2009, 36). Nationally representative sample surveys indicated that few respondents (15%) in 2009 viewed NGOs as having an impact on the lives of those in their community (Građanske Iniciajative 2009, 28–29). A 2015 survey found that citizens do not believe NGOs are active in the areas citizens perceive of highest importance (TASCO 2016, 35).

Serbian respondents were more favourable toward the *potential* impact of NGOs' work in the areas of gender equality (43% of respondents were positive) and combating domestic violence (57% were positive) than on many other issues, including promoting democratisation (Građanske Iniciajative 2009, 31). In 2015, 22% of citizens surveyed agreed that participation in an NGO could bring about change (CRTA 2015, 7).

Levels of participation in civic activity are lower than levels of trust in civil society organisations. Since 2013, the percent of citizens who engaged in voluntary action in the past year has increased only 1% each year, with 6% reporting such action in 2015 (USAID 2015, 217). Grass-roots protests, including strikes, sit-ins, and anti-development actions since 2009 that are only loosely tied to NGOs, point to widespread discontent with the broken promises of transition and resulting social problems (Kraft 2015; Morača 2016), Serbian citizens' capacity to mobilise over socio-economic marginalisation, and scepticism of NGOs. A higher percentage (12%) of citizens in 2015 reported engagement in their local community (CRTA 2015, 7). This provides support for Kostovicova and Bojicic-Dzelilovic's (2013, 9) assertion of the negative impact of external donors' practice of working with a narrow "slice of the civil society cake" that overlooks a variety of traditional grass-roots institutions. In sum, Western policies and actions in the 1990s considered to hurt Serbs, as well as their approaches to assistance after 2000 have contributed to Serb scepticism towards Western-aided civil society organisations compared to citizens in other countries of Eastern Europe.

Literature

In this challenging environment, local and women's organisations face an uphill struggle for public acceptance, which is needed for NGOs to substantially improve local communities and governance. Social Movement Theory's notion of frame resonance encourages attention to both citizen values and interests, as well as to NGOs' work and outreach to citizens. Framing centres on the conscious, strategic efforts by groups to develop shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 6). In this article, we use the resonance of frames to help understand the extent of shared understandings achieved and public legitimation of and support for civic organisations.

Cross-national studies in East Central Europe have studied the impact of rational considerations and socialisation on citizens' attitudes toward and participation in civil

society organisations. Marinova (2011), whose study does not include Serbia, argues that the relationship of factors associated with citizens' rational self-interest – concern with corruption and with their personal economic situations – with high levels of trust in NGOs suggests that citizens disappointed in formal institutions are more willing to turn their trust toward alternatives such as NGOs. In addition, her study found that citizens exposed to agents of socialisation after 1990, such as the church, were more likely to trust NGOs. However, Marchenko's (2016, 20) multi-national study of factors affecting civic activity, which is different from but related to support for civic organisations, found no relationship between lack of trust in domestic political institutions in Serbia and increased civic activity. Instead, interest in politics, a factor that Marinova found a statistically insignificant predictor of trust in NGOs, was positively associated with civic activity in Serbia.

While citizens' values and interests likely play a role in their openness toward NGOs, so does the work of NGOs themselves – their goals and activities, the norms they promote and communicate through frames, and their openness. Literature on Western-aided civic organisations suggests that domestically developed NGO goals and activities that respond to local priorities should build citizen trust in local groups. Research in Romania (Kandis 2004) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Pickering 2006) argues local NGOs that developed organically and offered tangible help for the population were most likely to gain popular support. Otherwise, NGOs were "condemned by people around them for pursuing projects that are not relevant to the huge problems of their communities" (Mikuš 2015, 47). However, international donors have often imposed externally set priorities (Hemment 2007; Howard 2012) that did not have much local resonance (Hawthorne 2005). Mikuš (2015, 51) characterised the problem of local NGOs pursuing projects regardless of their missions, as NGOs engaging in "whatevering" (svaštariti) to survive. Such problems illustrate the "double bind" created by global funding sources and local needs that many NGOs face (Helms 2014).

NGO activities consistent with and meaningfully framed to align with locally resonant norms, or widely shared conceptions of appropriate behaviour (Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein 1996, 54), should increase their resonance among local populations and success.[3] Batinić (2015, 102) argues that many urban-based activists in Serbia's WWII Antifascist Front of Women possessed weak communication skills and understanding of rural norms, which hampered their ability to gain the trust and participation of rural women. Sundstrom (2005) found the norms promoted by Western donors of Russian NGOs in two sectors – women's rights and soldier's rights – influenced aid's impact on those NGO movements. Foreign aid to Russian NGOs working on the universal norm of "against bodily harm" strengthened those organisations. In these cases, local activists successfully adapted ideas from transnational sources to local meanings, a strategy that Merry (2006b, 40) argues will allow human rights to spread more effectively and with greater legitimacy. In contrast, those women's NGOs that worked on gender equality and those soldiers' rights organisations that advocated anti-militarism were perceived as promoting Western norms that lacked support in Russia. As a result, donors did not strengthen these NGOs. In the same vein, Obradović-Wochnik argues the narrow frame adopted by the most prominent NGOs in Serbia advocating "coming to terms with the past" of a process of exposing past wrongs and then expecting that they will lead to reconciliation has alienated

citizens. Citizens view these NGOs' approach as over-focused on asking individuals to accept non-Serb victims and as confrontational and patronizing (Obradović-Wochnik 2013, 212–3).

The norms advocated are particularly likely to affect support for women's groups. The history of women's organisations in Serbia, their contacts with the West during socialism, and surveys suggest a more hospitable environment for gender equality, if not feminism, in Serbia than in Russia.[4] But, Henderson (2000) argues foreign aid undermined Russian women's organisations' sustainability by privileging Western-style feminist groups over women's groups engaged in social welfare issues, which would expected to be valued given socialism's commitment to social welfare. Ker-Lindsay (2013, 262) laments the negative impact of international funding too often supporting rights-based groups over service providing groups. Hemment's (2007) study of women's groups found Russians often viewed civil society as a way for the West to promote its neo-liberal agenda. Indeed, the EU's approach to local civil society organisations has been described as seeking to harness their greater capacity than external organisations to diffuse norms (O'Brennan 2013, 49).

The limited empirical evidence available suggests responsiveness to local norms and concrete priorities is likely to increase when NGOs are open in their decision-making, membership, and citizen feedback. We expect this to be a challenge because NGO dependence on international donors has often weakened NGO ties and responsiveness to local communities (Carothers 1999; Ghodsee 2004; Sperling 2006; Howard 2011; Kostovicova and Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2013). Competition for limited and unpredictable funding increases competition and insecurity among NGOs, which can distract them from citizens' needs (Cooley and Ron 2002). Studies of local organisations in Russia and the Western Balkans found that Western assistance frequently widened the gap between the activists and the rest of society because the process of NGOization frequently transforms them into hierarchical, centralised entities that value their own survival more than their mission (Richter 2002; Stubbs 2012; Ker-Lindsay 2013). It is promising that the lessons the EU learned from its past donor practices that inadvertently increased competition between NGOs and disproportionately rewarded big city NGOs were incorporated in 2008 into its Civil Society Facility programme in Serbia, which shifted assistance to capacity building, networking, and sustainability of civil society organisations (Venneri 2013). Along these lines, the EU has recently encouraged larger NGOs to work with smaller NGOs, including co-operation through re-granting (TASCO 2016, 39). Richter (2002, 56) also recommends that donors reward civil society groups whose decision-making encourages wide participation and transparency.

The Serbian context, as well as literatures on Social Movement Theory, Western supported NGOs, and trust in post-authoritarian societies, informs expectations about the conditions under which Western-aided women's organisations are most likely to gain public acceptance in Serbia. We anticipate that Serbian citizens are more likely to support women's organisations that pursue domestically determined goals and activities, advocate locally resonant norms, and are open in terms of membership, decision-making, and citizen feedback. In addition, we expect that Serbian citizens who are more distrustful of formal institutions, and who are women, younger, and have higher levels of education to be more supportive of women's NGOs.

Methodology

To investigate this hypothesis, our research takes the unusual step of focusing on citizens' rather than activists' perspectives on the resonance of frames and actions promoted by NGOs. We do so by taking advantage of a small-*n* comparative case study design that allows the gathering of multiple types of evidence needed to best understand the complex reasons for varying degrees of public acceptance of women's and local NGOs.

We conducted research in four medium-sized towns with locally based NGOs that focus on women's rights and have been active for at least five years. Attention to women's organisations facilitates testing the norms argument, allows us to control for the type of NGO across towns, and provides information on a type of NGO supported by donors. We consulted data from the NGO network "Women against Violence" (*Žene protiv nasilja*) and leaders of women's organisations in cities to locate women's NGOs working in towns. A focus on medium-sized towns avoids the preoccupation of scholars on civil society in large cities, whose populations are significantly better educated and economically more secure than the average Serbian citizen.[5] Our design roughly controls for the size of the population, which can affect the extent of local knowledge of and activism in organisations. Residents of medium-sized towns are slightly less likely to be members of NGOs than residents of large towns, and slightly more likely to be members of NGOs than residents in small towns and villages (World Values Survey 2005–2009). We also considered ethnic demographics and economic resources. After controlling for these factors, the existence of at least one NGO focused on women's issues, and selecting towns across Serbia's regions, we chose the cases of Smederevska Palanka, Pirot, Užice, and Vranje (Table 1).[6]

This design allows for focus on the interplay of several hypothesised variables of interest: the local focus of activism, the extent to which organisations' goals resonate with local norms, and the openness of organisations. Because we did not have the nuanced information needed to judge how the women's organisations in case study towns varied on their norms, activities, and openness, we gathered this information through interviews. This means that our study is best suited to explore our hypothesis and generate suggestions for testing our findings in a more comprehensive study.

Within each of these medium-sized towns, we conducted semi-structured interviews in spring 2014 with 25 people who were approached near sites important for virtually all citizens' everyday life – farmers' markets and supermarkets. It is important to learn about the views of NGOs of the Serbian population rather than rely on an unrepresentative sample of those experienced with NGOs. To encourage candid responses, we conducted the study independently of donors and took the time to talk one-on-one with citizens.[7] A total of 100 interviews were conducted with citizens, who form the constituents of Serbian civil society organisations.[8] One of the authors[9] also conducted in-depth, semi-structured

Table 1. Characteristics of case studies.

	Population	% Serb	Net earnings, in RSD (2010)	Region
Pirot	38,785	94.0	29,720	East Central
Smederevska Palanka	23,601	93.0	28,216	Central
Užice	59,747	97.5	32,746	West-Central
Vranje	60,485	92.0	27,214	South

Source: Republika Srbija, Republički zavod za statistiku (2014).

interviews with local NGO leaders in the same four towns. Analysis of NGO leaders' testimony, NGO websites, and NGO publications identifies the frames used by these groups, while analysis of citizens' responses suggests the extent to which these frames resonated with them and their norms. This case study design allows us to suggest factors that affect public acceptance of civil society organisations by citizens residing in Serb-dominated, medium-sized, middle-income towns in Serbia. We test the impact of individual characteristics and views that Marinova argues influence support for NGOs through statistical analysis of a nationally representative survey in Serbia conducted in 2005.

Findings

Low levels of public acceptance. To determine the level of public acceptance of local women's NGOs, we asked the respondents first about their level of knowledge about NGOs: "Are you familiar with local women's and other local NGOs in Serbia?" Follow-up questions gauge the level of familiarity with and spur evaluation of NGOs' impact. If so, "tell us something about their activities" and "your opinion of the impact of NGOs' activities on Serbian citizens and your town … [and] why".[10] Answers to this series of questions revealed that many respondents who initially claimed they knew about local NGOs did not know about local women's NGOs and could not name one or discuss the activities of a different local NGO. We labelled these interview responses as "don't know".

For those who knew about a local women's or other local NGO, but lacked the knowledge needed to evaluate its impact, we coded these responses as "too little knowledge to evaluate". If respondents had enough information about NGOs to judge them, we assigned their views of the impact of NGO activities on their community to one of four categories that emerged from testimony. Respondents' views of NGOs were categorised as: "positive" if they believed the work of NGOs improved their communities; "ambivalent" if they expressed mixed feelings or were undecided about the work of NGOs; "questioning" if they were not sure about the impact of NGOs but were predominantly sceptical of their ability to achieve good; or "negative" if they believed NGOs did or intended to inflict harm.

Only a little more than 23% of respondents knew about women's organisations in their towns. Even among those respondents who knew about a local women's NGO, nearly 41% lacked the information needed to evaluate its impact on their local community (Table 2). The predominance of these two types of responses about local women's NGOs and the fact that no respondents could name an activity sponsored by a local women's organisation signal that these NGOs are not visible in their communities. Our case study communities are small enough that residents should know something about NGOs that have been

Table 2. Views about types of Serbian NGOs, expressed by those who knew about NGOs.

Views about types of NGOs	Local women's NGOs	Other local NGOs	Non-local NGOs
Positive	13.6%	8.8%	12.9%
Ambivalent	4.5%	21.1%	22.6%
Questioning	13.6%	15.8%	18.3%
Negative	27.3%	28.1%	33.3%
Too little knowledge to evaluate	40.9%	26.3%	12.9%
Total responses	*22*	*57*	*93*

Note: Data from interviews conducted by Danković (2014).

working in the locality for years. Only a slightly higher percentage of women, who should be the constituency of women's groups, than men knew about local women's NGOs. Even this estimate probably inflates the proportion of Serbians in medium-sized towns who know about women's and other local NGOs, because two out of three people who were initially willing to be interviewed did not know what the term NGO meant, so they were not questioned further. The women who had some knowledge about local women's NGOs were more supportive of their activities than men.[11] Nonetheless, only 28% in Vranje, 25% in Pirot and Užice, and 15% in Smederevska Palanka knew about the existence of local women's NGOs. Indicating varying levels of public support, views of women's NGOs were more positive (positive to ambivalent) in Užice and Smederevska Palanka, than in Pirot or Vranje (Table 4, column 6).

Views about the *potential* of NGOs differed from views about the *practice* of NGOs. Many interviewees believed that genuine NGOs could play a positive role in Serbia's society, similar to the 2009 survey. Comments made by citizens who did not have any knowledge of local women's NGOs but expressed opinions about NGOs active in their town or elsewhere, were predominantly negative (Table 2), although less so than Grøde-land found 10 years earlier. Of those who knew about local NGOs working on other issues, 28% expressed negative views about their impact. Of the respondents who volunteered an assessment of the work of Serbian NGOs, regardless of where they were based in Serbia (non-local NGOs), one third expressed negative views about impact.[12] Only a tiny 2.2% of respondents had participated in an NGO.

Explaining the varying but low levels of public acceptance

Citizens' socialisation. To begin making sense of low but varying levels of public support for NGOs, we tested Marinova's argument about the impact of socialisation factors and rational self-interest on attitudes toward women's organisations and humanitarian organ-isations. We do so by conducting statistical analysis on nationally representative sample data in Serbia from 2005 (World Values Survey 2005), which unfortunately is the most recent individual-level survey with relevant data. These data indicate that most (56%) of Serbian respondents do not trust women's organisations. Contrary to Marinova's findings in East Central Europe, an ordered logistic regression analysis finds that respondents who are distrustful of political institutions, as indicated by distrust in the civil service, are also *more* likely to be distrustful of women's and humanitarian organisations in Serbia (Table 3).[13]

This points to more widespread citizen distrust of formal institutions *and* organisations in Serbia than in East Central Europe. Statistical analysis supports only part of the socialisa-tion hypothesis in Serbia. Women and those with higher levels of education are more likely to support women's organisations. But other factors associated with socialisation, such as age group, church attendance, national pride, interest in politics, and political ideology, had no statistically significant impact. A bar chart comparing ideal types of respondents helps interpret the statistical results. This chart illustrates the probability of varying levels of trust in women's organisations expressed by respondents on opposite ends of the scale for factors found to be statistically significant – gender, education, and trust in civil service, while holding other factors at their means (Figure 1). For example, the pre-dicted probability of expressing quite a lot of trust in women's organisations in Serbia

Table 3. Predicting lack of trust in Serbia of women's and humanitarian organisations.

Independent variables	Women's NGOs Coefficient	Humanitarian NGOs Coefficient
Rational self-interest		
Lack of trust in civil service	1.071***	0.963***
Lack of savings	−0.0171	−0.076
Socialisation		
Lack of pride in nationality	−0.044	−0.065
Attends church rarely	0.100	0.169**
Lack of interest in politics	0.030	0.011
Gender	−0.896***	−0.468**
Size of settlement	0.65	−0.012
Age group	0.036	0.029
Education	−0.122**	−0.167***
Political ideology	−0.022	−0.045

Notes: $N = 588$.
LR $\chi^2(10) = 136.01$.
Prob $> \chi^2 = 0.0000$.
Source: World Values Survey (2005). For coding of variables, see Appendix 1.
**Significant at the .05 level.
***Significant at the .001 level.

(the third set of bars in Figure 1) for a woman with college education and a great deal of trust in civil service is 0.54, compared to the predicted probability of 0.09 for a man with no education and no trust in the civil service.

NGOs' goals and activities. Beyond the influence of citizens' characteristics and interests on support for NGOs, we anticipated that NGOs could themselves, through domestically rather than externally determined NGO goals and activities, promote public acceptance.[14] We first describe leaders' views and then Serbian citizens' views of NGO goals and activities. In response to our question about how they formed goals, NGO leaders from all four towns described this process as domestically determined and democratic. While leaders in Pirot, Smederevska Palanka, and Vranje voted on adopting the NGOs' missions and goals, leaders from Užice used consensus. Despite their inability to specify the processes they used to determine local needs, all leaders asserted that the needs of the local populations drove decisions about their NGOs' missions and activities, which we discuss below.

Women's Association "Femina" in Smederevska Palanka and SOS Vranje shared goals of combatting violence against women and children and helping victims (Table 4, column 2).
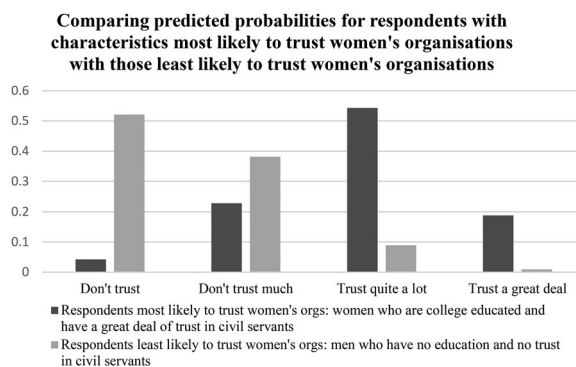
Figure 1. Comparing ideal types of respondents' levels of trust in women's organisations.

Both NGOs, who are connected to the NGO network "Women against Violence", focus their activities on maintaining SOS hotlines for women and children victims of violence and providing free legal advice to women. The leaders of these organisations advocated gender equality in their frames of outreach to citizens, maintained ties to human rights groups in Belgrade, and participated in public celebrations of International Women's Day. Both NGOs recently intensified cooperation with local government institutions on combating violence against women. In Smederevska Palanka, NGO leaders worked with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to promote the safety of high school women. In Vranje, leaders worked with local government institutions by holding seminars for capacity building of a local network combatting violence against women. They also held other street campaigns, such as the observance of International Roma Day. Statistics suggest that SOS hotlines respond to important local problems, such as violence against women. The Vranje region has Serbia's highest rate of violence against women and the SOS Vranje hotline received 160 calls in 2012, 140 of which were determined to be female victims of domestic abuse (B92 2013).

Table 4. NGOs, missions, norms, openness, and public acceptance, arranged from highest to lowest level of acceptance.

Town & women's NGO	Mission and goals	Activities responsive to local priorities?	Norm locally resonant?	Open to new people and decision-making?	Public acceptance (positive to ambivalent views)
Užice: Women's Centre	Improving the quality of life of women through the realisation of women's human rights using feminist principles	More than other cases, since includes work on economic empowerment of women, including young and rural	Helping marginalised – yes Feminist principles – no	Medium low	34.0%
Smederevska Palanka: Women's association "Femina"	Promotion of gender equality and raising awareness about and supporting victims of domestic violence	Partly, since work against domestic violence and for youth Lack work on economic problems	Against bodily harm – yes Gender equality – yes	Low	33.3%
Pirot: Women of the South	Protection of human rights, particularly the rights of women; promotion of gender equality; focus on invisible women- rural, disabled and violence survivors	Partly, since work on protection and socio-economic improvement for all, including rural population	Helping marginalised – yes Against bodily harm, – yes Gender equality – yes Human rights – not much	Medium low	16.7%
Vranje: Bureau for human rights, SOS hotline for women	Struggle against and disclosure of violence against women; support to victims of domestic violence	Less than other cases. Work helps a narrow segment of those vulnerable Lack work on economic problems	Against bodily harm – yes Human rights – not much Ties to Belgrade NGOs working on transitional justice – no	Low	0.0%

Source: Table adapted from Sundstrom (2005).
Note: Data gathered through interviews conducted by Danković (2014).

Association "Women of the South" (Žene juga) in Pirot and Women's Center (Ženski centar) Užice had broader goals in comparison to the NGOs in the other cases (Table 4, column 2). The women in Pirot and Užice both emphasised the education of women in their frames of outreach to citizens. Leaders in Pirot video-documented women's experiences with oppression and educated about women's empowerment, while leaders in Užice established a women's studies programme to promote gender equality. Education also extended to training, with Pirot's leaders holding workshops to train rural and Roma women on computers and Užice's leaders training women to work as economic technicians, in rural cooperatives, and as entrepreneurs. In Pirot, NGO leaders also held workshops with youth on preventing gender-based violence, raised awareness about the negative consequences of patriarchy, and hosted discussions on improving human rights. Though Women's Center Užice's website mentions its embrace of feminism, its activities focus more on everyday needs, including economic, of local women, than the NGO in Pirot (Table 4, column 3). This helps them gain public acceptance. For example, the Užice NGO's training resulted in the formation of a handful of cooperatives and initiatives, such as one working with the art school to turn recycled materials into clothing and art for donation to economically disadvantaged families, and resale (Ženski Centar Užice 2012.)

NGO leaders told us they initially worked on activities that fit their missions. Quickly, however, they realised that many projects available for funding from foreign donors were unrelated to the leaders' passions. The NGO leader from Užice emphasised that she applied for funding from Western donors only when the tender has projects whose goals coincide with her NGO's goals. This probably helped Užice Women's Centre gain more public support than other NGOs in our study. Other leaders admitted they have applied for funding from foreign donors even when the projects were unrelated to the scope of their prior work. They did so to survive financially. This supports the argument that local translators of transnational norms are often vulnerable to donors; they operate in a system of unequal power (Merry 2006b, 40; Mikuš 2015). Because of their dependence on donors, NGO activists often volunteer their time for un-funded activities that fit the NGOs' mission. Užice's leader illustrated the impact of pressures for "NGOization":

> donors are rigid and applications are cumbersome. We all are losing the edge of being activists and are turning into bureaucrats. I wish donors were more activities-oriented than project-focused.

Concerns about burdensome applications and project-based work reflecting donors' priorities echo those found by Howard (2011). All NGO leaders were critical of the funding process and donors' lack of attention to small organisations outside the capital. They also believed Belgrade activists could do more to facilitate funding for smaller NGOs. The competitive funding environment hindered closer relationships among NGOs. This feedback suggests the EU's effort to rectify these problems starting in 2008 with the Civil Society Facility programme (Venneri 2013; TASCO 2016) has a ways to go before this shift in aid disbursement is felt by NGO leaders and citizens outside of big cities.

Regardless of NGO leaders' testimony that missions and activities were chosen based on local needs, citizens consistently viewed NGOs as having unclear goals and being unresponsive to local priorities. Those respondents who were sceptical of NGOs wondered out

loud about the missions of the NGOs. A pensioner said, "I heard about women's NGOs, but I do not know what their goals are … " (Author interview with 94, U).[15] Second-hand knowledge gained about NGOs led a significant portion of interviewees to dismiss NGOs' ability to bring positive changes to the broader population. Only 15.8% knew about NGOs through direct contact with them, while about one half learned about NGOs through word of mouth and 28.4% through television. Citizens lack opportunities to see local NGO activities that would help them better understand the otherwise abstract notion of NGOs. If NGOs do not engage in tangible activities that allow citizens to make informed opinions of them, then they leave a space to be filled with second-hand information of questionable accuracy.

The most negative views expressed were those toward non-local Serbian NGOs that respondents considered tools of the West that interfered in politics in order to control or harm Serbia. Others saw NGOs as working against Serbs because they cooperate with those "who once bombarded us", pick favourites (gays, Roma, Albanians), or support Kosovo's independence (Author's interviews with 80, V; 48, U). The most negative comments came from Vranje, perhaps due to its proximity to NATO bombing in 1999 and the resulting destruction, to the fact that many NGOs based there were working mainly with Albanians in neighbouring villages, and the devastating effect of post-socialist transition on its industrial-based economy. The view that liberalisation led to waves of corrupt privatisations and de-industrialisation that benefited a small group of elites (Kraft 2015, 205–206) seemed to be embraced by many in Vranje and to contribute to negative attitudes toward NGOs that appeared to ignore these huge socio-economic problems.

Citizens frequently criticised NGOs for working on issues that citizens do not prioritise. A male respondent who knew about NGOs through television and who sometimes discussed them with friends, described an NGO as (Author's interview with 96, U):

> a type of organisation supposedly concerned about issues in society. The funny part is the loudest ones are dealing with issues concerning one per cent of the population. All others are not their concern.

NGO work is seen as narrowly focused, abstract, and intangible at a time when people need help with something more existential and basic (Author's interview with 76, V). A 2015 USAID (221) assessment of civil society concluded that Serbia's civil society organisations did not sufficiently tackle poverty and unemployment, the top priority concerns of citizens. This assessment is shared by the public, with 74% of citizens believing civil society organisations were not actively engaged in the priority problem of employment (TASCO 2016, 34).

NGO norms. Sundstrom's work suggests that the norms underlying Western-aided NGO goals and work and framed in communication with citizens also affected acceptance of NGOs. To gather information on and measure the resonance of norms, we asked interviewees to specify how local and women's NGOs could increase their positive impact on their town. Asking respondents to generate suggestions for improving NGOs' contribution to the community should tap into ideas of appropriate behaviour that we can then compare to other interviewees' responses in order to judge how broadly shared they were. This strategy intends to better elicit answers about norms than directly asking

about norms, which is an abstract concept. The open-ended nature of questions should also reduce social desirability.

The vast majority expressed support for a norm of "responsibility for helping those most vulnerable in society". This norm was rooted in an idea of vulnerability tied to socio-economic status, rather than to Western donors' views of vulnerability linked to gender or ethnic or sexual minorities. This interview testimony is supported by survey data from an earlier, nationally representative sample in Serbia in which 72% of respondents said that "it is important to this person to help the people nearby; to care for their wellbeing" describes a person somewhat to very much like them (World Values Survey 2005). Of those interviewees who expressed positive views of local NGOs and NGOs not based in their locality, they suggested NGOs could fill the gap of working on issues the government cannot address. One respondent commented, "NGOs make society function better – they pick up where governmental institutions dropped the ball" (Author's interview with 14, P). Many citizens suggested that NGO activities be directed toward changing the difficult social and economic situation though focusing on youth and vulnerable groups, including the elderly, unemployed, and disabled. A respondent from Vranje articulated a common view by suggesting that NGOs could be useful by organising programmes to help unemployed people develop skills and find jobs (Author's interview with 84, V). Many interviewees believed NGOs should be working on improving "the wellbeing of the society as a whole" (Author's interview with 62, SP) and addressing problems exacerbated by the transition, such as lack of jobs, drug use, and loss of moral values (Author's interviews with 10, SP; 59, SP; 19, P; 73, P; 93, U; 97, U).

Only a few interviewees mentioned women as a vulnerable group that needed to be singled out for assistance. When respondents mentioned women as recipients of NGO activities, they did so as part of the whole society. NGOs should do "something that is good for majority of people, where women are pillars of society and deserve support" (Author's interview with 39, U). Several respondents agreed with the sentiment, "everyone should be protected and should have equal rights, including women and young people" (Author's interviews with 22, P; 89, U). A less common view was that women are better off than many men (Author's interview with 66, P).[16]

Interviewees, regardless of gender, condemned violence against women and supported efforts to prevent this and to help victims. This suggests the applicability to Serbia of Sundstrom's findings in Russia of support for the norm "against bodily harm". Interviewees rarely initiated discussion of SOS hotlines or safe houses. When asked, however, they responded they thought these were useful, though insufficient; they needed to be supplemented by work on underlying, core problems, particularly economic ones. This view is similar to Hemment's (2007, 102) findings on views of crisis centres in Russia. Some also described norms about male behaviour toward women. Men are held to a standard of being a "real man" [and expected] to be protective; it is not noble to be aggressive nor acceptable to be violent against vulnerable people (Author's interview with 27, V; 67, P).

In contrast to Sundstrom's findings in Russia, Serbians tended to support the norm of gender equality. Nonetheless, respondents overwhelmingly viewed this as a low-level priority. NGO links to organisations like Women in Black, advocating change in policy, politicised the issue of women and violence, which did not sit well with citizens.[17] This

sentiment is consistent with Greenberg's (2010) findings on Serbian youth's purposeful non-participation in the tainted realm of politics.

The norm of human rights was also not fully accepted since Serbian citizens often associated it with the controversial approach and political objectives of the Humanitarian Law Centre and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Belgrade, whose leaders were seen as exclusive, self-righteous, biased, and working for Western agendas. Our research suggests that the negative attitudes that Obradović-Wochnik (2013) found among citizens toward these NGOs' confrontational frames of "coming to terms with the past", linger. Other citizens questioned human rights as a goal that could be realistically achieved or should be prioritised: "I have no problem with human rights. But to preach constantly about that means there is an agenda behind it. NGOs talk about things that do not matter much to most people" (Author's interviews with 53, SP; 57, P, respectively). This also supports Merry's (2006a, 136) point that some human rights activists decide to favour more radical rhetoric over more culturally resonant rhetoric in the hopes of bringing about long-term change. Our research suggests that this strategy did not promote change but rather created a backlash.

NGO leaders understood that their organisations were looked at with some suspicion. But leaders did not view the lack of resonance of the frames they used to describe their organisations' norms and priority activities as contributing to suspicion. Instead, they explained this by citizens' lack of understanding of the challenge of working for social change. A leader from Pirot believed that "changes are slow in society and people are resistant to accepting anything new". The NGO leaders are well-educated women who frame their missions with language and norms that criticise the role of politics in women's rights. Our interviews suggest that this view did not arise from local peoples' concerns and this frame of their work of blame for citizens' poor conditions did not help them connect to citizens. Norms that resonate with the leaders are on a very different level than those that resonate with citizens (Table 4, columns 2 and 4). Serbians are focused on surviving daily existential struggles, not on what they consider to be intangible, rather vague ideals like democracy that are often incorporated into NGOs' donor-friendly missions. The genuine efforts NGOs made to concretely assist victims of violence, as well as rural and disabled women, were overshadowed by their political activism and frames that emphasised this activism. By repeating abstract ideals in their communication with citizens, NGO leaders had trouble connecting to the public. The partial exception is Women's Centre Užice, which focused on women's economic empowerment, a frame that responded to local norms of helping those socio-economically vulnerable and improving community well-being.

NGO openness. Logically, NGO openness to citizens should help NGOs work on norms that resonate and activities that reflect local priorities. As expected, the openness of NGO leaders to recruiting more members, the transparency of funding decisions, and the receptivity of NGOs to feedback by citizens were problems for all the NGOs in our case study towns. While criticisms about the perceived lack of openness of NGOs were sometimes made by citizens with direct experience with NGOs, they were more often levied by citizens who learned about NGOs second-hand.

Common complaints were that: "NGOs are so secretive" and need to be more transparent and welcoming (Author's interviews with 7, SP; 21, P; 27, V; and 34, V; 48, U, respectively) "I don't think they [NGOs] want to expand and/or include others" (Author's interview

with 23, P). Many respondents urged NGOs to develop "a better understanding of society, and not to be elitist" (Author's interview with 82, V). An interviewee once involved in a local NGO agreed the onus was on NGO leaders: "They have to be more proactive to reach out to people to explain in good, basic terms what they do … " (Author's interview with 50, U). This comment and research by Mikuš (2015) and TASCO (2016, 51) suggest that to connect to citizens, NGOs need to do more than be transparent; they also need to demonstrate and communicate plainly and consistently with citizens about how their activities improve their communities.[18]

Several respondents expressed concerns about how NGOs handle grant money. "I have nothing against them, but wonder where they spend all the money they get" (Author's interview with 66, P). NGOs are viewed by many as a good opportunity for employment rather than as means to develop civil society and strengthen democratic values. "Be employed there. It is so 'in' these days! Big money; they travel and do nothing" (Author's interview with 32, V). Several respondents (Author's interviews with 9, SP; 78 V) mentioned the questionable moral values of NGO leaders as a reason for their negative views of local NGOs. Some believed only leaders, considered self-centred, were benefiting from grants (Author's interviews with 35, V; 76, V; 9, SP; 38, V). This implies unresponsiveness to citizens, as a woman put bluntly, "NGOs should represent the population and be responsible to the citizens, but they are not" (Author's interview with 77, P). Of the leaders of our case studies, the only one who had gained respect locally was the leader of Women's Centre Užice, who had a track record of activism stretching back to socialist times and whose organisation made visible contributions to the local community. Very few respondents were either involved or received invitations to participate in NGO activities.

In contrast to popular perceptions, the NGO leaders interviewed claimed to be open and willing to reach out to recruit new members. In response to the question about how they do that, leaders stated that they usually gave out flyers, offered workshops, or organised street protests. They admitted no clear strategy was ever used for citizen feedback. One leader questioned the usefulness of citizen feedback, arguing citizens are "overly suspicious" and reluctant to change.[19] Consistent with Sperling (2006), the leaders of women's NGOs were not effectively building a domestic constituency. Women's Centre Užice, which used social and conventional media, and Women of the South, whose leaders were journalists, were slightly more open and active in their communication than the other women's organisations (Table 4, column 5).

Due to financial uncertainty, leaders scramble to diversify sources of funding to survive.[20] The difficult socio-economic environment in Serbia hindered the ability of NGOs to be open to citizens and to focus on local issues. It also discouraged Serb participation in NGOs and profoundly affected citizens preferred activities for NGOs.

Conclusions and suggestions for further research

Our investigation suggests that women's and local NGOs in Serbia were more likely to gain public acceptance when they demonstrated through words and deeds how their goals and activities were not simply consistent with locally resonant norms but also met local priorities.

Serbian citizens consider improving the socio-economic situation for society as a whole as the priority problem they wanted NGOs to address. This flowed from the norm of helping those vulnerable. If "well-meaning people use money for basic community needs" (Author's interview with 48, U) and improve living conditions, then citizens would support them. The increased support that Serbians gave to several service-based grass-roots actions initiated after our fieldwork, including those assisting victims of floods, rising heating prices, and refugees (USAID 2015, 219) further bolsters our argument.

The women's NGO that obtained slightly more public acceptance than others did the best at combining the locally resonant norms of helping the most socially vulnerable and against bodily harm, with clearly communicating goals, and producing impact on the broader population. This was Women's Center Užice, whose activities included helping women generate income and engaging youth in an award-winning project of the design and sale of recycled clothing (Dobitnici nagrade 2015) (Table 4). Framing these activities as "improving quality of community life" and following this frame with impactful activities tied them better to citizens than the other case NGOs.

Nonetheless, Serbian citizens believed NGOs generally worked on issues that were of a low priority and often abstract, failed to address core socio-economic problems, or affected a narrow segment of the population. Citizens' perceptions that a lack of clear communication with, openness to, and understanding of citizens and their priorities suggests that NGOs' framing of their goals and activities often fails to resonate locally. These perceptions also help explain why Serbian citizens do not see NGOs as more worthy of trust than the opaque government, as Marinova found in East Central Europe. These sentiments apply more strongly to the work of NGOs in general than to women's NGOs, about which Serbs new little. Generally, NGOs in Serbia are Janus-faced, feeling compelled to please external donors, who push work on abstract ideas like democratisation,[21] while struggling to respond to the needs of their local constituencies, whom they are supposed to serve. This promoted a relationship in which NGOs worked *over* not *with* citizens.

Simply delivering results and messages to local communities (Ker-Lindsay 2013, 264) is not enough for Serbian NGOs to move beyond this. Instead, Serbian NGOs would need to better listen to citizens and focus their work and the frames of their work on locally resonant norms and on associated socio-economically oriented priority concerns of citizens that are clearly communicated and demonstrated to people. Some fear that NGOs' attention to "uncontroversial", socio-economic concerns could detract from efforts to strengthen democracy. Ker-Lindsay (2013, 262) suggests a compromise of ending donors' prioritisation of rights-based groups over service-based organisations with the conditioning of aid to rights-based groups on their engagement with service-based organisations. Somewhat differently, our research suggests prioritisation of NGO responsiveness to pressing socio-economic needs and community welfare norms of citizens could more effectively build trust in and habits of democratic activism, broadly defined.

Our research raises questions that merit further attention. Conducting observation of the planning, implementation, and assessment of activities of women's and local NGOs would encourage a deeper understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of NGO approaches to the public. To complement in-depth observation, a nationally representative survey of citizens' norms, priority concerns, and attitudes towards NGOs active in different sectors and with different goals should be conducted both in Serbia and in

other post-socialist countries. An experiment that systematically varies the content of the frame that NGOs working in the same sector might use could identify those frames that best resonate with local norms. Further research will refine the activities, norms, and outreach Western-funded NGOs could adopt to become more rooted in Serbian and post-socialist communities.

Notes

1. This echoes early female communists', including those who fought in the Second World War, criticisms of feminism as an import from the West (Jancar 1985). Such a view was promoted by the Communist Party (Batinić 2015, 83–86). For more on feminists who organised in Belgrade in 1980 and addressed issues such as class and gender equality, feminism, and rape as a weapon, see Mlađenović (1992) and Feministicke sveske 1-2 (1990).
2. Grodeland invited 10 people to attend each of 10 focus group discussions in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Užice, Požarevac, and Bujanovac. Of the 10 citizens invited, half had prior contact with NGOs.
3. Sundstrom (2005, 423–424) measures the success of NGOs in Russia by their ability to change public policy or society and by the extent of public awareness of and support for them. The focus of this article is on the latter two measures.
4. On a measure of attitudes toward gender equality expressed in nationally representative sample surveys, Serbs were more likely (63%) than Russians (45%) to disagree with the statement that "On the whole, men make better business executives than women do" (World Values Survey 2005).
5. Approximately 46% of Serbia's citizens live in towns with populations between 10,000 and 77,000.
6. The dearth of women's organisations active in medium-sized towns and effort to control for other factors compelled us to select towns with a wider variation in population than intended. Because the women's organisation in one town originally selected did not respond to multiple requests for information, we selected Smederevska Palanka, the smallest of our cases.
7. There are potential shortcomings to this approach of interviewing people on the street. To avoid biased selection, we attempted to interview every third passer-by, approached only individuals, and tried to balance age and gender. It is possible that people with strong views on NGOs – negative or positive – may be more likely to volunteer their views. Analysis shows that our interviewees were more likely to be college educated (27% of respondents had college degrees compared to 10.6% of the Serbian population) and slightly more likely to be unemployed than the Serbian population. Older people were not over-represented in the sample. More than one half of those approached, without knowing the topic, refused to stop to talk.
8. Because street noise made five interview recordings in Smederevska Palanka incomprehensible, the total number of usable interviews was 95. For the interview questionnaire, see Supplemental Material. We analysed interview testimony with the help of excel, which allowed us to systematically code the interview data. On a randomly selected sample, an intercoder reliability check found 91.2% agreement among different coders.
9. One of the authors was an activist in local, including women's, NGOs in the 1990s, which provides her with unique insight on the evolution of NGOs in Serbia, the challenges they face, and the attitudes of Serbian citizens toward NGOs.
10. Most interviews lasted about 15 min. Though the questionnaire was pre-tested five times, we received feedback from interviewees about the wording, which may have inadvertently generated negative feelings. For example, upon hearing the question about NGOs' impact on civil society (*građansko društvo*), one respondent in a joking manner wondered if NGOs' ultimate goal was to turn people in rural areas into "urbanites", meaning more valued inhabitants of a country. The meaning of "građanski" can be urban, civil, or citizen. This response suggests class divisions between relatively more decently paid civil society workers and Serbian people. See also Mikuš (2015).

11. Though our numbers are small both due to our small sample size and to the limited number of respondents who knew about local women's organisations (12 women and 10 men), 28% of women and no men expressed positive views.

12. Grødeland (2006) found that focus group participants in Bosnia (44%) and in Macedonia (57%) expressed more positive views towards NGOs than participants in Serbia (29%). Ideally, we would have cross-national data on the views of NGOs in general to evaluate how Serbian responses compare to the answers of citizens in other European and North American countries. Unfortunately, we are not aware of these data. However, nationally representative sample surveys consistently show higher levels of membership in voluntary organisations among Americans and Europeans than East Europeans (World Values Survey 2005–2009; Howard 2002, 157–169). Surveys in the US indicate just under 70% of Americans formally belong to a social group (Putnam 2000). Fifty six per cent of Americans view activity in social or political organisations as important component of what it takes to be a good citizen (Smith et al. 2014).

13. Though Marinova uses respondents' concern with corruption and relative economic situations as measures of distrust of formal institutions, the World Values Survey in Serbia lacked these indicators. Instead, we used trust in civil service, which is a more direct measure of trust in formal political institutions, not confounded by trust in the ruling parties as are views of the government, and likely tied to concern with corruption, and the amount of personal savings as an indicator of the output of formal political institutions. Marchenko found that his measure of confidence in domestic political institutions, which was comprised of a combination of respondents' confidence in parliament, government, and political parties (2016, 16), was not correlated with civic activity in Serbia. A Likelihood Ratio test reveals that the effect of having no trust in civil service on no trust in women's organisations is significant at the 0.01 level.

14. Before doing fieldwork, we hypothesised that one measure of the organic nature of NGOs could be connections to socialist-era citizens associations. Interviews with women's NGOs' leaders did not support this hypothesis. In this article, we discuss the impact of the other measure of the organic nature of Serbian NGOs that we proposed prior to fieldwork – NGO leaders and members themselves determining their goals and activities.

15. To protect the identity of respondents, we use a code to refer to them.

16. While we have some concern that social desirability affected the responses of citizens to questions of rights and treatment of women, the variation in responses – including this last one that implies frustration with special attention to women – suggests that respondents replied candidly to these questions.

17. Statistical analysis of the survey in Serbia (Table 3) did not find that ideological views of respondents explain varying levels of support for women's organisations. The lack of correlation makes sense in a party system that is even weaker in South Eastern than in East Central Europe.

18. Mikuš' (2015, 53) study of Serbian organisations' efforts to engage in local fundraising found that a youth NGO's activists reduced suspicion and encouraged support of their actions to clean a rubbish dump by emphasising their common roots, identity and interests with villagers. They did this through their outreach and their work together with locals to clean.

19. NGO leaders' confidence in their ability to decide what is "good for the population" reminded us of Communist officials' confidence in their ability to decide what is "good for the population", perhaps reflecting the hubris of both sets of leaders towards citizens.

20. It was difficult to gather precise information on particular donors' funding of the women's organisations. No evidence suggests that the women's organisations we studied had substantially different financial resources. We intend to gather these data to investigate the proposition that NGOs with the most diversified set of donors and/or more domestic donors are more responsive to citizens' needs than those reliant on one or a few foreign donors. Association "Women of the South" (Pirot) had the largest and most diversified set of donors.

21. The authors owe this insight to Val Bunce.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

Notes on contributors

Sladjana Danković's research focuses on evaluating efforts to improve public health outcomes in Serbia and South Eastern Europe. She has also led and volunteered for several non-governmental organisations in Serbia. She received a Master's degree in Public Health from George Washington University.

Paula M. Pickering's research focuses on peacebuilding, the impact on international aid for democratisation, and ethnic politics in South Eastern Europe. She is currently conducting research in South Eastern Europe and in Uganda on efforts to improve the quality of local democratic governance, which is funded by Evidence in Politics and Governance. A recent book chapter is "Local governance in Bosnia: addressing both ethno-nationally and locally defined interests?" in Y. Hashamova and T. Dragostinova, eds., *Beyond Mosque, Church, and State: Alternative Narratives of the Nation,* Budapest: Central European University Press, January 2016, pp. 287–311. Her book, *Peacebuilding in the Balkans: The View from the Ground Floor*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, was published in 2007. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Michigan.

References

Alvarez, S. 1999. "Advocating Feminism: The Latin American Feminist NGO 'Boom'." *International Feminist Journal of Politics,* 1 (2): 181–209.

"B92 fund to build safe house in southern town". 2013. Beta, 15 March, 16.

Batinić, J. 2015. *Women and Yugoslav Partisans.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, K. 2009. "Do We Know How Yet? Insider Perspectives on International Democracy Promotion in the Western Balkans." NCEEER Working Paper. Seattle. Accessed May 30, 2012. http://nceeer.org/papers.html&hash;2009.

Bunce, V. 2015. "Political Transition." In *Central and East European Politics: From Communism to Democracy*, edited by S. L. Wolchik and J. L. Curry, 3rd ed., 43–65. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Carothers, T. 1999. *Aiding Democracy Abroad.* Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Centar za istraživanje, transparentnost i odgovornost (CRTA) [Centre for research, transparency, and accountability]. 2015. "Javno Mnjenje o učešću gradjana u demokratskim procesima u Srbiji 2015. Godine" [Public opinion on the participation of citizens in democratic processes in Serbia in 2015]. September 2015. http://www.crta.rs/uploads/documents/2015-09-15&per;2013:50:51_a_47_l_rs_doc.pdf.

Collins, K. 2007. "Ideas, Networks and Islamic Movements: Evidence from Central Asia and the Caucasus." *World Politics* 60 (1): 64–96.

Cooley, A., and J. Ron. 2002. "The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action." *International Security* 27 (1): 5–39.

"Dobitnici nagrade Aurea 2015 Nagrada za izvestiju godine". 2015. http://www.aurea.rs/view.php?id=1.

Einhorn, B., and C. Sever. 2003. "Gender and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 5 (2): 163–190.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and World Bank. 2010. "Life in Transition II, datafile." http://www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/economic-research-and-data/data/lits.html.

Fagan, A., and I. Sircar. 2015. *Europeanization of The Western Balkans: Environmental Governance in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Feministicke sveske 1-2. 1990. "Autonomni ženski centar, Beograd".

Ghodsee, K. 2004. "Feminism-by-Design: Emerging Capitalisms, Cultural Feminism and Women's Non-Governmental Organisations in Post-Socialist Eastern Europe." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29 (3): 727–753.

Građanske Iniciajative. 2009. *Percepcija i stavovi javnosti o nevladinom sektoru u Srbiji u 2009. Godini* [Perceptions and public views of the non-governmental sector in Serbia in 2009]. Belgrade: Građanske Iniciajative. http://www.gradjanske.org/page/civilSocietyDevelopement/sr/center/publications.html.

Greenberg, J. 2010. "'There's Nothing Anyone Can Do about It': Participation, Apathy, and 'Successful' Democratic Transition in Postsocialist Serbia." *Slavic Review* 69 (1): 41–64.

Grødeland, A. B. 2006. "Public Perception of Non-Governmental Organizations in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39 (2): 221–246.

Hawthorne, A. 2005. "Is Civil Society the Answer?" In *Unchartered Journey: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East*, edited by T. Carothers and M. Ottaway, 81–113. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Helms, E. 2014. "Movementization of NGOs? Women's Organizing in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina." In *Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies: Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminisms, and Neoliberalism*, edited by V. Bernal and I. Grewal, 21–49. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books.

Hemment, J. 2007. *Empowering Women in Russia: Activism, Aid, and NGOs*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Henderson, S. 2000. "Importing Civil Society: Western Funding and the Women's Movement in Russia." *Demokratizatsiya* 8 (1): 56–82.

Howard, I. 2011. *Mistakes Donors Make: Civil Society and Democracy Assistance in the Balkans.* Belgrade: Agency for EU Integration and Civil Society Cooperation.

Howard, I. 2012. "Unfinished Business: Civil Society." In *Unfinished Business: The Western Balkans and the International Community*, edited by V. Dzihic and D. Hamilton, 35–47. Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University SAIS Center for Transatlantic Relations. http://transatlantic.sais-jhu.edu/publications/Unfinished%20Business.

Howard, M. M. 2002. "The Weakness of Postcommunist Civil Society." *Journal of Democracy* 13 (1): 157–169.

Irvine, J. A. 2013. "Leveraging Change." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 15 (1): 20–38.

Jancar, B. 1985. "The New Feminism in Yugoslavia." In *Yugoslavia in the 1980s*, edited by P. Ramet, 201–220. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Jepperson, R., A. Wendt, and P. J. Katzenstein. 1996. "Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security." In *The Culture of National Security*, edited by P. J. Katzenstein, 33–75. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kandis, S. 2004. "Deportation to Democratization: The role of an Authentic NGO in Romania." *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 46 (1–2): 185–194.

Ker-Lindsay, J. 2013. "Conclusion." In *Civil Society and Transitions in the Western Balkans. New Perspectives on South-East Europe*, edited by V. Bojicic-Dzelilovic, J. Ker-Lindsay, and D. Kostovicova, 157–164. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kostovicova, D., and V. Bojicic-Dzelilovic. 2013. "Introduction: Civil Society and Multiple Transitions-Meanings, Actors, and Effects." In *Civil Society and Transitions in the Western Balkans. New Perspectives on South-East Europe*, edited by V. Bojicic-Dzelilovic, J. Ker-Lindsay, and D. Kostovicova, 1–25. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kraft, M. G. 2015. "Insurrections in the Balkans: From Workers and Students to New Political Subjectivities." In *Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism*, edited by I. Štiks and S. Horvat, 199–222. London: Verso.

Križan, M. 1989. "Civil Society: The New Paradigm in the Yugoslav Theoretical Discussion." *Praxis International* 9 (1–2): 152–163.

Marchenko, A. 2016. "Civic Activities in Eastern Europe: Links with Democratic Political Culture." *East European Politics* 32 (1): 12–27. doi:10.1080/21599165.2015.1130698.

Marinova, D. M. 2011. "When Government Fails Us: Trust in Post-Socialist Civil Society Organisations." *Democratization* 18 (1): 160–183.

McAdam, D., J. McCarthy, and M. Zald, eds. 1996. *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Merry, S. E. 2006a. *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

Merry, S. E. 2006b. "Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle." *American Anthropologist* 108 (1): 38–51.

Mikuš, M. 2015. "Indigenizing 'Civil Society' in Serbia: What Local Fundraising Reveals about Class and Trust." *Focaal- Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 71: 43–56.

Mishler, W., and R. Rose. 1997. "Trust, Distrust and Skepticism: Popular Evaluations of Civil and Political Institutions in Post-Communist Societies." *Journal of Politics* 59 (2): 418–451.

Mlađenović, L. 1992. "Poceci Feminizma" [Beginnings of Feminism], Autonomni ženski centar Beograd. http://www.womenngo.org.rs/zenski-pokret/istorija-zenskog-pokreta/217-poceci-feminizma-zenski-pokret-u-beogradu-zagrebu-ljubljani.

Morača, T. 2016. "Between Defiance and Compliance: A New Civil Society in the Post-Yugoslav Space?" *Osservatorio balcani e caucaso*, Occasional Paper 2, August, www.balcanicaucaso.org.

Mreža žene protiv nasilja [Network "Women Against Violence]. www.zeneprotivnasilja.net.

Mungiu-Pippidi, A. 2010. "When Europeanization Meets Transformation." In *Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Post-Communist World*, edited by V. Bunce, M. McFaul, and K. Stoner-Weiss, 59–81. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nikolić-Ristanović, V. 2002. *Social Change, Gender and Violence*. Vol. 10. Belgrade: Social Indicators Research Series.

Obradović-Wochnik, J. 2013. "Serbian Civil Society as an Exclusionary Space: NGOs, the Public, and 'Coming to Terms with the Past'." In *Civil Society and Transitions in the Western Balkans. New Perspectives on South-East Europe*, edited by V. Bojicic-Dzelilovic, J. Ker-Lindsay, and D. Kostovicova, 210–229. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

O'Brennan, J. 2013. "The European Commission, Enlargement Policy and Civil Society in the Western Balkans." In *Civil Society and Transitions in the Western Balkans. New Perspectives on South-East Europe*, edited by V. Bojicic-Dzelilovic, J. Ker-Lindsay, and D. Kostovicova, 29–46. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Petrova, T., and S. Tarrow. 2007. "Transactional and Participatory Activism in the Emerging European Polity: The Puzzle of East-Central Europe." *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (1): 74–94.

Pickering, P. M. 2006. "Generating Social Capital for Bridging Ethnic Divisions in the Balkans: The Case of Two Bosniak Cities." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29 (1): 79–103.

Pusić, V. 1992. "A Country by Any Other Name: Transition and Stability in Croatia and Yugoslavia." *East European Politics and Societies* 6 (3): 242–259.

Putnam, R. 2000. *Bowling Alone*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Ramet, S. 2002. *Balkan Babel*. 4th ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Republika Srbija. 2011. "*Stanovništvo prema nacionalnoj pripadnosti* [Population according to national belonging]. Republički zavod za statistiku, 2014, http://webrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/Public/ReportResultView.aspx?rptId=1210.

Richter, J. 2002. "Evaluating Western Assistance to Russian Women's Organisations." In *The Power and Limits of NGOs*, edited by S. Mendelson and J. Glenn, 54–90. New York: Columbia University Press.

Sali-Terzić, S. 2001. "Civil Society." In *Policies of International Support to South-Eastern European Countries: Lessons (Not) Learnt from Bosnia and Herzegovina*, edited by Ž. Papić, 138–159. Sarajevo: Open Society Institute.

Smith, T. W., P. Marsden, M. Hout, and J. Kim. 2014. *General Social Survey, 2014* [*Machine-readable Data File*]; *Sponsored by National Science Foundation*. Chicago, IL: NORC at the University of Chicago.

Sperling, V. 2006. "Women's Organisations: Institutional Interest Groups or Vulnerable Dissidents?" In *Russian Civil Society: A Critical Assessment*, edited by A. B. Evans, L. A. Henry, and L. M. Sundstrom, 161–177. Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe.

Stubbs, P. 2012. "Networks, Organisations, Movements: Narratives and Shapes of Three Waves of Activism in Croatia." *Polemos* 15 (2): 12–32.

Sundstrom, L. M. 2005. "Foreign Assistance, International Norms and NGO Development: Lessons from Russian Campaign." *International Organization* 59 (2): 419–449.

Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations (TACSO). 2016. "2016 CSO Needs Assessment Report: Serbia." May, http://www.tacso.org/documents/reports/Archive.aspx?template_id= 73&langTag=en-US&pageIndex=1.

US Agency for International Development (USAID). 2015. *The 2015 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*. Washington, DC: Bureau for Europe and Eurasia, Technical Support Office, Democracy and Governance Division. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/ documents/1861/Europe_Eurasia_CSOSIReport_2015_Update8-29-16.pdf.

Venneri, G. 2013. "A Practitioner's Perspective." In *Civil Society and Transitions in the Western Balkans. New Perspectives on South-East Europe*, edited by V. Bojicic-Dzelilovic, J. Ker-Lindsay, and D. Kostovicova, 85–92. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

World Values Survey Wave 5. 2005–2008. "Official Aggregate v.20140429." World Values Survey Association (www.worldvaluessurvey.org). Aggregate File Producer: ASEP/JDS, Madrid.

Ženski Centar Užice. 2012. *12 godina zalaganja za ekonomsko osnazivanje zena* [12 years of promoting the economic strengthening of women]. Užice: Foto Zvezda.

Žeravčić, G. 2008. "Analysis of the Civil Sector Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina." In *Civil Society*, 65–149. Sarajevo: Kronauer Consulting.

Appendix 1. Coding of variables used in Table 3 (World Values Survey 2005).

Dependent variables: Lack of trust in women's organisations; lack of trust in humanitarian organisations	1 = trust a great deal, 2 = trust quite a lot, 3 = don't trust very much, 4 = no trust
Lack of trust in civil service	1 = trust a great deal, 2 = trust quite a lot, 3 = don't trust very much, 4 = no trust
Lack of savings	1 = save money, 2 = just get by, 3 = spend some savings and borrowed money, 4 = spent savings and borrowed money
Lack of pride in nationality	1 = very proud of nationality, 2 = quite proud, 3 = not very proud, 4 = not at all proud
Non-religious	1 = attend religious institution more than once/week, 2 = attend once a week, 3 = attend monthly, 4 = attend on holy days, 5 = attend once a year, 6 = attend less than once a year, 7 = never attend
Interest in politics	0 = not at all interested in politics, 1 = not very interested in politics; 2 = somewhat interested, and 3 = very interested in politics
Gender	0 = if female; 1 = if male
Settlement type	If reside in a town: 1 = <2000; 2 = 2000–4999; 3 = 5–9999; 4 = 10–19,999; 5 = 20–49,999; 6 = 50–99,999; 7 = 100–499,999; 8 = ≥500,000
Age group	1 = if 18–28, 2 = 29–40, 3 = 41–53, 4 = 54–65, 5 = older than 65
Education	1 = none, 2 = some primary, 3 = complete primary, 4 = some secondary technical, 5 = complete secondary technical, 6 = some secondary university prep, 7 = complete secondary university prep, 8 = some university education, 9 = completed university
Political ideology	Self-placement of political views on a scale of 1 = left to 10 = right