



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Spillover Monitor
Mission to Skopje

Assessment of Intra-Municipal Relations and the Role of Neighborhood Self Government

Commissioned by
OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This assessment was designed to support the country's decentralization process and to promote growth in self determination by exploring the potential to strengthen neighborhood self-government. It is unique in that it provides nationwide, objective, statistically valid data on the citizen's perspective of neighborhood and municipal government. Recommendations are tailored to respond to citizen expectations within the current cultural and political context, given that implementation of decentralized local government is scheduled to begin in 2005.

Neighborhood government, an institutionalized form of citizen participation retained from the former Yugoslavia remains prevalent throughout the country, and principally serves as a communications conduit between citizens of all ethnic groups and their municipalities. Neighborhood government performs a particularly crucial function in rural areas, where it serves more than 70% of the population and is the institution responsible for resolving a large number of community issues.

Citizens with neighborhood government – just over half of the population - think their neighborhood government is much more aware of their everyday problems than their municipal government. In that only a quarter of those polled in this survey think that their municipality is aware of their problems, citizens clearly feel that municipal government is not listening to them. This communication gap between citizens and their local governments is greatest in urban areas, and particularly in the Skopje region - areas without neighborhood governments.

Data from this research demonstrate that there is a high correlation among active neighborhood government, higher levels of participation in the governing process, higher trust in local government (both neighborhood and municipal), and greater willingness to pay fees for local improvements. And, despite low levels of trust in local government, those polled show a remarkable willingness to be actively involved, and overwhelmingly agree that citizens can influence change at the local level. These findings demonstrate considerable potential for increased levels of self determination and citizen participation. It is evident that the citizens want change, want their problems solved, and are willing to participate in resolving local issues.

Neighborhood self-government, if strengthened, can assist newly decentralized municipalities in resolving citizen concerns and in providing minimal service delivery. ZELS, the organization of units of local self-government, should consider establishing a devolution committee to share best practices among Mayors concerning the devolution of services and activities to neighborhood government. ZELS should also consider setting up an organization for neighborhood presidents to share best practices, receive training, and enhance communication with Mayors.

There is a significant gap between the 60% of those polled who claim they are willing to participate in resolving local problems and the no more than 15% who claim that they currently participate in local activities, indicating a lack of motivation to actually

participate. The survey produced data that identify the areas in which citizens wish to participate and in what manner they wish to participate. This information provides a blueprint from which to design and implement innovative programs to motivate citizens to become involved in the governing process.

1. Introduction

Participation in local decision making, or citizen participation, is an essential element of a successfully decentralized system of democratic local government. Throughout the country, there is the potential to increase citizen participation in governing by building on an existing participatory institution - neighborhood self government - which has received minimal attention from the international donor community.

International donor programs, such as USAID's Community Self Help Initiative and the World Bank's Community Development Project have implemented community projects in cooperation with neighborhood governments. There has been however, no systematic program to engage neighborhood governments and their citizens in the governing process.

There has been little information on neighborhood governments' current activities - to what extent they provide services or are perceived by citizens as representing their interests - or on their role in intra-municipal decision making, and, it has not been known whether this form of citizen participation actually engages citizens more or less effectively than other participatory processes.

A common perception is that citizen participation is limited and that interventions are required to encourage citizen participation in local decision making. These include interventions by the donor community, such as the creation and support of citizen committees, NGOs, and other civic associations; support for public hearings and meetings; and the inclusion of participatory processes in the implementation of donor funded development projects – what is known as “participatory development”.

There is considerable anecdotal information on citizen participation, and a number of surveys have been conducted on citizens' opinions on various issues, but there appears to be no objective data concerning citizens' perception of their role in the local decision making process.

Neighborhood government has the potential to serve as a sustainable, demand driven form of citizen participation, complementing the occasional public hearing organized by a municipality or a civic organization. The history of neighborhood self government and of self assessment or self contribution at the neighborhood or local level in the country demonstrate a willingness on the part of the citizen to participate both in decision making and in financing of improvements at the local level.

2. Survey Objectives and Methodology

This project was designed to support the country's decentralization process and promote growth in self determination by exploring the potential to increase citizen participation in local decision making. The research has focused on the opportunity to build

neighborhood self government and to determine to what extent it remains a viable institution and is perceived by citizens as representative of their interests.

Neighborhood self government was a Yugoslav institution and the fundamental building block of the socialist governing system. Though this level of neighborhood organization still exists throughout the country and continues to be authorized by municipal statute, little has been known of its prevalence, level of activity, or of citizen perception of its role or potential.

Specifically, the objectives of this project are:

- to determine the prevalence of neighborhood self government;
- to measure current levels of citizen participation;
- to explore relations between citizens and the municipal and neighborhood levels of government;
- to survey the willingness of current Mayors to devolve activities to the neighborhood level, and;
- to determine the willingness of citizens to participate in resolving problems in their neighborhood or municipality.

Recommendations in this report to improve local government, increase citizen participation, and strengthen neighborhood government are designed to be politically, practicably, and financially feasible within the current context in the country.

The research consists of two national surveys: a quantitative survey of 1029 randomly selected citizens, and a qualitative, in-depth survey of 30 Mayors (representing a good portion of the 80 municipalities which will likely remain municipalities after the proposed territorial organization), and 22 presidents of neighborhood councils.

The quantitative survey that was conducted is different from other polls. The survey had only one multiple choice question. No other questions on this poll requested answers which were prompted by the interviewer. All other questions required a yes or no response, an opinion rating on a scale of 1 to 5, or an “open ended” response where the person interviewed provides the entire answer. In using this technique, the goal of this survey was to be as objective as possible and to let the respondent speak freely about what he/she thinks about local government and about citizen involvement at the local level. What is revealed in these data is that, when citizens speak their minds, they are optimistic, display little cynicism, and rarely speak negatively or complain about politics.

On the survey, which was conducted in person by experienced interviewers, citizens were asked about their awareness of, their experience with, and their willingness to participate in specific types of citizen participation activities. They are not asked about citizen participation generally or theoretically, such that they would respond based on their own definition of citizen participation; they are asked to focus on citizen participation from a personal and from a neighborhood perspective.

The survey has produced nationwide data on the extent to which citizens find neighborhood and municipal government representative of their interests, and a current or potential provider of local services; the degree to which citizens are aware of opportunities to participate (public meetings; hearings; neighborhood, community, NGO or association meetings, etc); whether citizens have participated in specific activities; and, whether they have an interest to be active, and, if so, in what manner. Data are statistically valid for the country as a whole, and by region, and through cross tabulations by gender, ethnicity, urban or rural areas, level of education, perceived standard of living, and employment.

The qualitative survey contains many of the same questions as the quantitative survey, and allows comparison of citizens' perspectives with those of Mayors and neighborhood council presidents. It probed more deeply into their perspectives of citizen participation and of the role of the neighborhood government in relation to the municipality, providing data for a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of various forms of citizen participation.

Mayors were interviewed to determine their attitude toward neighborhood government and their willingness to devolve particular activities to council presidents under the 2002 local self government law.

Mayors were asked many of the same questions asked of citizens so that a comparative review of citizen participation activities can be made between the quantitative and the qualitative results. Mayors were asked specific questions about municipal relationships with citizens and with neighborhood councils: the number and types of meetings and what is discussed, and whether the interactions are useful. Mayors were also asked whether and what services can be effectively devolved to neighborhood governments, and what neighborhood governments could do to assist Mayors in carrying out their municipal functions.

Although all the Mayors who were interviewed will either stand for re-election or leave office in October 2004, each has over three years' tenure in the job and an experienced perspective on the role of citizen participation and on neighborhood government in the governing process. Their insights and advice should be helpful to incoming Mayors, to the national government and to the donor community.

While the surveys of citizens and of Mayors are statistically valid, the survey of neighborhood presidents provides only anecdotal information. In that there are no data on the number of neighborhood governments in the country, whether they are urban or rural, or the extent to which they are active, it is not possible to create a representative sample of neighborhood governments from which to obtain objective data. Neighborhood presidents who were interviewed were not chosen randomly and in a manner such that they represent neighborhood presidents throughout the country. They were selected to represent as broad a sample as possible, but were chosen based on recommendations from interviewers and from field workers for donor projects. Only active neighborhood presidents were interviewed in an effort to determine those elements which contribute to

the successful operation of neighborhood government.

In preparation for this research, a number of interviews were conducted over a two week period in May 2004 with government, municipal and neighborhood government officials, and with international donors involved in local government activities. Information obtained from these interviews was extremely helpful in the development of the qualitative and the quantitative questionnaires. A local survey firm, SMMRI was retained to conduct field research during a three week period in May and June.

3. Background: Neighborhood self government

The 2002 Law on Local Self Government contains a number of provisions which address the relationship between municipalities and their citizens. Articles which authorize or regulate citizen participation are Article 55 (Committee for Inter – Community Relations), Article 56 (Consumers’ Council), Article 8 (on Informing the Public), and Articles 25 to 30 (on forms of citizen participation).

Article 114 of the Constitution states that, “Municipalities are units of local self-government. Within municipalities forms of neighborhood self-government may be established.”

Neighborhood self government is discussed in Articles 82 through 86 of the Law on Local Self Government. Neighborhood self government serves as a forum for citizen gatherings to ... “review issues, take positions, and prepare proposals...” (Article 83), and the Mayor of a municipality “...may delegate the performance of certain activities...” to the president of the neighborhood council (Article 86). Article 83 speaks to neighborhood self government’s role as a representative of citizen interests, while Article 86 acknowledges neighborhood self government’s role as a potential service provider.

In the former Yugoslavia, neighborhood government was the fundamental building block of the socialist system, and was used to provide services, organize citizens and as a conduit to communicate up and down the system of government. Though neighborhood governments were not dismantled, most were effectively rendered impotent when, under the 1995 Law on Local Self Government, they were required to turn their facilities and properties over to municipalities. They have survived it appears, for the most part, to represent neighborhood concerns to the municipality.

Under the territorial realignment proposed in 2004, the number of municipalities will be reduced from 123 to 80 (33 urban and 37 rural municipalities; the City of Skopje, with 10 proposed municipalities having a separate status). The smaller municipalities which will be absorbed into larger municipalities under this new law will likely become neighborhood governments. Article 86 will then allow these new governments to continue their current activities as devolved activities, but it also allows Mayors to devolve activities to presidents of current neighborhood governments.

Neighborhood governments have historically had the authority, through municipal statutes that regulate their activities, to provide a variety of services or to perform a number of these “certain activities” referred to in Article 86. These services or activities as listed in indicative municipal statutes include:

- Resolving issues related to communal/utility/infrastructure services;
- Maintaining facilities such as water supply, streets, cultural facilities, sports facilities/sports grounds, etc;
- Protection of the environment;
- Regulating and maintaining cemeteries in rural or suburban areas;
- Starting an initiative to regulate the surrounding area;
- Organizing cultural, sports, entertainment, and other forms of events; and,
- Putting forward proposals and initiatives before the appropriate authorities of the municipality, especially when it comes to issues related to education, health care, social protection and other issues which are of interest to citizens/residents.

Neighborhood governments may also collect funds (permitted under separate legislation) and organize labor within the neighborhood. Some citizens recall the construction of water supply systems through the assessment of fees from local residents following a successful local initiative to undertake the project. Municipalities also, have raised funds through initiatives.

Municipal statutes also regulate the non-partisan elections of neighborhood councils. The council members elect a president who convenes meetings of council and meetings of citizens, and represents the neighborhood in meetings with the Mayor of the municipality.

The structure of neighborhood government is standard across the country, though the roles of individual governments varies depending on the level of citizen activism, quality of leadership at the local and municipal level, and on financial conditions. Currently, many neighborhood governments maintain bank accounts for the minimal funding they receive from municipalities, generally for expenses. For example, Novo Selo, a village in Kumanovo, receives 100 euros per year from the municipality.

Members of neighborhood councils are volunteers and those interviewed claim they rarely receive complete reimbursement for expenses incurred in executing their responsibilities. They are well acquainted with local social and infrastructure needs, and most often, especially in rural areas, in addition to basic services such as water, cite the need for a park or playground, or a civic center for youth, the elderly, or community meetings. They claim they give the neighborhood “a voice”, and as “not every citizen can meet with the Mayor, they represent the citizens to the Mayor in regular meetings. Many neighborhood governments, as is the case often with municipalities, note the lack of funding for improvements and services.

The country’s local government system is a “strong mayor” system, where executive authority and the ability to appoint all municipal employees are vested in one position. This concentration of power can be used to actively involve neighborhood governments

and citizens in decision making, or a Mayor can choose to not involve citizens or to devolve any activities to the president of the neighborhood council.

The quality of mayoral leadership appears to be a major factor in citizen attitude toward participating, and the level of citizen participation, as illustrated by two examples from opposite extremes: the municipality of Kumanovo, and the municipality of Cucher Sandovo, outside of Skopje.

The Municipality of Kumanovo, with a population of 103,000 according to the most recent census, is the second largest city in the country. It has a mixed ethnic population consisting of 59% Macedonians, 26% Albanians, and 14% other. Kumanovo has 47 neighborhood self governments, of which 30 are urban, 13 are suburban, and four are rural. In what is apparently a unique situation, the municipal administration in Kumanovo employs a staff member who maintains relations with the neighborhood governments and coordinates activities with the City Council's Commission on Neighborhoods.

The Mayor of Kumanovo has a reputation for encouraging citizen participation in his community. His staff member explained that the majority of neighborhood governments in Kumanovo have good communications with the Mayor, and that the municipality finds them helpful in that they know the problems and they represent the most direct voice of the citizens. The president of Novo Selo, a Serbian village and neighborhood government in Kumanovo says that he travels to the municipality approximately twice a month to meet with the Mayor and discuss village issues.

4. Key findings

4.1 Neighborhood Self Government

The research reveals that neighborhood government, despite losing most of its property and funding in the mid 90's still exists and remains familiar to most citizens, especially in the rural areas. It continues to function as a communications vehicle and has the potential, if strengthened to function as a unit of self determination.

- Over 50% percent of those polled say they have neighborhood government and almost 70% of citizens living in rural areas say they have neighborhood government.
- Neighborhood government is common to all ethnic groups.
- The disparity in distribution of neighborhood governments is an urban/rural disparity and a regional split between the Skopje region and the rest of the country. There are no ethnic distinctions in the distribution or prevalence of neighborhood government.
- Neighborhood governments are most active in providing initiatives and in supporting infrastructure and environmental projects.
- A significant number of issues in rural municipalities are solved at the neighborhood level upon the initiative of the neighborhood government.

Though the country is small, it is quite diverse. This diversity however, is not so much an ethnic diversity as it is a regional, urban/rural, or likely, a socio-economic diversity. Residents of rural areas have a much stronger sense of neighborhood than those living in urban areas. They also have a considerably greater number of neighborhood governments (72%) than those in urban areas (48%).

The Skopje region, one quarter of the population and which is 78% urban, is significantly different from the rest of the country. Much of the difference is attributable to its status as a major urban area as Skopje has a more transient population with less of a sense of neighborhood. The region has notably fewer neighborhood governments (28%) than the rest of the country (60%), though the city does have building councils, which function in a manner similar to condominium associations or neighborhood councils.

Mayors who were interviewed agreed that well organized neighborhood governments can assist newly decentralized municipalities in resolving citizen concerns and in providing minimal service delivery. ZELS, the organization of Mayors, should consider establishing a devolution committee to share best practices among Mayors concerning the devolution of services and activities to neighborhood government.

ZELS should also consider setting up an organization for neighborhood presidents to share information and best practices and receive skills training in leadership, organization, activities management, and problem solving. The international community could fund these activities initially, so that municipal officials can concentrate on receiving technical training on the subjects of their newly decentralized responsibilities.

4.2 Trust and Performance: The Gap between Citizens and their Governments

There is a significant communication gap between citizens and their local governments as shown in the following numbers:

Only 35% of those polled think their municipality considers citizens' opinions when preparing a municipal strategy, and only 26% of all respondents think municipal government is aware of their problems.

Though only 29% of those with neighborhood government think neighborhood government does a good job, 44% of them think neighborhood government is aware of everyday problems.

While only 26% of respondents think municipal government is aware of their problems, a much larger 44% (of those who have neighborhood government) feel that neighborhood government is in touch with their problems. Though the performance of neighborhood government is not rated highly (29%), people still believe that neighborhood government more closely relates to them.

The gap between citizens and their local government is greatest in urban areas, and particularly in the Skopje region. About 45% of rural residents say their municipality considers citizen opinions when preparing a municipal strategy, in contrast to approximately 30% of urban residents. Rural residents are more confident in their neighborhood government and in the president of their neighborhood council. They also rate the performance of their neighborhood government at a higher level. And, they are more willing to trust both their neighborhood and municipal government to levy fees for improvements.

Those in the Southwest region feel closest to their municipal government (37% say officials are aware of everyday problems in contrast to 17% of those in the eastern region who feel that way). Those in the Southwest (49%) and those in the Northwest/Kumanovo (51%) regions feel closest to their neighborhood governments.

Almost 60% of those polled are willing to pay fees for improvements to their neighborhood government; just over 50% are willing to pay fees to their municipal government. Willingness to pay at the neighborhood level is highest in the Southwest region at 68% and in the Northwest/Kumanovo region at 62%; it is lowest in the East/Central region at 48%. Willingness to pay fees for improvements at the municipal level is highest in the Northwest/Kumanovo area at 63% and lowest in the east at 41%.

Citizens clearly feel that municipal government is not listening to them, and therefore is not representing their interests. In contrast, almost all Mayors interviewed in the qualitative survey claimed they have good communication with citizens and that they do consider citizen concerns in municipal decision making. They cite frequent meetings with organization and neighborhood leaders, communication in citizen information centers, public meetings, regular open door days, and communication through the local media.

The problem with these types of communication is that, though a Mayor may reasonably assume that he/she is involved in a significant amount of activity, these are not necessarily the types of activities that reach a significant portion of the population in a meaningful manner. Much of this communication is one way communication: from the Mayor to the audience. Citizens, consequently, don't feel they are being heard, or that their opinions are being sought.

Poll data indicate that citizens would feel more favorably toward their local government if they believed their opinions were considered, and thought that municipal officials were aware of their everyday problems and were working to resolve them.

The key to addressing this issue and to improving relations between local governments and citizens is for Mayors to seek out citizens' opinions and listen to citizen concerns. Citizens need to feel that they are being heard. They not only need opportunities to express their opinions, but they need to be expressly asked for their opinion. Mayors should not passively wait for citizens to come to them to tell them what they think, or they will hear mostly from those with negative opinions or complaints. Mayors should spend more time in the neighborhoods, attend neighborhood events, and enlist

neighborhood presidents in convening forums in neighborhoods. Mayors should engage citizens in the governing process, and actively solicit their ideas and opinions, listen to their concerns and work to solve their problems. Even if problems cannot be resolved, Mayors must demonstrate concern and show that they did as much as they could to satisfactorily resolve issues.

4.3 Awareness and Participation: The Gap between Participation and Willingness to Participate

There is a huge gap between the 60% of those polled who claim they are willing to participate in resolving local problems and the fewer than 15% who claim that they currently participate in local activities. The level of awareness of various opportunities to participate is approximately 30%, as shown below.

Awareness of opportunities to participate

- 35% say their municipality has held a public meeting or hearing
- 32% say their neighborhood has held a public meeting or hearing
- 33% say they know someone who has attended a city council meeting
- 30% say they have heard of citizen information centers
- 15% say they have a citizen information center in their municipality
- 20% can name organizations that are active in their municipality

Self reported participation levels

- 12% have attended a municipal public hearing or meeting
- 15% have attended a neighborhood hearing or meeting
- 9% have attended a city council meeting
- 6% have been involved in deciding how to spend donor funds in their municipality or neighborhood
- 6% have participated in neighborhood government, 1/3 of those as council members
- 3% have visited a citizen information center

The participation rate in neighborhood government activities is twice as high in rural areas as it is in urban areas. Citizens living in rural areas have a higher rate of attendance at city council meetings than those who live in urban areas, and a greater number of rural respondents were aware of hearings held in their municipality and in their neighborhood. Quite a number of issues in rural municipalities are solved at the neighborhood level upon the initiative of the neighborhood government. Rural residents showed a higher rate of visits to citizen information centers (45%) to urban residents (17%), for those who have centers in their municipality. And, they have had a higher rate of participation (11%) in deciding how to spend donor funds (3% in urban areas).

The Northwest/Kumanovo region stands out in that the gap between neighborhood government and the citizens is much smaller in this region than in other regions. Though

the percentage of respondents with neighborhood government is similar in the three regions outside the Skopje region, the Northwest/Kumanovo region has much higher participation levels (21% compared with 6 to 9% in other regions). Levels of trust in both municipal and neighborhood government and in the president of neighborhood government are also highest in this region. Those polled in the region also expressed a greater than 60% willingness to pay fees for local improvements.

Participation levels at municipal hearings, at city council meetings, and in deciding how to spend donor funds are the highest of all regions. Almost 50% of Northwest/Kumanovo residents say their municipality considers citizen opinions when preparing a municipal strategy, in contrast to 30 to 40% in other regions.

Though citizens may not participate directly in local decision making, they may participate as members of organizations, or perceive that certain organizations represent their interests. To determine the extent to which this more indirect level of participation exists, citizens were asked whether they could name any organizations in their area, and whether they participate in activities sponsored by those organizations. Of those polled, 20% could name organizations, and almost 60% of those respondents mentioned women's organizations; environmental organizations were mentioned by 33%.

4.4 Potential for Participation

Though current, self reported participation levels don't exceed 15%, 78% of those polled think citizens can effect change, and 60% say they are willing to become involved themselves. Citizens say they want to be actively engaged but are apparently not motivated to participate, as participation levels are significantly below the level of willingness.

Without leadership at the local level, it is unlikely that citizens will be motivated to participate. Someone has to be responsible for organizing an event, a meeting, or an improvement where citizens can contribute their ideas, labor, organization, or money.

The gap between actual participation and willingness to participate presents an opportunity to increase levels of citizen participation at both the neighborhood and municipal levels of government. As can be seen from the data on rural areas and on the Northwest/Kumanovo region, higher levels of participation correlate with higher trust in local government (both local and municipal), and greater willingness to pay fees for local improvements.

The data presented below on areas in which citizens would like to participate and in what manner provides an initial blueprint from which to design new approaches to engage citizens in local activities. From these open ended responses, it is apparent that citizens want to be involved in something meaningful, in something where they can contribute to resolving problems in their community.

When asked an open ended question about which areas they are willing to be involved in,

respondents cited the following areas at the following rates:

Willingness to Participate

- environmental protection 41%
- street maintenance 37%
- waste management 34%
- initiating regulations 28%
- cultural or sport events 27%
- water supply 26%
- parks and playgrounds 26%
- sports maintenance 19%

This question was followed by the one multiple choice question on the poll, where citizens could select one or more ways in which to be involved:

- contributing labor 73%
- through organizing 41%
- financial contribution 26%

Mayors and neighborhood presidents should develop programs to motivate citizens to become involved in resolving issues at the local level and to encourage leadership at the neighborhood level. Neighborhood presidents should receive skills training in leadership and organization to improve their ability to coordinate citizen participation activities, so they can actively motivate citizens to participate. Citizens need to be involved both in identifying and in solving the problems. They need a specific role, something to actually do or decide, rather than to just show up passively at a meeting to hear what someone else has decided.

4.5 Devolution

When asked an open ended question about the role of neighborhood government, more than half (57%) of those polled said neighborhood government should help solve citizens' problems. Respondents were then asked about a series of specific services and activities, whether they thought the municipality or the neighborhood currently provided those services or activities, and which level they thought should be providing the service. The specific activities listed in the survey are those listed in municipal statutes as the activities that Mayors under the 2002 law on local self government may devolve to presidents of neighborhood councils.

The responses reflect only citizen opinion, not economic efficiency, or financial feasibility. The responses do, however, reflect some notion of subsidiarity, the principal that a service should be provided by the lowest level of government that can effectively provide the service. When asked about delivery of services and organization of specific activities, a majority responded that park maintenance and environmental protection should be the responsibility of the neighborhood government. Overall, when asked which

level of government should be responsible for certain services and activities, there is a noticeable shift in citizen thinking that park maintenance, environmental protection, organization of cultural events and responsibility for initiating regulations could be devolved to the neighborhood level. Citizens support not only decentralized activities, but also further devolved activities to the neighborhood level.

A majority in the Skopje region want to shift event organization to the neighborhood level and a significant number want to shift cultural facilities, parks maintenance, and responsibility for initiating regulations to the neighborhood level. Mayors in the Skopje region favor shifting responsibility for initiating regulations, environmental protection, organization of cultural events, and maintenance of parks to the neighborhood level.

A significant number of those polled in the Northwest/Kumanovo region want to shift responsibility for environmental protection, and initiating regulations to the neighborhood level. However, Mayors interviewed in the region are in favor of devolving only responsibility for initiating regulations and environmental protection.

A bare majority in the Southwest region wants to shift responsibility for initiating regulations to the neighborhood level. A significant number wants to shift park maintenance, event organization, and environmental protection to the neighborhood level. Mayors in the Southwest region favor shifting responsibility for initiating regulations, environmental protection, organization of cultural events, and maintenance of parks to the neighborhood level.

Citizens in the Eastern region weren't interested in changing any responsibilities from where they thought they were at present, while Mayors and neighborhood presidents interviewed in the region said all of the listed activities could be devolved to neighborhood governments.

ZELS should consider establishing a devolution committee to foster sharing of information and best practices among Mayors concerning what works, what doesn't and how, concerning devolution.

5. Conclusion

The main findings of this research are:

- There is a huge disparity between urban and rural citizens in the way they relate to municipal and neighborhood government. Neighborhood government serves a particularly crucial function in rural areas, serving 70% of the population and resolving a large number of issues at the local level. Citizens living in the Skopje region are quite different from citizens in other regions of the country in their attitudes and behavior toward local and neighborhood government.
- There are few ethnic distinctions in attitude and behavior toward municipal and neighborhood self government.
- There is a significant communication gap between citizens and their local governments.
- Those with neighborhood government think their neighborhood government is much more aware of their everyday problems than their municipal government.
- Citizens would feel more favorably toward their local government if they believed their opinions were considered, and thought that officials were aware of their everyday problems and were working to resolve them.
- Despite low levels of trust in local government, almost 80% of those polled think citizens can change things, 60% are willing to participate, and more than half are willing to pay fees for local improvements, indicating a strong desire among the public for changes and improvements at the local level.
- Almost 60% of those polled are willing to pay fees for improvements to their neighborhood government and over 50% are willing to pay fees to their municipal government.
- There is a significant gap between the 60% of those polled who claim they are willing to participate and no more than 15% who claim that they currently participate in local activities, demonstrating a lack of motivation to participate.
- There is a high correlation among active neighborhood government, higher levels of participation, higher trust in local government (both neighborhood and municipal), and greater willingness to pay fees for local improvements.
- When asked an open ended question about the role of neighborhood government, more than half of those polled said neighborhood government should help solve citizens' problems.
- When asked about delivery of specific services and organization of specific activities, a majority responded that park maintenance and environmental protection should be the responsibility of neighborhood government.

6. Recommendations

Strengthening neighborhood government and motivating citizens would increase participation which correlates with higher levels of trust and confidence in local government.

The principal recommendations resulting from an analysis of this research are:

Mayors should promote well organized neighborhood governments to assist them in assessing and resolving citizen concerns, and in delivering minimal services under the newly decentralized system.

ZELS should consider establishing a neighborhood government committee to foster sharing of information and best practices among Mayors, and should consider setting up an organization for neighborhood presidents to share information and best practices and receive skills training in leadership, organization, activities management, and problem solving. The international community could fund these activities initially, so that municipal officials can concentrate on receiving technical training on the subjects of their newly decentralized responsibilities

ZELS should consider establishing a devolution committee to foster sharing of information and best practices among Mayors concerning what works, what doesn't and how concerning devolution.

Mayors need to spend more time in neighborhoods listening to citizens and engaging citizens in the governing process.

Mayors and neighborhood presidents should design and implement innovative programs to motivate citizens to become involved in resolving issues at the local level and to encourage leadership at the neighborhood level. These programs should be designed based on the survey data that identify areas in which citizens wish to participate and in what manner they wish to participate.



Assessment of Intra-Municipal Relations and the Role of Neighborhood Self Government

STRATEGIC
Marketing and Media Research Institute

Skopje, May/June 2004

Overall Project Objective:

To determine the level of citizen participation at the neighborhood and municipal levels of government, explore relations between the municipal and neighborhood levels of government, survey the willingness of current mayors to devolve activities to the neighborhood level, and the willingness of citizens to participate in local decision making.

Qualitative Survey

Research Method: In depth interviews with 30 mayors and 20 presidents of neighbourhood councils (both urban and rural municipalities)

Questionnaire: Formulated by OSCE and SMMRI

Fieldwork: May/June 2004

Quantitative Survey

Research Method: Face-to-face interviews at respondents home

Territorial coverage: The entire country and four strata (Skopje, Northwest+Ku, Southwest and East&Central), both urban and rural municipalities

Target population: Total population 18+

Sampling frame: Census 2002

Sample size: 1000 questionnaires (1029 questionnaires from the field)

Sample type: **Stratified three-staged probability sample**

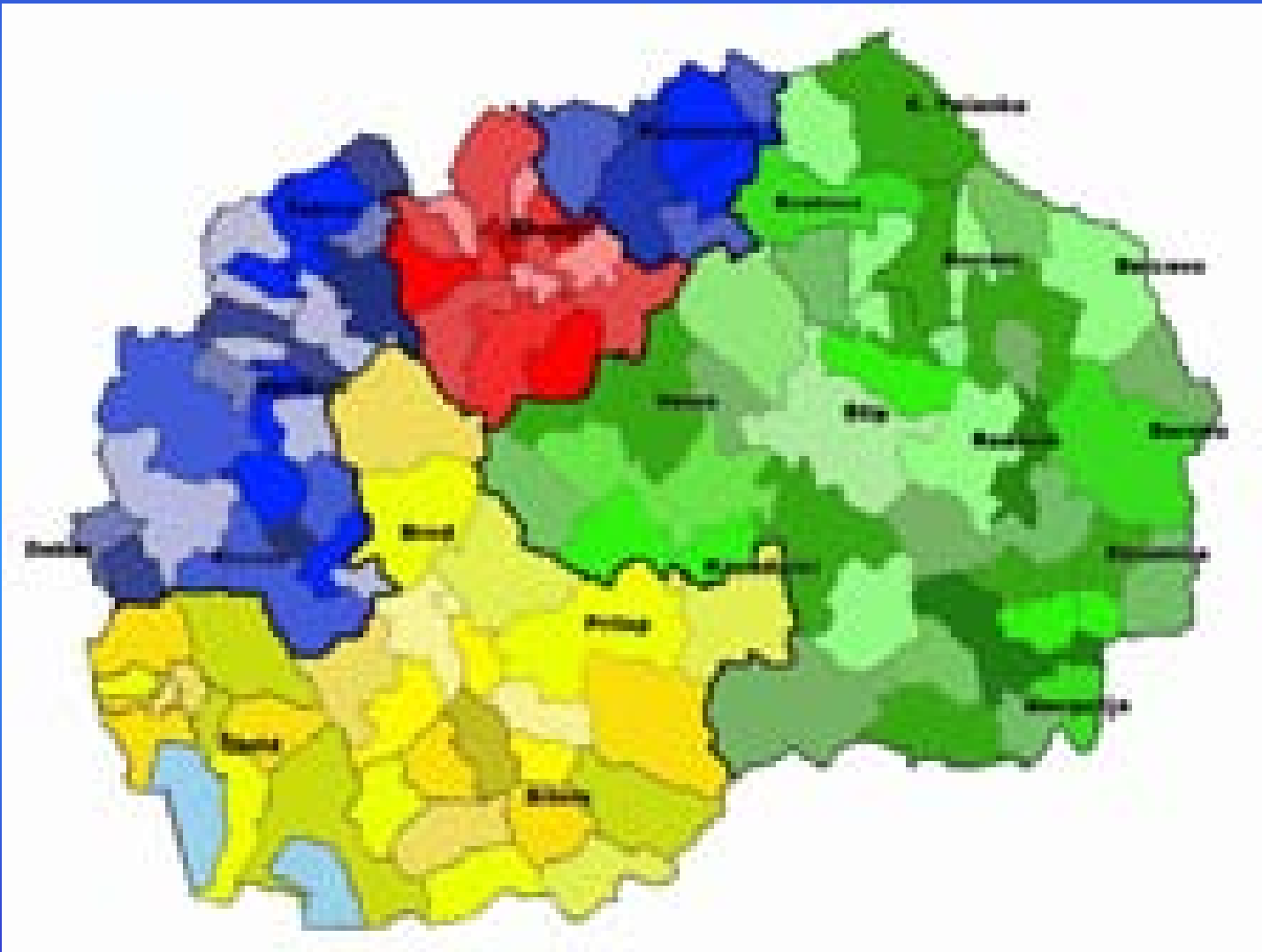
- Local districts – census block units
- Households by random route technique
- Household member by Kish scheme

The data were weighted to correct for imbalances

Questionnaire: Formulated by OSCE and SMMRI

Fieldwork: May 2004

Regional Distribution



Urban / Rural Distribution

Total country: 58% urban, 42% rural

Skopje region: 78% urban, 22% rural

Southwest: 56% urban, 44% rural

Northwest+Ku: 40% urban; 60% rural

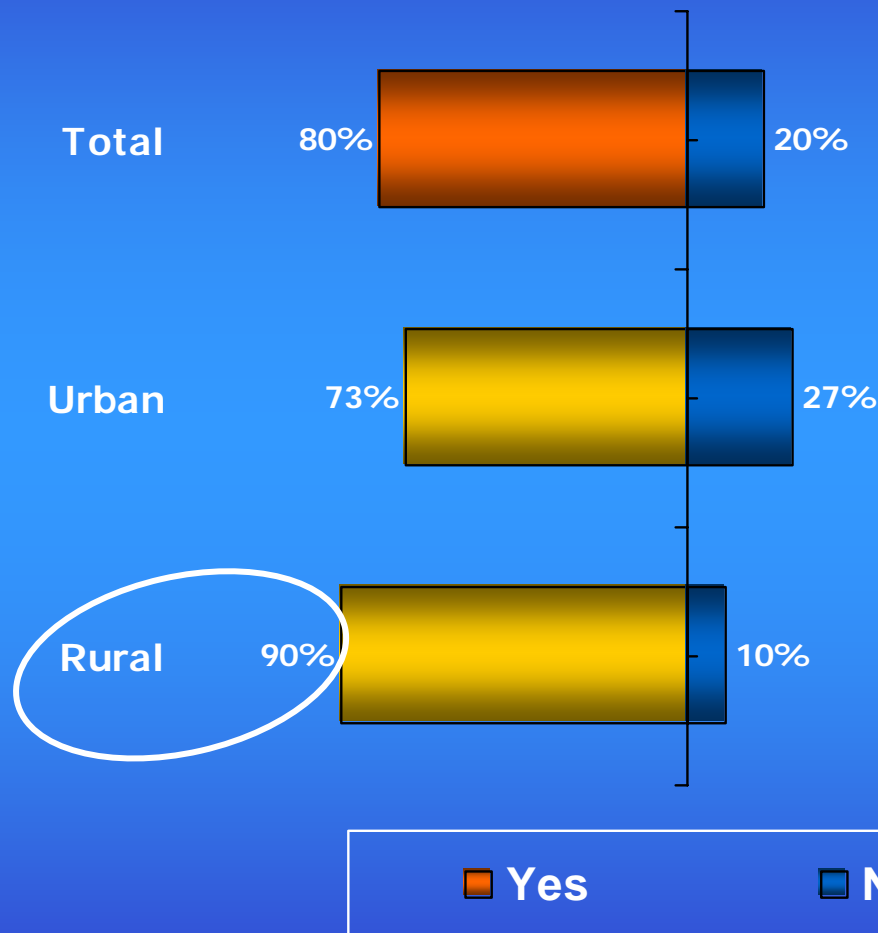
East & Central: 54% urban, 46% rural

Overview

- Neighborhood Government
- Trust and Performance
- Devolution
- Awareness and Participation
- Potential for Participation

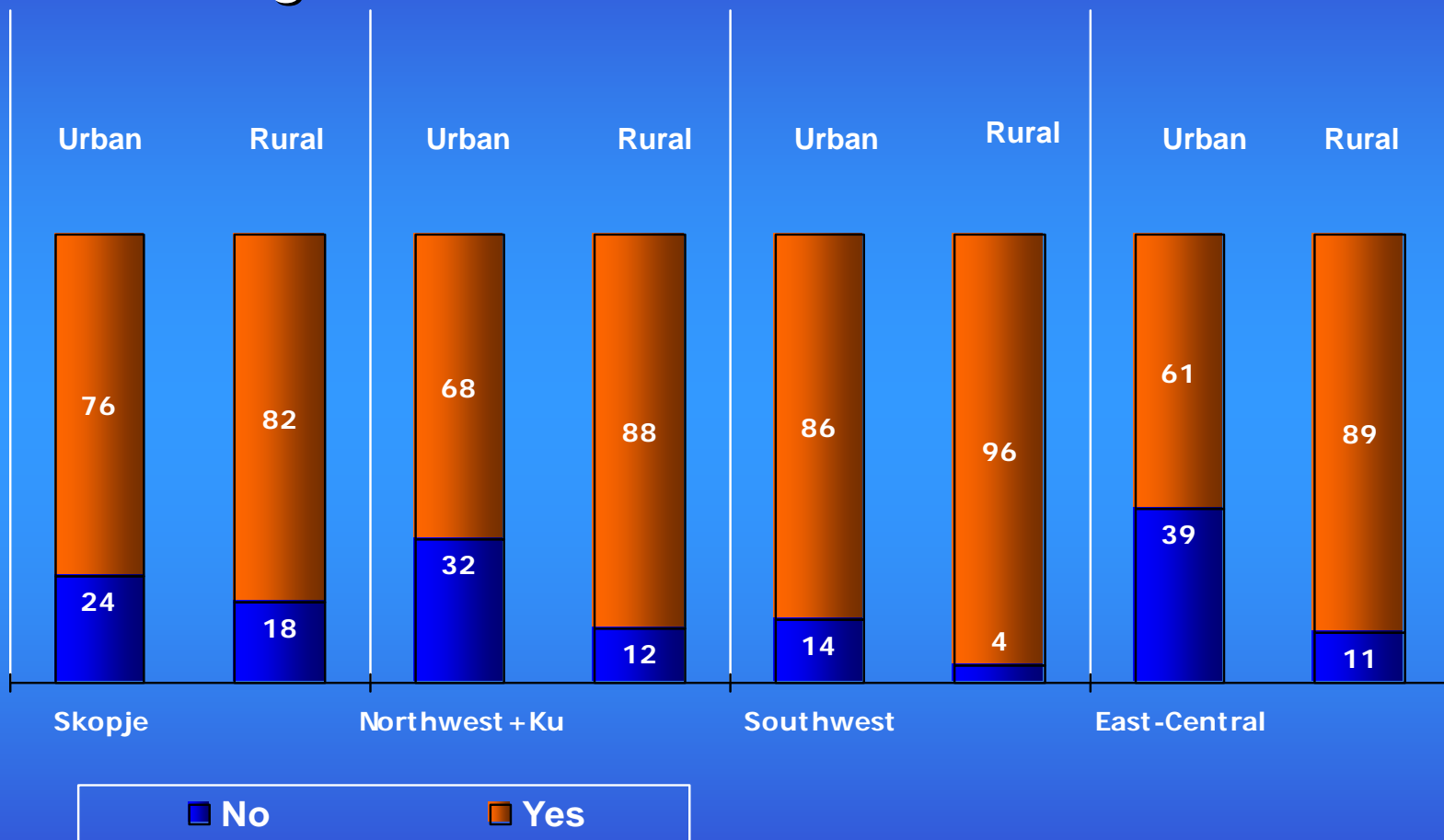
NEIGHBORHOOD GOVERNMENT

Do you know the name of your neighborhood?



Comment: Rural areas have much greater neighborhood identification, sense of place, of belonging; urban areas more transient

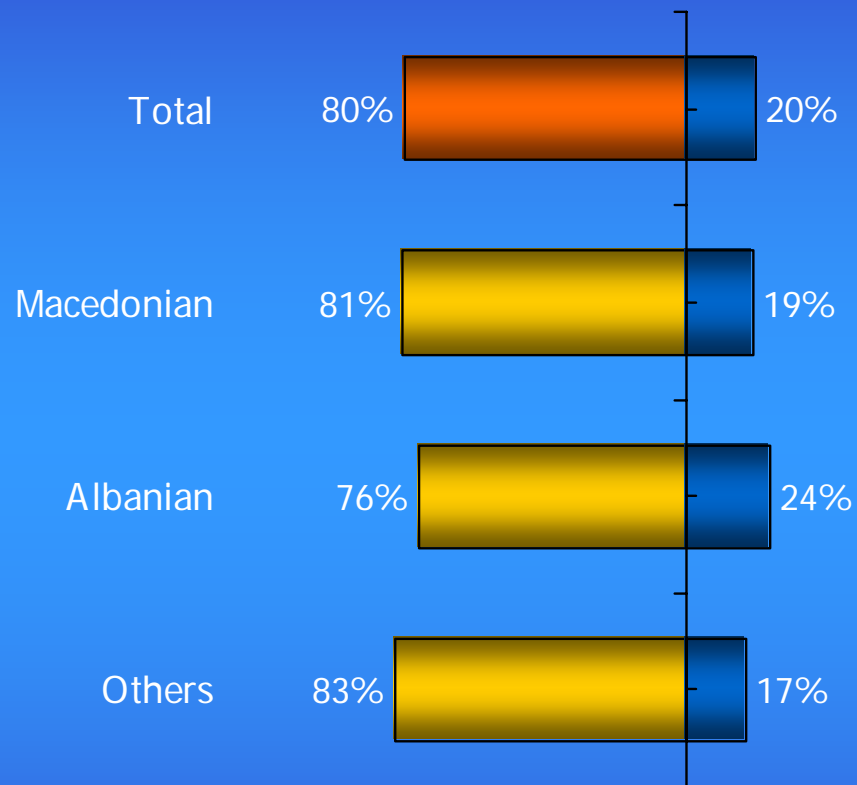
Do you know the name of your neighborhood?



Base: 1029 respondents

Comment: All ethnic groups in all regions have a strong sense of neighborhood, more so in the Southwest, least so in the Skopje region

Do you know the name of your neighborhood?



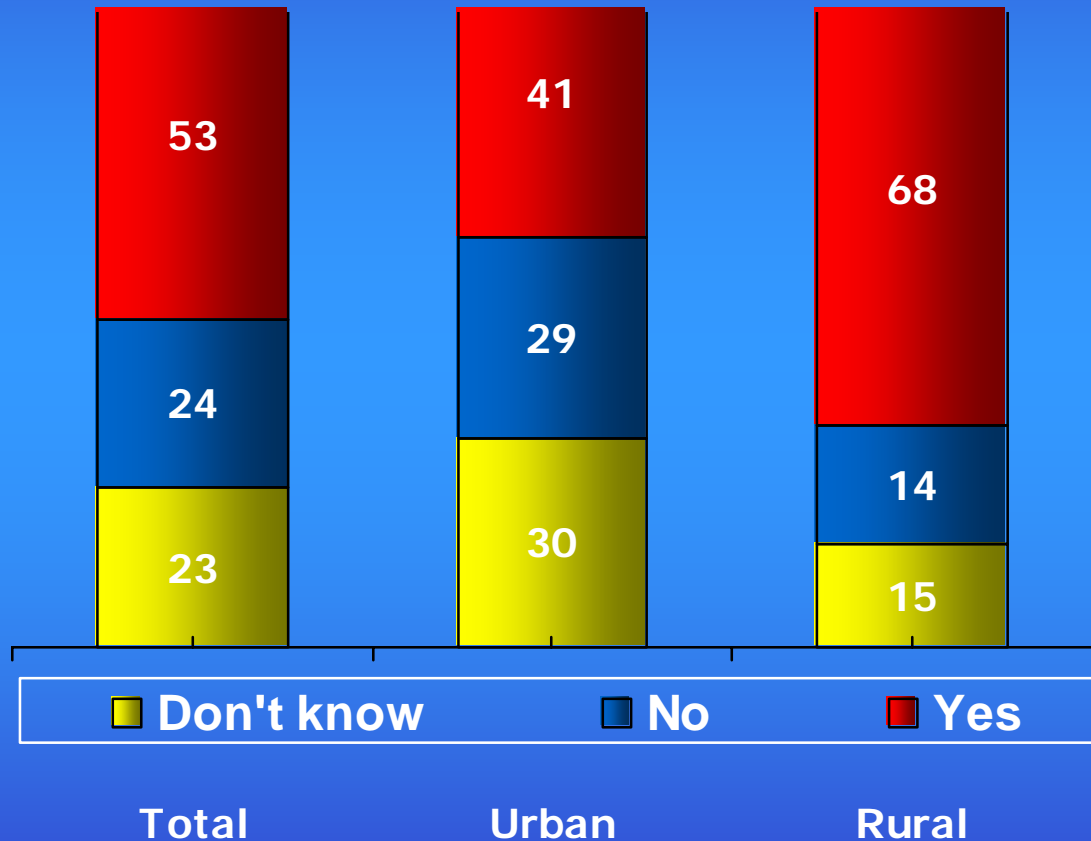
Yes

No

Base: 1029

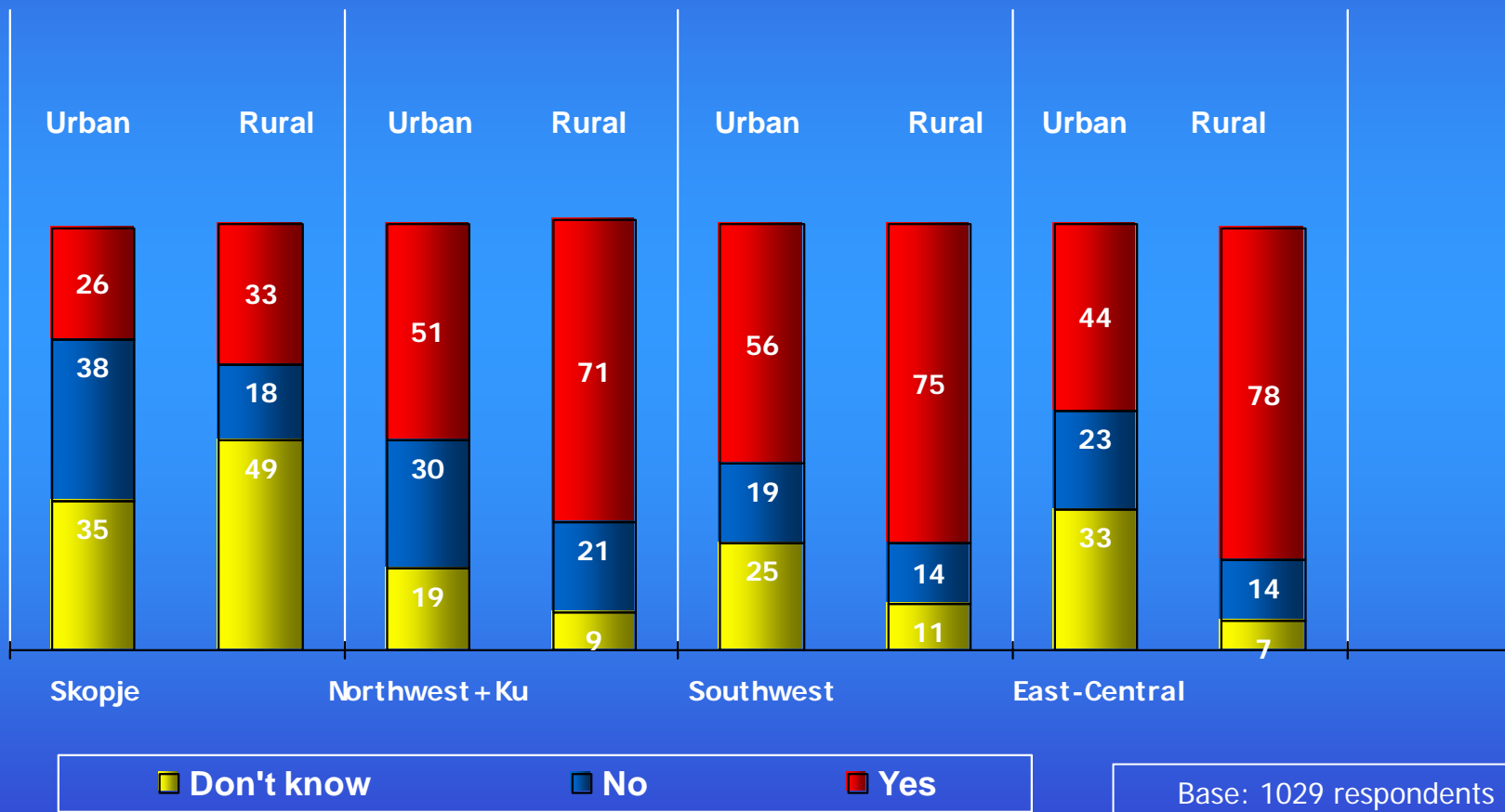
Comment: All ethnic groups have a strong sense of neighborhood

Do you have an active neighborhood self-government?



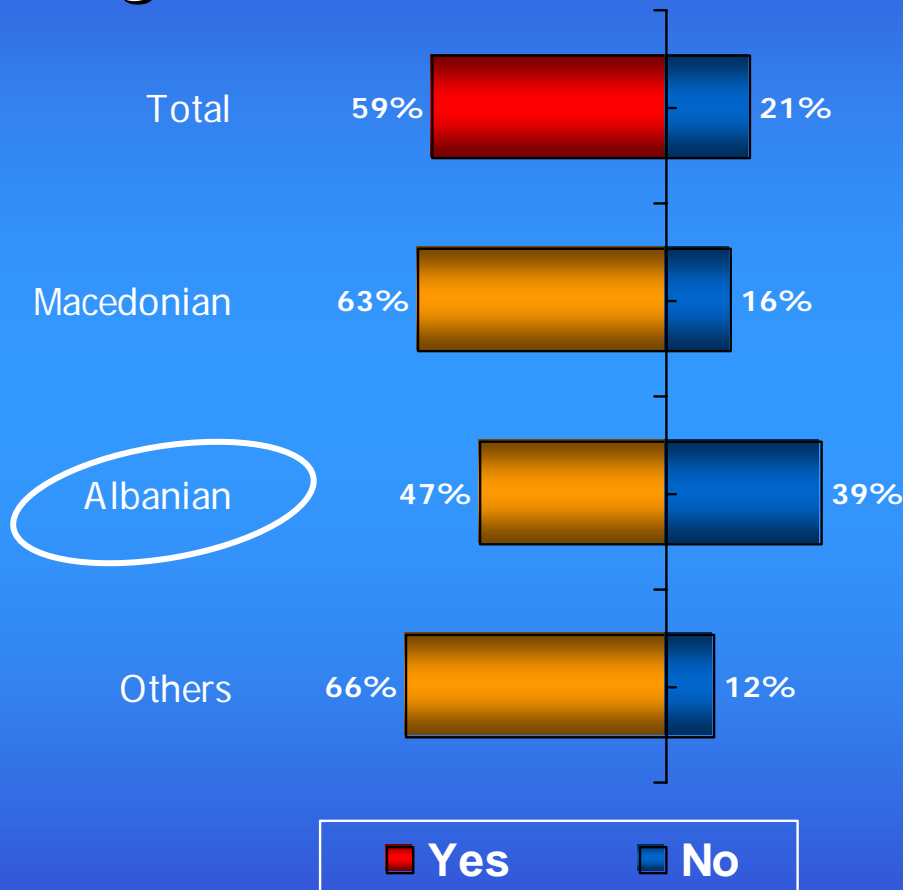
Comment: The majority of the respondents say they have an active neighborhood government, and almost 70% of rural residents say they have an active neighborhood government and twice as many people in urban areas don't know whether they have an active neighborhood government.

Do you have an active neighborhood self-government?



Comment: Here we can see that neighborhood governments are even more active in rural areas outside of Skopje.

Do you have an active neighborhood self-government?



Base: 1029

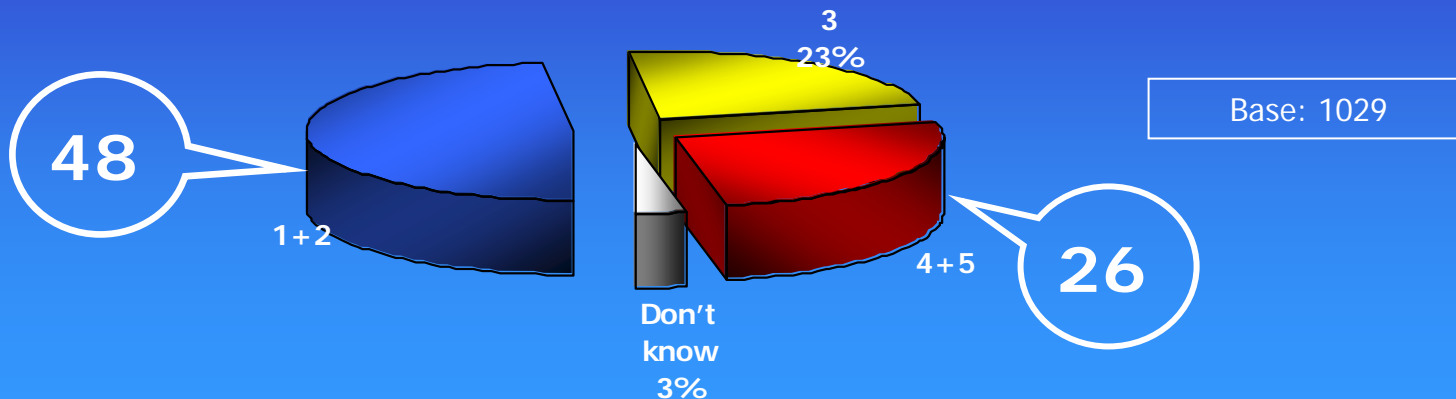
Comment: Neighborhood government common to all ethnic groups. The lower level of neighborhood governments reported by Albanians is due to a 14% rate from the Albanians from Skopje, while Albanians from NW responded with rate of 58%.

Neighborhood Government

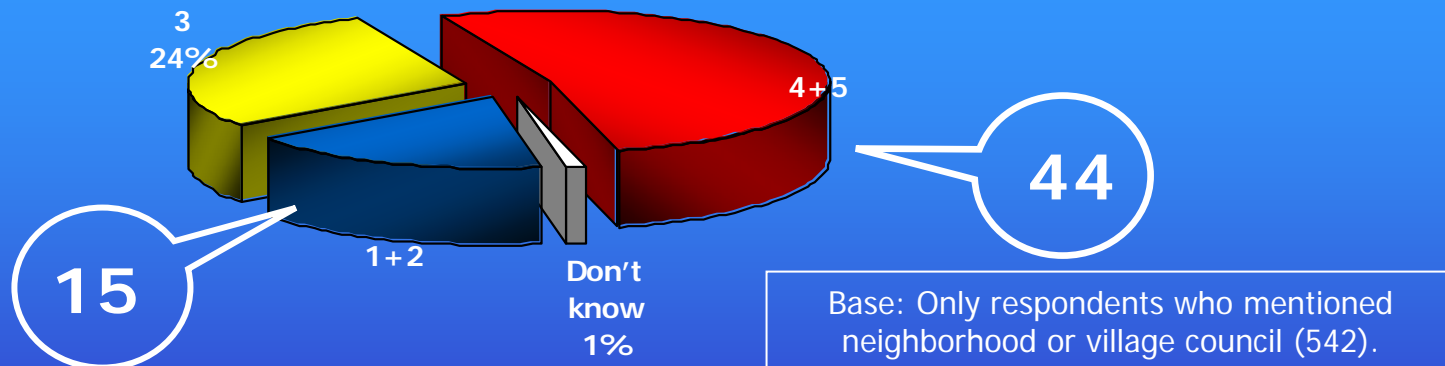
- ❑ **More than half** (53%) of the respondents said that they had neighborhood government
- ❑ **More prevalent in rural areas** (68%) than urban (41%)
- ❑ The Skopje region has significantly fewer active neighborhood governments than the rest of the country: 28% vs. 60%
- ❑ Very common in rural areas outside the Skopje region (71 to 78%)
- ❑ **Common to all ethnic groups**
- ❑ **The disparity in distribution of neighborhood governments is an urban/rural disparity and a regional split between the Skopje region and the rest of the country. There are no ethnic distinctions in the distribution or prevalence of neighborhood government.**
- ❑ All mayors interviewed were aware of the neighborhood governments in their municipality and the extent to which they were active or not, and generally maintain regular communication, some much more frequently than others

TRUST AND PERFORMANCE

To what extent is your municipal government aware of the problems citizens face in everyday life?



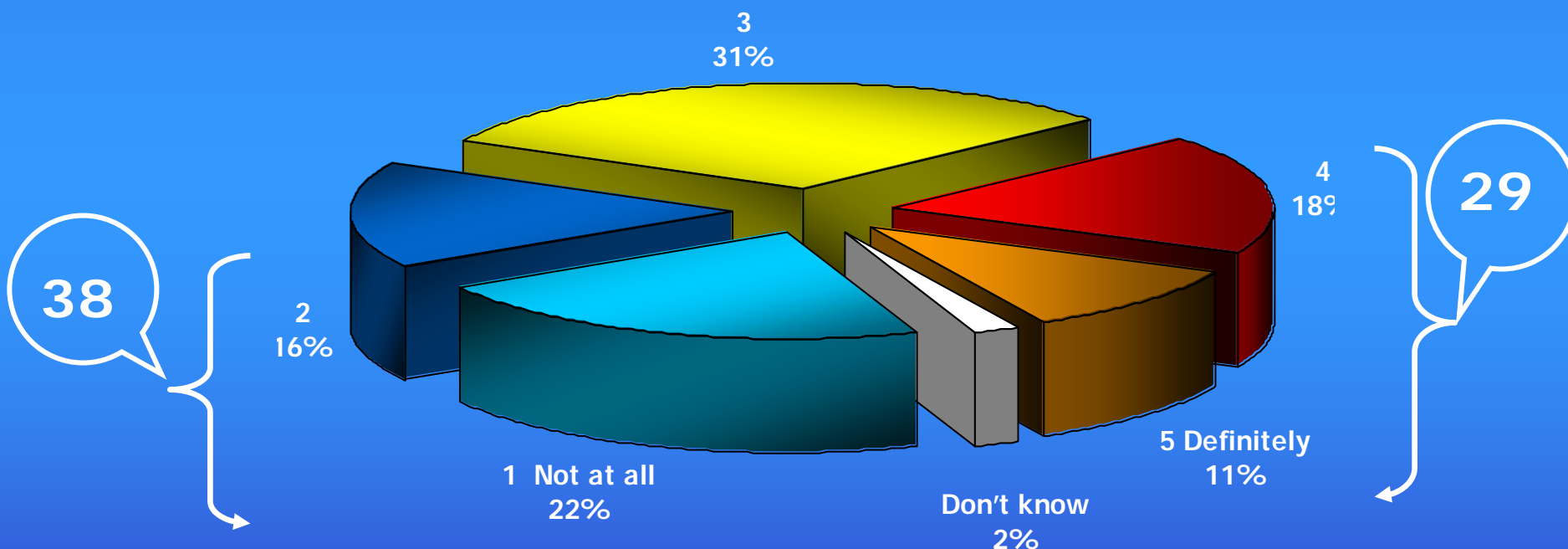
To what extent is your neighborhood self government aware of the problems citizens face in everyday life?



Comment: Those with neighborhood government overwhelmingly believe that their NSG is in touch with the citizens in contrast to the way citizens feel about the municipality. The Northwest and Southwest feel that the neighborhood level is most aware of their problems. These are also the two regions most willing to pay fees to the neighborhood level for improvements.

Does your neighborhood self-government do a good job of representing your interests to the municipality?

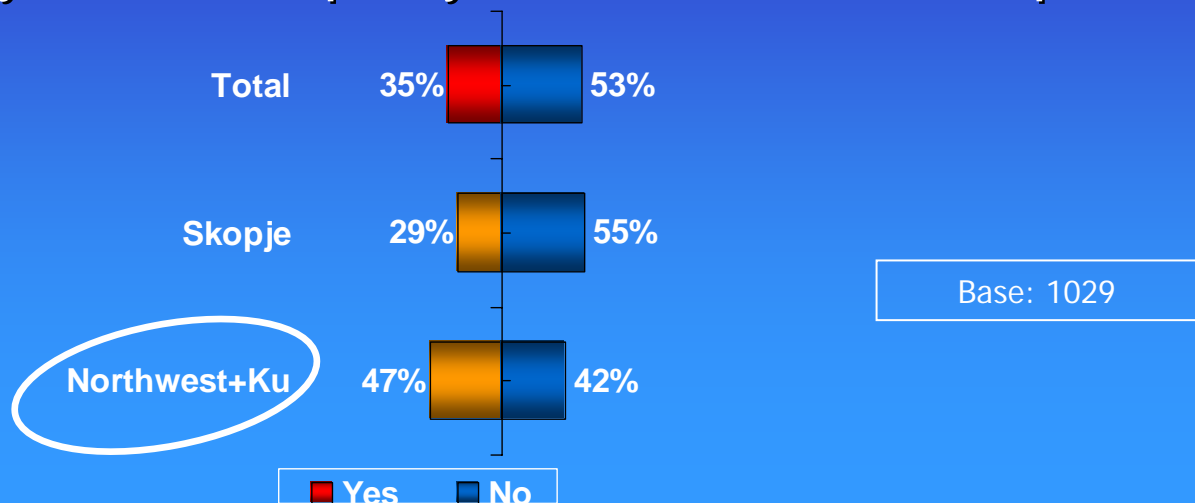
Grades from 1 to 5 like in the school



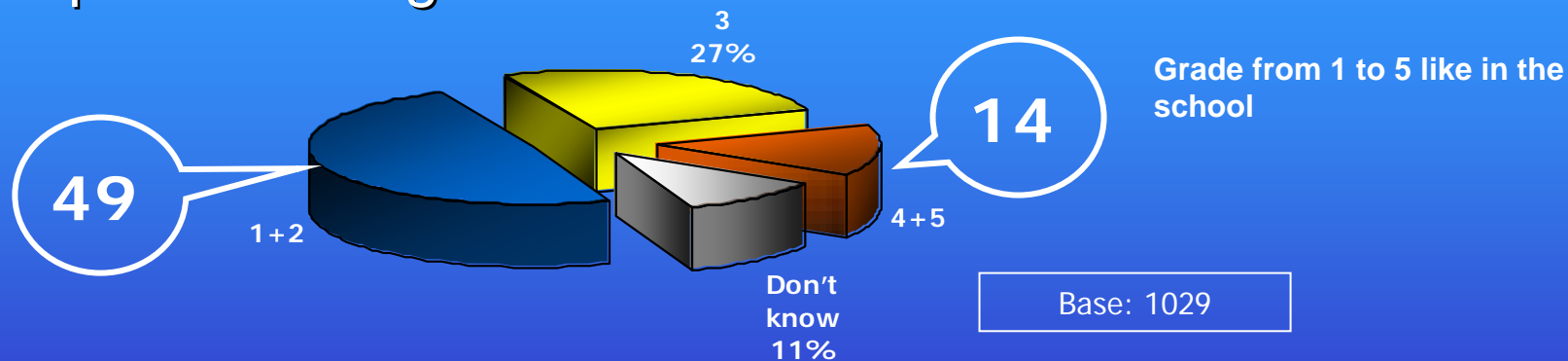
Base: Only respondents who mentioned neighborhood or village council (542).

Comment: They feel that their NSG is in touch with their problems, but their performance is not high.

When preparing a strategy for municipal development, does your municipality consider citizens' opinions?

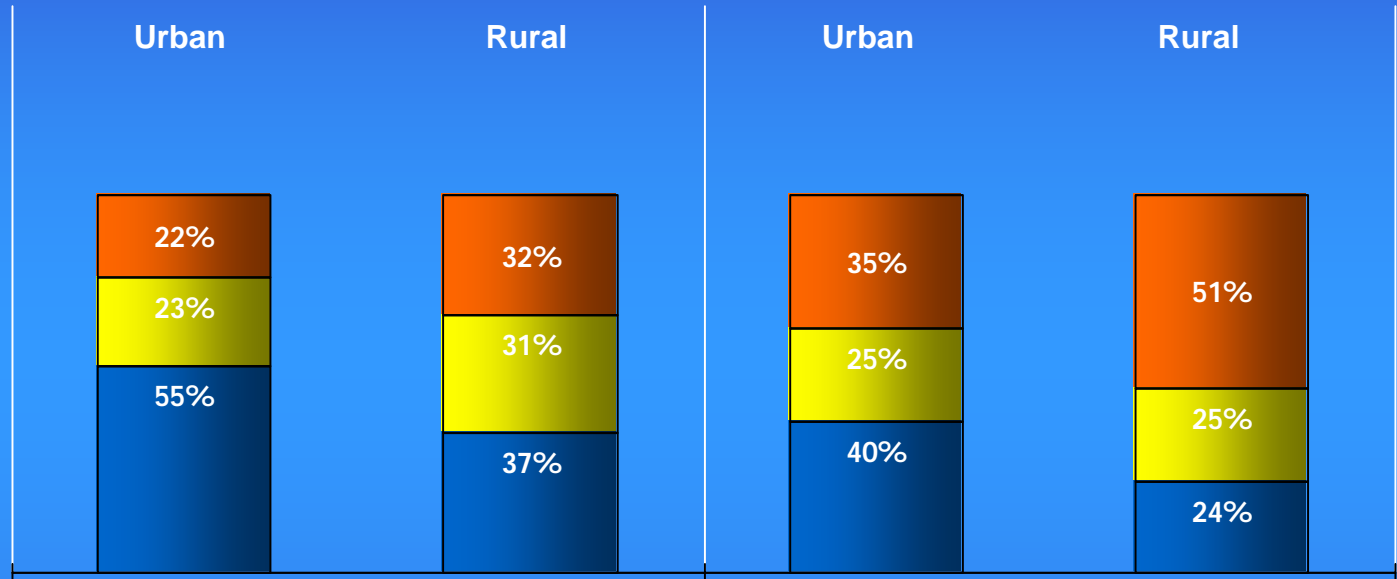


To what extent does your municipality take the opinion of neighborhood leaders into account?



Comment: The responses to these questions demonstrate a large gap between the citizens and the municipalities according to the citizens. There is much less of a gap in rural areas than in urban (44% - rural and 28% - urban)

Awareness of the citizens' problems and representing their interests



Base: 1029

To what extent is municipal government aware of the problems citizens face in everyday life

To what extent is neighborhood self government aware of the problems citizens face in everyday life

Base: 542

■ 1+2

■ 3

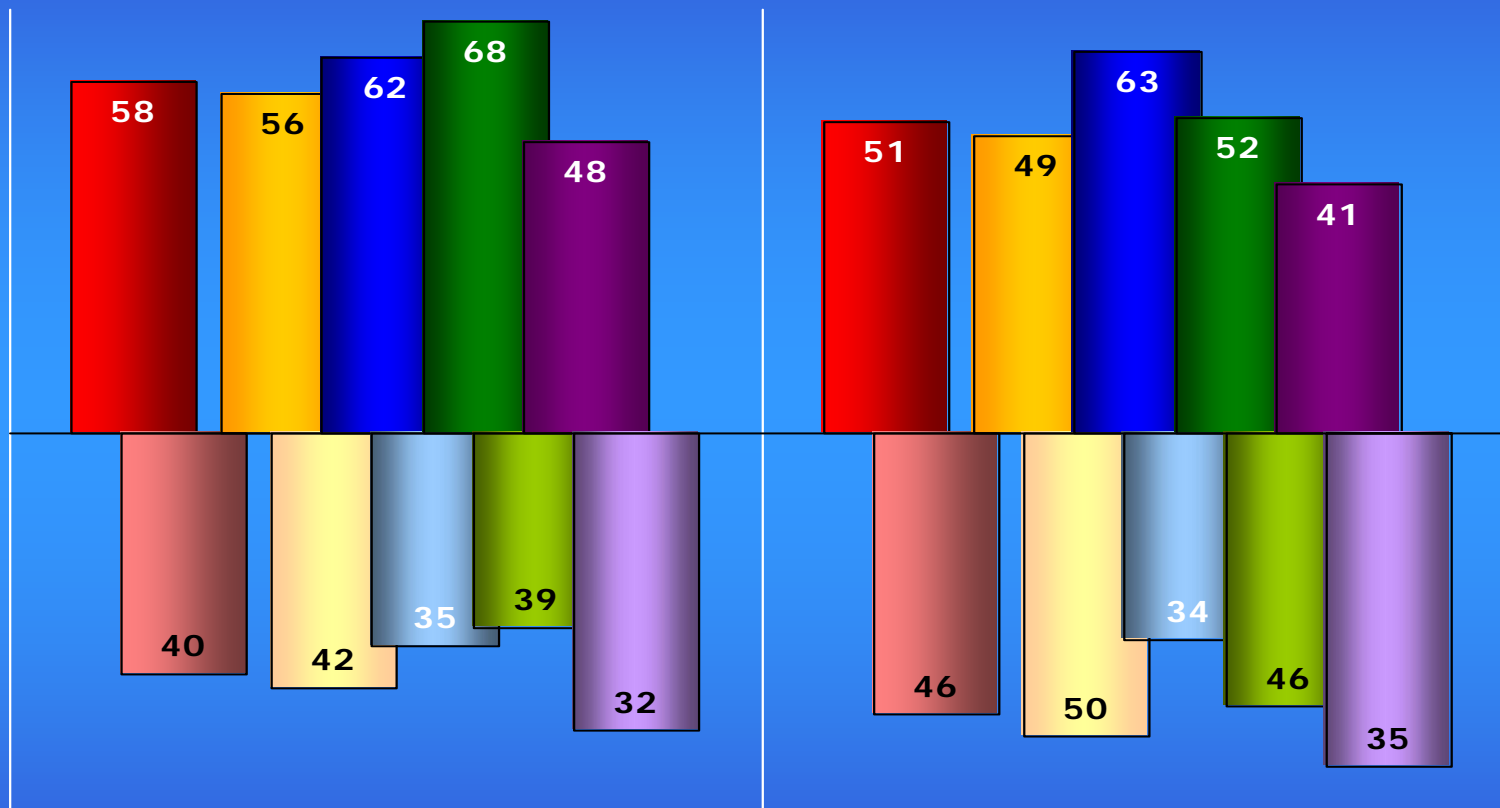
■ 4+5

Comment: NSG generally is perceived as more representative of citizens interests, most particularly in rural areas.

Would you trust your ... to levy fees from you for municipal improvements?

neighbourhood self government

municipal government



■ Total ■ Skopje ■ Northwest+Ku ■ Southwest ■ East+Central

Base: 1029 respondents

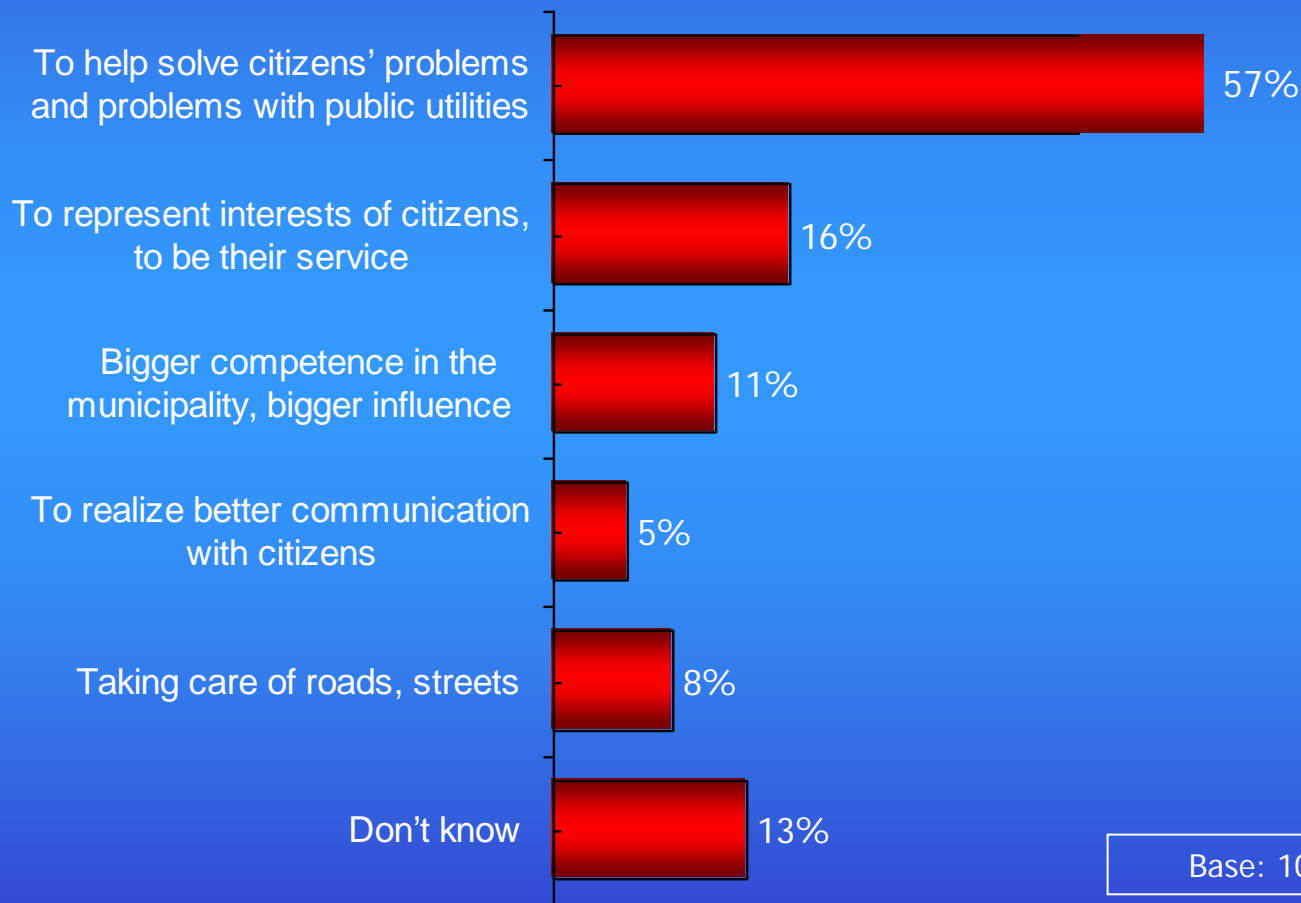
Comment: Residents are willing to trust both NSG and MG to levy fees, yet rate the municipality low on considering citizen and neighborhood leaders' opinions, and rate the neighborhood level low on performance. Regional distribution on this issue varies. Correlates with awareness of problems – highest at NG level in NW and SW. But, MG most aware in SW.

Trust and Performance

- ❑ Only a quarter (26%) of all respondents think municipal government is aware of their problems and only 35% think their municipality considers citizens' opinions when preparing a municipal strategy. This demonstrates **a large gap between municipal government and the citizens.**
- ❑ Though only 29% of those with neighborhood government think neighborhood government does a good job, almost half (44%) of them think neighborhood government is aware of everyday problems. **Though the performance of neighborhood government is not rated highly, people still believe that neighborhood government is more in touch with them.**
- ❑ Mayors interviewed stated that they do consider citizen concerns through meetings with neighborhood leaders, communication in citizen information centers and municipal offices, public hearings, and other meetings.
- ❑ **Mayors interviewed were generally favorable toward neighborhood government** and cited the ability of a well organized neighborhood government to assist the municipality in identifying citizen concerns and representing their interests.

DEVOLUTION

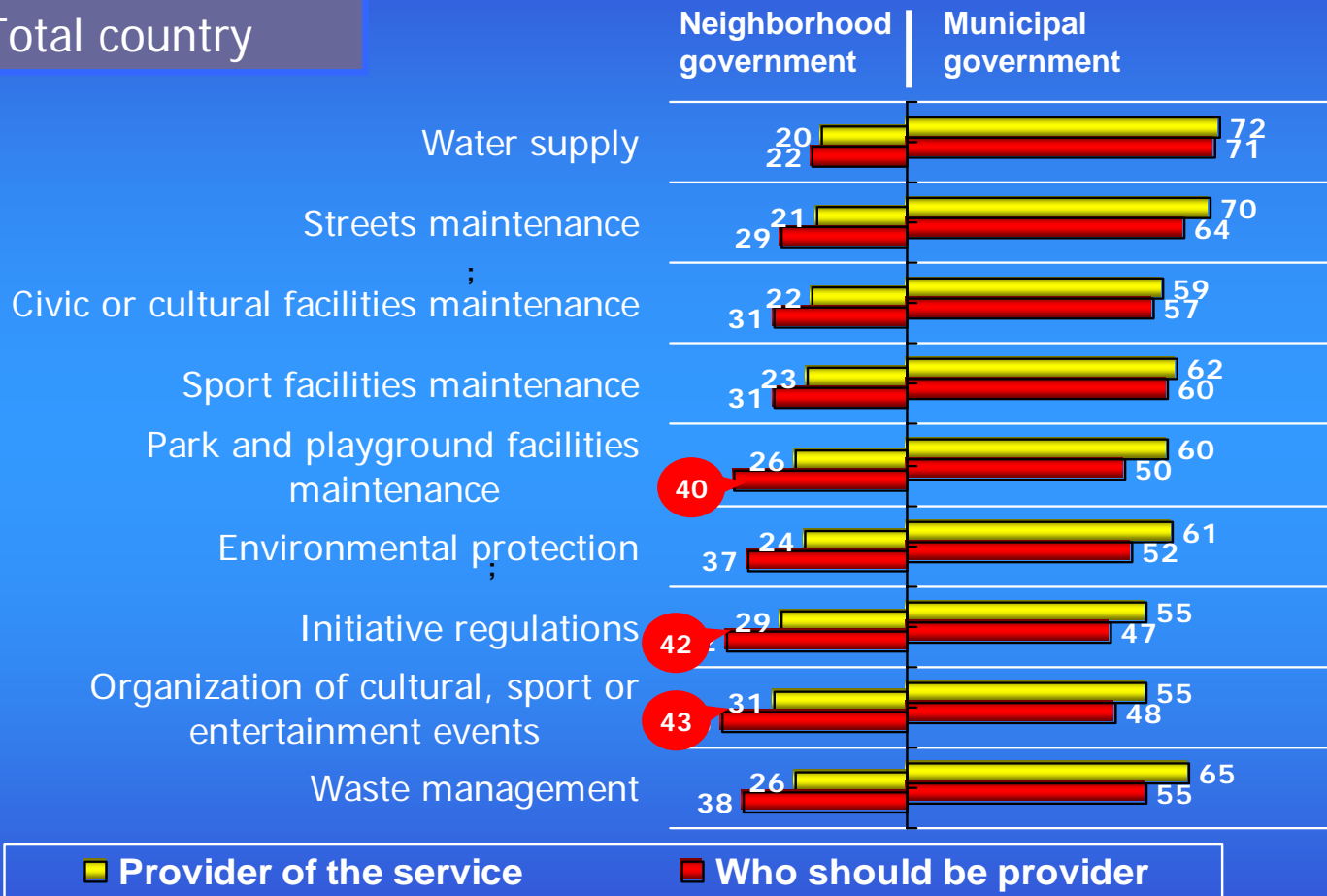
What role do you think neighborhood self government should have under decentralization? (open ended)



Comment: Overwhelmingly people want their problems solved.

Who is providing the following services and, in your opinion, who should be responsible for providing them?

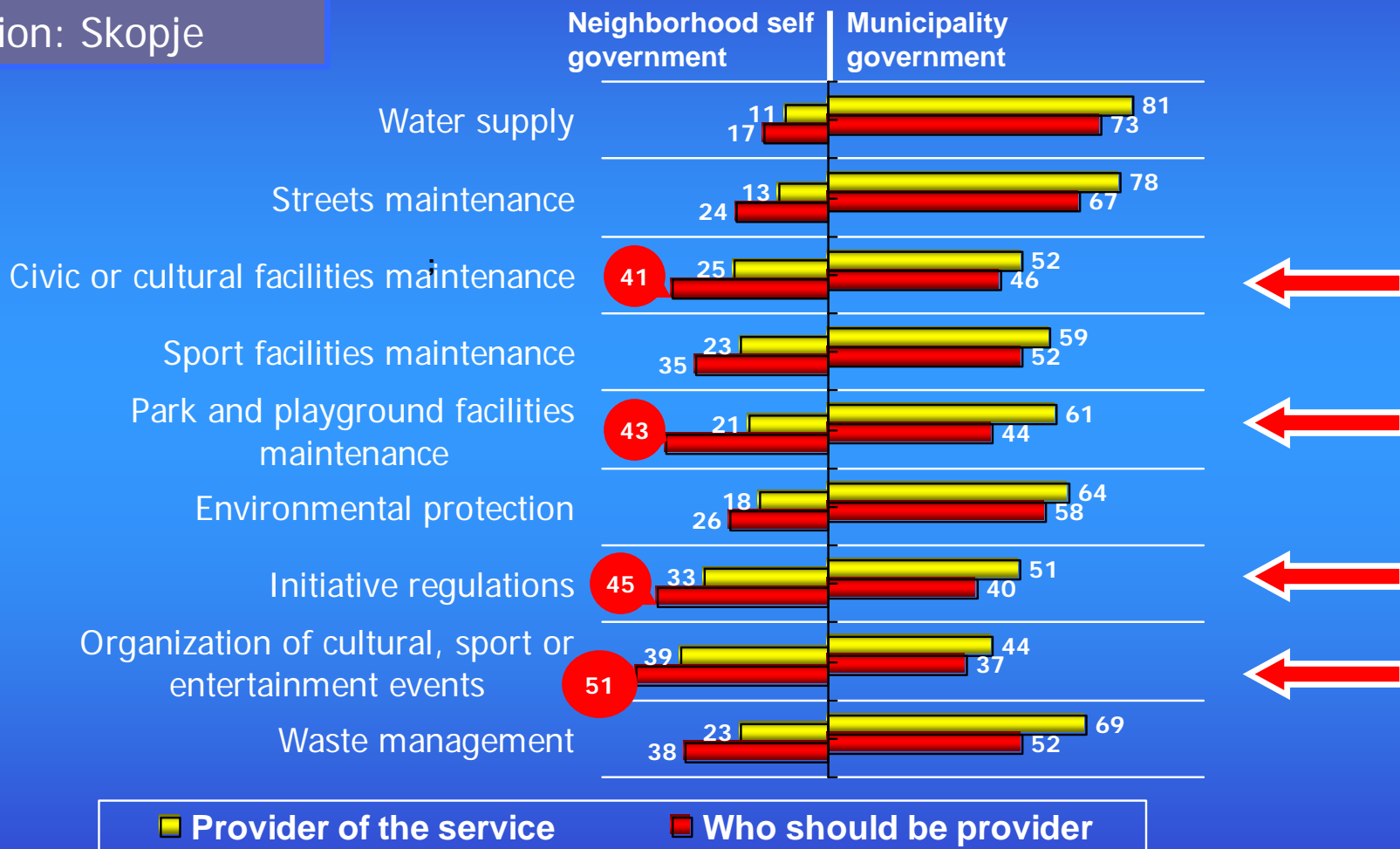
Total country



Comment: 29% now think municipal government is responsible for initiating regulations, and 42% think neighborhood government should be; 31% think municipal government organizes events and 43% think neighborhood government should. But, there is quite a regional disparity.

Who is providing following services and, to your opinion, who should be responsible in providing it?

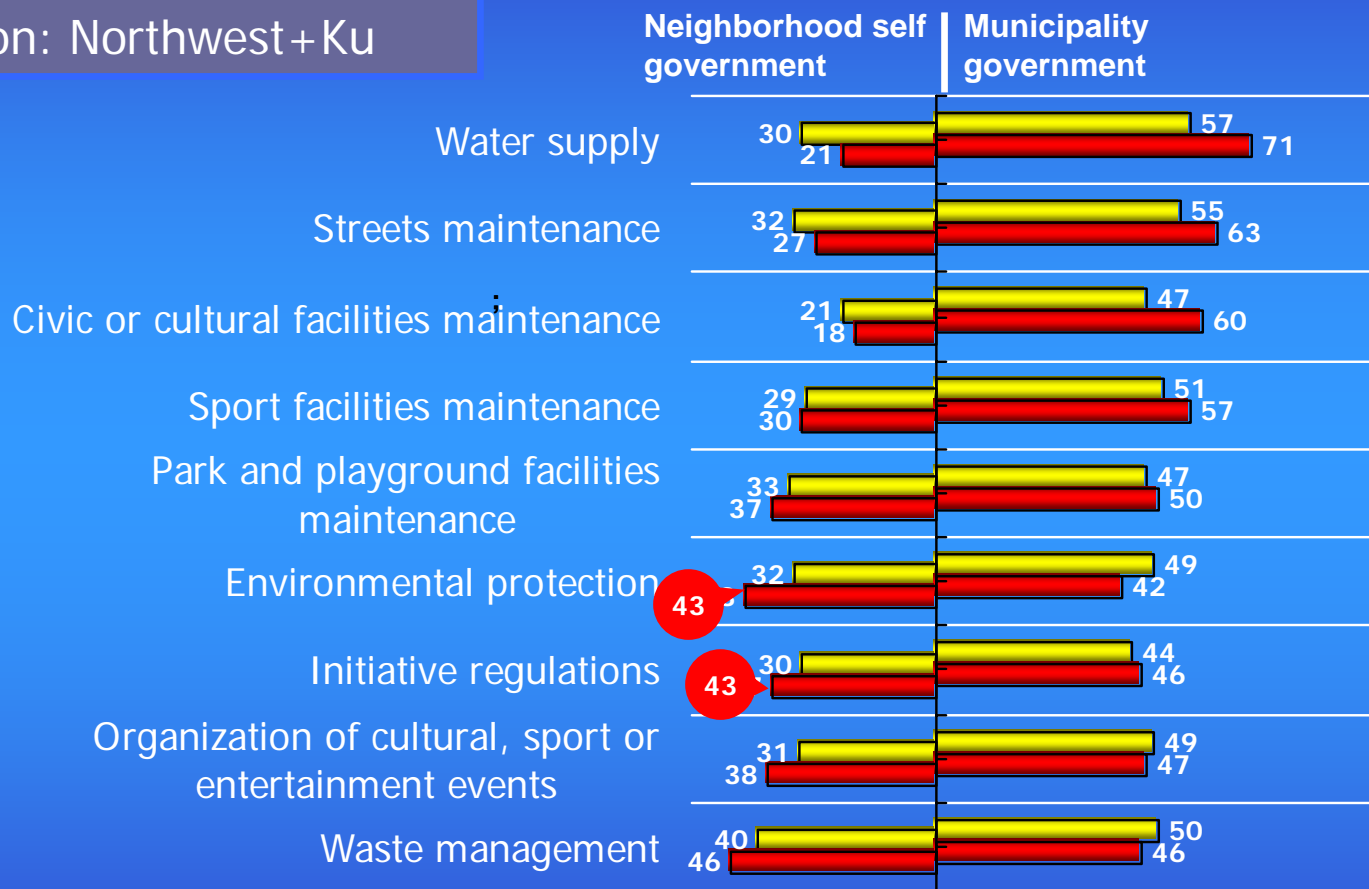
Region: Skopje



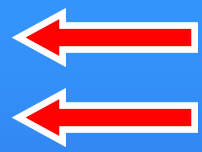
Base: Skopje -284

Who is providing following services and, to your opinion, who should be responsible in providing it?

Region: Northwest+Ku



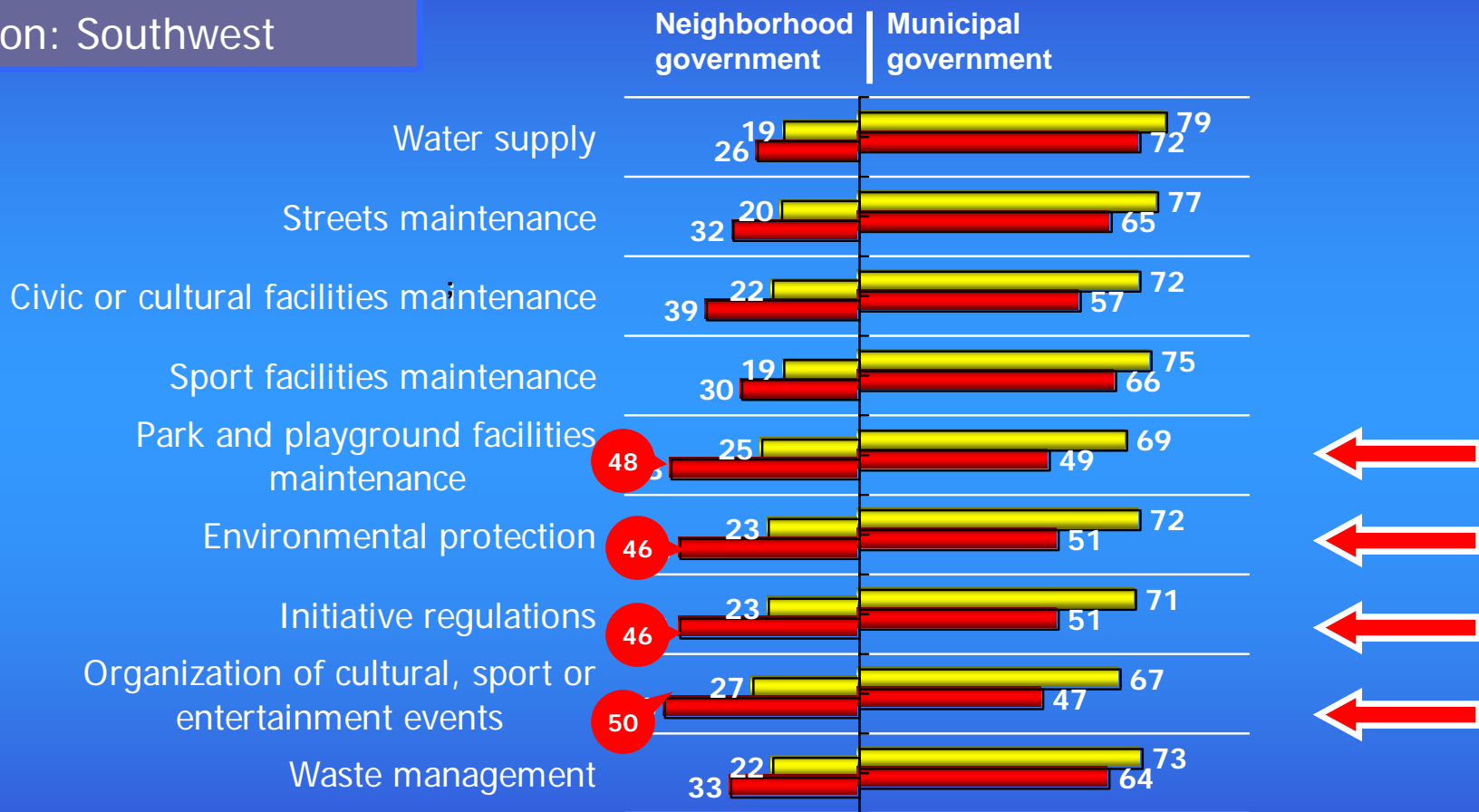
■ Provider of the service
 ■ Who should be provider



Base: Northwest+Ku -256

Who is providing the following services and in your opinion, who should be responsible for providing them?

Region: Southwest



■ Provider of the service
 ■ Who should be provider

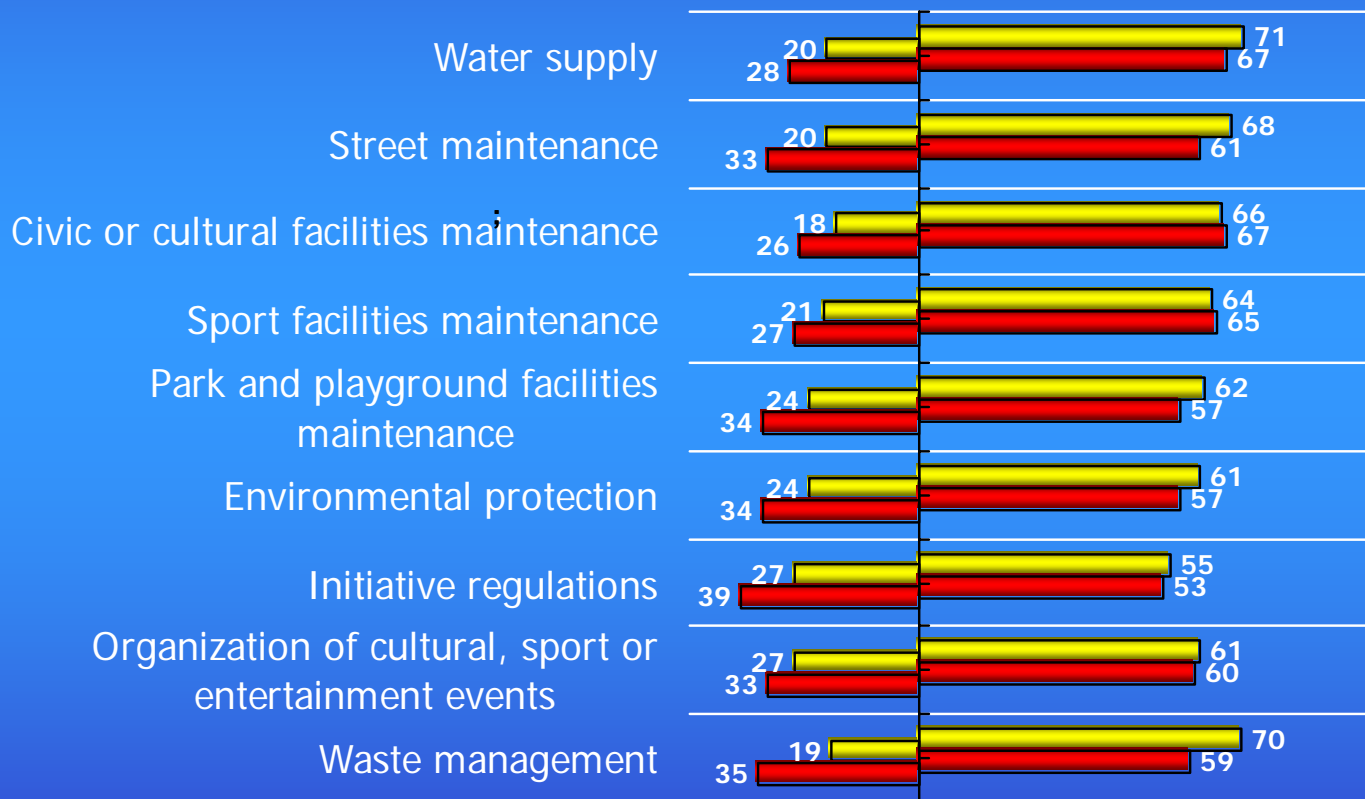
Base: Southwest -221

Who is providing following services and, to your opinion, who should be responsible in providing it?

Region: East & Central

Neighborhood self government

Municipal government



■ Provider of the service

■ Who should be provider

Base: East&Central-269

Devolution

- When asked an open ended question about the role of neighborhood government, more than half (57%) said neighborhood government should **help solve citizens' problems**. When asked about delivery of services and organization of specific activities, a majority responded that **park maintenance** and **environmental protection** should be the responsibility of the neighborhood government.
- Overall, when asked which level of government should be responsible for certain services and activities, there is a noticeable shift in citizen thinking that park maintenance, environmental protection, organization of cultural events and responsibility for initiatives and regulations could be devolved to the neighborhood level. Citizens support not only decentralized activities, but further devolved activities to the neighborhood level.
- The majority nationwide believe neighborhood government should help solve citizens' problems, take responsibility for maintaining parks and playgrounds, and for environmental protection.
- And, almost all mayors and neighborhood presidents agreed that the main responsibilities of neighborhood government are to identify the citizens' problems and represent the citizens' interests
- But, not all citizens of all regions agreed, nor did rural and urban residents, nor did mayors of all regions

Devolution

- ❑ A majority in the Skopje Region want to shift event organization to the neighborhood level
- ❑ A significant number want to shift cultural facilities, parks maintenance and responsibility for initiatives and regulations to the neighborhood level
- ❑ Mayors in the Skopje region favor shifting responsibility for initiatives and regulations, environmental protection, organization of cultural events, and maintenance of parks to the neighborhood level

- ❑ A significant number in the Northwest/Kumanovo Region want to shift responsibility for environmental protection, and initiatives and regulations to the neighborhood level
- ❑ However, mayors interviewed in the region are in favor of devolving only responsibility for initiatives and regulations and environmental protection.

Devolution

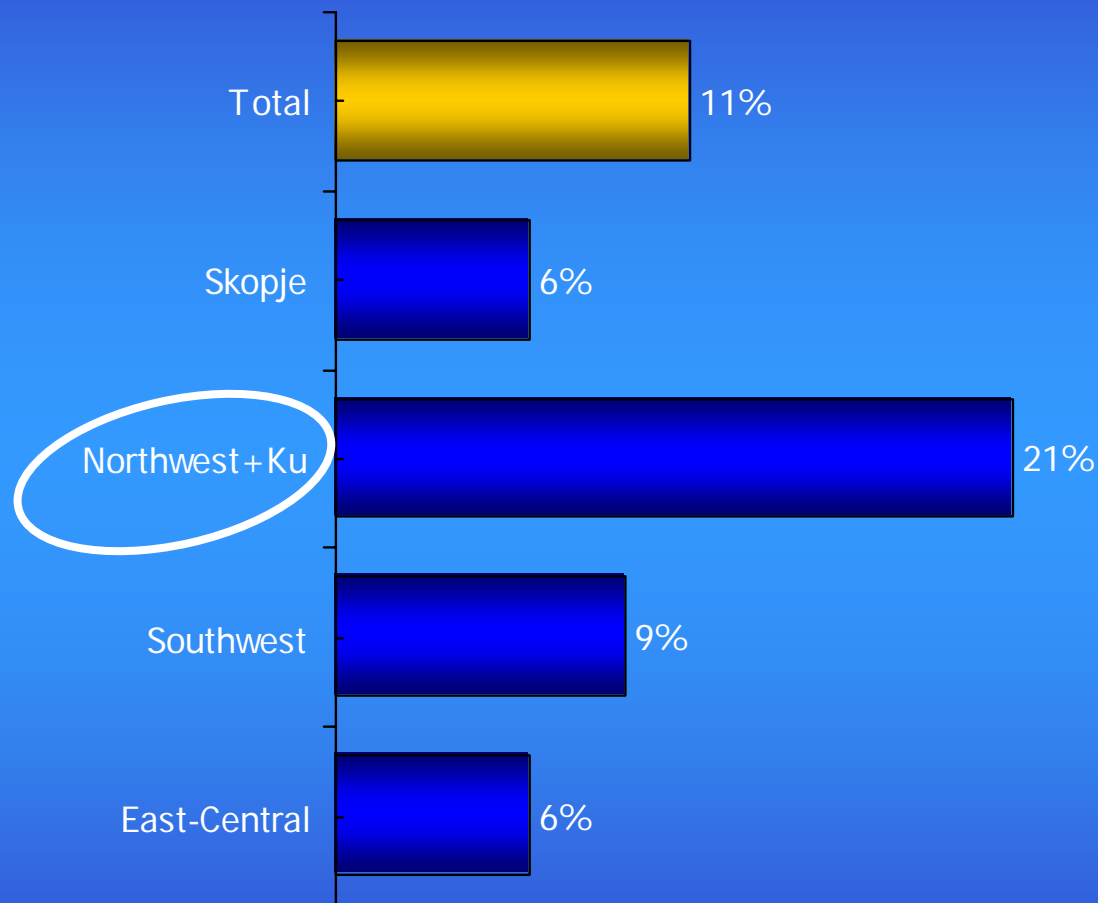
- ❑ A bare majority in the Southwest Region wants to shift responsibility for initiatives and regulations to the neighborhood level
- ❑ A significant number want to shift park maintenance, event organization and environmental protection to the neighborhood level
- ❑ Mayors in the Southwest region favor shifting responsibility for initiatives and regulations, environmental protection, organization of cultural events, and maintenance of parks to the neighborhood level

- ❑ Citizens in the Eastern Region don't want to change anything
- ❑ Mayors and neighborhood presidents interviewed in the region said all of the listed activities could be devolved to neighborhood governments



AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION

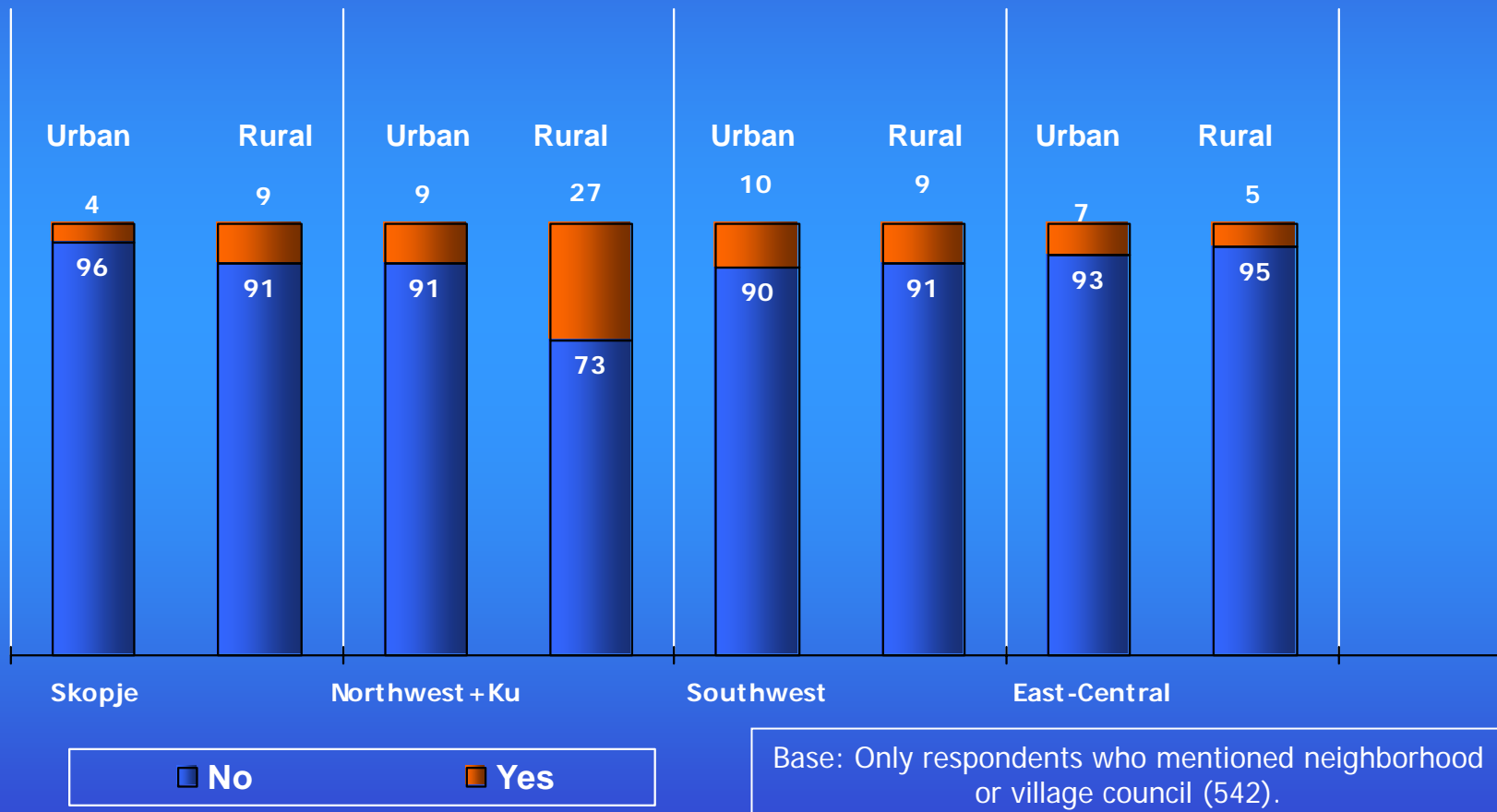
Do you participate in any activities held by your neighborhood or village self government?



Base: Only respondents who mentioned neighborhood or village council (542).

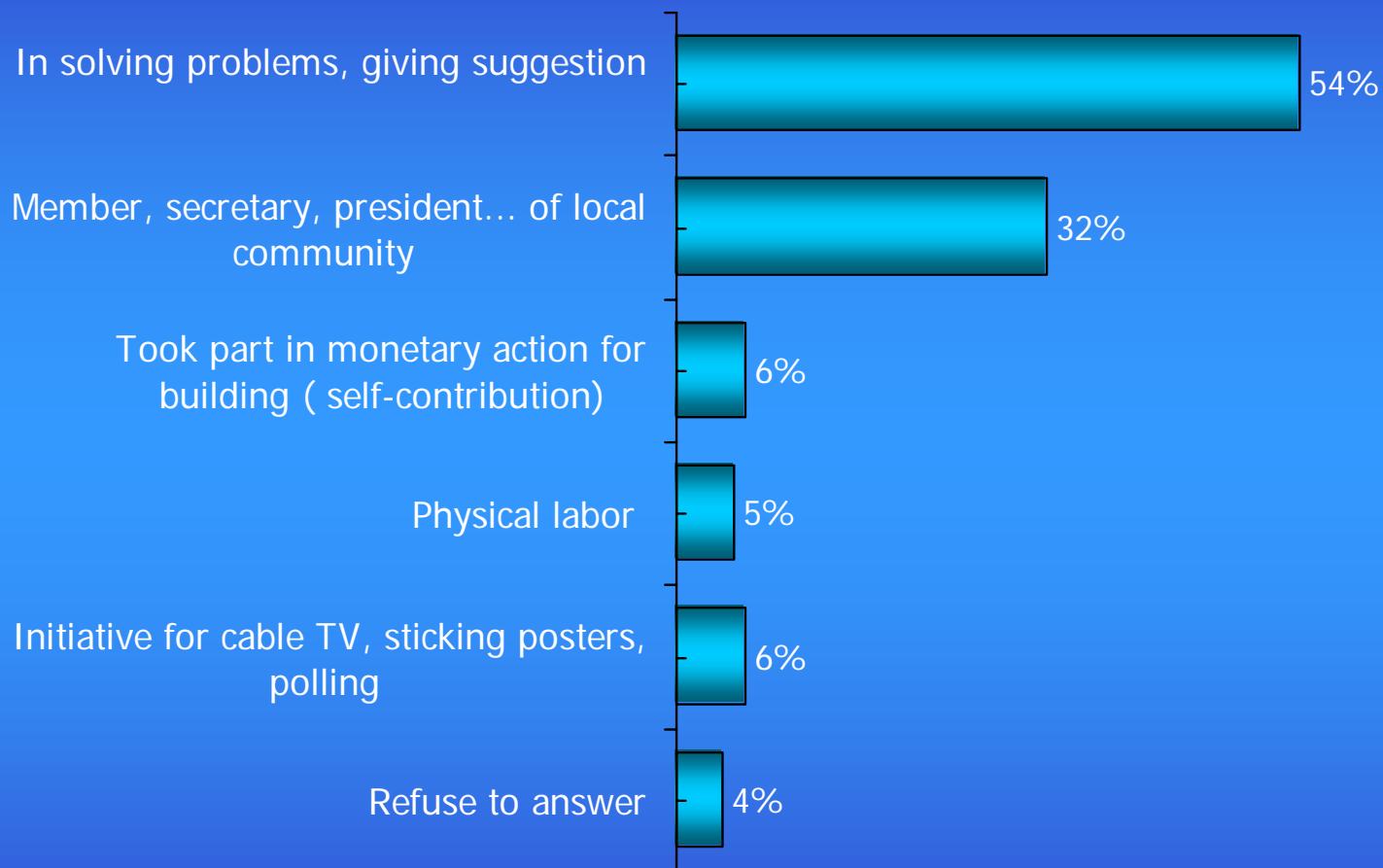
Comment: Though 53% stated that they have an active NSG or village council with an even regional distribution outside of Sk region, the NW+Ku region has the highest level of participation in neighborhood government.

Do you participate in any activities held by your neighborhood or village self government?



Comment: The main difference can be seen in rural areas of the Northwest + Ku region.

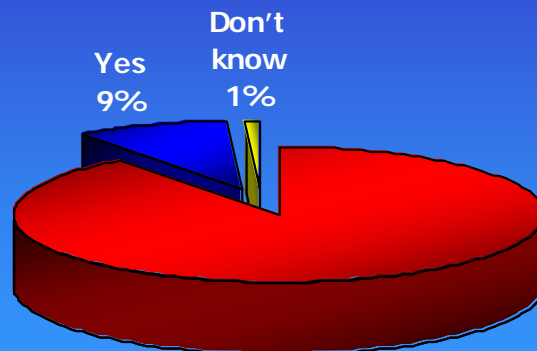
How do you participate, what is your role? (open ended)



Base: Only respondents who mentioned neighborhood or village council. Multiple responses possible (61).

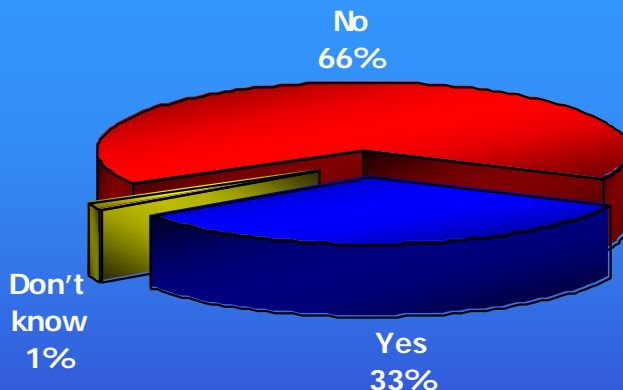
Comment: 1/3 of those who participate are elected members of the council which shows a low ratio of participation of non-officials.

Have you ever attended a City Council meeting in your municipality?



Base: 1029

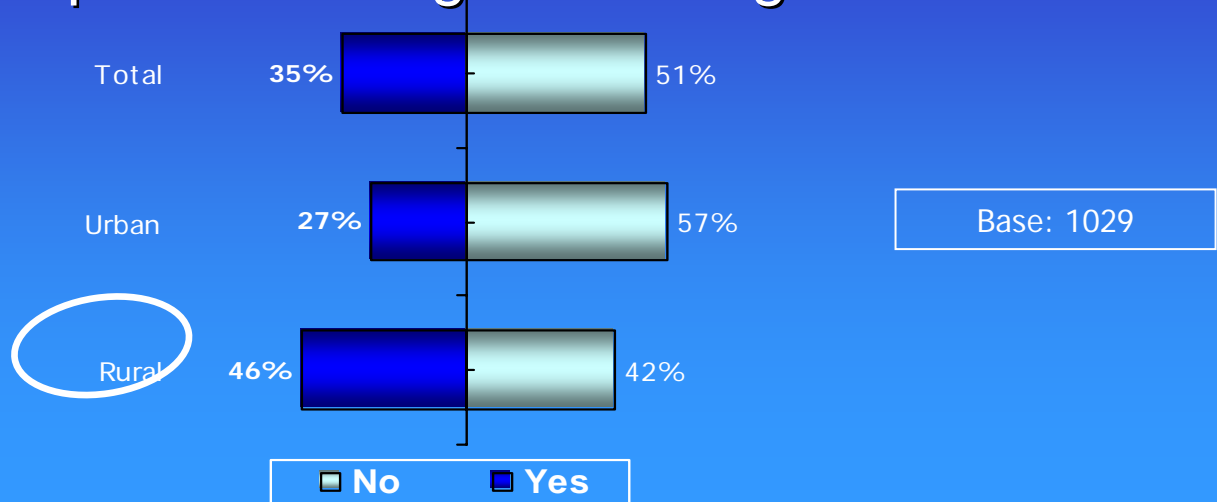
Do you know anyone who has attended a City Council meeting in your municipality?



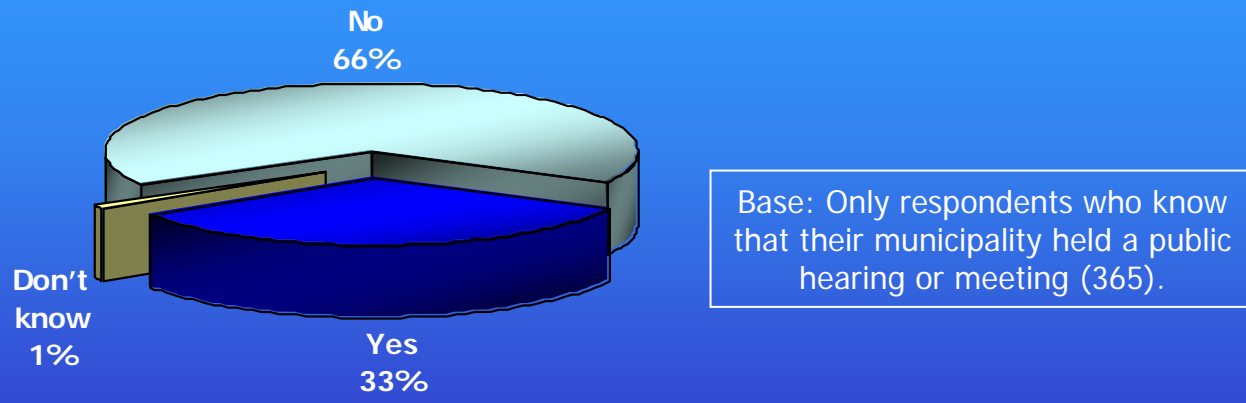
Base: Only respondents who have not attended a city council meeting in their municipality (932).

Comment: Higher than expected awareness of and attendance at open City Council meetings, with higher participation in rural areas among higher educated people over the age of 40.

To your knowledge, has your municipality ever held a public hearing or meeting?

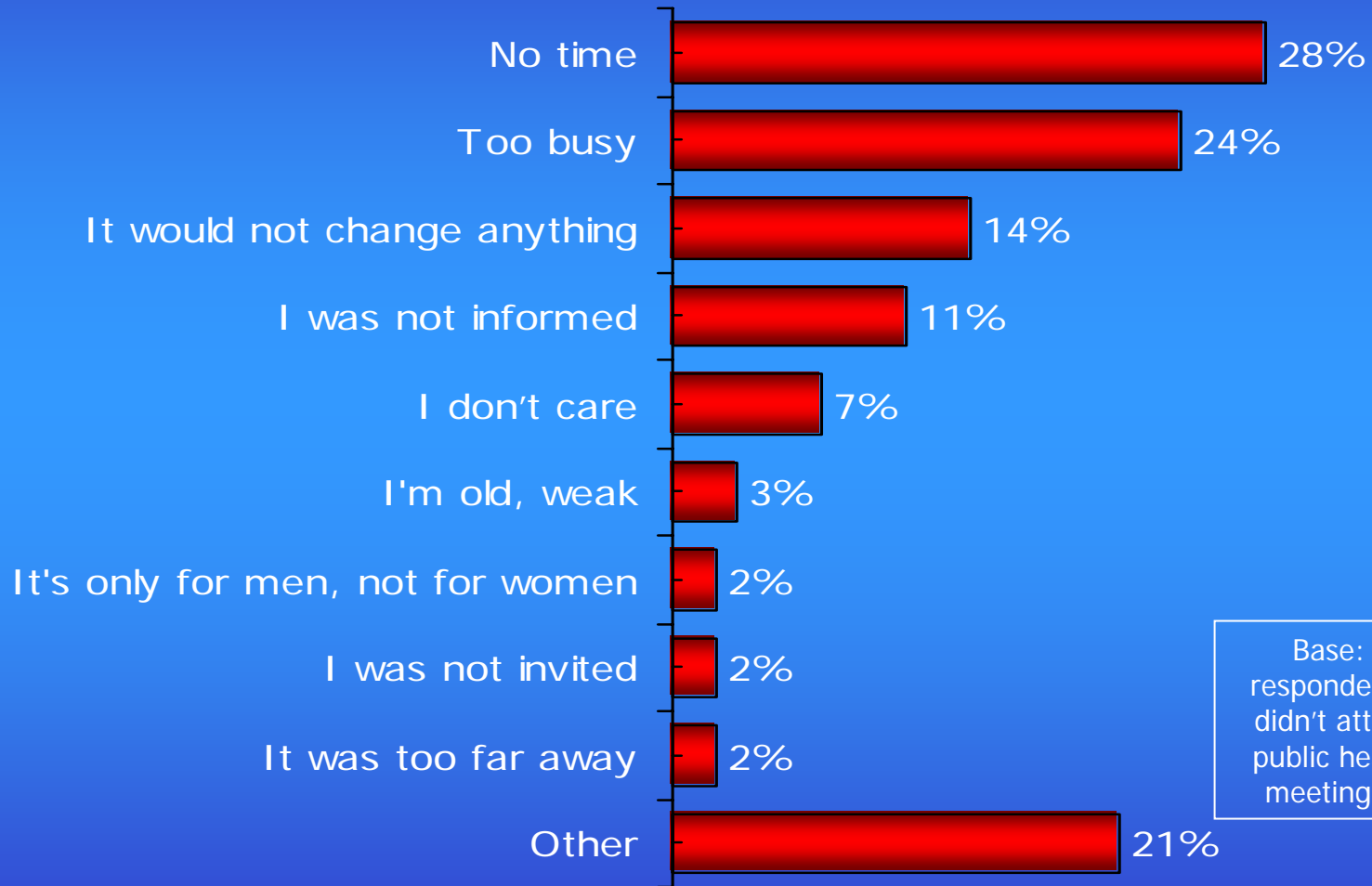


Did you attend that public hearing or meeting?



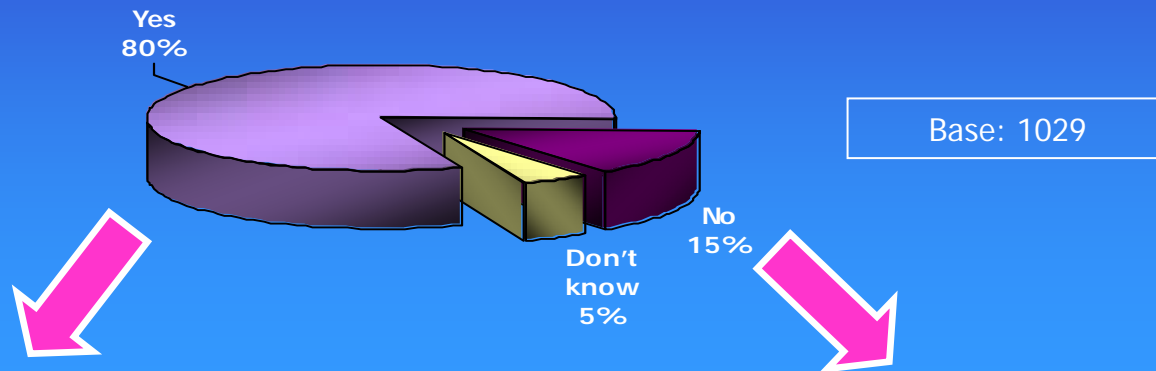
Comment: 1/3 of citizens who are aware of municipal public hearings have attended them.

What was the reason that kept you from attending? (open ended)

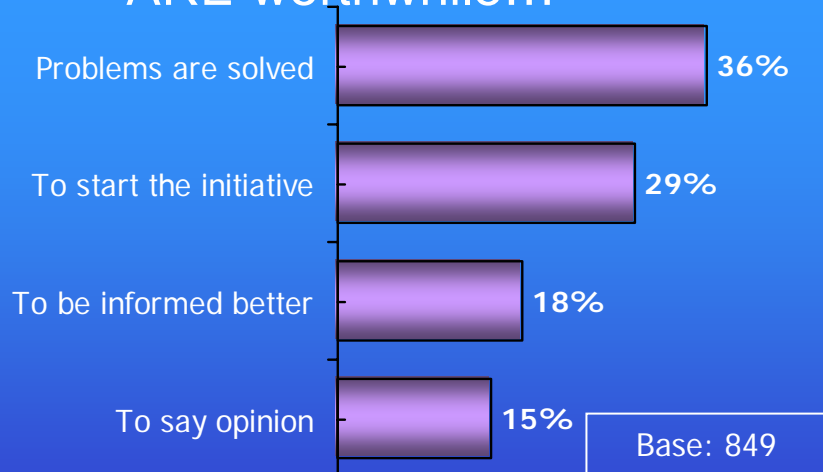


Comment: Excuses that respondents have mentioned.

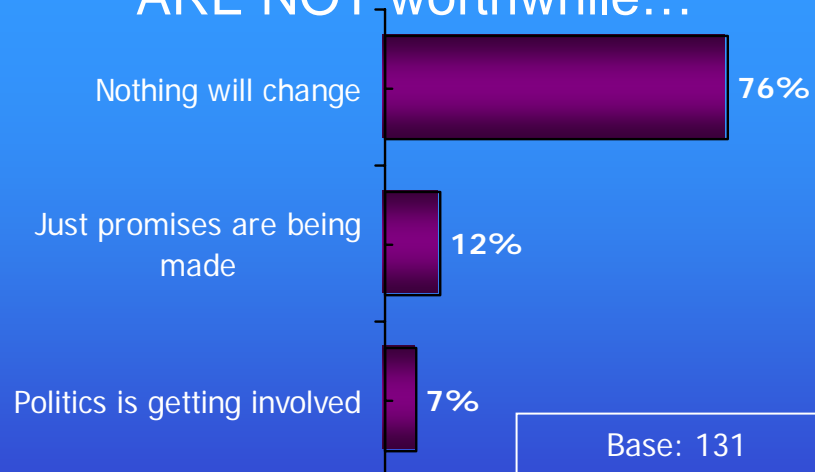
Do you think the public hearings or meetings in your municipality are worthwhile?



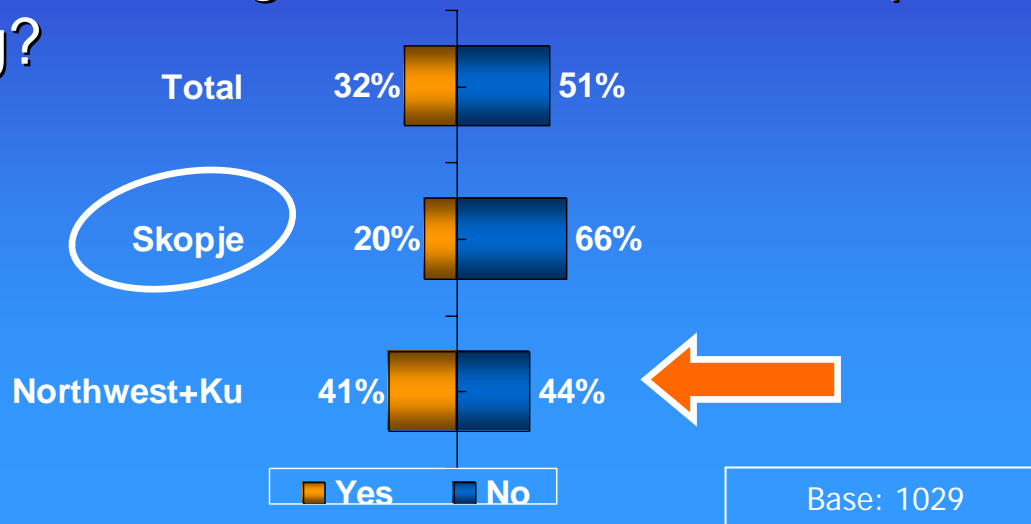
Why do they think they ARE worthwhile...



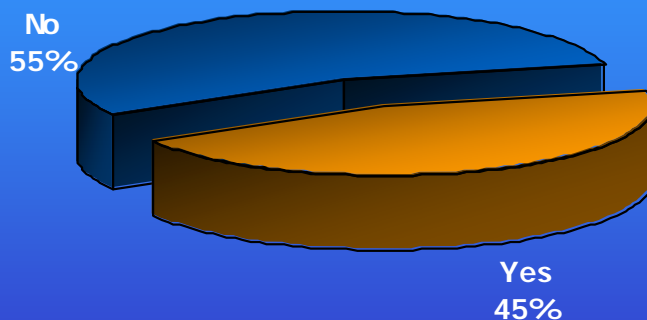
Why do they think they ARE NOT worthwhile...



To your knowledge, has your neighborhood self government or village council ever held a public hearing or meeting?



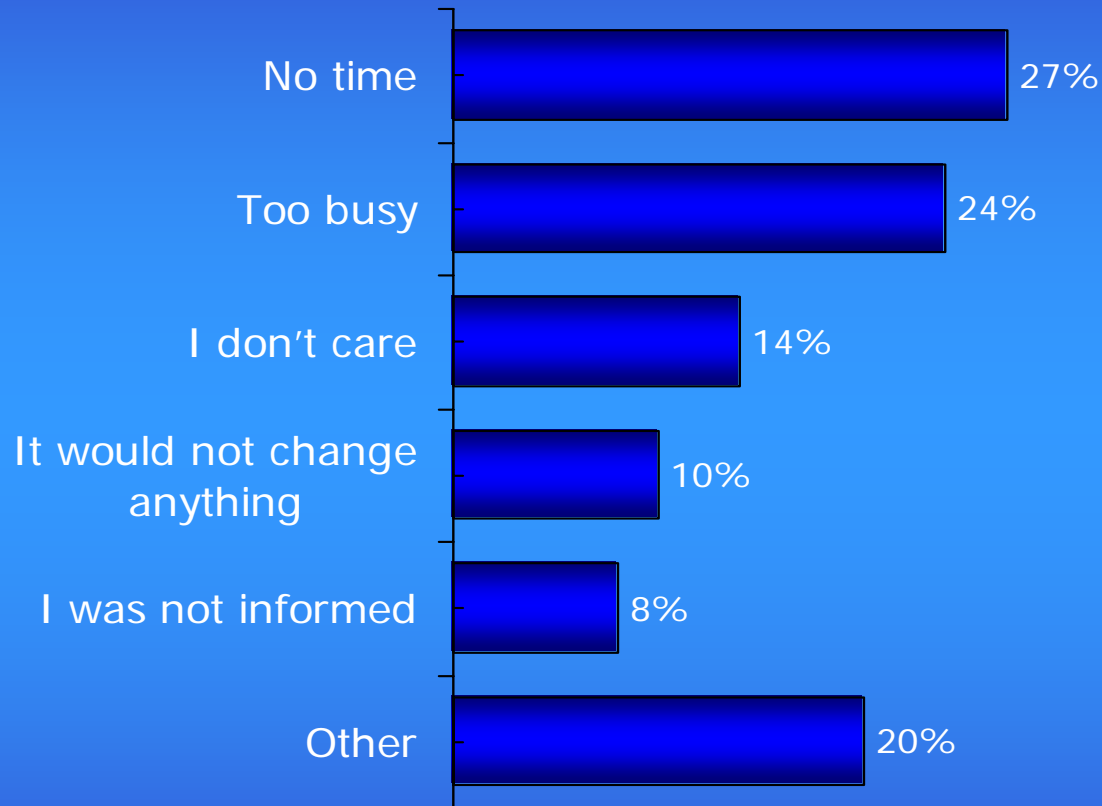
Did you attend that public hearing or meeting?



Base: Only respondents who mentioned that their neighborhood self government unit or village council has held a public hearing or meeting (324).

Comment: When people are aware of neighborhood meeting the attendance is higher than at municipal meeting of which they are aware.

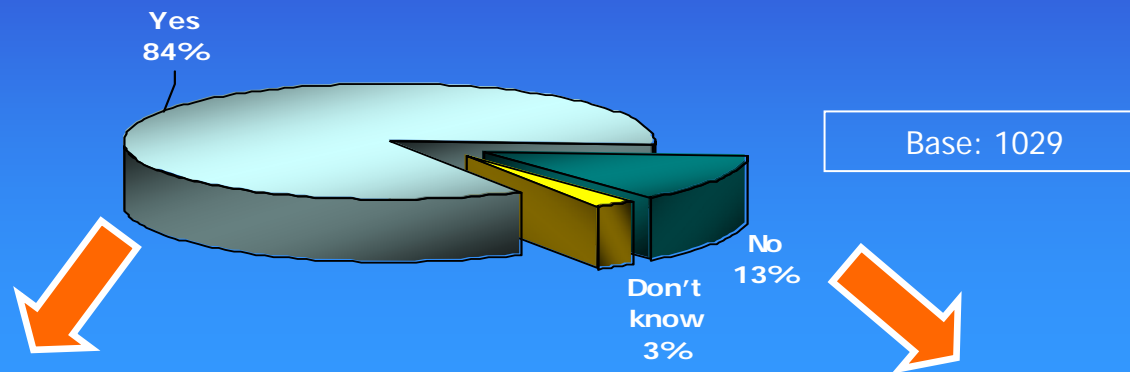
What was the reason that kept you from attending?



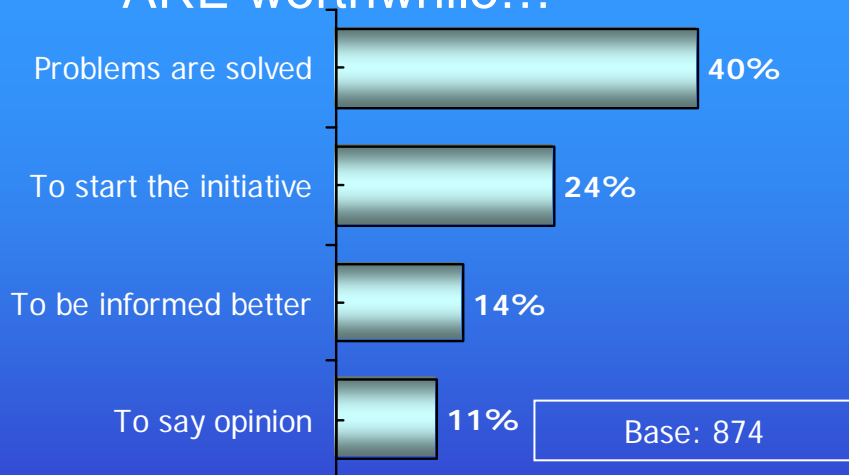
Base: only respondents who have not attended the public hearing or meeting who knew that there was one (177).

Comment: More excuses...

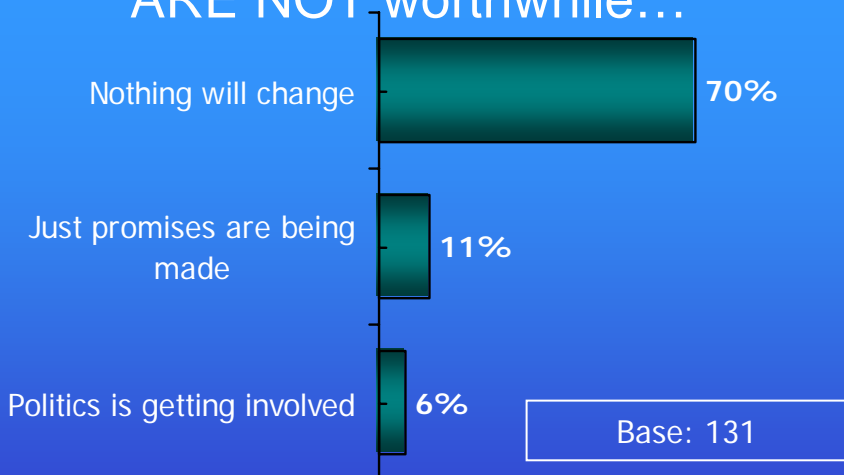
Do you think the public hearings or meetings in your neighborhood are worthwhile?



Why do they think they ARE worthwhile...

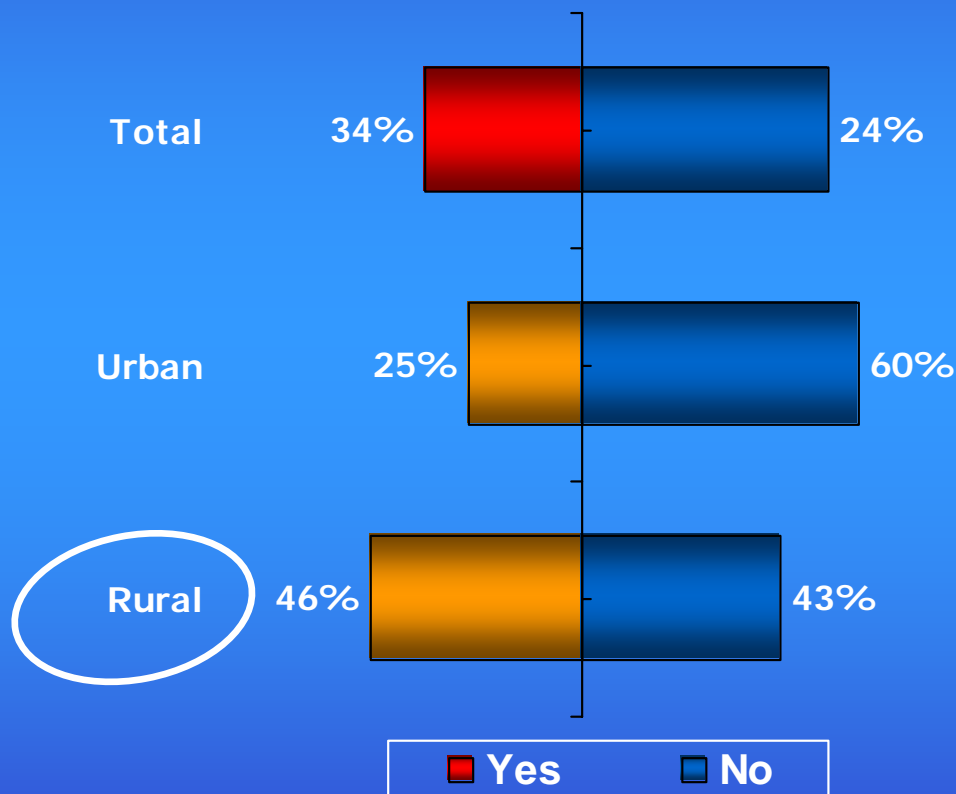


Why do they think they ARE NOT worthwhile...



Comment: This shows a link between the support of public meetings and the citizens' view of the principal role of neighborhood government as the problem solver.

To your knowledge, have the citizens in your municipality or neighborhood ever conducted a citizen initiative?



Base: 1029

Comment:

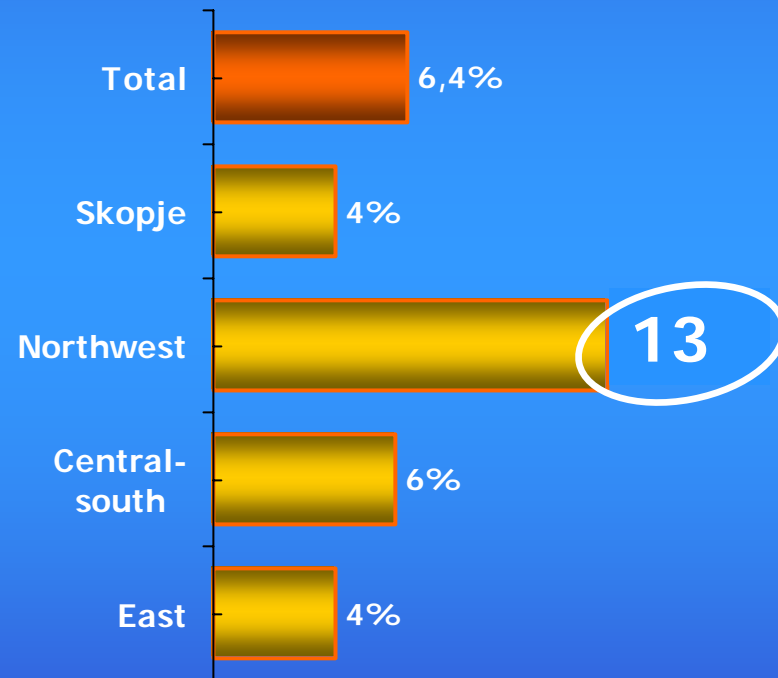
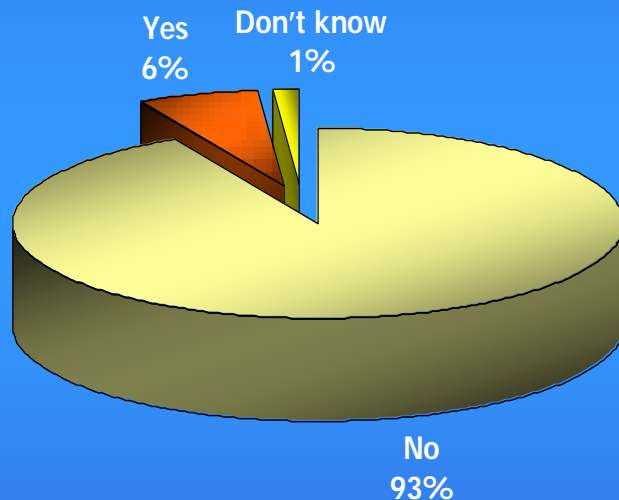
On what subject have the citizens in your municipality or neighborhood conducted a citizen initiative?



Base: Only respondents who are informed that citizens in their municipality or neighborhood have conducted a citizen initiative (347).

Comment:

Have you ever been involved in deciding how to spend donor's money in your municipality or your neighborhood?

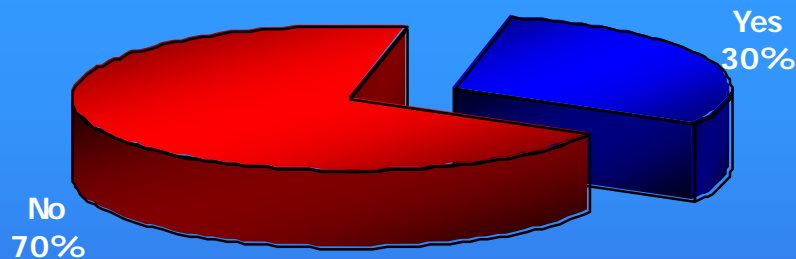


Base: 1029

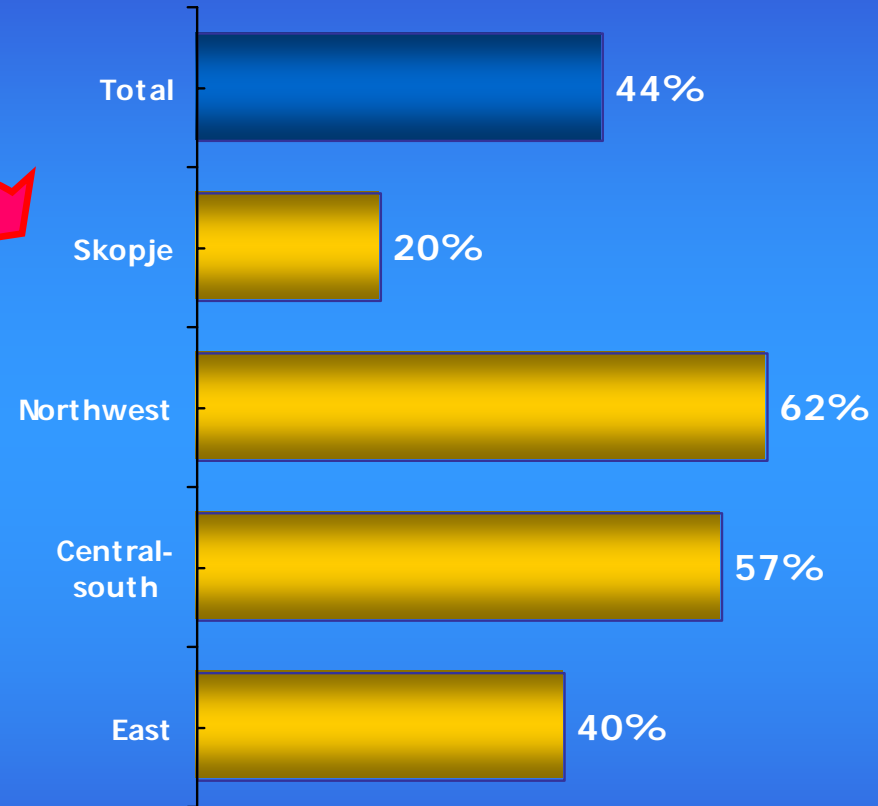
Comment: This correlates with a generally higher level of participation in the NW+Ku region, but the participation level may be higher due to a higher level of donor activity.

Does your municipality have a Citizen Information Center?

Have you heard about Citizen Information Centers that provide information and documents to citizens?



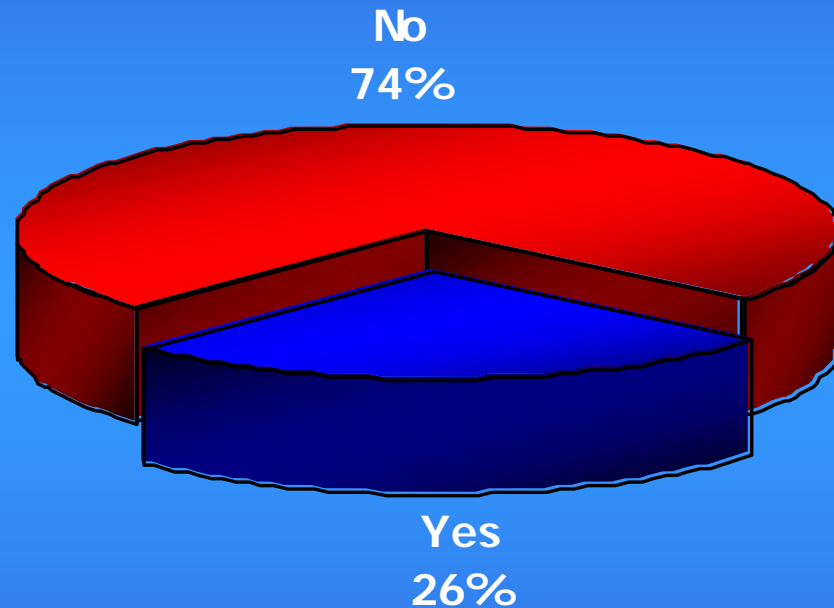
Base: 1029



Base: Only respondents who have heard of CIC (308).

Comment: 1/3 of awareness with divers regional distribution.

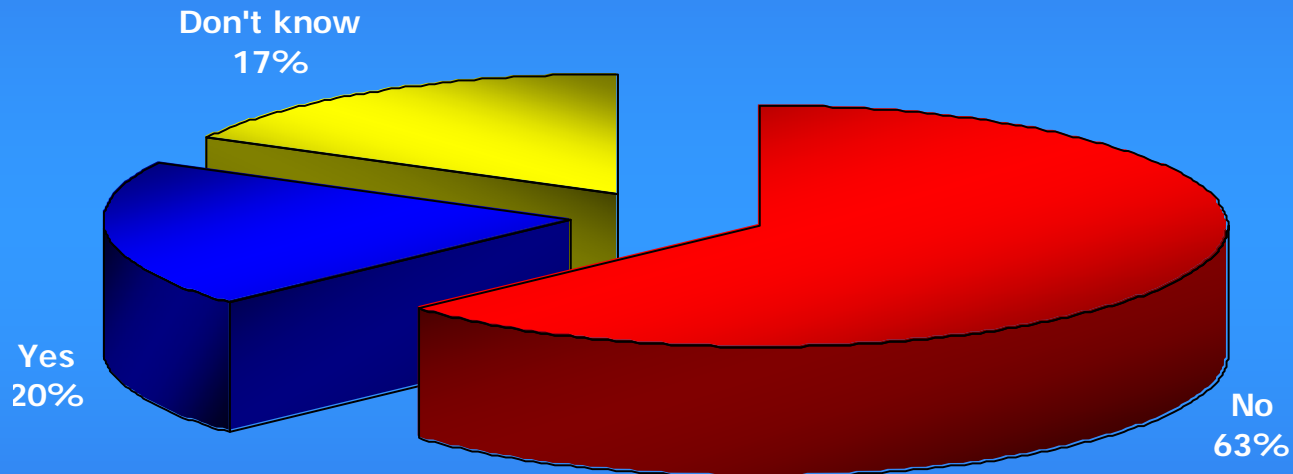
Have you ever visited a Citizen Information Center?



Base: Only respondents who know that in their municipality exists citizen information center (134).

Comment: Only 3% of all respondents have visited a CIC.

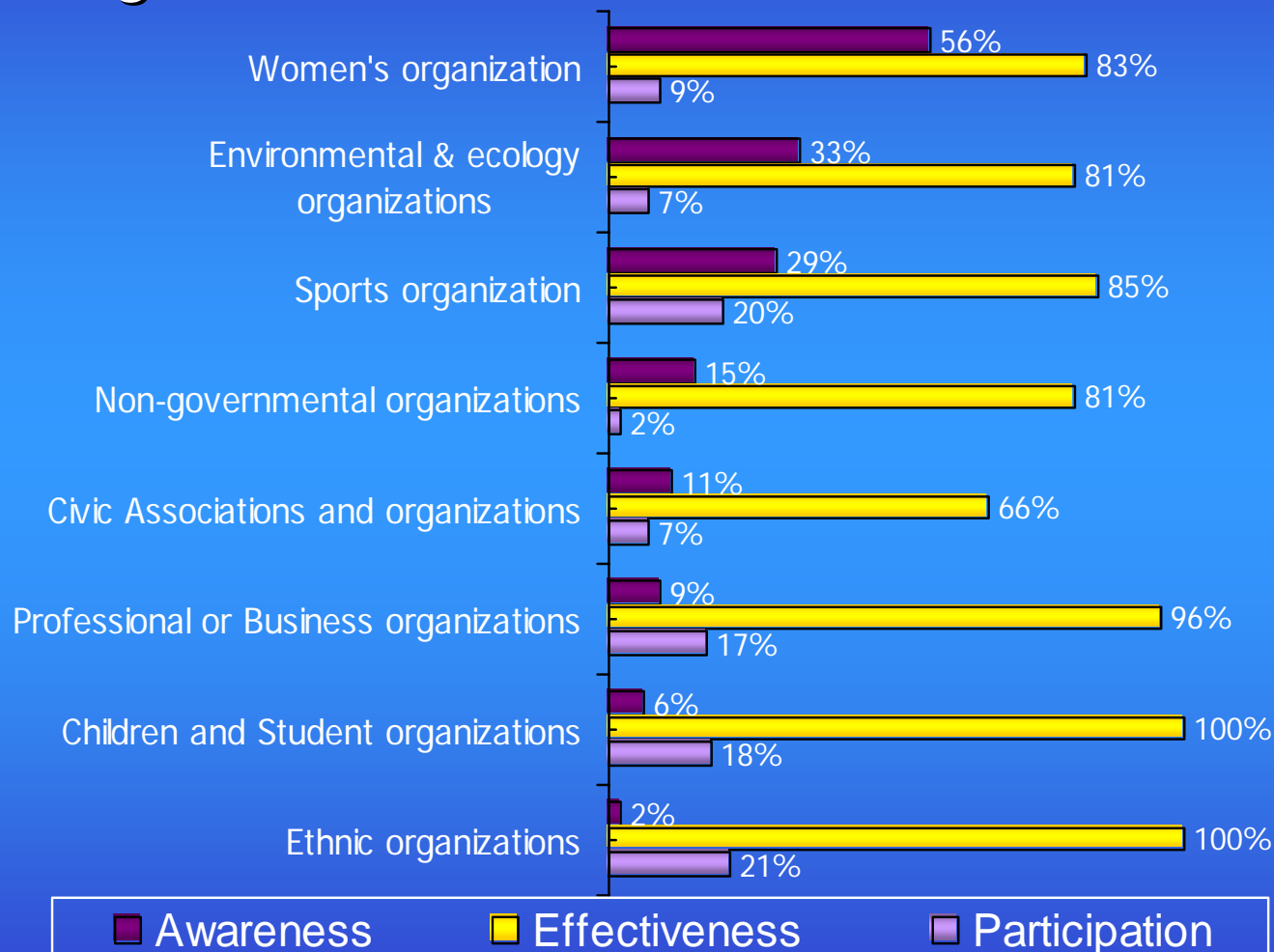
Can you name any organizations that are active in your municipality?



Base: 1029

Comment: Awareness of organizations is lower than awareness of public meeting, city council meetings or CICs.

Awareness, effectiveness and participation in organizations



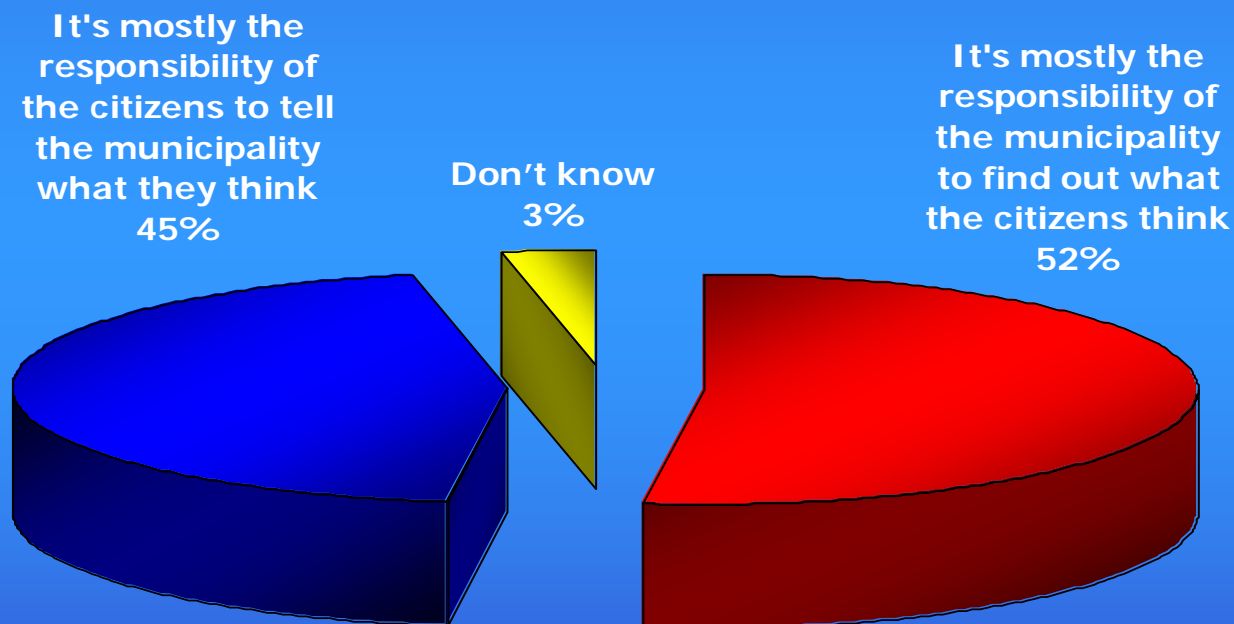
Base: 196

Comment: Women's' organizations mentioned consistently throughout the country; environmental organizations mentioned overwhelmingly in the east; sports organizations dominant in the NW



POTENTIAL FOR PARTICIPATION

Is it the responsibility of the citizens to tell the municipality what they think, or the responsibility of the municipality to find out what the citizens think?



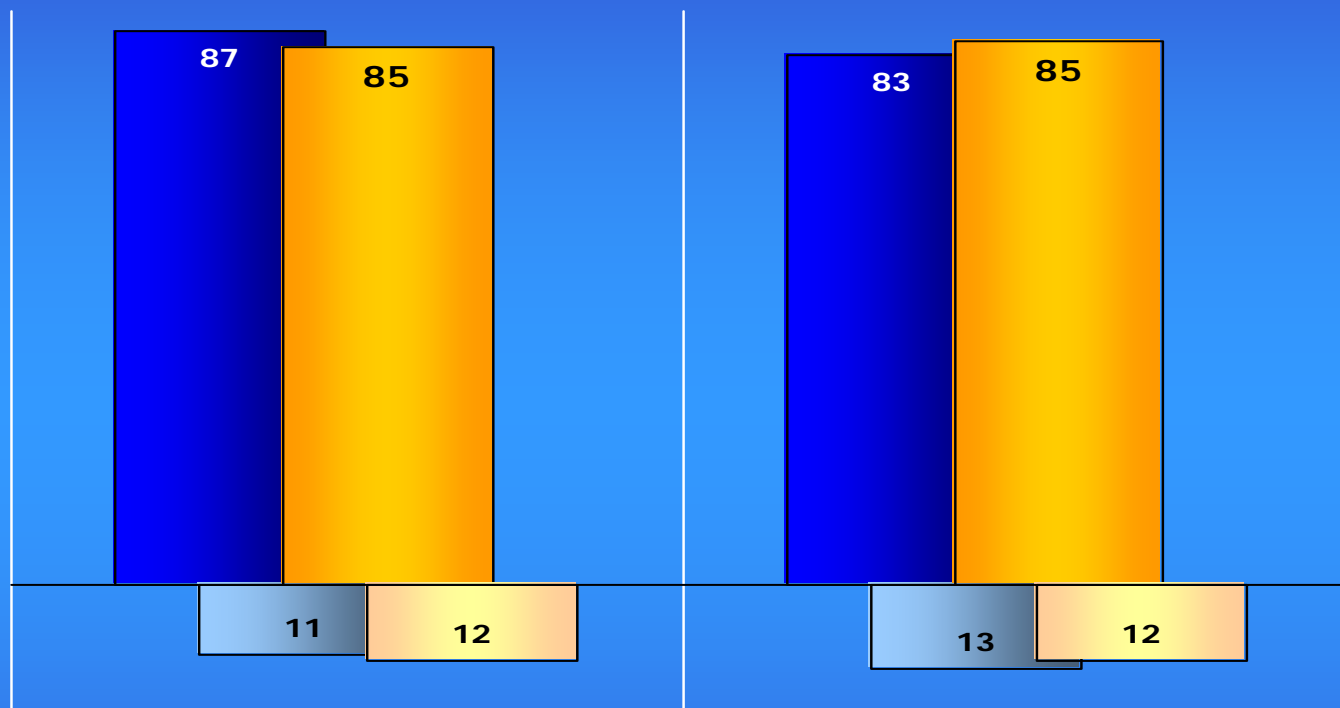
Base: 1029

Comment: Almost half of respondents are not passive and acknowledge some citizen responsibility; may indicate willingness to participate in meetings, to vote, to sign petitions, to seek out information, to take the initiative.

Do you think citizens are...

Interested in what is going on in their...

Willing to participate in resolving problems in their...



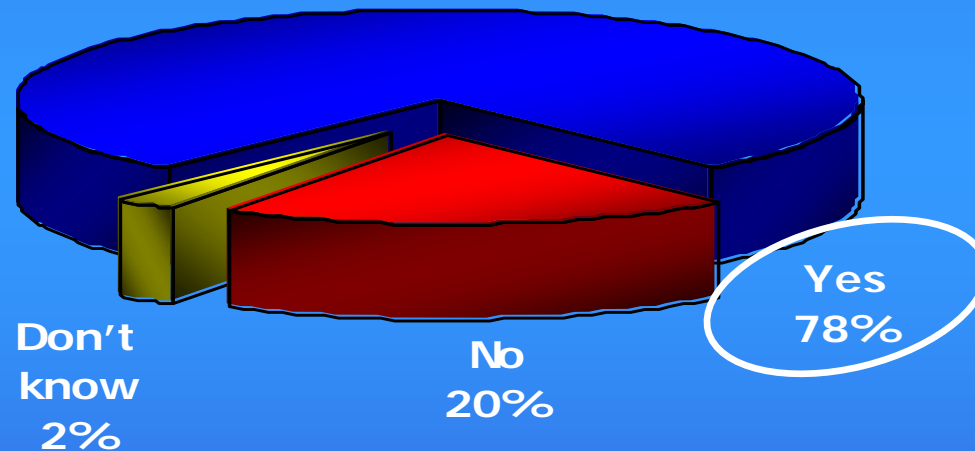
■ Municipality

■ Neighbourhood

Base: 1029

Comment: This shows a high level of optimism.

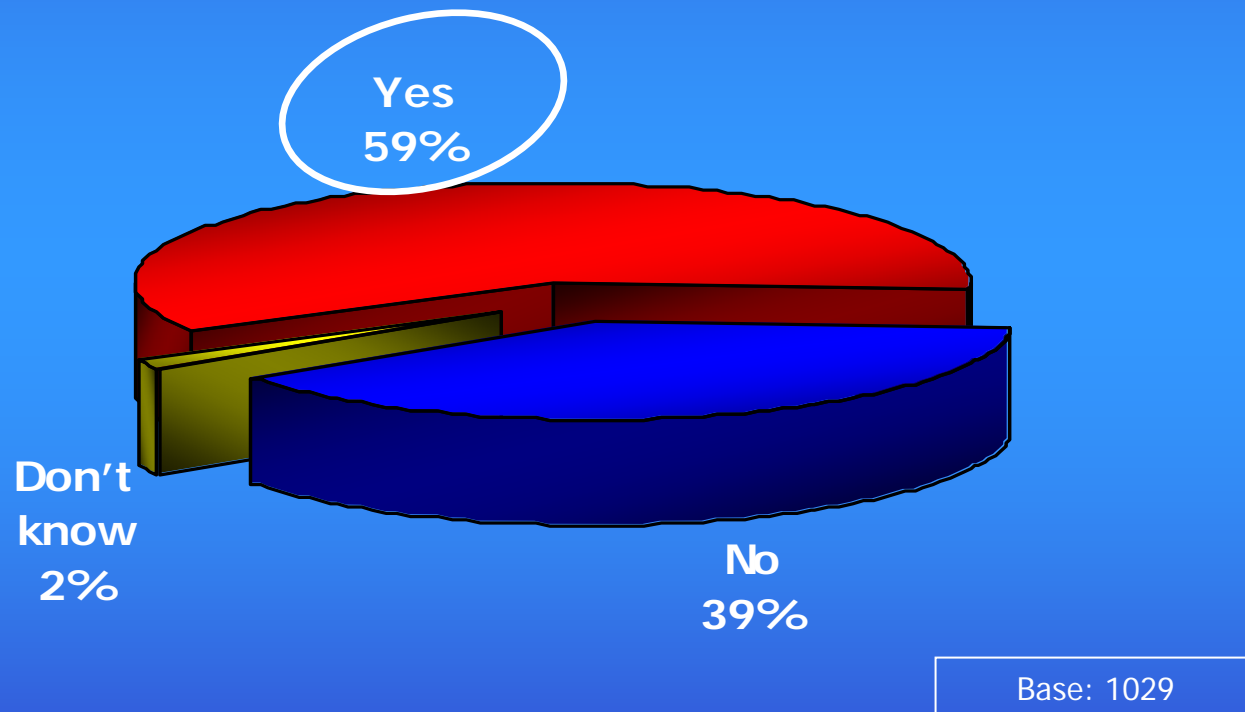
Do you think citizens can influence changes in their municipality or neighborhood?



Base: 1029

Comment: And again optimism or remarkable wish for changes.

Are you willing to be involved?



Comment: Almost 60% are willing to be involved in contrast to the current participation rate in NSGs of 11%.

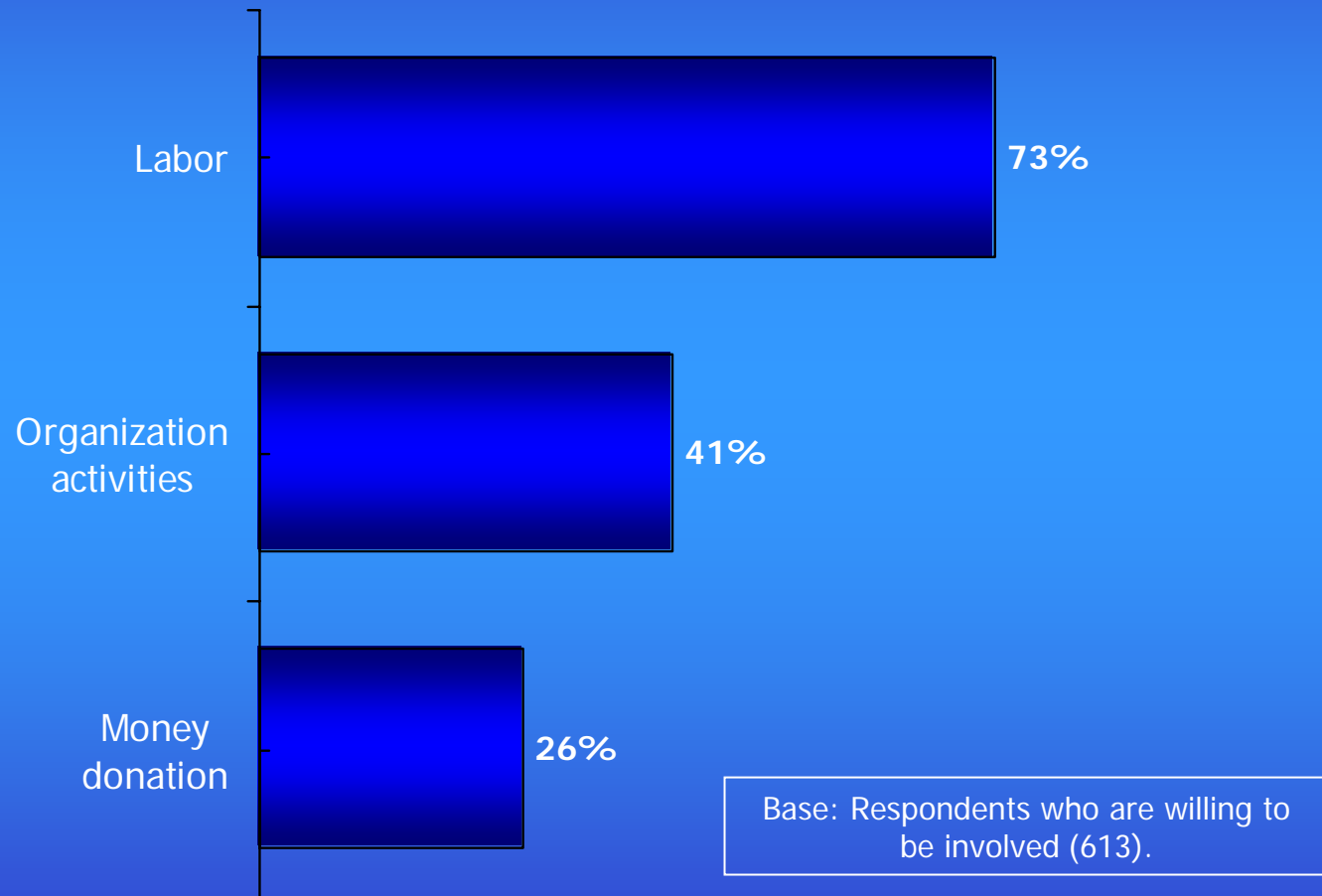
In what areas are you willing to be involved?



Base: Respondents who are willing to be involved (613).

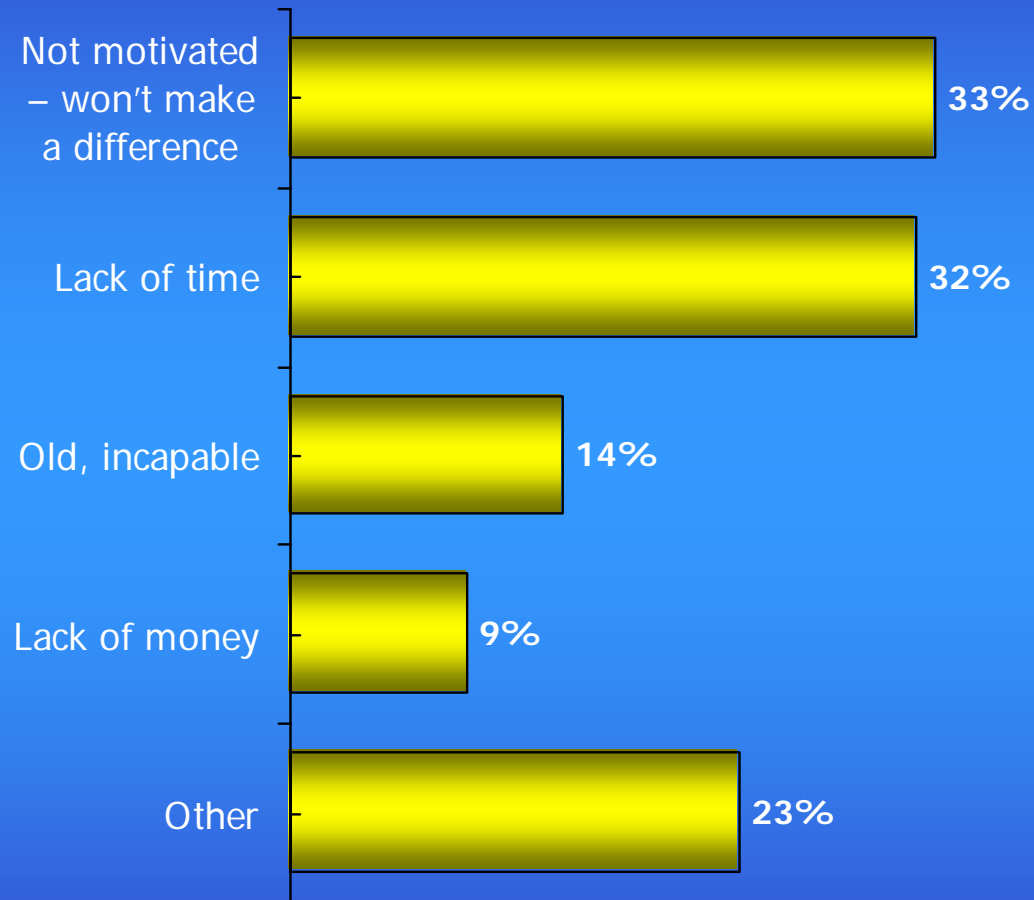
Comment: People are ready to be involve in various areas...

How would you like to be involved?



Comment: ...mostly in labor and less so in contributing financially

Why you are not willing to be involved?



Base: Respondents who are not willing to be involved (400).

Comment: level of cynicism is low, less than 15%; including other, approximately 30%

Potential for Participation

- Approximately **one third of respondents are aware** of public meetings or hearings that have been held in their municipality or neighborhood, know someone who has attended a City Council meeting, or have heard of Citizen Information Centers.
- **Participation levels** at meetings or hearings, city council meetings, in neighborhood government, and in organizations is **less than 20%**.
- 78% think citizens can effect change, more than 80% think others are interested and willing to become involved, and 60% are willing to become involved themselves
- Huge gap between willingness to participate and actual participation. Let's look at two areas where the gap is not so large: rural areas, and the Northwest and Kumanovo region
- **Rural Areas:** Stronger sense of neighborhood and 72% **active neighborhood governments** vs. 48% in urban areas. Participation rate in neighborhood government is twice as high as in urban areas. Rate **confidence in neighborhood government** and in the president of the neighborhood council higher than in urban areas. Rate the **performance of neighborhood government** at a higher level. Higher level of trust in both neighborhood and municipal government to levy fees for improvements.

Potential for Participation

- ❑ **The Northwest and Kumanovo** The percentage of respondents with neighborhood government is similar in the three regions outside the Skopje region. However, the Northwest and Kumanovo region has much **higher participation levels**, and **levels of trust** in both municipal and neighborhood government and in the president of neighborhood government. The region also has strong trust in neighborhood and municipal government to levy fees for improvements
- ❑ Participation levels at municipal hearings, at City Council meetings, and in deciding how to spend donor funds are the highest of all regions. Respondents had a much greater awareness of neighborhood meetings than those in other regions, but the rate of attendance wasn't much greater than that of those in other regions.
- ❑ Almost 50% of Northwest residents say their municipality considers citizen opinions when preparing a municipal strategy, in contrast to 30 to 40% in other regions.
- ❑ The gap between the neighborhood and the citizens and between the municipality and the government is much smaller in this region than in other regions. The gaps in rural areas are smaller than the gaps in urban areas.

Conclusions

- ❑ There is a high correlation between active neighborhood government, higher levels of participation, higher trust in local government (both neighborhood and municipal), and greater willingness to pay fees for local improvements.
- ❑ Overwhelmingly, citizens want their neighborhood governments to solve problems. They are also willing in some areas to see some activities devolved to the neighborhood level
- ❑ Citizens are willing to be involved, think they can change things, but do not participate. They are not motivated to participate.
- ❑ Citizens should be motivated to participate in resolving their problems at the neighborhood level.
- ❑ This is what citizens are willing to do (be involved), and want (their problems solved). It would increase participation which correlates with higher levels of trust and confidence in local government.

Recommendations

- Accelerate decentralization, advocate and support further devolution to the neighborhood level where feasible, and strengthen neighborhood government
 - Establish a devolution committee within ZELS to foster sharing of information and best practices
 - Establish a neighborhood government committee within ZELS to foster sharing of information and best practices, and to set up an organization for neighborhood presidents to share information and to receive training in leadership, organization, activities management, and problem solving.
 - It is important to institute these committees in ZELS as the new local government law allows neighborhood governments to implement activities and services only to the extent that they are devolved to them by the mayor.



STRATEGIC MARKETING

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