

THE CITIZENS' OPINION OF THE POLICE

**Results of the Public Opinion Survey
Conducted in Serbia**

September, 2017



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PUBLISHER

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ABOUT THE SURVEY

The third round of the public opinion survey "The Citizens' Opinion of the Police Force" was conducted in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia. The questionnaire based on which the public opinion survey was conducted was devised by the regional network POINTPULSE to provide answers concerning the citizens' opinion of the police. The questionnaire included six groups of questions:

1. The level of citizens' trust and confidence in institutions;
2. The perception of the police as an institution, but also of policemen and policewomen as individuals;
3. The perception of corruption in the society and the police force;
4. Opinions of citizens regarding the fight against corruption;
5. Opinions of citizens on the work of civil society organisations;
6. Demographics.

The field research in Serbia was conducted in June 2017 by IPSOS Strategic Marketing, on a representative sample of 1,000 adult persons, citizens of Serbia. A questionnaire was used as a research instrument and interviews were conducted using the "face to face" technique, which involves direct contact with respondents.

The report was published as part of the project titled "Western Balkans Pulse for Police Integrity and Trust", which aims to contribute to increasing the trust and confidence in the police by promoting its accountability and strengthening its integrity. For this reason, the following seven civil society organisations from the region came together to form the POINTPULSE network: Analytica from Skopje, Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP) and Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) from Belgrade, Centre for Security Studies (CSS) from Sarajevo, Alternativa Institute (IA) from Podgorica, Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) from Tirana, and the Kosovo Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) from Pristina.

The project is supported by the European Union through the programme "Civil Society Facility" under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). The content of this report is the sole responsibility of the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy and the views expressed in this document are not necessarily those of the European Union.

SUMMARY

More than half of the population in Serbia (56%) showed trust in the police. Over the last three years, a steady yet small increase in the level of trust in the police has been observed. However, it is still below the global average of 60-90%.

A decrease in the perceived level of corruption within the police has been identified. Two out of three citizens (68%) see the police as significantly corrupt. This is a drop from 2016, when this was the opinion of 72% of the population. However, only one out of 25 citizens considers police to be completely free of corruption.

The police force mostly operates as a service to the citizens, which is the opinion shared by one out of three respondents (37%). Although this association is a positive one, there has been no improvement in this area when compared to the previous year. Moreover, every second citizen (58%) believes that the police operates the least in this capacity, as a service to the citizens.

The above mentioned positive developments warrant no commendation, since the citizens are also acutely aware of other problems that exist within the police, as a result of their own personal experiences – corruption, politicisation and lack of professionalism. Despite these problems that citizens perceive to be at rampant levels, they do not seem to be reflected to a great extent in the level of trust reported.

Police ranks second when it comes to perceived levels of corruption, preceded only by the healthcare system. Traditionally, the traffic police are the organisational unit deemed most corrupt by the citizens.

Citizens associate policemen mostly with arrogance or crudeness (10%) and see them as corrupt (8%). Despite the fact that policewomen comprise a significant share of the police force, a clear gender bias is evident in the citizens' perceptions, and their first associations have nothing to do with policing. Namely, policewomen are mostly seen as kind and good looking, but also three times less corrupt than their male colleagues.

Citizens have unfavourable opinions of how one gains employment in the police force, listing personal connections with friends and relatives as a means to get to wear the blue uniform (46%). This is followed closely by political connections and public competition as means of finding employment (40% each).

Three out of four citizens of Serbia (70%) believe that politics excessively influence the operational work of the police, which is the finding that to some extent contradicts their views of police being a service to the citizens.

The citizens are extremely unlikely to report corruption in the police. Regardless of whether reporting is done anonymously or one is required to disclose personal data, almost half of the citizens would not report corruption. Only every fourth citizen (26%) would report corruption in the case they need to disclose personal data, whereas additional one out of three (35%) would do it anonymously.

The youngest segments of the population (18-29 years old) tend to have the most negative perception of the police force. The youth exhibits the lowest level of trust in the police; they tend to see police officers as more corrupt than the average population, and the opinion that the police force is politicised is highly present within this group.

Based on the results of this survey, several recommendations could be suggested.

The police need to communicate the results and outcomes of their work to the citizens more effectively in order to improve their own standing. Much more effort needs to be invested in investigating and resolving the issues related to police work, where citizens tend to have very negative perceptions based on their own experiences. The procedures for reporting and dealing with corruption in the police need to be more easily accessible to citizens but also made more efficient to earn their trust.

TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Citizens Trust the Education System and the Police the Most

Citizens' trust in institutions is considered a very useful tool for estimating the quality of services that said institutions provide, as well as the general perception of their performance. The research measured the extent of citizen's trust in 12 institutions that form the cornerstone of a democratic society, i.e. the police, the judiciary, the Parliament, the media and the independent state bodies (see: Chart 1). In addition, the role of these institutions in fighting corruption was also taken into account in the process of their selection. These were the main reasons why some other institutions, such as the Serbian Armed Forces, were omitted from the survey.

Chart 1: Trust in 12 different institutions in Serbia

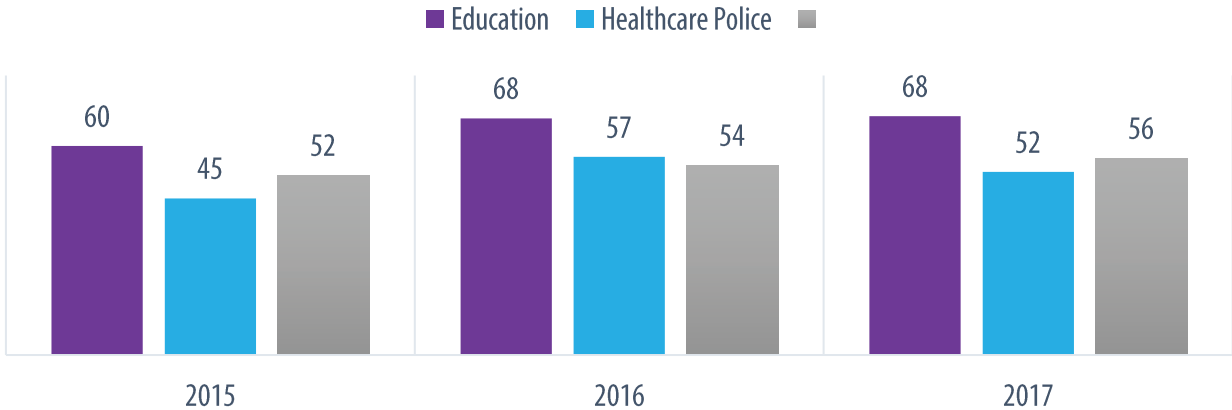
Q: How much do you trust the following institutions in Serbia? Please answer using the scale from 1 to 4, where: 1 means that you do not trust the particular institution at all, 2 that you mainly do not trust it, 3 that you mainly trust it, and 4 that you completely trust that institution.



Over the past three years, the citizens of Serbia have consistently demonstrated that they trust educational institutions the most, followed by the police and health care (see: Chart 2). There is a slow but steady trend of increase of citizens' trust in the police, with an average annual upward trend of two percentage points, which should be commended. In 2017, it reached 56%, which is the all-time high. However, it is still below the global average of 60-90%, which points to the fact that much more can be done by the police and the Ministry of Interior (MoI) to earn popular trust.

Chart 2: Institutions with the highest level of trust, 2015-2017

Q: How much do you trust the following institutions in Serbia? Please answer using the scale from 1 to 4, where: 1 means that you do not trust the particular institution at all, 2 that you mainly do not trust it, 3 that you mainly trust it, and 4 that you completely trust that institution.

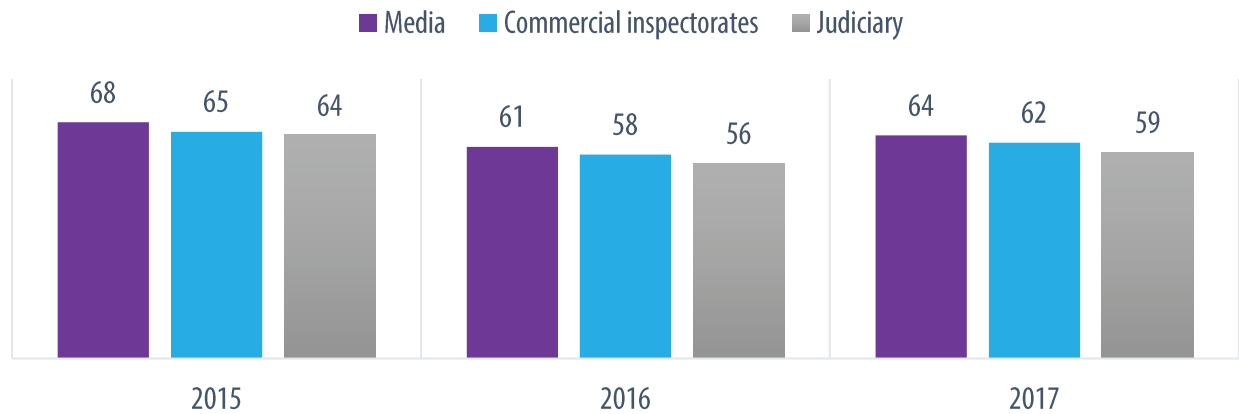


Despite the increase in the level of trust, negative experiences of citizens in direct contact with the police further suggest that a number of problems still exist concerning the conduct of officers, as can be seen from other chapters of this report. In other words, citizens are able to identify very clearly where the problems lie within the police. Yet, these problems are not reflected in their overall level of trust in this institution. This is especially true when it comes to the general perception of corruption within the police, which maintains its extremely high level (see chapter on perception of corruption in the report) without having a measurable effect on the level of trust in this institution. One of the possible explanations is that the rampant level of corruption and poor governance across the board have become something that is widely accepted by the citizens, to the point where it is considered a new normal and does not influence trust in institutions to the extent which could be expected.

When it comes to institutions that are the least trusted by the citizens, these traditionally include the commercial inspectorates, judiciary and the media (see: Chart 3). It is especially worrisome that the media outlets, which should serve as a governmental corrective and a public discussion platform, provoke the least amount of trust, i.e. that, on average, only every third Serbian citizen thinks the media is deserving of his/her trust. Moreover, the popular trust in these three observed institutions has dropped when compared to the previous year by an average of three percentage points. These results further corroborate the finding that the popular trust in institutions, on average, is well below that found in the developed world. These results could be attributed to the overall lack of efficiency and widespread corruption in public institutions, tabloidisation of the media, and generally poor quality of media reporting.

Chart 3: Institutions with the lowest level of trust 2015-2017

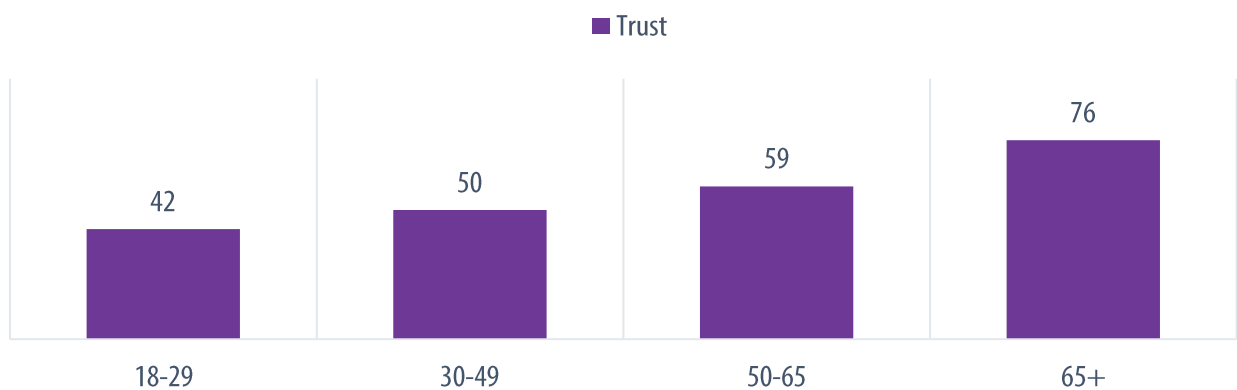
Q: How much do you trust the following institutions in Serbia? Please answer using the scale from 1 to 4, where: 1 means that you do not trust the particular institution at all, 2 that you mainly do not trust it, 3 that you mainly trust it, and 4 that you completely trust that institution.



People with higher levels of education tend to be less trusting of both the police and other institutions. The age seems to determine the average levels of trust in the police (see: Chart 4), where the youngest citizens (18-29) tend to trust them the least (42%) while the oldest segments of the population (65+ years old) have the most trust in this institution (76%).

Chart 4: Trust in police, by age group

Q: How much do you trust the following institutions in Serbia? Please answer using the scale from 1 to 4, where: 1 means that you do not trust the particular institution at all, 2 that you mainly do not trust it, 3 that you mainly trust it, and 4 that you completely trust that institution.



Other variables, such as gender or nationality, also influence the level of trust in the police, but to a lesser extent. For instance, three out of four members of the Bosniak community in Serbia have some level of trust in the police (76%), which is a higher level of trust than in the total population. On the other hand, ethnic Hungarians appear to have the least trust in police (45%). Women tend to think of police as trustworthy slightly more than their male counterparts (59% and 53% respectively).

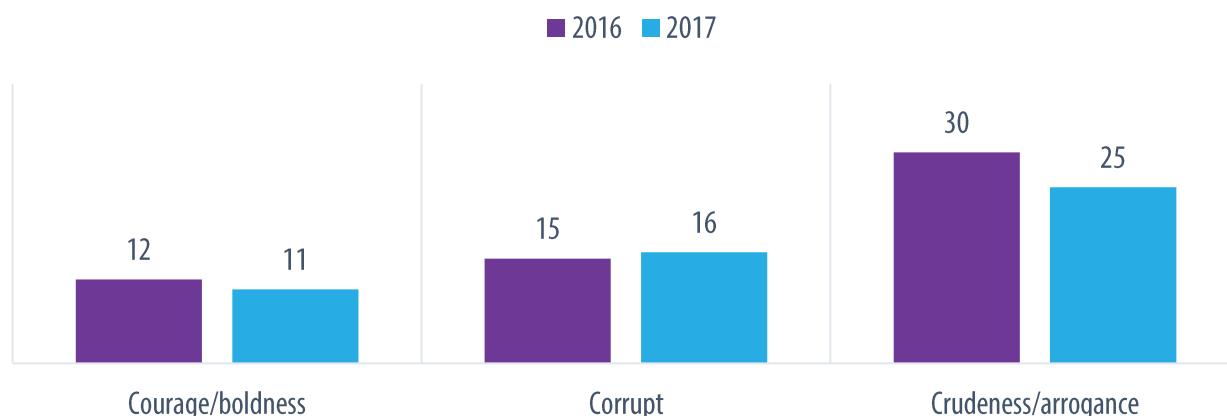
PERCEPTION OF THE POLICE

Policemen are Arrogant and Policewomen are Pretty

As regards the first impressions of regular police officers who are in contact with the citizens on a daily basis, the most frequent association is crudeness and/or arrogance, which is the answer every one out of 10 respondents gave to an open-ended question (see: Chart 5). The second most frequent trait is corruptness (8%), and finally there are courage and boldness (5%). These perceptions seem to be consistent and deeply rooted, with little to no change over the years. These findings could be used by the MoI in the implementation of the recently adopted code of conduct which could bring police officers closer to the citizens.

Chart 5: Impressions of policemen (all answers)

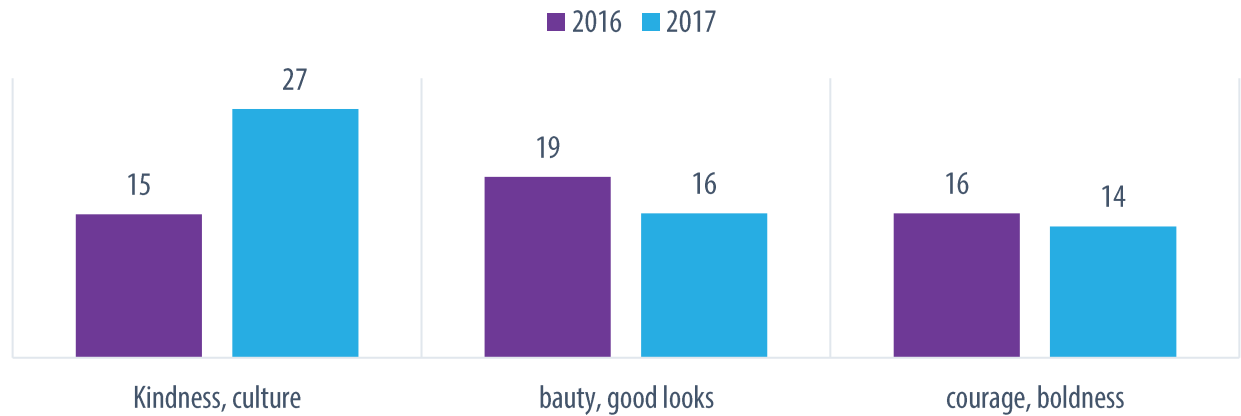
Q: And when you think about a typical police officer in Serbia, police officer who is in direct contact with the citizens, how would you describe him? Please specify several attributes (adjectives, words) which, in your opinion, best describe the typical police officer in Serbia.



When it comes to the perception of female police officers, the most common associations are those traits that have little to do with their professional line of work but are rather focused on their physical appearance and charm (see: Chart 6). The attributes that were listed first by one out of four citizens include kindness, culture or decency, whereas for additional 16% of population beauty and good looks are the first thing that comes to mind when meeting a female police officer. In addition, 14% of the citizens perceive women in the police as friendly and helpful, whereas the same percentage of population thinks they are bold and courageous. The biggest difference appears in the area of perception of corruption, where female police officers are almost three times more likely to be considered honest and incorruptible in comparison with their male counterparts (11% and 4% respectively).

Chart 6: Impressions of policewomen (all answers)

Q: When you think of a female police officer, the one in direct contact with the citizens, how would you describe her? Please, state several characteristics (adjectives) that, in your opinion, best describe an average female police officer in Serbia.



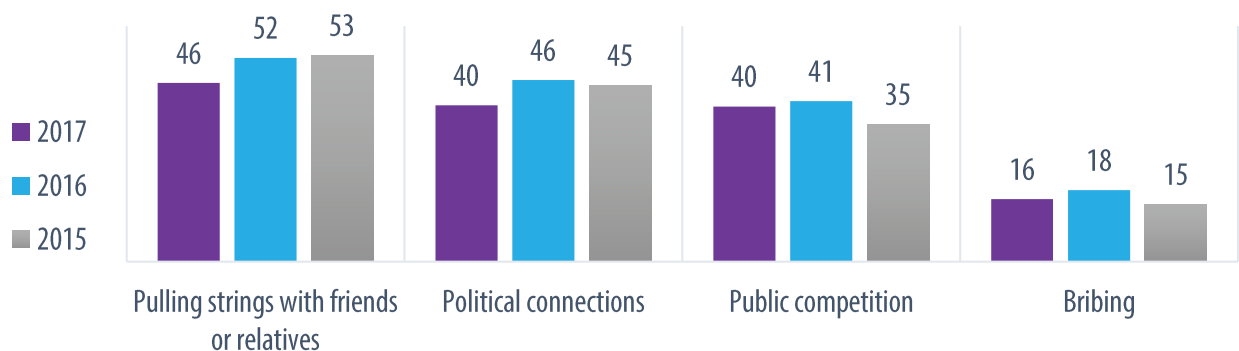
These findings point to two important issues. First, despite the fact that women began to comprise a larger share of police force in Serbia after 2000 and are now much more visible to the public, being a police officer is still traditionally considered a male profession. This is supported by the fact that respondents, both male and female, consistently tend to judge the women in this line of work based on their physique and/or appearance and not on their performance. Second, it shows that there is a need for a concerted effort aimed at promoting the contribution of female police officers in their everyday duties.

Lack of Professionalism and Merit-Based Recruitment in the Police

Despite the recent changes brought about by the new Law on Police from 2016, which include mandatory open calls for employment in the police and for filling the top hierarchical posts, citizens believe the police officers are still employed based on whom they know and not on their merit (see: Chart 7). Almost every second citizen (46%) believes that pulling strings with friends or relatives is the most frequent way of getting into the police force.

Chart 7: Employment in the police (all answers)

Q: In your opinion how are the candidates for police force selected and employed?

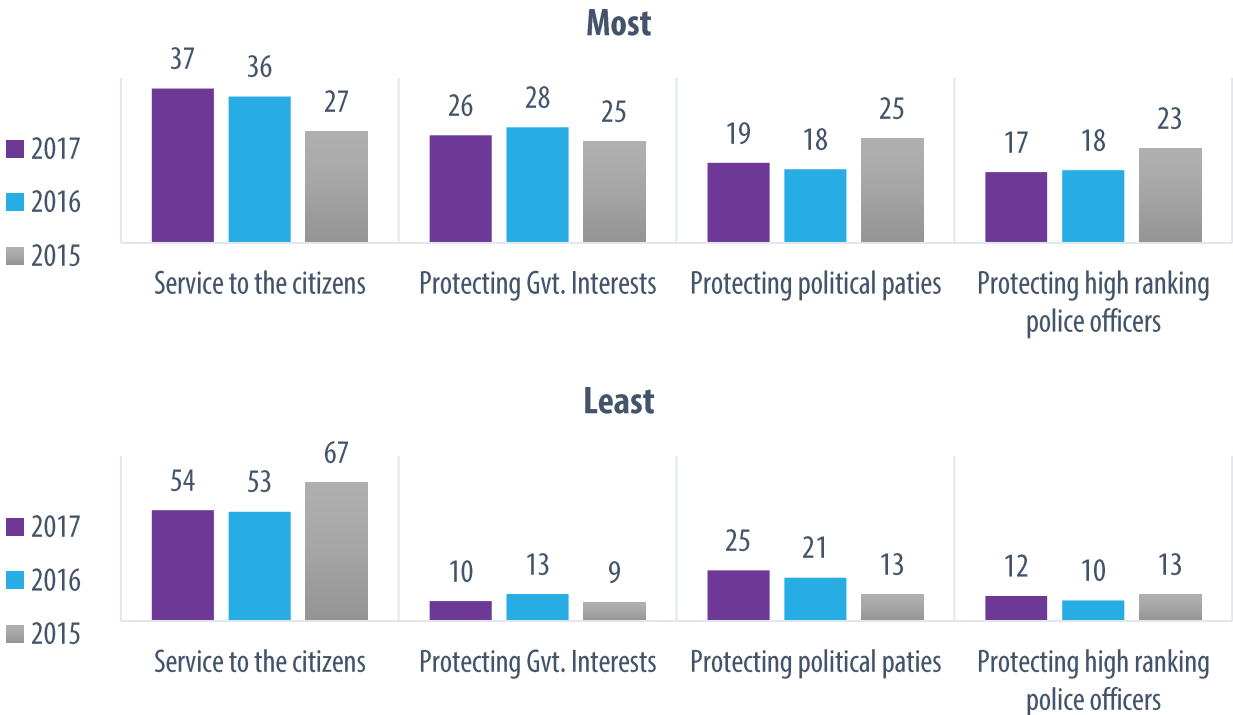


Political connections are the second most frequent option, almost at the same level as public competition (40% for each), whereas bribing someone to get into the police force is considered to be a widespread practice by 16% of the respondents. It should be noted that this was a multiple answer question, which means that one practice does not necessarily exclude others, e.g. one can at the same time use a political connection and participate in an open call, or simultaneously offer a bribe and pull certain strings.

When asked in what capacity the police force operate most (see: Chart 8), citizens have diverging opinions. Every third respondent feels that the police work in their interest, as a service to the citizens (37%). Although this was the most frequent answer, at the same time every second respondent (58%) believes that the police operate the least in this capacity. This finding represents a cause of concern, because it is evident from the responses that the citizens perceive the police as an instrument of the Government and the political parties. This leads to a lower rate of crime reporting, which could reduce the overall police effectiveness and accountability while at the same time the citizens’ personal safety needs are not being met.

Chart 8: In what capacity the police operate the most and the least?

Q: In which of the following capacities does the police force in Serbia operate the most and in which capacities does it operate the least – as service of the citizens, as a means for protection of Government’s interests or as a means for protection of interests of political parties?

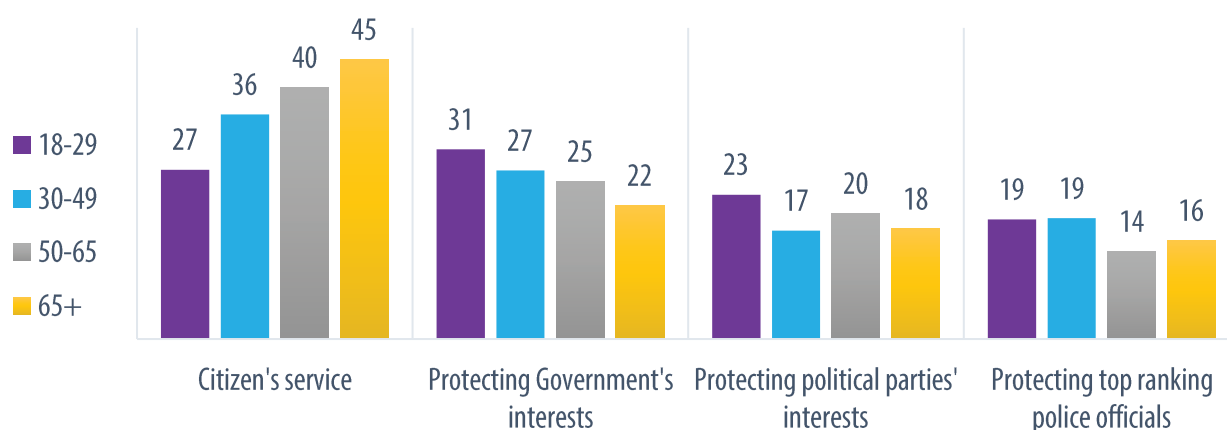


One out of four citizens (26%) feels that the police are still being used to protect the interests of the Government, whereas one out of five (19%) thinks they are protecting the interests of the political parties in power. Although far from ideal, this is still an improvement in positive perception when compared to previous years, and a positive trend is easily observable. Further research is required to

determine the exact causes of this trend, yet it could be assumed that a good communication strategy and promoting the results of police work could be the contributing factors. Again, age is a good indicator of how citizens feel about the capacity in which the police operate, with younger population being more critical of their role when compared to their older counterparts (see: Chart 9).

Chart 9: Capacities in which the police force operates, by age group

Q: In which of the following capacities does the police force in Serbia operate the most and in which capacities does it operate the least – as service of the citizens, as a means for protection of Government’s interests or as a means for protection of interests of political parties?



Only every fourth respondent (27%) under the age of 30 considers the police a service to the citizens, compared to almost every second (45%) citizen above the age of 65. The youngest citizens are also the only demographic group whose first association at the mention of police is not service to the citizens. The youngest citizens are most likely to see the police as protecting the interests of the Government (31%) and those of the political parties (23%). It appears that the older citizens get, the more lenient they tend to become in their perception of the police and their role in the society as a citizens’ service, as well as the influence the Government wields over this institution. This difference between the age groups is the smallest when the protection of interest of political parties and top ranking police officials is observed.

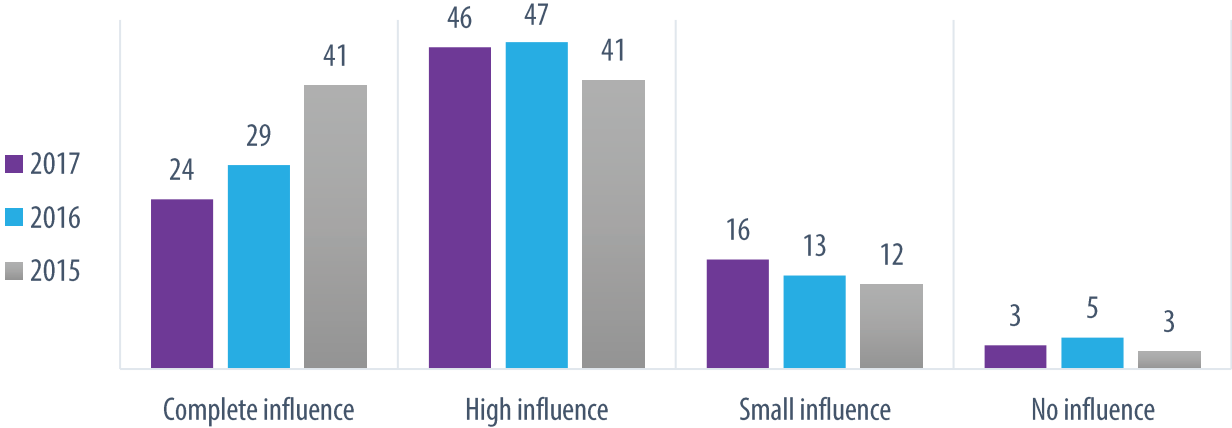
Politicians Have Excessive Influence on Policing

Politicisation of police in Serbia is a much-debated issue and citizens strongly feel that the amount of influence that politicians exert on police work is excessive. This is true despite the fact that the provisions contained in the Law on Police of 2016 lay ground for a more independent police force, including better external oversight and a clearer division of responsibilities between the MoI and the Police Directorate. This issue was also brought up by the European Commission, in the form of an interim benchmark within the Area of Justice, Freedom and Security (Chapter 24) negotiation framework, which stipulates that the influence of politics on the police force needs to be reduced.

One out of four citizens (24%) think that the police are completely subordinated to the political interests, whereas additional 46% believe that political influence is present to a high extent (see: Chart 10). These two figures, combined, point to the fact that three out of four citizens feel that politics have too much influence on the police. Although the situation did improve somewhat when compared to the previous years, politicisation is still perceived to be at the alarmingly high level. Again, age is a good indicator of the citizen's opinions regarding levels of politicisation of the police, since younger individuals tend to perceive it to a greater extent.

Chart 10: Influence of politics on the operational work of the police

Q: In your opinion, to what extent do politicians have influence on the operational work of the police force?



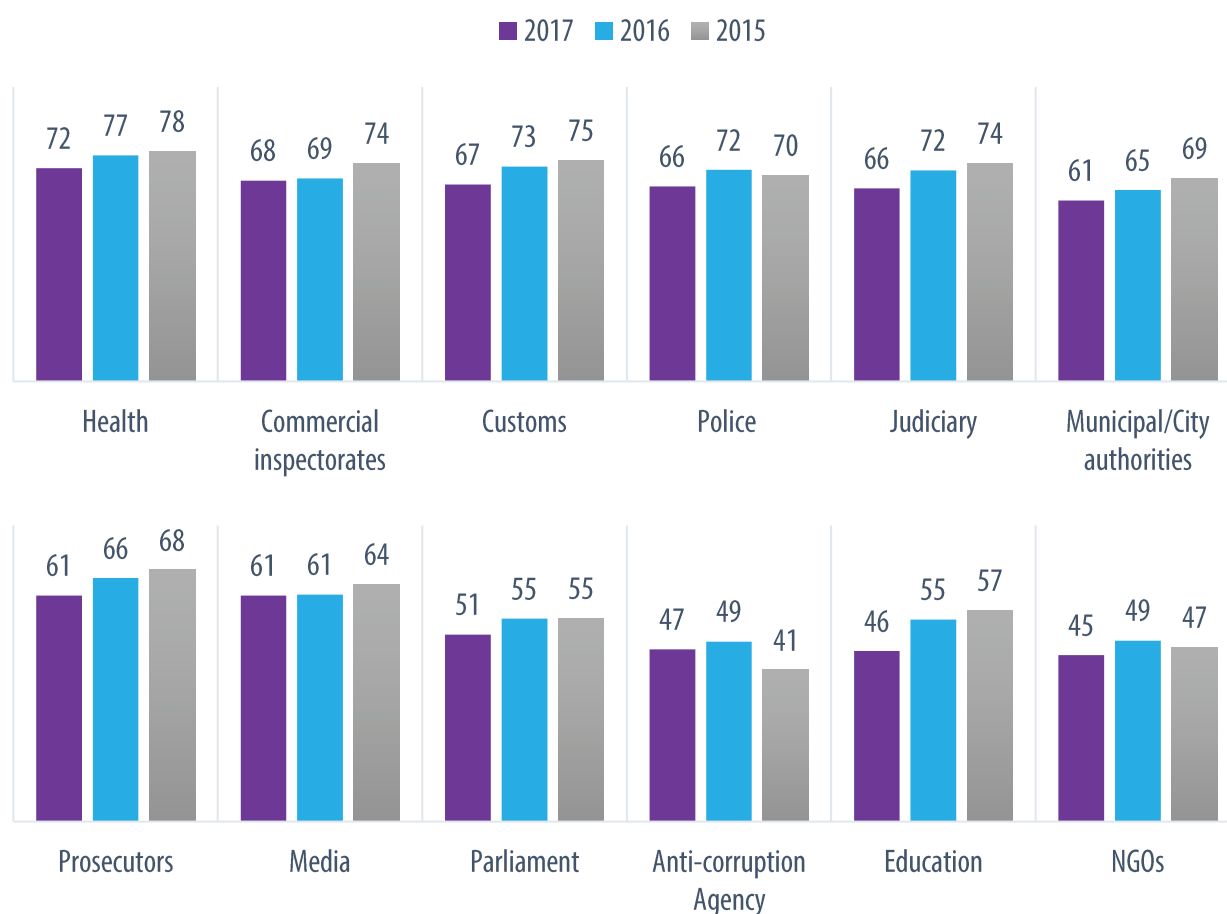
PERCEPTION OF CORRUPTION

The Highest Perception of Police Corruption is Present in Belgrade

When it comes to the perceived levels of corruption within the institutions (see: Chart 11), the police rank high, in the second position (68%), and are preceded only by the healthcare system which ranks first (72%), and are followed by the customs (67%). Only one in every 25 citizens considers the police to be completely free of corruption. Although this is not a good result, it is still an improvement when compared to the previous years, and a negligible decline of four percentage points within a three-year period in the perception of corruption within the police can be identified. Women tend to see police officers as less corrupt than men do, although the difference between the genders when it comes to the perception of corruption in the police is not that significant.

Chart 11: Prevalence of corruption in Serbian institutions

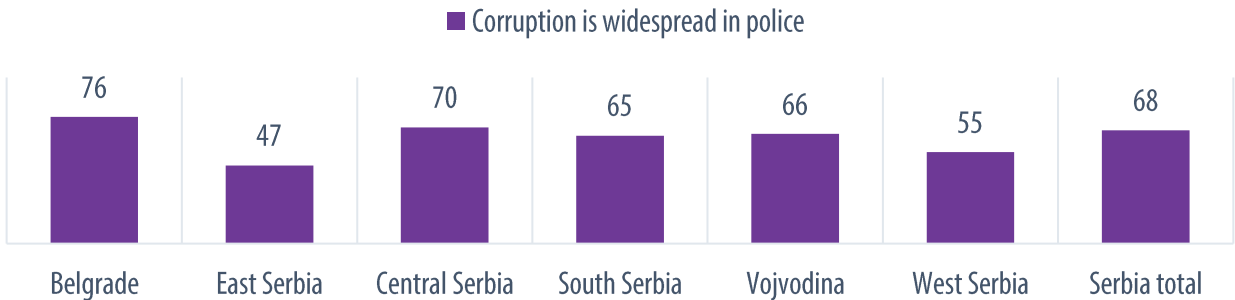
Q: How widespread is corruption in the following institutions? Please answer using the scale from 1 to 4, where 1 means that it is not widespread at all, 2 means that widespread to a little extent, 3 means that it is somewhat widespread, and 4 means that it is widespread to the highest extent.



When regional variations are taken into account, the data show that the highest perception of corruption is present in the Belgrade area (see: Chart 12), where three out of four citizens (76%) believe that corruption within the police is widespread. On the other hand, the least corrupt police force is in the East Serbia region, where one out of every two citizens thinks that corruption is present within this institution (47%).

Chart 12: Perception of corruption within the police, by region

Q: How widespread is corruption in the following institutions? Please answer using the scale from 1 to 4, where 1 means that it is not widespread at all, 2 means that it is widespread to a small extent, 3 means that it is somewhat widespread, and 4 means that it is widespread to the highest extent.

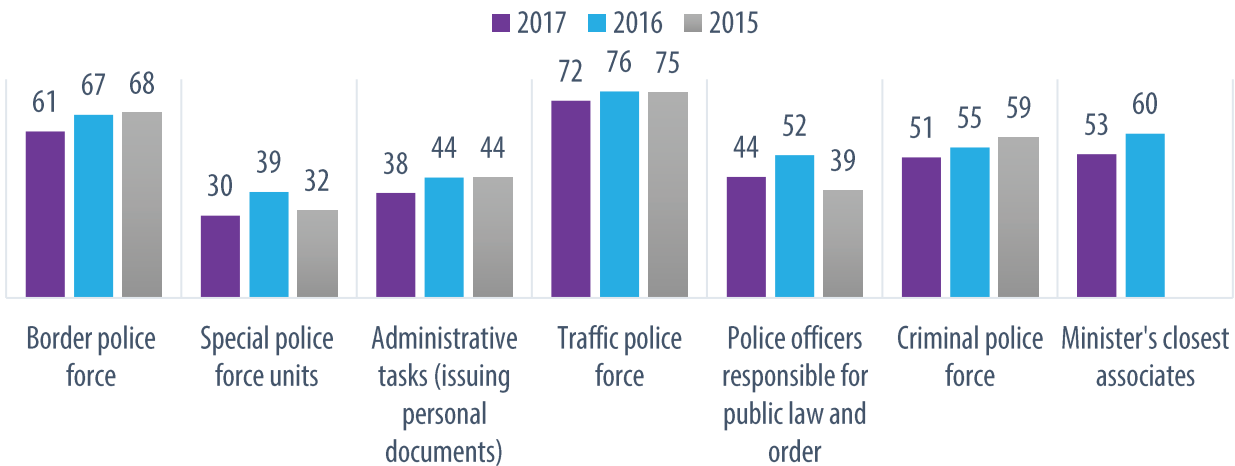


The Traffic Police are Once Again Considered the Most Corrupt

The levels of perception of corruption differ across the organisational units within the police, which is a well-known phenomenon if one takes into account the fact that citizens tend to have direct contact with certain segments of the police force more frequently than with others.

Chart 13: Perception of corruption within police by organisational unit

Q: How widespread is corruption in the following police force units? Please use the scale from 1 to 4, where 1 stands for Not widespread at all, 2 Slightly widespread, 3 Somewhat widespread, and 4 Widespread to the highest level.



Traditionally, traffic police tend to be perceived as the most corrupt unit within the police force and three out of five citizens see it this way (61%). On the other hand, the special police forces are least prone to corruption with less than 1/3 of the citizens considering them corrupt (see: Chart 13). A caveat here is that citizens notice petty corruption because it is a form that is the most visible to them, which is why the results tend to be skewed toward traffic police more than other units.

FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

Citizens are Not Yet Willing to Report Corruption

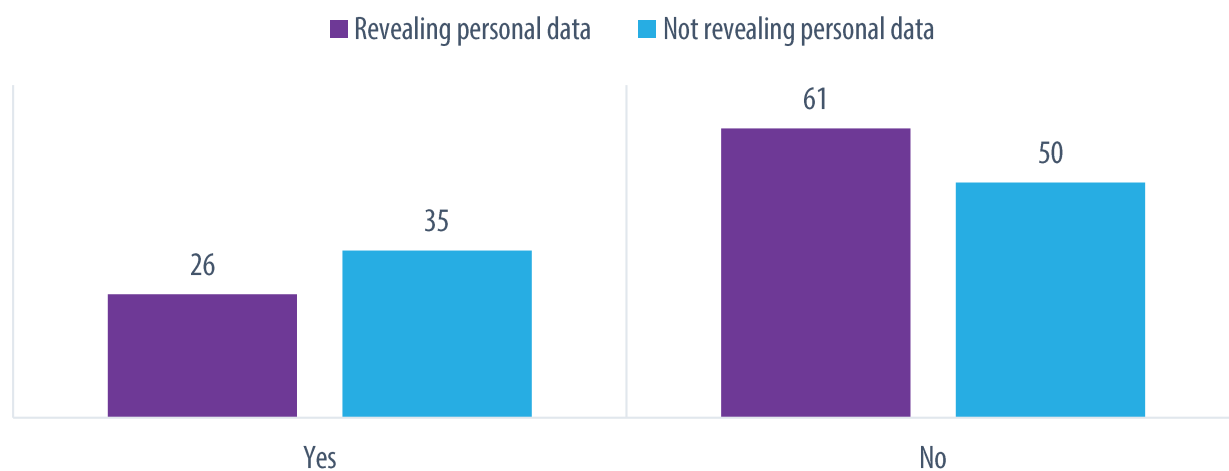
Despite the high levels of perceived corruption in the police, citizens are hesitant to report it. Again, it should be taken into account that petty corruption is the most visible form, which is widely accepted as a way to get out of trouble with the police. In addition, both the citizens and police officers reap personal monetary benefits from this practice, which is why it is difficult to either assess the scope of this problem or find effective ways to deal with it. However, despite these limitations, readiness to report corruption within the police stands at a very low level (see: Chart 14).

Only one out of four citizens would report it if it was necessary to reveal their personal data (26%). However, much higher number of citizens would report corruption in the police if it was possible to do so anonymously, i.e. without revealing personal data (35%), which brings the total number of citizens willing to report it to 61%.

It is worrying that almost two out of five citizens would not report corruption in police under any circumstances. This could be either because they fear the consequences if they do so, or because they feel that reporting it would not be effective. Whichever the reasons are, it is necessary for the police to make reporting corruption within their own ranks a more streamlined process.

Chart 14: Willingness of citizens to report police corruption

Q1: Would you report a case of corruption in the police force (being asked for bribe), if you were required to reveal your personal data (personal identification number, address etc.)? Q2: Would you report a case of corruption in the police force if you were not required to reveal your personal data?

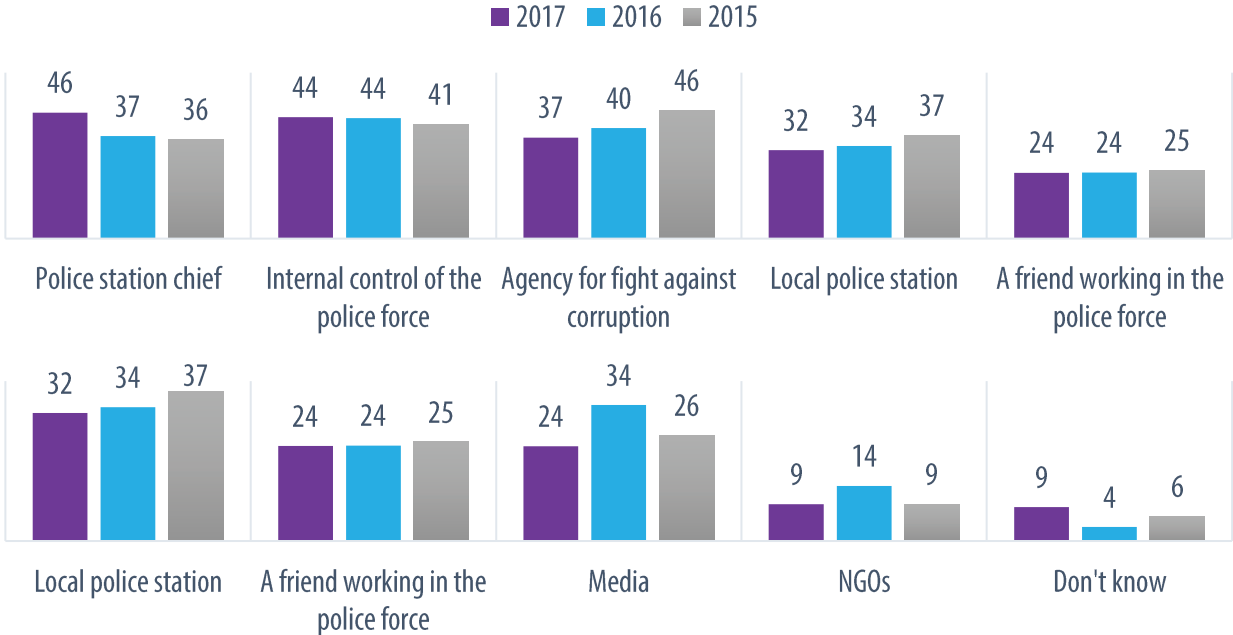


Local Chief of Police is the First Choice for Reporting Corruption

When it comes to reporting corruption (see: Chart 15), citizens are most likely to do it either through their police station chief (46%) or through internal control of the police force (44%). This finding points to the fact that the citizens recognise internal control as an important organisational unit for fighting corruption, and that they trust their local police station chiefs sufficiently to report corruption directly to them. However, it is worrisome that an ever-smaller percentage of people is ready to report corruption to the Anti-Corruption Agency of Serbia (ACAS). This could be due to the institutional deadlock in which ACAS has found itself, or because of general apprehensiveness among the population when it comes to the fight against corruption and its results.

Chart 15: The most common choice for reporting police corruption

Q: Who would be the first on the list to whom you would report a case of corruption in the police force? Who else?

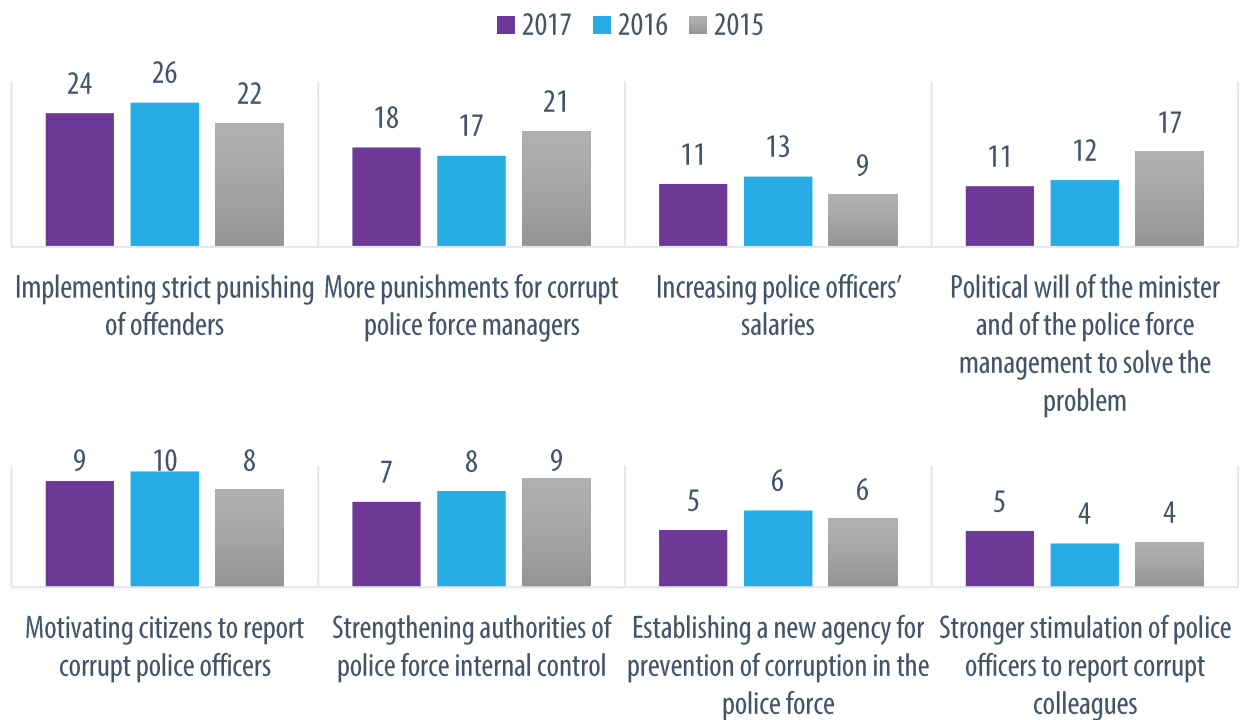


Stricter Sanctions Remain the First Solution for Tackling Corruption

Citizens' opinions diverge when they are asked about the necessary efforts that need to be made in order to curb corruption (see: Chart 16). Citizens tend to think that harsher punishments are necessary, together with more repressive measures in general, but they have little understanding of the preventive ones. One out of four citizens in Serbia (24%) thinks that there is a need to implement stricter punishments for the offenders, and additional 18% feel the same way about corrupt police managers. In addition, one tenth of the citizens believe that low police salaries are one of the risks of corruption and suggest an increase, whereas the same number of people believes that political will to solve this issue is the main factor.

Chart 16: Most necessary for preventing police corruption

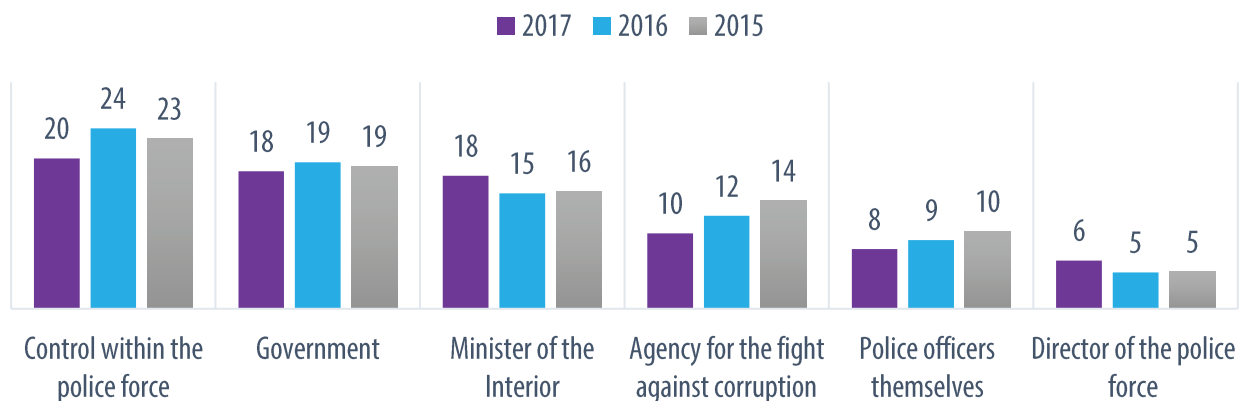
Q: What do you consider most necessary for preventing corruption in the police force?



When asked which institution is supposed to be leading the fight against corruption within the police (see: Chart 17), citizens point mostly to the internal control within the police (20%), the Government (18%), and the Minister of Interior (18%). It is easily observable that the citizens' perceptions of political influence on the police are also reflected in these findings. Namely, they correctly assign the task of fighting corruption to these political bodies, right after the internal control, whereas the Director of Police is perceived to have a marginal role in resolving this issue, with only 6% of the respondents considering him/her an important actor.

Chart 17: Who is viewed as most responsible to fight corruption

Q: Please look at the following list of institutions and tell me which institution should be the first to fight corruption in the police force.

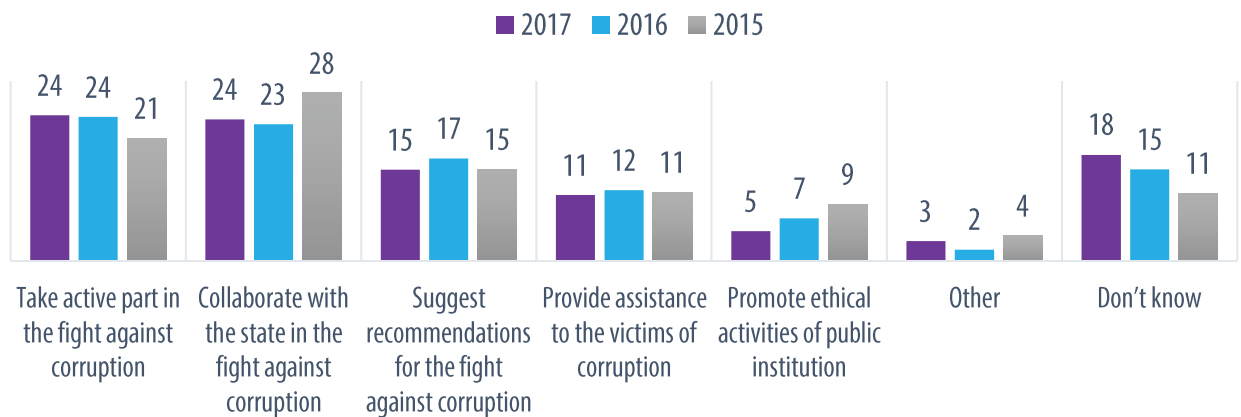




When asked about the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in fighting corruption (see: Chart 18), an equal number of citizens, one out of four (24%) thought that NGOs should take an active part this process and that this should be done in cooperation with state institutions. It is worrisome that an increased number of citizens does not know what the role of NGOs should be, which is the opinion of every fifth respondent (18%). If we take into account that NGOs have little access to policy making process, that room available for civic activity is constantly shrinking, and the smear campaigns in the media against those most active in exposing corruption and organised crime, these results do not come as a surprise.

Chart 18: Role of the NGOs in fighting corruption

Q: People have different opinions on the role of NGOs in the fight against corruption. Bearing this in mind, what role do you think NGOs should have in the fight against corruption?



METHODOLOGY FRAMEWORK

Location	Serbia
Time	June 2017
Data collection method	Face-to-face, in the respondents' homes
Sampling frame	The citizens of Serbia who are 18 years of age and over, who permanently resided in the territory of Serbia at the time of the survey
Size of sample	1,000
Type of sample	Three-stage random representative stratified sample
Stratification	Performed by region, type of settlement, gender, age and level of education
Sampling error	$\pm 3.31\%$

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