

Most Russians Don't Know a Single NGO

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Most Russians cannot name a single nongovernmental organization, though public support for NGOs in Russia has greatly increased over the past decade, a recent poll shows.

More than half of the people questioned by state-run pollster VTsIOM — 59 percent — could not provide an answer when asked to give the name of an NGO, a poll published Thursday showed.

With 6 percent, the most popular answer for those who could think of an NGO was Greenpeace, the environmental group that made headlines in Russia after 30 of its activists were arrested for trying to scale a Gazprom oil rig.

Another 4 percent of respondents thought they had an answer, but actually didn't, and named United Russia, the ruling political party, as an NGO.

But despite the apparent lack of in-depth knowledge about NGOs, the number of Russians who believe they protect citizens' rights and encourage civic activity has risen to 56 percent

from 39 percent in a similar poll held a decade ago, the poll showed.

Most respondents also thought the government should support NGOs in the form of distributing information about the groups' activities or through funding.

Just below a quarter of respondents — 22 percent — said NGOs should function without any government support and one in three Russians said the country didn't need the organizations at all.

Despite their name, scores of NGOs around the world rely on government support such as tax breaks or grants for humanitarian causes.

Russia has recently tightened government control over NGOs, with a law passed in 2012 requiring organizations to register as "foreign agents" if they receive foreign funding and are engaged in what is deemed to be political activity.

The poll was conducted on July 5-6 among 1,600 people in 42 Russian regions and gave a margin of error of no more than 3.4 percentage points.

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