

# Shrinking Civic Space: Survey Responses from Transparency, Accountability, and Citizen Participation Organizations



TRANSPARENCY &  
ACCOUNTABILITY  
INITIATIVE

November 2018

# We are a Donor Collaborative

of leading funders of transparency, accountability and participation efforts worldwide



## Associate Members



TAI is responsible for the content that follows; this information does not reflect TAI members' views.



# Table of contents

## **A. Research framing**

- [Civic space learning questions](#)
- [Defining civic space](#)

## **B. Methodology**

- [Online survey approach](#)
- [Interpreting the survey findings](#)

## **[C. Key survey findings](#)**

## **D. Survey respondent profile**

- [Survey respondent office location](#)
- [Survey respondent staff size](#)
- [Survey respondent operations](#)

## **E. Survey findings**

- [Civic space environment](#)
- [Freedom of association](#)
- [Access to resources](#)
- [Freedom of expression](#)
- [Grantee responses](#)

## Civic space learning questions

What did TAI seek to learn from this research?



1. Have member grantees been affected by closing civic space, and if so, how?
2. How are grantees responding to changing civic space conditions?
3. What are the implications of these findings for grantees and grantee-funder relationship?

# Defining civic space



The ability of civic actors to organize, participate, and communicate freely to influence the political and social structures around them.

Survey components:

- Overall civic environment
- Freedom of association
- Ability of CSOs to access resources
- Freedom of assembly
- Freedom of expression

Among other resources, TAI referred to the [CIVICUS Monitor civic space framework](#)

# Online survey approach



- Total population sampling of TAI members' transparency, accountability, and participation portfolios
- Unit of analysis = grantee organization / office
- Responses collected in March 2018
- Preliminary survey findings webinars with members and grantees

# Interpreting the survey findings

## Key limitations

- a. Population only TAI member grantees, not all groups pursuing TAP issues
- b. 45% non-response; uncertain if findings are representative of TAI grantee ecosystem
- c. Survey online and in English, uncertain of respondent comprehension
- d. Respondents and data are not geographically representative

## Contributions

- a. Appears to be only TAP-specific data on shrinking civic space
- b. 55% response rate offers some clear signals for civic space learning questions
- c. Findings a good start for funder and grantee dialogue and reflection in any language
- d. Can triangulate with available civic freedoms country data

## Key survey findings

121 out of 220 (55%)  
grantee organizations  
completed the survey

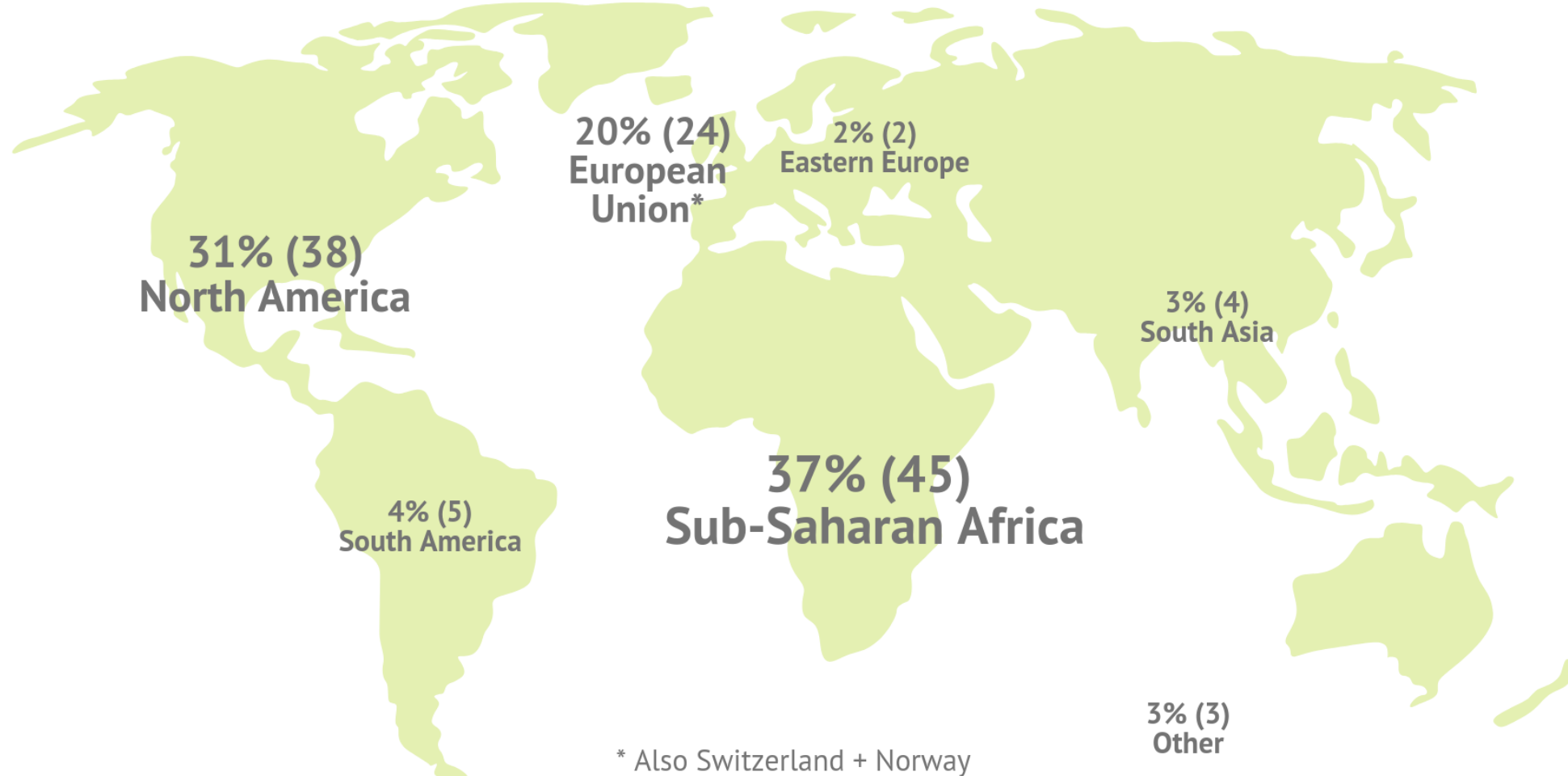


- Widespread awareness of and concern with closing civic space reported
- Most concerns reported featured limitations with
  - freedom of expression (including self-censorship), and
  - freedom of association (including access to international funding)
- Grantees reported applying a variety of responses to closing civic space
- International and national grantee responses often differed



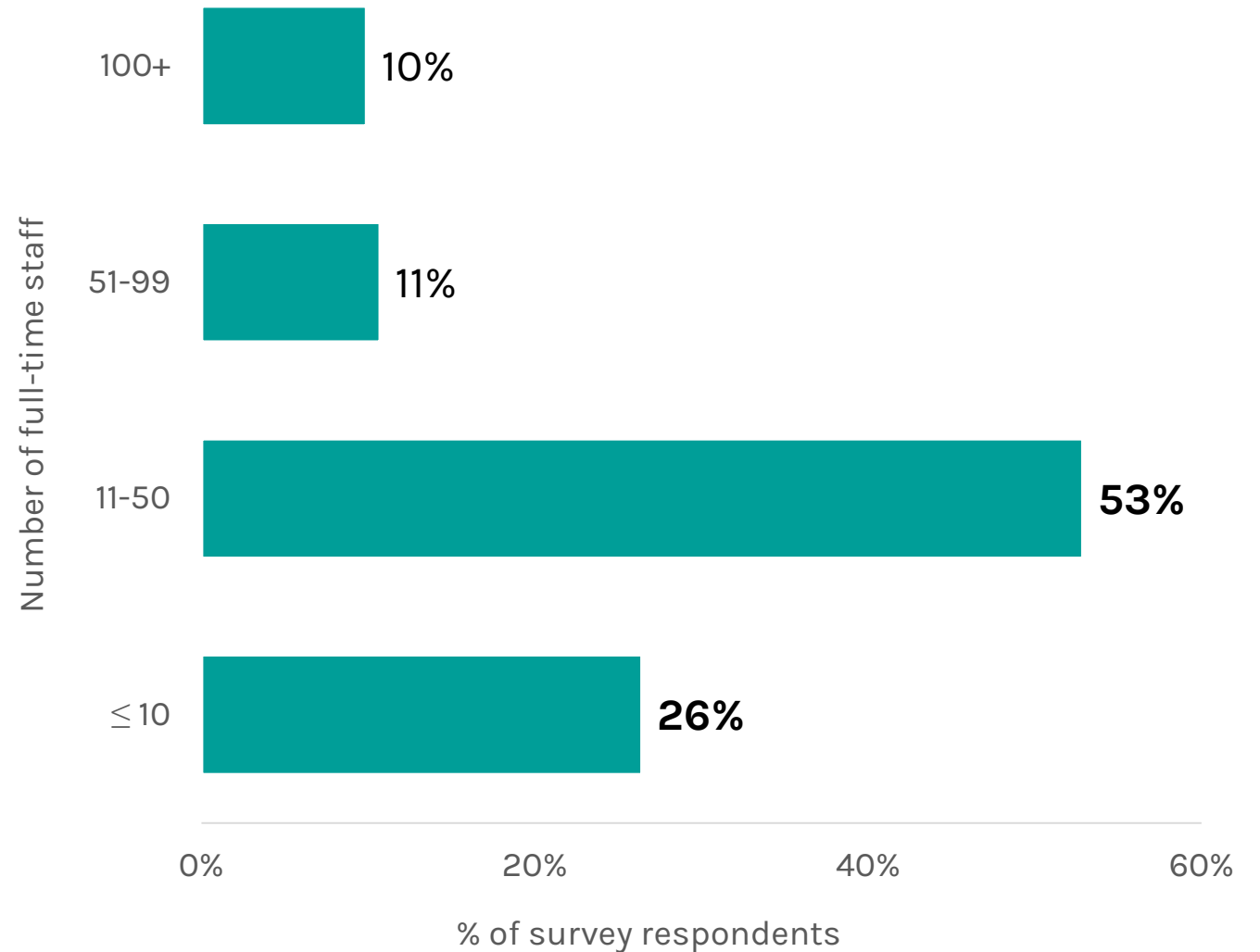
# Survey respondent office location

Most have offices based in Africa or North America



## Survey respondent staff size

Most respondents have 50 or less full-time staff



## Survey respondent operations

Survey respondents self-identified their main geographic operating scale



### **International Respondents**

64 organizations | 53% of respondents

Main operating scale in multiple countries  
in one or more regions



### **National Respondents**

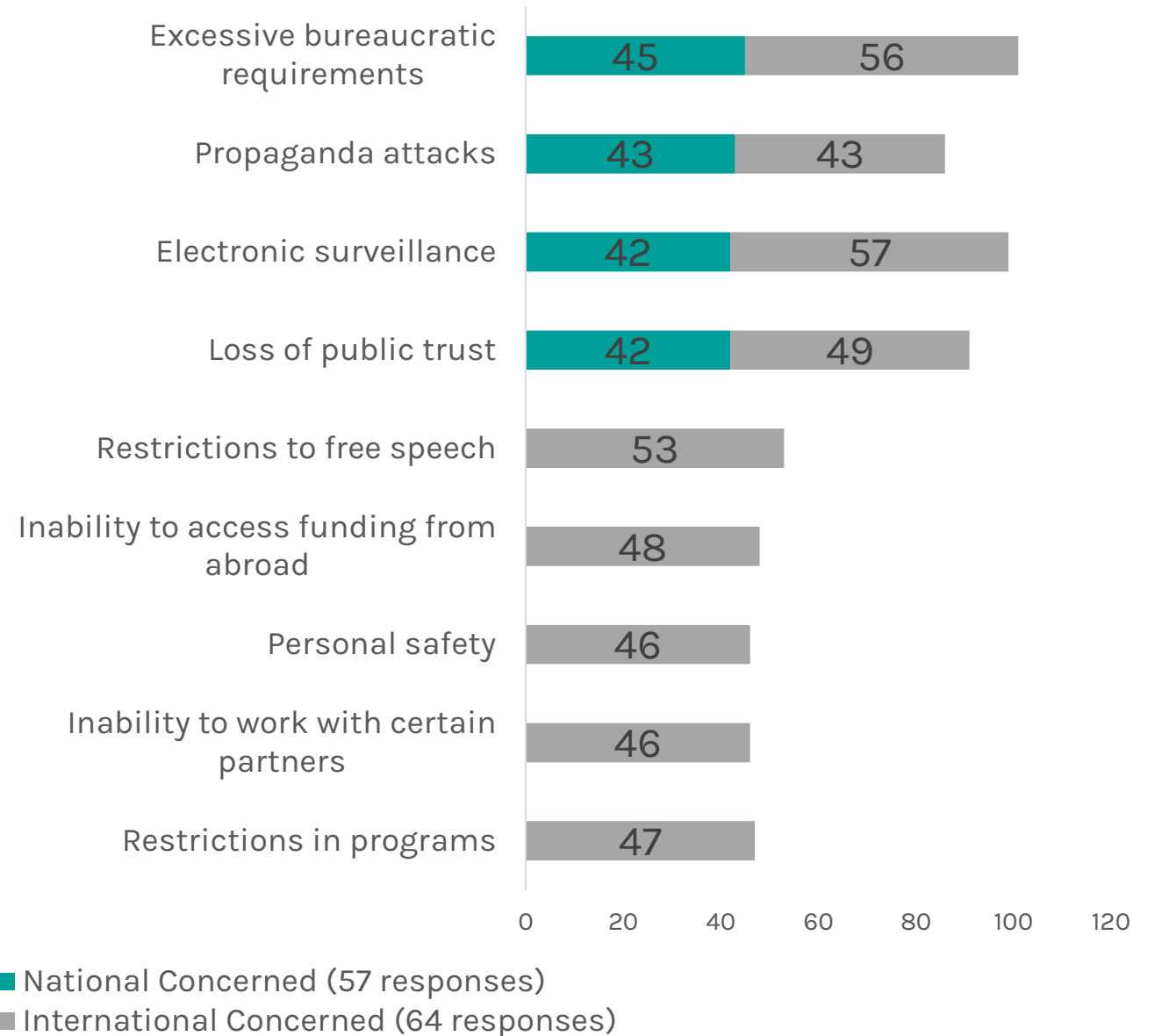
57 organizations | 47% of respondents

Main operating scale in one country at the  
national or sub-national level

## Civic space environment

International grantees report more areas of critical concern\* in the context of closing civic space than national grantees.

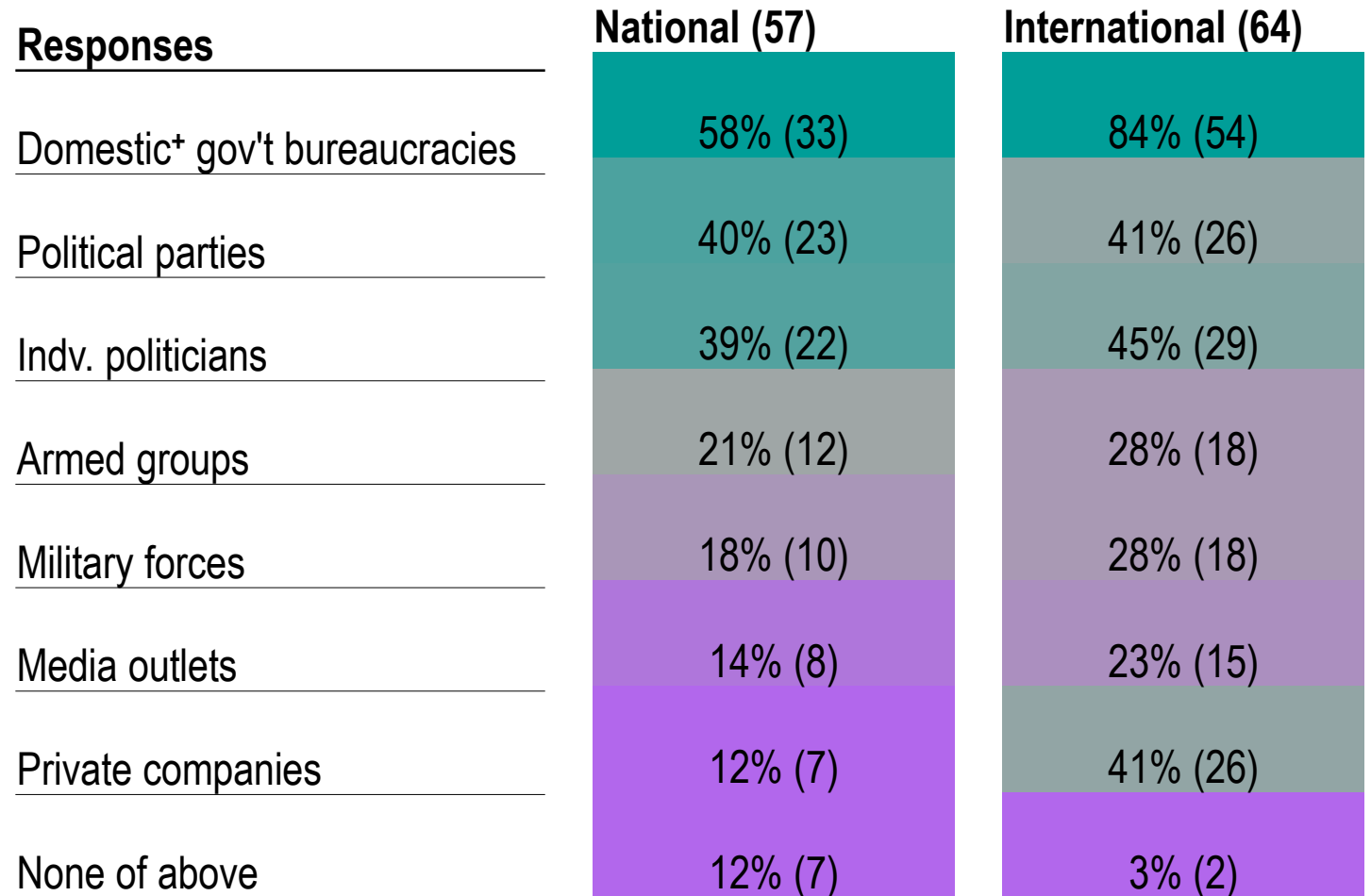
\* Critical concern = 70% or more of respondents are 'highly' or 'slightly' concerned



# Civic space environment

National and international grantees identified relatively similar\* actors or institutions contributing to closing civic space, some of which may also be key accountability actors or programmatic partners.

\* Except for armed groups (national) and private companies (international)



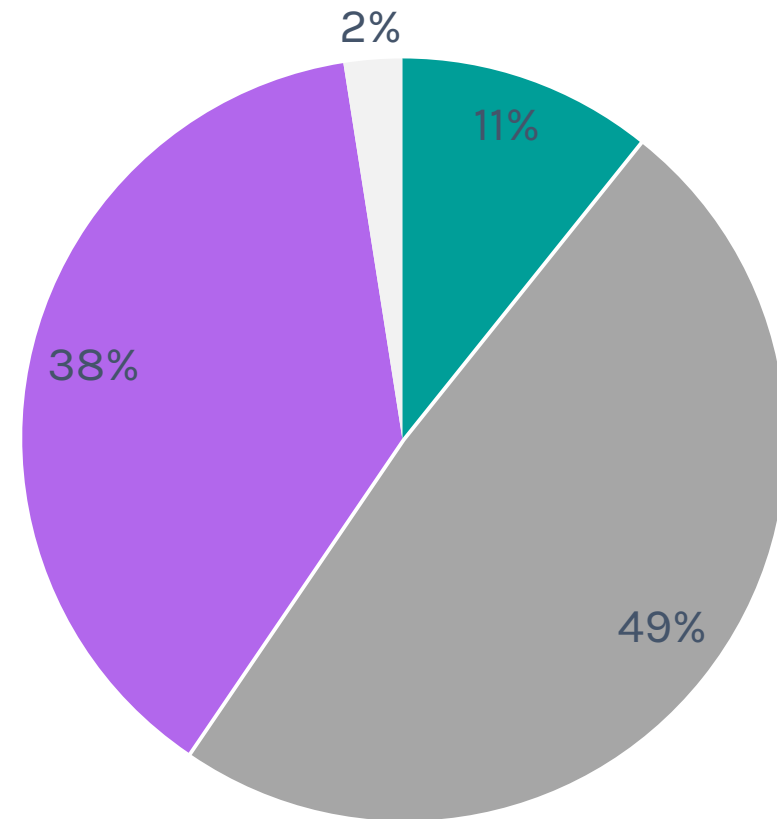
+ 'Domestic' only for national respondents



## Civic space environment

87% of respondents expressed concern about threats to their organization's digital security.\*

\*Examples include state-sponsored surveillance of electronic communication, phishing, hacking, malicious viruses or spyware.



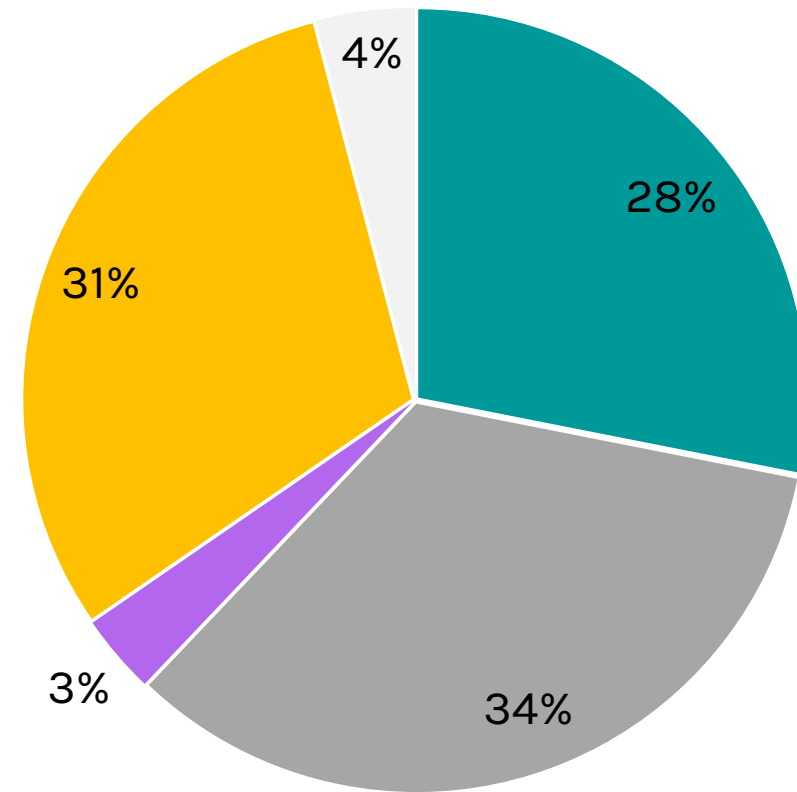
- Not at all concerned
- Slightly, somewhat concerned
- Deeply concerned
- Don't know/can't answer

121 responses

## Freedom of association

More than a quarter of respondents report an increase in the threat of de-registration in past 5 years.

Also of note – 34% reported no changes, and 31% reported that this is not an issue for their organization.



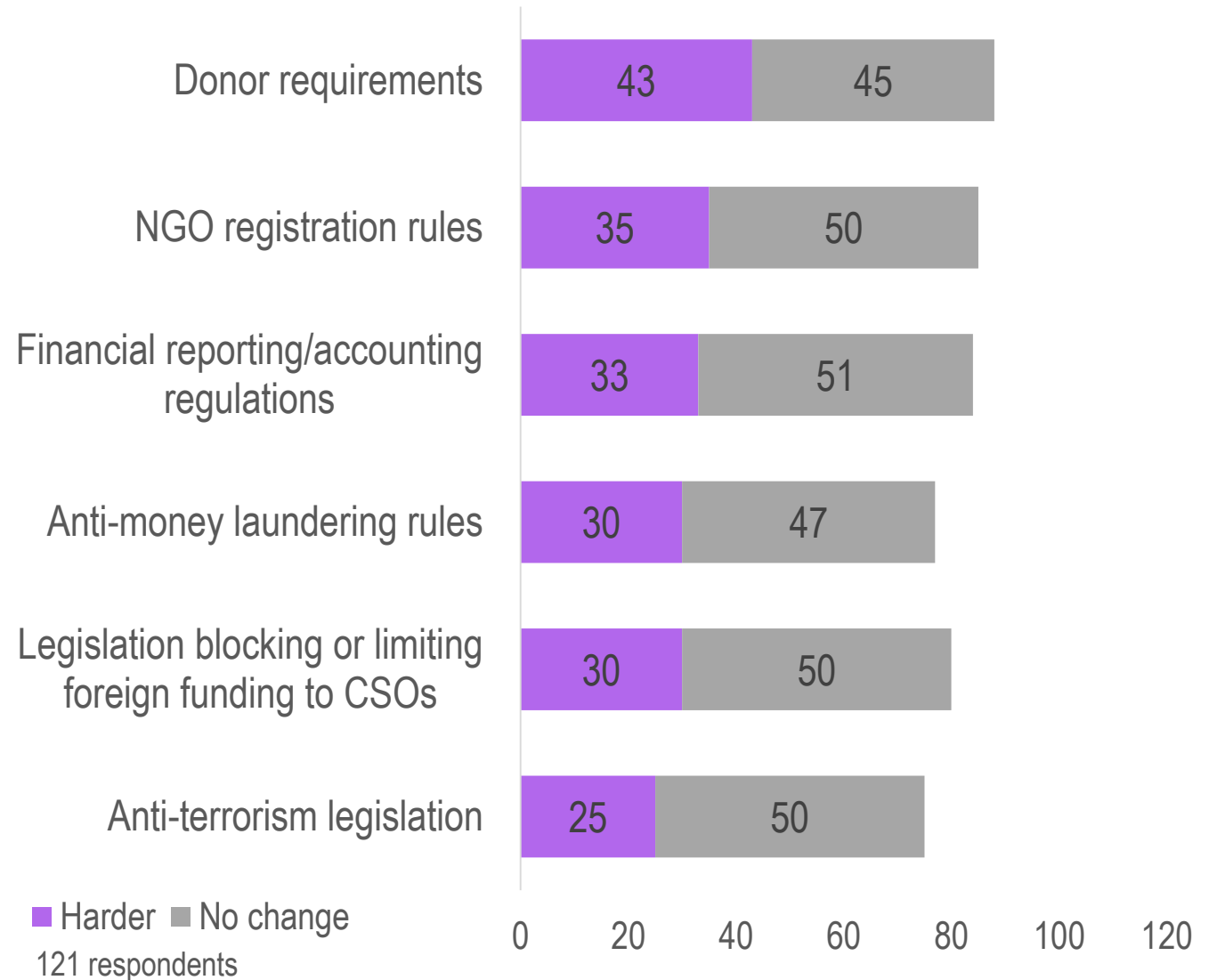
- Increasing
- No change
- Decreasing
- This is not an issue for our organization
- Don't know/can't answer

121 responses

## Access to resources

‘Donor requirements’ the most frequently cited factor making it harder to access international funding.

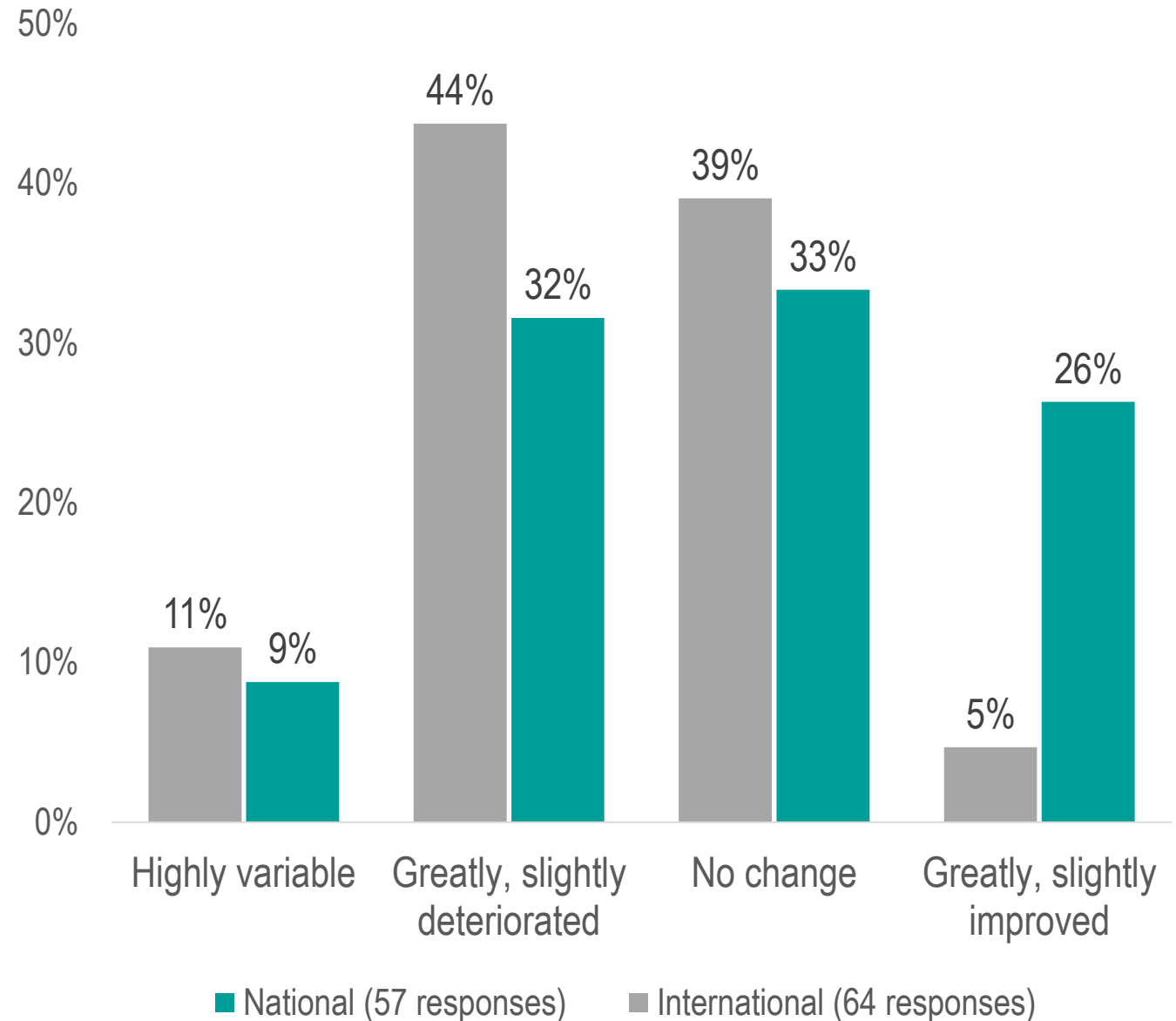
Though most respondents reported no changes in their ability to access international resources.





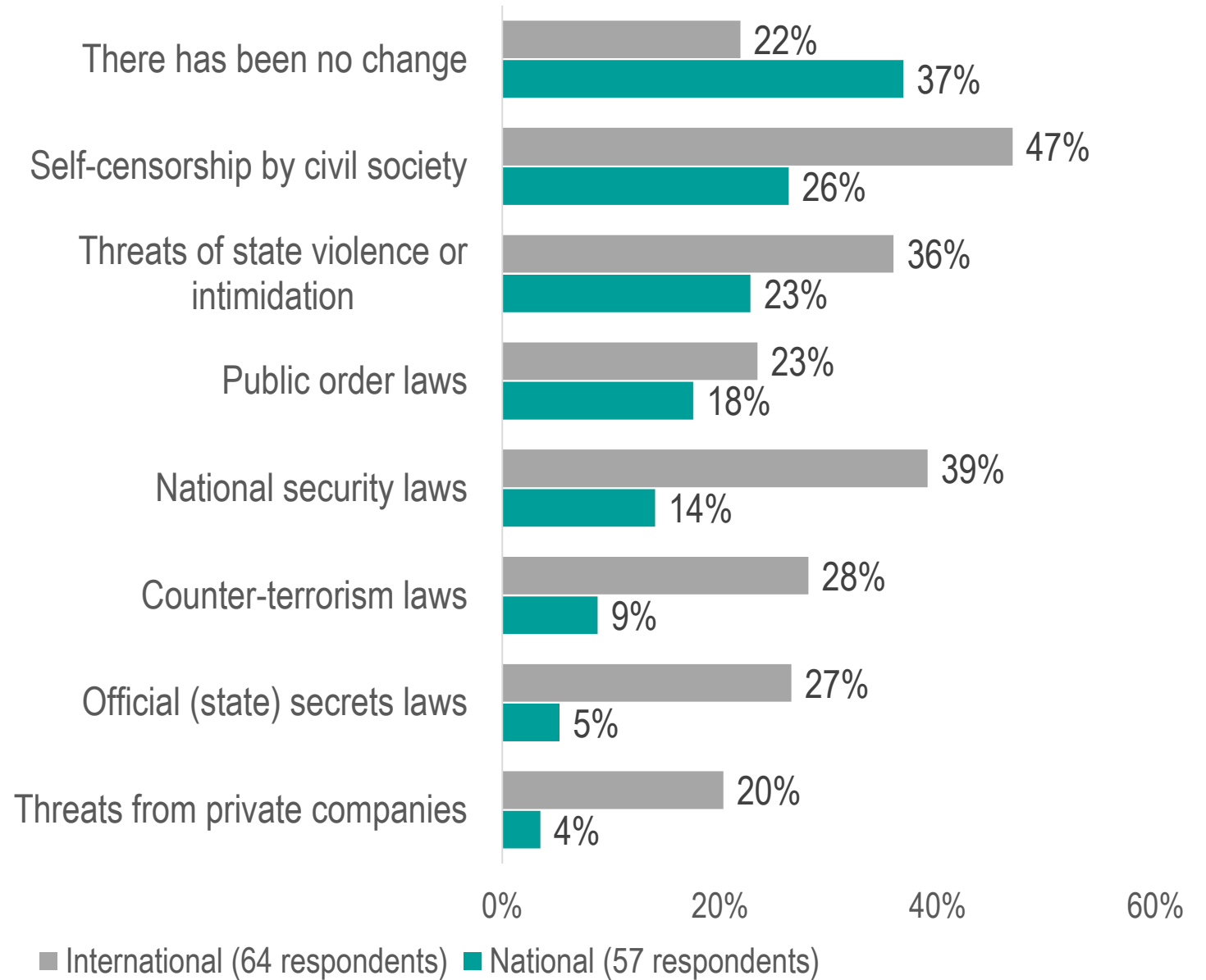
## Freedom of expression

International grantees report more deterioration, while national grantees report greater improvements in their organizations' ability to exercise freedom of expression.



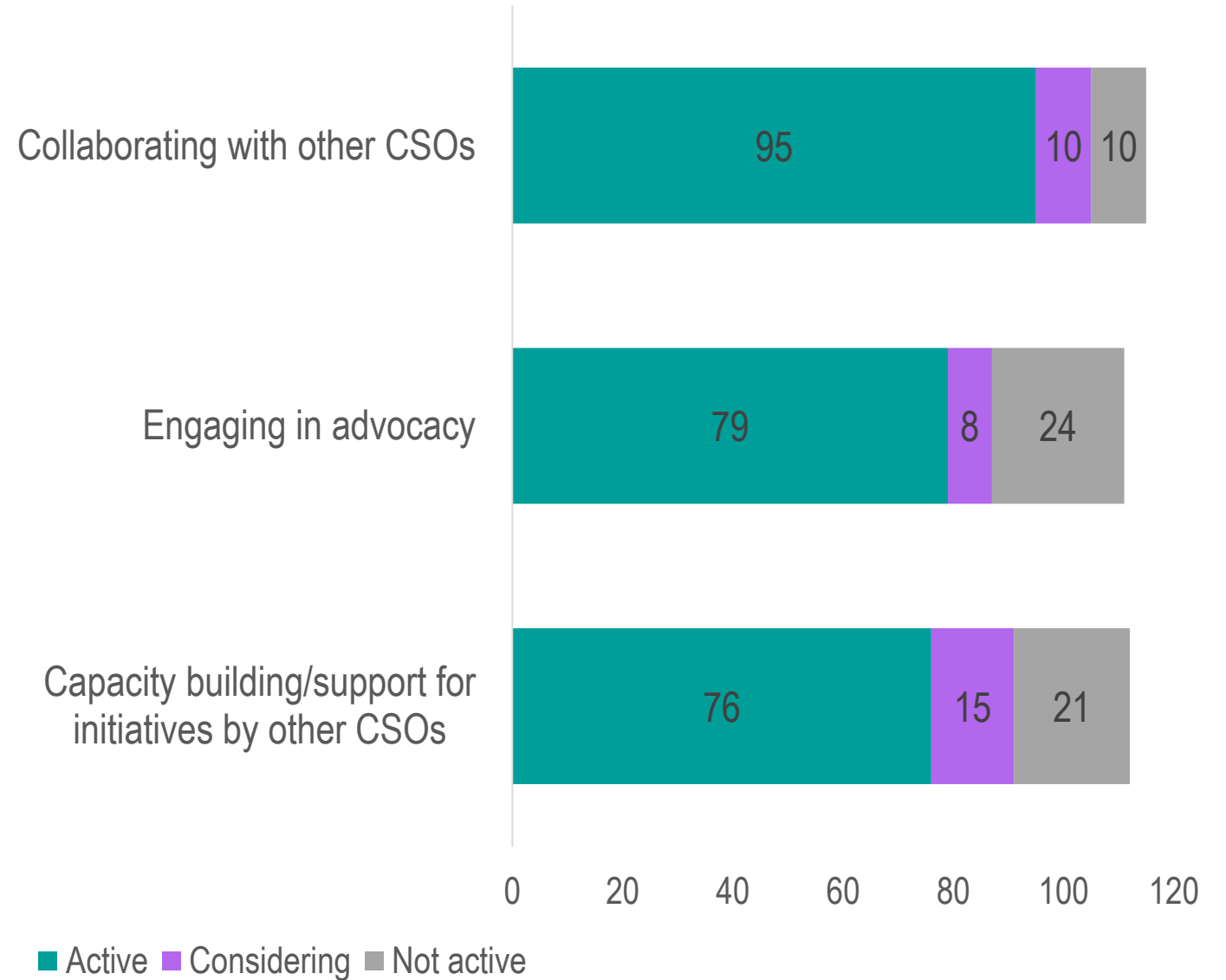
# Freedom of expression

International and national grantees reported different factors contributing to reduced freedom of expression for their organizations or networks.



## Grantee responses

At least half of all respondents cited three common measures in response to closing civic space.

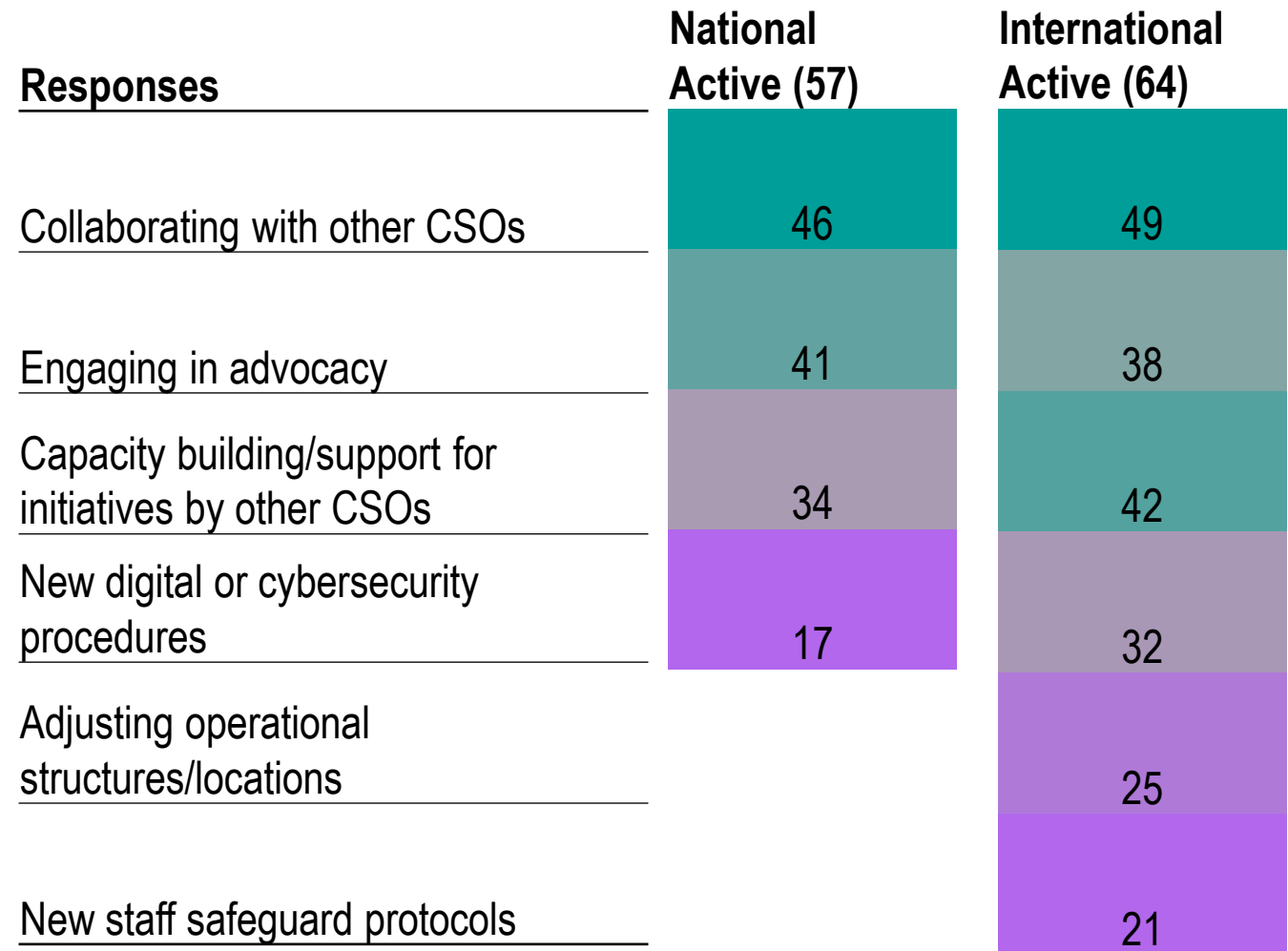


121 respondents

## Grantee responses

At least 30% of **all** grantee respondents are active in the top three common responses to closing civic space.

At least 30% of **international** grantee respondents are also active in other responses to closing civic space.



Lowest value



Highest value



## Shifting Sands: Experiences and Responses to Shrinking Civic Space from the Transparency, Accountability, and Participation Field

Learn more about this research through TAI's research [brief](#), which includes survey findings, grantee organization voices from post-survey interviews, and recommendations to inform future funder efforts.



# TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVE

W: [www.transparency-initiative.org](http://www.transparency-initiative.org)

E: [contact@transparency-initiative.org](mailto:contact@transparency-initiative.org)

T: [@TAInitiative](https://twitter.com/TAInitiative)

November 2018