



POLITICAL TRUST AND POTENTIAL OF PARTICIPATORY DIALOGUE IN MINING AREAS IN SERBIA: THE PERSPECTIVE OF LOCAL POPULATION OF BOR AND MAJDANPEK

... Milena Toković, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Geography ...

... Tamara Maričić, Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning of Serbia ...

... Milovan Vuković, University of Belgrade, Technical Faculty in Bor ...

* MINING IN THE POSTSOCIALIST CONTEXT



- Post-socialist countries in Europe are becoming attractive for mining investments due to the undefined land ownership and less strict environmental standards (Mandacia & Tutan, 2018).
- Environmental protests in Serbia started mainly among locals whose environment was threatened by the commercial projects of land/water grabbing (Pešić & Vukelić, 2022).
- This was followed by weak institutional response to citizens' demands (Pešić & Petrović, 2023).
- The future of civic engagement in such a context of declining democracy and widespread distrust presents a research challenge.



* POLITICAL TRUST



- People are not by nature distrustful.
- Trust is always developed through experiences and interactions .
- It is based on devotion and faith, much more than on calculations.
- Trust in institutions is different from interpersonal relationships, because institutions in themselves are impersonal (Bešić, 2011).
- For the functioning of democracy, „social trust“ is particularly important because it is the basis of the social system and the functioning of the entire society (Kramer, 1999).
- Numerous authors have pointed to a general decline in trust in institutions the world over.



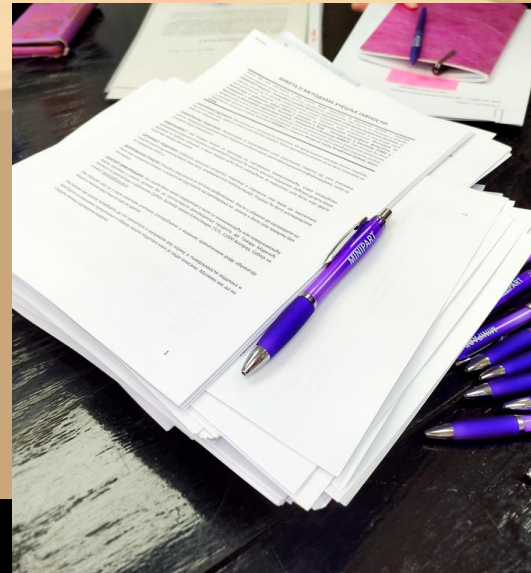
* SOURCES OF DISTRUST AND LIMITED PARTICIPATION

- Due to a lack of trust in both the mining company and the state, citizens are also discouraged from participating in formal decision-making processes (Conde, 2017).
- This lack of trust is maybe a key reason why citizen engagement often takes the form of protests and demonstrations rather than formal participation.
- Fear of violence and punishment stops people from participating in politics to keep themselves safe.
- In tightly controlled contexts, they turn to informal, everyday forms of resistance, viewing formal participation as dangerous or pointless (Bayat, 2010).



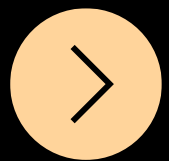
Survey Data

- Citizen polling: July – September 2024
- Random sample: urban municipalities (N = 200)
- Two-stage sample: purposive selection of rural communities with random sampling during the field research phase (N = 100)





MAIN RESEARCH AIM



To explore the potential of participatory dialogue in mining areas





HOW DO WE EXPLORE THIS POTENTIAL?

By analyzing ...

- > political trust
- > participation

... among the local population, including both rural and urban perspectives.

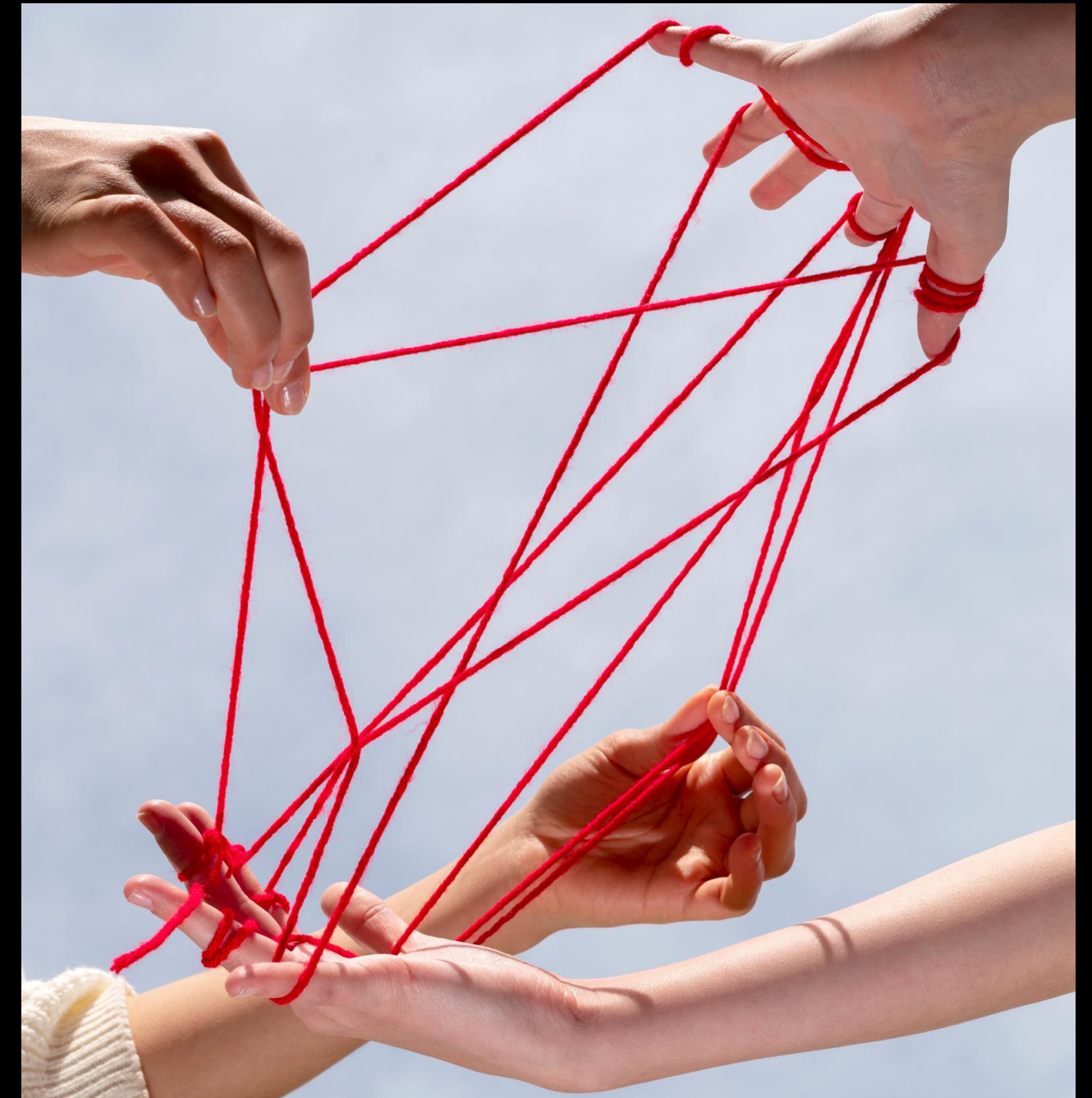
- Perceived contributions of relevant actors to solving issues related to mining activities.
- Perceived consideration of community suggestions by local authorities.

...

POLITICAL
TRUST

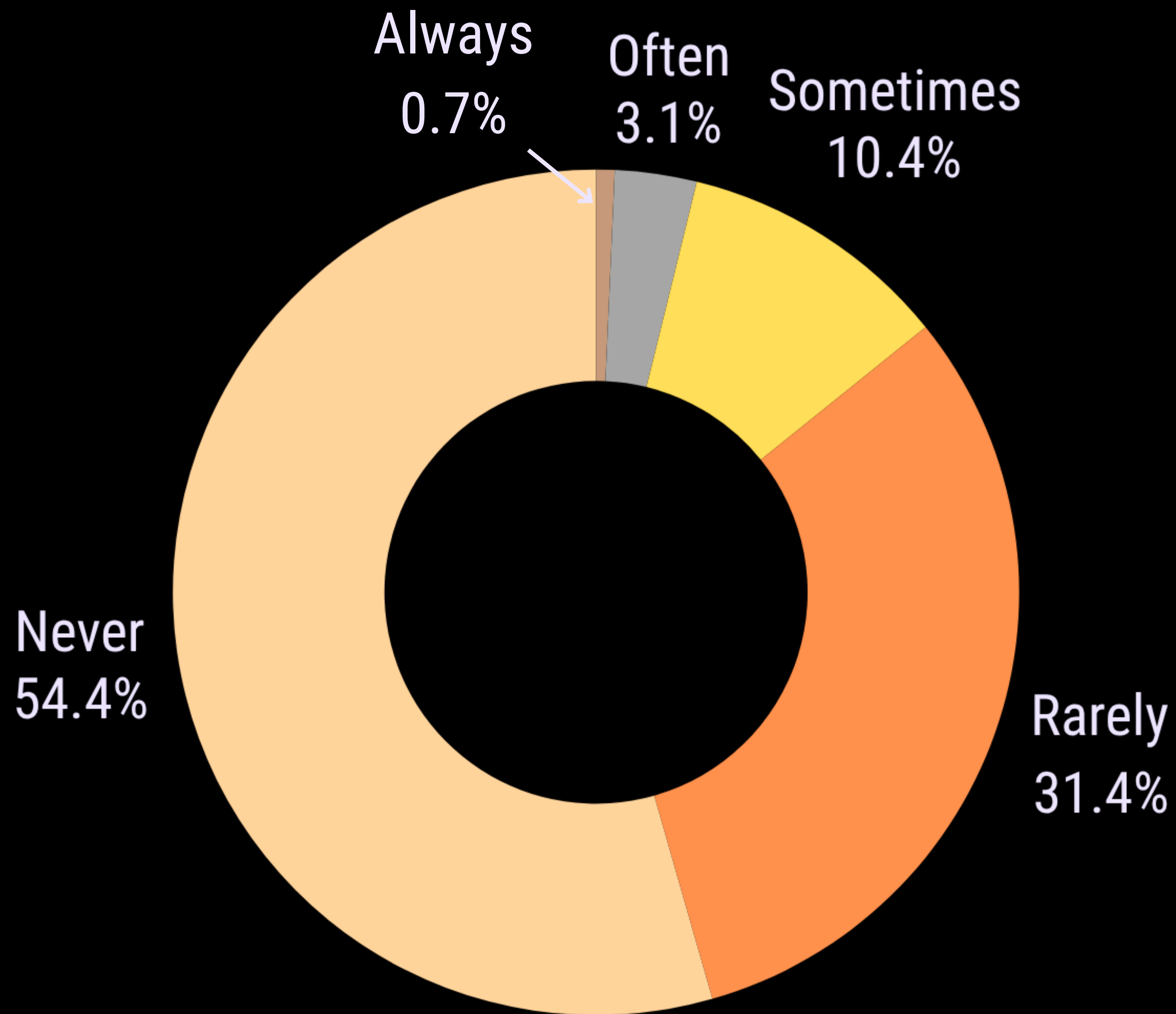


- > Membership in organizations
- > Informing citizens about local activities (last 5 years)
- > Participation in local activities (last 5 years)
- > Perceived reasons for low public engagement in planning document creation



PARTICIPATION

Perceived Contributions of Relevant Actors to Solving Issues Related to Mining Activities (%)	No contribution / Small contribution	Neither small nor large contribution	Large contribution/ very large contribution
National government	73.5	15.1	11.4
Local government	75.5	16.8	7.7
Private companies	80.1	15.5	4.4
NGOs	77.4	16.2	6.4
Experts and scientific community	81.5	14.8	3.7
European Union	84.8	11.8	3.4
Citizens – local activism	62.7	22.0	15.3



How often does the local population feel that their suggestions are considered by local authorities?

Are the respondents members of any of the following organisations?	Active member (%)	Inactive member (%)	Not a member (%)
Youth organizations / student councils	1.9	0.8	97.3
Church or other religious organisations	2.7	5.0	92.3
Animal protection organisations	2.3	3.7	94.0
Environmental organisations	4.0	2.0	94.0
Humanitarian organisations	5.4	3.7	90.9
Political parties	6.4	9.8	83.8

SOLVING LOCAL ISSUES (26.5%):

Maintenance of parks and green areas, fountains, renovation of playgrounds, sports fields, streets, school renovation, addressing heating issues, waste cleaning, cleaning of rivers, lakes, and the city swimming pool, caring for abandoned dogs, humanitarian actions, assisting fellow citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic, NGO sector initiatives, and efforts to inform citizens about corruption in the city of Bor.

PROTESTS (17.8%):

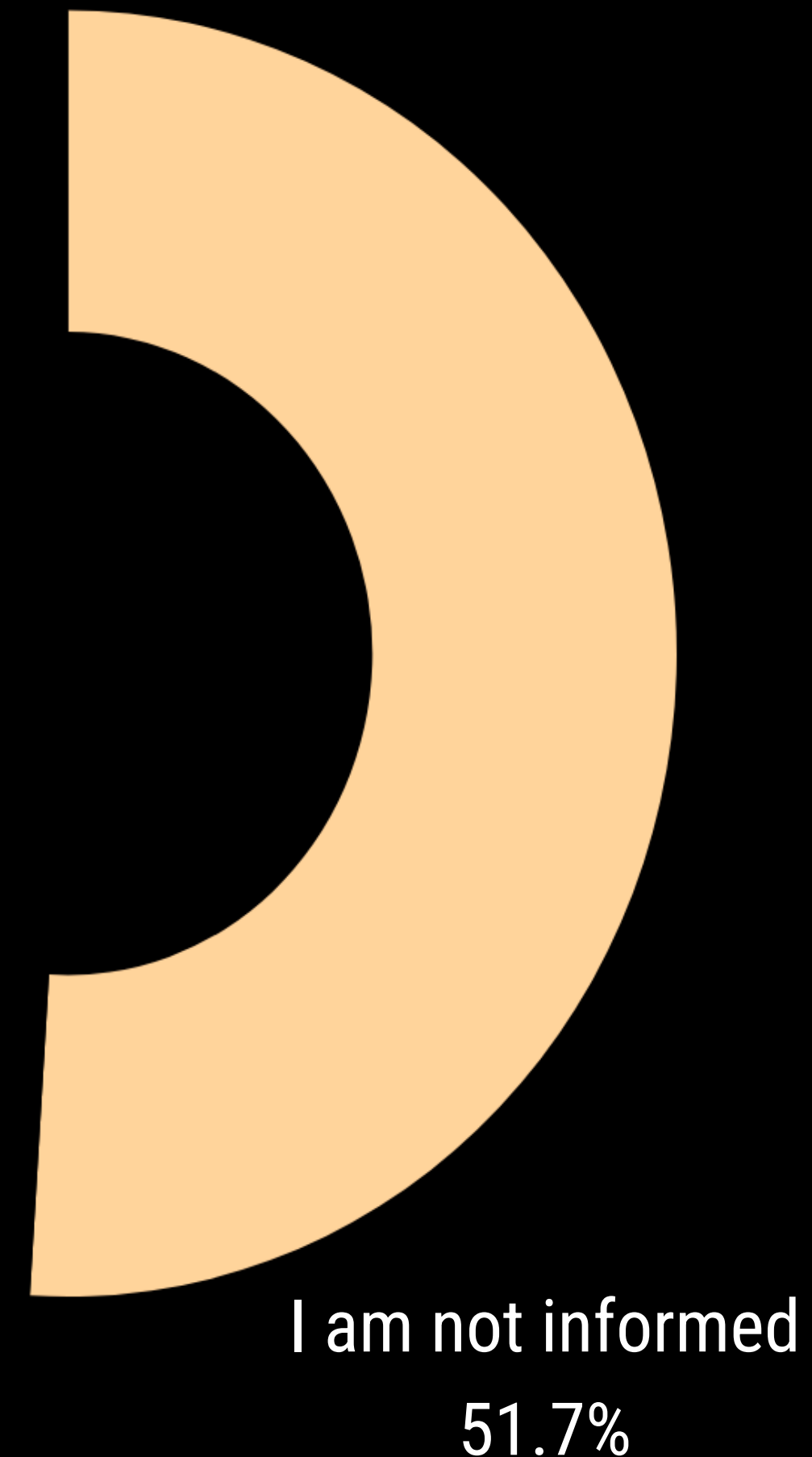
Protests against Rio Tinto, air pollution, population displacement, the lack of parking, illegal construction in Bor, road blockades in Krivelj, and gate blockades at Zijin.

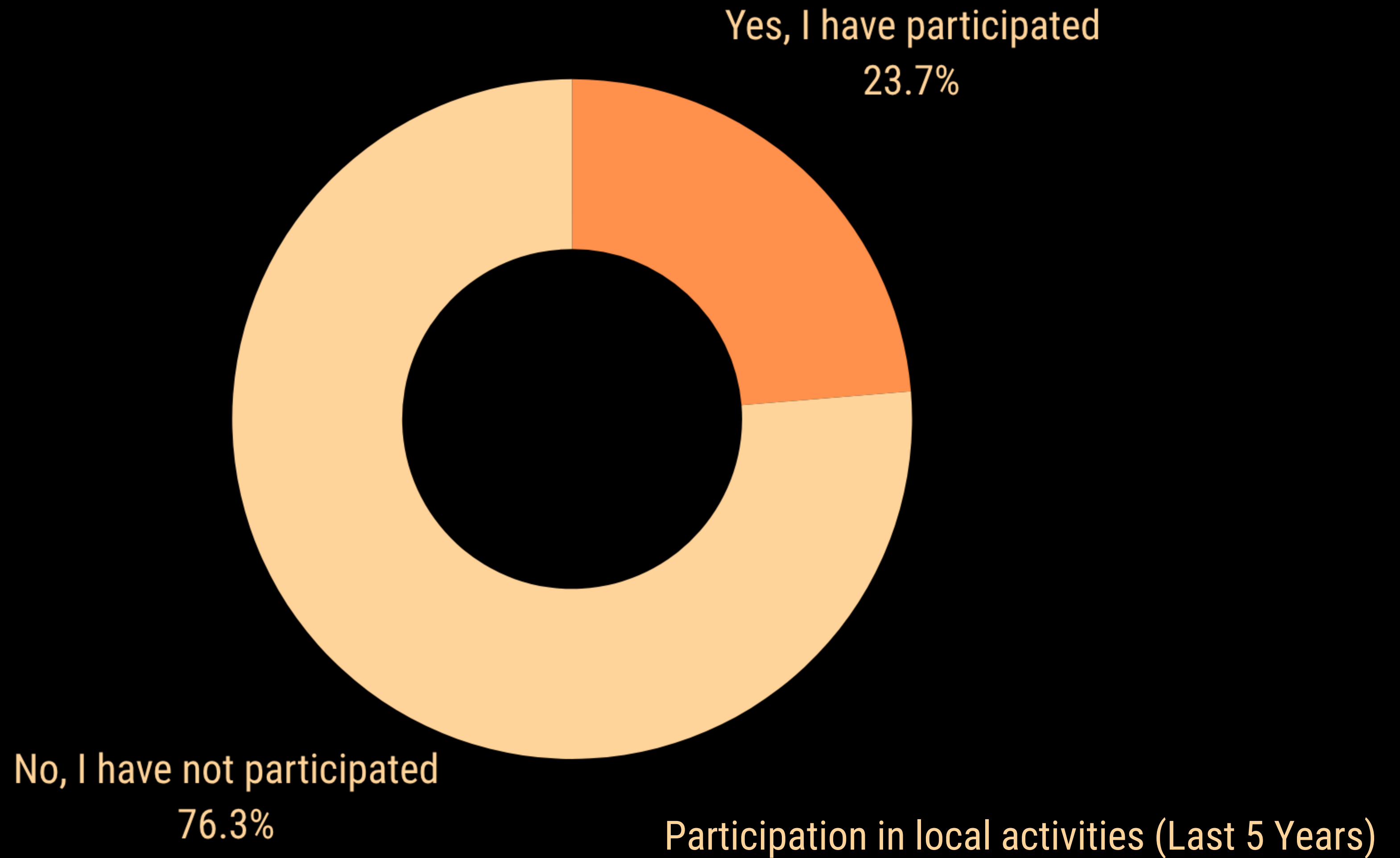
CIVIC PARTICIPATION PROCESSES (2.7%):

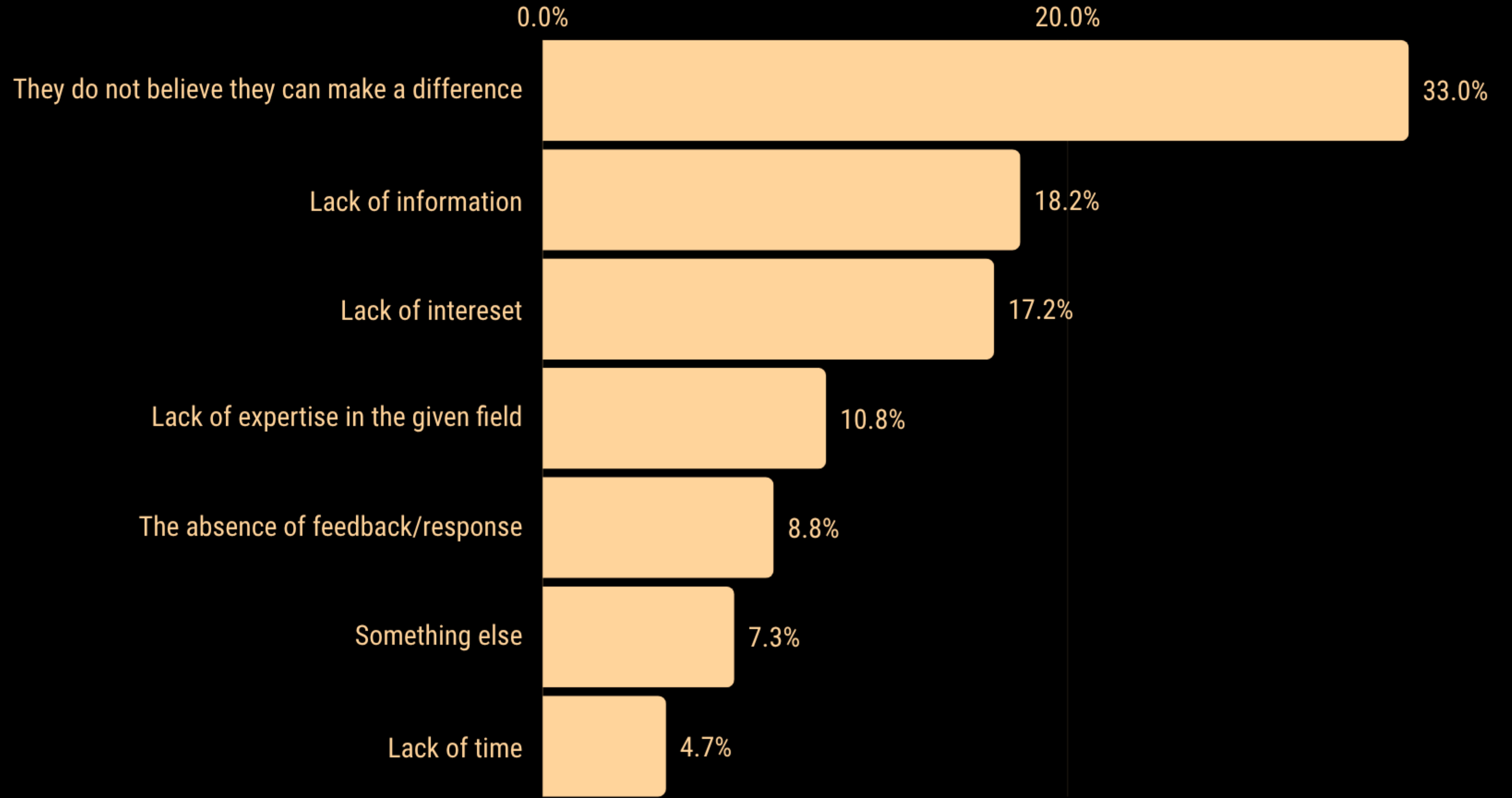
Public forums, local community meetings, addressing the local community, municipal authorities, and the mayor, media appearances, and petition signing.

NO RESPONSE / OTHER(1.3%)

Informing citizens about local activities (Last 5 Years)







Perceived reasons for low public engagement in planning document creation

Something else?

- Rudeness
- Fear (of authorities, blackmail, workplace coercion)
- Relocation
- Young people are not interested in anything
- Feelings of powerlessness against profit-driven, self-interested stakeholders
- Distrust in authorities (local and national)
- Lack of interest from local authorities in involving citizens in planning

7.3%



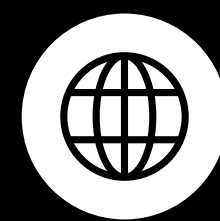
Instead of a Conclusion: Citizens' Insights on How to Improve Public Participation

- Increase awareness of the importance of participation in planning.
- Encourage citizens to take initiative, with greater involvement of youth.
- Legal obligation for direct citizen voting through e-government.
- Financial incentives.
- Transparency, clarity, and simplicity in reporting and public hearings.
- Respecting comments and suggestions and providing feedback.
- Realistic presentation of the plan, without lies and manipulation.
- Conducting more surveys and interviews (online and in-person) with the local population.
- Socio-political factors as preconditions for improving public participation methods (“change of government,” “depoliticisation of local authorities,” “stopping population displacement,” “restoring trust in institutions,” etc.).
- Pessimistic outlook for the future (“There is no point in doing anything,” “No help is coming”).



* THANK

YOU FOR YOUR
ATTENTION



www.minipart.rs

Photo Sources

Freepik

[https://www.freepik.com/free-vector/employees-giving-hands-helping-colleagues-walk-](https://www.freepik.com/free-vector/employees-giving-hands-helping-colleagues-walk-upstairs_7732609.htm#fromView=search&page=1&position=19&uuid=a83e00cb-eee8-4c21-a332-f1e6331c0112&query=trust)

[upstairs_7732609.htm#](https://www.freepik.com/free-vector/employees-giving-hands-helping-colleagues-walk-upstairs_7732609.htm#fromView=search&page=1&position=19&uuid=a83e00cb-eee8-4c21-a332-f1e6331c0112&query=trust)

[https://www.freepik.com/free-photo/human-hands-connected-with-red-thread_34136516.htm#](https://www.freepik.com/free-photo/human-hands-connected-with-red-thread_34136516.htm#fromView=search&page=1&position=14&uuid=87d14e91-246d-401f-b37e-1d9573c4b3e3&query=participation)

[fromView=search&page=1&position=14&uuid=87d14e91-246d-401f-b37e-1d9573c4b3e3&query=participation](https://www.freepik.com/free-photo/human-hands-connected-with-red-thread_34136516.htm#fromView=search&page=1&position=14&uuid=87d14e91-246d-401f-b37e-1d9573c4b3e3&query=participation)

[https://www.freepik.com/free-photo/side-view-woman-packing-desk-items_28476785.htm#](https://www.freepik.com/free-photo/side-view-woman-packing-desk-items_28476785.htm#fromView=search&page=1&position=38&uuid=13f9cf00-6753-4f8c-9db2-f2122f3b04b1&query=losing+job)

[fromView=search&page=1&position=38&uuid=13f9cf00-6753-4f8c-9db2-f2122f3b04b1&query=losing+job](https://www.freepik.com/free-photo/side-view-woman-packing-desk-items_28476785.htm#fromView=search&page=1&position=38&uuid=13f9cf00-6753-4f8c-9db2-f2122f3b04b1&query=losing+job)

Web Source

Foto: Twitter/Eko straza, available at: <https://nova.rs/vesti/drustvo/snimak-iz-vazduha-pokazuje-koliko-je-unisten-majdanpek-video/>

References:

- Arendt, H. (1970). On violence. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Bayat, A. (2010). Life as politics: How ordinary people change the Middle East. Amsterdam University Press.
- Bešić, M. (2011): Politički i situacioni prediktori poverenja u institucije. Godišnjak Fakulteta političkih nauka, 5 (6): 119f
- Conde, M. (2017). Resistance to mining: A review. Ecological Economics, 132, 80–90. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2016.08.025>
- Kramer, R. M. (1999): Trust and distrust in organizations: Emerging perspectives, enduring questions. Annual Review of Psychology, 50(1): 569f
- Mandacia, N., & Tutan, M. U. (2018). Global land grab and the Balkans: Continuity and changes in a unique historical context. Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies, 20(3): 230–250. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2018.1379754>
- Pešić J. & Petrović M. (2023). Potentials and Obstacles for the Transnationalisation of Recent Environmental Struggles in Serbia. Sociology and space, 61 (2023) 227 (2): 397-422, <https://doi.org/10.5673/sip.61.2.7>
- Pešić, J., & Vukelić, J. (2022). Europeanisation from below at the semi-periphery: The movement against small hydropower plants in Serbia, Sociologija, 64 (1): 5-27, <https://doi.org/10.2298/SOC2201005P>
- Toković M., Milosavljević D., Vuković M., Pantić M., Maričić T., Resistance and Engagement in Mining Communities: Experiences from Bor and Majdanpek (Serbia). *Spatium, On line first*, <https://doi.org/10.2298/SPAT250327001T>
- Toković, M., Milosavljević, D., Pantić, M., Maričić, T., & Vuković, M. (2025, June 4). Bor and Majdanpek – Report on the Results of the Survey Research. Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning of Serbia. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15593376>
- Wedeen, L. (1999). Ambiguities of domination: Politics, rhetoric, and symbols in contemporary Syria. University of Chicago Press.

MINIPART - Improving participation in spatial planning of mining areas 2024/2027

Project partners:



ИНСТИТУТ ЗА АРХИТЕКТУРУ И УРБАНИЗАМ СРБИЈЕ
Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning of Serbia



External collaborators:



UNIVERSITY OF
EASTERN FINLAND

Supported by:



Science Fund
of the Republic of Serbia



www.minipart.rs



info@minipart.rs



[#MINIPART](https://twitter.com/MINIPART)