

# ACCESS TO INFORMATION

## RESULTS



**Access to Information Programme**



National Representative Public Opinion Poll  
February 2010



Aiming at better efficiency of its mission to assist the exercise of the right of access to information, Access to Information Programme assigned to Market LINKS, a research and consulting agency, to perform a public opinion poll among adult Bulgarian population. The first wave of the public opinion poll was performed in September-October 2008, while the second – in February 2010. The public opinion poll had the following aims:

- To study the level of awareness about the right of access to public information\* among Bulgarian citizens
- To outline public attitude towards the guarantee and respect of the right of access to public information\*
- To outline practices and problems with obtaining access to public information\*
- To outline public attitudes after the enforcement of the December 2008 amendments to the Access to Public Information Act (APIA) and the ensuing practices

*\*Under the APIA, public information shall be any information relating to the social life in the Republic of Bulgaria, and giving opportunity to the citizens to form their own opinion on the activities of the persons having obligations under this act.*



## **Opinion poll among adult citizens**

*Citizens awareness of access to information right*

*Public opinion assessment on practices and problems related to the access to public information*



<b>TYPE OF OPINION POLL:</b>	Qualitative
<b>METHOD OF REGISTRATION:</b>	Direct personal interview
<b>POLLED SAMPLE:</b>	Population, 18+
<b>SIZE OF THE SAMPLE:</b>	1143
<b>REPRESENTATION:</b>	National
<b>TIME FRAME:</b>	February 2010



<b>Gender</b>	<b>Female</b>	52,1%
	<b>Male</b>	47,9%
<b>Age</b>	<b>18-34</b>	29,6%
	<b>35-59</b>	42,3%
	<b>60+</b>	28,1%
<b>Place of living</b>	<b>Sofia</b>	16,5%
	<b>Big city</b>	15,0%
	<b>Other city</b>	39,0%
	<b>Village</b>	29,5%
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Bulgarian</b>	94,7%
	<b>Roma</b>	3,6%
	<b>Turkish</b>	1,6%
	<b>Other</b>	0,2%

## RESULTS



Right after the first wave of the public opinion poll performed in October 2008, amendments to the APIA as of December 2008 (unrelated to the opinion poll) introduced number of measures to ensure greater transparency in the work of the administration, including proactive disclosure of up-to-date public information on the Internet sites of the public authorities.

The amendments introduced the obligation for publication of certain categories of information in the *Access to Information* section on the web sites of the administrative structures within the system of the executive power.

1. list of the acts issued within the scope of the powers of the respective authority;
2. description of the data volumes and resources, used by the respective administration;
3. an annual report on the number of requests for access to public information, which shall contain data on the refusals made and the reasons therefor;
4. the internal rules related to the access to information and the procedure for access to the public registers maintained by the administrative structures within the system of the executive power.

By that time some of these materials had never been publicly available, while others had not been accessible through the Internet.

Citizens who presumably have used information published on the Internet and did not have to submit a request for access to information, explicably do not identify themselves as *having exercised their right of access to public information*.

That fact explains why in comparison to the first wave of the public opinion poll, the percentage of those who have exercised their right of access to information remains the same (7% like in October 2008), as well as the percentage of those who would seek for access to information only if they had particular reasons (64% in 2010 and 63% in 2008).



According to 38% of the respondents the right of access to information is guaranteed in Bulgaria. Their portion has increased with 6% in comparison to the previous wave of the public opinion poll. After the last amendments to the APiA, the percentage of those who believe that the right of access to public information is not guaranteed by the Bulgarian legislation has considerably decreased – now they are 39%, while in 2008 they were 51% of the respondents. 22% of the citizens cannot define their opinion about the legislative guarantees with regard to the right of access to information.

The percentage of adult citizens who are not aware of their right of access to public information has decreased to 52%. For comparison, in 2008 it was over 60%.

The portion of citizens, who know about the Access to Information Programme, regardless of their direct or indirect impressions, has increased. The percentage is 41% in comparison to 34% in 2008.

An increase is registered among those who are aware of the Access to Public Information Act. They are 45% of all respondents. In 2008, the fraction was 40%.

Almost half of the respondents hold the opinion that the citizens' right of access to public information is not respected in Bulgaria – 46% of all respondents believe that. The fraction, however, has decreased in comparison to the results from the first wave of the public opinion poll when 62% of the respondents hold that opinion. The pessimistic attitude towards the respect of the right of access to information dominates among citizens living in the capital of Sofia – 65%.





In comparison to the previous wave of the public opinion poll and after the media campaign accompanying the APIA amendments in the end of 2008, the portion of adult Bulgarian citizens who are aware of the procedure for obtaining access to public information has considerably increased – 36% of the respondents know (well or considerably well) what they shall do in order to obtain the information they need from state and municipal authorities. In 2008, their portion was 28%. The percentage of those aware of the procedure is higher among respondents from smaller towns in comparison to the respondents from Sofia and other big towns. Nevertheless, the percentage of citizens who are not aware of the procedure is still high.

An increase is registered among those citizens who know (well or considerably well) whom to address to obtain public information. Their percentage is 38% in comparison to 28% in 2008.

Like in the previous wave of the public opinion poll, the question of which institution to address in case of refusal of provision of information remains the most unclear with regard to the procedure for access to public information – 34% do not have a very clear idea, while 39% are definite that they do not know whom to address. The portion of the latter, however, has decreased as compared to the 65% in 2008.



The biggest percentage of those who have exercised their right of access to information is that of citizens who make their request for public information in the institutions themselves – in a written form (39%). Other 37% request information via the Internet – email or electronic contact form on the web site of the institution. Their portion has increased from 28% in 2008, at the account of those who make their request for access to public information at the institution orally – 31% in comparison to 44% in 2008.

The percentage of citizens who state that they need assistance in the process of obtaining public information has decreased to 38% in comparison to 49% in 2008. Other 22% from the respondents, however, stated that they need assistance/consultation in cases when they have been refused access to public information. The portion of those who have declared that they do not need assistance/consultation has increased to 21% in comparison to 13% in 2008.

Out of the citizens who have exercised their right of access to public information, more than two-thirds (68%) state that they have received all of the requested information. In 2008, the percentage was 51%. Another one fourth of the respondents state that they have received information, but not all of it. In 2008, their percentage was 31%. In 2010, the percentage of citizens who have exercised their right of access to public information and received refusals is lower (7%) in comparison with 2008 (12%). The fraction of those who have not received an answer to their request is negligible – 1% in comparison to 6% in 2008.



The decreased number of refusals partly explains why the majority of respondent citizens are not aware of cases in which access to public information has been refused. In 2010, 81% do not know of such a case. Their portion has increased from 73% in 2008. The portion of those who are aware of one or more cases of refusal is only 9% and has decreased from 14% in 2008.

Only one in six respondent citizens who were refused access to information has appealed the refusal. One respondent has not appealed because they did not know whom to address, and four respondents did not appeal due to other reasons.

The results from the public opinion poll show that the respondents are mostly interested in decisions of the public authorities which would affect all citizens (60%). Second ranks the declared interest towards public information related to activity reports of local authorities (52% in 2010), which however has decreased from 60% in 2008. The interest towards public information about programs and development strategies has slightly decreased (50% in 2010 and 57% in 2008). The interest towards public registers, however, has increased to 41% in 2010, in comparison to 35% in 2008.

The interest towards access to information related publications and broadcasts in the media registers a downfall during the years of economic crisis. The majority of citizens (60%) state with absolute certainty that they do not follow publications and broadcasts on the topic. Their percentage has increased, in comparison to the first wave of the public opinion poll – 54% in 2008.



**The Public Opinion Poll shows that:**

- **The level of awareness about the right of access to public information remains the same, but the extent of awareness about the procedure related to the access to public information has increased;**
- **The level of citizen confidence in the legal guarantee of the right of access to public information has increased;**
- **Citizens' belief that the right of access to public information is respected in Bulgaria has increased;**
- **Higher percentage of citizens are convinced that it is important that their right of access to public information is guaranteed and respected in Bulgaria;**
- **Public awareness about the Access to Information Programme has increased;**
- **The percentage of citizens who are aware of the Access to Public Information Act has increased;**
- **Citizens are mostly interested in the decisions of the public authorities that affect everybody.**



**Regardless of the positive results in comparison to the first wave of the public opinion poll, there is a continuing necessity for:**

- **Raising awareness campaign on citizens' right of access to public information;**
- **Training and assistance in cases when institutions refuse to provide public information;**
- **Publication of information in the media about specific cases of refusal of access to information, measures taken and successful assistance provided by Access to Information Programme.**

## RESULTS IN GRAPHS

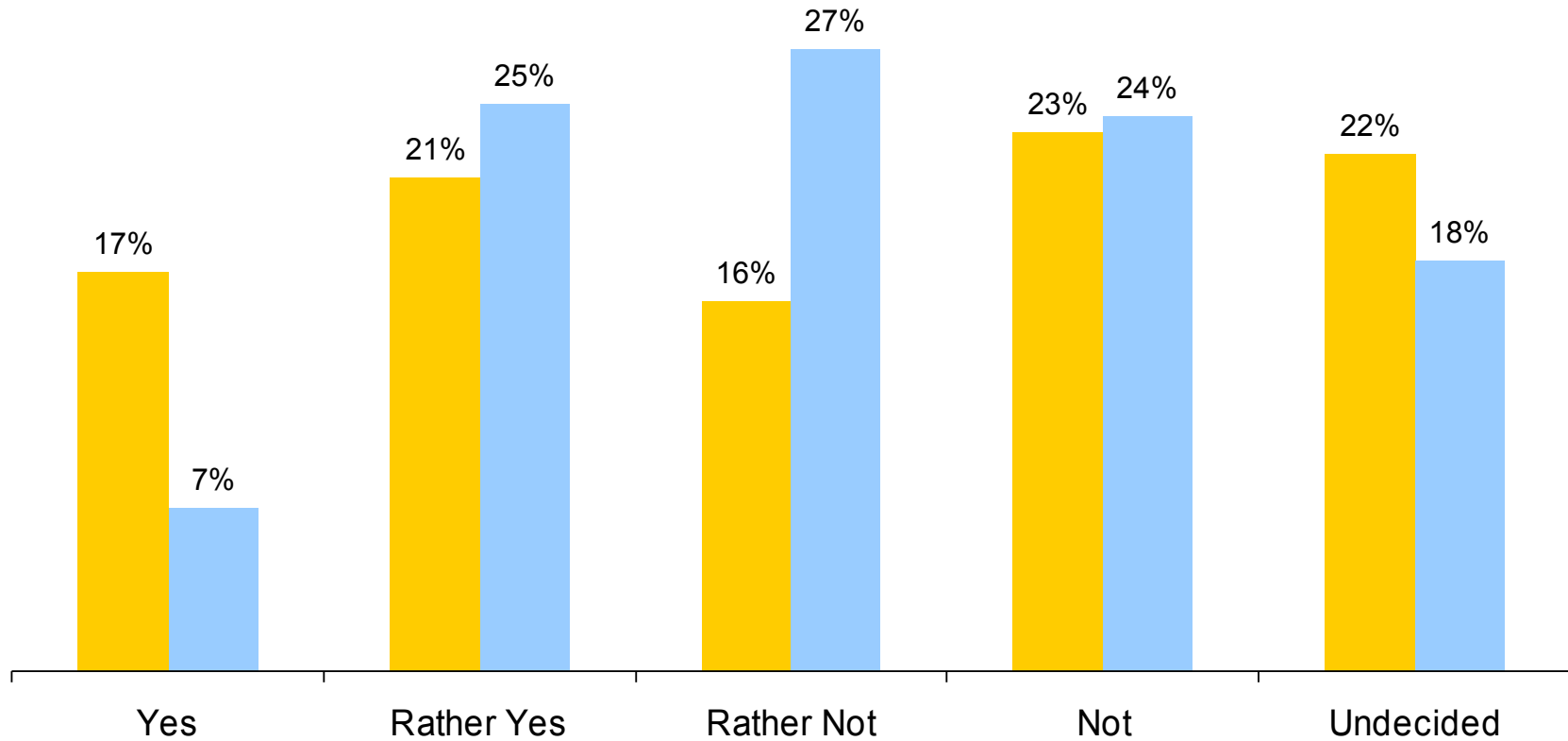
# Right of access to public information guaranteed by Bulgarian legislation



Q. Do Bulgarian laws guarantee citizens' right of access to public information?

2010

2008



Base: All respondents (1143), 18+

Base: All respondents (1210), 18+

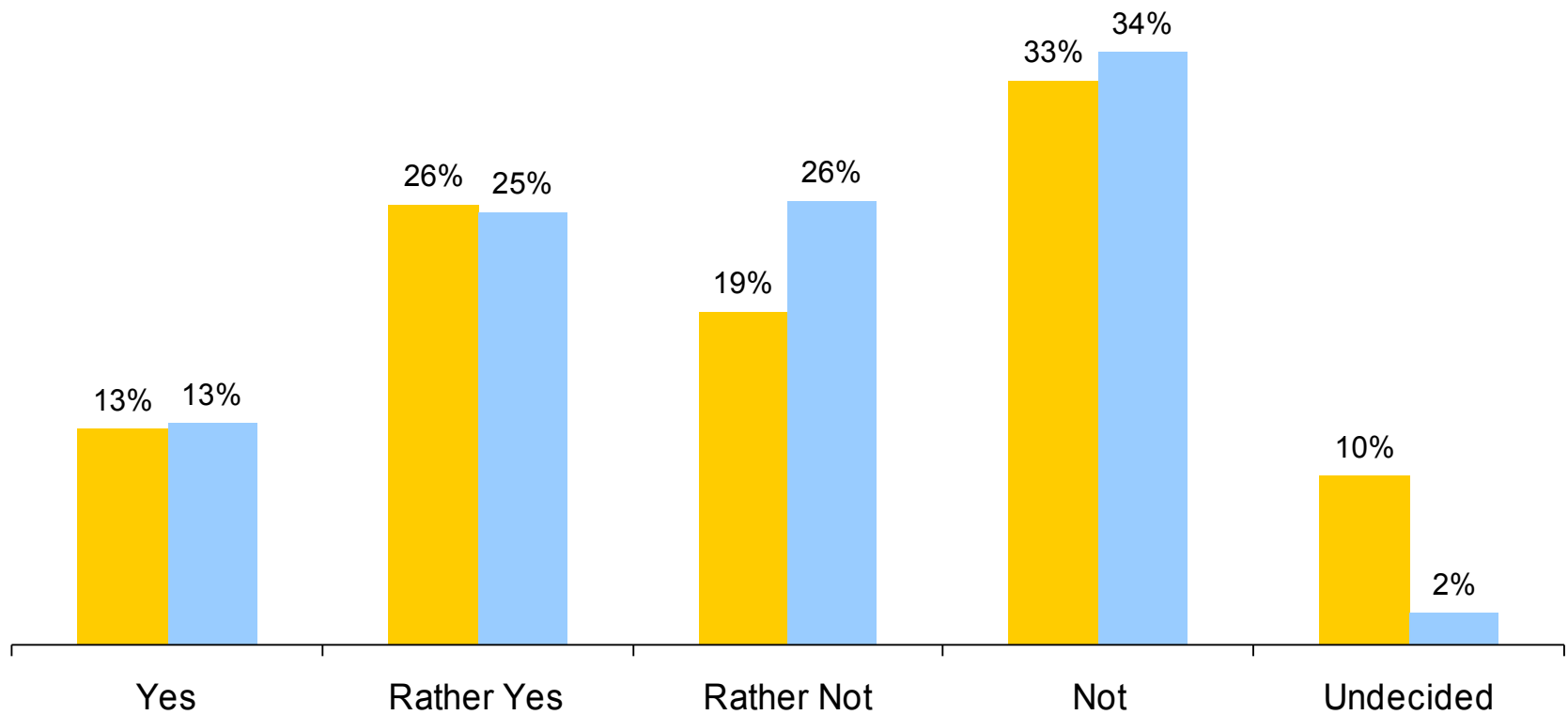
# Right of Access to Public Information in Bulgaria



Q. Are you aware of your right of access to public information?

2010

2008



Base: All respondents (1143), 18+

Base: All respondents (1210), 18+



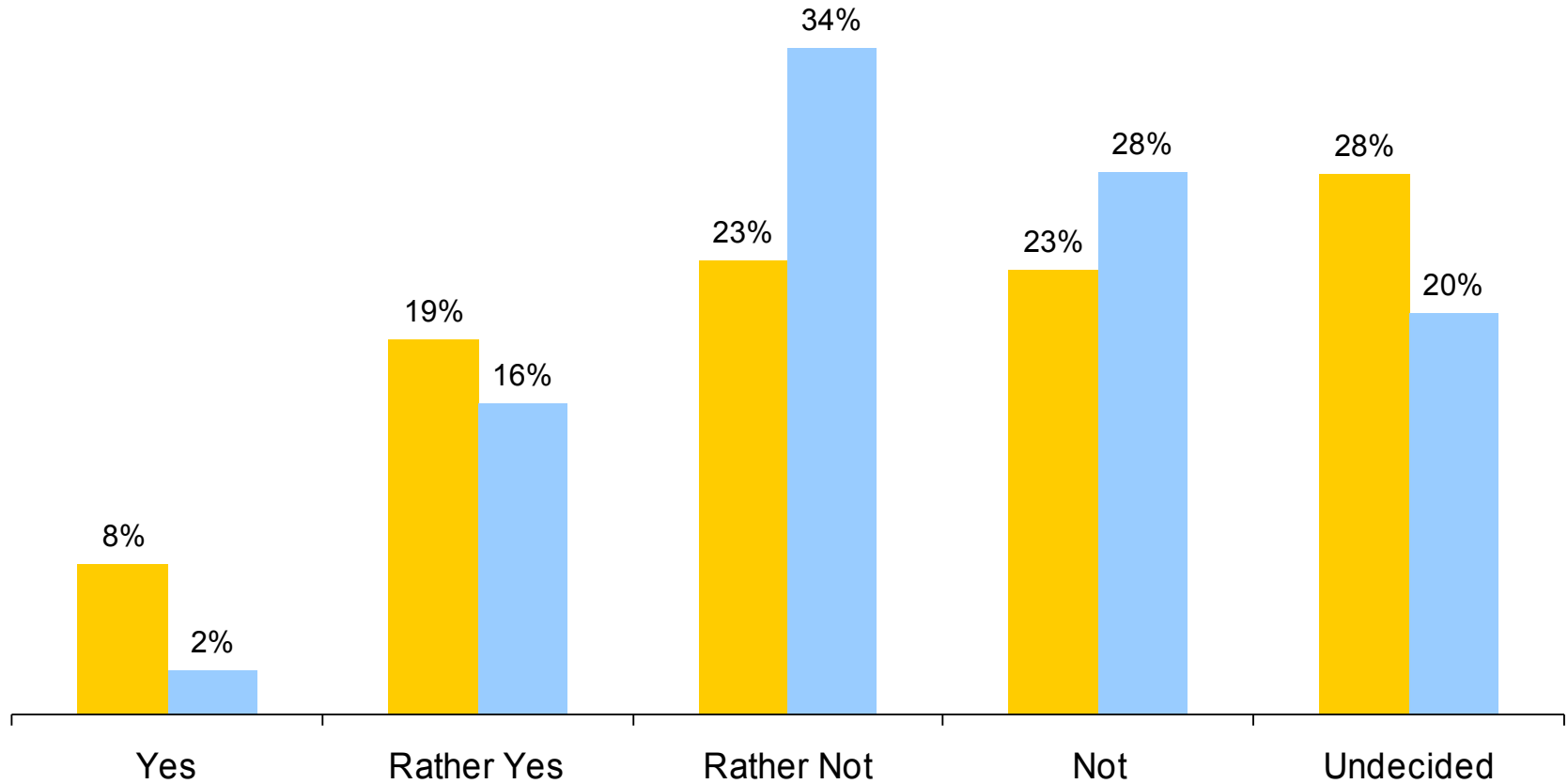
# Respect to the right of access to public information in Bulgaria



Q. Is the right of access to public information respected in Bulgaria?

2010

2008



Base: All respondents (1143), 18+

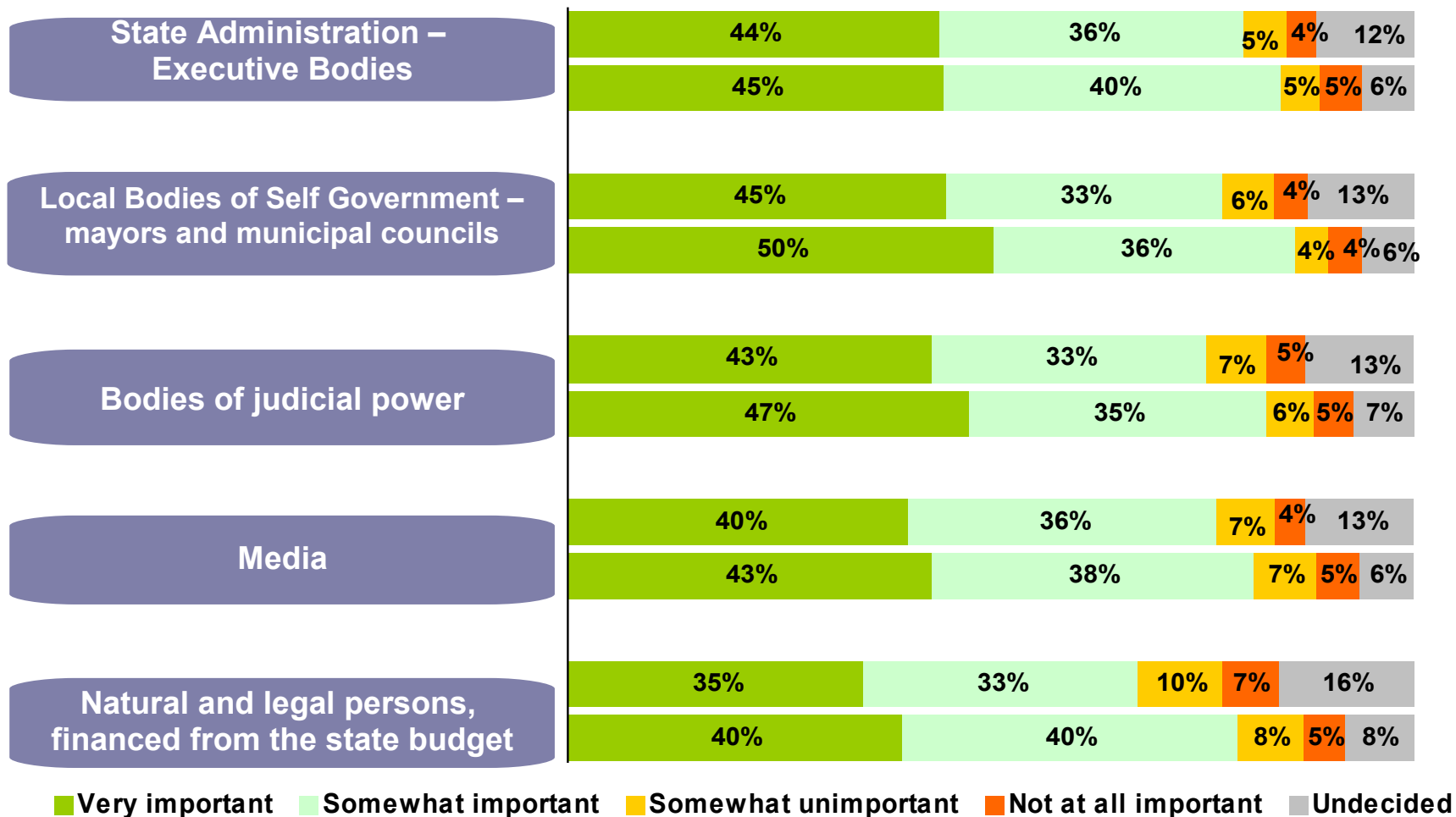
Base: All respondents (1210), 18+

# Guarantee and respect to the right of access to public information by the institutions



Q. How important is it that the citizens' right of access to public information is guaranteed and respected by the following institutions:

2010



Base: All respondents (1143), 18+

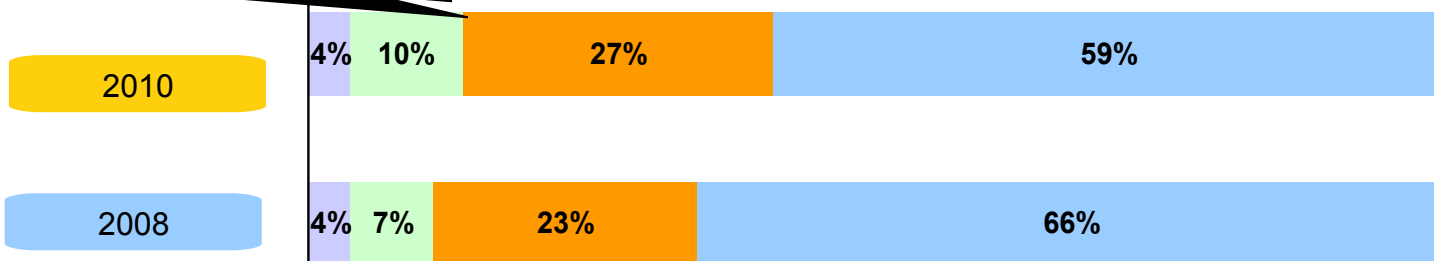
# Access to Information Programme and the Access to Public Information Act - awareness



Q. Are you aware of the existence of:

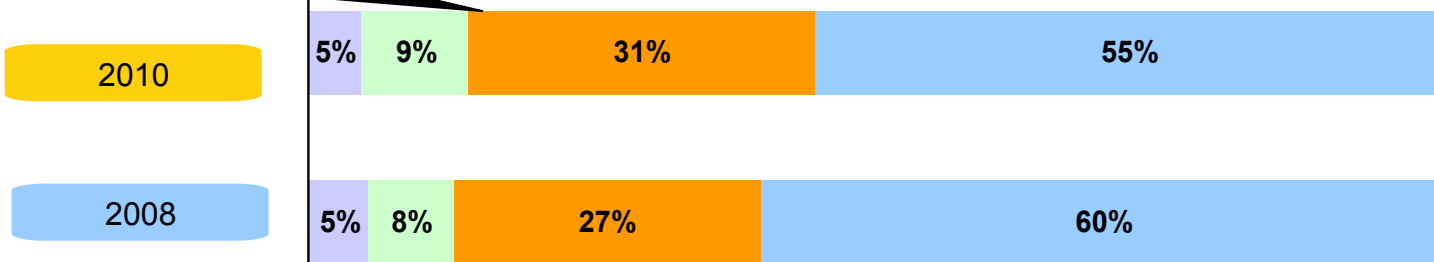
A total of 41% out of all respondent citizens are aware of the existence of Access to Information Programme

Access to Information Programme



A total of 45% out of all respondent citizens are aware of the existence of the APIA

Access to Public Information Act



I have contacted/used

I am aware of the existence but not familiar with

I am well aware but don't have direct impressions

I am not aware at all

Base: All respondents (1143), 18+

Base: All respondents (1210), 18+

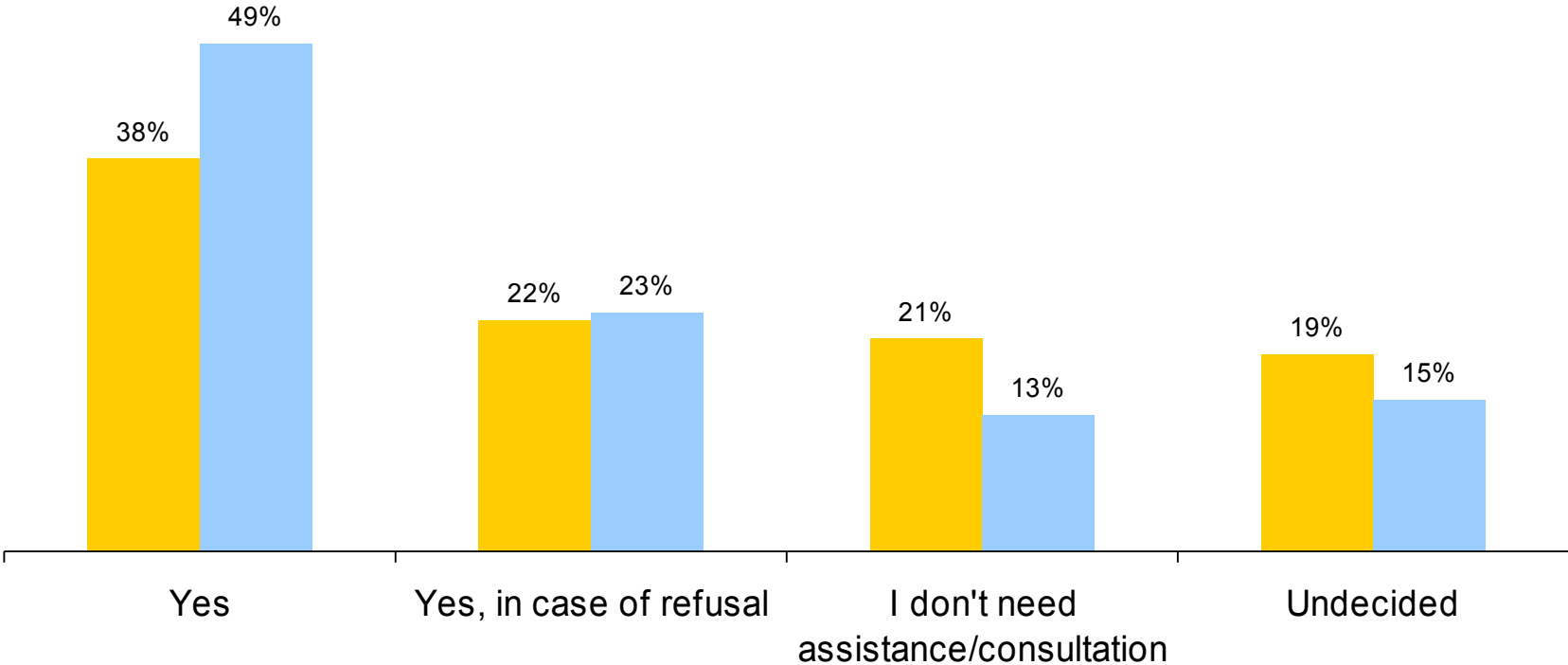
# Assistance in obtaining access to public information



Q. Do you need assistance/consultation in cases when you want to obtain access to public information?

2010

2008



Base: All respondents (1143), 18+

Base: All respondents (1210), 18+

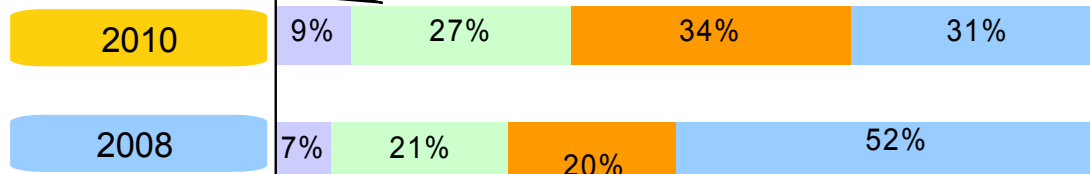
# Procedure of obtaining public information



Q. Do you know:

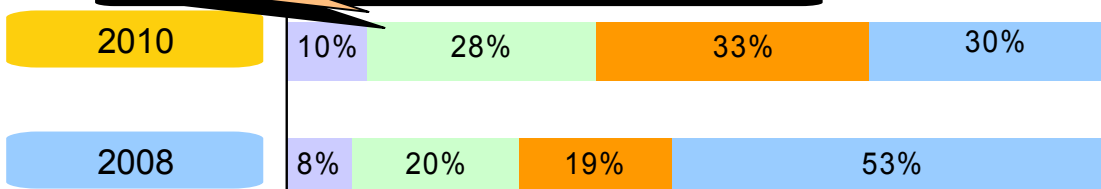
*36% of the respondent citizens know what to do in order to obtain public information from a central or municipal administration*

What to do to obtain information from central and municipal administration?



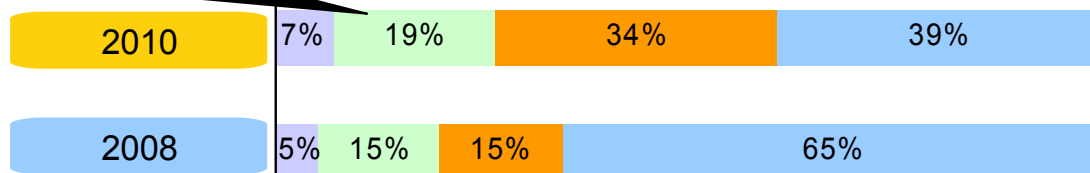
*38% of respondent citizens know whom to address in order to obtain public information*

Whom to address in order to obtain public information?



*26% of respondent citizens know which institution to address in case of public information refusal*

Which institution to address in case of refusal of public information?



■ Yes, I know well  
 ■ Yes, I know in general terms  
 ■ Rather not  
 ■ No, I don't know at all  
 ■ No answer

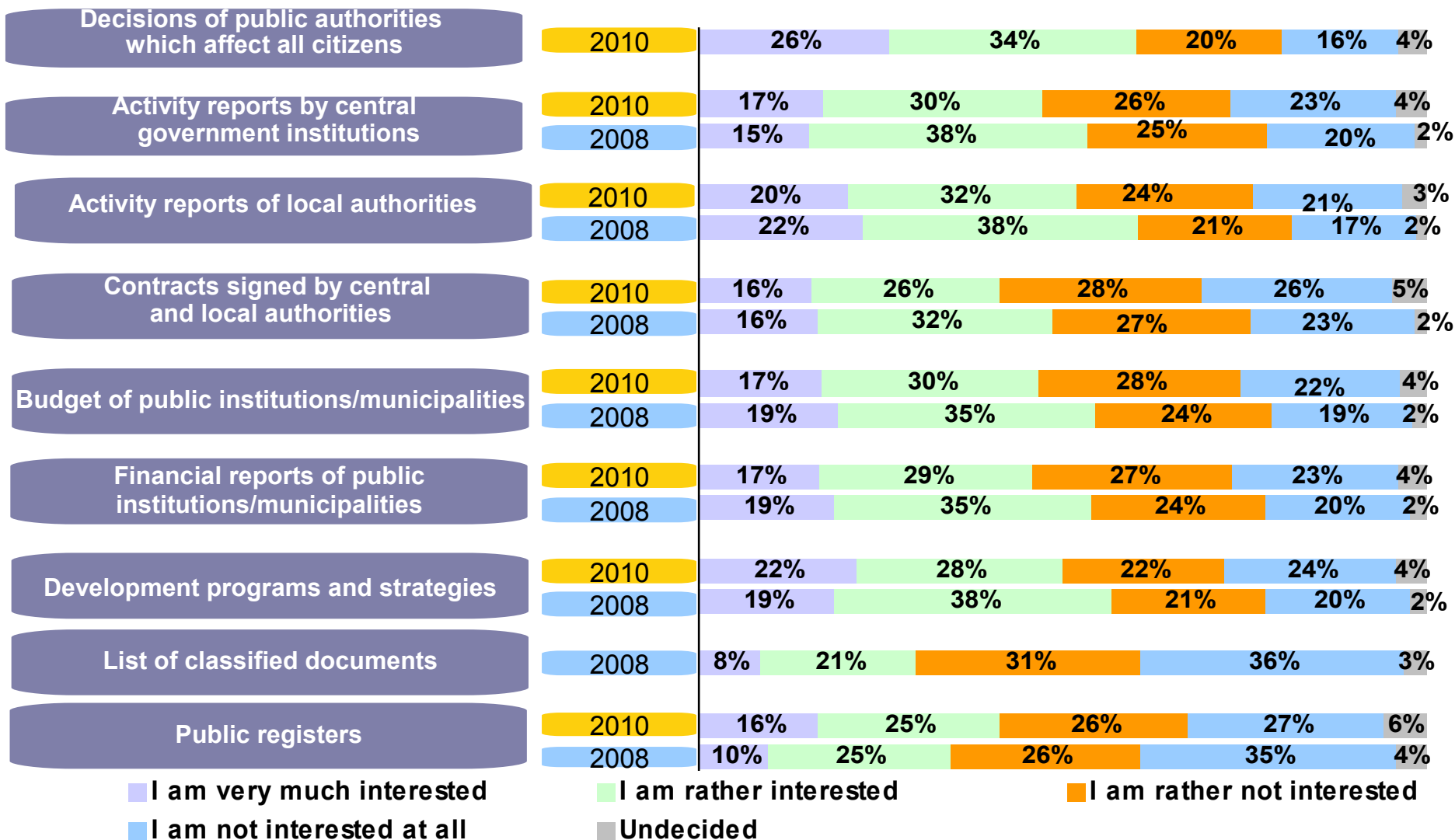
Base: All respondents (1143), 18+

Base: All respondents (1210), 18+

# Interest towards public information



Q. To what extent is the following public information interesting to you as a citizen?



Base: All respondents (1143), 18+

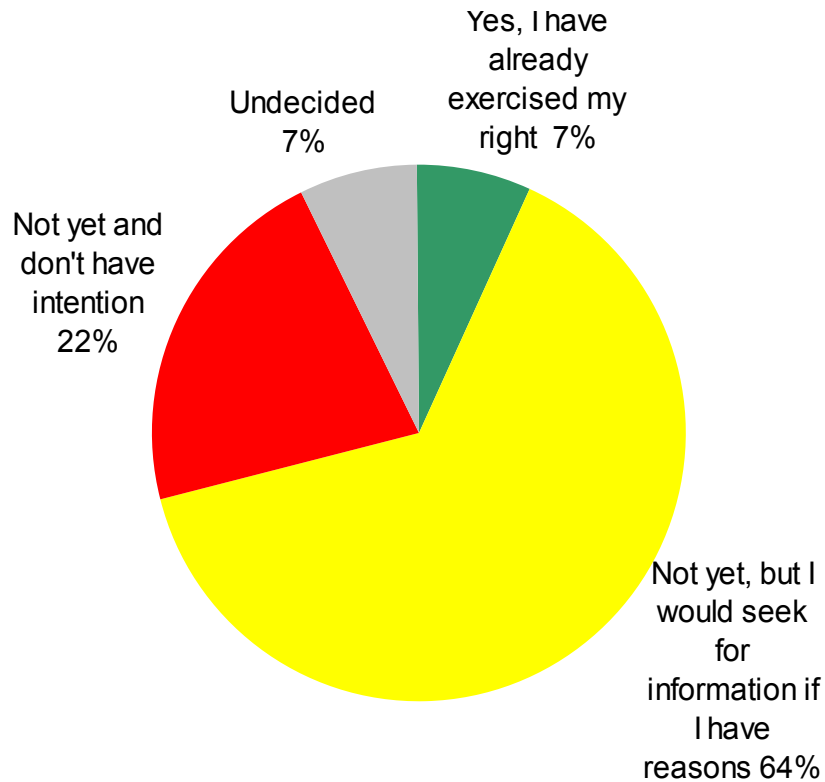
Base: All respondents (1210), 18+

# Intention to exercise the right of access to information



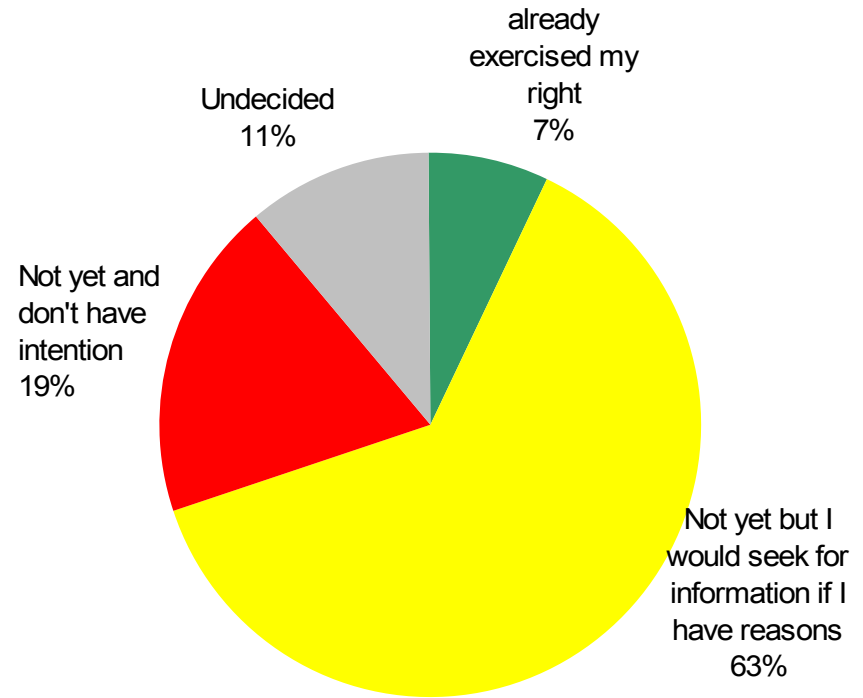
Q: Have you ever exercised the right of access to public information? Do you have intentions to exercise it if you have not done it yet?

2010



Base: All respondents (1143), 18+

2008



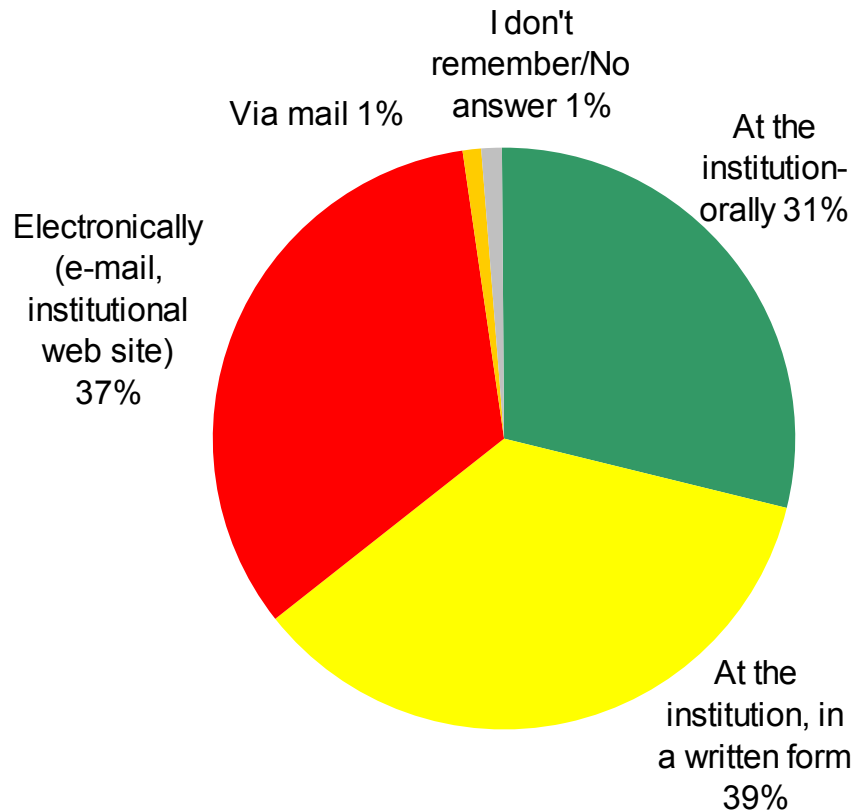
Base: All respondents (1210), 18+

# Ways of requesting access to public information



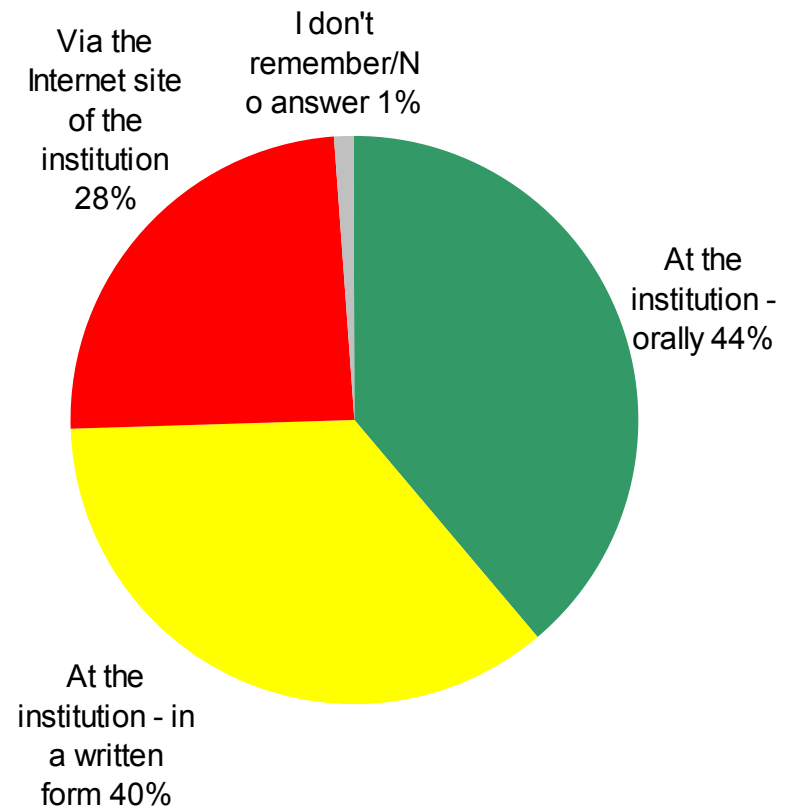
Q: How did you request access to public information?

2010



Base: All respondents who have exercised their right of access to information (80)

2008



Base: All respondents who have exercised their right of access to information (86)



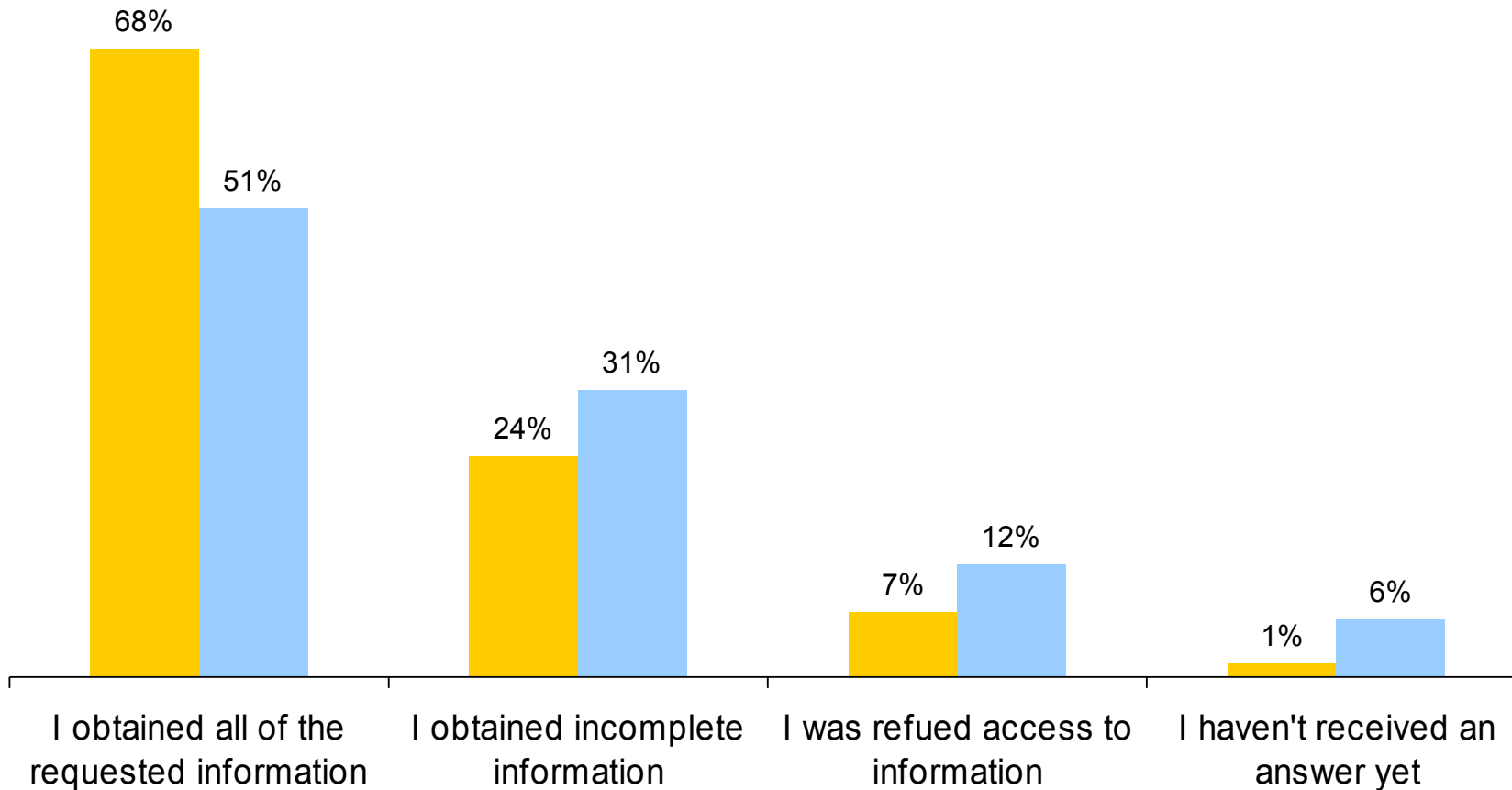
# Results after attempts to obtain access to information



Q. What was the result after your attempt to obtain access to public information?

2010

2008



Base: All respondents who have exercised their right of access to information (80)

Base: All respondents who have exercised their right of access to information (86)

# Reaction after a refusal of access to public information

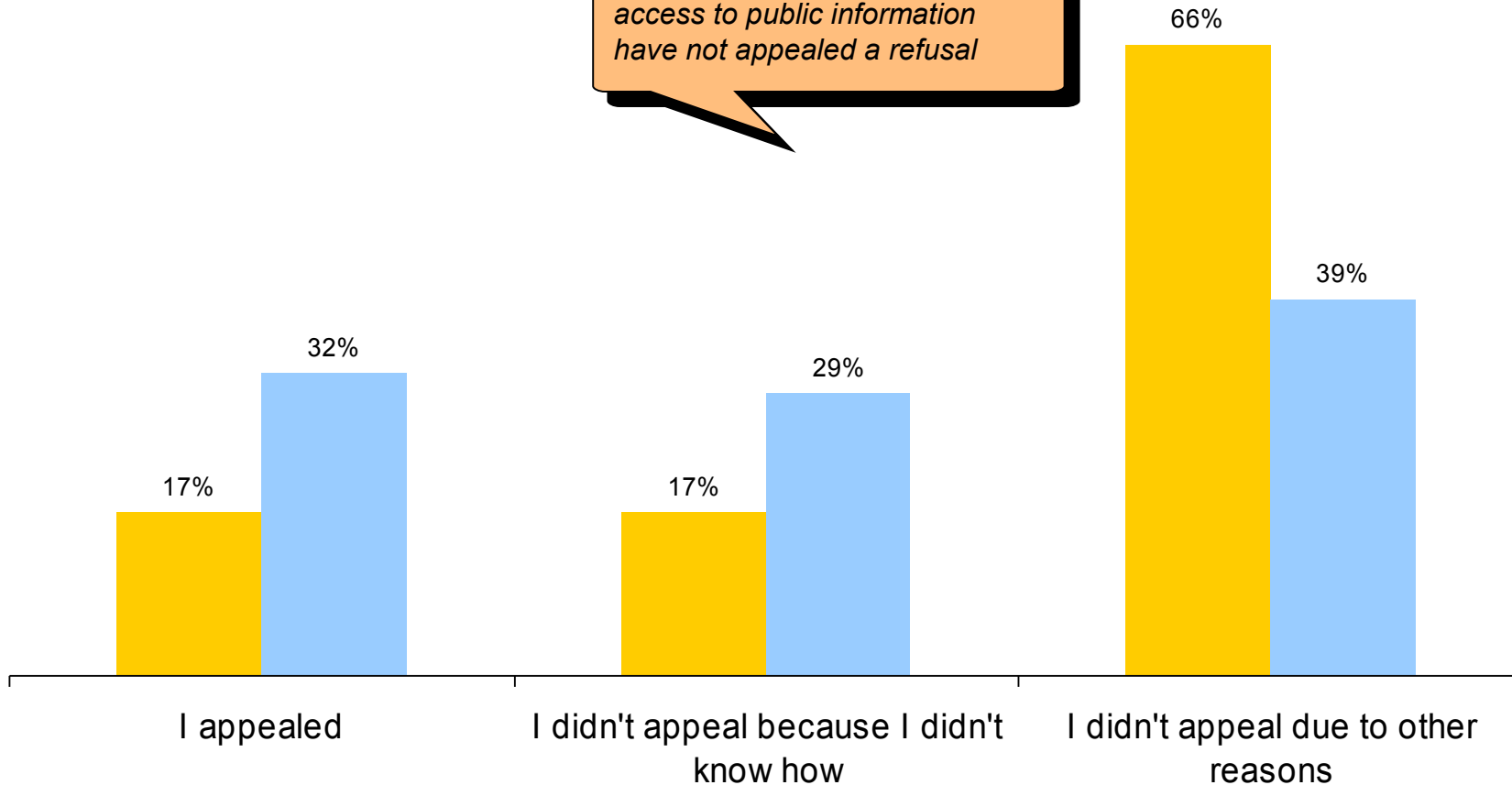


Q. Did you appeal the refusal of access to public information?

2010

2008

83% of all respondents who have exercised their right of access to public information have not appealed a refusal



Base: All respondents who were refused access to public information (6)

Attention! Bases here are small!  
83% equals 5 respondents!

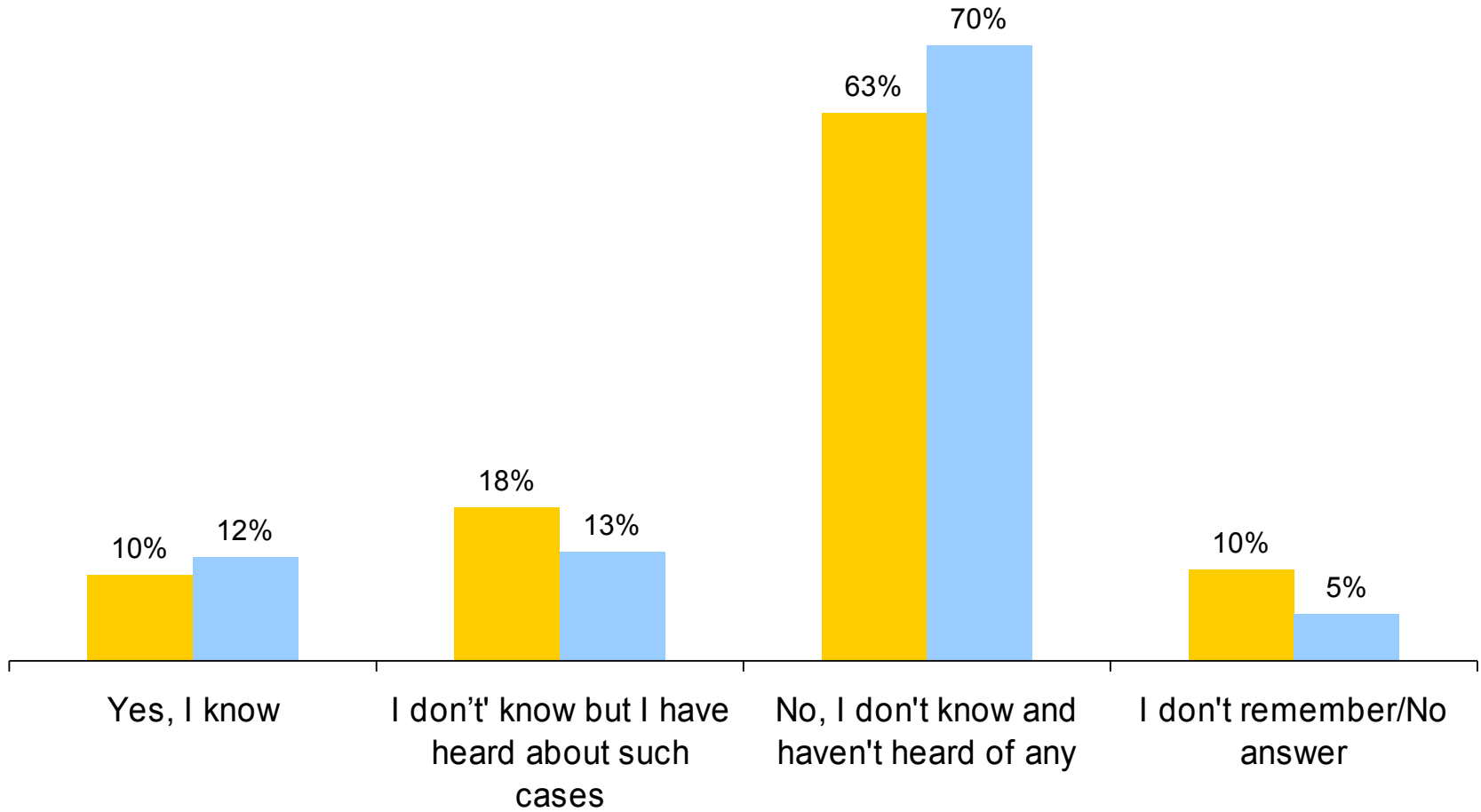
Base: All respondents who were refused access to public information (10)



Q. Do you know a person or an organization who have sought public information?

2010

2008



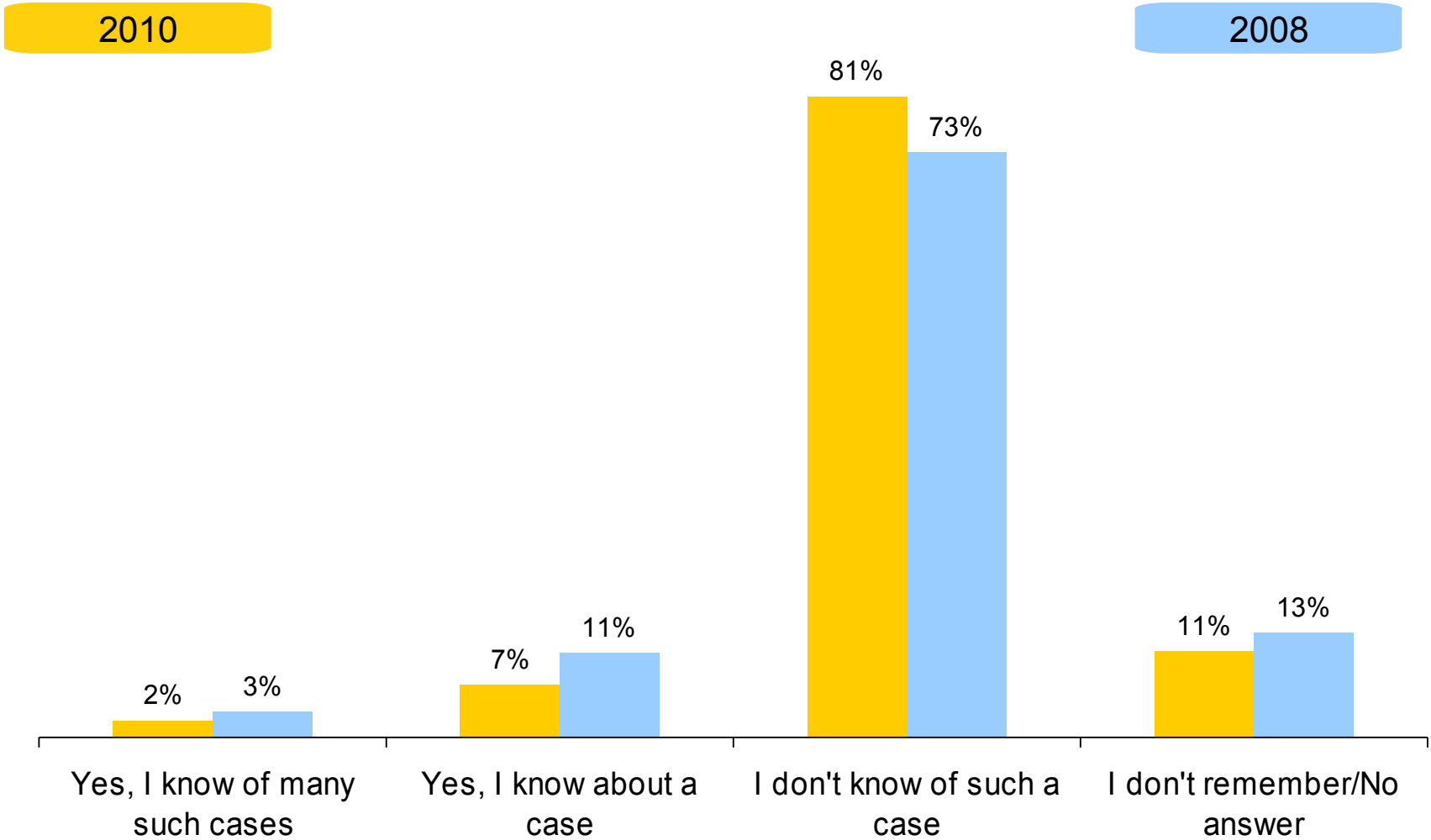
Base: All respondents (1143), 18+

Base: All respondents (1210), 18+

# Cases of refusal of access to public information



Q. Are you aware of any cases in which access to public information has been refused?



Base: All respondents (1143), 18+

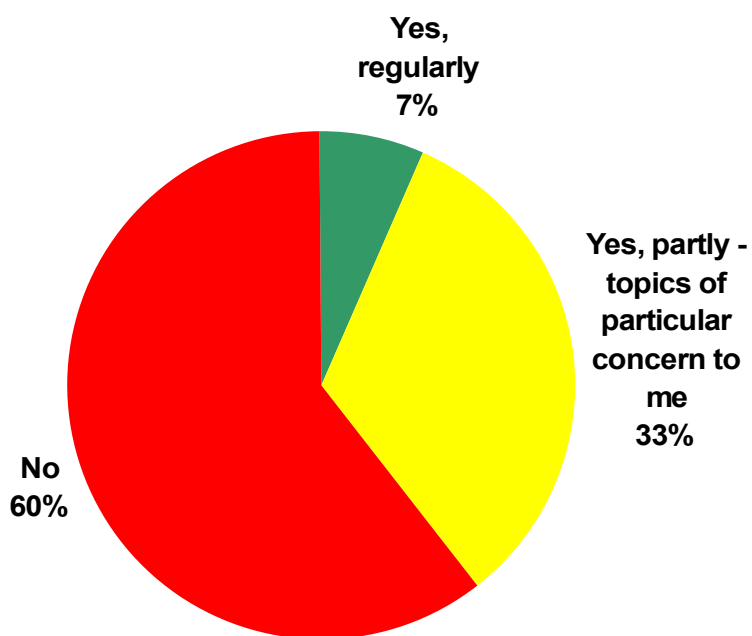
Base: All respondents(1210), 18+

# Public interest towards access to information related problems covered by the media



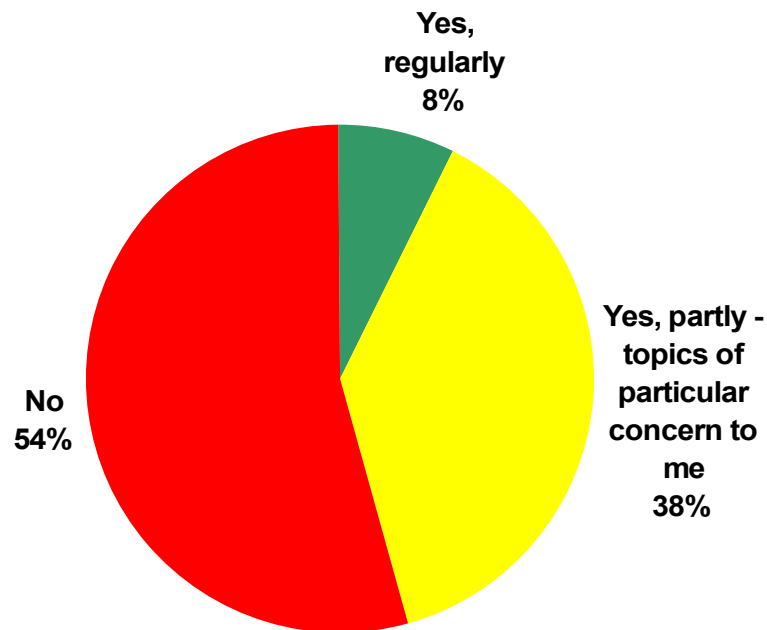
Q. Do you follow media publications/broadcasts related to access to information problems?

2010



Base: All respondents (1143), 18+

2008



Base: All respondents (1210), 18+