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UPDATE

**Global Civil Society Events:
 Parallel Summits, Social Fora, Global Days of Action**

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Introduction

The growth of global activities of civil society shows no sign of slowing down. In 2003 and in the first six months of 2004, 43 events took place (24 in 2003 and 19 in the first half of 2004). They split evenly between events independently organised by civil society networks with a global reach, and parallel summits organised in coincidence of official summits of international organisations or governments.

Building on the definition of parallel summits in the study (Pianta, 2001) that opened this line of research, global civil society events are defined as follows:

- events organised by national and international civil society groups with international participation, independently of the activities of states and firms;
- events that may result from the autonomous initiative of civil society, or may coincide with, or be related to official summits of governments and international institutions;
- addressing global issues, or the same problems as official summits, with a critical perspective on government and business policies;
- using the means of public information and analysis, political mobilisation and protest, and alternative policy proposals; and
- with or without formal contacts with the official summits (if there is one).

While parallel summits have been regularly documented since 1988 - shadowing UN conferences, IMF or World Bank meetings, G7/G8 Summits, or conferences of regional institutions - the number of independent global civil society events has long been extremely limited, and its growth dates from the first World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in early 2001 (that started itself as a parallel event to the World Economic Forum of Davos).

As in last year's update (Pianta and Silva, 2003), the majority of events has no corresponding 'official summit' (the share was 40 per cent in *Global Civil Society 2002*). And as in last year's report, one additional form of global civil society initiative is taking hold, the organisation of a global day of action with millions of participants to demonstrations and events in hundreds of cities all over the world. It took place on March 20th, 2004, against the US war and occupation of Iraq, following the path-breaking event of February 15th, 2003,

that protested against the preparations for such a war, and was then identified by the *New York Times* as the date of birth of global public opinion and civil society as a "second superpower".

This evolution of global civil society events is of great interest. Starting in the 1980s as protests outside the closed doors of inter-governmental decision making on global issues, parallel summits have grown both in mass participation and in their ability to challenge official policies and propose alternatives. The fragmented social activism associated to the first experiences of transnational campaigns by civil society grew into fully fledged global social movements in the late 1990s, developing a common vision and a policy platform demanding economic justice, international democracy and peace. Such movements have increasingly met since 2001 in World (and Continental) Social Fora and other self-organised events with mass participation, sharing political cultures, building collective identities, developing policy alternatives. The values and politics of global movements and global civil society activism were deeply challenged by the US government policy of unilateral, unrestrained global power engaged in systematic preparations for war. Opposition to war and the search for peaceful forms of conflict resolution - in the Middle East as everywhere - moved at the centre of global activism, and in 2003 and 2004 the first two global days of actions were an unprecedented, enormous success, bringing together people and civil society groups in all continents, with an extremely wide range of cultures, political orientation, class and ethnic backgrounds. The success of such global actions can be associated to their ability to give voice to the consensus of a large majority of world public opinion, reflected also in public opinion polls. Global civil society and global social movements are now able to articulate a vision for global political and economic relations that is alternative to the model of neoliberal globalisation and permanent, preventive war led by the US. They are also able to give a global voice to such a vision with unprecedented mass mobilisations, putting pressure for a change of course on national and global decision makers.

The effects on political processes are starting to become visible in the election of progressive governments in several countries of the South - Argentina, Brasil, India and other countries - and in the increasing realignment of the electorate in both Europe and the US. The outlook is for an increasing ability of global civil society to become visible, vocal, articulated, and able to influence the debates on global issues and, in some cases, on national policies too.

Global Civil Society Events

The figures presented here extend the analysis of the chapter 'Parallel Summits of Global Civil Society', published in the 2001 edition of this Yearbook (Pianta 2001), and of the update in the 2003 edition (Pianta and Silva, 2003b). We have followed the same procedure for collecting and organising information on global civil society events; the main sources are web sites, newspapers, and magazines, which devote extensive attention to such gatherings. The 43 cases identified for 2003 and the first six months of 2004 are considered representative of the range of events, topics, and locations.

In the progression from parallel summits to global civil society events and days of action, we find an even distribution across continents, a substantial number of large scale meetings, and two events with enormous worldwide participation. A stronger political agenda, that integrates economic and development issues with demands for democracy and peace also emerges, while the objectives give for the first time the priority to advancing proposals for alternative policy, closely followed by the usual search for networking among global civil society organisations.

Figure 1. Growth of events

The growth of global civil society events is shown in Figure 1, reporting the number of global events from 1990 to the first half of 2004. If in the rest of 2004 the pace of events remains the same, a pattern of exponential growth is likely to continue. The apparent slowdown in 2003 is associated to the decision to exclude from the count from that year on the large number of national Social Fora that included an international participation, but maintained a largely national focus. In 2002, in the aftermath of the first World Social Forum, such national Fora rapidly spread, especially in the South, and represented an important first opening to global issues. Events always include an international conference and, in most cases, a street demonstration, in addition to grassroots meetings and occasional media-oriented initiatives.

Figure 2. Location of events

The spread of events in the South continues. Figure 2 shows that Latin America concentrates one third of all events, Europe one quarter, Asia and Oceania one fifth, North America 12 per cent and Africa 7 per cent. This year, the appearance of really world-wide events is reflected in the small share associated to actions taking place in all continents. The large importance of Latin American and Asian meetings is related to the World Social Fora held in Porto Alegre (Brasil) in 2003 and in Mumbai (India) in 2004, with a variety of associated regional events.

Figure 3. Types of events

Social Fora now account for 30 per cent of all global civil society events. Other meetings organised independently from official summits represent 21 per cent of events. The other half is made by a 9 per cent of parallel events to UN conferences, 7 per cent each to IMF, World Bank or WTO meetings and to G8 summits, and 26 per cent of parallel summits dealing with regional conferences (European Union, American, or Asian government meetings).

Figure 4. Types of organisations

National associations and NGOs always are key actors in the organisation of global civil society events, joining in most cases with international NGOs and networks. Still, local groups continue to play a key role in most events and trade unions are a presence in more than 40 per cents of cases, with a small presence also of local authorities.

Figure 5. Number of organisations involved in organising the event

The networks of civil society groups active in the coordinating bodies organising global civil society events take different shapes. In a few cases, typically, World Social Fora, there are more than 400 organisations involved. Generally, however, the number of organisations working together has more manageable size, below 24 in a quarter of cases, between 25 and 49 in 30 per cent of cases, between 50 and 199 in 23 per cent of cases.

Figure 6. Fields of activity of organisations involved

Development, economic issues and democracy continue to characterise the main field of activities of the organisations involved in the organisation of global events, with two thirds, 56 per cent and 40 per cent of cases respectively (multiple responses are possible here). Labour and trade unions, environment, human rights and peace follow, with shares between

25 and 40 per cent. While peace is not an area of direct activity of most groups, it is remarkable that it has been taken up as a crucial concern and topic of mobilisation in the two days of global civil society action against the Iraqi war. This shows a major convergence among the themes of action of global movements and the ability of organisations mainly active in particular fields to participate to campaigns in other fields when the need arises. This attitude is confirmed by the results of our survey on global civil society organisations (Pianta and Silva 2003a).

Figure 7. Number of participants

Besides the two days of actions that saw the participation of millions of people all over the world, one third of events have more than 10,000 participants, and a slightly larger share is concerns events with 1,000 to 10,000 participants. Interestingly, there is an increase in events of modest size, 200 to 500 participants (20 per cent of cases), that gather activists with more specific interests or with events of regional scope, especially in the South.

Table 1. Number of participants by location of events

The table crosses the location of parallel summits with the number of participants. If Europe and Latin America appear to be the preferred locations, as Figure 2 suggests, Table 1 adds that European and Latin American events are the most attended ones. European events involve more than 10,000 people in close to half of the cases - 11 per cent of the total of events - while two thirds of Latin America events - 23 per cent of the total - involve more than 1,000 people. African events are much smaller in size, being joined at maximum by 500 activists. In Asia percentages appear to be more distributed, but more than a half of events accounts for less than 500 participants.

Table 2. Number of participants in different types of events

What is the relationship between number of participants and the type of parallel summits? As Table 2 shows, Social Fora usually involve more people than parallel summits do. Thus, a half of the Social Fora surveyed - 14 per cent of total events – involve more than 10,000 people. G8 and IMF/WB/WTO parallel summits are smaller: the former involve less than 500 people in two third of the cases, while the latter are slightly bigger, involving for the same number of cases between 1,000 and 10,000 activists. The high participation to Social Fora shows the success of meetings aiming at strengthening the infrastructure of global civil society, building shared identities and visions, common policy platforms and networks for action. All this now appears to be more attractive to civil society activists than a confrontation with global institutions in order to protest and challenge their policies. But it also confirms the success of a key *raison d'être* of the Social Forum formula: fostering and enlarging democratic participation and dialogue within the sphere of civil society.

Figure 8. Objectives of events

The progressive shift from protest to proposal of alternatives is evident also in the main objectives of global civil society events. In more than 90 per cent of cases there is a search for alternative policies, closely followed by networking among civil society groups and by efforts at public information and consciousness raising (multiple responses are possible). Political confrontation with governments accounts for 40 per cent of answers, while lobbying official summits is of minor importance.

Figure 9. The relation to official summits

Criticism of policies is the dominant attitude when parallel summits confront official ones, while active dialogue exists in one quarter of cases, and the extremes of strong conflict and integration in the official summit account for 10 per cent of events.

Figure 10. Assessments of the results

A most difficult estimate concerns the impact that global civil society events have. This evaluation, based on the judgement of organisers and participants or from media reports, clearly has to be treated with great caution. As in the past, the strongest impact is on civil society itself, as 55 per cent of events appear to have a strong or very strong effect, a big increase compared to the past. Global meetings have in fact deeply changed the agenda, travel plans and mode of activity of a very large number of global civil society organisations. On the basis of available documentation, their impact is significant also on public opinion and the international media, where a medium or strong effect may be identified in the majority of events. Little or no impact can be detected on international policies and on official summits.

Is there a link between the type of events and their impact? From preliminary evidence, it appears that the impact on civil society itself, on public opinion and the media is largely the same regardless of the type of event. When some impact on national policies is reported, this emerges from Social Fora or other events with no official summit, that have developed either a strong focus on policy proposal, or a close relationship to progressive national governments. When some impact on international policies is found, this generally comes from parallel summits to IMF/WB/WTO meetings (e.g. at the Cancun WTO conference), where protests at the summits are associated to a long and patient work of denouncing official policies, lobbying sympathetic governments and proposing alternatives.

The Survey on Global Civil Society Organisations

The findings on global civil society meetings and parallel summits may be compared to the results of a recent survey we have carried out on global civil society organisations, where the focus of the analysis was the individual organisation active on global issues (Pianta and Silva, 2003a). A questionnaire was prepared to gather data on the profile of global civil society organisations, their activities, priorities, and views on policy proposals. The questionnaire was circulated among the international participants at the Genoa Social Forum in July 2001 in Genoa, at the 4th Assembly of the Peoples' United Nations in Perugia in October 2001, and at the Second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in January 2002. It was e-mailed to hundreds of civil society organisations drawn from a variety of accessible sources (such as UN NGO lists, Civicus, and others).

The results presented here are based on 147 respondents, representative of all continents, types of organisations, and fields of action. Close to twenty per cent of respondents were international NGOs, 40 per cent were national associations or NGOs, 15 per cent international or national networks or campaigns; the rest mainly trade unions, local groups, and research centres; they are mainly active on development, human rights, peace, democracy, economic policies and environmental issues.

Respondents to the questionnaire were civil society organisations active on global issues whose national base was for 36 per cent in Europe, 22 per cent in Asia and the Middle East, 22 per cent in Africa, 6 per cent in North America. and 14 per cent in Latin America. Such a geographical distribution assures a balanced perspective from all continents and confirms the

growing presence of civil society groups in the countries of the South. Moreover, it may be noted that the share of organisations based in the North (42 per cent) is little different from the share of global civil society events taking place in the North (44 per cent) over the period in which the questionnaire was compiled.

The group of respondents covers all size classes in terms of members of civil society organisations (about 10 per cent are not membership organisations). More than a quarter of respondents are large associations with more than 1,000 members; the rest are equally spread between very small units (up to 20 members), small groups (21–100 members) and medium-sized organisations (101–1,000 members). Such a composition ensures that a diversity of experiences and perspectives is represented in the results.

Networking is a crucial aspect in the global activities of such organisations. Two-thirds of respondents belong to an international network or campaign, and the responses from networks show that they tend to be large coalitions, half of them coordinating more than 26 groups.

Figure 11. Survey on global civil society organisations: participation to global events.

The survey on global civil society organisations included a specific question on parallel summits: 'In which of the following parallel summits did your organisation participate in the past?' Figure 11 charts the answers we obtained. Participation to international events shows a general rapid increase that shadows the quantitative growth of events singled out by Figure 1. In 2000-2001, 50 per cent of respondents took part in a global civil society meeting with no corresponding 'official summit', while before 1988 less than 10 per cent did so. A steady rise can also be found in participation to UN conferences, that reached 37 per cent in 2000-2001 against 12 per cent in the early 1990's. An important part of civil society efforts deals with regional conferences (European Union, American or Asian government meetings), where in the last two years almost one third of the organisations surveyed have been involved. Less relevant in absolute terms, but still growing regularly, are the data concerning IMF, World Bank, WTO or G8 parallel summits that account for almost one third of all cases between 2000 and 2001. The slight decrease affecting the participation to other types of initiatives in 2000, confirms the pre-eminent role now played by large global civil society fora (see Figure 3).

Figure 12. Survey on global civil society organisations: vision on globalisation

What lies behind the activities of global civil society? What are the ideas and visions inspiring actions? Organisations were asked to describe their broad vision on the issue of globalisation. Figure 12 shows that responses to this question were mainly *Globalisation from below* in 33 per cent of cases and *Humanised globalisation* in 28 per cent of cases; in all, 60 per cent of respondents have a vision of globalisation putting at the centre civil society and human beings. In contrast, only 11 per cent emphasises the need for a *Governance of globalisation* and just 4 per cent declare themselves *Anti-globalisation*. At the same time, however, one-sixth of respondents declare that their focus is on the *national/local dimension*, playing down the importance of globalisation in their own identity and pressing for a turn towards localisation. These responses show how inappropriate the long abused term 'anti-globalisation' is in identifying the social movements active on global issues.

By combining the surveys on global civil society events and organisations, it is possible to obtain a picture of developments grounded in empirical evidence. An extension of these analyses has concerned the relationship between civil society and UN Summits (Pianta 2004).

Summing up the evidence, the evolution of the events and of the activities carried out by organisations involved in global civil society shows a *widening* across continents and countries of the actions undertaken, a *deepening* of the efforts, moving from protest to proposal of alternatives, a *convergence* on the priorities of peace and development of groups active on several different themes, and a progressive *sharing* of a common identity, vision and policy perspective. These are all typical elements of the emergence of global social movements demanding economic justice, international democracy and peace.

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Fig. 1. Growth of parallel summits

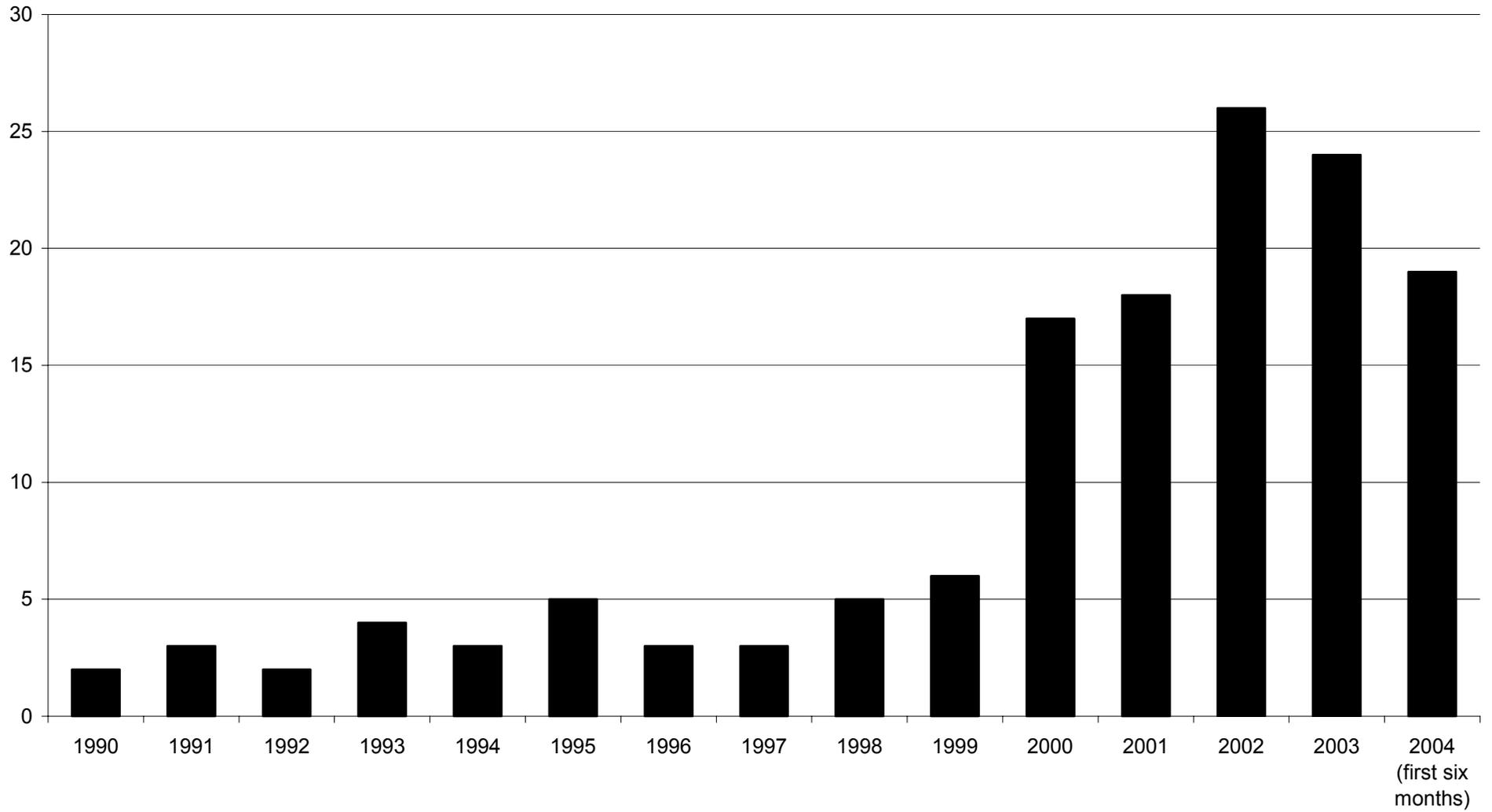


Fig. 2. Location of parallel summits

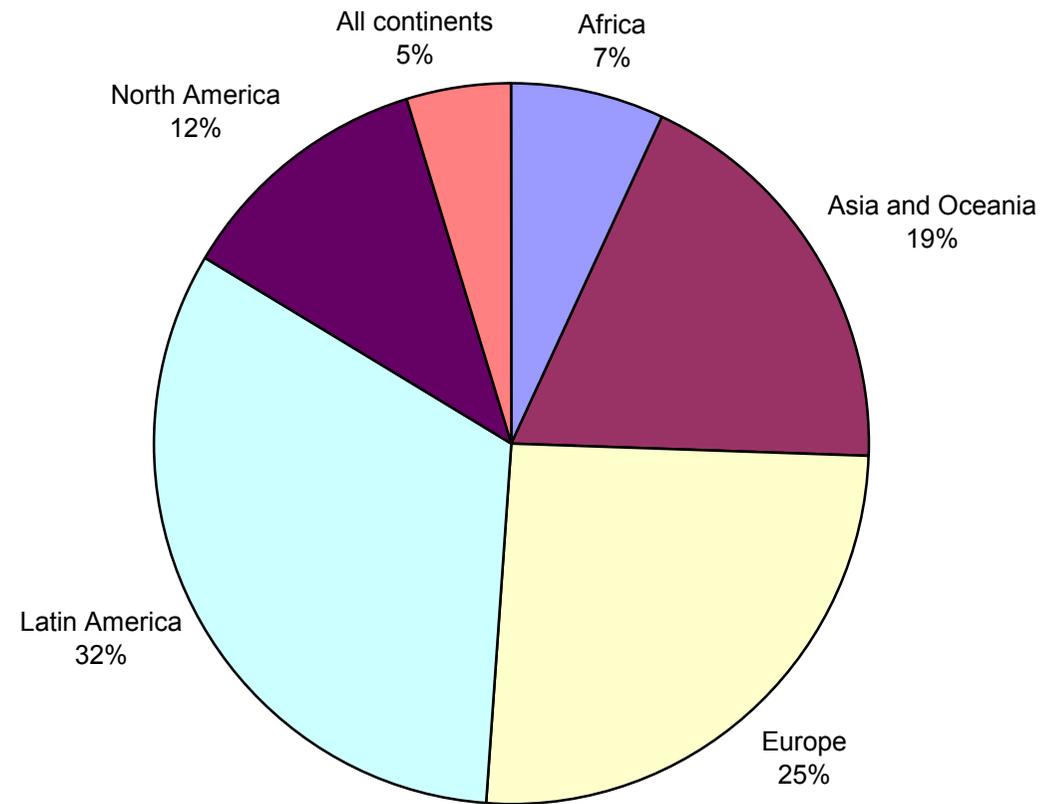


Fig. 3. Types of parallel summits

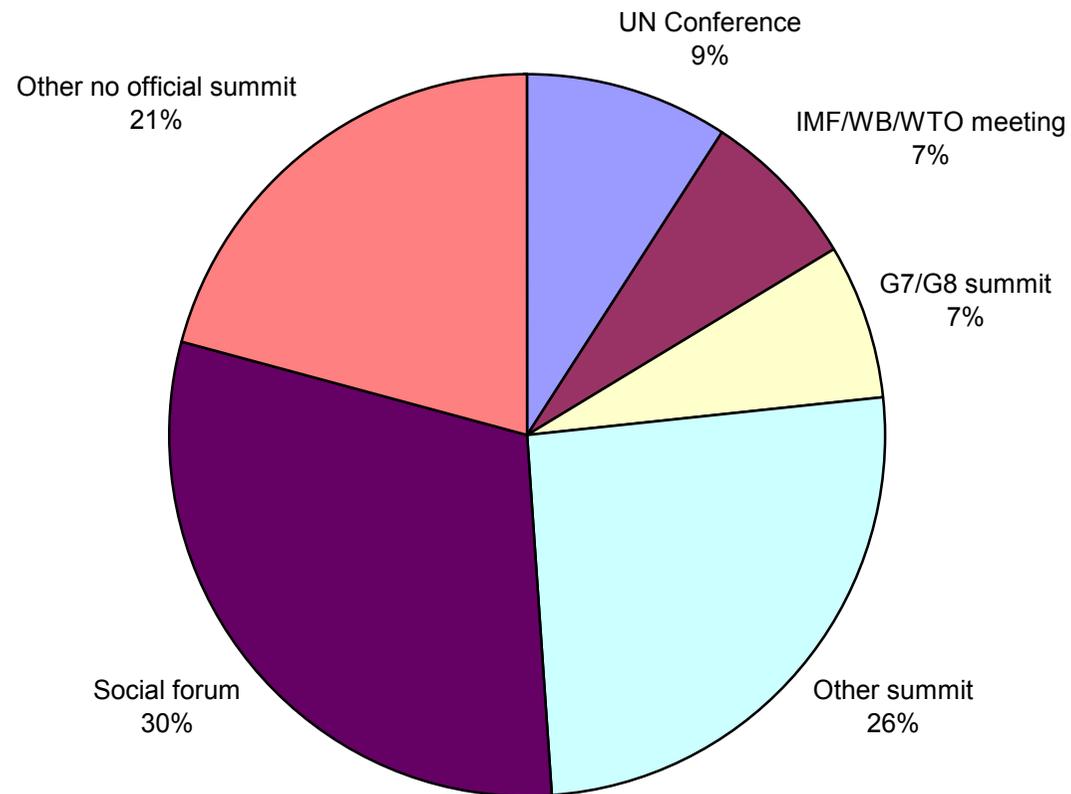


Fig. 4. Organizations and groups involved in the coordinating body of the parallel summit

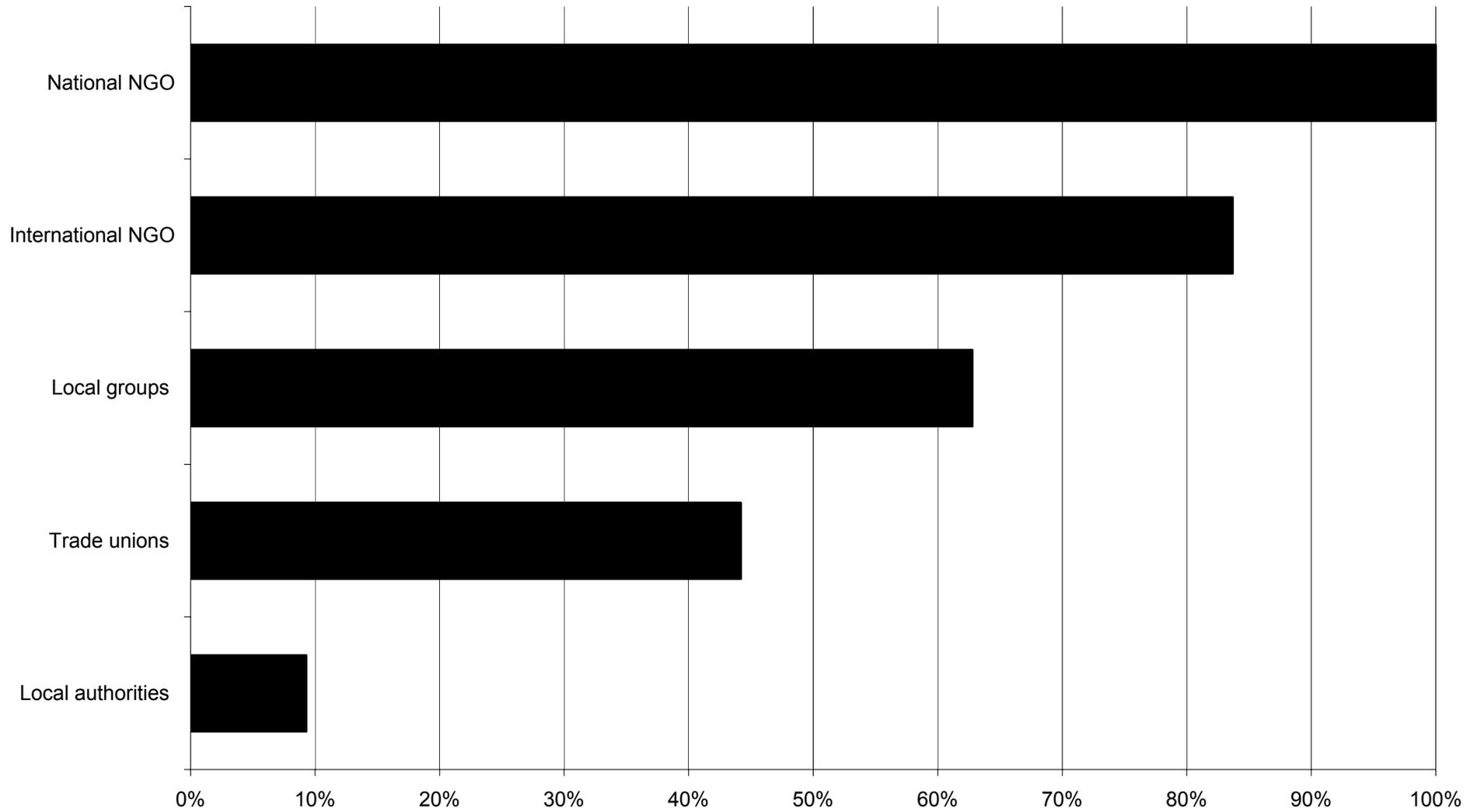


Fig. 5. Number of organizations involved in the coordinating body of the parallel summit

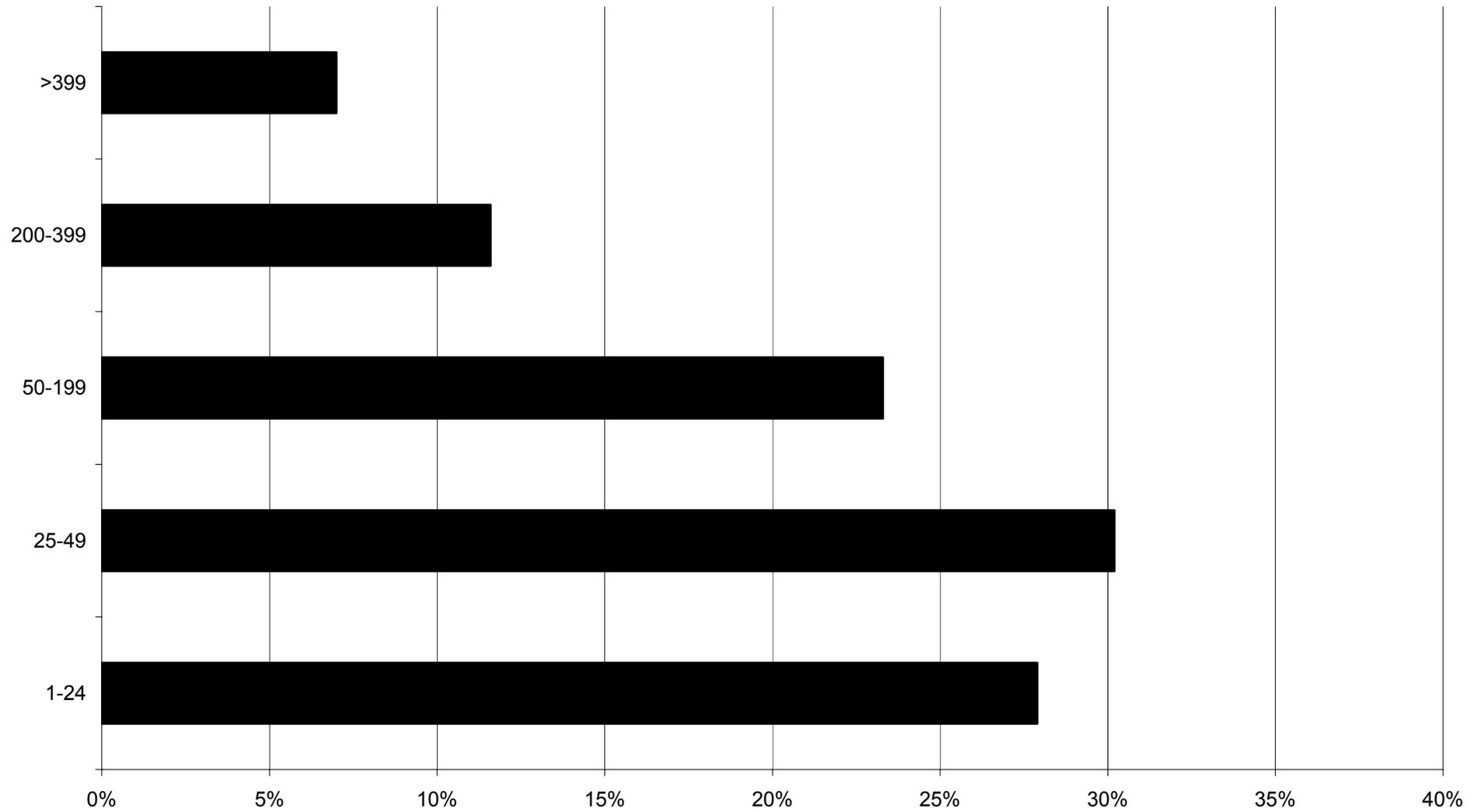


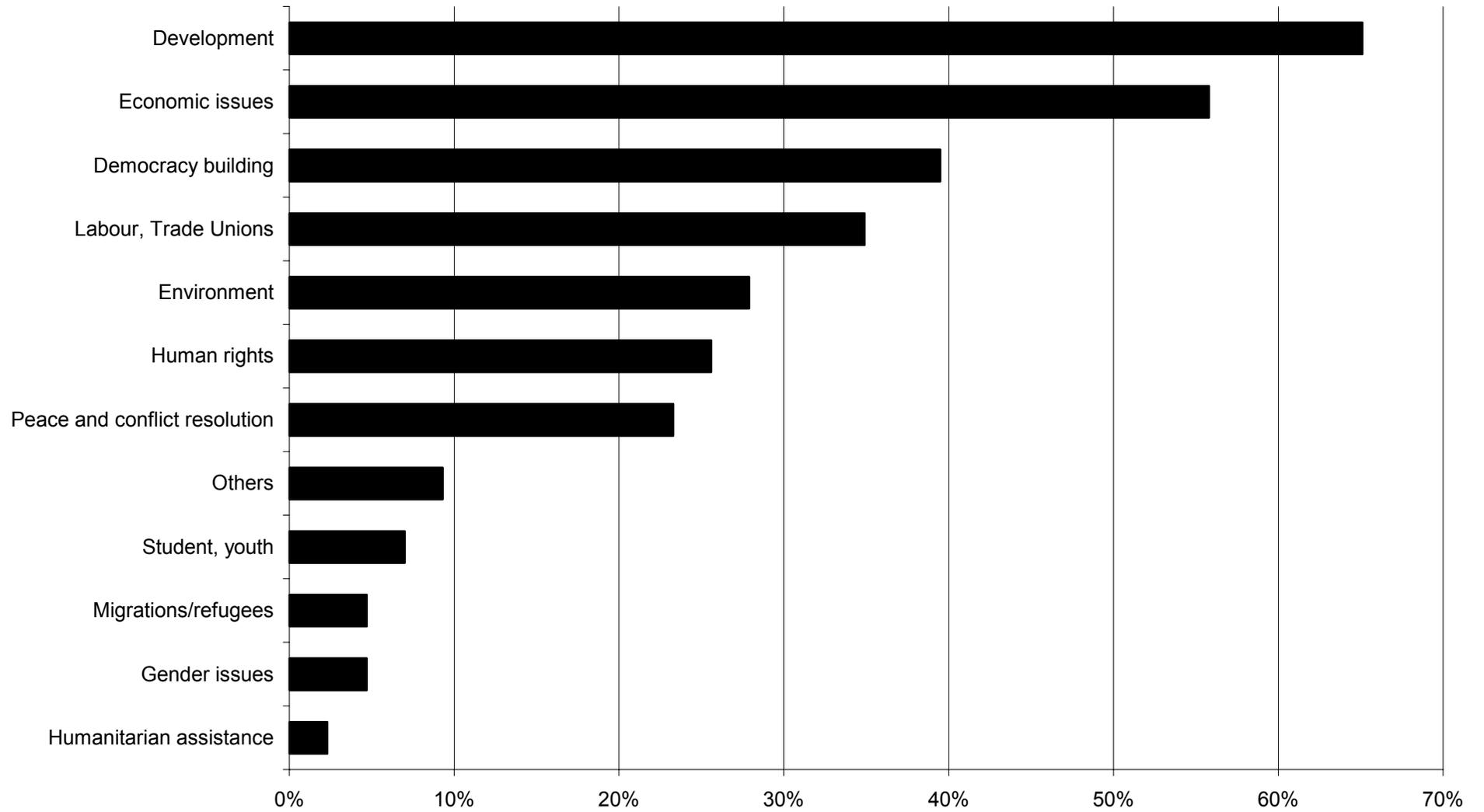
Fig. 6. Field of activity of the organizations involved

Fig. 7. Number of participants to the events of the parallel summit

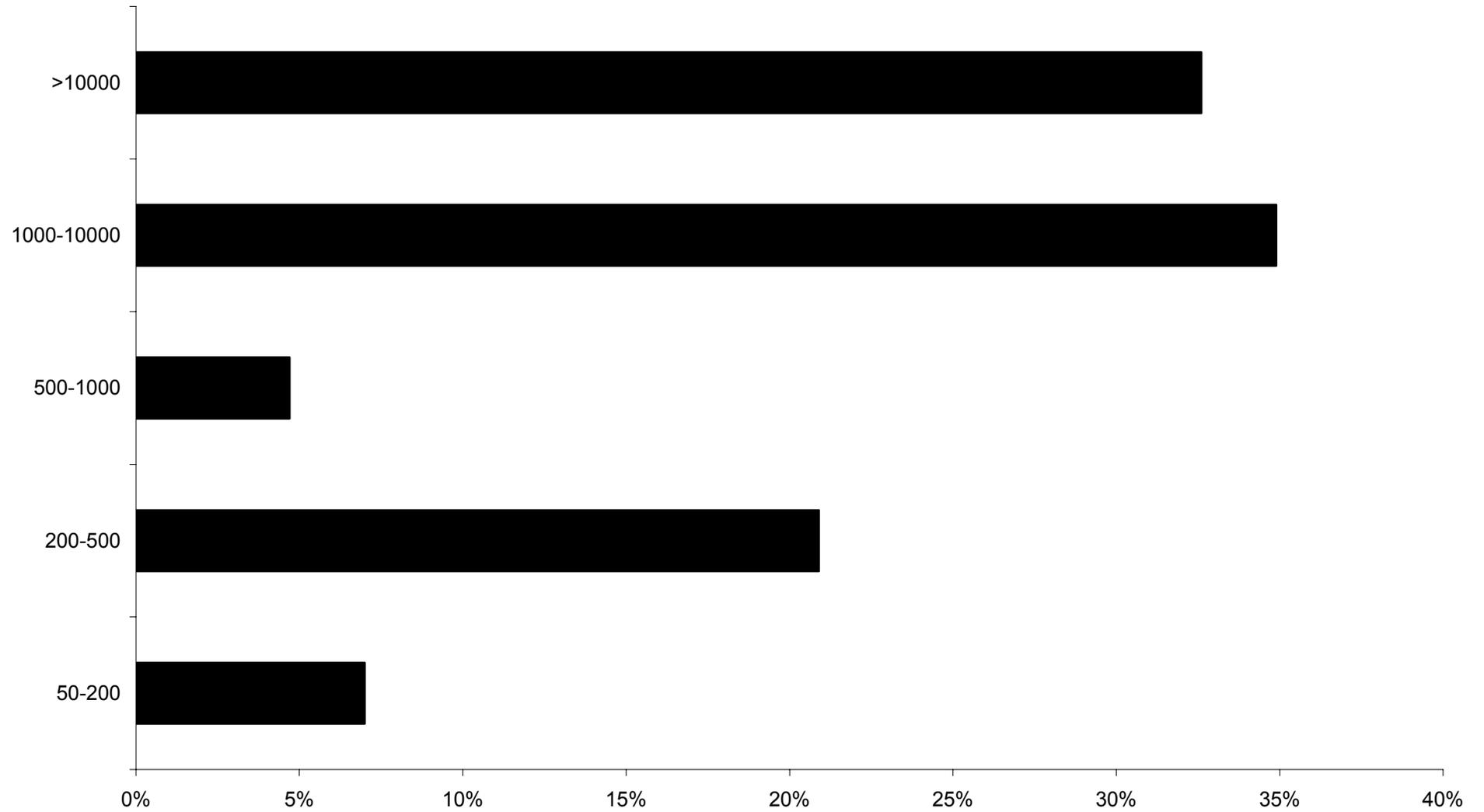


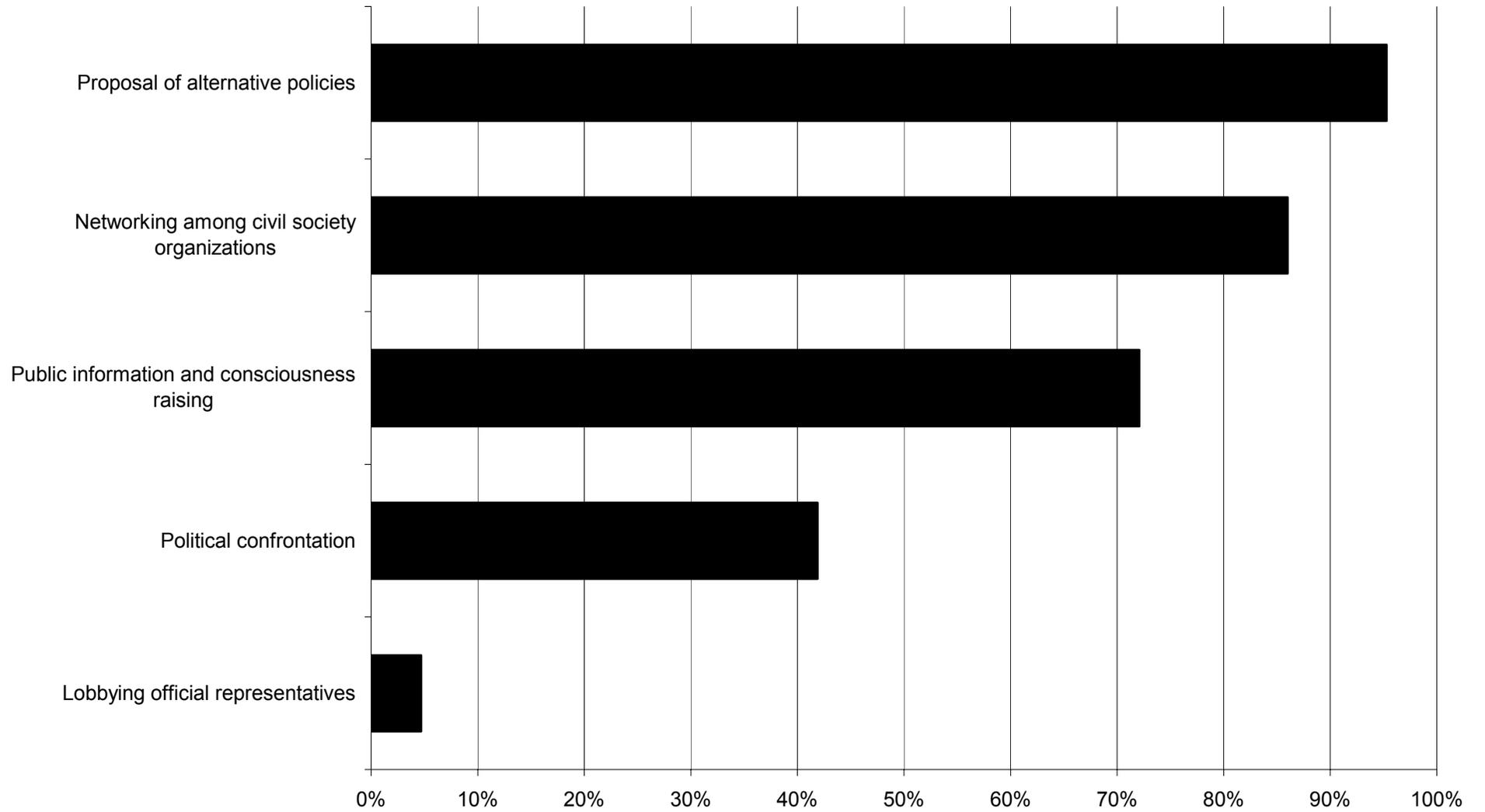
Fig. 8. Objectives of the parallel summit

Fig. 9. The relation to the official summit

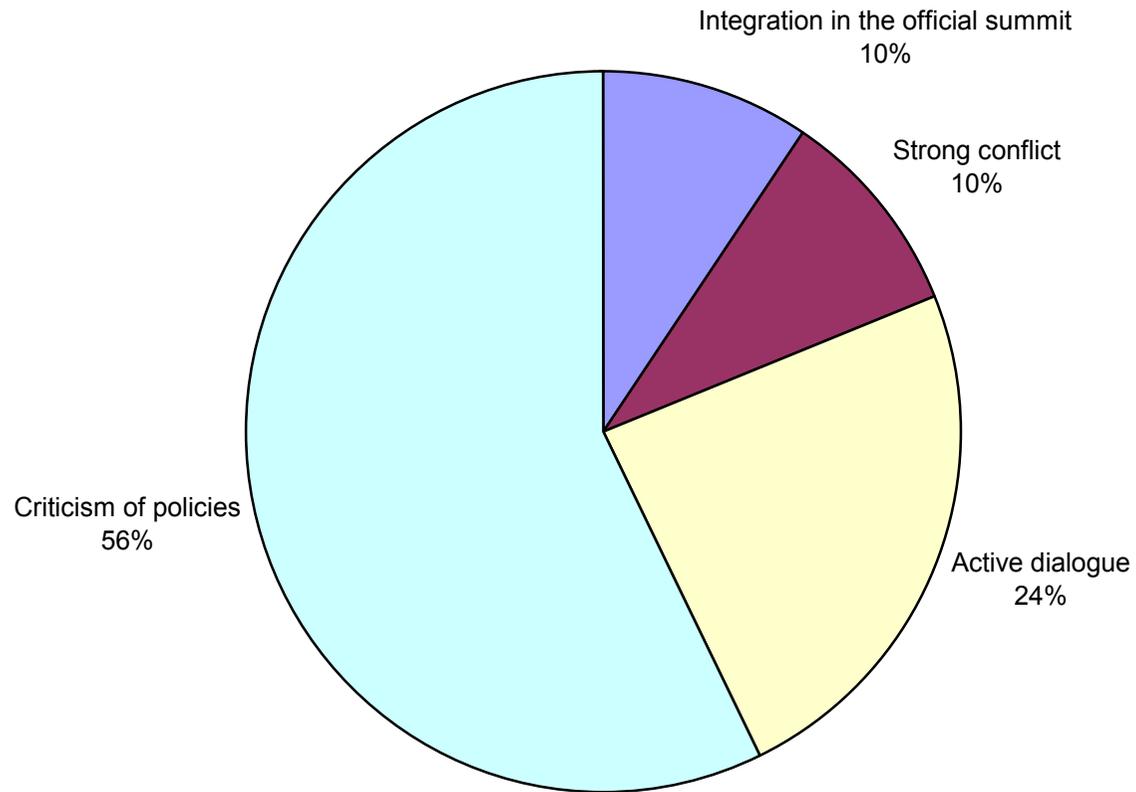


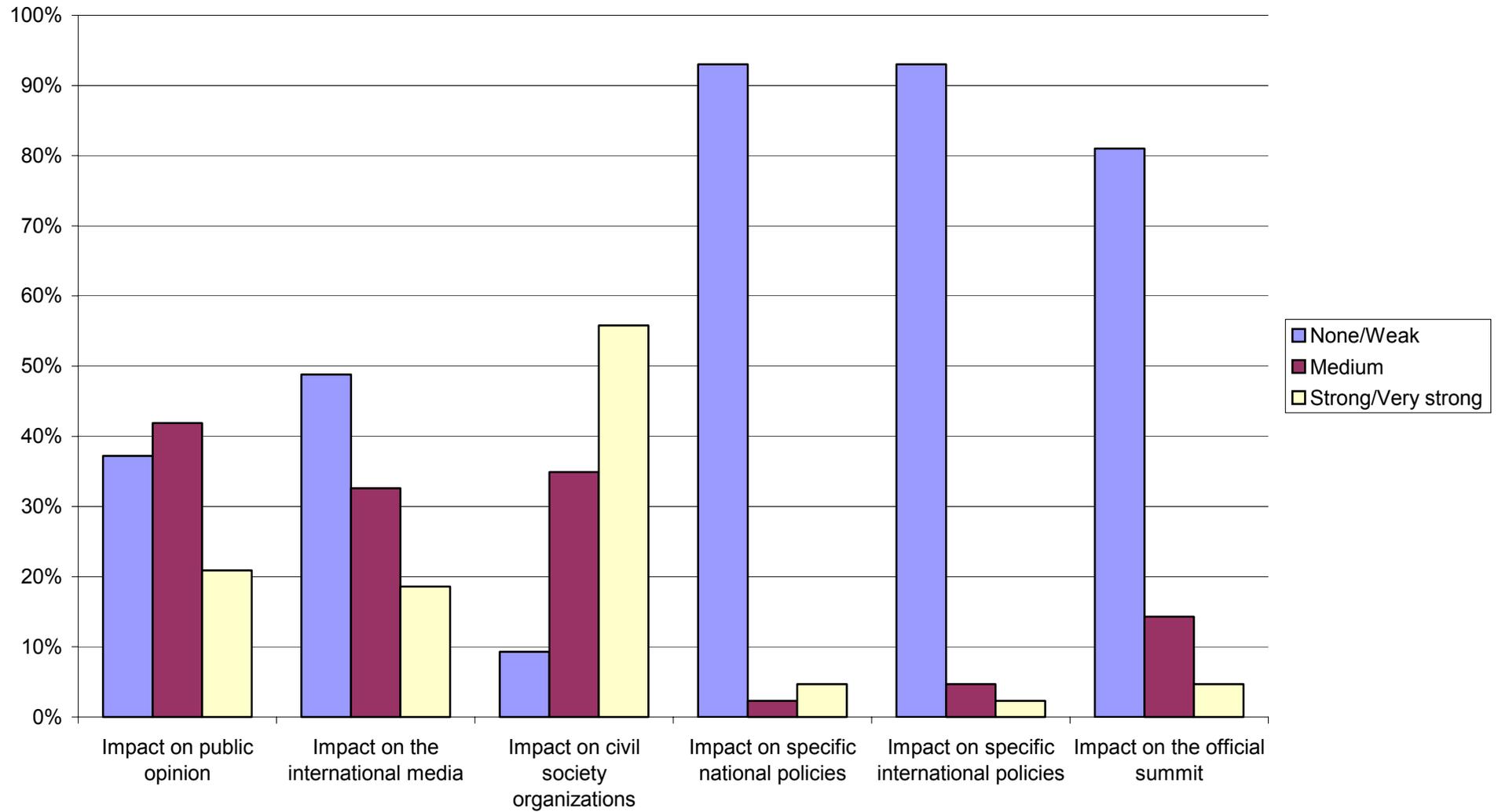
Fig. 10. Assessments of the results

Fig. 11. In which type of Parallel Summits did your organisation/group participate in the past?

Percentage of events, multiple responses possible

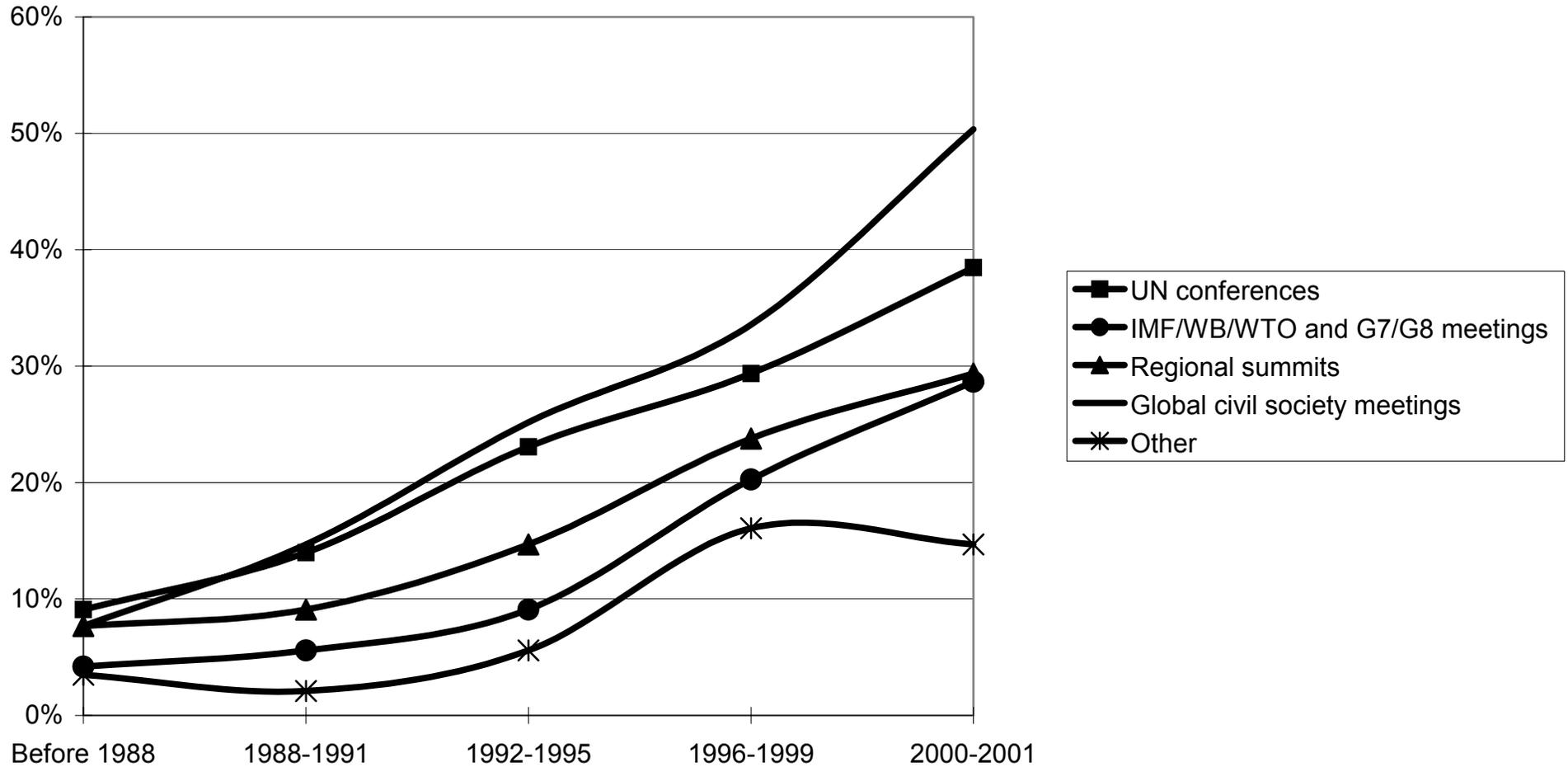


Fig. 12. What is the broad vision of your organisation/group on the issue of globalisation?

Percentage composition

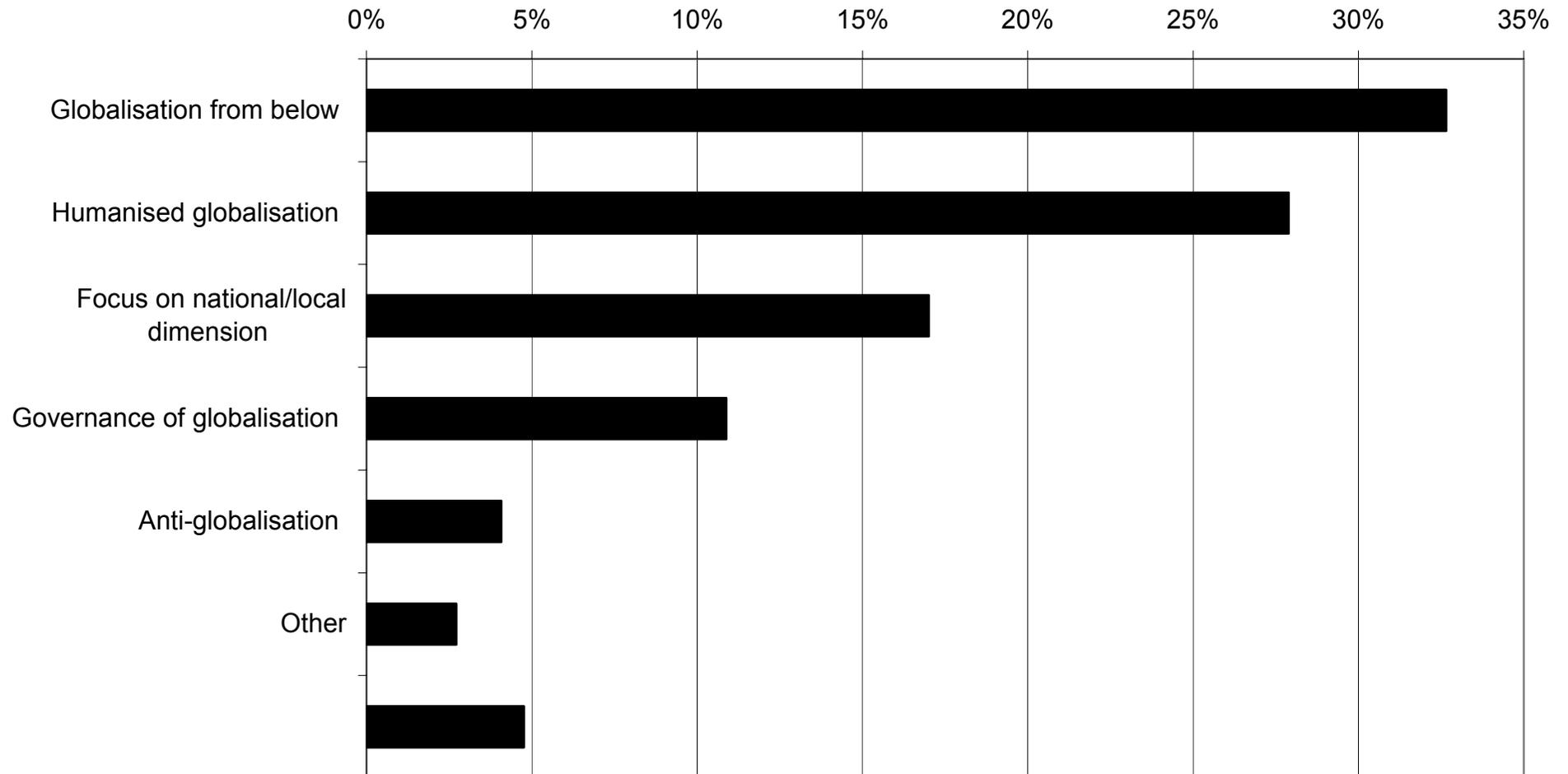


Table 3. Impact of action on global issues by Types of parallel summits										
% of the total										
Impact of action on global issues										
Types of Parallel Summits										
				UN Conference	IMF/WB/ WTO meeting	G7/G 8 sum mit	Other summit	Social forum	Other no official summit	Total
Impact on public opinion	<i>None or Weak</i>			2,3%	2,3%	2,3%	7,0%	14,0%	9,3%	37,2%
	<i>Medium</i>			7,0%	2,3%	2,3%	14,0%	9,3%	7,0%	41,9%
	<i>Strong or very strong</i>				2,3%	2,3%	4,7%	7,0%	4,7%	21,0%
	Total			9,3%	7,0%	7,0%	25,6%	30,2%	20,9%	100,0%
Impact on the international media	<i>None or Weak</i>			2,3%	2,3%	4,7%	9,3%	18,6%	11,6%	48,8%
	<i>Medium</i>			7,0%	2,3%	2,3%	11,6%	4,7%	4,7%	32,6%
	<i>Strong or very strong</i>				2,3%		4,7%	7,0%	4,7%	18,7%
	Total			9,3%	7,0%	7,0%	25,6%	30,2%	29,9%	100,0%
Impact on civil society organisations	<i>None or Weak</i>							7,0%	2,3%	9,3%
	<i>Medium</i>			2,3%	2,3%	4,7%	9,3%	11,6%	4,7%	34,9%

		<i>Strong or very strong</i>		7,0%	4,7%	2,3%	16,3%	11,6%	14,0%	55,8%
		Total		9,3%	7,0%	7,0%	25,6%	30,2%	20,9%	100,0%
Impact on specific national policies		<i>None or Weak</i>		9,3%	7,0%	7,0%	25,6%	27,9%	16,3%	93,0%
		<i>Medium</i>						2,3%		2,3%
		<i>Strong or very strong</i>							4,7%	4,7%
		Total		9,3%	7,0%	7,0%	25,6%	30,2%	20,9%	100,0%
Impact on specific international policies		<i>None or Weak</i>		9,3%	4,7%	7,0%	25,6%	30,2%	16,3%	93,0%
		<i>Medium</i>							4,7%	4,7%
		<i>Strong or very strong</i>			2,3%					2,3%
		Total		9,3%	7,0%	7,0%	25,6%	30,2%	20,9%	100,0%
Impact on the Official Summit		<i>None or Weak</i>		9,5%	9,5%	14,3%	47,6%	81,0%		
		<i>Medium</i>		9,5%			4,8%	14,3%		
		<i>Strong or very strong</i>			4,8%			4,8%		
		Total		19,0%	14,3%	14,3%	52,4%	100,0%		

